

GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS CAREERS

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Terry College of Business
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Guide to Sustainable Business Careers

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“The University of Georgia is committed to tackling the world’s grand challenges, from combating poverty, hunger, and infectious disease to fostering innovation, economic growth, and a more secure future for all. The United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a call to action that align with the defining commitments of the University of Georgia.”

<https://sustainability.uga.edu/sdg/>

While there are ebbs and flows in hiring, sustainable business represents a significant, and growing, element of worldwide business. A simple definition of sustainable business is one that supports the UN SDGs. The SDGs are 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations with the aim of making the world better. You can see the goals at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> and for information on how progress is being made on the goals see <https://ourworldindata.org/sdgs>.

To continue to make a positive impact sustainable business needs to generate profits and so a sustainable business, by its nature, aims to be financially successful. In this guide, however, we will also address jobs that benefit from using “business” skills in non-commercial areas related to sustainability such as not-for-profits and universities. We will also note that jobs in businesses that might not be classed as sustainable still can give potential to help move the planet towards being a better place.



What sort of job might you get?

“All roles are sustainability roles,” is a common saying.

Most people working to make business more sustainable will not have sustainable (or a similar word) anywhere in their titles. Given there are numerous ways to make a positive impact on the world, it is helpful to be open to a range of positive roles.

“Your first foray into the business world might not have sustainability in the title, and that’s okay – more than okay, it could be a huge asset. Sustainability touches every aspect of a business’ operations, which means we need sustainability champions in every part of a business’ operations. If you’re struggling to find a role with sustainability in the title, be sure to look for roles in other areas of interest where the organizational ethos and culture encourages you to innovate and gives you agency to pursue your ideas and make an impact.”

*Isaac Harper, Program Manager, Cleantech Ecosystem Strategy,
Georgia Cleantech Innovation Hub*

Dedicated Sustainability Roles in Businesses

There are jobs, often in large organizations, which have a direct sustainability connection. Companies like Cox & Siemens have entry-level roles and the Coca-Cola Company has a dedicated group of professionals working on issues related to sustainability, e.g., redesigning packaging or working with venues to reduce their waste. Such roles might not be called sustainability. Look for other terms like CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), SDGs, Emissions, or (Social/Environmental) Impact. Unfortunately, there are often not many dedicated roles in sustainability and it can be challenging to secure one.

Such direct sustainability jobs are often in the area of what might be called operations. This involves understanding how products are made and services delivered. Many of the



skills required in such jobs may be related to project management, ensuring that everything happens in the right way at the right time. You can expect to need to deploy systems thinking as well as change management and stakeholder engagement skills.

Professionals in operations-related sustainability roles might look at how waste/emissions/material inputs can be reduced without any reduction in product or service quality. Such work can often save firms money by finding more efficient ways to operate, a true win-win. An environmental/social benefit aligned with a financial benefit. It is always worth emphasizing that sustainability can be financially beneficial (even if this is not always the case). There are financial and practical pressures in business. When interviewing, showing an understanding of these can help signal that you will be someone who can drive implementable progress.

Technical jobs exist for those with specific skills. Environmental scientists might be able to develop products to predict and mitigate environmental impact. Materials scientists might deal with trying to reconfigure products to be less environmentally damaging. While deep knowledge of science, e.g., materials, might be needed in a small number of roles, many jobs will involve dealing with the business aspects of sustainability. A role might involve putting together a business case for switching to a new more sustainable material rather than deep expertise in the materials (although some expertise is likely to develop in time).

In addition to knowing the concepts of sustainability and having motivation to try and make the change, the person in a sustainability role will need to be able to understand the financial implications of decisions. They have to engage, build trust with, and motivate stakeholders, build momentum, etc. about what will need to change and help manage through any challenges that occur in the transition. The skills needed will often be interpersonal, financial, project and change management, in depth knowledge of the wider business and customer needs, as well as an understanding of sustainability and why it matters.

Reporting And Consulting

Another form of job that is directly related to sustainability involves reporting. An in-house reporting role will involve gathering and sharing information on the operations of the firm. For example, the firm might report on their greenhouse gas emissions, materials use, or on the prevalence of human rights abuses in their supply chains. Reporting roles also require knowledge of the operations of the business. This knowledge is likely to require a less detailed but broader view of relevant issues being tackled than the direct operational roles.



