Media Release

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Ecosa Challenges Main Stream Education With Free Tuition

PRESCOTT, AZ – Imagine attending an institution of higher education without worry of cash up front or spending much of your work life repaying school loans. If the Ecosa Institute has anything to say about it, free tuition will replace the current financial aid system saddling each of last year's university graduates with student loan debt averaging $37,172.

Putting money where its mouth is and paying vision forward into action, Ecosa now offers 28 prospective students free tuition to its Ecological Design Certificate Program (EDCP). Value of the 15-week semester is $12,000 for each participant and accepted students need only prove competence and commitment.

"We want to reach students who have the ability to think critically, perform in-depth research, and commit to a demanding program," said Tony Brown, Ecosa Institute founder and director. "The goal is to find students, regardless of income, who are most likely to create positive change in the world."

The Ecosa Institute's semester in Ecological Design was created in 2000 to show how human needs can be integrated with nature's requirements to ensure that both thrive. Students are given new perspectives on problem-solving through design in a small group of 14 participants who meet six hours a day five days a week in both studio and field settings.

The four-month certificate program emphasizes the balance needed between humans and nature through urban design, architecture, interior design, landscape architecture, graphic design, and environmental responsibility.

"The EDCP is much more than a design or sustainability program," Brown explained. "It's a transformational experience that provides unique, powerful insights into the world in which we live. Our students become adept at utilizing compelling design rationale to solve problems facing societies and ecosystems. The extra upside of those competencies is that they are transferrable to virtually any career path."

Motivation for the free tuition offer tracks with the decline in government funding for higher education, Brown stated, citing that costs increasingly have shifted from taxpayers to students. Only 34 percent of Americans 18 years of age and older hold college degrees, he added, and even fewer are willing to take on large debt before they have landed a job.

According to a Pew Research Center (PRC) survey of the general public, "a record share of students are leaving college with a substantial debt burden, and among those who do, about half (48%) say that paying off that debt made it harder to pay other bills; a quarter say it has made it harder to buy a home (25%); and about a quarter say it has had an impact on their career choices (24%)."

PRC also surveyed college presidents for their viewpoints on the state of higher education in the United States. Per that study, "nearly two-thirds of college presidents (63%) say students and their families should pay the largest share of the cost of a college education. Just 48% of the public agrees. An equal share of the public would prefer that the bulk of the cost of a college education be borne by the federal government, state governments, private endowments or some combination."

Brown and the Ecosa Institute are among that latter group. Both the man and the institution have been heavily influenced by Paolo Soleri, the late founder of Arcosanti, an urban design concept of architecture coherent with ecology. An architect by trade, Brown apprenticed for several years with Soleri on the Arcosanti project, which proposed a radical new approach to structuring cities. That experience led Brown to establish Ecosa in 1996 and now, spearhead free tuition.

"Paolo was a real inspiration for me and taught me how to 'think outside the box,'" Brown explained. "Free tuition started as a crazy idea. Expecting that a tiny organization such as ours could influence the national debate on education seems bold and daunting. But our board recognizes that we have to put our stake in the ground and move the concept forward."

As part of its efforts, the board has written a "Manifesto," which identifies the current state of higher education, soaring tuition debt, ignorance leading to a downward spiral in social engagement and civic involvement, income inequality, and the premise that students should not be forced into debt to be educated.

"We believe a pay-to-learn policy creates a divided society and our program provides an important role model for the next generation approach to higher education," Brown stated.

"So, after much debate, Ecosa decided to take a leap of faith and offer the Institute's semester program tuition free for the fall 2017 and spring 2018 semesters. We encourage other institutions of higher learning to follow our example."

Ecosa Institute is undertaking a comprehensive fundraising campaign, including gofundme and corporate underwriters, to fund the free tuition program.

Deadline to apply for the fall 2017 semester is June 1st. Information about the two-stage application process is available at www.ecosa.org. A $50 non-refundable application fee is required when submitting the application. For additional information, call Laura Kasper at 928-541-1002.

ABOUT ECOSA INSTITUTE:

The mission of Ecosa Institute is to restore health to the natural environment, and thus the human environment, through education in design. The institute's vision is of a world that blends the ethical values and ecological patterns, which are essential to the health of the world, with the vitality and dynamism of the design arts. In 1996, Antony Brown founded Ecosa Institute in Prescott, Arizona, with a goal of bringing innovative ecological design thinking and an interdisciplinary approach to design education. The intent was to educate designers who can integrate human aspirations and nature's systems by understanding the greatest designer of all – nature.

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