



JOURNAL OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOUNTABILITY

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 1, MARCH 2010

	Page
Editorial	1
Feature articles on Sustainability Accounting Education	
Enhancing Graduate Skills by Incorporating Sustainability into Accounting Education <i>Sharon Kemp</i>	3
Teaching a Sustainability Accounting Course in an Australian University: Insights for Sustainability Accounting Education <i>Sumit Lodhia</i>	15
Environment Extra!	23
Call for Papers	25

Published by the *Centre for Accounting, Governance and Sustainability*,
School of Commerce, Division of Business, University of South Australia, Australia.
Supported by *CPA Australia (SA Division)*, 280 Pulteney Street, Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia.
© University of South Australia 2008 ISSN 1448-6679

EDITORIAL

The first edition of the *Journal of the Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Accountability* for 2010 has a focus on the views of two academics about their implementation of sustainability in university education. Sharon Kemp's article details her approach to developing student skills to facilitate a 'real world' understanding of corporate governance, CSR, ethics and change through the introduction of a Corporate Governance and Ethics unit at the undergraduate level. The second article, by Sumit Lodhia, provides a complimentary commentary on teaching that provides insights into two sustainability courses taught at an Australian university in 2009. The author of this commentary details changes to the course syllabus and assessment in an endeavour to enhance the learning process.

We then follow our regular **Environment Extra!** with information about **Forthcoming Conferences**.

Finally, our thanks go to the international panel of editors listed on page 2 of this issue, to contributors, readers and to CPA Australia our continuous supporter since the Journal commenced publication in 1996.

Contributors should contact the Co-editor: Dr. Sumit Lodhia

Email: sumit.lodhia@unisa.edu.au

Ph: +61 8302 7379

Fax: +61 8302 0092

Instructions for contributors

Articles should be submitted in a word document, *Times New Roman*, 12 point, single spaced, two columns, attached to an email. References should be in the UniSA Harvard author-date referencing style, available from the following link:

<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/student/learningAdvisors/documents/harvard-referencing.pdf>

As a guide to authors articles should have no more than 6,000 words. However, the submission of short articles is particularly welcome. Feature articles are independently reviewed by members of the Editorial Board in accordance with the following requirements for classification as a C1 journal article in Australia: 'For the purposes of the HERDC, an acceptable peer review process is one that involves an assessment or review of the research publication in its entirety before publication by independent, qualified experts. Independent in this context means independent of the author.' Each article published in the *Journal of the Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Accountability* is independently reviewed by at least two members of the Editorial Board.

We are pleased that the *Journal of the Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Accountability* is recognised by Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) as a C level scholastic journal on their Listing.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Co-Editors

Dr Sumit Lodhia

University of South Australia, Australia

Professor Roger Burritt

University of South Australia, Australia

APCEA Board Members

Professor Cosmas Ambe

University of Limpopo, South Africa

Professor Amanda Ball

University of Canterbury, New Zealand

Professor Judy Brown

Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Professor Nola Buhr

University of Saskatchewan, Canada

Professor Jong-Seo Choi

Pusan National University, Korea

Associate Professor Lorne Cummings

Macquarie University, Australia

Professor Craig Deegan

RMIT University, Australia

Associate Professor Geoff Frost

The University of Sydney, Australia

Associate Professor Kathy Herbohn

University of Queensland, Australia

Professor Katsuhiko Kokubu

Kobe University, Japan

Professor Gweneth Norris

Charles Darwin University, Australia

Professor Gary O'Donovan

University of Tasmania, Australia

Associate Professor Jean Raar

Swinburne University, Australia

Dr Anne Lee Rowe

Curtin University, Australia

Professor Dr Maliah Sulaiman

International Islamic University, Malaysia

Professor Carol Tilt

Flinders University, Australia

Professor Richard Welford

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Editorial Support: Joanne Tingey-Holyoak

ENHANCING GRADUATE SKILLS BY INCORPORATING SUSTAINABILITY INTO ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

Associate Professor Sharon Kemp PhD

Associate Professor in Management,
Swinburne University of Technology

Abstract

In order to incorporate sustainability into the business courses at an Australian university it is recognised that it requires development of skills in problem identification, anticipation and analysis as well as in stakeholder interaction and negotiation. The goal of creating sustainable organisations requires the skills to facilitate corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical approaches to business and organisational change (Rands, 1993; 2009). This paper details an approach to developing student's skills to facilitate a 'real world' understanding of corporate governance, CSR, ethics and change through the introduction of a revised accounting unit that incorporated corporate governance and ethics at undergraduate level. It concludes by detailing the learning process involved and makes recommendations for further research.

Introduction

In my experience many graduates make the mistake of equating their 'skills' with their degree or qualifications. While what is studied and what can be done are connected, they are not the same thing. A skill is a developed capacity, flair or aptitude; it is a combination of 'know-how', practice, knowledge and natural capacity.

Rather than a narrow interpretation of graduate skills that is based on the discipline within which studies were undertaken, it is more relevant for employability to think in terms of 'transferable skills' and a balance of 'hard' and "soft" skills¹. Both businesses and

university business schools concern themselves with two questions: 'How can the knowledge and competencies that were acquired by university graduates be applied to a workplace environment?' and 'How can students be provided with the abilities to contribute to organisations in a sustainable way?'

The Karpin Inquiry into management and leadership needs (1995) and The Business Council of Australia (2002) expresses concern that business graduates should have a balance of 'hard' and 'soft' skills. More recently, Beard, Schweiger and Surendan (2007) highlight the need to address the apparent lack of soft skills competence amongst accounting graduates. In addition, businesses desire graduates to have an appreciation and an ability to implement sustainability principles and practices in the workplace. This means not only the need for measuring business success in economic, environmental and social terms but also considering and taking full account of the environmental and social outcomes of organisational action. Increasingly, organisations view action toward sustainability as yielding win-win situations (Porter & van der Linde, 1995) and recognise

protocols, safety standards, financial procedures and sales administration. These skills are typically easy to observe, quantify and measure. They are also easy to train, because most of the time the skill sets are brand new to the learner and no unlearning is involved. By contrast, 'soft skills' (also called 'people skills') are typically hard to observe, quantify and measure. People skills are needed for everyday life as much as they're needed for work. They have to do with how people relate to each other: communicating, listening, engaging in dialogue, giving feedback, cooperating as a team member, solving problems, contributing in meetings and resolving conflict.

¹ 'Hard skills' are technical or administrative procedures related to an organization's core business. Examples include machine operation, computer

the possibility that it is ‘good for business.’ Elkington (1998), through the use of a triple bottom line approach to organisational activity and value, indicates that responsible business action is good for society as well. Sustainability requires new modes of decision making and action fundamentally different from those embedded in present-day organisational routines (Kearins and Springett, 2003). In order to incorporate sustainability into the business courses at an Australian university it was recognised that it would likely require development of skills in problem identification, anticipation and analysis as well as in stakeholder interaction and negotiation. It then follows that the goal of creating sustainable organisations requires the skills to facilitate corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical approaches to business and organisational change (Rands, 1993; 2009). To implement CSR, ethics and change successfully in an organisation requires critical thinking and analysis skills, so as to provide evidence based decisions; reflective thinking, in order to take corrective action as well as consider multiple scenarios of action; team oriented skills, in order to approach complex problems and situations with a diversity of skills and knowledge; leadership skills, to have confidence to suggest and take necessary action; and discussion and presentation skills, to communicate effectively so that all positions and viewpoints are taken into consideration when arriving at solutions (Guiller, Durndell & Ross, 2007; Freeley & Steinberg, 2009).

In order to develop the student’s skills to facilitate corporate governance, CSR, ethics and change a revised accounting unit was introduced that incorporated Corporate Governance and Ethics at the undergraduate level. Students enrolled were formed into teams and were required to undertake projects to examine the programs of Corporate Social Responsibility that had been implemented or proposed within an organisation.

A number of issues arose such as resistance to a different method of learning and skill development; student free-riding; coming to agreement regarding standards and quality of work; lack of comfort and familiarity with negotiation; lack of experience and varying abilities to consider other points of view and varying abilities of students to self-manage and plan commitments. The students benefited from in-class discussions of course concepts and how to apply them to their specific project. Clear communication mechanisms were put in place to discourage social loafing and free-riding behaviour, and there was regular feedback on work to date and team development which provided reassurance, particularly to students who had limited experience with working in teams or whose previous experiences with teams had been negative.

Scholars in business learning (Goleman, 1998; Hambrick, 1994; Kayes, 2002; Wenger, 1998) emphasise the importance of providing “real-world” learning opportunities that transcend the theoretical or are academically self-reinforcing. Senge *et al.*, (1994; 1997) indicate that to over-come reliance on theoretical models that do not represent organisational reality or business as practiced, inter-disciplinary, action learning and experiential styles of education are most appropriate as they do not seek to reduce complexity or eliminate paradox. Ahrens and Chapman (2007) refer to this approach as ‘management accounting as practice’ and Schatzki (2001) refers to it as the ‘practice turn’. Such practice is useful in deciding amongst future alternatives as well as being a vital resource for making sense of past decisions and the present (Ansari and Euske, 1987 and Brunsson, 1990).

