

February 2018

Editor's Introduction to Inaugural Issue

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Recommended Citation

Koch, Robert Jr. (2018) "Editor's Introduction to Inaugural Issue," *Journal of Sustainability Studies*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://ir.una.edu/sustainabilityjournal/vol1/iss1/1>

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Introduction

Robert Koch Jr.

It might seem strange to find a professor of English Composition serving as editor on a journal about sustainability, but that's only until you consider that writing, like sustainability, is interdisciplinary. The work of University Writing Centers and Writing in the Disciplines, which I have been engaged in for most of ten years, requires a perspective on writing that is not limited to notions of canonical English literature, but that instead views the act of writing as a set of decisions that are nuanced by discipline-specific needs as well as content. Similarly, it helps to understand sustainability if we expand it beyond the domain of the natural sciences, and understand it as an interdisciplinary field as well.

Much of the literature available on sustainability, including many of the selections in this inaugural issue, identifies the subject as sitting at an intersection where environment, economics, and society overlap. This is often depicted as a Venn diagram, shown below:

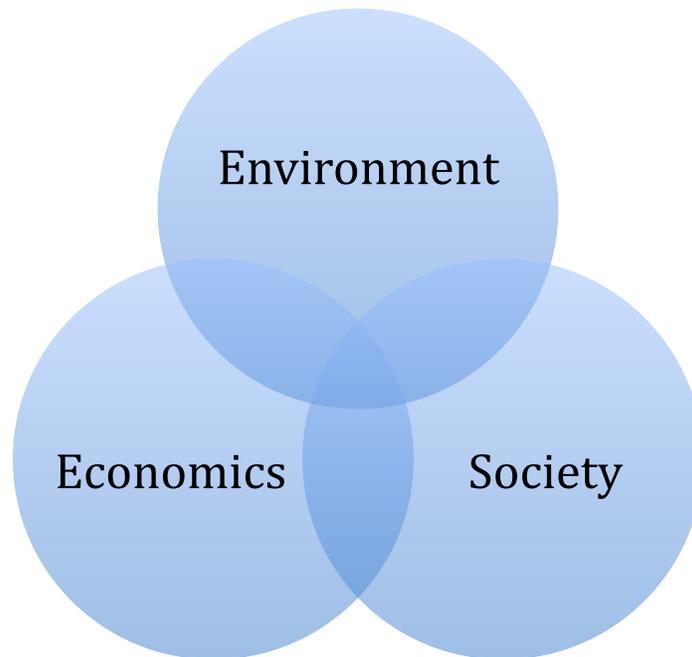


Fig. 1. Sustainability Venn Diagram

Thus, the definition of sustainability inherently speaks to an overlap in disparate disciplines and competing ideas, most visibly the natural and social sciences with business and economics. The subject is *interdisciplinary*, in that it can be studied from a number of disciplines and perspectives.

This, then, is the purpose of the *Journal of Sustainability Studies*: to expand our understanding of, and our relationship to, sustainability by making an array of sustainable ideas accessible to both an academic and non-academic audience. We wish to promote ideas about sustainability that are expressed not only in academic research, but in “how-to” guides, literature, multimedia, and even art. Our goal is to create a journal that comfortably situates selections of intellectual rigor alongside critical experiences in the workplace, community, and even the home.

In our inaugural issue, we asked for contributions that answered these questions: “What is sustainability? In my field, what does sustainability mean? What are examples of current unsustainable practices? What are the barriers to living more sustainably? What is the best-case scenario for how to attain sustainability? If we fail to live sustainably, what will happen? What will sustainability look like in my field? In the distant future, how will people be living sustainably?” The answers were varied, insightful, and, as expected, interdisciplinary.

The cover art for our inaugural issue is a piece by Alabama artist and educator Nancy Muse, a watercolor reimagining of Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* that clearly delineates competing visions of the future, with and without sustainable efforts. The issue is then divided into four sections. Section I, titled “What is Sustainability?” offers three explanations of how sustainability intersects with three very different disciplines. Mario Mighty illustrates the ways in which geography is a foundational science necessary for answering questions and solving problems in sustainability. Then, Doug Barrett examines the mutually shaping forces that sustainability and economics exert on each other. As a foundational concept in the aforementioned description of sustainability, economic theories and methods play a significant role in the development of this new field. Finally, Gary Padgett argues that critical pedagogy and cultural awareness should lead educators to move from teaching about sustainability to creating sustainable teaching. Uniting each of these selections is a clear understanding that sustainability is not just in vogue, or

something likely to become passé, but that it is part of a significant cultural shift that can enhance—and be enhanced by—each of these disciplines.

Section II, “Research and Theory,” transitions from definitions of sustainability to issues in the subject itself. This bridge is best made through Robert Sroufe’s “Operationalizing Sustainability,” which at once outlines the relationship of sustainability to marketing while also delineating specific strategies to be employed in workplace environments that make sustainability less a buzzword and more an idea that can be practiced. Then Mark Puckett outlines a clear argument for sustainability as he explores and explains the geological and atmospheric evidence underlying historical mass extinctions, including the one currently underway. In Section III: “Sustainable Practice,” our contributors provide a deep contrast in practical engagement with sustainability. First, Simon Bevis, a farmer-turned-graduate student, narrates his own experience with sustainability, encouraging readers to follow the old mantra “think globally; act locally” and suggesting ways in which readers might be able to do so. The featured art selections, acrylics by Carty Bledsoe, visually examine what she calls “wounded systems,” creating an artistic parallel to ideas observed in several of our other selections. This issue concludes with reviews of seminal books in Sustainability Studies, as well as a review of the website Treehugger.com.

We are proud to present this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Sustainability Studies*, and would like to thank the following people at the University of North Alabama

who made it possible: Dr. Ken Kitts, President; Dr. John Thornell, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost ; Dr. Mark Puckett, Past Director of the UNA Center for Sustainability Studies; Mr. Jeremy Britten, Associate Director for Digital Communications; and the members of the UNA Center for Sustainability Studies, both on campus and in our [Facebook community](#). In closing, I thank the journal interns, Falon L. Yates and Brandi Hope Johnson, for their hard work and dedication, and I welcome Dr. Amanda Coffman, Associate Professor of Chemistry, as our incoming Center for Sustainability Studies director. Enjoy the read, and be sure to check the [call](#) for our December issue -- our focus will be on Sustainability Policy!