

SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES AND TOPICS

SOKA LEARNING CLUSTER
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DESCRIPTION

The concept of sustainability has acquired iconic status in the 25 years since 1987 and the publication of the Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future*. Despite the simple summary of it, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet these own needs," figuring out what can and should be done in specific circumstances has proven to be most challenging.

Concerns about maintaining biodiversity; achieving higher standards of living while simultaneously narrowing wide gaps between the rich and poor; improving the health, education, and welfare of entire populations; devising economically efficient ways to account for valuable environmental services; creating competent means to govern and manage; building the capacity of organizations to operate more effectively; and a long list of other compelling issues all clamor for attention. The long list of legitimate issues and concerns is daunting, if not even overwhelming.

Where to simply and so begin? This Learning Cluster will focus on four separate, albeit often interrelated, issues:

- Biodiversity—Balancing the needs of people and the environment with development
- Eco-Efficiency—Including Industrial Ecology and Urban Symbiosis
- Certification—Keeping "score" of environmental processes, practices, and services
- Social Enterprise/Social Entrepreneurship—Creating new ways to live for the long run

An over-arching collection of ideas generally labeled "Capacity Building" will round-off the course as a way to link the four topical issues.

Students will select one of the topics early in the course and will form into working groups to carve out and define a select problem from within the topic for more detailed analysis. This will be called the *Problem Definition* exercise. I will work with each group to help sharpen and refine the problems each selects for more in-depth analysis. Group *Oral Presentations* and a final, written *Executive Summary* are also required.

Groups will work to produce an analysis and oral presentation which will provide substance for the final written product. The group's analysis and oral presentation should include the following four elements:

- A clear statement of the problem, with specific care given to different perspectives and disciplinary approaches that come to bear.
- A clear description of various options to consider by way of resolving the problem (or seizing the opportunity).
- A clear analysis of each of these options, again including some attention to the different individual perspectives and institutional roles involved.
- An executive/decision summary that argues the respective merits of one of more alternatives and also clearly lays out the respective costs and benefits of each.

The main objectives of the course include the following:

- Exposure to the complexity of environmental/sustainability issues—taken from scientific, economic, political, and other points of view. A set of core readings that introduce the four main issues in this Learning Cluster will be covered in some detail.
- Opportunity to learn about important, ongoing environment/conservation/resource issues and topics—preferably as these are presented in specific contexts or settings around the world. An opportunity to engage others outside the LC will be explored.
- Participation in group work.
- Oral and written professional presentations.

In addition, I am prepared to supervise individual work beyond the LC itself. For instance, if students are preparing proposals or requests for specific projects or work after the LC, I am quite happy to help in different ways to improve chances for success.