

By Re_Generation

Make Recommendations for Change

Description

This section outlines the various ways sustainability can be introduced into courses, from new specialized courses to the addition of new case studies or modules into existing courses. It also introduces and outlines the importance of considering the structure of the courses that involve sustainability. It's essential that the courses are engaging and promoted well - both to ensure students absorb the content, and to drive enrollment in the courses. This section outlines ways to ensure engagement, from integrating guest speakers and experiential learning, to providing opportunities for research projects. Finally it includes examples of existing business school courses in Canada and around the world which integrate sustainability in various ways.

There are multiple avenues by which sustainability can be introduced into courses.

- Specialized courses
 - A course entirely dedicated to sustainability (ex: Sustainable Finance, Sustainability in Business, Social Enterprise, etc.)
 - To teach these courses, recruit PhD candidates as well as professors with expertise or interest in sustainable finance, while also using local industry talent to co-teach courses with guest speakers or lecturers.
- Introductory business courses that include a module or at least one case study on sustainability
 - Since introductory courses are generally standardized across the faculty, if one or two faculty members suggest adding a case study or sustainability module, the others can easily follow.
- More “traditional” business courses and electives with case studies or conferences focusing on sustainability.
 - Identify professors who appear to be interested in ESG issues and ask them to integrate sustainable development into their courses.
 - Position sustainable management as a transversal skill, such as marketing or accounting. Example: cover environmental and social risks when introducing the DCF method in a finance course.
- An internship program in sustainability in collaboration with a business
 - For example, Concordia launched the first sustainable finance internship program in a Canadian university last year in collaboration with Manulife.
- Specialized Master’s or MBA degree program in sustainable management
 - Accessible for students and professionals wishing to go back to school, whether they initially studied business or another discipline.

But for sustainability courses to be successful -- and to become permanent -- they have to be well received by students and generate consistent enrollment. To ensure this, it’s important to consider course formats and promotion.

Working with faculty and administration: don’t forget about course structure.

It’s important to consider and discuss the format of exactly how sustainability will be integrated in courses for three reasons.

1. It will help you “speak the same language” as faculty and administration.

Make sure you understand the background of what is already available, and the language of the types of programs and courses specific to your school. [Mapping the educational landscapes](#) should equip you well for these discussions. Showing you’ve done your research, and that you understand the system will help leaders see you as an equal, rather than falling into the power imbalance of usual teacher-student relationships. Creating this dynamic will help you get the information you need, and gain trust in order to advance change.

2. It will help you answer the question, “What would you propose?”

Although designing a course is the job of the administration and faculty, it is very common for this question to be asked to the students. They can help lay some groundwork and reduce the burden on faculty and staff. This provides a very good opportunity to:

Demonstrate professionalism and a desire to move your institution forward alongside other stakeholders,

Advocate for modern teaching approaches that adapt to the current needs of students
Put yourself in the other person's shoes. While we want to apply pressure, and be firm in demonstrating students' demand for change, we also need to be empathetic with the individuals we're working with. Recognize that the person you're speaking to also faces barriers as to what they can and cannot change; work with them to address them rather than blaming them for inaction.

3. It will help ensure sustainability courses are promoted well to students

This project does not end with the creation of a course that integrates sustainability. That course must also be described and promoted well to spur enrollment. Then, the course formats themselves must be optimized to provide value and be engaging for students. This will generate quality student reviews and further increase demand for the course. It is therefore important to ensure that the course format chosen gives the best possible value to the teaching and allows the students to develop their skills.

Below are some examples of different specific ways sustainability can be involved in courses, and the value they bring to students. It may be useful to work with faculty to ensure sustainability content is delivered through a variety of these formats, to appeal to diverse student interests and groups.

Make Sustainability Courses Engaging

These formats can supplement existing course material to integrate sustainability topics in an engaging way.

Guest Speakers

Classic and effective, lectures allow for the presentation of a variety of topics and can expose students to prestigious speakers and leaders. A lecture series also has the advantage of being able to be set up in the evening, which makes it possible to overcome the constraints of overcrowded schedules. Sometimes, institutions offer to reward the attendance of students who attend lectures with ECTS credits. The lecture cycle can be divided between several institutions, which encourages interaction with other students.

