



Education for Sustainable Development: The RAU Approach

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“We prepare our students to critically reflect on the future and participate in shaping solutions to modern global challenges!”

Education is a prerequisite for promoting sustainable development and enhancing society's capacity to cope with the environmental, social, and economic challenges of the modern world.

As a university committed to contributing to the sustainable development of society, the Russian-Armenian University (RAU) sees its mission as preparing students capable of actively participating in sustainable transformation at the national, regional, and global levels. By imparting systemic knowledge on sustainable development and simultaneously fostering applied skills and competencies, RAU prepares graduates capable of working on creating solutions that combine environmental sustainability, economic efficiency, and social justice.

Key areas of sustainable education at RAU:

- Transfer of modern theoretical and applied knowledge in the field of sustainable development;
- Development of competencies for the practical application of sustainability principles in various spheres;
- Implementation of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary learning formats;
- Encouragement of critical thinking, group work, and the capacity for systemic reflection.

Depending on their field of study, RAU students work with topics such as:

- Food security and sustainable agri-systems;
- Environmentally safe infrastructure and water resources;
- Sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity;
- Development of rural and urban territories;
- Modern biotechnologies and ecosystem innovations;
- Social changes and community resilience.

Institutional Principles of Sustainable Teaching at RAU

RAU strives for the systemic integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into the academic process, including:

- Structural and substantive integration of ESD into educational programs at all levels of training.
- Promotion of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches that facilitate the integration of knowledge from natural, technical, social, and humanitarian sciences.
- Creation of an educational environment for discussion, exchange of experience, and critical analysis, allowing students to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of sustainable processes.

Special attention is paid to learning formats such as:

- Team projects on real sustainable development challenges,
- Student research initiatives,
- Dialogue platforms and workshops,
- Integration of practice-oriented cases into the academic process.

Significance for RAU's Development Strategy

Sustainable education is not only part of RAU's academic mission but also the foundation for developing active citizenship among students. Specialists trained at the university are capable not only of applying the knowledge gained but also of being agents of sustainable change in their professional fields and society. RAU views the further development of sustainable education as a strategic direction, including:

- Modernization of educational programs taking into account the UN Sustainable Development Goals,
- Expansion of inter-faculty and inter-university cooperation,
- Development of partnerships with governmental, international, and public organizations working in the field of sustainability.

Thus, an academic and social environment is formed where education becomes a tool for a sustainable future.

What is Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)?

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is an approach to learning aimed at developing the capacity of learners to act responsibly and sustainably in the interests of present and future generations. It is not only about transmitting knowledge but also about developing the mindset and skills necessary to participate in solving complex global challenges of our time – the so-called Grand Challenges (climate change, loss of biodiversity, inequality, resource conflicts, etc.). Successfully responding to these challenges requires not just technical knowledge but also sustainable solutions based on a deep understanding of the interconnections between ecological, social, and economic systems.

Key Competencies for Sustainable Development

ESD involves developing the following competencies in future specialists and leaders:

- Systems thinking – the ability to see interconnections and the complexity of processes in nature and society;
- Problem-solving skills – the ability to find practical solutions in conditions of uncertainty;
- Capacity for reflection – critical reflection on one's own actions, values, and their consequences;
- Communication and dialogue skills – including the capacity for negotiation on social norms and future development scenarios.

RAU strives to impart to its students not only academic knowledge but also these key skills of sustainable thinking and action.

Didactic Features of ESD

The central element of Education for Sustainable Development is the use of modern pedagogical approaches focused on student participation, interdisciplinarity, and the development of critical thinking.

Among these approaches are:

- Discursive learning – discussion of complex topics in a context of pluralism of opinions;
- Student participation and co-creation in the learning process;
- Problem-oriented and systemic approach to the topics studied;
- Interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary formats, combining different fields of knowledge and the experience of practitioners.

This approach fosters dialogue between faculty and students, enhances learner engagement, and makes the education process more relevant and significant from a sustainability perspective.

Faculty Professional Development

For the successful integration of sustainable development into the educational process, it is important that faculty themselves possess the relevant competencies – both substantive and didactic. Therefore, the university needs to develop professional development programs and pedagogical training for faculty in the field of ESD. University experience shows that faculty training on sustainable development topics is a crucial factor in the institutional implementation of ESD. The Russian-Armenian University considers this aspect a strategic priority in the development of its educational policy.

Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity in RAU Teaching

Interdisciplinary Approach to Learning

Interdisciplinarity suggests that complex problems and issues are examined not only from the perspective of a single academic discipline but by drawing on methods and approaches from various fields of knowledge. At the core of this approach is the exchange between disciplines and the integration of knowledge for a deeper understanding of the subject and the search for comprehensive solutions.