Mintzberg & Gosling (2002) indicate that education for the business environment needs to go beyond borders and boundaries so as to strike an effective balance between a range of tensions: ‘These tensions include balancing the global and the local, reflection and action, cooperation and competition and the

conceptual and the concrete'. There are a number of action approaches to learning with a range of foci such as behavioural change needs (Revans, 1980; Schon, 1983), cognitive-transformative approaches (Goleman, 1998; Wenger, 1987), reflective approaches (Welsh & Murray, 2003; Reynolds, 1999), and experiential approaches to learning (Kolb, 1984; Reason, 1994). Learning requires consideration of a combination of these approaches, in order to balance the tensions between, but effectively use, experience, reflection, abstraction and action (McGill & Beatty, 1996; Byrne, Flood & Willis, 2002). It is important not only to provide learning processes and opportunities that will enable students to deal with multiple complexities of leading and managing for today but that will enable graduates to meet and address the changing and unpredictable challenges that will emerge tomorrow, and further into the future (Adams, 2004).

As change occurs there is an impact on all organisations in industry, government and the community sectors and this introduces new risks, new threats and new opportunities. These can equally change at a future point in time and become increased strengths, new opportunities, or problematic weaknesses. To navigate such complexity in their environments organisations need systematic and integrated knowledge of the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal drivers of the external environment (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008). In order for organisations to compete, as well as collaborate and be innovative, they need employees who have the ability to apply systems thinking and critical analysis to a range of business environments and to the dynamic capabilities of organisations, so as to recognise opportunities to pursue socially responsible and ethical choices as well as choices that yield competitive advantage, and collaboration as well as competition (see Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1997; Hitt, Ireland, Camp & Sexton 2002).

Education and learning that is based solely on uncritical application of theory and models is unsustainable as it places undue emphasis on the obvious, the 'seeable' and the planned whilst not recognising the 'unseeable', the unplanned and the emergent (see Mintzberg Ahlstrand & Lampel, 2008). Mintzberg *et al.* (2008) suggest in their book *Strategy Safari* that students and practitioners should go on a safari in the wilds with their thinking. They should search and discover clues in the landscape (the organisational environment). They should observe behaviour and interaction of not only the animals but the interaction of all elements in the 'landscape', investigate artefacts such as plants and vegetation that have been grazed upon, and seek evidence of action such as footprints so that the 'seeable' and 'unseeable' elements can be brought together as a basis for decisions. Reasoned judgements regarding risks and opportunities can then be made about a range of organisation options for action.

As Hart (1995; 1997) indicates organisations need to take into account environmental, social and economic drivers if society is to achieve stability and sustainability. To date there has been an unfortunate over-reliance by organisations on economic drivers and judgements of organisational and personal business success that have been based on economic measures such as profits, cost savings, organisational growth, organisational efficiency and returns to shareholders. To focus only on economic outcomes of organisational decisions and actions is to ignore important environmental and social outcomes, that is, to experience only partial 'seeability' and therefore underestimate risks and be unprepared for threats and opportunities alike. This point is emphasised by Mintzberg *et al.* (2008) who state that:

'We are the blind people and strategy formation is our elephant. Each of us, in trying to cope with the mysteries of the beast, grabs hold of some part or other. [We] rail on in utter ignorance of what

each other mean, and prate about an Elephant not one of [us] has seen! ... Managers take one narrow perspective or another — the glories of planning or the wonders of learning, the demands of external competitive analyses or the imperatives of an internal “resource-based” view. Much of this writing and advising [by managers and consultants] has been decidedly dysfunctional, simply because managers have no choice but to cope with the entire beast’.

Commentators such as Elkington (1998) recommend that organisations should consider and report their performance using a triple bottom line approach where the economic, social and environmental outcomes of their operations are provided for scrutiny by the organisation’s key stakeholders. However, in order to see the Elephant – the entire beast (see Mintzberg *et al.*, 2008), both students and practitioners need to draw on ‘soft skills’ such as critical analysis and reflective thinking, have the capacity to engage in open discussion, and effectively present their ideas, and implement team oriented and leadership skills.

Student learning in the last decade has evolved from a passive activity to one of active engagement, collaboration, and self-empowerment. This change has been parallel in time with a debate in business education on curriculum content, facilitation and assessment practice. With this shift in student learning in mind and the pressing need to develop the ‘soft skills’ of students and practitioners there is a level of recognition that different approaches to learning are urgently needed. Especially, in the later stages of a degree, there is an opportunity with capstone and project units to address these needs. A possible option is the development of a project unit that aims to examine and complement the traditional case and exercise basic assessment practices in management accounting education. This option can include facilitation focused on balancing theory, reflective practice and

dialogue to ensure that ‘hard’ technical skills as well as ‘soft’ interpersonal, communication and team orientated skills are developed to a high standard. The shift in greater focus on ‘soft’ skills is considered crucial to the effective practice of accounting, management and business education alike (see Karpin, 1995; Mintzberg, 2004).

Assessment practice and its alignment with curriculum content are crucial in setting academic standards and developing graduate capabilities. Leading academics such as Henry Mintzberg and Clayton Christensen have highlighted the need for more emphasis on ‘soft’ skills in business training and practice and their insights help inform the discussion around the use of projects to develop ‘soft’ skills.

The current debate on the role of business schools and faculties in developing business graduates indicates that past practices in business education need to be scrutinised and reviewed with a view to improving capabilities in graduating students (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2004; 2006; Pfeffer and Fong, 2004). Stemming from this a new questioning of approaches to curriculum design and assessment in business education courses has emerged. The teaching of business and the design of curriculum, inclusive of learning and assessment tools, is an area that has been widely discussed in the education literature for some time (Greiner, Bhambri & Cummings, 2003; Galea, 2004; Dyball, Reid, Ross & Schoch, 2007). There has also been an emergence of new applications of alternative pedagogies, Kearins and Springett (2003) use critical pedagogy; Brown and Macy (2004) adopt whole-systems learning approaches and Bradbury (2003) incorporates experiential learning and activities. Each of the alternative pedagogies have been adopted with the specific aim of engaging business students so that they are able to develop the new thinking and understandings necessary to enhance the sustainability of organisations

and their business activities. A re-balance of 'hard' and 'soft skills' is considered to be essential to the sustainability of business in Australia. According to the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and KPMG Consulting, Inc., (2002) urgent attention is required if Australians are to retain their place as leading business professionals.

Corporate Social Responsibility Project

In a quest to make the final year of the accounting degree more relevant to the needs of business and society keen consideration was given to the debates outlined above. There are three very clear messages in the literature; firstly, accounting students and practitioners need to have a balance of 'hard' and 'soft' skills, as it is important to assist organisations in being able to pursue business in a sustainable manner. Secondly, there is a need for accounting students and practitioners to meet and address the changing and future unpredictable challenges. In order to meet these challenges critical evaluation of theories, models and approaches must occur providing a basis for reasoned judgement and decisions. To appreciate fully the 'seeable' and 'unseeable' in an organisation's environment, accounting students and practitioners must go on safari and pose questions and investigate the landscape. Thirdly, accounting students and practitioners need to have a broad base of knowledge and then be able to apply it in a systematic and integrated manner without reliance solely on economic measures of success. Organisational sustainability requires taking account of environmental, social and economic drivers of organisational action. Accounting students' and practitioners' careers become sustainable where the employee is able to contribute to an organisation in each of these three areas in an integrated manner. Students are better skilled and able to adapt to the new challenges and recognise opportunities with each successive wave of change facing their organisation.

With these clear messages in mind and as part an existing process of curriculum renewal and realignment with business and other stakeholder needs, a team of three academics, two in the accounting discipline and one in the management discipline at an Australian university decided to revise the accounting unit and the Corporate Governance and Ethics elements so that it included a project relating to CSR. The aim of the project unit was to enhance the experience of final year students and augment their skills, awareness and understandings using a range of methods to develop what are considered to be critical graduate attributes. Specifically, critical thinking and analysis, team-oriented and leadership skills, self-management and reflective practice, and presentation skills were targeted.

As most work in organisations is team based, the development and teaching team decided to run the Corporate Governance and Ethics element within the accounting unit using teams for a significant portion of the unit. Recognition was given to the need to identify the different performances of individual students by allocating 20% of assessment marks to complete a journal and a short essay based on student reflections and the changes that students observed occurring in their team. The unit commenced with 138 third year undergraduate students enrolled and during the unit only 11 students withdrew, mainly to reduce their workload or for health/personal reasons. The first step taken was to encourage students to create groups of no more than four members.

In the first meeting with students the teaching team provided a Team Work Quiz for students to complete. The purpose of the quiz is to get students to self-assess the type of team person they are. The quiz assists students specifically to identify whether they prefer to perform task roles within a team or whether their preference is for maintenance activities. It is intended that students will realise that a team that comprises a mix of

members who prefer performing task roles and members who prefer maintenance roles will increase team capacity to complete the project.

