

# AC 1: Sustainability Course Offerings

## Rationale

This credit recognizes institutions that provide opportunities to learn about sustainability across the curriculum. Sustainability course offerings and equivalent units of instruction can provide valuable grounding in the concepts and principles of sustainability, help build knowledge about a component of sustainability, and/or introduce students to sustainability challenges and concepts. Institutions that integrate sustainability throughout the curriculum prepare students to apply sustainability principles in their professional fields. Having sustainability courses and content offered by numerous departments helps ensure that the institution’s approach to sustainability education is comprehensive and interdisciplinary.

The process of identifying sustainability course offerings provides an important foundation for advancing sustainability curriculum. It provides a baseline for understanding current offerings and can help institutions identify strengths and opportunities for growth. Public sustainability course listings help students find and understand sustainability course offerings, which can assist them in organizing their academic studies. Incentives, training, and other support programs can help academic staff broaden and deepen the integration of sustainability into the curriculum in ways that may not be captured in departmental offerings or public listings.

## Applicability

Applicable to institutions that offer **courses** or equivalent units of instruction for academic credit.

## Points available

A maximum of 14 points are available for this credit.

## Criteria

### 1.1 Percentage of academic departments with sustainability course offerings

An institution earns 8 points when all of its **academic departments** have integrated sustainability into their course offerings or equivalent units of instruction, as evidenced by the presence of one or more **sustainability-focused courses** or **sustainability-inclusive courses**. Incremental points are available and earned as outlined in Table I.

Table I. Points earned for indicator 1.1

Number of academic departments with at least one sustainability course offering		Total number of academic departments that offer courses for credit		Points available		Points earned
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## Measurement

Report on courses and equivalent units of instruction (e.g., modules or subjects) that are currently offered or have been offered within the previous three years.

A comprehensive listing of each department’s sustainability course offerings is welcome, but not required. Rather, an institution may identify one or more examples of sustainability-focused and/or sustainability-inclusive courses for each department for which it is claiming points. A list of suggested keywords to help identify sustainability course offerings is available for download from the [STARS website](#).

Each department with a sustainability course offering may be counted, even if the courses are offered or administered jointly with other departments.

Departments that exclusively offer practice-oriented courses (e.g., clinical practice, activity-based physical education, hands-on trades, and arts performance, technique, or composition) may be excluded as long as they are also excluded from the count of departments with sustainability course offerings.

## Documentation

Report the following information in the online Reporting Tool.

- Total number of academic departments that offer courses that may be taken for credit (required). Report on those subdivisions of the institution that are devoted to specific academic disciplines. If the institution’s academic subdivisions typically incorporate multiple disciplines or fields of study, report instead on the academic disciplines or fields of study themselves.
- Number of academic departments with at least one sustainability course offering (required). Include departments that offer at least one course or equivalent unit of instruction that is sustainability-focused or sustainability-inclusive.
- Annotated list or inventory of the institution’s sustainability course offerings by department (required). Upload. Include sufficient information to justify the inclusion of each department, e.g., at least one course description that clearly indicates its sustainability content.
- Description of the process used to identify the institution’s sustainability course offerings by department (required). Include information on any exclusions or data limitations that may have influenced the results.

The Reporting Tool will automatically calculate the following figure:

- Percentage of departments with sustainability course offerings

## 1.2 Published sustainability course listings

An institution earns 3 points when it maintains a public multidisciplinary listing of its sustainability course offerings or equivalent units of instruction as a resource for current and prospective students.

The listings must include courses spanning multiple departments or fields of study, clearly distinguish sustainability courses from other course offerings, and be accessible to current and prospective students A) on the institution’s public website, B) through formal designation in the institution’s official course catalog, or C) in a standalone publication.

## Measurement

Report on the institution’s currently available sustainability course listings.

To qualify, the listings must have been updated within the previous three years, e.g., to exclude courses that are no longer offered. At minimum, the listings must include sustainability-focused courses, but may also include sustainability-inclusive courses if the institution finds value in identifying them.

## Documentation

Report the following information in the online Reporting Tool.

- Does the institution maintain a public multidisciplinary listing of its sustainability course offerings as a resource for current and prospective students? (required)

*If Yes, at least one form of evidence (website URL or document) and the descriptive field that follows are also required:*

- Online location where the institution’s sustainability course listings are maintained.  
Website URL.
- Publication where the institution’s sustainability course listings are maintained.  
Upload.
- Description of the process used to create and maintain the institution’s sustainability course listings. Include information about the criteria and definitions used, how academic staff engaged in sustainability education are involved, and the process for reviewing, validating, and updating the listings.

## 1.3 Support for academic staff to integrate sustainability into the curriculum

An institution earns 3 points when it A) provides incentives for individual **academic staff** working to integrate sustainability into the curriculum to pursue relevant professional development and/or training and B) hosts an ongoing multidisciplinary community of practice, sustainability across the curriculum training program, or equivalent support program for academic staff who are working to integrate sustainability into the curriculum. Partial points are available and earned as outlined in Table II.

