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Sustainability in Undergraduate Property Courses

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Abstract

Sustainability, green buildings and climate change are three of a number of relatively new and similar terms that are used in the property field. This paper reviews the literature on teaching the concept of sustainability in university courses and identifies key aspects of content, perspective and delivery methods that should be considered in designing the curriculum to increase understanding and practice of sustainability. The paper provides a case study of the approach taken within the University of South Australia undergraduate property degree to incorporate sustainability and challenge students to change their environmental footprint.

1. Introduction

Sustainability must be a key theme in our Australian property courses so that our graduates can be leading in sustainability practice and live sustainable lives. This will require significant change as the Dixon et al (2008) study shows that the graduates we produce are joining a sector identified as laggards with respect to a green profession. This requires us as academics to drive the content and practices of programs, and to encourage the Australian Property Institute to provide leadership and support so we produce graduates that understand, practice sustainability and can lead in sustainability issues.

I first started teaching about sustainability in rural land management courses in the early 1990's. The aspects taught were based on my experience with land care and my membership of the Angus Bremer Water Resources Committee and membership of the Central Hills Soil Conservation Board. I had undertaken a private study of farming practices in the south west of Western Australia and observed how involvement with land care and catchment management would lead to change of farming practice. Farmers initially, planted trees and they followed this by examining how they could improve farming practices for their current enterprises. This would later lead to them questioning the crops they grew and even their involvement in farming. The self examination of their sustainable

practices empowered them to make other sustainable changes. Later in the 1990's the combination of new knowledge, skills, etc to support sustainability came to be described as capacity building.

I still teach sustainability but it is now in both an urban and rural context and includes a component of challenging students about their sustainability practices and Australia's sustainability as a whole.

Today, when teaching about sustainability, there is an expectation that this concept will be taught at all levels in all education environments. The thrust for this comes from the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), which has the goal of integrating the principles, values and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning. This education effort is expected to result in behavioural change that will create a more sustainable future for current and forthcoming generations with respect to economic viability, environmental integrity and a just society.

This education has four major thrusts:

- Promote and improve basic education
- Reorient existing education programs at all levels to address sustainable development
- Develop public awareness and understanding of sustainability
- Provide training

UNESCO Sustainable Education web page

This paper reviews what the literature indicates makes successful sustainable education and some of the 'lessons learnt' that have been published. The paper also provides an overview of how sustainability education is being approached at the University of South Australia (UniSA) and the aspects of sustainability currently covered in the property program.

2. Literature

The involvement of universities in sustainable education goes back to 1990 when twenty two universities around the world issued a ten point plan on sustainability, which is known as the Talloires Declaration. This has subsequently been signed by 350 universities around the world. The first three action points of the Talloires Declaration (USLF website) read:

1. Increase awareness of environmental sustainable development; use every opportunity to raise public, government, industry, foundation and university awareness by openly addressing the urgent need to move towards an environmentally sustainable future.

2. Create an Institutional culture of sustainability: encourage all universities to engage in education, research, policy formation and information exchange on population, environment and development to move towards global sustainability

3. Educate for environmentally responsible citizenship: establish programs to produce expertise in environmental management, sustainable economic development, population and related fields to ensure that all universities graduates are environmentally literate and have awareness and understanding to be ecologically responsible citizens

Another significant push for sustainability education occurred in 1992 at the Rio de Janeiro "Earth Summit". It was identified that universities train the teachers, develop the teachers and the curriculum and, as such, universities had a significant opportunity to reorientate the formal education system. The Rio agenda was further developed and the Earth Charter (2000) was published for the new millennium. The Earth Charter urges environmental responsibility, peaceful coexistence, respect for life, democracy and justice and sets out sixteen principles to achieve this.

