

WESTERN GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND SUSTAINABILITY CAPABILITIES

WSU Graduate Attributes and Sustainability

For a 21st century facing cascading crises including global pandemics, climate change impacts and inequalities and social and economic disruption sustainability education is more critical than ever. We need to develop students (and a curriculum) that have sustainability capabilities - the skills, knowledge and mindsets that allow graduates to become deeply committed to building a more sustainable future.

Graduate attributes (GA) are used to describe the abilities, capacities, and traits that our Western Sydney University students have developed to become contributing members of society in all its richness and diversity beyond the discipline knowledge they have accumulated. Western is committed to developing graduates who can:

1. Enact the principles of intellectual enquiry.
2. Apply knowledge and skills to curate and communicate ideas truthfully, with purpose and impact.
3. Demonstrate a commitment to life-long learning.
4. Actively collaborate in partnership, with respect and reciprocity.
5. Act ethically and responsibly with and for Indigenous Australian peoples and communities.
6. **Contribute to a sustainable, diverse, and socially-just world.**

Our approach to our new 'Sustainability' GA is to incorporate sustainability capabilities that focus on what a **graduate can do** as much as **what they learn**, and to develop graduates who can *critically envision better futures and take action towards it*. The Sustainability GA connects with all the other 5 GAs and through acknowledging the importance of understanding and connecting to an Indigenous Caring for Country perspective is closely aligned to Western's Indigenous GA.

Sustainability Capabilities: Think, Care, Do

Think (Cognitive)	Care (Socio-Emotional)	Do (Praxis)
Thinking ethically, critically, and creatively to apply a systems and futures thinking perspective to problem and opportunities underpinned by an understanding of fundamental ecological principles.	Respecting and valuing multiple perspectives from a diversity of people, values, and worldviews (a socio-cultural literacy) and taking a deep appreciation of and re-connection with environment and place - the more-than-human along with the human.	Engaging in practical and effective action and applying ecological knowledge to the practice of ecological design.

Sustainability capabilities cut across disciplines at Western in both our undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum. At the core, sustainability capabilities are reflective of the 'head, heart and hands' approach of several educational philosophies and the general notion of education that covers knowledge, capabilities (or attributes), and values. We have themed these capabilities as Think (cognitive), Care (socio-emotional) and Do (praxis) ¹ and suggested teaching content that can be used to support collaborative, participatory and action orientated

¹ Germein, S. 2022, Framework, adapted from Centre for Ecoliteracy (2022)

learning (Figure 1). These are situated within larger knowledge systems of Caring for Country, scientific Earth systems boundaries and a commitment to social justice and cultural diversity.

