



Re_Generation

Interacting With Your Institution's Stakeholders

Description

In order for the project to be credible in the eyes of the administration, you'll need to gather and demonstrate broader student support. This support will legitimize your mission: it will show the administration that there is a demand for the programs and changes you are asking for. To mobilize them as campus stakeholders, here are several potential methods you can employ. This PDF outlines some of these methods.

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- Communicating and working with the most relevant student associations depending on the institution (student unions, organizations, or other)
- Consultation by questionnaire or survey, summarized into key impactful statistics in a presentation or report.
- Conferences or regular town halls to keep your fellow students informed of the project's evolution, and to welcome feedback
- A newsletter or column on social networks, which you also submit to other student news channels (such as the student paper).
- Initiating or collaborating on a policy referendum. This can help get a lot of external attention. Ex: Concordia led a campaign demanding that the institution commits to teaching all students about sustainability and the climate crisis in their curriculum. This campaign decisively passed with an 89% yes vote, in a by-election with 20% turnout- the highest in our student union history, and it was widely covered by the CBC radio and TV. Learn more [here](#).

Enrolment numbers drive course decision making. So, it's going to be tough to advocate that students need more sustainability-oriented content if no one is taking electives already available. Read into the available electives, and consider them from the student perspective: what could the faculty teaching the course do to make it more appealing to students (ex: in the course description text)? Ask your peers why they are/aren't taking the courses. Do your best to work with the professors to help get enrollment numbers up. While the ideal scenario includes a mandatory sustainability curriculum for all students, it is demonstrated demand that will help drive this point home - including demand for any existing elective courses.

It is impossible to ensure that all students are interested in environmental and social issues. You don't need to convince everyone to be passionate activists; it's important to provide compelling facts and evidence. Whether one is sensitive to these issues or not, it has become necessary and unavoidable to be able to learn about sustainable development to succeed in one's profession. Consequently, the institution must ensure that it trains students who are enlightened citizens and who have been able to develop these skills throughout their degree programs (in the same way that business schools place an emphasis on accounting, strategy, or operations classes). Helping the broad student body understand this, and garnering support for the concept at a basic level is a worthwhile pursuit.

One of the major challenges in introducing a new course or transforming an old one is the academic resources at your disposal. Without a professor trained on the subject, competent and motivated by the course, the project is more difficult to implement. It is therefore very important to discuss with the professors in your school and make them your allies.

Identify the professors who might align with your cause and meet with them

There are probably a few professors in your school who are known for their sustainability awareness, regardless of the subject they teach. They can be valuable allies in dealing with the administration and other professors, and they will most likely be advocates and volunteers in their own classes.

Once a group starts to be structured and the strategies defined, it is important to try to include the less sensitive professors and try to convince them to support the initiative. Recognize that the task can be daunting and uncomfortable for professors new to sustainability topics. They are used to being experts in their field, and being encouraged to teach material they don't know well is stressful. It's okay to start small and learn from the profs with more experience about how they got started.

Consider the role that these professors will take in the working group

It is important that the role of the professors in the working group be well defined, in agreement with them. They can be a consultative and advisory body, a support point in negotiations with the management, or they can structure the working group thanks to their experience: anything is possible!

Some professors will prefer to stay in the background, while others will want to be fully involved in the working group. This is why it is important to identify a base of professors who are willing to help you with different degrees of involvement so that everyone is included.

Identify points of resistance

All professors must be consulted in order to identify both the levers and the obstacles, and to be able to move forward with full knowledge of the facts.

One must imagine that many professors have been teaching for decades and have never been confronted with such a challenge. Especially since the sense of climate urgency among students is recent, the professors are discovering the extent of the project at the same time as you are.

The challenges may vary school to school - in one the barriers may lie mostly in the administration's unwillingness to receive structural curriculum change. In another, it may be more related to individual professors being comfortable with existing teaching norms and resistant to enact change. Work with your allies to understand the specific landscape at your school and target action accordingly.

Without the support of the administration, it is difficult to move forward. Although students and teachers can identify a need for change and propose solutions, it is the administration that validates and incorporates the project into the institution's strategy. For the project to be successful, you and the administration must share a common vision of an institution that will express its identity at least partly through a multi-faceted sustainability approach. Depending on the institution, contacts with the administration will be very different: it is your experience and your conversations with faculty and members of the administration that will allow you to know with whom to start.

