



International IAU Conference
EDUCATION FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE
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Report of Working Group 1
Initial Education and Training (Bachelors and Masters)

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Given the interdisciplinary nature of education for sustainability (EFS), it was acknowledged that the disciplinary approach is still very present in higher education and that this is a fundamental challenge. We do not need a completely new curriculum, but reform can happen within existing disciplinary structures. The challenge is: How do we introduce SD in the curriculum? How do we integrate it into the disciplines? We need to identify and disseminate the best examples of these.

Accreditation bodies are a key leverage point. We must work with these groups so that they begin to expect SD to be taught.

The group discussed several examples of attempts to bring sustainability to the curriculum:

- At Monterrey Tech (Mexico), a required course on SD for Bachelors students was not well received. Now they are more successfully weaving SD throughout the curriculum. What they need now is a way to evaluate and assess their progress.
- An interdisciplinary, multi-cultural seminar at a Belgian university was described involving an extensive role-play on climate change in which countries were represented and asked to develop resolutions on CO2 reduction. Student response to this experience was very positive – they felt they were taken seriously and engaged in real problem solving. Water will be the next focus of this seminar.
- A South-North project administered in Holland by the Dutch National Network for SD (DHO) involves students from multiple universities traveling south, for

example, to Benin to work with students on a sustainability problem there (usually having multiple social, economic, and environmental dimensions). Then Benin students came to Holland to work on a sustainability issue there.

- A virtual seminar was also described, which involves students from 16 European universities addressing a case on water management.
- Members of Engineering department in Sweden were required to come together and design a new Engineering program, which incorporates SD. There were skeptics from the beginning, but because all were required to participate, there was full support for the resulting program.

All examples supported the need for interdisciplinary efforts, for engaging students in solving real world problems and making the link to social responsibility and action.

Participants discussed related concerns and needs:

- need for resources/good examples to support innovation in teaching and disciplinary structures;
- need for financial support at some universities;
- challenge of making SD compelling for greater numbers of faculty members;
- need for case studies addressing why problems arise in efforts to incorporate SD;
- question of whether SD course should float independently, should be infused into the departments, or both.

WG participants also discussed briefly some examples of efforts to teach educators and faculty members how to teach SD within their disciplines.

A critical question was raised, which we could only begin to address: What are the essential tools that students ought to have in order to understand and address the complex problems of the world? What is the minimum or basic knowledge all graduating students should possess?

The moderator and rapporteur introduced the WG to the “Global Higher Education for Sustainability Partnership (GHESP) Toolkit: Reorienting Higher Education Toward Sustainability,” a major project of the GHESP Type II partnership.

Participants divided into four small groups and discussed the following questions:

- 1- What kinds of tools and resources would be most useful in the online Toolkit?
- 2- What specific tools would you recommend?

Discussion summaries

Small Group I: The Toolkit should provide:

- definitions of the concepts of sustainable development with links to relevant disciplines, innovative ways to teach the topics, and good examples
- list of suggested topics for MA and PhD theses, as well as abstracts of completed theses
- bibliography for ESD with summaries of each publication

- good models of curriculum reform
- institutionalization strategies – how do you get to real and lasting results?
- good practices on public policies (as in Sweden) – need evidence for lobbying governments
- examples of non-sustainable projects and negative consequences – give attention to problems and barriers; development plans that have proved counter-productive in various parts of the world
- speakers list
- consultants list
- methodologies for interdisciplinary approaches
- subsidiary resources/course – on dynamics of social change

Challenges: getting information in the Toolkit that is useful for different parts of the world (it cannot do everything); avoiding reinventing the wheel

Small Group II: The Toolkit should:

- help HE institutions in moving toward the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development
- provide advanced search engine with proper classifications, keywords, etc.
- provide different languages to make absolutely clear its international intent
- offer format for universities to report advances in SD – those who report should be available through email
- take into account that universities are very conservative and be designed accordingly
- be specific in terms of who its intended audiences are and be designed accordingly
- provide two paths: examples or case studies on how universities can evolve toward SD AND specific examples of courses that have incorporated SD
- be concrete and flexible – curriculum changes from country to country, as do university structures
- provide quality more than quantity; otherwise it won't be used

Small Group III: The Toolkit should include:

- list of MA (and PhD) programs related to SD
- relevant course descriptions and interdisciplinary teaching materials
- sources of funding
- questions/challenges for SD – AIDS, poverty, obesity, alcohol, etc.
- requests from different parts of the world for South-North projects, etc. – an active “bulletin board”
- membership options? Email network?
- limited editors – rotating editorial board

Small Group IV: The Toolkit should include:

- button with suggestions, theories
- guidelines for teacher education, primary and secondary
- basic principles accepted by EU

- not only specialized courses
- regional languages where possible
- dilemma oriented learning model
- collection of examples to inspire teachers (now in Swedish)
- strategies for change on all dimensions - inspiring lectures
sticks and carrots
- courses/examples Bachelor, Masters

Other Needs:

- research/development of different SD related teaching methods
- how create a program
- how can we make the teachers work together - common vision
- interactive site: with questions
- start in kindergarten, and include primary and secondary examples
- combine practice with theory