As suggested by Wood *et al.* (2006: 212-213) 'all members of effective teams help "lead" these teams [towards success and goal attainment] by contributing towards both task and maintenance activities in the team process. It is just that members will have a preference for more of one activity over the other'. Schein (1988) indicates that 'task activities include: initiating, seeking information, giving of information, clarifying and summarising. Team maintenance activities include encouraging, harmonising, compromising, gatekeeping, setting standards and followership'.

The teaching team decided to offer students a choice from ten CSR projects, so that students could conduct a project on a topic and industry sector in which they had some interest. Ten senior managers were contacted and their agreement received to participate and be interviewed about their organisation and a CSR initiative that had either been implemented in the organisation or was planned for implementation. The companies contacted were: Bluescope Steel, Transurban, Alcoa, Toyota Australia, Westpac Banking Corporation, Australia Post, Shell Australia, Lion Nathan, HJ Heinz, and Nikon. These companies were selected as members of the teaching team had contacts/ personal relationships that made gaining access to information and establishing a contact for students easier. A profile of each organisation was written and placed on the unit's Blackboard² site. Students read each of

the profiles individually and drew up a shortlist of three of the organisations that they would like to contact to undertake their CSR project. Once the students had formed a group with four members, they were required as a group to select one organisation on which to base their project. Selection involved negotiation between the group members and for the group to arrive at a consensus. Students captured the negotiation process and the basis upon which decisions were made as a first entry in their reflective journal. Students were asked to complete a reflective journal so they could record their thoughts about their team experience, about their learning whilst undertaking the project and record any questions they could reflect on and critically analyse at a later time.

Each team discussed the negotiation process and the basis for their selection of a particular organisation with a member of the teaching team. Teams came to recognise that they had to balance individual preferences with the preferences and needs of the team as a whole. Teams considered each member's prior experience and knowledge of industry sectors as well as their impressions of the organisation's philosophies, goals and policies and their level of comfort with them.

In the formation stage for the team the primary concern was the initial entry of members to the team. At this stage individuals considered: 'What can the team offer me?', 'What will the team ask me to contribute?', and 'Can my individual needs be met at the same time as I contribute to the team?' (Heinen and Jacobson, 1976; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). According to Wood *et al.* (2006: 206) '[at this stage] people are interested in discovering what is considered acceptable behaviour, determining the real task of the team and defining the team rules'. Once teams are formed and they decide on the organisation that is to be the focus of their CSR project the

² Blackboard[®] is a flexible eLearning and online communities system for students and academics. Blackboard can be used for delivering online courses or establishing online communities. It enables academics to add an online component to traditional classes or teach an entire course on the Web. It is particularly useful for bringing learning materials, class discussions, and tests online.

next step is to get agreement on 'the rules of the game'. Each student was provided with a Team Charter document so they could draft their individual views and contribute to a discussion within their group in relation to team ground rules, team values, team goals and expectations, and expectations of the project unit.

Whilst working on their CSR project, the teams experienced periods of emotion and tension among members. The teams themselves were experiencing many changes. Team members needed to practice self-management by scheduling in team tasks and meeting deadlines, whilst balancing other demands on their time such as other units of study, work commitments, family and social commitments. Team members experienced self-development opportunities as they began to understand one another's interpersonal styles and make efforts to find ways in which to accomplish team goals whilst also satisfying individual needs (Wood *et al.*, 2006). Although there had been agreement about goals and expectations established in the Team Charter document, some teams experienced conflict within the team around member's failures to meet expectations in terms of work quality and levels of effort. Teams had identified in the Team Charter their expectations concerning the grade that they would like to achieve in the unit. Teams found it challenging to specify the level of quality that was expected in their team. It took a number of negotiations for teams to settle the quality issue and establish realistic expectations of each other.

Teams experienced 'jockeying' behaviours as individuals competed with each other to impose their preferences in the group and to achieve their desired position in the team. In all teams a leader emerged and in some teams two leaders emerged who had complimentary skills and they divided team management tasks based on their areas of strength.

After three weeks the teams began to enter a norming stage, where they started to settle

down into routines and began to perform as a coordinated unit (See Tuckman, 1965). Teams strived for win-win situations in their negotiations and the incidence of team members volunteering for tasks increased in frequency. The idea of work and tasks being imposed by a leader/manager diminished within the groups. What the teaching team observed occurring in the teams is described well by Wood *et al.* (2006: 207):

'There is a precarious balancing of forces [in the team]. In their pleasure at the new sense of harmony, group members will most likely strive to maintain this balance. The group as a whole will try to regulate individual behaviour towards this end; minority viewpoints and tendencies to deviate from or question group directions will be discouraged'.

Teams are required to conduct further research on their project organisation. They need to establish the organisation's background, place in its industry sector, context of the CSR initiative, drivers for CSR in the organisation's external environment, impact of other industry competitor's CSR initiatives, impact of the CSR initiative on key stakeholders, the nature of impacts on the external environment (economic, environmental, social), and the nature of internal impacts (personnel, knowledge management, and technology). This was the stage that highlighted the need for critical thinking and analysis skills. The teaching team discovered that teams did not have a clear understanding of what was meant by the terms 'critical thinking' and 'critical analysis'. Students took the word critical to have a quite negative meaning, for example, finding fault with someone or something. There was confusion amongst the students as to why they were required to adopt a negative approach to the literature and resources they had discovered as an outcome of their research activities.

With this lack of understanding of what constitutes critical thinking and analysis, it became clear that one of the first tasks

needed to be addressed, as a group, is to clarify what is meant by the term 'critical'. To this end it was decided to adopt the explanation of Halpern (1997) who refers to critical thinking skills as the ability to examine processes, systems, objects, artefacts, issues and ideas in terms of their component parts and to make informed judgements about their worth, as well as the value and relevance of the information. When people think critically they are being active; they are not passively accepting everything they read and hear, but questioning, evaluating, making judgements, finding connections and categorising. It means being open to other points of view and not being blinded by individual biases. (Browne and Keeley, 2001) Judgements made need to be well grounded in research, wide reading, and include consideration of all possible viewpoints (James, Scoufis, Farrell & Carmichael, 1999).

Using Betts, Farquharson and Seitz (2005: 35) as a guide, it was suggested to students that they ask themselves three questions to help in the examination of all written sources and verbal opinions:

- (1) 'What is the author's or speaker's argument (theory, theme, point of view)?'
- (2) 'Am I convinced by it?' and
- (3) 'If yes, why? (if no, why?)'.

Using these three simple questions as a guide the teams appear to have increased their critical thinking and analysis skills. Within tutorial sessions there was a noticeable increase in questions asked of the teaching team and an increase in questioning and positive debating between group members. The questions arose, not from a lack of understanding of the task at hand, but from more incisive thinking which replaces the previous pattern existing in the teams of accepting all written sources and verbal opinion as reliable and factual.

The teaching team noticed that team members who were previously not substantially engaged with team discussions

had changed. The team members who failed to verbalise their ideas readily at the beginning of the project were now presenting their ideas in a more confident manner. Their confidence came from being able to present their ideas to the team using an evidence base obtained from their research activities.

Teams had previously experienced confusion and at times tension arising from team members not completing tasks on time in the early weeks of the project. Gersick (1991) explains the situation in which the teams found themselves. She states that pressure builds when 'complacency and a sense of having time lost to the panic accompanied by an approaching deadline... At this time the team receives a 'wake up alarm' and has to rapidly reassess its goals and direction'.

To assist the teams move from this stage and develop self-management skills, the teaching team suggests that students need to use a reliable method to allocate tasks, track their completion, and be able to see where there are deviations occurring in plans to complete their project. A demonstration example was provided of a project spanning twelve weeks with four team members, using a Gantt chart, a PERT chart and a chart generated using Microsoft Project. By the end of the fourth week all teams had sophisticated planning processes in place to keep them 'on track'.

During the fifth week, the team had a progress meeting and the evidence was that all teams had begun to master a number of previously identified critical graduate attributes. The teams had entered the performing stage of team development as they were now displaying indications of a mature, organised and well-functioning team. 'An effective team at this stage is made up of members who; continue to work well together, understand their individual and collective responsibilities to other groups and to the larger organisation, and are able to adapt successfully as opportunities and demands change over time' (Wood *et al.* 2006:207).

All teams completed their projects to a high standard and delivered the final report and the team presentation to the student cohort on time. The teaching team designed a short survey, and received assistance in the administration of the survey and in the evaluation and interpretation of the data from Teaching and Learning Services staff.

The survey was completed in late 2007 by 102 students. Twenty five students not present on the day that it was administered.

There was a strong indication from students that the most useful elements of the project were, in descending order of times mentioned:

Critical Analysis

Student's comments include:

'You can't take what people say or what you read and assume it is correct. It could be wrong and so you have to question and analyse it.'

