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Business as usual? barriers to education for sustainability in the tourism curriculum

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Dr Erica Wilson, on behalf of authors.
Business as Usual?

Barriers to Education for Sustainability in the Tourism Curriculum

Abstract

There is little research on how ‘sustainability’ is embedded within tourism programs. This paper draws on findings from a study of Education for Sustainability (EfS) within the first year business/tourism curriculum at an Australian regional university. Using an interpretive methodology, interviews took place with 16 academics regarding the barriers in trying to incorporate sustainability. Three key themes were revealed: (1) a crowded curriculum; (2) staff and student resistance to sustainability, and (3) the realities of a complex, multi-campus institution. These impediments will be important to consider if we want to engender a more transformational approach to sustainability leadership in tourism education.

Keywords: tourism studies, higher education, transformational leadership, curriculum, sustainable development, sustainable education

RUNNING HEAD: Sustainability in the Tourism Curriculum
Introduction

It has been argued that integrating sustainability education in the curriculum better prepares students to face the significant environmental and societal challenges we now face (Albinsson, Perera, & Sautter, 2011; Hasan, 1993; Munilla, et al., 1998). Yet the concept of ‘sustainable development’ offers a tremendous challenge for the higher education curriculum. Working from a critical, values-based pedagogy, ‘sustainability’ in education may mean a radical rethink of how institutions operate, how teachers teach, and how learners learn (Brookfield & Holst, 2010). Here, we define sustainable development (or, more broadly, sustainability) in the sense of the ‘Brundtland’ report; that is, ‘development’ which does not impact upon the needs of future generations, and which is based on a firm cautionary awareness of the social, cultural and ecological crises and complexities that the planet currently faces in a resource-scarce environment (WCED, 1987).

The integration of sustainable development principles in higher education also presents a number of interesting opportunities. A move towards ‘sustainability’ can prepare students, teachers, and the whole campus community to be more creative and innovative leaders in the face of complex social and biological problems, including climate change (Galea, 2007; Glasser, Calder, & Fadeeva, 2005; Kearins, & Springett, 2003). As the organisational and educational research demonstrates, ‘transformational leadership’ relies upon individuals who are passionate, energised, and charismatic in inspiring others to think differently and critically about global issues and problems (Bass, & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2005). In
teaching sustainability, which is premised on action and change in the educational context, ‘instructional’ or ‘transactional’ leadership styles may no longer work. The transformational educator in sustainability must lead that action, be actively reflexive, and clear in the ways in which their values and worldviews influence their pedagogical approach. However, the ability to embrace transformational leadership in teaching tourism (or sustainable tourism) at the higher education level is always mediated by external factors such as institutional support and culture, educational market factors, and political imperatives (Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2005).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is a holistic concept that draws together the tenets of sustainable development and education, and has been most widely promulgated via the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) (2005-2014) campaign. The UNDESD “seeks to mobilize the educational resources of the world to help create a more sustainable future” (UNESCO, no page). Education for Sustainable Development attempts to transgress education merely about the environment and sustainable development, although this is still important. ESD strives for a more environmentally sustainable world through encouraging individuals and social groups to take action and make behavioral changes in their everyday lives (Fien, & Tilbury, 1996; Tilbury, Crawley, & Berry, 2004).

As the UNDESD draws to a close, it is pertinent to reflect upon the extent to which EiS and sustainable development principles are now ‘embedded’ within higher education pedagogy and curricula. This applies equally to the university tourism studies context. ‘Sustainable tourism’ has indeed been a prominent feature on the tourism research agenda over the last four decades (Bramwell, & Lane, 2008), as the cautionary and post-cautionary platforms
prevailed (Jafari, 2003) and scholars have become increasingly concerned about tourism’s impacts on society, culture and the environment (Busby, 2003; Weaver, 2006). That said, little research has explored how sustainable development principles have been embedded within the tourism curricula, embraced by students and taught in the ‘classroom’ (some exceptions include Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2012; Canziani, Sonmez, Hsieh, & Byrd, 2012; Wilson, 2010).