Table II. Points earned for indicator 1.3

Criterion	Points available	Points earned
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A. Institution provides incentives for individual academic staff working to integrate sustainability into the curriculum to pursue relevant professional development and/or training.	1	
B. Institution hosts an ongoing multidisciplinary community of practice, sustainability across the curriculum training program, or equivalent support program for academic staff who are working to integrate sustainability into the curriculum.	2	
Total points earned →		

## Measurement

Report on the current status of the institution's programs.

To qualify, an incentive program must A) have a stated intent to support academic staff in increasing student learning about sustainability, B) support participation in a sustainability across the curriculum training program or equivalent, or C) have resulted in the development of new sustainability courses, units, modules, or instructional content during the previous three years.

## Documentation

Report the following information in the online Reporting Tool.

- Does the institution provide incentives for individual academic staff working to integrate sustainability into the curriculum to pursue relevant professional development and/or training? (required). For example, funding or release time.

*If Yes, the following field is also required:*

- Narrative and/or website URL providing an overview of the incentives provided for individual academic staff to integrate sustainability into the curriculum. Include, for example, the stated intent of the incentives program, the specific incentives that are provided, and examples of positive outcomes.
- Does the institution host an ongoing multidisciplinary community of practice, sustainability across the curriculum training program, or equivalent support program for academic staff who are working to integrate sustainability into the curriculum? (required)

*If Yes, the following field is also required:*

- Narrative and/or website URL providing an overview the institution's sustainability-focused community of practice, sustainability across the curriculum training program, or equivalent support program

## Glossary

**Academic department** – An administrative subdivision of a college, university, or school faculty that is devoted to a particular academic discipline (e.g., Economics, Environmental Science, or Sociology) or a closely related set of disciplines (e.g., Asian Studies or Physics & Astronomy). Departments may exist under other nomenclature and with coarser or finer divisions, depending upon an institution's

context. If, however, the institution's academic subdivisions typically incorporate multiple disciplines or fields of study, report instead on the academic disciplines or fields of study themselves.

**Academic staff** – Personnel whose primary assignment is instruction, research, or public service. Also known as “faculty members”, academic staff include personnel who hold an academic rank with titles such as professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, lecturer, or the equivalent. The category includes personnel with other titles (e.g., dean, director, associate dean, assistant dean, chair, or head of department) if their principal activity is instruction or research. It does not include graduate, instruction, or research assistants; student teachers; or teacher aides. [Adapted from the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and the work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).]

**Course** – A unit of instruction comprising a sequence of educational activities in a particular field or range of related fields of education. A course may also be referred to as a “module”, “unit”, or “subject” and is often one academic term in length, led by one or more instructors, and has a fixed roster of students. A course may be taken singularly or combined with other courses offered as part of an education program. [Adapted from the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).]

**Sustainability challenge** – An issue or situation that threatens or undermines ecological integrity, racial equity and social justice, or the ability of future generations to meet their needs (e.g., biodiversity loss, poverty and inequality, and climate change), OR a goal or objective that contributes to the resolution of such an issue or situation (e.g., ecosystem health, universal human rights, and renewable energy generation). To identify sustainability challenges, it may be helpful to reference the [targets embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), the principles outlined in the [Earth Charter](#), and/or the [Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries](#).

**Sustainability-focused course** – A unit of instruction that has a primary and explicit focus on the integrated concept of sustainability and/or the interdependence of ecological and social/cultural/economic systems. This focus must be demonstrated in the title or high level description of the course. Sustainability-focused courses may include:

- Foundational courses with a primary and explicit focus on sustainability (e.g., Introduction to Sustainability, Sustainable Development, Sustainability Science).
- Courses with a primary and explicit focus on the application of sustainability within a field (e.g., Architecture for Sustainability, Green Chemistry, Sustainable Agriculture, Sustainable Business). As sustainability is an interdisciplinary topic, such courses generally incorporate insights from multiple disciplines.
- Courses with a primary and explicit focus on a major sustainability challenge that requires students to consider the interdependence of ecological and social/cultural/economic systems (e.g., Climate Change Science, Environmental Justice, Global Poverty and Development, Renewable Energy Policy). The focus of such courses might be on providing knowledge and understanding of the problems and/or the tools for solving them, but they should bring a systems thinking approach to the challenge.

**Sustainability-inclusive course** – A unit of instruction that is primarily focused on something other than sustainability, but clearly incorporates sustainability content or addresses one or more sustainability challenges. This may include courses that are focused on, for example, ecological integrity or social justice. It may also include courses that:

- Incorporate a unit or module on sustainability or a sustainability challenge,
- Include one or more sustainability-focused activities or readings, or

- Integrate sustainability challenges, issues, and concepts throughout the course.