'I now understand that I should question things and not just accept them because they are in writing. I ask myself where is their authority and what is their standing on this'

'It's important to get both sides of an argument. You need to look closely at all of the sources you use'

Learning to Work as a Team

Students state that:

'I have hated teams because you always get at least one person who won't do anything. But this time it was good because we had the agreement. The charter helped make people in the team keep their promise to turn up, and do their stuff on time. That was better than leaving it to the tutor to pull students into line. We did it ourselves as a group. We made each other work better. When it got difficult we were able to help each other like a real team should'.

'Learning to take responsibility, to say what you think instead of just sitting there. It was really big for me speak up and say what I thought. Before I didn't disagree with people I just went along with what people said. I learned to put my view forward and I actually took the lead in a few things we did.'

Reflection

Comments included:

'I liked the reflecting part...with the journal. Thinking about what I am doing, what's working and what's not. It was very useful to try to work out why the company was doing the things they were doing. I have continued to keep a journal...to force myself to think and plan what I'm doing'.

'I have continued to keep a journal. I think it will be a good thing to keep doing after I graduate. I can see that as a manager you have to review what you are doing... you just can't keep doing the same thing if it isn't working'.

Task and Time Management

Students reveal that:

'I started to feel unsure about the project and I felt really panicky that we wouldn't get it all done and we would fail. When we learned how to plan the project and work out who did what I felt a whole lot better. Using Project helped us meet our targets'.

'Having the deadlines and the tasks all laid out was good. You knew that if you followed the chart that we did with Project that you could get it all done. It helped work out who should do what and who was overloaded and who was keeping quiet cause they had got nothing to do'.

'Learning how to plan the project really helped. It looked like a really big task and it was really important for us all to get our heads around how we were going to do and get it done on time without chuckin' a hissy fit. The deadlines and the tasks were there,

you can't argue with it or you don't get things done. I will probably use it when I get a job'.

Conclusions

The aim of the CSR project within the revised Corporate Governance and Ethics unit was to provide students with the opportunity to explore and consider sustainable business practices at an organisational level. A project approach was used to help students to develop and critique sustainable business practices in "real world" environments. Students were provided with the opportunity to examine and understand the range of CSR initiatives, the motives behind CSR initiatives, the perceived and expected benefits and outcomes from CSR initiatives at the individual, group and organisational process level. The experience offered in the CSR Project was intended to increase the capability and confidence of accounting students. The inclusion of a CSR project within the Corporate Governance and Ethics element of the accounting unit also provided an opportunity to contribute to the sustainability of organisations by equipping students with a balance of 'hard' and 'soft' skills.

Students who are better skilled and have a wider array of skills are more able to contribute to the success of organisations. In learning to use critical thinking and analysis students learned to question and to seek evidence to base decisions upon. To fully appreciate the 'seeable' and 'unseeable' in an organisation's environment, business students and practitioners must go on safari and pose questions and investigate the landscape. In a constantly changing environment, students as practitioners will need to prepare for the unexpected. They can create a level of preparedness if they have asked the question 'What if?' and if they have considered and queried multiple scenarios. Organisational sustainability requires taking account of environmental, social and economic drivers of organisational action. Students as practitioners will need to

reflect on how existing systems and ways of doing things can better contribute to organisations that considers success measured in environmental, social and economic terms. Students as tomorrow's practitioners will need to draw on team oriented approaches to form diverse teams that can be entrepreneurial and creative as the problems they will need to solve become more complex with multiple social, environmental and economic impacts and outcomes. Practitioners will need to be able to voice their views confidently whilst being prepared to listen to the views of others and work collaboratively towards organisational futures.

The initial offering of a CSR project within the Corporate Governance and Ethics element of the accounting unit has gone some way towards equipping students with a range of soft skills which will contribute to organisational sustainability. It is recommended that we contact this cohort of students after they have left university and have been in employment for 1 year. This exercise has commenced and will be completed in 2010. Interviews with students will be conducted to determine what skills they have found most useful in the workplace and what skills they wish they could have more of. To complement the student interviews it is intended to administer a survey to employers to determine what skills and abilities that they would like enhanced in their workforce in order to encourage sustainability.

References

- Adams, J 2004, 'Mental models at work: implications for teaching sustainability'. in *Teaching Business Sustainability*, ed C. Galea, Sheffield, Greenleaf.
- Ahrens, T & Chapman, CS 2007, 'Management Accounting as Practice', *Accounting Organizations and Society*, 32 (1-2), 1-27.
- Atrill, P, & McLaney E 2004, *Management accounting: an active learning approach*, Blackwell Publishing, Melbourne.
- Betts, K, Farquharson, K & Seitz, A 2005, *Writing Essays and Research Reports in the Social Sciences*, Thomson, Melbourne.

- Bailey, J R 2003, 'Walter Nord as intellectual and pedagogical hero'. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, vol.2, pp.378-384.
- Balogun, J 2006, 'Managing change: steering a course between intended strategies and unanticipated outcomes', *Long Range Planning*, vol.39, no. 1, pp.29-49.
- Beard, D, Schweiger, D & Surendan, K, 2007, 'Incorporating soft skills into accounting and MIS curricula', *Proceedings of the 2007 ACM SIGMIS CPR Conference on Computer Personnel Research: The Global Information Technology Workforce*, ACM, New York.
- Bradbury, H 2003, 'Sustaining inner and outer worlds: a whole-systems approach to developing sustainable business practices in management', *Journal of Management Education*, vol.27, pp.172-187.
- Brandenburger, AM, & Nalebuff, BJ (1996). *Co-opetition*, Doubleday, New York.
- Brown, J & Macy, J 2004, 'Teaching sustainability: whole systems learning'. in *Teaching Business Sustainability*, C Galea, Ed Greenleaf, Sheffield.
- Browne, M & Keeley, S 2001, *Asking the right questions: a guide to critical thinking*, 6th ed., Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Business Council of Australia 2002., *Employability Skills for the Future*, Department of Education, Science & Training, Canberra.
- Byrne, M, Flood, B & Willis, P 2002, 'The relationship between learning approaches and learning outcomes: a study of Irish accounting students', *Accounting Education*, vol.11, no.1, 27-42.
- Christensen, C 1997, *The innovator's dilemma: when new technologies cause great firms to fail*, Harvard Business School Press, Massachusetts.
- Clegg, SR, Dwyer, L, Gray, JT, Kemp, S, & Marceau, J, 1995, Embryonic industries: leadership and management needs, in *Enterprising Nation: Renewing Australia's Managers to Meet the Challenges of the Asia - Pacific Century*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Elkington, J. 1998, *Cannibals with forks: the triple bottom line of 21st century business*. New Society Publishers, British Columbia.
- Freeley, AJ & Steinberg, DL 2009, *Argumentation and debate: critical thinking for reasoned decision making*. Wadsworth, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Galea, C 2004 *Teaching Business Sustainability*, Greenleaf, Sheffield.
- Gersick, CJG 1991, 'Revolutionary change theories: a multi-level exploration of the punctuated equilibrium paradigm', *Academy of Management Review*, vol.16, no.1, pp:10-36.
- Gosling, J, & Mintzberg, H 2002, 'Reality programming' for MBAs *Strategy+Business*, vol.26, no.1.
- Gosling, J and Mintzberg, H 2004, 'The education of practicing managers', *Sloan Management Review*, vol.45, iss.4, pp.19-22.
- Gosling, J & Mintzberg H 2006, 'Management education as if both matter', *Management Learning*, vol.37, iss.4, pp.419-428.
- Goleman, D 1998, *Working with emotional intelligence*, Bantam, New York.
- Greiner, LE, Bhambri, A, & Cummings, TG 2003, 'Searching for a Strategy to Teach Strategy', *Academy of Management Learning and education*, vol.2, no.4, pp.402-420.
- Guiller, J, Durnell, A & Ross, A 2008, 'Peer interaction and critical thinking: face-to-face or online discussion?', *Learning and Instruction*, vol.18, no.2, pp.187-200.
- Halpern DF 1997, *Critical thinking across the curriculum: a brief edition of thought and knowledge*. Lawrence Erlbaum & Associates, New Jersey.
- Hambrick, D.C. (1994). What if the academy actually mattered? *Academy of Management Review*, 19, pp.11-16.
- Hart, SL 1995, 'A natural-resource-based view of the firm', *Academy of Management Review*, vol.20, pp.11-16.
- Hart, SL 1997, 'Beyond greening: strategies for a sustainable world', *Harvard Business Review*, vol.75, no.1, pp.98-1014.
- Heinen, JS & Jacobson, E 1976, 'A model of task group development in complex organizations and a strategy of implementation', *Academy of Management Review*, vol.1, October, pp.98-111.
- Hitt, MA, Ireland, RD, Camp, SM, & Sexton, D 2002, *Strategic Entrepreneurship: creating a new mindset*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia and KPMG Consulting, Inc. 2002, 'The New CFO of the Future: Finance Functions in the Twenty-first Century', *KPMG Consulting on behalf of ICAA*, Sydney.
- James, B, Scoufis, M, Farrell, H, & Carmichael, E, 1999, *Unravelling the mysteries of critical thinking*, University of Western Sydney, Nepean & Video Education Australasia Pty Ltd,