It is possible that the administration is already working on an overhaul of the program/course related to these issues. Find out if there is a "curriculum or program review" taking place, and if so, contact the person in charge of that project. Seek to understand their goals, learn how you can help to incorporate the student voice in the process if they have not already done so.

Who to Talk To

If this process is not already underway, other actors can be supportive to kickstart action:

- Associate Deans.
 - Different schools structure their administration differently, however, most will have an associate dean of teaching/education, or an associate dean of each program (ex: undergraduate). This person likely oversees some decisions at the program wide curriculum level. Any action that involves adding new programs or courses would need to flow through them.
- Sustainability Representatives at the school:
 - Check if there is a department/person in charge of these issues. If so, contact them directly. They may work within a sustainability research centre, be on staff at the administration, or work more broadly across the university rather than at the business school. Actions related to green-ing campus activities will relate to them -- but they'll also be a key advocate and supporter to connect you to the right stakeholders in other advocacy efforts.
 - Hiring managers: As mentioned previously, changing curriculums at your school cannot be done without professors trained to teach on matters of sustainability. This will require both training of current professors and, eventually, the hiring of more sustainability-experienced professors.
- The dean of your business school:
 - An important player who you'll likely need to convince. It may be appropriate not to meet with them too quickly, as you need to be able to develop a solid argument with this person. Alternatively, if they are already focused on sustainability, this may be the first actor to meet with, to unblock the situation immediately. Try to assess the specific situation at your school, and act accordingly.

What to Tell Them

For successful conversations which lead to next steps and action with these stakeholders, you'll need to prepare convincing arguments that demonstrate how your proposition to reform curricula benefits the school. Here are some good starting points:

- Demonstrate demand from business (corporate recruiters hire their students -- and hiring rates are a key metric of success for business schools. Problems like climate change, social injustice, inequality,

etc are major issues of the 21st century, and strategies addressing them are increasingly being incorporated at the hearts of businesses across Canada. These businesses are increasingly demanding sustainability-conscious employees, who will assure their long-term growth and resilience.

- Draw it back to the school's mission. One of the missions of any higher education institution is to train responsible citizens. Business schools are no exception, and to train young professionals knowledgeable about the contexts business is conducted in is becoming crucial in a world defined by supply chain disruptions, resource shortages and the increasing costs of fossil fuels.
- Many school directors have signed declarations of good intentions on the integration of climate or sustainable development issues in their courses: if this is the case, it is one more argument to encourage them to put their money where their mouth is.
- Check if they are a signatory to PRME (Principles of Responsible Management Education), and what accreditations they have. All these commitments can be leveraged as reasons to take sustainability seriously.
- Encourage them to be a pioneer
 - Schools don't want to be left behind. Many schools are starting to take action. This is evidenced by the average positive impact rating increasing by 3% in one year (in addition to the many best practises and examples referenced elsewhere). If a school's competitors are moving more quickly than they are, students will choose that school over them, and they'll lose money.
- Students are demanding change.
- Students are the "customers" in business schools -- they must be satisfied to keep choosing one school over the competition, generating revenue for the school.

Here are some key resources to refer to for evidence of student demand for sustainability:

- [The Re_Generation Manifesto](#), which was supported by over 65 youth organizations, and over 1,000 young leaders from 18 years old to 35 years old.
- [The Positive Impact Ratings Report](#), which collected data from over 8,800 students rating business schools' sustainability practices. The report demonstrated some of students' top demands, including:
 - Put sustainability at the core of economics and business courses.
 - "Stop teaching outdated theories and business models," including things like shareholder primacy.

Your school's Alumni are precious allies, as former students of the school who likely have had the chance to witness the importance of knowledge on sustainability in the workplace.

Their professional experience gives them a perspective on the training that we students do not yet have. Consulting with them and having them as allies can be a real asset for your conversations with the school's administration. Additionally, alumni can potentially be powerful guest speakers to talk to you and your team about the importance of change, and some might even have thoughts of their own or contacts with professors which you may otherwise not have had access to.

Reach out to alumni through whatever avenue is accessible, whether it be by email or by an alumni platform of the school, or even with the facebook groups and other social networks of the classes. Introductory conversations can take various forms, including (but not limited to) a questionnaire to analyse and draw conclusions on the way forward.

Why Alumni are Essential Stakeholders

Alumni are very important actors of an institution and are living proof of the value the school's education provided. They are also an important source of income for universities, which will help to amplify the voice of your movement.

