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Sustainability in Swiss Higher Education Institutions: Integrating Sustainability into Courses, Programs, and Disciplines for Authentic Student Engagement

Following the United Nations' proclamation of a 'Decade of Education for Sustainable Development' (2004-2015), many Higher Education (HE) institutions worldwide began including sustainability principles and concepts into their programs and curriculum. While these initiatives were noble, they produced mitigated results as many HE institutions struggled with the integration and logistics of preparing students to be future change agents with authentic engagement toward sustainability. Previous literature has examined the opportunities and challenges of integrating of sustainability concepts at an institutional, curricular, and instrumental level in HE institutions. Further, it examined how sustainability could be implemented such as one course, one program, or one degree, embedding sustainability into all courses, sustainability electives, or integrated and interdisciplinary learning experiences. We administered the Sulitest (sustainability literacy test) with first semester students at one international hospitality management school in Switzerland. Students completed a pre and post-test in Sustainable Hospitality Culture course. From our results, we found that our students scored slightly higher than the Swiss average and, in some areas, better than the global average as well. Nonetheless, the relatively low global averages indicate a lack of sustainability knowledge still existing in 2018. The low global averages suggest a continuing need to improve sustainability knowledge in HE institutions. HE institutions must find more effective means of teaching sustainability principles and concepts that resonate with students and create authentic engagement with sustainability practices which will be continued upon graduation. From previous research, the solution seems simple, embed sustainability in all courses and programs, regardless of the discipline. Nonetheless, in this study, we found that students' sustainability knowledge can improve in one intensive course. While our initial results are positive, further studies would need to be conducted to confirm long lasting behavioral changes. Thus, the question remains: How should sustainability concepts be effectively integrated into Swiss HE institutions? We posit a need for a tool like the Sulitest to be used by all Swiss HE institutions to gauge students' existing knowledge about sustainability and establish the gaps in their knowledge to integrate relevant, specific sustainability concepts into existing programs to make authentic positive social change.

This paper addresses the following topics:

- The integration of transferable skills into university courses and study programmes
- The integration of cross-disciplinary competences into teaching

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