

Sustainability | Individual communication

IC - (21205) - VIRTUAL INTERNATIONAL GROUP STUDY: TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY USING SUSTAINABLE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

Christine Walsh¹; Rita Dhungel²; Hana Curties³

1 - Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary; 2 - School of Social Work and Human Services, University of the Fraser Valley; 3 - Global Learning Advisor, University of Calgary

Background and objectives

Despite the proliferation of study abroad programs, few have attended to issues of sustainability and sustainable development. Our intention to deliver an international undergraduate elective two-course field study to Nepal focussing on intercultural competence and the United Nations 2015-2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Spring of 2021) was derailed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This presented an opportunity to re-envision, design, deliver, and evaluate a one-month virtual collaborative group study program on SDGs using sustainable teaching approaches.

Process and methods (for empirical research)

The study received institutional approval and participants provided informed consent. Canadian students (n=24) provided their course assignments including a reflective journal and Nepali students (n=25) and their instructors (n=2) participated in one of two one-hour focus groups, led by trained research assistants, via Zoom technology. The Zoom mediated audio-recorded was reviewed for accuracy and assignment and recordings were thematically analysed.

Main results (or main arguments in the case of critical reviews)

Canadian students reported that partnering with students from Nepal allowed them to better understand the history, knowledge, and geo- and socio-political contexts of Nepal, as well as the social issues and policies that impact social work and community development. Intercultural competence was promoted through interaction with panels of Nepalese scholars, practitioners and community leaders, virtual tours of local historical, environmental, and cultural sites and community development agencies as well as experiential learning activities, such as practicing Nepali language, dance, meditation, and the preparation of traditional food, offered hands-on cultural immersion in sustainable ways. All students advised that they were previously unaware of the SDG; the final group project on an SDG of their choice allowed them to appreciate the issues, develop effective solutions and make connections across global context. Challenges to sustainability included technology, limited access to information and unfamiliarity with inquiry-based learning for the Nepalese students and minimal experience working cross-culturally for all.

Implications for research and practice/policy | Importance and originality of the contribution

Future delivery virtual international courses are important to deliver content of the SDG in sustainable ways.