

**Program in Sustainable Development**

Frequently Asked Questions

**What is “sustainable development”?**

Sustainable refers to managing the world’s economy in a manner consistent with the continued 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 wellbeing of the global community, especially for the poorest people.

Sustainable development is one of the most pressing challenges facing humanity. As the world’s population grows, we must develop new ways to meet our requirements for food, energy, water and other basic needs without undermining the planet’s natural systems. This challenge touches on a vast number of issues, including poverty alleviation, climate change and food security, all of which must be viewed collectively to understand their complicated interdependencies.

Global pandemics, climate change, natural disasters, poor soil conditions, deforestation—these issues are at the heart of sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development requires systemic and integrated approaches that consider the complex interactions between the planet’s natural and social systems, while working at multiple levels of society, from the local to the global, to achieve a more equitable societies.

**What is the Earth Institute?**

The Earth Institute is made up of over 30 research centers and programs (housed both on the Morningside campus and at the Lamont campus in Palisades, N.Y.) and emphasizes a cross-disciplinary approach to solving complex problems associated with Earth, the environment and society.

While students do not apply to the Earth Institute or become students there, the Earth Institute maintains academic relationships with numerous departments on campus. This collaboration between the Earth Institute and the Columbia community to provide academic programs, activities, lectures and events that seek to incorporate and advance the goals of both the Earth Institute and the respective academic departments and their students. In doing so, the Earth Institute is able to offer programs such as the undergraduate major and special concentration in sustainable development, wherein students can incorporate courses in the earth and biological sciences, engineering, social sciences, and health sciences to gain a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development, as well as to tailor the program to their own interests.

**What is the difference between the major and the special concentration in the Undergraduate Program in Sustainable Development?**

The major requires 15 classes and a practicum for a total of approximately 47 credits, while the special concentration requires nine classes and a practicum for approximately 28 credits. The special concentration is modeled after the major but is intentionally more flexible.
Can I graduate with just a special concentration?

No. A special concentration is not a standalone major or concentration; it is intended to serve as a complement to the disciplinary specialization and methodological training inherent in a concentration or major. In addition to the special concentration, students must therefore complete a major or full concentration. Students may graduate with either a major or a special concentration in sustainable development, but not both.

Why a special concentration and not a concentration?

The special concentration is designed for combination with a second program to ensure that students gain academic depth in addition to the breath provided by their coursework in the special concentration.

Can juniors and seniors take the special concentration?

It is strongly advised that juniors and seniors consult with their advising dean before deciding to declare the special concentration. The special concentration requires nine courses (not credits) and a practicum; many seniors would not have time in their final year to complete this coursework.

Can courses count for credit toward more than one major/concentration/special concentration?

No. It is the policy of both Columbia College and the School of General Studies that there cannot be overlap between courses used for majors/concentrations/special concentrations. Students should refer to the bulletins of their specific schools for additional information:

General Studies Bulletin [http://www.gs.columbia.edu/major-requirements#double](http://www.gs.columbia.edu/major-requirements#double)

If you have questions, please contact your advising dean.

Can courses for the major be taken by students in the special concentration?

Yes. Special concentrators may take any of the Natural Science, Skills/Actions, and Analysis and Solutions to Complex Problems courses required for the major.

Why are the natural science requirements for the major and the special concentration different?

Students in the major are required to take a sequence of natural science courses as part of the basic disciplinary foundation requirement. This is to allow students in the major to develop more depth in a particular subject area. Special concentrators are not required to take a science sequence, but in fact many of the natural science course options for the special concentration are taken from one of the two-semester sequences.

Students should note that for the major, EEEB W2002 Environmental Biology is the same course as EESC V2300. Additionally students who take the Engineering Science sequence (EAEE E1100 A Better Planet by Design and EAEE E2002 Alternative Energy Resources) may not take the 4000-level Alternative Energy Resources class (EAIA W4200) to fulfill the Complex Problems requirement. Students who have not taken the sequence, who choose Alternative Energy Resources
as one of their Complex Problems classes must take it at the 4000-level.

**Can the SEE-U course be taken as six credits?**

Yes. If students in the major or the special concentration take SEE-U as a six-credit course, they can use three credits towards the Analysis and Solutions to Complex Problems requirement and three credits towards the Skills/Actions requirement. If SEE-U is taken for three credits it will count as one Analysis and Solutions to Complex Problems class.

**Do any of the courses required for the major and the special concentration fulfill the Columbia Core?**

Yes. SDEV W2330 Science for Sustainable Development fulfills the Columbia Core science requirement, as do some of the natural science courses. Students should refer to their school bulletins for specific courses that fulfill their science requirement.