- Sydney., Accompanying video tape notes 1-86341-840-7.
- Johnson, G, Scholes, K, & Whittington, R 2008, *Exploring corporate strategy: texts and cases*, Prentice Hall, London.
- Karpin Inquiry (David Karpin, Chairman), 1995, *Enterprising nation: renewing australia's managers to meet the challenges of the asia - pacific century*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
- Kayes, D C 2002, 'Experiential learning and its critics: preserving the role of experience in management learning and education', *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, vol.2, no.1, pp.137-149.
- Kearins, K, & Springett, D 2003, 'Educating for sustainability: developing critical skills', *Journal of Management Education*, vol.27, pp.188-204.
- Kolb, DA 1984, *Experiential learning*, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- McGill, I, & Beaty, L 1996, *Action learning: a guide for professional, management and educational development*, Kogan Page, London.
- Mintzberg, H 2004, *Managers not MBAs: A Hard Look at the Soft Practice of Management and Management Development*, Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco.
- Mintzberg, H, Ahlstrand, B, & Lampel, J 2008, *Strategy safari: the complete guide through the wilds of strategic management*, (2nd ed.) Financial Times, Prentice Hall, London.
- Mintzberg, H, & Gosling, J 2002, 'Educating managers beyond borders', *Academy of Management Education and Learning*, Vol.1, no.1, pp.64-76.
- Pfeffer, J, & Fong, C T 2004, 'The business school "business": some lessons from the U.S. experience', *Journal of Management Studies*, vol.41, no.8, pp.1501-1520.
- Porter, M & van der Linde, C 1995, 'Green and competitive: ending the stalemate', *Harvard Business Review*, vol.73, no.5, pp.120-133.
- Rands, GP 1993, 'Preparing students to work for sustainability: teaching as if the Earth's future mattered', *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, vol.5, pp.19-46.
- Rands, G 2009, 'A principle-attribute matrix for environmentally sustainable management education and its application: the case for change oriented service learning projects', *Journal of Management Education*, vol.33, no.3, pp.296-322.
- Reason, P 1994, 'Three approaches to participative inquiry'. in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, NK Denzin, & YS Lincoln Eds., Sage, Thousand Oaks, pp. 324-339.
- Revans, RW 1980, *Action learning: new techniques for management*. Blond and Briggs, London.
- Reynolds, M 1999, 'Critical reflection and management education: rehabilitating less hierarchical approaches', *Journal of Management Education*, vol.23, pp.537-553.
- Schatzki, TR 2001, 'Practice theory: an introduction', In *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, T.R. Schatzki, K. Knorr Cetina & E. von Savigny, Eds. Routledge, London.
- Senge, P, Kleiner, A, Roberts, C, Ross, RB, & Smith, B 1994, *The fifth discipline field book: strategies and tools for building a learning organization*, Doubleday, New York.
- Senge, P, Kleiner, A, Roberts, C, Ross, RB, & Smith, B 1997, *The dance of change: the challenge of sustaining momentum in learning organizations*, Doubleday, New York.
- Schein, EH 1988, *Process consultations*, vol. 1. No.2, Addison-Wesley, New York.
- Schon, DA 1983, *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, Basic, New York.
- Tuckman, BW 1965, 'Developmental sequence in small groups', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol.63, pp.384-399.
- Tuckman, BW, & Jensen, MAC 1977, 'Stages of small group development revisited', *Group and Organization Studies*, vol.2, pp.419-427.
- Welsh, MA, & Murray, DL 2003, 'The ecollaborative: teaching sustainability through critical pedagogy', *Journal of Management Education*, vol.27, pp.220-235.
- Wegner, D 1998, *Communities of practice: learning, meaning and identity*, Cambridge University Press, New York.
- Whittington, R 1996, 'Strategy as practice', *Long Range Planning*. Vol.29, no.5, pp.731-735.
- Wood, J, Zeffane, R, Fromholtz, M, & Fitzgerald, J 2006, *Organisational Behaviour: Core Concepts and Applications*. (1st Australasian ed.) John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Brisbane.

TEACHING A SUSTAINABILITY ACCOUNTING COURSE IN AN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY: INSIGHTS FOR SUSTAINABILITY ACCOUNTING EDUCATION

Dr Sumit Lodhia

Centre for Accounting, Governance and Sustainability, University of South Australia

Abstract

The United Nations has named 2005-2014 as the decade of education for sustainable development, thereby highlighting that 'education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving the capacity of the people to address environment and development issues' (Agenda 21, UN, 1992, p. 363). In light of the above, this paper provides insights into two sustainability courses taught at an Australian university in 2009. The paper differs from prior studies in sustainability accounting education which focus on business programs (see for example, Nowak *et al.*, 2008) or on the incorporation of sustainability into accounting degrees (see for example, Haigh and Hazelton, forthcoming). A personal account of my experiences in lecturing an undergraduate and graduate course provides insights into the design of sustainability accounting courses. The paper also highlights the critical need for accounting students to be aware of one of the most difficult challenges that needs to be addressed by governments, the business community and other institutions, and individuals; sustainable development. If accountants are to play a role in addressing sustainability, it is essential that the educational process provides the necessary skills to students which would equip them to handle an area that goes beyond the basic fundamentals of mainstream accounting.

Introduction

This paper provides insights into two sustainability courses taught at an Australian university in 2009. The university has been

offering a sustainability accounting course as an advanced third year course as well as a graduate course undertaken by coursework Masters and Honours students since 2007. These courses were only compulsory for those students that majored in corporate sustainability. However, accounting students without a corporate sustainability major constituted almost ninety percent of the class, indicating that this was a popular elective among accounting students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Last year, I decided to change the course syllabus and assessment in order to enhance the learning process. The course was run for thirteen weeks and students in both courses had the same course content as well as assessment. However, as will be discussed later, the expectations from graduate students were greater than for undergraduate students.

The focus of the course was on corporate accountability, accounting and reporting in the context of sustainability. It extends an understanding of accounting beyond that of shareholder value maximisation and places an emphasis on the concerns and information needs of a range of stakeholders. The emphasis was on the social and environmental context of corporations, the relevance of stakeholders in regard to social and environmental issues, and corporate social responsibility accountability, accounting and reporting within a mandatory and voluntary framework

Teaching Philosophy

Marton and Saljo's (1976) seminal paper provides the foundations of the teaching philosophy. The authors contrast surface-level and deep-level learning, suggesting that deep-level learning is useful because the

knowledge gained extends beyond merely satisfying the requirements of the course work. Emphasis in both courses was on deep level learning and this was clearly pointed out to students, in the first lecture. I clearly highlighted to all students that for them to perform well in this course, they had to engage in the learning process and this would be facilitated through the course content and assessment requirements. Thus, students had to gain knowledge that went beyond simply acquiring a piece of paper with their grade and required the development of a range of critical and analytical skills to both theoretical and practical aspects of sustainability.

The work of Biggs and Tang (2007) was also instrumental in structuring the course in order to facilitate deep-level learning. The authors contend that the traditional two hour lecture plus one hour tutorial is not always an ideal platform for facilitating deep-level learning. They suggest that lectures should be interactive and should provide an environment for students to learn. Biggs and Tang (2007) also mention that given the rise in information technology usage, information is more easily available now and therefore, lecturers are under pressure to illustrate the importance of a lecture to students. This could include an interactive face to face class as well as the focus on discussing matters that are not provided in textbooks. For instance, academics involved in teaching could reflect on their research and be aware of contemporary developments which textbooks and journal articles may not be able to provide because of time lags in publication. Baldwin (2005) supports the link between research and teaching, highlighting that research led teaching provides the opportunity for enhancing the learning process.

The lectures for both courses were run as a three hour seminar, rather than the lecture and tutorial format. The undergraduate class had 60 students (almost double the student intake from the previous year) while the graduate class had 7 students. Thus, the

potential for extensive discussion in class was greater for the graduates than the undergraduates. In spite of this, the structure of the lecture enabled discussions to take place. The formal lecture was between one and a half to two hours and quite often this was interactive while the rest of the time was spent on class discussions. To facilitate discussion in earlier weeks, discussion questions were used, while in later weeks, focus was primarily on discussing the assessment components.

The university had a compulsory requirement for lectures to be recorded. However, recorded lectures are no substitute for interactive lectures and as such; an exemption was granted not to have the lectures recorded. It was explained to students that a lecture recording could not replace the dynamics of a face to face interactive class and were encouraged to discuss with the lecturer if they were unable to attend a particular lecture.

In line with Baldwin (2005), the nexus between research, learning and teaching was enriched in this course through the teaching of a subject matter which was the lecturer's major research interest. I was able to talk about contemporary research in sustainability accounting and illustrate its practical relevance as well. Feedback from students confirmed that they valued the discussion of contemporary research issues in sustainability, something that may have been difficult to gain from a mere textbook or reading.

