The age of the anthropocene is characterized by unprecedented human impact on planetary systems. Nowhere is this impact as evident as in the global economy. The term global economy is itself revealing since it contours up images of an economy that is disconnected from its local and regional context. Yet it is precisely these social/cultural and environmental context system that first make economic activity possible and that can sustain it in the long term. This talk will offer a contextual view of economic activity that recognizes economic activity as inextricably linked to the social/cultural and environmental contexts within which it takes place. This alternative view of a sustaining economics makes evident that those processes that take place outside of the economic process itself, but that sustain input generation, material transformation and waste absorption, are critical to the creation of economic activity and the benefits derived from it. These external but essential processes are referred to as sustaining services. An economy that maintains or enhances sustaining services can be considered a sustaining economy that creates wealth; one that undermines or destroys them diminishes wealth. It is argued that the transition to such a context-based view of a sustaining economy is essential and has profound consequences for rethinking economic policy and its broader social and environmental implications.

Dr. O’Hara is well known for her expertise in sustainable economic development, global education and executive leadership. Dr. O’Hara is a strong advocate of higher education with experience in virtually every aspect of university administration including curriculum development, strategic planning, program accreditation, international partnerships, development and marketing.