Those involved in reporting will need to be able to work with a wide range of people. They will likely have to be able to compile large volumes of data, so data management skills will be useful. Some reporting can be covered by external rules. As such, the sustainability team will also have to be able to understand and explain the rules as they apply to the firm. This will also require following advances in the world of reporting.

Consulting roles may be in-house at large firms, but they are also commonly housed in specialist firms. These professionals will bring their expertise to help companies with tasks such as life cycle analysis (full environmental impact of a product from cradle to grave) or complying with reporting requirements. Many of the skills needed in external consulting are similar to the in-house reporting roles and it may be relatively easy to transfer skills between these two types of roles.

The thing that sets the internal and external roles apart is the need for external consultants to be able to quickly understand new companies and their business models. External consultants have access to structures and processes for developing and assessments and reports which may need to be created for in house reporting. The external consultant will need to be able to quickly identify any problems and likely draw on skills and experience from other firms to help address them. They may also have to deal with relatively high-level partners in other firms so strong inter-personal skills and business credibility will be valuable. Consultants also help businesses set targets, write reports, communicate efforts so communications and marketing skills are useful here.

Using General Business Skills at Sustainability-related Organizations

A special type of job is a non-sustainability role at a sustainability-oriented organization. This might be marketing at a renewable energy company, or accounting at a sustainability consulting firm. The nature of some of the work will be familiar to anyone in those professions if the context is a little different.

The good news is that having a technical business skill that is in demand can be an important way to get to work for a sustainable business. For example, as we build out a more sustainable economy there will likely be many more roles for those implementing new ways of working as well as those who can sell products and services to clients. Vital skills will include understanding and helping address any concerns that potential new adopters may face.

All Roles Are Touched by Sustainability

Any role can be a sustainability role as all jobs have ways that they can positively impact sustainability. Thus, even if someone doesn't immediately work on sustainability, they can bring their skills and interests to bear in their day-to-day roles.

“Don't just focus on your first job. Think about getting great experiences.”

Evan Pellegrino, Senior Director, Finance – FSOP, The Coca-Cola Company

Indeed, there are sometimes more opportunities to make progress on sustainability at companies that are not focused on sustainability. You can find small ways to make a positive impact. There are more likely to be easy wins still to be found given others haven't thought much about sustainability in the past. Furthermore, often these wins can save the business money as well as improving products and services, encouraging the managers towards great interest in sustainability. Major contributions towards sustainability can be made at almost any firm. You can also learn valuable skills that you can bring to sustainability roles in future.

Types of Business

Small Business

The vast majority of businesses in the world are small businesses, e.g., under 500 employees. Small businesses typically won't have a dedicated sustainable business role. The good news is that employees might find it easier to influence such organizations given they often have a small number of leaders who are likely to be empowered to make quicker decisions. (As opposed to having to send ideas up a long chain of command for approval at a larger organization). Many smaller businesses will adopt sustainability missions due to the founder of the company. Where there is a clear sustainability mission, managers might be very receptive to sustainability plans although financial



pressures, e.g., how much banks will lend to the company, will still limit what can be achieved.

One potential negative is that working for a small business often sees lower salaries. There aren't the resources to pay high salaries or have extensive benefits and formal training once in the role as might be the case at larger organizations. On a more positive note, being at a small organization can often mean great responsibility at an early age. A successful young employee at a small business may have the ability to heavily influence choices in a way that would never happen at a Fortune 500 company.

“Unless you are at a sustainability focused company, sustainability teams tend to be small. But I think there are many ways to get into companies and help out even if you don't start in a specific sustainability role. Risk, Finance, Strategy and Sourcing all have roles to play and sometimes it can be important to get into companies and learn the business as a start and then move into the role later. I don't think I am alone in saying teams are constantly looking for good partners throughout the business. My last point would be that as companies mature it can sometimes be just as important to have people embedded in functions as it is to be in a standalone function.”

Isaac Asher, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility, Fiserv

Large and Global Businesses

In contrast large businesses tend to have more bureaucratic structures, e.g., more layers of middle management, meaning it can be hard to make an impact quickly. More positively they are likely to have more structured training regimes, pay more, and have supervisors who are experts in sustainability to learn from.

There are many opportunities that arise in large companies because the company has an obligation to deliver on sustainability. The actions of a large company can often seem more functional, getting the job done, than the sustainability passion of the founder of a small company. Still, even if it isn't as inspiring as a charismatic sustainability focused leader, the need to comply with regulations and client needs can still be a powerful motivator driving large organizations towards sustainability. A company operating



across the whole of the U.S. will need to pay attention to additional sustainability requirements in states, e.g., California. This can create opportunities for work in understanding the requirements, reporting on what is needed, and generally pursuing sustainability goals even if not all states, or federal rules, mandate action.

