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Threading Environmental Sustainability into Occupational Science Education: An Undergraduate Course in Wellness and Sustainable Living

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Occupational science and occupational therapy (OT) have important contributions to address environmental concerns such as global warming, natural resources/habitats, and health and quality of life. An undergraduate course was created by the author to provide experiential learning of these contributions and has been taken by over 100 students over seven semesters at a major university in the U.S.

Objectives of the course: students will be able to explain the relationship between sustainability, wellness and daily occupation, discuss various sustainability topics and their relevance to lifestyle choices, describe how sustainable living and connection to nature can increase health and wellbeing, navigate the commercial and cultural dimensions of everyday life with regards to sustainability, and provide peer education and health promotion activities related to sustainability. The course is available for elective credit, typically has approximately 30 students per class and meets weekly.

Methods include assigned readings, journaling, extensive class discussions, student presentations and small group projects and presentations. Lifestyle Redesign® is introduced and provides a framework for voluntary behavior change.

Results (quantitative and qualitative) include positive course evaluations, student self-report of increases in sustainable and wellness occupations and behaviors, and increased interest in OT including enrollment in the school's OT masters program. Students have reported incorporating environmental sustainability and wellness into their daily lives and their work beyond graduation. Students learn how to be sustainable, how it helps them to have better health and quality of life, and how important it is to protect the natural world and our access to it.