In the context of tourism education and this TEFI special issue, there is a need to explore how tourism curricula might be rethought, reshaped and refigured to help teach our students (who are our future transformational tourism leaders) to act in sustainable, ethical and environmentally responsible ways. TEFI values like stewardship, ethics and mutuality (Sheldon, Fesenmeier, & Tribe, 2009) are also integral to a sustainable pedagogy, and are attributes that many of us hope our tourism graduates attain. But how do we teach sustainable development in the context of a values-based tourism education? What does sustainability look like in a tourism curriculum, particularly one that is situated within a business faculty? And at what level or point in a course/degree do we introduce concepts like sustainability? While sustainability is generally viewed as a ‘higher order’ concept (Canziani, et al., 2012), some argue that as a concept it is better placed in the later years of a degree, or even at the graduate level, when students will assumedly be more receptive (Greenspoon, 2008); others suggest that sustainability must be incorporated from the very start, in the first year curriculum (Springett, 2005). In this way, the first year experience becomes an exceptionally important foundation point in student learning (Pitkethly, & Prosser, 2001), where students may be gradually exposed to higher order learning and concepts like sustainability.
Yet these are not curricular or chronological issues alone. The role of the academic teacher as a transformational agent and leader is particularly important in thinking about Education for Sustainable Development, as he or she brings with them their own personal and political values, beliefs and worldviews (Brookfield, 2005). As stated by Stergiou, Airey and Riley (2008, p. 635) “the teacher has special responsibilities in relation to subject-knowledge … This responsibility places special demands not only on the depth, but also on the understanding of how it should be ordered in ways that will be clear and accessible”.

Stemming from the above issues and debates, this paper draws on selected findings from an empirical analysis of how sustainability is embedded within the first year business (including tourism) curriculum at a regional, multi-campus university in Australia (see von der Heidt, Lamberton, Wilson, & Morrison, 2012). The focus here is on insights gained from a set of qualitative interviews with individual academics, who teach first year subjects. Of particular interest are their experiences of teaching or embedding sustainability in a business/tourism program and the barriers and challenges inherent in doing so.

Education for Sustainability in Business and Tourism Higher Education

As indicated in the introduction, a number of terms abound in the literature on sustainability as it relates to education. These include Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Ecologically Sustainable Development (another ESD acronym, which emerged from the Rio Earth Summit and the ensuing Agenda 21), Education for Sustainability (EfS), Education about Sustainability (EaS) and Education for and about Sustainability (EafS). For the purposes of this paper, we use the term Education for Sustainability. EfS is a term originating in Britain and which is now used widely in Australian policy and educational contexts (Leihy, & Salazar, 2011).
It is important to distinguish briefly between Education about Sustainability and Education for Sustainability. This is not merely a matter of wording, but a significant difference in pedagogical approach. Education about Sustainability focuses on teaching students about the content matter of sustainable development, such as over-consumption, climate change, and biodiversity loss (Tilbury, Crawley & Berry, 2004). Crucial issues as these are, EfS is a holistic, pedagogical concept that motivates and equips individuals in making reflective, informed decisions to work towards a more sustainable world (Tilbury, et al., 2004). Underpinned by the principles of critical theory and critical thinking skills, EfS seeks to engage and empower people to implement systemic change and action. In this way, both student and teacher can become transformational agents of change in their own lives, and in the world around them.

While certainly a paradigm shift has been noted in the education sector, EfS is not taken up widely in universities. Over a decade ago, Filho (2000) identified a number of factors that might explain why sustainability is not being integrated. First, sustainability is not a subject per se because it is viewed as too abstract, too theoretical and too broad. Second, there is a lack of resources and qualified staff to teach it; and third, ‘sustainability’ is perceived as a mere fashion of fad. Further, there are often other political and institutional reasons why teachers may find it difficult to ‘embed’ sustainability principles into their curricula (Leihy, & Salazar, 2011). These constraints and barriers need exploration if EfS is desired.

According to some (Barlett, 2008; Bates, Silverblatt, & Cleban 2009; Springett, 2005), business schools in particular are lagging behind other disciplines in ‘going green’. In previous research, von der Heidt and Lamberton (2011) discussed the sustainability
imperative and the role of business in the transition to sustainability. Although ‘business’ is commonly cited as the culprit of unsustainable consumption, adoption of sustainable business practices can provide solutions to many of these problems (Ferraro, & Sands, 2009; Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2009), particularly when managers have the requisite education and motivation to implement such practices (Bridges, & Wilhelm 2008).

