



Sustainable Education

Savvy business schools offer courses in **sustainability** to help graduates break into this expanding market. By Holly O'Dell

The topic of sustainability is a growing priority within the corporate sector. Organizations large and small are addressing sustainability—a business method that integrates social, environmental and financial considerations. They're doing so for two reasons: They want to remain competitive in this expanding market, and they view it as the right thing to do.

"We've moved well beyond the case for sustainable management in business," says Nicola Acutt, associate dean of programs at the Presidio Graduate School in San Francisco. "Companies get the concept now, and the question has shifted from 'Why should we do it?' to 'How should we do it?'"

To answer that question, business schools throughout the United States have introduced innovative programs and learning opportunities. "We try to teach students that sustainability offers an opportunity to develop

forward-looking business models, products and strategies that will enhance and balance that triple bottom line of ecological integrity, economic vitality and social equity," says Jessica Thomas, managing director of the Center for Sustainable Enterprise at the University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School in Chapel Hill.

As knowledge of sustainability grows among enterprises, so does the demand for qualified professionals who can tackle related challenges.

"If you have the competencies to help companies redesign products and services, retrain employees and evaluate finance and capital management, you will be an asset to any organization," Acutt says.

Here are four key ways business schools are incorporating sustainability education into their programs:

Integrated Learning Opportunities



Professor Stephen Lawrence teaches a sustainability class at the **Leeds School of Business** at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Rather than taking a silo approach to sustainable education, business schools are weaving the subject into the curriculum and entire MBA programs. “The principles of sustainability are infused into basic MBA curriculum,” says Paul Jerde, executive director of the Deming Center for Entrepreneurship at the Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado at Boulder. “The professor who teaches supply-chain management has begun to integrate a higher degree of sustainability content into his standard course.”

Ten years ago, UNC’s Kenan-Flagler Business School formed the Center for Sustainable Enterprise (CSE) with the goal of integrating sustainability into the core of the business school. To that end, CSE identified three strategic

priorities. The first is education.

“We work in partnership with a range of faculty from different areas, programs and research centers to incorporate the principles of sustainable enterprise throughout the work, education and research that Kenan-Flagler does,” Thomas says.

One example of this integration is the center’s concentration on sustainable enterprise, which applies across all functions and industries. MBA students choose from 17 courses—including Systems Thinking for Sustainable Enterprise, Social Entrepreneurship and Environmental Strategy—intended to complement other career concentrations, such as marketing or finance. In the 2009 graduating MBA class, one in five students had the sustainable enterprise concentration.

A second strategic area for CSE is practice, where MBA students have opportunities to work directly with businesses on real-world sustainable challenges. Through the CSE Consulting program, teams of MBA students work on sustainable consulting projects and present actionable recommendations to businesses. Past projects have included the development

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of a green scorecard for Walt Disney Imagineering and the creation of an environmental footprint assessment for Bank of America's North American operations.

Finally, the center's third priority is knowledge and "how to expand the teaching tools, academic resources, research and case studies in the area of sustainable enterprise," Thomas says. The center supports faculty and student research projects that cover four areas: innovation and design, financial metrics and models, economic development, and leadership and corporate governance.

Industry Focus

Some schools are adding a sustainability focus to specific industries. For instance, the Leeds School of Business incorporated sustainability principles into two of its centers of excellence: the University of Colorado Real Estate Center and the Deming Center for Entrepreneurship.

The Real Estate Center, which is primarily funded by professionals throughout Colorado, takes a new approach to developing a sustainable real estate perspective, according to Susan Watts, executive director of the center. "A lot of decision makers in this industry are not as knowledgeable or open to sustainability," she says. "People need to be more broadly educated about sustainable practices and how they can help attain more market share, how they can get their project approved more quickly and how they can improve the bottom line."

The Real Estate Center has formed the Initiative for Sustainable Development, which educates and unites students, faculty and industry leaders as they pursue the best practices and policies in the field of sustainable land use and real estate development. The initiative includes graduate and professional development courses within the business school—plus collaborations with faculty to offer classes in a new sustainability track. The program also includes opportunities in applied research and consulting.

