



Green Gown Awards Australasia

Learning, Teaching & Skills

2020 Case Study

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Sustainability Bootcamp: Introducing the SDGs to students and staff at WSU

The 21C curiosity pod 'Sustainability Bootcamp' introduces the core concepts of sustainable development and the SDGs through worldviews, systems awareness and future thinking. It comprises 5 key modules and an on campus/virtual group activity that make up to 15 hours of interactive online learning, including lectures, local case studies, film clips and resources.

The pod was initially designed for two purposes. Firstly, to be accessed as a learning resource for WSU academics to incorporate into their current teaching programs and secondly as a standalone extracurricular activity for engaged students. The results to date are impressive with strong interest and engagement across faculties and programs.

Throughout 2019 – 2020 over 1,300 students from business, health, industrial design, architecture, nursing, science, humanities, and education interacted with the pod and workshopped the relevance of the SDGs in a variety of class activities. One example is the Primary Health Care in Action unit, a core unit in our undergraduate and postgraduate Nursing program, that introduces students to primary health care as a social model of health and a World Health Organization (WHO) strategy for achieving just and humane health care. Both programs have embedded the pod for a week's learning in their unit.

The extracurricular version with a campus activation event on urban heat was introduced in the second half of 2019 with over 40 students gaining a digital badge. The 2020 extra curricula student cohort is currently running with 112 students enrolled. In May 2020 the first cohort of 100 staff were engaged with the pod to pilot its' relevance as a professional development opportunity with a 65 staff completing.

The pod was co-designed using partnership pedagogy and Education for Sustainability principles in collaboration WSU academics, students and local community partners (including Penrith City Council, SydWest Multicultural Services, Hawkesbury Harvest and Hawkesbury EarthCare Centre) drawing on Western Sydney specific research case studies.

The SDG framework was used to clearly articulate to all students the importance of the global goals firstly from a personal and discipline perspective and then to start to think about systemic connections with other disciplines. The case studies profile inspirational local initiatives and research across Western Sydney and include diverse issues such as

the fashion industry, urban heat, refugee resettlement, pollinators and local food systems. The pod also includes lists of local initiatives and community groups that students and staff can connect with and take ongoing action. The modules include:

Module 1: ‘What is sustainability? Why does it matter?’ Discover why we are talking about sustainability and what it means for you.

Module 2: ‘The Future is now’. Introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Module 3: ‘Worldviews and Systems Thinking’. Sustainable development involves a transformative approach to thinking and action that engages with worldviews and values, systems understanding and an orientation to the future we want.

Module 4 (students): ‘Urban Heat: A Cool Future for Western Sydney’. Get involved in a real-world case study looking at urban heat impacts on our campuses and strategies to beat the heat.

Module 4 (staff): ‘Food for Thought. Thought for Food’. Let’s explore what it means to be an active and conscious consumer and ways we can improve our university.

Module 5: Where to from here? Take a look at what’s on offer and take action with our Global Sustainability sub-major.

FIND OUT MORE



These goals are only relevant to the student urban heat workshop, not the Bootcamp

Leadership & Engagement

The 21C Project reflects our commitment as an anchor institution for the communities of Western Sydney and our recognised national and international leadership in relation to championing just and responsible social change through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As part of the 21C initiative, this program has developed new transdisciplinary curriculum which leverages partnership pedagogy, SDG frameworks and EfS learning principles to equip students for the future of work and society, and our staff to be active global citizens.

Through desktop research there appears to be no other ‘taster’ pod of this nature available in any other university in Australia. RMIT’s Sustainability 101 focuses on sustainability generally, looking at global picture and is 3-hours in length. Ours differs as it is place-based and its focus is around sustainable development and the SDGs in Australia.

The Bootcamp is innovative and offered at scale through varying avenues of engagement including the option for academics to develop their own unit based assessments with the pod.



Environmental & Social Benefits

Western has acknowledged our responsibility through our teaching and learning to equip the next generation of leaders, innovators and thinkers to understand the global challenges facing the world and the role they can play in rising to meet these challenges. As such the overall initiative has created and increased academic engagement in sustainability and the SDGs at Western, and allowed for large numbers of student to be introduced to this agenda. It was the first at scale offering to the university community of a 21C pod and the first with a sustainability focus.

The benefit for students is in new learning that opens up and challenge mindsets to understanding the global goals and sustainable development from a local context regardless of discipline. *“I think this module [pod] provided a great introduction to the SDGs without either sounding overly complex or simply assuming the students’ knowledge prior to the Bootcamp. That is, the introduction to the SDGs was informative and easy to digest and understand, and it did not feel like we were being judged for not having much or any knowledge of the Sustainable Development Goals.”*, Arts student feedback.

The pod and digital badge was also designed to enhance employability by strengthening in demand ‘soft skills’ – critical thinking, understanding complexity and adding to discipline breadth. The pod was also used as a blueprint for other 21C projects and has assisted with a cultural shift towards supporting meaningful cross school collaborations and multi-school program offerings. It has further encouraged academics to redesign their units to include a sustainability element and supports our institutions UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network Higher Education Commitment, endorsed by our Vice-Chancellor in 2017.

The pod has also been beneficial for our staff in the pilot professional development offering, highlighting their role in sustainable practices at work and at home. *“I really enjoyed the Bootcamp, and believe it is such a great way to highlight so many sustainability opportunities to every individual who undertakes it. You are doing a fantastic job!”*, staff feedback. *“Most of us were trying to be informed consumers. We shared a motivation to do better, but acknowledged that up until now we had not really thought very much about where the products we consumed came from the personal costs some workers were paying for our convenience and the cost to the earth of this overproduction and unrealistic low cost of products, staff feedback.”*

Their learning journey has been transformative, with the Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic portfolio now developing a list of the practical actions their departments could take from small environmental and social actions at work and home to large proposals for institutional change.

Wider Societal Impact

Sustainability thinking is applicable to all students and successful graduates will need to not only have a depth of knowledge in their chosen discipline but a breadth of transdisciplinary knowledge. The pod is multidisciplinary and as such is structured for students to undertake study in new disciplines and to challenge new ways of thinking and doing in a rapidly changing world. It reflects our responsibilities as an anchor institution for the communities of Western Sydney and our recognised national and international leadership in relation to championing just and responsible social change through the SDGs.

The SDG framework was used to clearly articulate to all students the importance of the global goals firstly from a personal and discipline perspective and then to start to think about systemic connections with other disciplines. The case studies profile inspirational local initiatives and research across Western Sydney, explicitly mapping the goals to each case study. The pod includes lists of local initiatives and community groups that students and staff can connect with and take action in the wider community. By the end of 2021 we aim to have the pod embedded in every key program at the University so all Western students are aware of the critical importance of the SDGs.

Top 3 Learnings

Working across disciplinary silos can be challenging but rewarding

Include ‘Students as Partners’ from project inception to delivery as they have different ways of looking at things!

Be prepared to build the plane while flying and be flexible