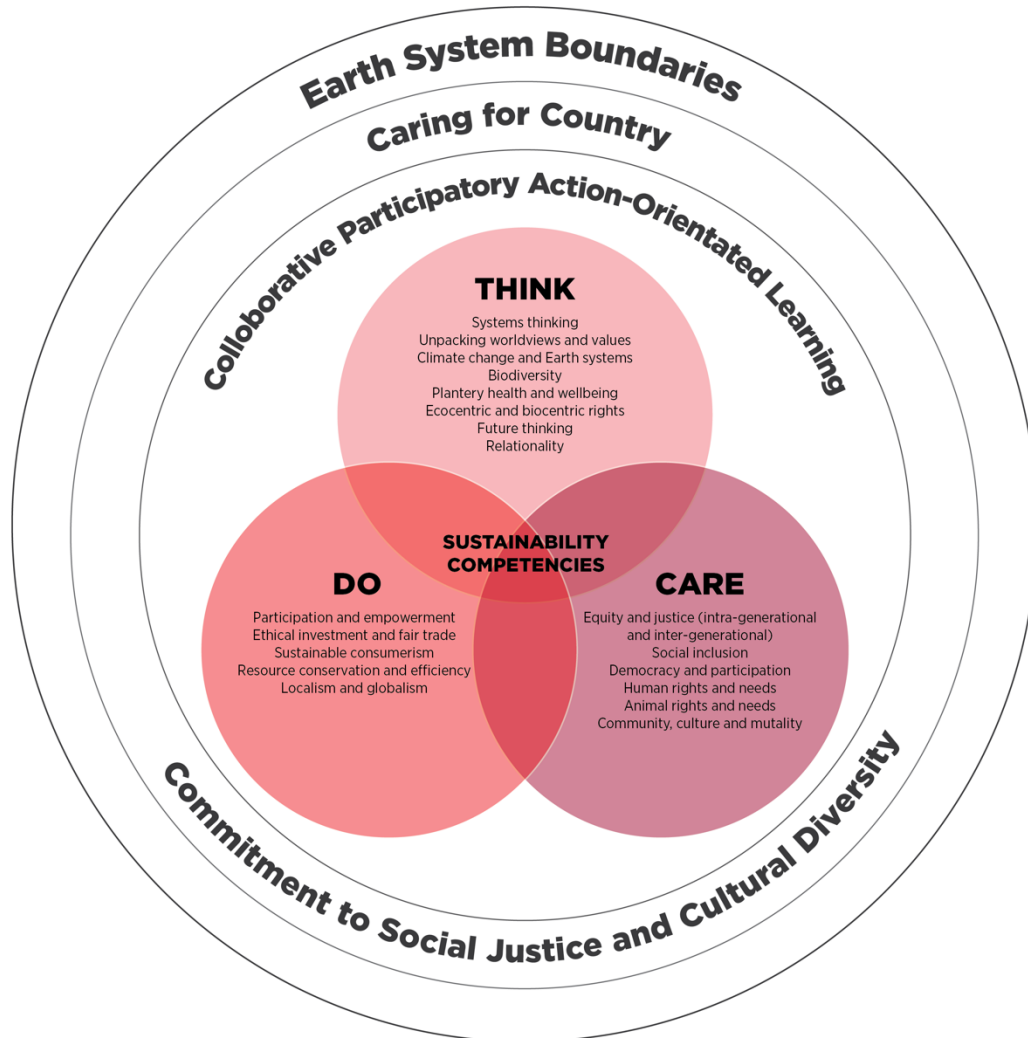


Figure 1: Sustainability Capabilities and Education for Sustainability (EfS) Content to support Western's Sustainability Graduate Attribute²

Sustainability capabilities can be integrated at a:



Program level with majors and minors focused on sustainability and incorporating transformative teaching.



Whole of subject focused on sustainability which can provide discipline-specific or generic sustainability literacies.



Component within a subject such as case studies, assessments, student research projects or curiosity pod based on the real-world.



Professional practice, like work integrated learning experience, internship, or outbound mobility program, that focuses on sustainability.

² Dollin, J. and Vermeulen, B. (2022), Framework for Western's Sustainability Graduate Attributes.

Western's Sustainability Education Principles

There are a number of guiding principles that can be utilised when looking at how sustainability capabilities could be incorporated into teaching. These principles should be understood on the basis that sustainability is not a state nor an end point, but a practice and an ethic. We acknowledge there are different types of paradigms, pedagogies and tools that are deployed to deliver this form of transformative learning.

- **Different frameworks for knowing:** Being able to learn and question prevailing epistemic (worldview) beliefs and value assumptions;³
- **Interdependence and earth systems limits:** Of society, economy, and the natural environment, from local to global scales and an understanding of earth system boundaries and limits for the economy and our society;
- **Needs and rights of future generations, citizenship and stewardship:** Intergenerational equity, rights and responsibilities, participation and co-operation;
- **Quality of life, equity, justice and diversity:** The importance of cultural, social, economic and biological variety for humans and more than humans
- **Uncertainty and precaution in action.** Being able to acknowledge and navigate uncertainty, disruption and complexity⁴; and
- **Whole person learning:** cognitive, socio-emotional, affective.⁵

³ Bawden, R (2005). A systems perspective on essential learning. DECS, South Australia.

⁴ Sterling, S. (2012). The Future Fit Framework: An introductory guide to teaching and learning for sustainability in higher education. York, Higher Education Academy and Western Sydney University's Sustainability and Resilience Strategy 2030.

⁵ Centre for Ecoliteracy (2015). Ecoliterate practices that will help nurture your emotional, social and ecological intelligence.