In many universities, tourism schools are located in business or management departments and faculties (Dredge, et al., 2010; Wilson, Harris, & Small, 2008). As such, tourism students are predominantly business/management students, graduating with business/management degrees. This is no doubt a product of the history and development of tourism in higher education over the last three decades. While some tourism programs emerged from the anthropological, geographical or sociological disciplines, many were tied to the hotel school model popular in Europe and the USA (Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006) or from the polytechnic system prominent in the UK and Australia (McKercher, 2002). Striving to be taken seriously as a subject of university study, tourism scholars and curriculum developers have turned to theoretical frameworks offered in the fields of business, management and economics for guidance (Fidgeon, 2010; Jafari, 2003).

As a result, vocational and professional skills were seen as paramount to receiving a ‘good’ tourism (business/management) education (Airey, & Johnson, 1999; Busby, 2001; Inui, Wheeler, & Lankford, 2006). Indeed, a content analysis of tourism course prospectuses in the United Kingdom in the early 2000s revealed a predominantly vocational focus, with no words, phrases or subjects related to sustainability, the environment or tourism impacts (Busby, & Fiedel, 2001). More recent studies show that the vocational still reigns in tourism programs in Australia (Dredge, et al., 2010). Vigorous debate has ensued around the idea of
whether tourism education should follow a vocational or philosophical path (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009; Dredge et al., 2012; Stergiou, Airey, & Riley, 2008; Tribe, 2002). Studies have also revealed that students themselves predominantly desire a tourism degree in the vocational mould (Busby, 2001), leaving scholars to argue over whether today’s students are being adequately exposed to reflective, critical and philosophical perspectives (Tribe, 2002).

EfS would usually align more closely with a liberal, philosophical ontological view towards teaching and curriculum, which exposes students to the complex, multidisciplinary nature of tourism (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009; Tribe, 2002) and its associated social, cultural and environmental impacts (Belhassen, & Caton, 2011; Canziani, et al., 2012; Jamal, 2004). Uncovering and unmasking these complexities is the goal of the critical tourism scholar and educator (Fallon, 2006; Fullagar, & Wilson, 2012), thus many teaching in sustainability would be overtly critical and, ultimately, transformative in their approach to teaching and learning. The critical educators’ view contrasts sharply with that of the university as a neoliberal, market-driven institution, which is highly conservative and managerial in nature (James, 2002). This instrumentalist view of education works to sustain and reinforce the dominant capitalist paradigm, through seeing education as a product that can be bought by the consumer (the ‘student’) (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009; Biggs, 2002).

An Audit of Sustainability in the First Year Business/Tourism Curriculum: The Case of Southern Cross University

Southern Cross University (SCU) is a mid-sized regional university whose main campus is located in Lismore, in the far north-eastern corner of the state of New South Wales. It also has campuses in Coffs Harbour and Sydney, as well as a newer campus at the southern end of the Gold Coast (Queensland), and a number of educational articulations with other domestic
and international institutions. Like many universities in Australia, Southern Cross University is a signatory to the Talloires Declaration, and has a stated strategic commitment to sustainability and the ‘triple bottom line’. Of the four recently articulated goals in the SCU Strategic Plan 2010-2015 (Southern Cross University, 2010, p. 10), Goal 4 states: “We will enhance our performance in a sustainable and responsible manner” with the corresponding strategy to “embed a commitment to the triple-bottom line to enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the University”.

This paper presents selected aspects of an empirical study of this commitment In 2011, an audit and evaluation was undertaken of how ‘sustainability’ was embedded into the curriculum and assessment of the first year Bachelor of Business (BBus) held in the Southern Cross Business School (SCBS) and the Bachelor of Business in Tourism Management (BBusTM), held in the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (STHM) courses (von der Heidt, et al., 2012) While these two courses are housed in different schools, they share some elements of the core first year. Further, several of STHM’s degrees are grounded in the business/management paradigm, and carry the ‘B. Bus’ preface, thus an analysis across both schools was logical.

