



Sustainability Course Attribute Policy

DRAFT V5.3

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1 Introduction, Impact and Benefits

2
3 Creation of a “sustainability” course attribute is motivated by student interest and a student call for
4 easy identification of course work that relates to sustainability. It will provide an opportunity for units
5 offering such courses, if they so choose, to make it easy for students to find courses that include a
6 focus on learning about sustainability.

7
8 In addition, such an attribute will allow UW-Madison to meet requirements to represent externally the
9 extent to which learning about sustainability is included in coursework. Specifically, UW-Madison,
10 through the Office of Sustainability, has committed to participate in the Sustainability Tracking,
11 Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS), a national, self-reporting framework for colleges and
12 universities to measure their sustainability performance (<https://stars.aashe.org/>). An attribute will
13 make it straightforward to routinely identify courses that fit a university-wide endorsed set of criteria.

14
15 A planning group led by Professors Cathy Middlecamp and Ann Terlaak developed criteria for courses
16 to carry the sustainability attribute, based in learning outcomes related to sustainability.

17
18 Sustainable development has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present while
19 safeguarding earth’s life-support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations
20 depends.” (Griggs et al, 2013). Thus, sustainability is what is achieved when sustainable development
21 is put into practice. Sustainability has social, economic, and environmental dimensions. It requires
22 strategies that simultaneously achieve:

- 23 • social goals, such as ending poverty, improving health, delivering quality education, and
24 reducing inequality.
- 25 • economic goals, such as achieving affordable clean energy, responsible production, and
26 economic growth.
- 27 • environmental goals, such as addressing climate change, preserving biodiversity, and
28 protecting our oceans and forests.

29 The study of sustainability can center on one or more of these dimensions and goals.

30 (Full Citation: Griggs, D., M. Stafford-Smith, O. Gaffney, J. Rockström, M. C. Öhman, P. Shyamsundar, W. Steffen, G.
31 Glaser, N. Kanie, and I. Noble. 2013. Policy: sustainable development goals for people and planet. *Nature* 495(7441):305-

307. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/495305a>)

Once established and linked to courses, the sustainability course attribute can be used to identify these courses and will be searchable in the Guide and the Enroll App to meet students' needs. The sustainability course attribute will also be available in data and reporting systems such as the data warehouse and makes possible reports on courses that carry the attribute to meet institutional needs.

Criteria for the Sustainability Attribute

Criteria

A course with the sustainability course attribute will be required to include at least two of the following course learning outcomes among those for the course. The stem of each learning outcome is fixed. However, instructors can tailor the ending of each outcome to fit their instructional goals.

Students will be able to:

- I. Explain the social, economic, and/or environmental dimensions of the sustainability challenge(s) of *
* Examples: "extinction of species and biodiversity," "global health issues in developing countries," "business organizations," or "providing electricity".
- II. Apply sustainability principles and/or frameworks to addressing the challenge of**
** Examples: "ending poverty," "clean water and sanitation," "climate change," "sustainable cities and communities," "affordable and clean energy" or "quality education."
- III. Analyze the causes of and solutions for the sustainability challenge of***
*** Examples: "ending poverty," "clean water and sanitation," "climate change," "sustainable cities and communities," "affordable and clean energy" or "quality education."
- IV. Analyze sustainability issues and/or practices using a systems-based approach.
- V. Use sustainability principles for developing personal goals and professional values.

This common minimum criterion serves as a baseline; there is no intention to define and regulate all content and learning activity related to sustainability content. Proposals for courses to carry the sustainability course attribute will include two of these five course learning outcomes in addition to any other course outcomes established for the course.

Implementation

Upon approval of the sustainability course attribute criteria by the University Curriculum Committee and the University Academic Planning Council, the sustainability course attribute will be created in SIS and the opportunity to propose it to be attached to a course will be added to the course proposal process.

Courses that are offered as independent/directed study are not eligible to carry the sustainability course attribute.

The attribute code will be "SUST".

