The idea of sustainability, since its first introduction some 40 years ago, has become increasingly accepted as a new way of considering humanity’s relationship with nature. Sustainability is defined as a way of life that meets current human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Thus, sustainable living stays within the means of ecosystems to provide life-supporting goods and services, and embraces concepts of quality of life, including economic, social, and political equity. Setting goals for sustainability therefore involves intricately connected ethical and scientific questions regarding human values, social relations and the natural environment.

Many questions of sustainability remain unanswered: What qualities of life do we seek? What current needs are we working to meet? How do we plan for meeting unknowable future needs? What level of inequality do we permit? Answering such questions requires broad participation by all members of society in framing new ways of perceiving and thinking about societal challenges. The Sustainability Science Project at Texas State University – San Marcos offers opportunities for individual and community engagement into active learning and community building through its graduate program, public outreach, and collaboration with local communities in resource management.
Graduate studies – Advanced graduate studies in sustainability science are available at Texas State University – San Marcos through the Master of Arts (M.A.) and Master of Science (M.S.) programs in Interdisciplinary Sustainability Studies. These degree programs are specifically designed for present or future community leaders, to deepen their understanding of human-environment relations, and to train them in the skills necessary to address emerging sustainability issues. The programs are open to any qualified student, irrespective of past academic specialization. Graduates will be prepared for admission into doctoral programs or professional schools, and important positions in the growing field of sustainability-related careers within local, state, or federal government, regulatory agencies, non-governmental organizations, consulting firms, and industries.

Public Outreach – Lectures, seminars and workshops in sustainability science are available upon request to groups of community leaders, activists, environmentally-minded professionals and non-profit organizations. The focus is to promote sustainability literacy, to empower people to critically evaluate the origins and consequences of the social-ecological crisis, to evaluate the sustainability of their homes or places of work, and to plot personal pathways towards sustainability. The larger goal is to build the foundation for an ecologically-based communitarian ethics and practice that can respond more effectively to changing social-ecological forces and lead to more fulfilling, peaceful and sustainable ways of life.

Community collaboration – Community-based practices are aimed at restoring the resilience of human and natural communities, helping them to bounce back from adverse situations and learn to adapt to inevitable social and environmental changes. These practices are based on three interacting and interdependent principles for building social-ecological resilience: (1) learning to live with change and uncertainty; (2) nurturing biological and cultural diversity for reorganization and renewal in the presence of disturbances; and (3) combining different kinds of knowledge for transformative learning and social change.

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