**Methodology**

For the overall study, a mixed method approach was used to enable a full audit of the first year B. Business and B. Business (Tourism Management) courses. This involved a content analysis of the 14 first year unit statements and learning materials as to the presence of key sustainability concepts, as well as semi-structured interviews with 16 academics involved in teaching the first year curriculum (14 Unit Assessors (UA) or ‘subject lecturers’, and two course/degree coordinators (CC)). As outlined above, this paper focuses solely on the
interview data and on one research question, which pertained to the barriers and challenges that academics faced in incorporating sustainability in their teaching practices and curricula. Thus it should be noted that the findings of the content analysis are not presented here, but can be found in the full report (von der Heidt, et al., 2012). The first year business and tourism course curriculum at Southern Cross University is shown in Table 1.

**INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE**

The focus in the interviews was on exploring the academics’ attitudes towards and experiences of EfS in their units. As experts on their curriculum design and delivery, the UAs/CCs were knowledgeable key informants who are best able to provide insights (Miller, Cardinal, & Glick, 1997; Seidler, 1974). Approval to undertake the interview study was obtained from the University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. All first-year UAs and CCs were included in the sample to obtain a representative view of the first year. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to find out what academics were thinking, feeling and ‘doing’ regarding EfS; to allow for a richer understanding of their experiences of sustainability (Kvale, & Brinkmann, 2009). In particular, the in-depth interview guide asked participants to reflect on how they conceptualised ‘sustainability’, their knowledge of EfS and sustainable development, how they incorporated sustainability principles into their units and curriculum, and to identify any barriers or challenges faced in trying to incorporate sustainability (or EfS) into the business/tourism curriculum, or into their own practices as a teacher. It is this latter question which forms the focus of the current paper analysis.

It should be noted that academics perceived and taught sustainability in a variety of ways; the researchers did not want to ‘structure’ participants’ views or definitions of sustainability.
However, our wider study results reveal that most academics (10 out of 14) viewed sustainability as a holistic concept incorporating social, cultural, ethical and/or environmental dimensions, and many identified it as aligning with ‘triple bottom line’ thinking. Furthermore, four academics clearly resonated with a ‘strong’ sustainability focus on ecological/environmental awareness, and a challenge to the dominant economic model of consumptive business and tourism practices (von der Heidt, Lamberton, Wilson, & Morrison, 2012).

The interviews were conducted by an experienced interviewer knowledgeable about the interview topic, and also a teacher of sustainable business ethics herself. The interviewer controlled the course of the semi-structured interview, was sensitive to the nuances in meaning and sought to have these clarified, where possible. Each recorded interview was transcribed by an experienced transcriber from oral speech to written text (the transcript) to prepare the interview material for analysis. All interview transcripts were checked by interviewees, thereby providing additional support for the validity of their words and experiences. Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001), the researchers then identified, analysed and reported patterns and themes within the data. To do this, the researchers first fully familiarised themselves with the transcribed data. The material was then coded manually on the basis of the research questions; individual transcripts were dissected and reorganised in terms of the codes. Codes were analysed, discussed and refined, and then combined to form a core group of broader themes; in this case, three overarching themes were elicited which best reflected the experiences and perspectives of academics in trying to teach sustainability in tourism.

**Findings: Barriers and Challenges in Teaching Sustainability**
Based on thematic analysis of interviews, it was evident that key challenges emerged in terms of academics trying to embrace and embed sustainability, environmental awareness and/or the principles of EfS. These were: a) a crowded curriculum; b) staff and student resistance to the concepts of sustainability, and c) the realities of learning in a complex, multi-campus institution. These will now be discussed in turn.

**A crowded curriculum**

When asked about barriers and challenges, a common theme discussed by participants (11 out of 16) related to a lack of time or a lack of space in the curriculum, or what we have termed here the ‘crowded curriculum’ dilemma. That is, academics may have had the interest or motivation to incorporate sustainability into their unit/course, but it was deemed that there was not sufficient time or space within what was already seen as a very tight first-year business/tourism syllabus.