83 The published description will be “Sustainability”.
84 The short “behind the scenes” descriptor will be “Sustain.”

85
86 To support the implementation and maintenance of the sustainability course attribute, the following
87 question will be added to the course proposal form: “Should this course be considered for the
88 Sustainability attribute?”

89
90 If the individual proposing the course answers the question “yes” to this question, they will be required
91 to respond to the question: “Provide an explanation of why the proposing department is seeking the
92 SUST attribute and indicate how the requirement to meet the criteria will be maintained by the offering
93 unit.”

94
95 Individuals submitting the course proposal will enter the appropriate course learning outcomes in the
96 Course Learning Outcome (CLO) section of the course proposal.

97
98 A link to more detailed information about the SUST attribute for those who are proposing the course
99 will be added to the course proposal system.

100
101 When these SUST attribute questions has been added to the course proposal form, the attribute may be
102 requested as a part of any new or edit course proposal.

103
104 Similarly, for a course that has been approved for the SUST attribute, if an offering department decides
105 to remove the SUST attribute, they do so through the course proposal system, and respond “no” to the
106 question about the SUST attribute.

107
108 These criteria are intended to be sufficiently straightforward that department and school/college
109 committees will be able to apply them without substantial training. During the proposal review
110 process, reviewers at the department and school/college level will verify that the SUST-specified
111 course learning outcomes are present.

112
113 At the campus level, the UCC will review proposals based on the same SUST criteria.

114
115 The common and consistent use of these specified SUST course learning outcomes, which will also
116 then be reflected in the course syllabus, will allow for a consistent and sustainable implementation of
117 the SUST attribute across UW-Madison’s more than 190 Subject areas.

118
119 After policy approval and as part of implementation, steps will be taken to make the SUST attribute
120 available in association with courses throughout all of the curricular records systems such as Guide,
121 Enroll App, InfoAccess, and curricular reports. The attribute will not be available in DARS, nor will it
122 show on the student record, nor on the transcript.

123
124 **Establishing the List of SUST Courses That Carry the Provisional SUST Attribute (SUSP)**

125
126 APIR will take the leadership role in working with school/colleges and their departments to identify
127 lists of existing courses that meet the letter or spirit of the criteria for the SUST attribute. This
128 approach will provide a one-time expedited route for the identification of courses that meet the criteria
129 and allow for courses to carry the SUST attribute in a provisional format, coded as SUSP, for a period
130 of up to three years.

131
132 In this expedited process, departments will be invited to identify courses that they consider as meeting
133 the criteria for the SUST attribute. They will not be required to provide a syllabus for this purpose for

134 campus-level approval. The department will approve a course list, and forward it to the school/college
135 for approval. School/college approved lists will be forwarded to APIR. Courses that are identified via
136 spreadsheets in this process will be assigned the provisional attribute value of SUSP. The provisional
137 SUSP attribute is a one-time attribute that will expire and be removed at the end of the three-year
138 provisional period (three years after the provisional effective date).

139
140 During the three-year provisional period, departments may convert courses with the provisional SUSP
141 attribute to the permanent SUST attribute value codes at any time. This will be done by submitting a
142 regular course change proposal through the Lumen Course Proposal System to request the addition of
143 the permanent attribute; the permanent SUST attribute will not have an expiration timeline. Similarly,
144 any new or additional course can be proposed to carry the SUST attribute through the course proposal
145 system.

146
147

148 **Additional Information and Resources**

149
150 UW-Madison Office of Sustainability: <https://sustainability.wisc.edu/>
151 Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS): <https://stars.aashe.org/>
152 Student Learning Outcomes Resources: [https://assessment.provost.wisc.edu/student-learning-](https://assessment.provost.wisc.edu/student-learning-outcomes/)
153 [outcomes/](https://assessment.provost.wisc.edu/student-learning-outcomes/)
154 Lumen Course Proposal System: <https://my.wisc.edu/Lumen/>
155 UW-Madison Policy on Establishing Course Attributes: <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=89674>

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