In Australia, since these two key initiatives occurred, there have been many reports and demonstration projects. Tilbury (2005) found, in reviewing Australian Higher Education in 2004, that there was no systematic sustainability education but rather individual project and initiatives within universities. Tilbury (2005) identified that integrated sustainable education would require;

- Mission statements to express ongoing commitments to sustainability
- Concepts and practices of sustainability incorporated into all academic disciplines(including teaching, professional development and faculty and student research
- Conscious recognition of the role of the institution plays in social and ecological systems
- Knowledge of sustainability is a critical concern in the hiring, tenure and promotion systems
- Sustainable policies and practices are adhered to for operations, building and site management
- Institutional support and services are present that support the social capital of the staff and students as well supporting the sustainability functions of the university.

Dawe et al (2005), in reviewing the implementation of sustainable education in higher education in the United Kingdom, found similarly that there was very mixed practice. They found some excellent examples and some disciplines providing no sustainability education. Dawe et al (2005) also identified the importance of staff as role models in putting sustainability into practice and the need to improve staff awareness and skills in delivering sustainability.

In more recent years, it has been identified that we need to accommodate emerging issues and adaption for climate change should also be included. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Changes (IPCC) defines climate change adaption as " …an adjustment in ecological, social and economic systems in response to observed or expected changes in climate stimuli and their effects and impacts in order to alleviate adverse impacts of change or take advantage of new opportunities" Tilbury(2005).

Lyth (2007) undertook a review of climate change education for the built environment for the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Water Resources. The four professions included in this review were Engineers Australia, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Planning Institute of Australia and the Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture. The built environment professions would embrace three objectives, namely reducing the sensitivity, altering the exposure and increasing the resilience of the built environments and their communities. The key findings of this review were that there are significant gaps in current university education and professional development with respect to climate change adaption. They reinforced that the need for climate change adaption should not be tacked onto existing courses, rather that it was integrated throughout the program. This meant that climate change adaption and sustainability would be one of the cornerstones of program reviews and would be assessed by the professional bodies at the time of reaccreditations for programs. This research stimulated the built environment professional

bodies to review the climate change adaption resources and information available to members and what professional development they could provide members. The report also drew attention to the need to provide lecturer with models, case studies and experiences so they could incorporate climate change adaption into their courses.

Sterling (2004) presented the following table from lesson learnt by a European project related to increasing sustainability in agricultural higher education institutions

From	**To**
Transmissive learning	Learning through discovery
Teacher centred approach	Learner centred approach
Individual learning	Collaborative learning
Learning dominated by theory	Praxis –orientated learning linking theory and experience
Focus on accumulated knowledge and content orientation	Focus on self-regulated learning and real issues orientation
Emphasis on cognitive objectives only	Cognitive, affective and skills related objectives
Institutional, staff-based teaching/learning	Learning with and from outsiders
Low-level cognitive learning	High –level cognitive learning

The paper written by Tinker and Burt (2004), notes that very few construction courses In America included sustainability components despite the increase in interest in sustainability by buyers and a requirement in several states for some green components in construction. The authors did, however, indicate that a few schools had included sustainability in a significant way and had integrated material into a number of courses. This integration into a number of courses, rather than just adding courses on sustainability, is what Tinker and Burt advocate as the preferred method.

Edwards (2004) argues that architecture and built environment courses in the United Kingdom have had aspects of sustainability since the 1960s. This was initially in relation to the role that orientation of the building had on comfort and on energy use. Following the oil price shock of the 1980s, energy usage became a significant driver energy efficient design. The importance of water saving grew as a result of the droughts at the end of the last century. These events have allowed architecture and built environment courses to naturally flow into what are now sustainability guiding factors –This is supported by the professional bodies which have a commitment to sustainability.

Tilbury and Janousek (2006) report on the development of a national approach to monitoring, assessment and reporting on the decade of education for sustainable development. Indicators and environmental management go together and significant effort is being made around Australia to identify appropriate indicators for all environmental programs funded by the Commonwealth. It is believed that indicators influence policy makers and ensure stakeholders are focussed on achieving with respect to the indicators. This report showed great commitment to the need for indicators and the form of the indicators but did not provide the answers. It made it clear that the indicators had to about education for sustainable development rather than indicators for economic, social, environmental or education indicators. The choice of meaningful and sensible indicators is problematic and achievement against indicators for achievements sake alone can produce spurious results.