Global companies must comply with rules that apply beyond the U.S., e.g., EU sustainability requirements are impacting many U.S. companies that operate in Europe. Many large U.S. companies now need to follow European rules. This means that jobs in such companies may be less vulnerable to political oscillations related to U.S. politics. This may make global companies a good place to look for sustainability roles in challenging times for sustainability. Multi-national firms may also present employees with opportunities to work abroad which can be an excellent way to learn about sustainability internationally. For example, poorer countries often experience problems related to sustainability, e.g., climate change, before more wealthy ones. Understanding the problems being faced provides an important way to understand the need for sustainability.

Consulting

Consulting firms come in all sizes. Companies like EY, PwC, Charles River Associates, and FTI Consulting all have work that connects to sustainability. The problems facing a consultant's clients can differ considerably, making the field potentially remarkably interesting and a fantastic way to learn quickly. Consulting is, however, notorious for work-life balance issues. Traditionally, a consultant might end up travelling for most the week and have an extremely tiring schedule, although remote work and zoom meetings have made significant impacts on some consultants' lives. Such work can give good exposure to senior managers in a range of organizations. Furthermore, the training, pay, and benefits are often particularly good leading employees to work for a few years in consulting before leveraging the experience to another role. Often these roles will be more senior than could have been secured if the employee had come in without the consulting experience.

With the growing amount of remote work there may be some progress on improving work-life balance in some firms. Consultants focused purely on sustainability may be more sympathetic to employee well-being than traditional consultants.

Not-for-Profits and Education

There are plenty of not-for-profit organizations working in areas related to sustainability. Often these are smaller organizations with lower salaries and less potential for training and career advancement. The benefit of working at a not-for-profit is often the knowledge that you work for an organization you wholeheartedly support. Your colleagues are all likely to care about the issue as much as you do, which can be a welcome change to for-profit business where attitudes vary.

Given many not-for-profits have modestly sized staffs, you should be willing to work on a range of tasks not formally part of your job. For example, if there is a special event you may be brought in to help out – e.g., set up the event – regardless of your formal title. This can be a wonderful experience but does require flexibility. Technical skills can be particularly valuable to a not-for-profit which may find it hard to compete with salaries for skilled professionals., e.g., accountants, marketers, or lawyers. If you are keen to work in a role that is more meaningful to you, and are able to accept the negatives such as lower pay, a technical background can be an excellent way in.

Government is also a possibility. These roles can exist at the local level right up to the Federal level.

Universities often have sustainability operations. Working for these can be fulfilling given the ability to interact with a large number of committed and interested people. Again, salaries are also likely to be lower than in the private sector and university decision-making can be glacial.

Teaching is also a possibility. What is needed will depend upon the type of organization. A professional background can help but a university will likely require a master's degree at a minimum and many will require doctorates. Some lecturers come to academic after a professional career. This can be a great path but obviously requires a successful sustainability-related career before you teach.

If you have good (but you may not need perfect) grades, love of learning, and willingness to commit then a doctorate may be possible. At universities, doctorates are often funded so can be accessible – you will likely need to do some work as an assistant. The downside is that these involve a large commitment of time, e.g., five years, work can be hard and sometimes discouraging. Job prospects may vary at the end of your studies. Those who enjoy education, are willing to work hard, and have a passion for sustainability and sustainable business in particular may find universities a good option



to consider. Don't be shy, no one has the perfect background to do a PhD. Talk to your professors as you may not realize it is possible for you to continue your studies.

For Terry College's PhD see <https://www.terry.uga.edu/phd/>. Do make sure you talk to your professors before applying. They can steer you in the right direction.

B2B and B2C Sectors

Sustainable businesses are in all sectors of the economy. B2B (business to business) companies can supply more sustainable products which appeal to their business buyers. For example, consider a company buying inputs to their production is reporting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions across the entire lifecycle of their products (known as Scope 3 emissions). Given the partner's emissions are part of the firm's GHG reporting then this company needs to work with partners who record and reduce their emissions. There are many opportunities like this for B2B to benefit from sustainability. Firms can sell to other firms using sustainability benefits as a key selling point.