Experiential Learning

What better way to learn than by doing? The relevance of projects is increasingly recognized, as they allow students to take the time to question themselves, to find the answer and to act accordingly. Therefore, to learn and develop skills. This brings a sense of satisfaction to the students, provided that there is a good pedagogical framework and that the themes are interesting and stimulating. You can do a project in one day during a hackathon as well as throughout the year.

This can be taken to the next level by harnessing the increased willingness of industries to support co-op/university practicum opportunities in sustainable business and make them credited in students degrees (e.g., [Concordia's sustainable investing practicum with Manulife](#)).

Research Projects

Research projects (for a course credit) allow students to learn by diving deeper into topics of interest to them. It is a way to discover new problems, to try to solve them and to confront reality. Research projects are well suited for sustainability issues, as the field is still so rapidly evolving. There are many avenues for

innovation, whether by finding new partners (environmental organizations, local experts, and companies at the forefront of sustainable integration) or by refining research practices to create more positive impact in and of themselves. Students can support faculty research for course credit, or be connected with local organizations for volunteer experiences, capstone projects, etc. within other courses.

Examples of Sustainability Courses and Programs

In the later stages of developing new courses, faculty may want models to work off of, or to understand how their plans compare to other schools. These examples set precedent and may provide a useful launching point for some professors.

Programs

- York University: Schulick School of Business: [BBA Specialization in Responsible Business](#)
- University of British Columbia: Sauder School of Business: [Sustainability and Social Impact Concentration](#)
- HEC Montreuil: [Sustainability Management Concentration](#) (12 credits)
- McGill, Desautels: [Major or Concentration in Managing for Sustainability](#)

Individual Courses

- University of Waterloo: [Sustainability Accounting, Indicators and Reporting](#)
- University of Toronto: [3573 - Sustainability Reporting](#) [3574 - Greenhouse Gas Accounting and Reporting](#)
- Western University Brescia College: [Nonprofit Marketing and Advancement](#)

International examples

- HEC: [Économie Circulaire](#)
- University of British Columbia: [Climate Change Courses](#)
- Harvard: [Sustainability and International Business: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies. Applied Circular Economics](#)
- Maastricht School of Management: [International Business & Sustainable Development specialization](#)
- Copenhagen Business School: [International Business and Sustainability](#)

Most business schools feature a variety of conferences each year. They are a great opportunity to re-engage alumni, and expose students to inspiring leaders. Some may be facilitated by the school itself -- perhaps by the program office or a certain faculty disciplinary department (e.g., Finance). Others may be hosted by student organizations and clubs -- both the sustainability-oriented club, and those focused on other topics.

All business school conferences present the opportunity to integrate sustainability. Here are some examples of how:

1. Sustainability-focused conference facilitated by the school
2. Sustainability-focused conference facilitated by students
3. Other conference hosted by the school
4. Other conference hosted by students

Sustainability Conferences Hosted by the School

If you're aware of an upcoming sustainability conference hosted by your school, try to ensure that someone on your team is involved with the process. This will:

- Help you strengthen your relationships with the faculty and administration organizing the conference.
- Give you the opportunity to connect with prominent alumni in the sustainability space, who you can then keep engaged throughout your other work and advocacy -- leveraging their status at the school to drive action.
- Allow you to push for the integration of cutting edge topics that students care about, and also remind the organizers to involve speakers and issues from diverse backgrounds.

Examples

- [Smith, Queens](#)

Sustainability Conferences Hosted by Students

Maybe your organization is ahead of the game, and you're already hosting and organizing sustainability conferences for business students at your school. Great job! This is a wonderful way to increase exposure for your movement, for important topics, and to achieve some of the benefits of working with the school on their conferences if they aren't doing it themselves.

Here are some tips on partnering to increase your impact:

- Involve non-business-focused sustainability student organizations in the planning and execution.
 - This can open up your range of topics and speakers to a more interdisciplinary realm. Plus, the more resources, the merrier.
- Partner with other business student organizations for promotion.
 - For example, if you are planning a session on Impact Investing, make sure to inform the fi-

nance-focused clubs at your school, and ask them to promote it to their members. This will help increase the exposure of sustainability topics to those outside the usual fold of interest.

