

I began to teach sustainability when I started my present position at McMaster University. Because I was moving from a different province, the first thing I tried to do was to connect with the local environmental NGO community. I joined or contacted every local environmental group I could find. I began to use these connections to develop very applied projects in my courses and some service learning opportunities. Student feedback about these projects is varied. Many students feel very motivated to excel when there are external experts who will be discussing the final student projects. I've found the calibre of service learning projects to be very high. Another positive aspect of working on "real" unsolved problems may be useful for job searches and external experts may form useful contacts. Some students write that they find the pressure of external experts is too stressful.

I presently teach environmental studies courses to earth science, environmental science and geography students. Students in my courses are approximately evenly split between social science and physical science. There are also students from other faculties, such as business, fine arts and engineering. I find it challenging to teach upper-year students with such varied backgrounds. I want to avoid teaching to the lowest common denominator when I know the fundamentals of each discipline vary. But there are many benefits to this interdisciplinary environment for the students and for myself.

Integration of different disciplines in a university course provides a potentially rich source of discussions and problem-solving. As a society, we'll need to use both social and physical science to understand so many environmental topics and to evaluate solutions to environmental challenges. Instead of sharing a set of fundamental skills and experience, students in my upper-year courses are able to benefit from the collective expertise of their peers. From the environmental sector, we hear that there's an increasing expectation for our graduates to have an understanding of different disciplinary approaches to complex problems. There's certainly an expectation that graduates will work productively with other disciplines in their professional lives. I hope that experiences in my courses help prepare students for an integrated approach to their professional work and a willingness to participate in civic life in their communities.