Springett (2005) reinforces there are three perspectives to environment education. These are education in the environment (experiential education), education about the environment (providing information) and education for the environment. The latter is to ensure that students understand the problem, its political context and are prepared to play an active role. Springett (2005) argues that business and management education have hijacked sustainability education by maintaining the status quo and have provided education about the environment whilst ensuring economic growth, market forces and self advancement need to be maintained. She indicates that education for sustainability will challenge the rationality of the model of production and consumption and the ethics and politics of unstainability.

Springett (2005) describes a postgraduate course that has been taught at Massey University for ten years. The first half of the course defines the problem and examines the perspective and cause of unstainability and then explores how business can operate sustainably. The assessment includes producing a fact sheet for a workplace on practical sustainability. Springett argues that the course evaluations show that this course does meet the goal of education for the environment as the students reflect critically and become more responsible for the environment.

Roome (2005) describes a European MBA course on sustainability and supply chain management which is built on the concept that no company is sustainable and the best companies are in transition to sustainability. It is also based on a global context, assuming businesses have to source raw materials or products from other countries. The course creates some challenges for students as they undertake this in intensive format and it includes students from business schools in Hong Kong, Brazil, Mexico, the USA and Europe. It achieved it goal in that it was clear there is no one universal sustainability answer, but rather sustainability is related to the situation and context. This MBA course clearly is an example of a course taught in a context of teaching for the environment rather than about the environment, which Roome (2005) indicates is often the norm when sustainability is added to MBA programs.

Lorenz& Lutzkendorf (2008) advocate a pro-active role for valuation in sustainability. They argue that valuation reports should educate the clients on the importance of sustainability and its benefits. Valuation reports should include information on sustainability of the subject property and the comparable properties. It is argued that many aspects of sustainability do affect the value of the subject property due to their effect on the cost of operations with water and energy use being obvious examples. They also argued that property professions in the development phase should make it clear to clients the advantages of investing in green technology upfront so they will reduce the long-term operating costs.

Lorenz & Lutzkendorf (2008) also argue that sustainability aspects should be considered when determining the discount rate. In particular, apart from cost of operation issues, the discount rate will be affected by as sustainable buildings are likely to have a lower risk rate. The argument is that less sustainable buildings will face increased risks with respect to occupancy, operating costs, regulation change and perception in the market place.

Pivo (2008) reports on a survey review which was undertaken by the United Nations Environment Program Finance Initiative Property Working Group during 2006-7. They were trying to identify and highlight emerging opportunities with respect to Responsible Property Investing(RPI). They identified two RPI strategies which were the no cost (eg turns lights off) and the value adding in

which investor had to spend more upfront but would recoup the benefits over time. They identified the issues and good practice with respect of the following ten issues:

Energy conservation, Environment protection, Voluntary certifications, public transport-oriented developments, urban revitalization and adaptability, health and safety, worker wellbeing, corporate citizenship, social equity and community development, and local citizenship. They found examples of god practice around the world but in their final thoughts reminded us that though good practice is going into new developments, that this generally only replaces 2-3 % of the building stock each year and as such it is critical to identify strategies to deal with the practical management of refurbishment with the complexities of various ownership and occupancy structures.

Newell (2008) in reviewing listed properties trusts concluded that Australian property trusts were delivering on sustainability strategies and were providing best practice. He did also however give a sobering discussion on the issues that must be addressed by the remainder of the commercial property sector for sustainability to be achieved.

From the literature it is clear that best practice for sustainability education is for it to be provided in an institute that is committed to sustainability and where sustainability is embedded within a program in contrast to an add on. Also, that the education thrust is education for the environment and it includes some multidiscipline components with staff that are committed to and role model sustainability. The property literature makes it clear that sustainability is being picked up by industry and that academic institutions have a mixed performance with respect to producing graduates with knowledge on the various aspects of sustainability.