B2C (business to consumer) firms can benefit from their sustainability efforts by appealing to consumers who care about sustainability. Thus, Tony's Chocolonely has built a successful consumer business around a mission to end modern slavery in the chocolate supply chain. CPGs (consumer packaged goods companies) can share their mission to build more consumer support and so further their mission. If you want to read more on how business, specifically from a former CPG CEO, subscribe to Paul Polman's newsletter, <https://netpositive.world/keep-updated/>.

Firms such as market insights firm Kantar often have sustainability practices, e.g., <https://www.kantar.com/north-america/campaigns/sustainable-transformation>.

Technology

Moving towards a more sustainable future is likely to involve the development and deployment of significant cleaner/greener technologies that are accessible to people in all income bands. This means an interest in sustainability fits especially well with an interest in innovation. Innovation and new business models can help create new more sustainable ways to operate.

The energy sector has significant potential given the dramatic recent drops in the price of renewable energy. One possibility is even working with a start-up in the sustainability space.

For more on sustainable innovations there are some excellent podcasts such as Hannah Ritchie's and Rob Stewart's Solving for Climate (<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/solving-for-climate/id1776500195>) or Bloomberg's Zero (<https://www.bloomberg.com/green-zero-emissions-podcast>).

How to Find Sustainable Businesses

Wanting to work for a more sustainable business is likely to involve the job seeker having to put in more effort to find the opportunities. As such, expect it to take more time to turn up leads. The good news is that sustainability jobs, when you get them, tend to be more rewarding. If you are interested in sustainability, it is generally worth the extra upfront effort and stress to find something that works for you.

How then to find a more sustainable company? Certifications and company reports are an excellent way to identify what is a sustainable business. If you participate in college recruiting, you can see what the company emphasizes in its materials. Is the company able to demonstrate how they tackle a selection of the UN SDGs?

“Sustainability starts with your mindset. It's about building habits of awareness, empathy, and adaptability. Every job, every experience teaches you something. Be curious, make connections, and trust that the path will become clearer with every step.”

*Courtney Combs, University of Georgia Class of 2025,
Marketing Coordinator at WAP Sustainability*

Company Annual and Sustainability Reports

Public companies will share their financial reports. While these give, at best, an incomplete view of the company especially as it relates to sustainability you can still learn a lot about the company from what they share. There will be accompanying text that will talk of risks to the firm, often these are sustainability related. How can you help



address these risks? At a minimum reading a company's annual report will allow you to seem well prepared during any interview you might get.

Companies, especially larger companies, often produce specialized reports detailing their progress in the area of sustainability. It is important to read these reports carefully, as some have less substance than would be ideal. In general, detail is often extremely helpful. If, for example, a company is actively monitoring its greenhouse gas emissions and reporting the numbers this is much more convincing than merely stating that the environment matters to the company.

Companies might share their materiality assessments. This will show what matters to the firm. The firm might use the materiality assessment to focus on achieving the most for the world while delivering a profitable business. The presence of a materiality assessment is generally a good sign and tells you what matters most to the firm.

B Corps and Benefit Corporations

B Corps are certified by the independent not-for-profit B Lab as being a business that is better in a variety of ways around social and environmental impact. Many of these businesses are relatively small. As such, they may be unlikely to have formal spots for graduates. For B Corps in Georgia see B Local Georgia, <https://www.blocalgeorgia.com/directory.html>.

There are household name B Corps, e.g., Patagonia, Ben & Jerry's (currently part of Unilever), Seventh Generation (Unilever), Nespresso (Nestle), and Danone North America. These might be worth considering for those looking for a corporate job with a more sustainability focus. For a listing of all B Corps see <https://usca.bcorporation.net/>.

Benefit corporations and B Corps are not the same thing (although many sustainable companies are both). A benefit corporation is a company registered with the state as pursuing a form of business that seeks to benefit more stakeholders than just the owners. (This isn't possible in all states). Benefit Corporations are therefore committed to paying attention to having a more positive impact on employees, customers etc.

If you are interested in jobs in these areas a good place to start is sustainable business focused job boards. For example, Business For Good, <https://www.theimpactjob.com/job-categories/impact-businesses> or <https://greenjobs.greenjobsearch.org/>.



How To Contact People and Interview

Networking is Critical

“Nothing guarantees your next job, but networking and showcasing your work will make you more visible and allow you to get more ‘shots on net’. The best time to start was yesterday – the second-best time is today!”