Alumni can best assess the efficacy of their education, they have been offered because they have been able to compare it to their professional experience. Students do not yet have this perspective and members of the administration have it partially. It is therefore precious and even essential to collect the opinion of the Alumni to have the most complete vision possible of a course. They allow us to identify potential gaps in a course, strategic themes, the need to review certain course formats to make the content more attractive, etc.

Depending on the age of the institution, some Alumni will be more relevant than others, because the courses offered by the institution may have evolved. As a result, it may be best to begin by speaking with recent alumni, as the courses they have taken will more likely resemble the structure of the next iteration of the class offered by the school. Additionally, they will likely be able to connect you with alumni who came before them, so you don't have to find and cold call so many yourself. Ultimately, however, it's good to connect with more experienced alumni too. They bring credibility to your movement, and schools weigh their opinions heavily as potential donors.

How to Find Relevant Alumni

- During organised events (conferences, round tables) proposed by associations or members of the administration. Alumni can then share their career paths, their experience, present the company in which they work, etc
- During courses: Alumni have acquired an expertise that they are often called back share during lectures and seminars
- During competitions: Alumni often propose grants and prizes to reward student initiatives and initiatives, and encourage them in the path of entrepreneurship, research, etc.
- Through the Alumni Association: Most schools have some kind of formal network in which former students of the same school meet to, among other things, discuss school institute meet to, among other things, continue to maintain the bonds of camaraderie forged during their studies.

How to Contact Alumni

Several solutions exist to get in touch with the Alumni from your university.

1. Via the Student Union: there is probably an Alumni Officer in the Student Union of your school responsible for Alumni. This person will certainly be able to help you and direct you to the right people within the alumni association.
2. Via your administration: Similarly to the student union, you can find out if there is an Alumni Officer among the members of the administration.
3. Via the Alumni directory/platform: as a student, you most likely have access to a platform/directory allowing you to find all the alumni. The risk is that this directory is not updated. However, it is a good way to find names, according to criteria, such as the sector of activity or the region.
4. Via LinkedIn: a very useful tool that many students use to find internships. It can also be of great help to you. Like the directory, LinkedIn allows you to find names according to specific companies, sectors of activity, and training. Tip: By going to a company's profile you can directly see how many people have studied in your institution. You can even get in touch with these people by sending them a message on the LinkedIn messaging system.
5. Via Facebook discussion groups: many institutions have private Facebook discussion groups reserved for each class. If you manage to identify and join groups of former classes, this will allow you to send a message directly to an Alumni class. This technique works best for recent graduates (i.e. those who knew Facebook when they were students!)

How to Involve Alumni

To anticipate the different levels of motivation and investment you may encounter with Alumni, here are some suggested actions and formats that allow you to highlight their experiences and advice.

Level 1: Include all Alumni around a sustainability reflection/assessment

- Send a questionnaire to the entire Alumni database.
 - This questionnaire can allow you to survey the receptivity of the Alumni to certain subjects, and to identify some people interested in helping you more seriously.
 - It may be interesting to conduct this questionnaire with an Alumni you already know, to have them read it over
 - Note: you'll need to work with the school's alumni services department to gain access to send a survey like this. You'll also want to pilot test the survey with a group of close alumni contacts before you spread it wide.
- Write a letter to be signed by the Alumni asking for the integration of sustainability issues in your institution.
- Organise a special Alumni Afterwork on sustainability issues.
 - This is an opportunity to meet, create synergies, cohesion, and school spirit. Meeting and social interaction is always a powerful vector of emulation.
 - You can create a Facebook event for example, a small poster contest at your institution, an email to be distributed in the institution's newsletter and to the Alumni network, as well as a LinkedIn post

Level 2: Benefit from the expertise of some Alumni

- Build a list of expert Alumni speakers on certain topics who could participate in conferences or courses
- Propose to the most motivated Alumni to set up conferences and interventions in existing courses
 - This can bring a presence of environmental issues in a large set of courses.
- Organize special sustainability issues roundtables with these alumni, along with multi-stakeholder groups from the schools. These can include students, profs and administration and focus on a key initiative on which the school wants to improve.

What do you do if you are a recent graduate, but are unsure what to do because you are no longer at the university or in the area?

There are several actions you can take to enact change in your business school! For example, you can publish a message to initiate the reflection, launch the movement, break the ice.

Then advise the motivated students who are in the area with your experience as a former student. Eventually, you will introduce these students to our methodology to guide them.