

Sustainability

to Swiss

Higher

Education

Institutions*

Demands 2016

Swiss Association of Student
Organisations for Sustainability
VSN-FDD-FSS

Swiss Student Union
VSS | UNES | USU

adopted by VSN-FDD-FSS in December 2015
adopted by VSS | UNES | USU at the 165th Assembly of Delegates

*Swiss Higher Education Institutions (HEI) are universities,
universities of applied sciences and universities of teacher education.

I. DEMANDS TO THE HEAD OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEI)

A. Sustainability is institutionally anchored.

- a. In particular, responsibility for the HEI's sustainability commitments should be held at the highest decision-making level or in its immediate vicinity.
- b. Specifically, this may mean creating a sustainability specialist position or sustainability council.
- c. Students must have a contact person for sustainability at the HEI.

B. Every HEI should integrate sustainability into its strategy.

C. Within the framework of the sustainability strategy, the HEI should regularly communicate about its successes and efforts. It ensures that all HEI members are reached.

- a. A sustainability report is regularly compiled and a self-evaluation carried out.
- b. The HEI is transparent about its commitment to sustainability.

D. The HEI management ensures that sustainability is meaningfully integrated into the teaching of all departments and institutes.

- a. Sustainability is integrated into the existing curriculum.
- b. For this purpose, relevant training options for lecturers and teachers should be made attractive and increased.
- c. The specific meaning of this change should be continually discussed internally by each discipline and teaching should be adapted accordingly.

E. The HEI offers an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary study program.

F. The HEI is a living laboratory and implements sustainability specifically:

- a. As a meeting point between research and education, and the workplace of many people, HEI connect important social players. This potential should be used as a nucleus for innovations. Together research, infrastructure and teaching can implement forward-looking ideas for a more sustainable future.
- b. The HEI is a place of experimentation and innovation.
- c. The everyday life of the HEI is designed sustainably (mobility, resources, infrastructure).

G. In terms of investment and partnerships, HEI adhere to transparency and sustainable investment criteria.

- a. Financial support from third parties should be communicated publically.
- b. Financial investments by HEI should be made in such a way that they do not support environmentally and socially harmful business practices.
- c. The avoidance of investment in non-renewable resources in the spirit the "divest-movement" is welcomed.

II. DEMANDS TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND CANTONS

A. The Sustainable Development at Universities Programme is to be continued:

- a. A continuation according to the program "Studentische Initiativen zur Nachhaltigen Entwicklung" (2017-2020) is guaranteed and equipped with sufficient financial means.
- b. In particular, student projects are supported.

B. Sustainability is part of the performance mandate from the confederation or the cantons to the HEI.

- a. The performance agreement contains concrete sustainable development goals in teaching and research.
- b. The performance agreement obliges the HEI to sustainable operation.

C. Research programmes in the in the area of sustainability are supported, e.g. by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

D. In the framework of swissuniversities, a new delegation for “Sustainable Development” is mandated to the board.

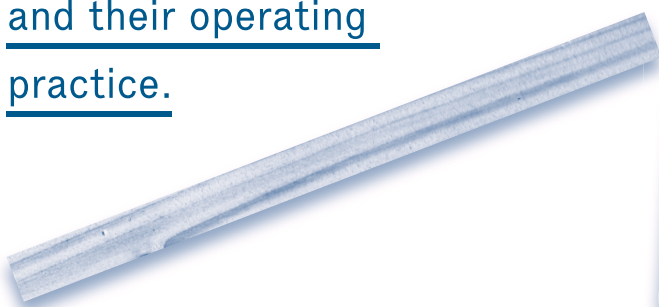
- a. All types of HEI are represented
- b. Student participation, including the right to vote, is guaranteed.
- c. The delegation develops a sustainability strategy and measures.

E. The confederation and the cantons are committed to taking research knowledge and know-how of HEI in the field of sustainability into account in their decisions and their operating practice.

III. BASIC REQUIREMENT: STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Students have to be increasingly included in planning and development processes of sustainable development, especially in the areas of teaching and everyday university life, where students are directly affected.

- a. Involvement of students in all relevant committees. Students are fully-fledged partners with regard to sustainable development at HEI and must have a right to vote.
- b. To enable and maintain student involvement, financial and structural support is available by the HEI and/or superordinate Institutions.



BACKGROUND:

The Higher Education Institutions (HEI) bear social responsibility: They educate future decision-makers, produce knowledge and innovation through their research and influence public opinion. As a public institution they also set an example. First efforts of the Swiss higher education system to anchor sustainable development in the institutions and the teachings are visible. This development and commitment is welcome. But the work is not yet done (cf. saguf: Zukunft gestalten: Nachhaltigkeitskompetenzen in der Hochschulbildung. In: GAIA 24/1(2015): S. 70–72)! VSN-FDD-FSS and VSS-UNES-USU want to encourage the HEI to assume this responsibility and urge them not only to make this a duty,¹ but also an opportunity: As an opportunity for society to present the scope for action that is sustainable and forward-looking.

VSN-FDD-FSS and VSS-UNES-USU follow the interpretation of sustainability, according to which the three areas of nature, society and economy are embedded in each other, interacting dynamically across space and time. The absolute limits of the biosphere as the basis of life need to be emphasized: The natural capital (the environment) is irreplaceable. Society is built on a natural foundation and the economy in turn is a construct of our society as a means of satisfaction of needs. In this perspective, economic motivations, such as individual profit maximization or economic growth, are not to be placed over the state of the environment on which they depend. VSN-FDD-FSS and VSS-UNES-USU thus speak for the concept of “strong” sustainability: An intact ecology is the basis for social and economic life as well as every form of economic activity. VSN-FDD-FSS and VSS-UNES-USU insist therefore on clear prioritisation of ecological sustainability.

1 In Switzerland, sustainability has a strong legal basis: the Federal Constitution emphasises the promotion of common welfare and sustainable development (Art. 2 Purpose para. 2), as well as the balance striven for by the Confederation and the cantons between nature and its capacity for renewal, and also its demands by society (Art. 74). HEI should also be committed to sustainable development (HEdA Accreditation Ordinance, Section 6 Quality Standards).

VSN-FDD-FSS

The Swiss Association of Student Organisations for Sustainability was founded in Berne in November 2013. As an umbrella organisation, it unites student organisations in Switzerland which are committed to sustainability. www.vsn-fdd-fss.ch

VSS | UNES | USU

The Swiss Student Union (founded in 1920) represents the student bodies of universities of applied sciences, of universities of teacher education and of research universities. www.vss-unes.ch

IMPRESSUM

This demand paper is based on the position paper “Sustainability at Swiss universities: Common objectives of VSN-FDD-FSS and VSS-UNES-USU” or “Nachhaltigkeit an Schweizer Hochschulen: Gemeinsame Ziele des VSN und VSS”. www.vsn-fdd-fss.ch/de/document/positionspapier