



Student Project on Global Sustainability Challenges



SDG focus

- ☒ Goal 4 - Quality education
- ☒ Goal 12 - Responsible consumption and production
- ☒ Goal 13 - Climate action

What did you do?

This second-year sustainability assignment, part of the Environmental Science and Planning program at Selkirk College, asked students to analyze personal and global sustainability challenges through three interconnected themes: individual ecological impact, population and resource use, and global systemic solutions. Students explored their own carbon footprint, critiqued ecological metrics like Earth Overshoot Day, and investigated one Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) in depth using global data. The activity built critical thinking skills while linking personal responsibility with systemic change, using tools like the Global Footprint Network, SDG Interactive Map, and sustainability progress metrics for Canada.

What were the benefits and outcomes?

1. **Student Learning and Insight** – Students reported gaining a deeper understanding of how individual actions scale to global consequences. Several mentioned they had never previously considered the idea of multiple "Earths" required to support their lifestyle.
2. **Systems Thinking Development** – By exploring population trends, SDG performance, and ecological metrics, students were encouraged to shift from an individualistic to a systems-thinking perspective.

3. **Teaching Impact** – The structure allowed for flexibility and current-event tie-ins, including critiques of carbon footprint metrics and debates on sustainable cities, making the assignment adaptable and engaging.

Student Quote: “It made me think about how even though I recycle and try to be sustainable, there are bigger systems that need to change — and maybe I can help influence those.”

What barriers or challenges did you encounter in embedding sustainability into your learning and teaching practice and how did you overcome them?

1. **Skepticism around metrics** – Students sometimes mistrusted tools like carbon calculators; addressing this by including critical thinking prompts and counterpoints helped engage them more meaningfully.
2. **Overwhelm at scale of issues** – To manage climate anxiety or defeatism, the assignment emphasized both personal agency and systemic change, encouraging hope through action.
3. **Limited time for in-depth exploration** – The 1,200-word limit required careful scaffolding to ensure students could meaningfully engage with complex ideas without becoming overwhelmed.

What are your conclusions and recommendations for others?

Integrating SDGs and ecological footprint tools into coursework provides a concrete and relatable entry point for students to explore sustainability. Embedding systems thinking and encouraging both critique and solutions can transform passive awareness into meaningful engagement. For best results, pair personal reflection with community or policy-level thinking, and offer optional bonus components for deeper dives.