

DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY IN CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

Defining sustainability as it relates to the uniqueness of each institution can provide guidance and structure towards incorporating sustainability and climate related strategies, goals, and targets. A definition of sustainability is not entirely necessary, but can help maintain focus on a topic that, at times, can seem overwhelming.

The definitions below outline how Canadian post-secondary institutions define “sustainability” or “sustainable development”.

This list of Canadian colleges and universities were provided from [the Greenest Workforce](#). Definitions were collected from personal emails and online research from sustainability and environmental policies, sustainability plans, climate action plans, strategic plans, and so on. Definitions and links are up to date as of December 2018. Links for documents and websites are provided within institution names. Definitions may, or may not, be within the most recent document type (for example, the 3rd version of a document contains the sustainability definition but not the 4th).

Following the definitions, a word bubble has been generated from the definitions to help provide prominent key terms.

Definitions

[Algonquin College](#): Development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[British Columbia Institute of Technology](#): Innovation to support the social and economic prosperity of the Province without harming our natural environment.

[Brock University](#): Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[Camosun College](#): Strives to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition to considering the long term, sustainability connects people and ideas, fostering relationships, respect, and a deeper understanding of solutions that lead to a better future.

[Carleton University](#): Sustainability means to live, learn and grow within our campus community in a manner that protects and strengthens our physical and social environments such that the students, staff and faculty of future generations can continue to develop and enjoy our campus community.

[Champlain Regional College](#): Champlain views sustainability in an inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice, secure livelihoods, and a better world for all generations.

[Concordia University](#): A mindset and a process that leads to reducing our ecological footprint and enhancing social well-being while maintaining economic viability both on and off campus.

[Fanshawe College](#): The ability to meet the needs of today's generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It incorporates environmental, social and economic dimensions that support human well-being, economic prosperity and environmental health over time.

[Fleming College](#): Sustainability means

- Students working on applied projects that improve social and environmental well-being;
- Concern for the environment and the health of the communities within which we operate is factored into all college decisions; and
- The College is operated in a manner which produces a net positive benefit on the environment and on social well-being while ensuring financial viability

[Humber College](#): Preserving our collective future by embracing the social, ecological and economic impact of our decisions.

[Laurentian University](#): Sustainability meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[MacEwan University](#): The practice of managing human and ecological systems in accordance with our global responsibility to conserve and restore the environment while advancing social equity.

[McGill University](#): Working together toward a shared vision for a flourishing future in a manner that integrates social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

[Memorial University of Newfoundland](#): Acting in a manner that is environmentally, economically and socially sustainable in administration, academic and research programs.

[Mount Royal University](#): Acting sustainably means the critical activities of this higher education institution are ecologically sound, socially just and environmentally viable.

Niagara College: Providing high quality applied education and training that meets the needs of students, employees, and the communities in which we operate today, while protecting and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future (personal email).

[Nova Scotia Community College](#): Meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[Royal Roads University](#): Meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[Ryerson University](#): Taking responsibility for a shared future with the broader community, and aiming to pursue environmental, social and economic sustainability through our programs, Scholarly Research and Creative (SRC) activity, policies, built environment and fiscally sound operations.

[Simon Fraser University](#): Improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems.

St. Lawrence College: Be accountable for our decisions and actions to ensure our long-term viability, reduce our environmental impact and foster a healthy and dynamic college (personal email).

[Université Laval](#): To preserve and improve the quality of life of people and our community through actions that affect people's way of life, living environment, and quality of life.

[University of Alberta](#): Process of living within the limits of available physical, natural and social resources in ways that allow the living systems in which humans are embedded to thrive in perpetuity.

[University of Calgary](#): Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

[University of Guelph](#): Meeting the needs of today's generation without compromising the needs of future generations.

[University of Lethbridge](#): The managing of natural resources in an effective manner to meet our needs and to preserve and maintain them for future generations.

[University of Manitoba](#): Below represents the University of Manitoba's overall perspective on sustainability, not simply a definition. It provides a good, comprehensive overview of the three pillars of sustainability as it relates to the institution.

Three interrelated and mutually supportive dimensions: environmental, social, and economic. Planning to address these dimensions of sustainability will protect the long-term resiliency of the University in terms of its programs, people and its physical resources.

Social sustainability includes the preservation and strengthening of cultural identities; the decreasing of social inequities; the empowerment of marginalized groups; and an emphasis on collaborative, participatory, and inclusive decision-making processes. There is also a particular commitment to social sustainability that builds and expands an Indigenous presence and visibility at the University that will result in improved access, recruitment, retention, and completion for First Nations, Inuit and Métis learners. The University is dedicated to becoming a place where all Indigenous students have a home.

Economic sustainability necessitates making economic decisions that reflect environmental and social effects, and requires prudence and care in creating efficiencies and locating new revenue streams to ensure that resources continue to be available to pursue the University's overall mission. Overall, the University wishes to ensure that its present actions do not decrease the chances for future generations to achieve levels of well-being that are at least as great as those achieved now.

Environmental sustainability includes maintaining and increasing ecological functions, ensuring that natural resources and ecosystems are not utilized beyond their regenerative capacities, transitioning from non-renewable to renewable natural resources and energy, and preserving and enhancing biodiversity. The way we design the built environment has implications for the long-term reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. For example, designing a more walkable dense urban environment can reduce car dependency and allow for more land dedicated to the natural systems that both human and non-human species rely on.

[University of Northern British Columbia](#): Addresses the human relationship to the environment, a relationship that has multiple dimensions.

[University of Prince Edward Island](#): Meeting the needs of the present without depleting resources or harming natural cycles for future generations; the quality of a state or process that allows it to be maintained indefinitely. The principles of sustainability integrate and balance the environment, the economy, and society into a system that can be maintained in a healthy state indefinitely.

[University of Regina](#): Commitments to sustaining human wellbeing and the natural environment.

[University of Saskatchewan](#): Stewardship of the natural environment in a socially and economically responsible manner that meets the needs of both present and future generations.

[University of Victoria](#): Achieving the ecological balance that allows social development and economic prosperity to be achieved across generations.

- Ecological Balance is the equilibrium between, and coexistence of, all organisms and their environment.
- Social Development encompasses a commitment to create social opportunities for

individuals and groups to enhance overall community wellbeing.

- Economic Prosperity is a financially healthy state.

[University of Winnipeg](#): The capacity of a thing, action, activity or process to be maintained indefinitely and meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

[Vancouver Island University](#): Meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Potential Challenges

- The term “sustainability” is all-encompassing, and it can be very difficult to capture this broadly enough to understand the breadth of the term while still providing meaning and focus.
- Identifying an efficient process for creating a sustainability definition.

Conclusion

Having a definition of “sustainability” for a post-secondary institute to strive towards and develop will be a useful exercise and asset, though not necessarily an easy one to achieve; because of this, aggregating sustainability definitions from Canadian colleges and universities is meant to simplify and serve as inspiration.

meet campus natural
 sustainability community
 leader viability within manner
 resources future
 ensure living present
 needs action social
 economic process ability
 life operations environment quality
 without compromising
 ecological enhancing human
 generations