Biggs and Tang (2007) suggest that for learning to be effective, both declarative and functioning knowledge should be acquired by students. Declarative knowledge constitutes the basic foundations of the subject matter, sometimes referred to as the core body of knowledge. On the other hand, functioning knowledge involves the ability to apply the declarative knowledge to the real world. McKenzie *et al.* (2002) refer to functioning knowledge as authentic learning, indicating

that teaching approaches should be aligned with the world for which students are being prepared.

The lectures and readings for this course enabled declarative knowledge to be gained. Functioning knowledge was gained through class discussions, student’s synthesis of the learning material and other resources which they were encouraged to access and assessment components. Feedback on the assessment also played an instrumental role in the provision of functioning knowledge. Further details of the course content and assessment are discussed next.

The Syllabus

The course content is an important requirement for facilitating deep-level learning. Table 1 illustrates the syllabus for this course. Most of the course content was covered in the first 10 weeks. Two weeks were devoted to student presentations (see details in next section) while the last week was a revision lecture which reflected on the learning from the course. The course did not have a textbook, instead, journal articles and practical documents, such as the Global Reporting Initiative and AA1000 standard, constituted mandatory reading requirements. The emphasis was on addressing theoretical as well as practical aspects of sustainability accounting, thereby enabling declarative knowledge to become functional.

Students were also encouraged to refer to other journals for articles on sustainability accounting in order to complement their mandatory readings. Accounting journals such as Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal, Accounting and Business Research, Accounting Forum, Accounting, Organizations and Society, Australian Accounting Review, British Accounting Review, Critical Perspectives on Accounting, European Accounting Review and Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management were referred to. Management journals such as Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly,

Journal of Business Ethics and Journal of Management were also used.

Week	Topic
1	CSR, Sustainability : An introduction
2	Corporations and CSR/Sustainability
3	Stakeholders and CSR/Sustainability
4	Accountability and theories of CSR/Sustainability
5	Trends in CSR/Sustainability
6	Management Systems for CSR/Sustainability
7	CSR/Sustainability accounting and reporting
8	CSR/Sustainability accounting and reporting: expectations gaps
9	Corporate Community Partnerships/ Public Sector Sustainability Accounting
10	Contemporary issues in CSR/Sustainability
MID SEMESTER BREAK	
11	Project Presentations
12	Project Presentations
13	Revision

Table 1: The CSR/ sustainability accounting syllabus

Moreover, sustainability specific journals such as Asia Pacific Centre for Environmental Accountability, Business Strategy and the Environment, Business and Society, Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, Greener Management International, Journal of Cleaner Production, Journal of Corporate Citizenship, and Social and Environmental Accounting Journal were identified.

In relation to reference textbooks, Unerman *et al.* (2007), Gray and Bebbington (2001), Schaltegger *et al.* (2003), and Schaltegger

and Burritt (2000) were made available to students either through the reserve collection in the library or from the lecturer. General texts such as Bakan (2004) 'The Corporation' and Al Gore (2006) 'An Inconvenient Truth' were available together with the videos. Students were also given a list of other books owned by the lecturer which were available for borrowing.

In the first week, students were introduced to the notions of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability and the distinction between these was discussed. Essentially, discussion focused on CSR being corporate responsibility and duties to society and sustainability as a long term concept that focuses on both current and future generations. Environmental and social issues were discussed and it was clear from the discussions that environmental issues, while difficult to address, were more clearly defined and could be more easily measured in physical terms (for example, tonnes of carbon emissions) when compared to social issues which were often subjective. It was also acknowledged that monetary measurements of both social and environmental issues were subjective. The lecture concluded with discussion on both Australian and global community responses to sustainable development. Parts of Al Gore's inconvenient truth video was shown and students were encouraged to watch the full documentary which was available from the library.

The second lecture focused on corporations and presented arguments for and against their involvement in social and environmental issues. Excerpts from "The Corporation" video were a critical part of the lecture. The emphasis on the need for corporate involvement in social and environmental issues then led to exploration of the relationship between accounting and sustainability.

Week three lectures focused on stakeholders and introduced students to stakeholder

theory, and the notions of stakeholder management and engagement. The following week, the relationship between corporations and stakeholders was highlighted through discussion of the accountability concept. The AA1000 standard was also discussed. The second part of this lecture then addressed the theories for corporate social responsibility by focusing on the Gray and Collison (2002) classification of managerialist, middle of the road (including stakeholder and legitimacy theory), and critical theoretical paradigms. Recent theoretical advances in social and environmental accounting such as new institutional theory (Larrinaga-Gonzalez, 2007) and Bebbington *et al's* (2009) reputation risk management were also discussed.

The fifth week of lectures took a practical perspective and focused on both historical and current trends in CSR. Numerous global and local initiatives in CSR such as the Global Compact, Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), National Pollutant Inventory and Public Environmental Reporting were also discussed. The lecture concluded with a real world example of CSR in action; practices in the Australian Minerals industry were discussed.

Week six focused on the internal organizational perspective through emphasis on environmental management, environmental management accounting and carbon pollution reduction techniques while week seven focused on triple bottom line reporting with emphasis on performance indicators, the media used for communication and motivations for reporting. The following lecture then focused on the expectations gaps in sustainability accounting with emphasis being on stakeholder expectations gaps, limitations of Triple Bottom Line report assurance and the distinction between triple bottom line reporting and sustainability reporting as identified by authors such as Rob Gray and Markus Milne (see for example, Gray and Milne, 2002).

Week 9 lectures moved beyond the business emphasis of earlier weeks and discussed corporate community partnerships as well as providing an overview of public sector sustainability accounting. The role of NGOs in sustainability was also addressed. The final lecture discussed contemporary issues in sustainability with the major emphasis being emissions trading.

Weeks 11 and 12 concentrated on student presentations and the final week brought the lectures together and identified the learning gained and the skills acquired from the course. Reflection of the learning process is essential for both students and the lecturers, enabling all parties to receive vital feedback (Ramsden, 1992, Brookfield, 1995).

Assessment

Table 2 addresses the assessment components which were the other major difference from the course in previous years.

Assessment item	Due date	Weighting (%)
Assignment 1	Week 5	15
Research Proposal	Week 8	15
Assignment 2	Week 10	15
Project Presentation	Weeks 11, 12	15
Class Participation/Reflective Journal	Weeks 1-13	10
Research Paper	Exam week	30

Table 2: The assessment components

This course did not have a final exam. Emphasis was on two assignments, class participation (including maintaining a learning journal), and a major research project which was subdivided into a proposal, a presentation and a final paper. These requirements linked assessment to

learning and enabled functioning knowledge to be obtained.

The assignments were individual and helped to identify the various capabilities of each student. The first assignment was based on the proposed emission trading scheme (ETS) for Australia. Students were required to discuss the challenges to the establishment of an ETS for Australia, highlight the accounting implications of the ETS and to specify what responsibilities they would have as a business consultant hired by a company to respond to the ETS. The second assignment was based on a case study. Students were given a case study of the Bhopal chemical disaster in India and had to address a number of questions. They were asked to highlight the difficulties associated with making multinational corporations (MNCs) accountable for their social and environmental impacts in foreign operations, discuss stakeholder engagement and reporting strategies that could have been undertaken and assess the effect this incident could have had on other companies operating in the same industry.

A major part of the course assessment was the research project and its assessment was divided into a number of specific components. The research project had to be completed in groups of three to five students for the undergraduates while for the graduate course, projects were undertaken either individually or in a group of two. As Biggs and Tang (2007) posit, group work is a vital component in disseminating functioning knowledge, enabling peer to peer interaction to capture the intricacies of the learning process. Some undergraduate students did elect to complete the project individually and were able to convince me that they were capable of undertaking a major project on their own.

Students initially had to propose a major research topic in social and environmental accounting. Feedback was then provided to the students which assisted them to complete

the research project. Emphasis was on whether they had a “doable” research question and objectives, the literature and theory they would use for the project, the appropriateness of the methods for the study and the significance of the study, thereby addressing the ‘so what’ question associated with all academic research.

Students had to present their proposal and preliminary findings after the two week semester break. Presentations allowed students to explain their learning to others in the class, enabling them to prepare for the ‘real world’ (Biggs and Tang, 2007). Undergraduate presentations were for twenty minutes while graduate presentations lasted thirty minutes. Based on the feedback from presentations, students were required to submit the final paper, which replaced the final exam assessment that is associated with most courses.

Class discussions were an integral part of the course and students were also rewarded for their contribution to this through the assessment. The final ten marks for the course were for class participation as well as for the learning diary. At the end of the teaching period, students had to submit a one page summary of their learning/reflective diary which had to specify what they had learnt from the course. Learning diaries are also beneficial to instructors, allowing them to reflect upon their teaching style and gaining useful feedback from students (Ramsden, 1992, Brookfield, 1995).

Student performance

Students were exposed to deep-level learning in this course and they had to go beyond their usual comfort zone to perform well. The assignments required independent research and built upon the declarative knowledge gained from lectures and associated readings.

