

# Proposal to Create an Undergraduate Graduation Requirement for Sustainability

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Drafted by the Presidential Working Group on Sustainability Education Committee

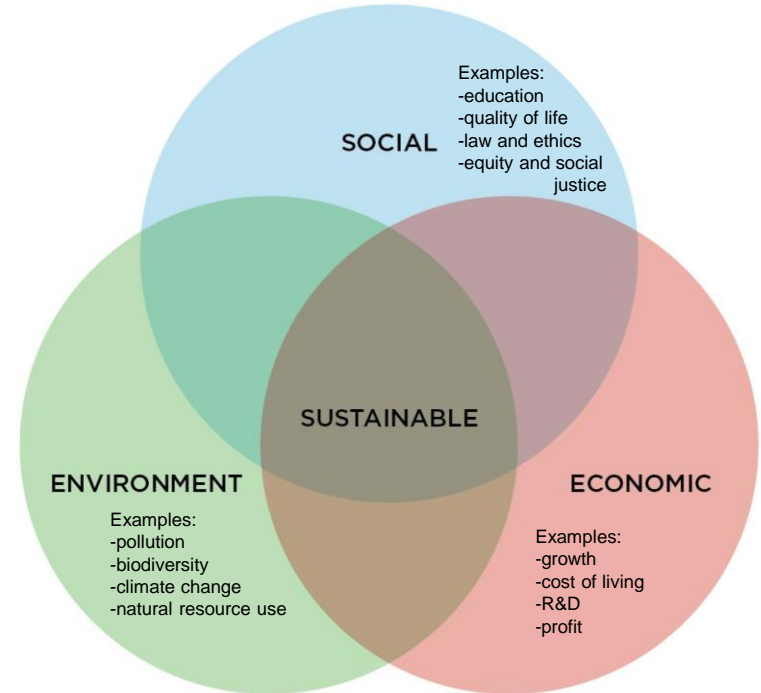
# USC Sustainability Education in Assignment: Earth

- Aspects that support pursuit of a graduation requirement
  - a. Vision: **Educating future leaders** from all walks of life in their chosen field with a problem-solving mindset aligned with human and natural systems, and involving all stakeholders
  - b. Aspiration: Ensure that USC alumni are stewards of the planet, with **every USC student engaged in sustainability learning** – both didactic and experiential – through courses, research, and engagement at USC.



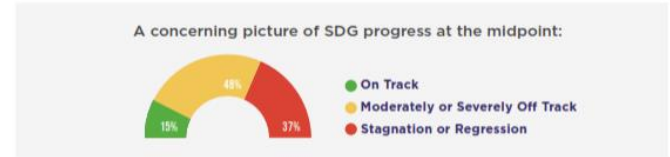
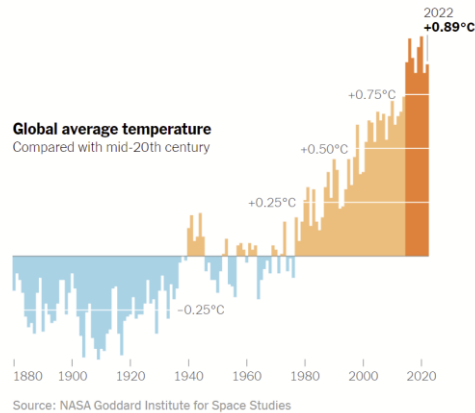
# Sustainability Graduation Requirement

- A requirement that all students take a course that meets **agreed upon standards** and is **tagged** as a sustainability course.
  - 3-4 units depending school
- The course may be from **anywhere** in a student's curriculum.
- **Every school** can integrate sustainability concepts into their own curriculum, topics, thematic areas, although a student could also obtain this credit through a GE (such as a writing-themed sustainability course).



# Students need greater awareness of the sustainability challenge we are facing

- Ongoing climate crisis
- Struggling to meet UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Planetary stability and resilience under threat



Progress assessment for the 17 Goals based on assessed targets, 2023 or latest data (percentage)



# Students need sustainability education to better prepare for the jobs of today/tomorrow

## 8 SUSTAINABILITY SKILLS FOR WORKING PROFESSIONALS

Courses For Organizations **Insights** More Info



Harvard Business School Online



07 OCT 2021

Catherine Cote | Staff

[Business in Society, Sustainable Business Strategy](#)

The primary goal of businesses has historically been to make a profit. Today, however, the world is highly complex, and businesses' goals have changed. Leaders and purpose-driven professionals are starting to value far more than just their companies' economic responsibilities; they also value their ethical, philanthropic, and environmental responsibilities.



USC Sustainability

UKGBC

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Homepage > News > **Every job is a sustainability job**

## Every job is a sustainability job: what skills and knowledge are needed for the green transition?

On Skills and Education Day at COP28, UKGBC outlines its vision of a built environment industry in which all stakeholders are equipped with the skills and knowledge to deliver climate action

Microsoft | Tech Community | Community Hubs | Blogs | Events | Microsoft Learn | Lounge

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## Make Sustainability Part of Everybody's Job

By [Drew Wilkinson](#)  
Published Feb 10 2022 08:44 PM 13K Views

As companies large and small wake up to the urgency of the climate crisis, many are marshaling their resources to reduce their environmental impact and transform their business. But all too often they fail to leverage one of the most powerful and readily available resources they already have - their employees. This article will explore why sustainability should be a part of everybody's job and how to get there.