3. Sustainability teaching at University of South Australia

The University of South Australia has significant commitment to sustainability though it is clear this is not a major driver for the Institute. It has several research groups working on sustainability and a few programs that include sustainability. It is currently developing a Sustainable Communities Cluster which will enable researchers to be brought together from across existing research centres and institutes to work on sustainability projects with government and private enterprise.

The graduate qualities framework for university courses includes sustainability in graduate quality 5 which is about our graduates being committed to ethic action and social responsibility as a citizen and as a professional. In reviewing the indicators for this graduate quality (see Appendix 1), graduate qualities 1,6 & 7 are also relevant. I suspect, however, that many of my university colleges do not appreciate that sustainability is included within these graduate qualities.

The university is currently reviewing it teaching and its programs with a desire to stop poor performing programs and to improve the quality and quantity of student engagement through three components of experiential learning: Teaching-research nexus, Practice based learning and Service learning. The fact sustainability is not a key component of the review shows clearly that this is not a university priority. The shift however in teaching method is consistent with some of the aspects required to teach sustainability.

3.1 The property program

The UniSA Property program consists of 24 courses of which eight are core business courses that are currently not targeted to sustainability except through an understanding of ethics and governance. It is anticipated that one of these core courses in 2010 will cover sustainability to the extent that it is required for EQUIS accreditation.(see appendix 2).

Sustainability is covered in part within the property program, but has not been designed into the program in a holistic manner. The concept of sustainability is introduced in the first year course 'Introduction to Property'. The 'Introduction to Property Economics' course includes a field trip to housing developments with this year's visiting the State's most environmental subdivision i.e. Lochiel Park, Campbelltown.

The second year course, 'Property Utilization and Sustainability', examines sustainability in relation to a range of property uses. The four pillars of sustainability and the concept of footprint analysis are introduced at the beginning of the course and students are challenged as to how they can reduce their footprint and increase their sustainability with respect to all four pillars. That is environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability

This challenge, initially discussed in tutorials, is reinforced in an assignment and the final exam question, which cover how the student believes they were improving their sustainability with respect to the four pillars.

The students, in their study of land use, are given readings that explore the potential impact of climate change or changes that would arise from carbon trading or other emerging influences on sustainability. This enables students to understand what drives current land use and what factors will potentially change in the next twenty years. The land uses covered in this course include traditional agricultural & horticultural production, forestry fish farming and aboriginal lands. It also covered the urban land uses for housing, commercial, retail and industrial real estate. Students are made aware of green buildings and other concepts about sustainability at a building level and more importantly at a regional planning and subdivisional level. Climate change is presented with information from the Garnaut Review on climate change. A field trip to a rural property included sustainability aspects of the farm and the farmer's house.

In the third year course entitled 'Property Development', students have lectures on current issues of development, which also includes the concepts of sustainability and green buildings.

In the final property course, 'Property, People and the Political Economy', the issues of sustainability are addressed from a number of perspectives:

- Exploration of indigenous management of resources around the world and what their systems offered or were lost in recent times
- Sustainability and how it is a driver in planning changes for both built environment and transport, new developments
- The greening of the supply chain
- Sustainability governance and reporting

The lecture series is presented by leading industry personnel and, as such, is taken very seriously by the students. The assessment for this course includes a debate and most of the debates incorporate a sustainability element within them.

The main technical courses in valuation do not go into sustainability per say as they are just one market consideration. The students are taught to take into account the market and, as argued by Parker (2008), this should cover it. At some time in the future, not in the short term, we may have to look at special issues relating to non green buildings.