Several participants felt that it was outside the scope of their unit syllabus or semester timeframe to ‘fit’ sustainability within it. This applied particularly to those units that promoted a practical orientation, such as economics, marketing, finance and accounting, and also business law, where certain core skills and graduate attributes needed to be covered. As participants noted who taught in these ‘practical’ areas: “I’d dearly love to but I think it’s the time, space factor. We have to cover all the different aspects... Consequently we only scratch the surface” (Participant 14). “[It’s a] first-year unit; hard to incorporate [sustainability] when laying down foundations, directions” (Participant 8). “I could do more on sustainability, but this is a class that is very practical” (Participant 1).
Professional qualifications and accreditation were also part of this. “The content is dictated by the needs of the School, and the degree needs to meet certain professional qualifications, such as accounting... but in the unit I teach, there’s no room for any of that” (Participant 5). Another tourism academic also noted difficulties with fitting everything in to a new ‘shortened’ semester model introduced recently by the University: “We have such a short teaching term that we have to be careful that we don’t make our syllabuses too crowded for our students” (Participant 12). Other participants shared similar frustrations: “The most obvious barrier is the amount of weeks in the semester. Sustainability is still at that level where if you have to prioritise, it’s one of the things that might get cut” (Participant 3); “We’ve got a very condensed course, and very condensed time” (Participant 15).

Some teachers thought that sustainability was better placed in later years of the degree progression. Students were not seen as ‘mature’ enough to engage with the philosophical and critical issues that sustainability posed: “It’s a first year, first semester unit and a lot of them are quite young and their heads are not yet in that space. I’d like to do more of that but I think maybe they need to walk before they can run” (Participant 6).

Time was not only an issue related to shortened semesters or a tight curriculum. Several academics talked in general about their lack of time in a workload that has many competing priorities (e.g. research, community engagement, academic governance). As such, sustainability was seen as something that might have been desired, but like many things, it was a matter of time and space for reflection. “It’s time for lecturers to do things differently than what they’ve done before” (Participant 15). “You just don’t have enough time ... And it’s all assessment driven ... we’re so used to doing that way” (Participant 6).
And while university employment was still considered the “promised land” by Participant 5, he acknowledged that “there is so much pressure on us to just keep our heads above water, particularly the teaching”. As one course coordinator noted, the industry-ready graduates that business and tourism schools now foster did not leave much time for ‘higher order’ concepts like sustainability: “We are working within industries that are used to having people that can come in and do things straight away, whereas we’re trying to produce graduates that have these higher order skills” (Participant 16).

Another participant felt that more time was needed for his own professional development and thinking regarding sustainability: “[It’s] my own lack of understanding. I think that will develop as long as there’s an opportunity for staff or colleagues to get together and talk about these issues” (Participant 3).

**Staff and student resistance**

Another key theme that emerged was a perceived resistance by other departmental staff and students to the incorporation of sustainability in the business/tourism curriculum. Eight of the 16 participants talked about a sense of resistance, often expressed in terms of a lack of support and interest from colleagues and/or students regarding the incorporation of sustainability principles into the first-year curriculum.

According to some academics, it was a matter of challenging the status quo, or a traditional business-focused teaching paradigm. “The barriers I suppose are the traditional lecturers that are set in their ways and some who don’t get it” (Participant 2). Another perceived that sustainability was overtly marginalised:
Some of our colleagues would not know how to embed sustainability and there’s probably a general culture of people work on their own and we don’t have a lot of cross disciplinary dialogue …I think they [lecturers] should recognise that sustainability is not a fad but it’s an important part. But I just don’t think that they’re there yet (Participant 10).

It was also felt that sustainability had to be championed by individual teaching staff, rather than having broad organisational or departmental support. “If I’d kept quiet in the last two years … those units would have been eliminated in the last review” (Participant 10); “There’s a bit of ‘well, we have a sustainability subject that’s in there so why are we worrying about putting it into all of our other subjects?’” (Participant 11). Another academic also mentioned a need to look outside of the ‘silo’: “We tend to be a bit silo-ish. We do our units in isolation … Is sustainability something we want to teach across all of our units, or just something a particular subject will take carriage of?” (Participant 13).

