

Definitions of Sustainability

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This is not an exhaustive list- this is just meant to get your started! The Brundtland Commission definition is the definition most often quoted, but should by no means be considered the final word on sustainability.

Sustainability is “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs....A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the basic opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.”

--Brundtland Commission , United Nations, 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 ”

--UK’s Forum for the Future, 2006

“Sustainability is achieved when all people on Earth can live well without compromising the quality of life for future generations.”

--Rolf Jucker, “A Vision for a Sustainable University”

“Sustainability is an ideal end-state- like democracy, it is a lofty goal whose perfect realization eludes us. For this reason, there will always be competing definitions of sustainability. We know these definitions will always include the well-being of people, nature, our economy, and our social institutions, working together effectively over the long term.”

--Alan Atkisson, “The Compass of Sustainability,” 1998

“Sustainability is presently seen as a delicate balance between the economic, environmental, and social health of a community, nation, and of course, the Earth....sustainability, however, is more than just the interconnectedness of the economy, society, and the environment...sustainability may be something more grand and noble, a dynamic, a state of collective grace, a facet of Gaia, even of Spirit.”

--Alan Fricker, “Measuring Up to Sustainability”, 1998

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)