

# Building academic coalitions on climate and sustainability in Japan

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## Background

With growing recognition of the signs of a global climate emergency, a unique window of opportunity has opened to raise ambitions to mitigate and build resilience to climate change while addressing other sustainability challenges across the Asia-Pacific region, especially in Japan. A potentially particularly important agent of change is young people. The emergence of student-led global movement for climate justice seen in many parts of the world is already beginning to push decision-makers to do more to protect the climate and achieve a sustainable future. There is nonetheless more that can be done to equip students with knowledge and skills needed for transformative changes.

## Objectives

Against this background, a new multidisciplinary course, entitled "Sustainable Development and Climate Change Mitigation" was launched during the 2022 Spring term at Kyushu University, Japan and was renewed again in 2023. The course aims to enhance student capacities for civic engagement on climate issues and their interrelationships with other areas of sustainable development. One longer-term aim of the course is to build bridges between academe and civil society, helping to inform the design of a core curriculum on similar topics for students across the Asia Pacific region.

## Results

A cross-section of undergraduate and postgraduate students from a diverse range of fields participated in an omnibus program focused on key themes related to climate and sustainability. Over the course of 8 weeks, approximately 20 students were introduced to different perspectives, approaches and solutions to global environmental challenges guided by the 2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Course content included a combination of lectures and hands-on exercises focused on different policy options and initiatives designed to address climate change and sustainable development, structured around 3 main pillars:

1. Overview of climate change science and sustainable development
2. International climate policy: targets, strategies, and implementation
3. Climate Change and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development

The course was well received both by students and faculty and has been officially added to the school syllabus to be conducted every April semester.

## Lessons Learned

Although this was run initially as a pilot course, some general lessons can be distilled for the design and implementation of similar initiatives in the future. First, there appears to be a strong demand for academic programs addressing climate and sustainable development from students of various backgrounds and disciplines. Secondly, universities are well positioned to become important contributors to global dialogue on topics related to evidence based policymaking and governance research in context of the SDGs. Lastly, higher academic institutions can play a catalysing role in building cooperation towards these ends.

### Universities are strategically placed to lead discussions on SDGs

Universities	Governments and Communities	Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possibilities to market university activities</li> <li>• Strengthened role in socioeconomic development and innovation</li> <li>• Educational services, by government or community officials, to universities in the form of sites for field experience or adjunct faculty in academic programs</li> <li>• Opportunities to work on translational research</li> <li>• Access to data and specialized facilities</li> <li>• Access to legislations and policies in development, and abilities to inform their development and implementation</li> <li>• Placement opportunities for faculty members in government offices</li> <li>• Opportunities for new funding streams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to analytical skills, research services, topical area expertise and capacity building initiatives</li> <li>• Evidence-informed policymaking and practice and improved service delivery</li> <li>• Placement opportunities for government or community officials in the form of adjunct faculty in academic programs or policy fellowship programs</li> <li>• New perspectives and fresh insights into policy areas and priorities, and how evidence and data can support them</li> <li>• Space to think in an intellectually challenging environment, enabling creative, unconventional problem-solving for policy issues not indoctrinated in usual government practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities to work on translational research</li> <li>• Career opportunities</li> <li>• Hands-on education</li> <li>• Networking with government and other researchers engaged in policy</li> </ul>

Adapted from: El-Jardali, F., Ataya, N., & Fadlallah, R. (2018). Changing roles of universities in the era of SDGs: rising up to the global challenge through institutionalising partnerships with governments and communities. *Health research policy and systems*, 16, 1-5.

## Future Work

Contributing partners are now working to replicate the course with the involvement of additional academic institutions across the Asia-Pacific, and welcome further collaboration and knowledge sharing on efforts to develop a core curriculum on similar topics at the regional and international levels.

Interested parties affiliated with academic institutions in the Asian region are invited to contact [hengesbaugh@iges.or.jp](mailto:hengesbaugh@iges.or.jp) for more information.

## Bibliography

El-Jardali, F., Ataya, N., & Fadlallah, R. (2018). Changing roles of universities in the era of SDGs: rising up to the global challenge through institutionalising partnerships with governments and communities. *Health research policy and systems*, 16(1), 38. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-018-0318-9>