



Green Gown Awards
Australasia

Learning, Teaching & Skills

2020 Case Study



Sustainability Module

The Sustainability Module is a new offering at the University of Auckland, focused on teaching students about the values and science of sustainability, encouraging critical thinking about societal challenges, and learning how to address them. Launched in 2019, the three-course module is available to students enrolled in a Bachelors programme in Arts, Science or Advanced Science (Honours).

Sustain 100: Sustainability and Us focuses on the values that underpin sustainability and the role individuals play in creating sustainable solutions. The major assignment involves working in teams to design a game that encourages people to think sustainably. It includes interdisciplinary case studies on water and food.

Sustain 200: The Sustainable Community introduces complex social systems, discusses human communities and the “circuit breakers” that disrupt business as usual, looks at models for sustainable cities, offers a practical project designing a sustainability innovation for the university, and includes case studies on climate change and fisheries.

Sustain 300: A Sustainable World examines global process for addressing issues, involves a practical project developing a policy proposal for a multi-national business, the NZ government or an international organisation and includes case studies on population and green technology.

The Sustainability Module was developed by Niki Harré (Professor of Psychology and inaugural Associate Dean of Sustainability, Faculty of Science), in collaboration with Joe Fagan (Senior Tutor in Environment, Faculty of Science) and Manuel Vallée (Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Faculty of Arts). The collaboration followed from Niki’s prior success in setting up the Faculty of Science Sustainability Network, and developing an interdisciplinary teaching unit on the global fashion industry, involving several academics (see *Harré et al, 2018*).

FIND OUT MORE



Environmental & Social Benefits

By completing the Sustainability Module, students learn to:

- | Embody a respect for all living beings and living systems.
- | Critically discuss and apply the values of sustainability.
- | Demonstrate critical understanding of focal topics such as water, food, climate change, fisheries and green technology and potential solutions.
- | Demonstrate understanding of how complex social systems and complex ecological systems work together.
- | Demonstrate an ability to solve real world problems and implement creative solutions.
- | Demonstrate how large scale social institutions including politics, the media, national and international law and economics contribute to sustainability 'problems' and 'solutions'.
- | Tell powerful and persuasive stories about the present and possible futures.

Because each course has a major group assignment at its core, students learn about collaboration and effective group processes, and develop their capacity to work with others on creative, values-based projects.

The benefits to society include:

- | Graduates contributing their values, critical thinking, and skills in problem solving, collaboration and storytelling for sustainability to the workforce.
- | Graduates positively influencing their families, friends and communities.



Leadership & Engagement

The Sustainability Module is a cross-faculty project focused on integrating learning about the science behind sustainability with the social dynamics that encourage the uptake of sustainable practices. The core staff who developed the module are involved throughout the three courses, providing a sense of continuity and coherence to students. Considerable effort is put into making sure the following pedagogical principles are embedded into each course:

- | Fostering an environment that is inclusive and inviting
- | Creating spaces and activities that are engaging and empowering
 - | Facilitating the active participation of students
- | Focusing on the positive, both in the course content and the assessment
 - | Creating a sense of community and humanising relationships (staff share their own experiences)
- | Promoting co-learning (the idea that all participants, including staff, are collectively seeking a greater understanding of sustainability)
 - | Focusing on problem-solving



Wider Societal Impact

Universities play an essential role in educating the leaders of the future. By enabling students to do three linked sustainability courses, alongside developing specialised skills in their major discipline or disciplines, we are helping to ensure that sustainability thinking becomes widespread in future leaders.

Top 3 Learnings

The creativity, listening and cooperative decision making skills that are developed by bringing together students from multiple disciplines to consider major environmental issues and solutions

The new, expert knowledge from different disciplines teachers absorb when working in an interdisciplinary team

That young people are deeply concerned about sustainability issues and very ready to take up opportunities to learn and contribute to problem solving for a better future