*Isaac Harper, Program Manager, Cleantech Ecosystem Strategy,
Georgia Cleantech Innovation Hub*

Networking is a vital task. Nearly everyone feels uncomfortable doing it, but you have to do it. Do not be put off if a few people don't get back to you. People are busy and you are looking for your help so rather than being disappointed if you are ghosted instead be grateful for any response you receive. You must reach out to a large number of people to be an effective networker. You simply never know who might be able to help, it is very unlikely to be the first person you talk to. Along those lines always be polite to everyone you meet. This is both the right thing to do but also a sensible choice as you never know who might have influence on a hiring decision.

Advice on networking from the University's Career Center:

https://career.uga.edu/build_your_network

Remember networking isn't just looking to talk to very senior people. There are many people at UGA who genuinely want to help. Make those connections early and keep them

Great contacts can be with your friends and colleagues and students in other years (especially those a few years ahead of you). Such people know you well and so are often most motivated to help. It is also less of a risk for them to vouch for you if they have seen you working in different circumstances over a decent amount of time. As you proceed in your career this will become even more important as you might lean on your former classmates for advice throughout your career.

Networking doesn't stop when you get your first job. Even if you find yourself in a role that is not directly connected to sustainability, continuing networking as you build a



skill set and a record of successful work can allow you to find opportunities that may appear.

The good news is that networking gets easier the more you do it. As long as you see networking as cultivating relationships – as opposed to asking someone for a job when you first meet them – then you can benefit from the connections and knowledge of your connections. This greatly enhances the number of people who you “know.”

“Become involved internally (or externally) to get the sustainability experience so many job postings require. Sign up for a task force or a committee, serve on a board that focuses on sustainability. Don't let the ‘I am too young to serve on a board’ mentality get in your way. Volunteer at sustainability related events, conferences, etc.”

*Nathan Stuck, Founder & Chief Impact Strategist Profitable Purpose Consulting
and Lecturer, Full-Time MBA, Terry College of Business*

Organizations To Investigate

The following are organizations you might want to consider looking to get involved with:

The Advanced Technology Development Center (ATDC): <https://atdc.org/>
Associated with Georgia Tech. “ATDC has been the startup garage to dozens of early-stage science and technology-based companies – among the most renowned and transformative companies ever to be born in the Southeast. The founders we support are visionary, determined, and diverse.”

B Local Georgia: <https://www.blocalgeorgia.com/>
“Making a profit and making a difference don’t have to be mutually exclusive ideas. B Local Georgia is a collection of for-profit companies each dedicated to and guided by this core principle—but it’s not just talk.” The Board Chair is Nathan Stuck who teaches in UGA’s MBA program. Listen to Nathan’s B THE CHANGE GEORGIA PODCAST, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/b-the-change-georgia-with-nathan-stuck/id1598982612>



BoldImpact ATL: <https://www.boldimpactatl.org/>

“BoldImpact™ ATL is a culture-driven sustainability initiative transforming global climate goals into bold, measurable outcomes across Metro Atlanta. For us, sustainability is more than a buzzword; it’s personal—and Atlanta’s culture is an integral part of building a vibrant future for everyone.”

Conscious Capitalism ATL: <https://www.consciouscapitalism.org/chapter/atlanta>

“Conscious Capitalism is a management philosophy and global movement that convenes and activates leaders who believe business can make a positive impact on the world.”

Georgia CleanTech Innovation Hub: <https://gacth.org/>

“The Georgia Cleantech Innovation Hub is creating a broad set of partnerships and programs to enhance market access; connect innovators to talent, capital, and customers; educate cleantech entrepreneurs; spread a culture of inclusive innovation. Ultimately, we want Georgia to be the best place for innovators to create new cleantech products, services and companies because the barriers to accessing resources are low. Join us in shaping Georgia’s future as a leader in tomorrow’s growth industries.”

Root Local: <https://rootlocal.org/>

“We are the environmental collective impact backbone organization in Metro Atlanta that focuses on learning about issues/needs within six (6) environmental sectors and taking action, making a positive impact on conservation and climate change mitigation. We connect individuals, businesses, and organizations – helping Atlantans make sustainable changes in their lives and communities.”

Additional events to watch out for:

Super South Conference: <https://supersouth.org/>

Held in the spring in Atlanta. “A cross-disciplinary program of plenary sessions, breakouts and expo with industry vertical and multiple cross-theme presentations and panels.”

