

By ReReGeneration

Assess the Current State of Curricula



Every institution has its own mandatory courses, electives, majors and minors. Your goal should be to map out all the courses offered by the school throughout all its potential business degree tracks. If students have the opportunity to take electives outside the business school, try to account for that, too. Think of this like a flow chart with all the various pathways students can take to graduate. Such a document probably already exists, so you can retrieve it from the institution's individual departments or by contacting the school's general administration.

Thanks to this program map, you can measure the share of sustainability-related content in the school's educational offering by discipline. Ultimately, you may be able to measure this by the number of teaching hours dedicated to sustainability.

Wondering how to get started on mapping? Here are some key steps to get you going:

1. Identify the different degrees possible at your business school (BComm/B.B.A, Masters, Minors, other)
2. Compile a complete list of courses which are offered at your business school today. Your school should have a course catalogue of some kind which you can use to help you in this. Separate courses according to their relevance to the degree tracks: depending on your school, some courses may be mandatory, complimentary, anti-requisite, or elective.
3. Additionally, you can identify which courses are shared by multiple degree tracks. This will allow you to eventually identify which courses are the most far-reaching in their impact (e.g., courses that are mandatory in multiple programs), which will be a good place to look when analysing course content in section 3.3 - Assess inclusion of sustainability content in various educational pathways.

Deeply understanding where your school sits today will better equip you to advocate for change.

For each course, you will need to find out how sustainability issues are addressed -- be they environmental, social, or economic. There can be three types of courses: a course centred on sustainability, a course that applies sustainability and a course that disregards sustainability.

In each course, the idea is to understand how sustainability topics are embedded throughout the curriculum, highlighting the gaps and strengths. As well, you may want to estimate the number of hours devoted to sustainability in a given degree track. To assess this, you can ask the relevant professors for their course syllabi. Often, syllabi topics are broken down session by session, and if you know the length of each session, you can count up the number of hours that will be spent covering sustainability topics.

This undertaking will be large, and you will likely need to enlist help from your working group as needed, and to divide the courses between yourselves to make the project manageable.

First, however, you should check to see if parts of this work haven't already been done by your institution and outside organisations. It is quite possible that someone has already done an analysis of the course offerings at your school. You may wish to ask the school's administration when the last time a formal program review was conducted -- and whether that review included any assessment of sustainability-related content.

If there is no existing program review for you to work off of, you can use this [evaluation tool](#) created by Re_Generation to score and track the level of sustainability integration in the curriculum. As you review the course content -- also consider how the content is taught, in addition to the topics included.

- Are there experiential learning opportunities?
- How are students evaluated? Are the methods accessible for different styles of learning? (ex: not purely multiple choice or written evaluation? Different options?)

Following your conversation about formal program reviews at the school, feel free to inform your school's administration that your organisation will be conducting your own review. Ultimately, they will need to be involved in any process that leads to curriculum change -- but you can help grease the wheels by collecting this information.

Keep a list of these courses with your notes regarding their levels of integration of sustainability. Presenting your analysis of current offerings when talking with your school's administration can be a powerful way to demonstrate that you are serious about this initiative, and to provide a starting point to be built on during this project.

By this stage, here's what you should have covered:

- [Macro-level model of the educational pathways](#)
- [Micro-level model of the specific content in individual classes](#)

Now, you're ready to put it all together. Understanding how these dimensions intersect can help you narrow your focus

Some good questions to consider:

- Are the courses that best include sustainability optional?
- Are they present early enough in the corresponding degree track to generate interest in other electives?
- Do the courses that should cover the subject cover enough of the key topics and issues students need to learn to be well equipped for today's workforce and issues?

Again, as you refine your understanding here, you have another chance to build upon work that may have already been done. Has your school taken part in the [Positive Impact Ratings](#) Assessment? If so, you'll have access to specific data about student perspectives in your institution. You can find out from your school administration, sustainability student organisation, or through the positive impact ratings report. Canadian Schools definitely tested in the most recent issue include: Sprott, Gustavson, and Molson – but double check at your school. They may have been too.

If your school hasn't been assessed before, you may want to consider adding this suggestion to your discussion with school administration. It's useful to have the credibility of a global organisation behind you, combined with localised data. You can also choose to run your own student survey. [This guide will help you design the questions.](#)

In the meantime, if you don't have an existing assessment to work from, here are some further questions you may want to consider in your own:

Common core or specialisation? It is interesting to see whether courses in which the environment is a central theme are offered to all students, whether they are considered core courses and whether they are available from the start of the degree track, or whether they are only reserved for students who specialise in these subjects later in their schooling - as is often the case.