- Draw upon the school for support.
 - Encourage faculty to share information about the conference in their classes; make sure to provide them with slides and details to make their lives easier. Also, you can seek out sponsorship from the school. They may have budget to support student activities. Talk to a member of the school administration you're familiar with - they can likely point you to the right department to find out.
- Leverage Corporate Sponsorship.
 - Although you'll want a diverse range of speakers and presenters --some of which likely will be nonprofits and SMEs without money to spare -- try to engage with some larger corporations for sponsorship. Reach out to them early -- they plan their budgets far in advance. Reference their sustainability and ESG commitments, and ensure you have an appealing package to give them which details the benefits of sponsoring you (e.g., amplifying their brand for recruiting new hires, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability which new grads value, etc.).

Examples

- [Schulich, York](#)
- [Ivey, Western](#)
- [Molson, Concordia](#)
- [Desautels, McGill](#)

Other (non-sustainability-focused) Conferences

Regardless of who these are hosted by, your organization can have an impact on the people and content included within them.

One method would be to try to establish a policy that a certain percentage of content at each conference the school hosts must be related to sustainability. Whether that be by showcasing a non-profit, social enterprise, etc., as a guest, or focusing on how another organization addressed sustainability issues in their financial planning, strategy, etc. You can lobby school administration to support you on this policy, or your student governing body/council. You can support this policy by volunteering your organization to support other clubs that are striving to meet this criteria and don't know where to begin.

This policy is similar to, and should compliment, one that advocates for diversity representation in conference speakers. If one of those isn't already present at your school, you can advocate for that as well, perhaps partnering with the DE&I club or committee if applicable.

Other Extracurricular Methods of Integrating Sustainability

Note: these examples were generated following the The Quebec Roundtables on Sustainable Finance, and pertain mostly to finance topics, however, the same ideas could be applied to other facets of sustainability.

- Student-run responsible or impact investing funds
 - Supervised by professors such as [Desautels Capital Management](#) at McGill with \$2.5 million invested in a socially responsible manner.
 - Managed by students independently of the University, such as the [Montreal Social Value Fund](#), which makes impact investments.

- A Fellowship program where students contribute to the professors' research projects.
 - Example at McGill with the [Integrated Management Student Fellowship](#) where students also have the opportunity to develop a project outside of class to apply the knowledge developed during the research. Here are examples of research topics for the [year 2020-2021](#).
- The organization of a Quebec case competition to use the creativity of students to solve local financial institutions' problems.
 - o Inspired by the [Rotman Sustainable Finance Week](#), which includes a case competition.
 - o Already partially exists (but not specialized on Quebec): [McGill International Portfolio Challenge](#) whose [2019 challenge](#) focused on the issue of divestment from fossil fuels, shareholder engagement, and decarbonizing a portfolio.
- The creation of forums for discussion and meetings between industry, professors and students
 - o The [Colloque québécois de l'investissement responsable des PRI](#) should give access to students and professors from all Quebec universities by offering preferential rates but also by providing free reserved seats, as the Responsible Investment Association (RIA) does for its annual forum.
 - o [Sustainability Ecosystem](#) could also be a great actor to facilitate and create those discussions, or a neutral actor such as Finance Montréal for example.
- A continuous learning program accessible to everyone, such as the [Sustainable Investment Professional Certification](#)
- Case Competitions are a great way to promote cross-faculty collaboration and create engaging opportunities for students. [Click here](#) for the Re_Generation comprehensive guide on running one.

Sustainability is inherently interdisciplinary. Addressing problems like climate change and its many impacts will require collaboration between experts of a variety of fields, and each field has something to bring to the others.

Allowing for greater cross-disciplinary exchange at the heart of the university stems from the possibility of exchange within the classroom. Opening up courses and minors in one department to students from other faculties will help students become familiar with cross-disciplinary work, and enable a greater degree of creativity in the solutions that students come up with.