Atlanta Sustainable Fashion Week: <https://www.atlsfw.com/>

Georgia’s First & Only B-Corp Certified and Zero Waste Fashion Week. “Redefining style, sustainability, and social impact — one stitch at a time.”

LinkedIn

You should have an active LinkedIn presence. Given this is a social media site, you can, indeed should, interact with other people. That said, LinkedIn is a professional site so be

careful about how you present yourself. Generally only post about education or work-related matters. A positive tone is usually something to adopt. Be very careful about positing anything too critical.

There are jobs posted on LinkedIn which can be good places to look. On LinkedIn you can also try to find alumni/others you might have a natural connection with and ask for their advice. Note don't ever start networking by directly asking for a job. Most people you ask won't be able to help even if they wanted to and so won't know how to respond. Instead, ask for a better understanding of what they do, information about the industry, and where they might expect opportunities to arise. This is vital background to being credible when you eventually do interview and can give critical advice that those not working in the industry will not know. If you convey interest and seem like a reasonable person, the people you contact may even refer you to someone else increasing your chance of finding someone who may be hiring. Such contacts can be vital to any job search.

Specific LinkedIn resources available to students:

How to leverage LinkedIn: https://career.uga.edu/leverage_linkedin

UGA Mentor Program: <https://mentor.uga.edu/>

Interviewing

“Sustainability and impact are truly areas where you can align what you care about with a career. I think one thing to focus on is that you don't have to work directly for a cause to make an impact. For example, if the environment (forest preservation, to be specific) is important to you, you don't have to work in the forestry industry. You can: lobby, be an environmental attorney, raise capital for a fund looking for creative alternatives to wood, etc. Articulate your passion and apply your skill set. You'll be amazed at the opportunities that are out there. Plus, because it is a passion point, the fact that you care will come across in an interview – and that is a big differentiator.” Gary Whitehurst, CEO at Brighter – Sustainable & Impact Investing

When interviewing, remember that sustainability is interdisciplinary. At first thought this is intimidating. You won't know everything. No one knows how to do inclusive HR and carbon accounting while also being an expert in project management and the technical aspects of innovative products. This is also liberating when you think of it. You won't have all the skills you might want but you will almost certainly have some useful skills. How can you leverage those? What skills do you have that might be in short



supply? How can you show an ability and willingness to learn what you don't already know?

The normal rules of interviewing apply to hiring for sustainability jobs. Would the interviewer want to work with you? Do you seem like you could get on with others in the organization? Being someone who others want to interact with is central to landing jobs.

Don't be afraid to display your passion. Show that you are willing to work hard because you care. That said, direct your passion. No company is perfect, think of how you can make the organization better. Be positive about how the world can get better. Frame any ideas in terms of improvement – rather than highlighting how the organization is failing.

Skills to Acquire

Sustainability can be data heavy. It is important to be able to show that you are genuinely achieving a more positive impact. As such, many sustainability jobs require the ability to wrangle copious amounts of data.

“Data analytics is a very valuable skill and is used at some scale in most jobs. Including ability to work with large data sets, create visualizations to tell the story of the data, and use Excel/PowerBi/Python etc.”

Samantha Siragusa, Sustainability Reporting Manager, UPS

Often this data won't be where you need it to be, and it is rarely in neat databases, so you will likely have to be able to work with people to acquire the data you need. You will need to be able to judge the quality of the data and understand what is useful and what is not.

Furthermore, an important skill is being able to explain what the data means. You need the ability to translate the data into clear messages. This might involve creating stories of what is happening and why whatever is happening matters. Data visualization skills can be important in the field of sustainability.



Even those who aren't working in finance and accounting will need to be able to work with financial gatekeepers. A basic knowledge of the financial side of business is often extremely helpful for most of those who go into sustainability careers.

Remember no one ever has every skill and piece of knowledge that would be useful in a new role. You will learn on the job so be willing to be flexible and convey that willingness to learn to employers. Critically, do not be modest about your current skills. Even if a job description asks for a specific requirement, think of how you could mitigate any holes in your resume and what additional skills you might be able to offer.

“The best bet for students who are interested in sustainability in business is to get into a company/area that they are interested in and find a way to pivot or incorporate this into their field.”

Praneet Venigalla, Current Student

Employers don't always know exactly what they want and so don't be afraid to apply for jobs that you think would be right for you even if you don't meet all the requirements listed. They might realize they need something different when they see the resumes, or no one might have the skills they specify leading them to cast a wider net. If you don't apply you will definitely never get the job. Applying at least gives you a chance and, if you get an interview, you can explain the skills you do have.