Both academic and practical information was required. For instance, for the first assignment, students had to be aware of contemporary developments in ETS and this

required an understanding of current news items in order to comprehend the challenges to the establishment of an ETS in Australia. Moreover, students needed to assess the academic literature and use their knowledge of accounting to highlight the accounting implications of ETS. For the second project, students drew upon the concepts of stakeholder engagement and triple bottom line reporting discussed in the lectures and applied this to a real world incident. They also had to assess how the chemicals industry responded to the Bhopal chemical leak of 1984 and had to assess the complexities associated with holding MNCs accountable in the underdeveloped and developing world.

The research project required team work for a majority of the students. The research proposal was something that the undergraduates were not exposed to previously and therefore, they required a lot of assistance. However, the “leap” in their learning process occurred from the presentations till the submission of the final paper as they realized that in essence, they were replicating one of the many research papers they had read in the course. All students gained in confidence in presenting as well as writing. Research skills became integral to their acquisition of knowledge and they began to realise the benefits of academic research. Thus, functioning knowledge was enhanced through authentic learning.

Students provided a number of very interesting research topics. These ranged from CSR in developing countries such as Malaysia, Singapore and China, to contemporary issues, such as the impact of the global financial crisis on CSR. A major emphasis was also on sustainability reporting but the context chosen for this research by the students differed from sensitive industries such as mining to automobile and banking industries. Other unique topics include CSR in small to medium sized enterprises, sustainability reporting by NGOs, water accounting, the sustainability balanced scorecard, corporate responses to the

proposed ETS in Australia and the climate change policy of companies.

In addition to the theoretical and practical understanding of sustainability accounting, students gained a number of transferrable skills. These included the ability to undertake independent research, to work as a team and the ability to write a paper and address a case study. Time and project management, presentation, communication, critical thinking, analytical, and interpretive skills were also enhanced. Thus, the functioning knowledge extended beyond application of course content to the real world and included lifelong skills.

Lessons learned

The insights gained from the course can be applied to the introduction of sustainability accounting courses in other universities. Student learning diaries and evaluation sheets suggest that despite the prior perceptions and biases that students had, this was a course from which they learnt much. They valued the structure of the course and enjoyed the assessment components. Working as a group and the requirement to present to the rest of the class was something that the students really benefitted from. The research project was a challenge but the functioning knowledge gained was something that students could easily use when undertaking research projects in their workplace or undertaking a higher research degree.

Students also mentioned that the learning diary enabled them to reflect upon the learning process in the course. Some of them even stated that this form of learning was more useful to them than the learning gained from sitting an exam. They also appreciated the discussion about the lecturer's current research areas and felt that this provided a human face to the numerous papers they had read – these papers were written by individuals with similar experiences to the researcher and even the students themselves. However, they did appreciate that the scale of

their projects differed from that undertaken by these academics.

Some of the course evaluation sheets suggested that students valued a course where they received hands on experience on a practical matter (sustainability). They felt that this was different from other mainstream accounting courses where emphasis was on financial figures. The lessons learnt from this course extended beyond practical and theoretical skills. Learning diaries indicated that a number of students had started considering the social and environmental aspects of their actions. Some even claimed that the course helped them in being a better person, even though this statement could be tested.

The key insight from the course is that academics must continue to move beyond the traditional course structure, prescriptions and exams and be ready to challenge mainstream perceptions. Sustainability accounting is a discipline which enables intuitive learning and students need to be exposed to different approaches to learning where emphasis is on acquiring both declarative and functioning knowledge. Sustainability accounting academics can play a role, albeit a small one, in sustainable development and this extends beyond pure research and includes the dissemination of knowledge through teaching. Based on the limited experience discussed in this article, research led teaching is critical for sustainability accounting education.

References

- Bakan, J 2004, *The Corporation: the pathological pursuit of profit and power*, Constable, London.
- Baldwin, G 2005, 'The teaching-research nexus: How research informs and enhances learning and teaching in the University of Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education', *University of Melbourne*, Melbourne.
- Bebington, J, Larrinaga, C & Moneva, JM 2008, 'Corporate social reporting and reputation risk management', *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, vol.21, No.3, pp.337-361.

- Biggs, J and Tang, C 2007, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (3rd edn) SRHE and Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Brookfield, SD 1995, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, John Wiley and Sons.
- Gore, A 2006, *An Inconvenient Truth: The planetary emergency of global warming and what we can do about it*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.
- Gray, RH, & Bebbington, KJ 2001, *Accounting for the environment*. 2nd edition. Sage, London.
- Gray, RH, & Collison, D 2002, 'Can't see the Wood from the Trees, Can't see the Trees for the Numbers? Accounting Education, Sustainability and the Public Interest'. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, vol. 13, pp. 797-836.
- Gray RH, & Milne, M 2002, 'Sustainability Reporting: Who's kidding whom?' *Chartered Accountants Journal of New Zealand*, vol. 81 no. 6, pp.66-70.
- Hazelton, J and Haigh, M (forthcoming) "Incorporating Sustainability into Accounting Curricula: Lessons Learnt From an Action Research Study" *Accounting Education*.
- Larrinaga-Gonzalez, C 2007, "Sustainability Reporting: Insights from Neo-Institutional Theory" In *Sustainability Accounting and Accountability*, J Unerman, B O'Dwyer, and J. Bebbington, (Eds.) pp.150-167 Routledge, Oxon.
- Marton F and Säljö, R 1976, 'On Qualitative Differences in Learning — 1: Outcome and Process', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol.46, pp.4-11.
- McKenzie, A, Morgan, C, Cochrane, K, Watson, G and Roberts, D 2002, 'Authentic learning: What is it, and what are the ideal curriculum conditions to cultivate it in?', in *Quality Conversations, Proceedings of the 25th HERSDA Annual conference*, Perth, Western Australia, 7-10 July, 2002, pp.426-433.
- Nowak, M, Rowe, AL, Thomas, G and Klass, D 2008, 'Weaving sustainability into business education', *Journal of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Environmental Accountability*, vol.14, no.2, pp.20-34.
- Ramsden, P 1992, *Learning to Teaching in Higher Education*, Routledge, London.
- Schaltegger, S & Burritt, R 2000, *Contemporary Environmental Accounting: Issues, Concepts and Practice*, Greenleaf, Sheffield.
- Schaltegger, S, Burritt, R, & Petersen, H 2003, *An introduction to corporate environmental management: Striving for sustainability*, Greenleaf, Sheffield.
- Unerman, J, Bebbington, J and O'Dwyer, B 2007, *Sustainability Accounting and Accountability*, Routledge, London.
- United Nations (UN) 1992, 'Chapter 36, Promoting education, public awareness and training" Earth Summit', *Agenda 21: The United Nations Program of Action from Rio UN Division for Sustainable Development*.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Ms. Deborah Veness for advice and resources on learning methods. Her enthusiasm for enhanced learning inspires others to consider the critical importance of teaching in one's academic's career. The encouragement of Professor Roger Burritt in writing this paper is also appreciated.

ENVIRONMENT EXTRA!

Business sketches path to sustainable living

8 February 2010

Major multinational corporations want to lead the way towards sustainability, arguing that global challenges present vast business opportunities.

Sustainable living by 2050 will require "fundamental changes in governance structures, economic frameworks, business and human behaviour," notes a report presented last week at the World CEO Forum in New Delhi.

The Vision 2050 - The new agenda for business report, published by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), argues that the changes are attainable and "offer tremendous business opportunities for companies to turn sustainability into strategy". They are convinced that some nine billion people can live well within the resource limits of the planet by 2050.

Growth, urbanisation, scarcity and environmental change will trigger construction of new infrastructure for transport, energy, water and waste, as well as helping to develop smarter mobility and eco-housing and restore nature.

The challenges are even expected to "spur a green race," with countries and business both working together and competing to get ahead.

The vision was developed by 29 global companies representing 14 industries. The companies ranged from Arcelor Mittal, E.ON and Sony to Syngenta, Volkswagen and Procter & Gamble.

The "must-haves" of the upcoming decade to achieve the 2050 sustainable vision include:

- Addressing the development needs of billions of people and boosting education and economic empowerment, particularly of women, and developing radically more eco-efficient solutions, lifestyles and behaviours;
- Incorporating the costs of externalities into the structure of the marketplace, starting with carbon, ecosystem services and water;
- Doubling agricultural output without increasing the amount of land or water used;
- Halting deforestation and increasing yields from planted forests;
- Delivering a four-to-tenfold improvement in the use of resources and materials;
- Halving carbon emissions worldwide (based on 2005 levels) by 2050 through a shift to low-carbon energy systems and improved demand-side energy efficiency, and;
- Providing universal access to low-carbon mobility.

Financing

The authors note that traditional financing models will not suffice and that "more innovation is needed" to create robust and affordable instruments that are suitable for mass replication. The report also foresees the emergence of "new forms of risk sharing and transfer (beyond traditional insurance models)".

