



## **Sustainability Course Attribute Policy**

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### **Introduction, Impact and Benefits**

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

In addition, such an attribute will allow UW-Madison to meet requirements to represent externally the extent to which learning about sustainability is included in coursework. Specifically, UW-Madison, through the Office of Sustainability, has committed to participate in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS), a national, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance (<https://stars.aashe.org/>). The STARS effort is one visible aspect of UW-Madison’s commitment to sustainability, conservation and stewardship (see Chancellor Blank statement: <https://sustainability.wisc.edu/chancellor-announces-sustainability-working-group/>).

A course attribute will make it straightforward to routinely identify courses that fit a university-wide endorsed set of criteria. A planning group led by Professors Cathy Middlecamp and Ann Terlaak developed criteria for courses to carry the sustainability attribute, based in learning outcomes related to sustainability.

Sustainable development has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present while safeguarding earth’s life-support system, on which the welfare of current and future generations depends.” (Griggs et al, 2013). Sustainability is fostered when sustainable development is put into practice. Working towards sustainability requires strategies that achieve:

- social goals, such as ending poverty, improving health, delivering quality education, and reducing inequality, and;
- economic goals, such as achieving affordable clean energy, responsible production, and economic growth, and;

- environmental goals, such as addressing climate change, preserving biodiversity, and protecting our oceans and forests.

The study of sustainability centers on one or more of these goals.

(Full Citation: Griggs, D., M. Stafford-Smith, O. Gaffney, J. Rockström, M. C. Öhman, P. Shyamsundar, W. Steffen, G. 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. Describe the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of \*\*\*\* and identify potential tradeoffs and interrelationships among these dimensions at a level appropriate to the course. \*\*\*\*Examples: “crop planting,” “climate change,” “ending poverty,” “affordable and clean energy.”
- VI. 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”.

The published description will be “Sustainability”.

The short “behind the scenes” descriptor will be “Sustain.”

There are two values associated with the SUST attribute: “SUST” for temporary; “SUSP” for permanent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Establishing the List of SUST Courses That Carry the Temporary SUST Attribute Value (SUST)**

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

In this expedited process, departments will be invited to identify courses that they consider as meeting the criteria for the SUST attribute. They will not be required to provide a syllabus for this purpose for campus-level approval. The department will approve a course list, and forward it to the school/college for approval. School/college approved lists will be forwarded to APIR. Courses that are identified via spreadsheets in this process will be assigned the temporary attribute value of SUST. The temporary SUST attribute is a one-time attribute that will expire and be removed at the end of the three-year provisional period (three years after the provisional effective date).

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

### **Sustainability Attribute Review and Evaluation**

Academic Planning and Institutional Research staff will monitor the implementation of the Sustainability attribute and watch for any problematic issues associated with applying the attribute. Three years after implementation Academic Planning and Institutional Research will conduct a review of the sustainability attribute and its utility. APIR will consider the extent to which the temporary attributes have been converted to a permanent attribute, the extent to which the attribute has been added to new courses, the additional workload for curriculum committees, the utility for the STARS and other institutional projects, and the value to students. APIR will consult with school/college curriculum committees and provide a report for UCC consideration.

### **Additional Information and Resources**

UW-Madison Office of Sustainability: <https://sustainability.wisc.edu/>

Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS): <https://stars.aashe.org/>

Student Learning Outcomes Resources: <https://assessment.provost.wisc.edu/student-learning-outcomes/>

Lumen Course Proposal System: <https://my.wisc.edu/Lumen/>

UW-Madison Policy on Establishing Course Attributes: <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=89674>

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