

What would I study in the Sustainable Development major?

One of the first degree programs of its kind in the United States, Columbia University's undergraduate major in sustainable development is founded on the principle that students must be trained in a variety of disciplines in order to be effective leaders in the field of sustainable development. The major is designed to ensure that graduates will understand the basics of the natural and social sciences and will be equipped to address complex problems across a wide range of challenges facing humanity. A [Sustainable Development minor](#) is also offered for students to augment their education with critical interdisciplinary skills and knowledge needed to address the urgent challenges of sustainable development. Five courses are required for the minor.

What courses should I take?

Beginning fall 2023, SDEV 1900 Introduction to Sustainable Development is no longer a required course for students in the major. The program recommends that students take SDEV 2300 and EESC 2330 prior to completing the remaining program requirements. No course substitutions will be permitted for SDEV 2300 and EESC 2330. Following the two foundations courses, students in the major take courses within the following framework:

II. Basic Disciplinary Foundation (four to five courses total)

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 (two courses)

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 (two courses)

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 (two courses)

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 (one course)

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.



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[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.

What knowledge and skills will I gain?

- Gain strong interdisciplinary knowledge in the natural and social sciences
- Develop analytical skills to evaluate data and models
- Think critically about existing systems and structures that must be reimagined in a sustainable future
- Debate and enact strategies for mitigating adverse effects on the environment
- Conduct original research collaboratively and communicate with interdisciplinary audiences

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 five years. Building upon the foundation of their undergraduate coursework, students who are accepted into the [sustainability management program](#) will learn to draw from interdisciplinary perspectives, as well as develop specific skills and knowledge in financial management, quantitative analysis, public policy, and the physical dimensions of sustainability.

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 declared, students have access to resources including staff advisors at the Climate School and the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, [professional development opportunities](#) and Columbia's [Center for Career Education](#).

Students enrolled in the Sustainable Development program administered through the Climate School confer their degrees from Columbia College or the School of General Studies. Students should complement the advising provided by the Undergraduate Program Office at the Climate School regarding majors and minors with guidance from their advising deans in Columbia College and the School of General Studies.

Program Administrator

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