The life insurance and pensions industries could play a role in bridging the financing gap for large infrastructure projects, provided that the right regulatory and risk assessment frameworks are put in place, the report suggests.

According to the authors, European life insurance and pension providers currently

manage 40% of the assets in the global insurance market, with around €5,750 billion of investment in corporate shares, bonds and other assets. Some 2-5% of these assets - representing billions of Euros - could be allocated to infrastructure projects, the businesses suggest.

Source: World Business Council for Sustainable Development:

<http://www.wbcsd.org/Plugins/DocSearch/details.asp?DocTypeId=25&ObjectId=MzczOT>
[c](#)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Social and Environmental Accountability Journal

CALL FOR PAPERS 30th March 2010

Articles in *Social and Environmental Accountability Journal (SEAJ)* cover all aspects of social, environmental and sustainable development accounting, accountability, reporting and auditing practice, research, theory and teaching. All contributions to *SEAJ* falling within the scope of the journal are welcome. *SEAJ* is a predominantly refereed journal committed to the creation of a **new** academic literature in the broad field of social accounting and provides a forum for a wide range of different forms of academic and academic-related communications whose aim is to balance honesty and scholarly rigour with directness, clarity, policy-relevance and novelty. A key feature of the journal is that papers are often of a shorter length than typical in many social sciences academic journals, up to a maximum of approximately 5,000 words in length (see Website for more detail), providing a platform for more focused academic contributions. All papers for the refereed section of the journal are double blind refereed. However, there is also a 'lighter touch' editorial reviewed section for appropriate material, and the ethos of the journal is to provide mentoring assistance where possible and necessary to emerging scholars submitting papers to either section.

**CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENTS
IN SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND
SUSTAINABILITY ACCOUNTING
EDUCATION**

THINKING AND PRACTICE:

Guest Editors: Ian Thomson and Lorna Stevenson

Submission date:- 30th March 2010

This special issue explores the contemporary landscape of social, environmental and sustainability

accounting education. Education is an important engagement channel between academic research, policy making, technical accounting developments, pedagogic theories, inter-disciplinary insights into SD governance and practice. Social, environmental and sustainability accounting education has the potential to critique accounting thinking and practice; and to transform students' understanding of how accounting can co-evolve with sustainability.

Theoretical and empirical papers are invited that contribute to transformative social, environmental and sustainability accounting education, especially papers on:

- Innovative education praxis;
- Theoretical insights into the future direction and visions of SEA education; and
- Theoretical critiques/insights into contemporary SEA education.

This special issue is not restricted to university level education.

Papers on Professional Accounting Syllabi; Continuing Professional Development; Further Education and Informal Education are welcome.

Call for papers for *Revista de Contabilidad - Spanish Accounting Review*

Special issue on "Social Responsibility Accounting and Reporting in

times of 'Sustainability downturn?'"

CALL FOR PAPERS 20th June 2010

Guest editors: Carmen Correa-Ruiz and José M. Moneva

Submissions are invited for a RC- SAR special issue on "Social Responsibility Accounting and Reporting in times of Sustainability downturn?" Although the literature on sustainability/social responsibility accounting and reporting has

increased over the last decade, further research should still be conducted to gain a better understanding of current practice in and the discourse surrounding sustainability/social responsibility accounting and reporting. Moreover, different ways of assisting all types of organizations should also be explored, in order to develop more sustainable and responsible patterns of behaviour. This research topic is even more urgent nowadays, at a time when sustainability performance does not seem to match the expectations raised by sustainable development and, moreover, and when the economic downturn could be further eroding social and environmental concerns and values and creating a “Sustainability downturn”. In reflecting and discussing on the notion of “sustainability downturn”, we anticipate that contributions to this special issue will deal with six main topics: understanding sustainability and/or social responsibility in accounting, enhancing sustainability awareness and responsible accounting education, exploring mechanisms for improved accountability and transparency, investigating responsible governance within organizations, researching management change for improved sustainability and scrutinizing effective stakeholder dialogue. Consistent with RC-SAR editorial policy, we invite contributions from a wide range of theoretical, methodological or epistemological standpoints, potentially including, but not limited to, the following:

- Sustainability and/or social responsibility in accounting:
 - Discourses around sustainability and/or social responsibility
 - Changing perceptions of social responsibility
- Enhancing sustainability awareness and responsible accounting education:
 - Responsible management and accounting education
 - Social responsibility reporting issues in governmental bodies and universities
 - Sustainability reporting as a way to enhance society awareness and responsible behaviour within corporations

- Mechanisms for improved accountability and transparency:

- NGO accountability, corporate accountability and the interplay between them
- The role of shadow accounts. What could organizations learn from the process of shadow accounting?
- Sustainable full cost accounting
- Assurance of sustainability reports and other instruments of credibility and trust
- Accountability and social responsibility in specific industries
- Socially responsible investment and corporate accountability
- Responsible governance within corporations
 - Corporate governance and accountability
 - Ethics and corporate behaviour accountability
 - Corporate social responsibility/sustainability and financial performance
- Management change for improved sustainability
 - Sustainability accounting from manager’s perspective
 - Sustainability accounting and management
 - Organizational change for social accountability
 - Sustainability performance and sustainability indicators
- Effective stakeholder dialogue
 - Engaging stakeholders in social responsibility and sustainability reporting
 - Stakeholders’ use of sustainability reporting

Submission process

Submissions are due by 20 June 2010. Authors are encouraged to contact the Guest Editors in advance to discuss their proposed topics.

Manuscripts should be prepared and submitted in accordance with *RC-SAR* notes for contributors (www.rc-sar.es) and will be subject to *RC-SAR*'s regular double-blind review process. All submissions must be done through RC-SAR’s online system at:

<http://services.bepress.com/sar>. Please specify that your submission is to the special issue on "Social Responsibility Accounting and Reporting in times of Sustainability downturn?"

Accepted papers are scheduled for publication in September 2011 (vol. 14, n. 2).

Guest Editors

Please direct any enquiries to the Guest Editors:

Carmen Correa-Ruiz, Universidad Pablo de Olavide – Centro de Investigación en Contabilidad

Social y Medioambiental (CICSMA)

Phone: +34 954 349280

E-mail: mccorru@upo.es

José M. Moneva., Universidad de Zaragoza – Centro de Investigación en Contabilidad Social y

Medioambiental (CICSMA).

Phone: +34 976767195

E-mail: jmmoneva@unizar.es

22nd CSEAR International Congress on Social and Environmental Accounting Research

In collaboration with The 13th EMAN Conference on Environmental and Sustainability Management Accounting 1st – 3rd September, 2010, The Gateway, University of St Andrews, Fife, Scotland
CALL FOR PAPERS 1st July 2010

The Annual International Conference of the Centre for Social and Environmental Accounting Research (CSEAR) will, in 2010, be held in partnership with the Environmental and Sustainability Management Accounting Network (EMAN). The conference, based as usual at the University of St Andrews in Scotland, is a gathering of academics, practitioners and researchers who focus on the teaching, research, theory and practice of social, environmental and sustainability accounting and reporting.

Environmental Management Accounting

Following the recent successful Australasian conference collaboration between CSEAR and EMAN, the 2010 Congress will explicitly encourage work in

and around the often more practically and managerially focused area of management accounting. Without diminishing work across the wider remit of CSEAR's interests, specialist streams and sessions with an EMAN theme will be encouraged.

Other specialist streams may also be arranged depending on demand from delegates with one suggestion so far received for a Large Sample SEA Research Stream.

Plenary speakers include:

- Brendan O'Dwyer, Professor of Accounting, Amsterdam Business School
www1.fee.uva.nl/pp/bodwyer/
- Stefan Schaltegger, Professor of Sustainable Management, Leuphana University,
www.leuphana.de/umanagement/projekte/eman/stefan-schaltegger-chairperson/

Papers are invited in all areas of **social** and environmental accounting and environmental and sustainability management accounting. The Conference explicitly encourages open discussion as well as close collegiality and communication around many of the key emerging issues in these dynamic and important fields.

Paper presentations are hosted in either smaller parallel sessions or workshops:-

- Parallel paper sessions will last for 75 minutes, contain 2 full papers, with presenters presenting for 20 minutes followed by discussion;
- Workshop paper sessions will last for 75 minutes and contain up to 3 papers with presenters presenting for 10 minutes each.

Anyone wishing to present their work should initially submit a title, details of authors plus a 100 word Abstract by 1st July 2010 at the latest using the email: csear@st-andrews.ac.uk. Abstract submissions will be acknowledged and

considered initially by the conference organisers for inclusion within the conference programme. Further review will be undertaken as necessary.

Delegates wishing to attend without presenting can register up until 1st of August if places allow. Full details of registration charges and conference packages will be made available on the CSEAR website in February 2010. For more detail and previous CSEAR

Conferences see URL:
<http://www.csear.co.uk/>

Funding for Bursaries for the first 10 PhD students who apply, covering the full cost of the symposium (but not travel) are currently being sought. Please visit <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~csearweb/>