The student's attitude towards the concept of sustainability gradually changes through the program. There are a range of initial attitudes with some students accepting sustainability and others expressing significant scepticism of specific issues such as the reality of climate change and the need for Australians to change their practices. Scepticism gradually reduces as students review the resources consumed by Australians and they begin to realise that many of the potential changes to lifestyles have an economic and social benefit. As students more fully understand the involvement of the Property Council, leading business people and major international businesses, the scepticism is replaced by commitment. The one problem that we all face, however, knowing how sustainable our potential purchases are due –this issue was reinforced in tutorial discussions when we tried to identify green products-of course gradually governments are establishing criteria and the trade practices commission stops companies from claiming greenness without evidence.

Through the program, a UniSA property graduate has been taught about the environment and for the environment and has been provided a small experience in the environment. The program would be potentially stronger if the University and Division practiced sustainability rather than having it on its checklist of considerations. The feedback from students is that they understand sustainability, are making some life changes to support the concept and, in a few cases, are acting as advocates by challenging friends and family about some of their unstainable practices.

The UniSA program is taught to both internal and externals using the same teaching materials and with the lectures often podcast for the external students. The externals miss out on field trips but this has been minimized by providing podcasts of the speaker and in some cases supported by photographs. This is an area that can be improved by using a combination of video and facilitating visits in other areas for students to discover similar aspects. However, this will be extremely resource intensive in a time when, as academics, we are expected to do more research and deliver efficient quality research. It should be acknowledged that the field trips have been supported by professional bodies with the provision of speakers and covering bus hire charges.

The property program by nature is multidisciplinary but with the students only studying with other property students in the core property courses. The literature would suggest that we should include some exercises with students from other programs. At this stage, this has not been contemplated as we also have to find away to do this for the externals. In time we will also have to ensure that sustainability is integrated into more courses within the program but we have made a good start with some aspects of sustainability in 30% of the courses.

4. Conclusion

The UniSA property program has made some significant progress towards incorporating sustainability, including climate change, into the program. Students are made aware of the unsustainability of current practices and initiatives being undertaken by industry and its leaders in advocating to improve sustainability. Students have examined sustainability issues across a range of rural and regional land uses and in urban situation through housing, commercial, retail and industrial buildings. They have been challenged with respect of their personal sustainability and hopefully the changes that have been started last beyond the program.

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Appendix 1

Indicators of graduate qualities

Program teams are required to develop a list of indicators for their program in consultation with key stakeholders. A generic list of indicators is available below as a starting point. An example of elaborated indicators for a program is available.

1	**A graduate of the University of South Australia operates effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice.** A graduate will: ▪ demonstrate an understanding in broad outline of a whole discipline or professional area (concepts, theories, proponents) including a knowledge of the boundaries ▪ apply knowledge (demonstrate application of theory to practice in real situations, appreciate limitations of theory, use materials, devices, safety codes and practices, specific equipment and techniques appropriately) ▪ identify the methodological and substantive limitations of the field and apply the discipline or professional area's mode of inquiry ▪ recognise the social and historical context of knowledge ▪ demonstrate an understanding of the needs, interests, protocols and perspectives of Indigenous groups ▪ demonstrate appropriate understanding of current research areas in the discipline or professional area.
2	**A graduate…is prepared for lifelong learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice.** A graduate will: ▪ locate, evaluate, manage and use information in a range of contexts – ie be information literate ▪ understand the limitations of, and have the capacity to evaluate, their current knowledge ▪ understand and accept personal weaknesses, strengths and preferred learning styles, have knowledge of a range of learning strategies, and take responsibility for their learning and development ▪ respond confidently to change in a flexible and adaptable manner ▪ maintain a positive concept of self as capable and autonomous ▪ sustain intellectual interest and critical thinking as a mature professional.
3	**A graduate…is an effective problem solver, capable of applying logical, critical and creative thinking to a range of problems.** A graduate will: ▪ gather, evaluate and deploy relevant information to assist problem solving – ie analysis and synthesis ▪ define researchable questions in the discipline or professional area ▪ initiate creative responses to problems and frame such responses as opportunities ▪ apply strategies to conceptualise problems and formulate a range of solutions.
4	**A graduate…can work both autonomously and collaboratively as a professional**. A graduate will: ▪ work in a self directed way ▪ use logical and rational argument to persuade others, to negotiate with others ▪ work collaboratively with different groups, identify the needs of others and build positive relationships ▪ provide leadership within a team context by understanding responsibilities for organisation, planning, influencing and negotiating ▪ work in a team (cooperate with all team members, share ideas, forgo personal recognition, negotiate solutions when opinions differ,