In addition to staff or collegial resistance, a number of participants also spoke of student resistance to the incorporation or embeddedness of sustainability. “[Students] see it as an isolated thing. It’s a bit ‘out there’, I’m afraid. … I think maybe the history of the word sustainable equalling something to do with, you know, greenies running up trees.” (Participant 13). “To be honest I don’t think enough people know what sustainability is. If you threw that at them it would freak the hell out of a lot of people!” (Participant 3). Others thought that business students generally tended to avoid a curriculum that was too ‘different’ or ‘innovative’. “They [business students] don’t like anything different … They want all the answers, they don’t want to have to think, they don’t like doing reflection... Any sort of
critical thinking, reflection” (Participant 4). “Also, a lot of students really resist new ‘innovative’ approaches, assessment” (Participant 15).

Complex, multi-campus institution

Southern Cross University has a high intake of distance (or external) education students. In the business and tourism schools in particular, academic staff teach across a number of campuses, and deal with a range of domestic and international partners. This was noted by some interviewees: “We’re across five campuses and the lead time to prepare (is long) … We have to moderate each others’ work” (Participant 7). A high level of familiarity with converged/distance learning practices and online technology was required. For one teacher, good online technology was an opportunity for innovation in sustainability teaching: “[We need] better support for those types of technologies. In terms of sustainability there would be real opportunities to do really clever stuff using online resources” (Participant 2). Some considered interactive, face-to-face involvement with their students to be germane to developing an appreciation of sustainability and lamented the limited time available to communicate with students directly: “I don’t have enough time with them. … When it comes to actually think about the complexities of sustainability in a holistic sense it kind of helps to be in the same room with them for a while” (Participant 6).

Discussion of Findings

A number of barriers and challenges were evident in the academics’ desire and ability to embed sustainability within the Bachelor of Business/B. Business (Tourism Management) programs. These constraints related to perceived curriculum crowding, the realities of working across complex programs and multiple campuses, as well as a feeling of staff and student resistance to the ideas of sustainability in the business program.
There is some broad support for these findings in the wider literature and policy on sustainable business/tourism education. Concerns about the ‘crowded curriculum’ have been noted in many disciplines, including in tourism studies (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009; Biggs, 2002). Pressures from institutional or other political forces (e.g., accreditation) can mean that the space for thorough planning, innovation and teacher-led curriculum can become squeezed. In many tourism schools housed within business departments or faculties, there is also the desire for students to be ‘work-ready’, via industry placements and internships (Canziani, et al., 2012). In Australia, federal university funding is now tied to performance criteria that include ‘graduate employability’ and placement in full-time work (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012).

As could be seen in the interviews with academics, ‘sustainability’ was construed as something separate from the rest of the business degree, where individual teachers were left to incorporate sustainable development and EfS principles according to their own interests. This led to teachers feeling that they were only able to ‘scratch the surface’ with sustainability (as one interviewee put it). As noted by Benckendorff, Moscardo and Murphy (2012; p. 64-65) in their study of tourism undergraduates’ environmental attitudes, sustainability should be “integrated throughout a curriculum, as having [it] as a separate component is unlikely to encourage changes in attitudes...”. Clear strategies that support staff and curriculum visioning and strategic planning are required, with commitment from the ‘top’ down.

Several academics also described resistance from staff and students towards the concept of sustainability in the business/tourism curriculum. This could be partly explained by wider
assertions that business and business/tourism students are career focussed and tend to prefer a results-oriented teaching style to a discursive, philosophical mode of enquiry (Busby, 2001; Macquarie University, 2009). Some studies have countered this view, revealing that business tourism undergraduate students had strong environmental awareness and were receptive to issues of sustainability within the curriculum (Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2012; Busby, 2003). The present study did not collect data on the student experience, but lecturers did note a lack of student engagement with the philosophical and critical thinking required for EfS.

An additional finding of interest to this theme was the perception that other staff (or the respective school) did not prioritise sustainability at the course or curriculum level. Perceived reasons for this included a lack of knowledge or interest in sustainability on the part of business colleagues, a lack of a sustainability-related value system, and the ever-present lack of time. Similar concerns have been raised in other tourism research. For example, Canziani et al. (2012, p. 9) noted that tourism academics may be ‘overwhelmed’ and ‘unnerved’ by the urgency and complexity that sustainability teaching brings with it. They also add to this “the very real resource constraints of current faculty skills bases and personal motivations in the area of sustainability” (p. 9).

