

“Sustainability is treating the Earth as if we intended to stay.”

SIR CRISPIN TICKELL, MEMBER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE JULIE ANN WRIGLEY
GLOBAL INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY

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What is sustainability?



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What is sustainability?

We get that question a lot, and the answer is wondrously complicated. Sustainability can apply to virtually anything you can think of – it's a powerful word that defies a simple definition. Still, most people agree that sustainability has three fundamental pillars – sometimes called the Three Ps.

First, something that is sustainable is beneficial to ourselves and others in society – People. Second, it is good for the environment – Planet. Third, it makes economic sense – Profit. At the School of Sustainability, students learn to look at problems and solutions systemically, understanding that no solution can be sustainable unless it fulfills all three sustainability pillars.

[+ sos.asu.edu/define](https://sos.asu.edu/define)

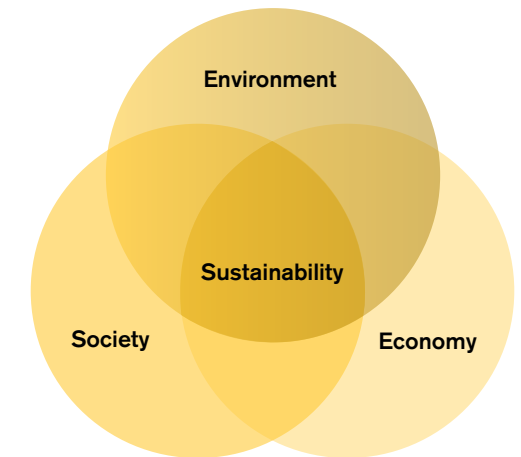


“It’s really not about being less bad, it’s about being more good. We have to become a creative force, not just a less destructive one.”

WILLIAM MCDONOUGH, MEMBER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE JULIE ANN WRIGLEY GLOBAL INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Upholding the three pillars

Just as sustainability defies a simple definition, it also defies a simple diagram. For a basic understanding of sustainability, though, we like this one. The three circles represent the three pillars of sustainability. Where they overlap – where a solution upholds all three pillars – that is sustainability.



Challenge areas

- Biodiversity and ecosystems
- Climate change and adaptation
- Economics and natural capital
- Energy, materials and technology
- Ethical business practices
- Food systems
- Future and systems thinking
- International development
- Policy and governance
- Social and behavioral change
- Urbanization
- Water quality and quantity