

Sustainable Development

What would I study in the [sustainable development program](#)?

The Earth Institute offers a major and a special concentration for students interested in studying the complex issues of development as they relate to the interactions between natural and social systems. The term “sustainable” refers to addressing the fundamental needs of the world’s growing human population in a manner consistent with the healthy functioning of Earth’s ecosystems, oceans, atmosphere, and climate. In this context, “development” refers to continued social, political and economic progress aimed at improving the well-being of the global community, especially for the poorest people.

What introductory courses should I take?

Students should take the following foundational courses in their first year at Columbia:

- SDEV UN1900 Introduction to Sustainable Development Seminar (offered in fall only for 2022-2023 academic year)
- EESC UN2330 Science for Sustainable Development (offered in fall)—*this course satisfies the science core requirement*
- SDEV UN2300 Challenges of Sustainable Development (offered in spring)

Following the foundational courses, students in both the [major](#) and [special concentration](#) take courses within the following framework:

II. Basic Disciplinary Foundation/Natural Science/Social Science

Core courses in basic disciplines require students to develop a deeper knowledge of the natural and social sciences that are important to sustainable development.

III. Analysis and Solutions to Complex Problems

Coursework in Water, Energy, Food, Public Health, Climate Change, Natural Disasters and Urbanization allow students to develop an expertise in critical thematic areas of sustainable development.

IV. Skills/Actions

These courses equip students with theoretical foundations and practical skills that are in demand in the public, private and nonprofit sectors, as well as in graduate education programs.

V. Electives/Practicum

Electives allow students to take additional Analysis and Solutions to Complex Problems and Skills/Actions courses, or to complete a senior thesis. The Practicum exposes students to the renowned research conducted at the Earth Institute, and helps them understand its application to sustainability issues.

VI. Capstone Workshop

The Workshop provides students with the opportunity to apply concepts learned in the classroom to hands-on sustainability problems. Students work as consultants with outside clients in need of sustainable solutions for specific issues.

[Study abroad](#) and internships are strongly encouraged as a basis for thesis research and to provide students with practical experience and enhanced global awareness. The [Global Fellows in Sustainable Development Program](#) provides funding for students to further their studies off campus in the form of fieldwork and research.

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What knowledge and skills will I gain? What opportunities do [graduates](#) pursue?

As a major or special concentrator, students:

- Gain solid foundational knowledge in the natural and social sciences
- Critically examine a variety of complex problems, including water, climate, food, and health
- Analyze quantitative data, and communicate analyses and interpretations
- Debate and enact technological strategies for mitigating adverse effects on the environment
- Strategically manage and contribute to team projects, and creatively adapt to reach goals

Graduates go on to work in public, private, and nonprofit organizations, and many pursue graduate studies. Alumni have been employed by organizations such as: the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Clinton Global Initiative, Closed Loop Partners, Unilever, and ICF International. Former students are also pursuing higher degrees in areas such as sustainable development, environmental law and public policy.

Accelerated [5-Year Program](#)

This companion degree program allows students to earn both a sustainable development bachelor's and a sustainability management master's degree in just five years. Building upon the strong foundation of their undergraduate coursework, sustainable development students who are accepted into the [sustainability management program](#) will learn to draw from interdisciplinary perspectives in general, as well as develop specific skills and knowledge in financial management, quantitative analysis, public policy, and the physical dimensions of sustainability. Students will receive practical professional training to help them to understand the systematic and organizational role of sustainability in any organization.

Who can answer my questions?

Students are encouraged to contact [program administrators](#) in one of their first few semesters at Columbia to discuss requirements. Peer-advising is offered by the [Student Union for Sustainable Development](#), an organization of sustainable development majors and concentrators. Once students declare, they have access to multiple resources, including the Earth Institute's [professional development program](#) and Columbia's [Center for Career Education](#).

Program Administrator

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