The Nature of the Field

The prevailing theoretical model of sustainability defines it as the intersection of the social, the environmental, and the economic. Sustainability thus implies a radical interdisciplinarity of the kind generally hailed as the academic model of the future. The Minor in Sustainability acknowledges the issue of sustainability as one of the most theoretically and practically complex questions of our time. Involving far more than simply turning off lights or recycling bottles and paper, sustainability has implications for how we eat and drink; how we treat the land, sea, air, and atmosphere; how we approach health and well-being on an interspecies level; how we produce and consume goods; how we distribute the benefits and costs of that production and consumption; how we derive the energy to maintain both those economic enterprises and our everyday lifestyles; and how we assess and rethink the proper balance between profit, politics, wealth, and the common good. The challenge of sustainability is its profoundly crosscutting nature; none of these questions may be answered without consideration of the others.

For more information about the minor, please contact:

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Solar collectors power the rainwater catchment-based plumbing system in Evans and Few Halls
The Course of Study

Students interested in a broad minor, integrating understandings of sustainability in natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities are encouraged to consider the Sustainability Minor. With a total of 20 credit hours, requirements include:

- Foundations of Sustainability (IDS 206)
- Four courses distributed over the three divisions (natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities)
- An e-portfolio that integrates sustainability learning from diverse courses
- A capstone research project (IDS 391)

What Can I Do With A Sustainability Minor?

Inherently interdisciplinary, the Sustainability Minor is easily interwoven with a wide range of majors and disciplines: Anthropology, Business, Economics, Environmental Sciences, Languages, Literature, Philosophy, and Religion, among others.


Study Abroad Options

Many of the study abroad options offered through Emory’s Center for International Study Abroad (CIPA) can help to fulfill the Sustainability Minor’s elective distribution requirements. Sponsored by affiliated universities and international education exchange groups, programs are located in areas including:

- London
- Milan
- Vienna
- Freiburg
- Athens
- Swiss Alps
- Mongolia
- Panama
- Costa Rica

Sample course topics reflect the broad range of content inherent to sustainability studies:

- EU Environmental Policies: On the Road to Sustainability
- Social Innovation, Geopolitics and the Environment
- Tropical Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation
- Tropical Biology on a Changing Planet
- Energy, the Environment, & Society
- Environmental Policies & Green Business

What Is Sustainability?

Sustainability refers to a process in which human societies adapt to live within the earth’s finite limits in ways that:

- restore healthy ecosystems and reduce harm to water, air, soils, and biodiversity;
- support secure livelihoods and vibrant local economies and redress poverty and inequality;
- create resilient cultural, social and natural systems and empowered communities;
- and meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Curricula focused on sustainability foster creativity and an expanded imagination of a thriving social, economic, and environmental world for ourselves and future generations. Students and faculty involved in the Minor recognize that the process of moving toward sustainability involves trade-offs, tensions, and difficult choices. Students apply analytical systems thinking to contemporary global and local problems, practice participatory strategies to resolve those problems, and demonstrate an ethical compass that guides their assessments of alternative solutions. Many kinds of courses from many perspectives help students prepare for the difficult sustainability challenges we face now and in the years to come.