

## SUSTAINABILITY 101

### Definitions of sustainability

Sustainability is meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN World Commission on Environment & Development: Brundtland Commission, 1987)

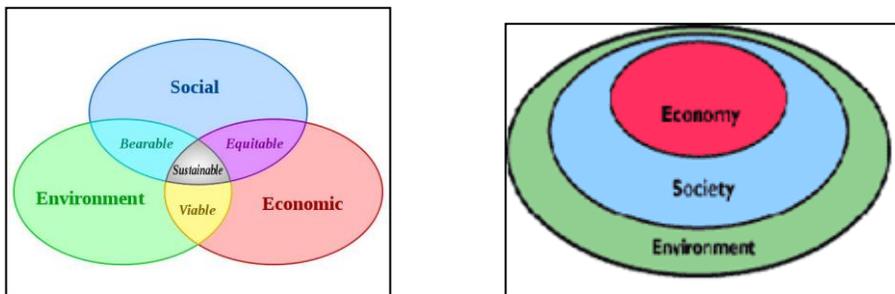
Sustainability is “A dynamic process which enables all people to realize their potential and improve their quality of life in ways which simultaneously protect and enhance the Earth’s life support systems” (U.K. Forum for the Future, 2006).

### “The Three Pillars of Sustainability”

Also known as the “triple bottom line.” Three interrelated dimensions of sustainability: ecology, society, and economics. The three are conceived of and labeled in various ways:

- Economy, equity, ecology
- Profit, people, planet
- Economic security, social justice, ecological health
- Economic well-being, social harmony, ecological integrity

The relationship among the three dimensions is conceived of in two primary ways.



### Social and geographical dimensions of sustainability

Sustainability needs to be considered at various social and geographical levels: personal, local, bioregion, state, nation, continent, planet. The emphasis placed on each of these levels varies among thinkers and issues.

### Sustainability in higher education

- "Sustainability implies that the critical **activities of a higher education institution** are (at a minimum) ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable, and that they will continue to be so for future generations."
- "The institution would **function as a sustainable community**, embodying responsible consumption of food and energy, treating its diverse members with respect, and supporting these values in the surrounding community."
- "A truly sustainable college or university would emphasize these concepts in its **curriculum and research**, preparing students to contribute as working citizens to an environmentally sound and socially just society."

--Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future ([www.ulsf.org](http://www.ulsf.org))

### Seeking the full significance of sustainability in the curriculum

Move beyond ...

- merely the operational to include the curricular
- merely the environmental, or only the environmental and economic, to include all three pillars.
- disciplinary specialization to interdisciplinary inquiry.
- prescription

The **status and function** of sustainability in the curriculum

- Sustainability as a **subject of analysis**
- Sustainability as a **prescription** for individual and corporate behavior
- Sustainability as a **lens of inquiry**: a way of looking at, evaluating, and solving problems.
- Sustainability as a **core educational value**, one that ought to find its way into courses across the disciplines, which will define and approach sustainability in various ways.
- Sustainability as a **transformative process** that has no final conclusion.

### Sustainability at UW Oshkosh

#### **Earth Charter:**

An international declaration based on the principles of respect and care for the community of life

- ecological integrity
- social and economic justice
- participatory democracy
- peace and nonviolence

In 2002, UW Oshkosh became one of only a few campuses to officially endorse the Earth Charter.

#### **Fair Trade:**

- Fair Trade is an alternative system of trade that aims to improve lives and protect the environment by empowering poor farmers and producers in the developing world, adopting a system of trade that is characterized by fairness and transparency, and creating a framework for ecologically friendly practices.
- In 2008, UW Oshkosh became the first university in the country to declare itself a Fair Trade University. Since then 8 other campuses have followed suit and a national Fair Trade University Steering Committee has been formed.

**A Campus Sustainability Plan** was adopted in 2008 as a resource to guide the integration of sustainability into *operations, curriculum, research, and community outreach*.

#### **UW Oshkosh has**

- **Campus Sustainability Council**, co-chaired by an operations leader and a faculty member, and including students faculty, and administration
- **Director of Campus Sustainability**: an administrative position focused on promoting, coordinating, and evaluating the sustainability of operations at UW Oshkosh..
- **Chancellor's Fellow for Sustainability**: a faculty member who promotes and coordinates the infusion of sustainability into the formal and informal curriculum.
- **Fair Trade Committee**, devoted to promoting, coordinating, and evaluating the university's efforts to support Fair Trade and educate the community about it.

#### **Essential Learning Outcome for the entire university**

- "*Knowledge of sustainability and its applications*" was ratified as one of the Essential Learning Outcomes for UWO students in 2008. It is part of the category of "Responsibility, as Individuals and Communities."
- Knowledge of sustainability is defined as "the ability to understand local and global *Earth systems*, the qualities of *ecological integrity* and the means to restore and preserve it, and understand the interconnectedness of *ecological integrity, economic well-being, and social justice*, in order to *analyze complex environmental, economic, and social issues* and to respond effectively to them."

#### **Signature Question**

- In 2011, sustainability was established one of three Signature Questions in the new University Studies Program: "*How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?*"
- The goal is to build intellectual curiosity and to lay the foundation for lifelong intellectual development and global citizenship concerning sustainability in all our students.
- Every student is required to take a Quest course with a sustainability focus within their first four semesters.