At the Deming Center for Entrepreneurship, sustainability has been a priority for nearly five years. "When large corporations change the way they do business, they create these vortices of opportunity," says Jerde, the center's executive director. "They need new services, solutions and products to help them do that." New courses include sustainable venturing and sustainable energy assessment.



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Stanford Graduate School of Business // Strategic Sustainability

Profitability and environmental responsibility are top priorities in the corporate sector. That's why Stanford University created a six-day intensive program to help company, government and organization leaders strike a balance between business and environmental objectives.

This fall, Stanford will offer the **Business Strategies for Environmental Sustainability** program for a fourth consecutive year. Faculty from Stanford's Woods Institute for the Environment and the Stanford Business School will teach the course. Their multi-disciplinary approach helps participants understand how to constructively overcome challenges within their organization.

"The participants learn not only from the faculty, but equally from one another," says Bill Barnett, creator and faculty director of the program.

Participants learn a variety of valuable skills, including:

- How to translate ideas from the program into improved business practices and government policies
- Strategies to gain a competitive advantage through product innovation and sustainable supply-chain management
- Frameworks to manage stakeholder relationships

The program produces innovative leaders who support the economy and a sustainable environment. "You're challenged as you advance in your career to do things that you've never done before," Barnett says. "For individuals, this becomes a great chance to learn how they can be better leaders."

To learn more, visit gsb.stanford.edu //

—Amanda Hoffstrom



Students participate in a team activity at Schwab Residential Center, the site of this year's Business Strategies for Environmental Sustainability program.

Real-Life Experiences

Although case studies are still a valuable tool in the MBA classroom, many business schools offer experiential learning in their programs.

The Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor is among the institutions that connect students with corporations and nonprofits.

Fifteen years ago, the Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise—a partnership between the Ross School of Business and Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment—developed a joint, full-time MBA/MS degree that emphasizes action-based learning. In the first or second year of the three-year program, students team up to develop a master's project for an outside organization that wants to solve a problem using sustainable practices, says Rick Bunch, managing director of the Erb Institute.

Past and current projects include:

- An environmental management plan for a year-round resort in Michigan
- An economic model for placement of wind energy installations
- Analysis of hybrid organizations that blur the lines between for-profit and nonprofit status

The Ross School of Business also offers a series of Multidisciplinary Action Projects (MAPs), including one geared toward executive MBA students. The ExecMAP course is a four-month field study that connects student teams with companies and organizations throughout the world.

ExecMAP courses often result in actionable recommendations for participating businesses, plus applicable skills that executives bring to their careers. "These are not textbook-in-the-classroom experiences," says Andrew Lawlor, an adjunct faculty member and director of ExecMAP. "Students work with a real organization with a real problem and develop tools they carry with them long beyond the Executive MBA program."

Sustainability Certification

Professionals who already have received their MBA or want to gain a deeper perspective on sustainability are turning to certification programs. In 2008, Presidio Graduate School introduced its executive education certificate, which distills concepts from the college's MBA in sustainable management into an intensive five-month program that blends classroom and online learning.

"The content of the curriculum includes core business issues taught through the lens of sustainability, whether it's product and service design, metric systems or operations," says Nicola Acutt, associate dean of programs.

Participants derive several important benefits from the certificate program. "They have the courage and competence to translate sustainability concepts into practical and applied business strategy," Acutt says. "They're also able to position themselves as experts with high-level skills."

Besides regular classes and online interactions, participants form a project or action plan to implement sustainability in their organization or community. "Often in traditional executive education programs, you sit in a classroom and learn about a lot of interesting concepts, but you're not necessarily challenged to apply that Monday morning," Acutt says. "The focus is, 'How do you turn what you've learned into a strategy or tangible product?'"

The demand for professionals trained in sustainability continues to rise, and businesses are evolving to meet the needs of the private and public sectors. "Sustainable management is a systematic framework for businesses that requires a blending of social, natural and financial capital to create an integrated bottom line," Acutt says. "It's much more than just being green." //

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