Things to Participate in While at UGA

UGA Sustainability and the Sustainability Certificate

UGA has an Interdisciplinary Sustainability Certificate. This can be combined with any major – you can be doing majors that might not immediately obviously connect to sustainability and still do the certificate. The certificate has requirements for courses to take, so planning early in your UGA career never hurts. That said, even if you are later in your UGA career, still look into the certificate. For example, you might find that courses you have already taken get you credit towards the certificate.



Doing the certificate will give you vital skills. It will also help you build your understanding of what sustainability is, and how you might potentially contribute. You will also get the opportunity to see speakers working in the field. Learn from these and practice your networking whenever you get a chance to interact with speakers.

Beyond the actual information learned and the people met the certificate is a credible signal of interest in sustainability. Sustainability roles do look for specific skills, but they also look for interest in creating a more sustainable world. If you have a demonstrable interest in sustainability – as shown by pursuing the certificate – this shows the employer that you care and are likely to be committed to the role.

“When considering entering the discipline of sustainability, be optimistic about creating a future for others you may never meet. The reward of sustainability is birth in one’s passion, which is innate and not developed, for designing and cultivating opportunities of advancement and resolution within an infrastructure that is highly complex in policy, educating the unlearned, and influencing stakeholders that making sizable investments absent of immediate returns are necessary and beneficial. When considering these factors and one decides to move forward, then sustainability may be the path suitable to travel.”

Kim Berry, Sustainability Consultant, Project with The Coca-Cola Company

For more information, visit <https://sustainability.uga.edu/certificate/about/>. Look for the information sessions or reach out to discuss the certificate.

If you are involved with UGA Sustainability, or doing the certificate, look out for their internship opportunities. This will help you build your resume and get more hands-on experience in the area.

Capstone Projects

What helps students get roles in sustainability? “A second-year capstone ‘real-life’ project with a company.” Ashish Pujari, Professor of Marketing at McMaster University



Throw yourself enthusiastically into any capstone projects you are engaged in, especially if they relate to sustainability. These build vital skills and can offer networking opportunities. They also give you something to discuss should you secure an interview. Being able to detail how you applied what you learned in your courses to a practical problem being experienced by an organization can be an enormously powerful differentiator at an interview. When preparing for interviews always make sure you have some examples of how you have applied sustainability thinking as they are likely to ask you something along those lines.

Terry Sustainability Courses

Terry College has a sustainability initiative:

<https://www.terry.uga.edu/about/strategic-initiatives/sustainability/>

Look for courses that relate to your interests. A good place to identify them is to find courses that count towards the sustainable certificate, look under the economic sphere, <https://sustainability.uga.edu/certificate/courses/>.

For example, consider:

- BUSN 3300: The Sustainable Business
- BUSN 7850: B Corp Consulting
- ECON 2100: Economics of Environmental Quality
- ECON 3100: Introduction to Sustainable Development
- ECON 4150: Environmental Economics
- ECON 4200: Economic Growth and Development
- MARK 4910: Sustainable Marketing Strategy (for marketers)
- MIST 4550/6550: Energy Informatics

Look at the many Study Away initiatives related to sustainability, <https://studyaway.uga.edu/>.



Conclusion

There is no single right way to do sustainability. People come at it from their own unique perspectives and with different skills and passions. That is wonderful. Leverage whatever skills and interests you have to make the world a better place.

Finding a job that helps drive the world towards a more sustainable footing can involve hard work, but it is more than worth it.

Best of luck with your job hunting.

Key Advice for Students Pursuing Careers in Sustainability:

1. **Build connections early.** *The most valuable part of your education is often the people — professors, mentors, and peers who can help shape your path.*
2. **Start simple, stay curious.** *You don't need a 10-year plan; begin with short-term goals and let curiosity guide your next step.*
3. **Find value in every job.** *Every experience teaches you something — communication, leadership, adaptability — all essential for a sustainable mindset.*
4. **Practice everyday sustainability.** *Small actions, from reducing waste to influencing others, reflect the mindset you'll need in your career.*
5. **Keep learning and adapting.** *Sustainability is always evolving, so stay open, strategic, and willing to grow beyond your comfort zone.*

Courtney Combs, University of Georgia Class of 2025,
Marketing Coordinator at WAP Sustainability

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Any errors remain my own.

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