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Abstract

Since the mid 1970s, a series of international declarations that recognize the critical link between environmental sustainability and higher education have been endorsed and signed by universities around the world. While academic initiatives in sustainability are blossoming, higher education lacks a comprehensive evaluation framework that is specifically tailored to the challenges of assessing sustainability programs. The article elaborates a novel framework for assessing the diverse set of higher-education curricular, research, and community-outreach programs devoted to sustainability based on critical review of quantitative- and qualitative-evaluation methods and on lessons drawn from experience in international development. The proposed multidimensional evaluation framework links process, outputs, outcomes, impacts, and continuous programmatic improvement based on sustained, contextually relevant observations. It engages three core purposes: management evaluation, capacity- and capability-development evaluation, and sustainability evaluation. Embedded in these purposes are key evaluation criteria adapted from an assessment of UNDP contributions to national

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development: long-term outcomes and impacts; evidence of cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional synergy; and resource mobilization for program enhancement. Along with practical examples of evaluation approaches used by universities in Europe, Japan, and the United States and the lessons that academic sustainability evaluators can draw from these practices, competencies required of graduates from sustainability programs are identified. The specific evaluative questions and methods presented offer universities a useful, conceptually grounded framework for adaptation and application in academic-sustainability assessments. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Koehn, Peter H., E-Mail: peter.koehn@umontana.edu