These interdisciplinary skills are essential for addressing societal problems, but they're also generally essential for student success in the workforce. [Studies show](#) that increasingly, employers are looking for wider skill sets in their employees. If schools want their students to succeed - a key driver of success in school rankings like the Financial Times - then they need to be equipping their students with interdisciplinary opportunities.

One example of this in action can be seen in minors at business schools created across the country available to non-management students- like [this program at McGill](#). However, these minors in many cases don't afford non-management students with the same selection of sustainable business classes available in other management-specific programs; pushing for greater accessibility of [programs like this](#) may help you rectify this.

Here are some strategies for incorporating interdisciplinarity at business schools

1. Collaborate with other faculties to create inter-disciplinary research on sustainability.
2. Include minors in management - and sustainable management - for non-business students. This is important because not all business leaders will come from business schools - it's important to equip students with skills in other disciplines (ex: environmental science) with the skills to manage effectively so they might start sustainable start up etc. In addition, it's important to open up the idea of sustainable management principles to other students outside business (ex: students in engineering) who might not be exposed to these ideas otherwise. (ex: [Guelph minor in Sustainable Business](#))
3. Within the management minors open to non-business students, open more sustainable business classes to them to ensure that future sustainable business leaders have multi-disciplinary backgrounds. Ensure sustainability-focused classes are accessible to minor students, as sometimes they are not included within the subset of courses available.
4. Open individual specialized courses in sustainable business to non-business students studying sustainability in other faculties (but cannot commit to take a full concentration or minor in management) to allow them to understand the business perspective and contribute to innovative solutions.
5. Open individual courses from other faculties (ex: International Development, Geography, or Environmental Science) to business students. Sometimes rather than reinventing the wheel with a new business course, some key concepts can be transferred to business students from other disciplines.
6. Open a minor in sustainability accessible to multiple faculties - ex: [MacMaster Minor in Sustainability](#)
7. Have an interdisciplinary conference, event, project or activity in collaboration with other departments at the school. For example, it can be good to mix up groups from different programs to expose students to different perspectives

Challenges to Interdisciplinarity

Like general curriculum change, the existing structures in academia present barriers to increasing interdisciplinarity in research and education. Change requires faculty buy-in (for creating new curricula, or adapting existing curricula to include collaboration with other faculty). New programs or changes to the structure, requirements and accessibility of existing programs need support from program administration. The additional challenge with interdisciplinary work comes from the sources of funding that University departments receive. The majority of funding is assigned to individual departments; thus, there is no incentive for one department to do something that will reward another. However, as interdisciplinarity gains traction in the job market, and as a priority for governments, explicit funding may be made available for programming that addresses this need. A good place to start would be looking into whether such funding sources exist at your school, and approaching departments that could collaborate to make use of them.

Additional Resources

- [How Undergraduate Programs Can Advance Interdisciplinarity and Connect to Practice](#)
- [Building Interdisciplinarity in Sustainability Education and Research](#)

When it comes down to it, a university is a business: it has operations just like any other -- beyond teaching. And those operations can be made more ethical and sustainable.

As the processes surrounding education begin to change to reflect the need for greater incorporation of sustainability, so too must the campus itself transform itself. Incorporating feedback from students and from other stakeholders to create a truly green campus will be vital. For example, has your school divested from fossil fuels yet? An **increasing number of schools** are taking action in this area, but there's more to be done. If no one has started this movement at your institution yet, this could be a great starting place.

Other areas to consider include:

- Ensure your school has a green bin (compost) and recycling infrastructure in place. If it doesn't, lobby!
- Advocate for plastic use reduction in school cafeterias, food franchises, and on-campus stores. Also ensure these establishments have plant-based food options, as these have a far smaller carbon footprint.
- Assess and advocate for inclusive hiring practices among school staff, and accessibility measures introduced for existing staff.
- Look for an assessment on energy efficiency on campus. If none have taken place, suggest one. Advocate that all new buildings are LEED certified, in addition to other certifications like Well.
- Consider the transportation options in and around your school. Is it optimized for active and public transportation? Or car-focused? Changes to transportation systems are long-term initiatives, however, stepping stone solutions like adding bike racks can be done in the interim.