**Is there a list of approved electives?**

Yes. A list is currently being updated and, once finished, the list will be posted on the Programs of Study section of the Undergraduate Program in Sustainable Development Website.

**Is there a Senior Thesis option?**

Yes. A senior thesis sequence can be taken by majors to fulfill the electives requirement. For special concentrators, the expectation is that those students who wish to do a senior thesis will do so in the department of their major or concentration.

**Does the department offer departmental honors?**

Yes. Majors will be considered for honors if they have at least a 3.7 GPA in their major courses and receive an A- or better in the senior thesis courses. A student's departmental involvement will also be considered.

**Are the major or the special concentration available to Barnard and Columbia Engineering students?**

The special concentration and the major are currently only available to students from Columbia College and the School of General Studies. Students from Barnard should contact Professor Stephanie Pfriman and Columbia Engineering students should contact Professor Patricia Culligan for more information about declaring to similar programs.

**Is there a deadline to declare the major or special concentration?**

Columbia College students typically declare their major or concentration (and any special concentration) through the Center for Student Advising during the spring semester of their sophomore year. Students in the School of General Studies may declare a major or concentration online during the months of March and October. Juniors and seniors who have already declared their major or concentration can also still declare the special concentration by visiting the Registrar’s Office. Students will need to obtain departmental approval to declare and should have their major/concentration declaration form signed by associate director, Natalie Unwin-Kuruneri (natalie@ei.columbia.edu) or program coordinator, Jessica Crespo (jcresco@ei.columbia.edu), both of whom are located in the Office of Academic and Research Programs (Hogan Hall).
Is it possible to substitute other Columbia courses for the ones on the list for the major and the special concentration?

Course substitutions are typically not permitted. While there are undoubtedly many Columbia courses that are similar in content to the courses required for the major and the special concentration, the program has been structured to ensure that students graduate with a well-rounded education and a working knowledge of the subjects that Earth Institute faculty have identified as critical for success in the field. The courses were specifically designed and selected to provide a holistic skill set and, therefore, we do not allow course substitutions.

Can my internship count towards the practicum requirement?

Students in both the special concentration and the major are required to complete a practicum. If a student wishes to substitute the practicum requirement with a related internship, they will first need to obtain approval from their program advisor. Students typically are not allowed to get credit for an internship; however, if the student presents a strong case they may use the internship only if they enroll in an independent study course for which they must write a paper and receive a letter grade. Students must enroll in the independent study course (SDEV W3998) during the same semester that they do the internship, or the semester immediately following.

Can graduate students declare the special concentration in sustainable development?

No. This degree program is specifically for undergraduates. The School of International and Public Affairs does, however, offer a Ph.D. in Sustainable Development for graduate students who are interested in the field. Eligible students should contact SO-AND-SO in the Columbia Graduate School.

What should I do if I am having difficulty registering for courses?

Students who have trouble registering for courses should contact the course instructor and let them know they are part of the major or special concentration. Students can also contact program coordinator, Jessica Crespo (jcrespo@ei.columbia.edu) for assistance.

Does the program place a greater emphasis on the social or environmental sciences?

The program seeks to balance emphasis in both of these areas. To be knowledgeable in the field of sustainable development, students need a strong foundation in both of these areas and then must concentrate on the unique interactions between them. The more subtle emphasis among the various fields can then be directed by the student and their advisers to fit their interests and career plans. Ultimately, the program’s flexibility in this regard is one of its strengths, allowing you to tailor your education to fit your interests.

Can I study abroad?

Yes, and we encourage students to study abroad. The best place to get information is from the study abroad office of your school. Courses accepted by the University for credit can be applied toward the major by working with your program adviser to find logical substitutions within the curriculum.

Does the department offer funding for fieldwork studies?
Yes. Through the Global Fellows in Sustainable Development Program students can apply for funding to conduct practical fieldwork in environmental and sustainable development that is related to their academic studies. Students doing senior theses are encouraged to apply. To learn more about the program and upcoming application deadlines please contact program coordinator, Jessica Crespo (jcrespo@ei.columbia.edu).

**Is there a list of approved study abroad programs?**

Yes. Please visit the Beyond the Classroom section of the Undergraduate Program in Sustainable Development Web site. You may also check with the study abroad office of your school for additional updates.

**What are some of the jobs graduates go on to work in after graduation?**

Graduates of the program go on to work in public, private and non-profit organizations and many go on to pursue graduate studies. Graduates are working at organizations such as: the Natural Resources Defense Council; Earthjustice; Booz & Company; Clinton Global Initiative; USAID; ICF International; Unilever; Boston Consulting Group and Teach for America. Former students are also pursuing higher degrees in sustainable development, environmental law and public policy.