## **Universities with Sustainability Graduation Requirements**

[Arizona State University](#)

[University of Wisconsin Green Bay](#)

[University of California San Diego](#)

[Western Michigan University](#)

[University of Vermont](#)

[University of Connecticut](#)

[University of Iowa](#)

[Furman University](#)

[CSU East Bay](#)

[Dickinson College](#)

[Pacific University Oregon](#)



# Why a graduation requirement is the right option

|      | Single required course   | General ed requirement   | Graduation requirement*   |
|------|--|--|---|
| Pros | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consistent content</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased options for students to engage with sustainability</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allow students to connect with sustainability in any way that interests them</li> <li>- Allow flexibility to departments in how they contribute courses</li> </ul> |
| Cons | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New hiring to staff course</li> <li>- Limited ability for students to connect sustainability to major</li> <li>- May impact time to grad</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creates larger conversation on GE program</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Some realignment in course offerings needed to meet induced demand</li> </ul>  |

- A requirement that all students take a course (min. 3 units) that meets **agreed upon standards** and is **tagged** as a sustainability course.
- The course may be from **anywhere** in a student's curriculum.



## Flexibility in completing requirement

| Course type     | 1st year | 2nd year | 3rd year | 4th year |
|-----------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| GESM            | X        |          |          |          |
| GE              | X        | X        | X        | X        |
| WRIT 150        | X        |          |          |          |
| Minor           |          | X        | X        | X        |
| WRIT 340        |          |          | X        | X        |
| Lower div major | X        | X        |          |          |
| Upper div major |          |          | X        | X        |
| Other elective  | X        | X        | X        | X        |

Suggest a petition system for untagged classes (e.g., 490, 499)



## Stakeholder Engagement

- Presidential Working Group on Sustainability in Education, Research, and Operations (PWG) voted in support of proposal
- Received feedback from the Council of Academic Advisors
- Discussed feasibility with the Registrar's Office
- Presented proposal to the Committee on Academic Policies and Procedures
- Student Sustainability Committee working on a USG resolution in support
- Last steps (anticipated):
  - Approval from the Provost
  - Implementation through UCOC



# Implementation

- Sustainability course criteria need to be refined and adopted
- Form course review committee
- Encourage faculty to submit existing and new courses for the tag and adjust syllabi if needed
- Estimate ~2,500 seats needed per semester in sustainability tagged courses



## Conclusions

A sustainability graduation requirement would be a draw for incoming students

Ease of implementation

- Very low cost
- Existing infrastructure

An opportunity for USC to be a leader among major research universities

Critical for our students futures and the world's future

A small lift with a giant impact



# QUESTIONS?



Working together  
for a sustainable future



# Rollout plan

**1. Decision to implement sustainability graduation requirement**

2. Adoption of criteria that define a sustainability course at USC

3. Creation of committee to assess syllabi for attainment of course criteria (step 2)

4. Assessment of course syllabi and assignment of new sustainability tag to courses that meet criteria

5. Analysis of tagged courses to ensure sufficient offerings to meet initial and final demand

**Inclusion of requirement in Course Catalog (fall)**

**Year 1:** Incoming first-years must meet requirement during time at USC

**Year 2:** First-years and sophomores must meet requirement during time at USC

**Year 3:** First-years, sophomores, and juniors must meet requirement during time at USC

**Year 4:** All undergraduate students must meet requirement during time at USC

## **Appendix: suggested USC sustainability course criteria**

1. Include universal sustainability student learning outcome (SLO) **A**, plus any two of SLOs **B-G** in the course learning outcomes
2. Incorporate course content on sustainability, or the application of disciplinary knowledge to sustainability, through assignments, modules, lectures, and/or experiential learning activities.

## Appendix: suggested USC sustainability course criteria

1. Include SLO **A**, plus any two of SLOs **B-G** in the course learning outcomes
  - A. Students will be able to describe one or more definitions/framework of sustainability that recognizes the environmental, social/equity, and economic dimensions of sustainability
    - i. Because there are many definitions, instructors should use the one(s) that most closely align with their discipline and/or that will resonate with the students in the context of the class.
  - B. Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to think critically about the role of sustainability in \*discipline\* (\*the discipline of the course)
  - C. Students will be able to analyze sustainability problems [related to \*discipline\*] and propose solutions needed for the transition to a sustainable future
  - D. Students will be able to evaluate impacts of sustainability problems and solutions on groups of people with differing identities
  - E. Students will be able to apply interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration in advancing sustainability
  - F. Students will be able to evaluate their own values as they relate to sustainability problems and solutions
  - G. A sustainability SLO defined by the instructor ([examples](#))



## **Appendix: suggested USC sustainability course criteria**

2. Incorporate course content on sustainability or the application of disciplinary knowledge to sustainability through assignments, modules, lectures, and/or experiential learning activities.
  - a. Content should aid students in achieving the sustainability SLOs included (from above)
  - b. Courses should have a substantial amount of sustainability material (around 30%), either by amount of time spent on sustainability or the amount of content.
  - c. Included in the material should be analysis of a sustainability problem(s) and solution proposals that addresses equity/justice, economic and environmental dimensions of the problem(s).
  - d. If the course is not specifically focused on sustainability, material should encourage students to demonstrate the interconnection between their field of study and the principles of sustainability as defined by the course.