Mandatory or optional? The idea is to ask whether all students have access to these courses, whether they are a compulsory part of the curriculum that allows each student to study these subjects, or whether it is possible to finish school without having taken them. How many hours are devoted, how many credits are associated? All too often, courses devoted to the environment receive little recognition in the academic curriculum, which is often reflected in the relatively small number of hours and credits devoted to them

What quality of content? Even for courses entirely devoted to these issues, it is important to keep a critical eye. Is it a quality course, with an engaging teacher? Are the issues covered in depth, or is it greenwashing? For this, the best approach is asking the students who have taken the course for their opinion. The PIR report results provide a critical foundation for this knowledge. But what if you're getting started outside the assessment cycle? Or you want to get more granular data specific to your school? To collect this information in real time, you can also conduct your own survey. Get guidance for building a student survey [here](#).

4. Reach out to Individual Professors

As mentioned in Part 2 (“Interacting with your institution’s stakeholders”), teachers and administrators are valuable allies in understanding the existing curricula and the program system it exists within. Meeting with them (both in formal and informal settings) will allow you to present your initial findings, and to get their insights on the state of affairs as well as areas for action.

As you develop a rapport with the professors in question, begin to ask whether they would welcome your suggestions on alternative topics the course could touch upon. Before these meetings, prepare extensively -- professors may push back, citing a lack of training in these matters. Remember: faculty see themselves as the experts -- and overall, they are. Our role is to present the student perspective, which faculty may not otherwise have direct access to. We bring a unique understanding of what students want, and how priorities are changing in the new generations. This is where it will be crucial to fall back upon credibility from student demand data (from [surveys](#) etc.).

If you’re proposing additions to curricula, you’ll ideally also want to come equipped with a few ideas as to where content can be cut from courses and/or curricula. Faculty often cite an issue that there are endless things they could include, but they have limited time and resources to do so. They cannot always add content without taking some away.

If you’re looking for sustainability-focused resources to suggest, look to Re_Generation’s [Manifesto](#) which outlines pressing problems and solutions that can be referenced and taught throughout curricula. [This resource guide](#) can help demonstrate to faculty that there are existing case studies, text books, and precedents of other schools integrating these topics.

To organize your approach, split the professors and members of the administration you’d like to meet with between the different members of your team. Create a spreadsheet to outline meeting dates, and link the documents holding the meeting notes. Ensure your team takes comprehensive meeting notes which also include next steps generated from each meeting.

To finish the initial assessment of your school, you should try to understand why questions of sustainability have not been sufficiently integrated into the school curriculum. All the [stakeholders](#) discussed so far can help you understand different elements and challenges. Depending on the obstacles you have identified, it is your responsibility to propose relevant courses of action to overcome them.

Some potential sources of problems for you and your team may be:

Bureaucratic Complexity

Navigating your university's bureaucracy to enact change in course content and degree track requirements will be challenging. The mechanisms to enact change in these slow-moving institutions can be slow and drawn out -- and each school may work a little bit differently based on their own politics and history. Allying yourself to an experienced professor or member of the administration with inner knowledge of the bureaucracy will be invaluable to you and your team, if you're able to find one. Regardless, ensuring you understand the requirements and expectations prior to any official meetings with your business school's decision makers will be crucial.

Reluctant professors

The integration of sustainability content can be a daunting task for professors who have no prior knowledge on the matter. Add to that the fact that they've been teaching the same content for up to multiple decades, and you have a recipe for some professors to be quite reluctant to integrate content they view as less crucial to know. By discussing sustainability with their peers and in the administration, you will start the conversation -- even if you don't convince reluctant professors right off the bat. By providing them with resources and content that other professors have made in the past, you make it easier for them to bring topics of sustainability into their case studies, their competitions and assignments. Otherwise, reforming curricula of existing courses places a lot of ownness and extra work on the faculty -- and if it's not part of a formal school review process, this work may be largely unpaid. You want to reduce this burden as much as possible to incentivize change.

Team Attrition

Losing members of your team, due to changing commitments or graduation, can be significantly harmful to your movement. Ensuring that you're able to secure continuity for your team and its operations will be key in ensuring your movement is successful in the long run. You must also ensure that you remain attentive and responsive to your team throughout this undertaking, as mentioned in Section 1 - Assembling a team. For more on team leadership and organization, check out our take action guide for building a student organization.

In Canada, any curriculum changes that are aiming for sustainability must include considerations around decolonization and Indigenization. This means we, as Canadians, need to acknowledge our history and the way our knowledge systems have been grounded in a colonial worldview. Meanwhile, we need to understand that more Indigenous worldviews and forms of knowledge are essential to building a more sustainable world.

Important Concepts and Definitions

To frame your thinking on how decolonization can be implemented within curricula, you need to begin by understanding a few core concepts generally. These descriptions come from the Re_Generation Take Action Guide on decolonization, which was developed with input from Mary Zhang, Jonathan Araujo Redbird, Ami Gagne, and Arshiyah Ahsan.

Decolonization

"Brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools". (Tuck and Yang, 2012). It is the process of challenging, critiquing, dismantling, disrupting current assumptions and systems.