	resolve conflict, recognise strengths of other team members, share responsibility, convey a shared vision for the team, display a commitment to make the team function effectively).
5	**A graduate…is committed to ethical action and social responsibility as a professional and citizen.** A graduate will: ▪ demonstrate a commitment to personal ethical actions within professional contexts ▪ define social aspects of a particular technology (political, economic, legislative, sociological, environmental etc) ▪ appreciate the impact of social change, the political decision-making process and economic imperatives of business and industry ▪ recognise social justice issues relevant to the discipline and professional area ▪ recognise the potential social and economic impact of enterprise activities upon particular social groups ▪ appreciate the importance of sustainable development ▪ demonstrate responsibility to the community – be aware of safety, efficiency, innovation, cost-effectiveness. ▪ consider the relationship between the construction of power and privilege and the ability of discipline knowledge to perpetuate or dismantle social inequality with respect to Indigenous groups.
6	**A graduate…communicates effectively in professional practice and as a member of the community.** A graduate will: ▪ demonstrate oral, written, mathematical and visual literacies as appropriate to the discipline or professional area ▪ display sensitivity to their audience in organising and presenting ideas ▪ communicate appropriately with professional colleagues and the public ▪ demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of Indigenous community protocols and communication styles.
7	**A graduate…demonstrates international perspectives as a professional and as a citizen.** A graduate will: ▪ display an ability to think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives ▪ demonstrate an awareness of their own culture and its perspectives and other cultures and their perspectives ▪ appreciate the relation between their field of study locally and professional traditions elsewhere ▪ recognise intercultural issues relevant to their professional practice ▪ appreciate the importance of multicultural diversity to professional practice and citizenship ▪ appreciate the complex and interacting factors that contribute to notions of culture and cultural relationships ▪ value diversity of language and culture ▪ appreciate and demonstrate the capacity to apply international standards and practices within the discipline or professional area ▪ demonstrate awareness of the implications of local decisions and actions for international communities and of international decisions and actions for local commu

Appendix 2: EQUIS STANDARDS & CRITERIA

Chapter 1: Context, Governance and Strategy

The Assessment Criteria

d) Mission, Vision and Values

- Do the School's core values include an explicit commitment to ethically and socially responsible behaviour in the management profession?

Chapter 2: Programmes…

The Assessment Criteria

c) Programme content

- Does the programme design and content explicitly include aspects of social responsibility?

Chapter 3: Students

Introduction

An essential function of all institutions of higher education is to facilitate the intellectual, social and personal development of students in preparation for their future lives as responsible and creative citizens.

A further expectation is that the School will educate its students to act ethically in their professional lives. Values such as integrity, respect for others, socially responsible action, service to society should be an integral part of the personal development agenda.

The Assessment Criteria

e) Ethics and values

- Describe the means by which issues relating to business ethics and corporate social responsibility are integrated into personal development processes.

Chapter 7: Contribution to the Community…

Information and Documents to be provided in the Base Room during the Peer Review

- Policy statements regarding ethics and corporate responsibility.
- Course syllabi or programme descriptions that refer to ethics and corporate responsibility in the educational curricula.
- Documents describing special projects in these areas.
- Information about student-led projects in these areas.

Notes

- The terms 'corporate responsibility', 'corporate social responsibility', 'global responsibility' are commonly used to designate the responsible behaviour of organisations and companies collectively and their managers individually in areas such as:
    - Ethical behaviour as reflected in the integrity and personal honesty of all managers
    - Concern for the impact of their activities on society and the natural environment
    - Contribution to long-term sustainable development
    - Corporate governance