

STARS 1.0 - Education & Research - Credit 5

Defining Sustainability in the Curriculum

The University of Denver is a great private university dedicated to the public good. Through its traditions and its adoption of the Presidents Climate Commitment in 2006, the University has committed itself to sustainability in teaching, research, and community engagement. Specifically, the University of Denver identifies sustainability-enhanced curricula based upon the following tenets:

- We believe in promoting learning by engaging with students in advancing scholarly inquiry, cultivating critical and creative thought, and generating knowledge.
- We strive for partnerships with local, regional, and global communities that contribute to a sustainable common good.
- We teach students to be ethical and socially responsible leaders prepared to be productive citizens.

The influential United Nations Brundtland Commission Report of 1987 defined sustainable development as “forms of progress that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs,” while promoting and maintaining equitable environmental, social, and economic systems. An understanding of sustainability, therefore, demands a cross-disciplinary, systems-based approach that addresses the interdependence of each of these components.

The University of Denver has also considered the role of higher education in sustainability. The institutional vision for sustainability is influenced by the Declaration of Thessaloniki (1997), which states, “Education is an indispensable means to give to all women and men in the world the capacity to own their own lives, to exercise personal choice and responsibility, to learn throughout life without frontiers, be they geographical, political, cultural, religious, linguistic or gender.”

Sustainability-focused courses concentrate on the concept of sustainability, defined above, including its social, economic, and environmental dimensions, or focus intently on one area. In addition, sustainability-focused courses must examine an issue or a topic using sustainability as a lens. **Sustainability-related courses** incorporate sustainability as a distinct course component or module, or concentrate on a single sustainability principle or issue. Courses do not have to address all three components of sustainability in order to be classified as either sustainability-focused or sustainability-related.

Students within **sustainability-focused courses** are expected to develop a grounded understanding of the concepts of environmental, social, and/or economic sustainability, as well as the ability to think critically about the application of the concept(s) to the real world. Students within **sustainability-related courses** are expected to build knowledge about a component of sustainability or develop an understanding of basic concepts related to sustainability in the context of a specific academic field of study.

The University continues its work in strategic planning and improvement in sustainability, including the assessment and identification of sustainability in the curriculum. The University recognizes that the nature of issues related to sustainability will evolve and that the body of knowledge that supports our understanding of sustainability will develop rapidly. Thus, the definition of sustainability in the curriculum will be periodically reassessed.