The constraints of working across multiple campuses and with a variety of cohorts (internal/external; international/domestic) may be endemic to the Southern Cross University case. However, other universities in Australia and around the world may share these realities, and the impacts of which would extend beyond incorporating EfS. The neoliberal higher education landscape is, naturally, focused on cost and scale efficiencies in offering its business and tourism programs (Ayikoru, Tribe, & Airey, 2009); the teaching and learning
vernacular has followed suit with concepts like ‘converged delivery’, ‘distance learning’ and ‘internationalisation’. While these have been important in globalising and democratising higher education, they have also led to an increasingly complex and fractured teaching environment (Biggs, 2002).

As in the world of organisational behaviour, transformational leadership in education is evident through academic ‘leaders’ (lecturers, senior management, unit and curriculum developers) being passionate, charismatic in their approach to teaching, learning and governance, and concerned with intellectually motivating students and staff to embrace new ways of thinking (Bass, & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood, & Jantzi, 2005). Critical thinking, EfS and other values-based teaching approaches rely upon transformational leaders and educators to inspire the future of tourism education. As the findings of our study suggest, however, transformational leadership and education may be hampered by a number of external factors, including political, institutional and curricular constraints.

If transformational change is desired in tourism and business higher education, and we want to train our students as future transformational leaders, a radical rethink of how we ‘do’ sustainability is called for. The starting point is for a tourism school/department to commit to education for sustainability and this must be evident in its values and mission statement to provide the basis for shared understanding and action from all stakeholders involved (e.g. all academic and professional staff, students, etc.). The biggest challenge, of course, is operationalising this commitment.

Benn and Bubna-Litic (2004) outline two main ways to embed EfS in curriculum, and these provide a useful framework here: (1) The incremental (or first generation) approach involves
integrating EfS in existing units and/or degrees. Teaching and learning techniques fostering active engagement germane to higher-order learning are emphasised. (2) The radical (second generation) approach is to create revolutionary new units or degrees designed to break-out of the ‘technocratic’ mindset and move toward a more ‘ecocentric’ ideology (Beder, 1996; Harding, 1998). The aim is to “develop graduates able to span both worlds and who have the ability to think critically and act creatively and reflectively to transform current business practices” (Benn, & Bubna-Litic, p. 90). The challenge for the first-generation approach is overcoming the dominant world view of exploitation of nature in existing curricula. Further, unless the sustainability content and examples are salient to the core curriculum, they will add to curriculum crowding. As with any radical (vs incremental) change or creation, achieving the second generation approach to EfS seems even more daunting. Benn and Bubna-Litic argue that either approach can be used to take students ‘beyond reflex’ action to an active reflection about the purpose of business, hence achieving a core objective of EfS.

Conclusion

The findings from this review of the first year Southern Cross University business/tourism curriculum reveal that, despite the articulated institutional commitment to sustainability, neither the first or second generation approach to EfS has been fully considered (Benn, & Bubna-Litic, 2004). Rather, it appears that sustainability is undertaken in an ad hoc way, often dependant on the interest, passions and personal values of the individual teacher.

Certainly, there is potential for ‘radical’ new units and even degrees, but these initiatives may be constrained by the complexities of individual departments and schools, and the bureaucratic processes that any curriculum changes must address. Further, in the neoliberal
Critical and transformational approaches are needed for ‘Education for Sustainability’ to occur within the business and tourism curriculum. To fully embrace the tenets of ‘strong’ sustainability in the first year and throughout the entire academic program, teachers and curriculum developers need to embody the values of sustainability and to ‘practice what they teach’ (Wilson, 2010). They will need to have room to make some challenging changes to the curriculum, which makes students think and can encourage them to question, change or take action in their lives to work toward a more environmentally and socially-just world. For this, they will need the support of their teachers and other academic leaders. Teachers will also need the support of sustainability experts to capacity build on sustainability concepts and their ‘fit’ within disciplines. Without these purposeful actions, tourism curriculum may continue to be just ‘business as usual’.

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References


Oxford: Oxford University Press.
TABLE 1: The First Year Curriculum (B. Bus and B. Bus Tourism Management, Southern Cross University)

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<tr>
<th>Unit Name</th>
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<th>Course (Degree)</th>
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SCBS = Southern Cross Business School; STHM = School of Tourism and Hospitality Management; SLJ = School of Law and Justice.