Decolonization is a framework through which we understand systems of oppression around the world. It is an overarching framework, and only a small part of that work is what would be traditionally considered EDI work, and it requires us to critically re-examine the settler-colonial structures we are accustomed to, unlearn, deconstruct, and rebuild (Indigenize).

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is related to Canada-wide initiative to "establish and maintain a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada". (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

Reconciliation is difficult because it implies the redoing of conciliation, which actually did not even exist in the first place. There was no recognition of trying to work together in harmony with one another and the earth. In order to move forward, we need an ally-ship that is proactive and genuine, however, the genuine aspect is what can be very difficult to arrive at. A big part of achieving this is through Indigenous people welcoming settlers/immigrants into their culture, which they are currently doing, and that is a respect to the original treaty of working together, and can show an understanding of the symbiotic relationship through which we are all connected.

Indigenous people regaining the ability to legally manage their own land is the first step to genuine reconciliation. This is slowly coming into fruition with new legislation and institutional changes.

Currently, what we have is a very paternalistic relationship, where Indigenous people have to prove their ability to manage their own lands since they were unjustly deemed "too savage" to do so before.

It is incredibly crucial for Indigenous peoples to have their perspectives featured in anti-racism conversations, and for Black and other POC activists to understand how they are part of the fight for decolonization as well.

While defining a scope and not getting overwhelmed is important, never lose sight of the fact that colonialism around the world is the same systemic problem, and tackling one aspect of it will always have implications on others.

Unlearning

When thinking about understanding and acknowledging different knowledge systems and worldviews, we are going to have to question some dominant assumptions we have. All stakeholders in the school need to be open minded and willing to unlearn.

Indigenization

"Movement centering Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being within the academy, in essence transforming institutional initiatives such as policy, co-curricular programs, curriculum, and practices to support Indigenous success and empowerment" (Pidgeon, 2016). Bringing Indigenous knowledge into spaces

What does decolonization in curriculum mean?

It's about rebalancing the power imbalances around what is taught in schools, since Indigenous centred approaches have often been marginalised. It's also about thought and action to redress forms of disadvantage in schools that are associated with racism and colonialism.

Like many curriculum change processes outlined so far, this work can start with a series of questions. You can ask yourself:

To what extent does the content of my/our syllabus/programme...
presume a particular profile / mindset of student and their orientation to the world?
allow students to understand the origins and purposes of this field of study in its historical context?
cultivate an appreciation for diverse entry points around a particular subject?
risk potentially being traumatic or painful to students either in general or in particular?
include a diverse demographic profile of authors on the syllabus?
enable the use of non-English sources in the curriculum? This is important because language can create barriers and limits to the perspectives included in course content.
It is not just a question of what is taught (and including Indigenous protagonists, examples, history and perspectives) but also how it is taught. Emphasizing different ways of learning, engaging and sharing knowledge is also important (e.g., through emphasis on narrative story telling).

Potential Strategies and Actions Your School Can Take

- There is no template for taking action on decolonizing curricula, but there are certain actions which may be broadly applicable, including:
- Educating yourself and others about why decolonization is central to any commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and justice. (This academic paper is a useful place to start: [Coloniality is Far From over, and So Must Be Decoloniality](#))
- Along with profs teaching in various disciplines, start conversations about which perspectives are and aren't included. Are there forms of knowledge being left out of the current teaching on a subject? Are there ways a broader global perspective could be included - rather than a purely Western one?
- Diversify the reading list - advocate for more diversity in authorship, but don't stop there. Without ensuring this work, and its challenges, are explicitly brought to light with students, diversity alone doesn't go far enough. A more diversified list needs to catalyze a conversation about the colonial history of a subject area, and how/why some voices have been left out so far.
- Land acknowledgements for the University. Use these as an opportunity to really learn and engage - not just recite. Stakeholders using and hearing land acknowledgements should learn about the communities whose names they hear. It's important to note, though, that these land acknowledgements are most effective when they are personal and reflective. It's okay to go off script and ask questions about how you fit into the broader picture.
- Avoid tokenizing Indigenous students in the classroom - the onus is not on them to educate their peers. Creating space to share perspectives is one thing, putting people on the spot or expecting something from them is another.
- Try to leverage research created by, and with Indigenous people - not just about them
- Co-construct experiential or land-based learning experiences with local Indigenous community elders and cultural knowledge keepers. If you are using people's time, though, consider how they might be compensated, as it is valuable.
- Tuition waivers for incoming Indigenous students from the displaced communities in the region.
- Pay a contribution to the communities in question every time a land acknowledgement is made.
- Emphasise mindset shifts across the University: rather than seeing non-Indigenous Canadians as the current/modern owners of land, consider ourselves as "foreigners from within" who are guests. To be invited to stay, we need to be deliberate about action (Deanne Leblanc, Six Nations Polytechnic).

Learn more about [how student groups can take action](#)

Additional References

[To properly acknowledge Indigenous territory, go off script – The Varsity](#)
[Time to put action behind university land acknowledgements](#)