In their professional careers, RAU graduates will increasingly work at the intersection of various industries and sectors. Therefore, the academic process at the university is aimed at preparing students for effective interaction with representatives from different fields of knowledge and for collaborative work on multifaceted tasks. Education at RAU promotes the development of such skills in students as:

- Understanding the languages and logic of other disciplines,
- The ability to integrate diverse approaches,

- The ability to conduct interdisciplinary dialogue and find a synthesis of solutions.

Transdisciplinary Approach to Learning

Transdisciplinarity goes beyond the academic environment and involves including practitioners – specialists, organizations, communities – in the educational process, taking into account their knowledge, experience, and values in the analysis and solution of specific problems.

This approach allows for:

- The formation of practice-oriented skills in students,
- The development of the ability to work with real stakeholders,
- Deepening the understanding of the social and cultural contextuality of sustainable development,
- Developing collaborative decision-making skills.

The involvement of practitioners in academic courses, case studies, project work with external organizations, and interaction with local communities allow RAU students to acquire transdisciplinary competencies from the early stages of their studies. This includes the ability to:

- Work with people directly affected by the problem,
- Consider multiple interests and perspectives,
- Establish a dialogue between academic and applied knowledge.

Significance for RAU's Educational Strategy

The integration of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches into the educational process:

- Enhances the applied focus of programs,
- Contributes to the formation of comprehensive thinking in students,
- Prepares future specialists for work in conditions of high complexity and uncertainty,
- Makes education at RAU more relevant and socially significant.

RAU strives for its learners not only to master knowledge in their professional field but also to learn how to work in teams where academic expertise, practical experience, and public interests are combined.

Spaces for Reflection in the Educational Process

The capacity for critical reflection on content and engaging in constructive dialogue is not only a basic academic competency but also one of the cornerstones of sustainable development. Critical analysis of existing conditions and structures opens the way to alternative approaches, innovative solutions, and new perspectives that contribute to the transition to a sustainable society. However, transformation processes are usually not linear; they are full of tensions, contradictions, and competing goals that require constant discussion, reflection, and harmonization. These

contradictions should not be silenced; on the contrary, they must become the subject of open discussions and analysis to form realistic and viable approaches to sustainability.

RAU strives to be a space where:

- Future-oriented ideas are born;
- Innovations are promoted;
- Critical thinking and the capacity for self-reflection are valued.

For this, the university needs educational and communicative formats that create conditions for:

- Development of creativity,
- Open and meaningful debates,
- Deep personal and collective analysis.

Examples of such spaces:

"The Courage to Be Sustainable"

A series of interactive lectures in collaboration with RAU Green Club, EcoHub Armenia, Fridays for Future Armenia, the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Armenia, and UNDP in Armenia. The goal of this interdisciplinary course is to unite students, researchers, activists, and civil society representatives involved in the Fridays for Future movement or inspired by the ideas of environmental sustainability. Within the course, participants scientifically research key topics of the contemporary climate agenda—from climate policy and renewable energy to social justice and ecological ethics. The first meeting will be interactive: students, invited experts, and faculty will jointly determine the thematic content of subsequent sessions. Throughout the semester, each student will work on an individual or group mini project that reflects the idea of “the courage to be sustainable”. Projects must be related to local environmental challenges and align with the values of the Fridays for Future movement.

Introductory Course: Understand and Experience Sustainable Development

This course gives students the opportunity to become familiar with the key aspects of sustainable development and delve into them through interactive experience. Especially at the beginning of the course, participants receive basic knowledge and practical skills that will form the foundation for further study of the topic throughout the course. The course is intended for undergraduate students of all majors but will also be useful for senior students and Master's students interested in sustainable development, global challenges, and the future of the planet.

Main topics of the course:

- Modern global challenges (social, ecological, economic)

- Theories, concepts, and approaches to sustainable development
- Systems thinking
- Values and ethical foundations of sustainability
- Scientific approaches and methods
- Education for sustainable development

The course is implemented with the participation of faculty from the Russian-Armenian University, as well as invited experts from the academic environment, environmental organizations, and international projects in Armenia.

Course format: interactive lectures, group discussions, case studies, field assignments, and reflection.

Language of instruction: Russian and/or English (depending on the composition of the group and invited speakers).

Level: Bachelor's, open to all majors.

Course "Sustainable Entrepreneurship: From Idea to Action"

A unique course is being implemented at the Russian-Armenian University, aimed at developing sustainable student initiatives, startups, associations, and socio-ecological projects.

Course Goal: To give students striving to create change the opportunity to develop and launch their own projects in the field of sustainable development, gaining the necessary knowledge, tools, and support.

Course topics:

- Generating sustainable ideas and formulating the project mission
- Fundamentals of social entrepreneurship
- Project management and strategic planning
- Startup and NGO ecosystem in Armenia
- Creating a business model and developing the first prototype
- Financial planning and resource mobilization
- Teamwork, leadership, and initiative presentation

Learning format:

- The course includes interactive sessions, teamwork, project practice, workshops with experts, as well as open lectures.

- Meetings with successful entrepreneurs and partner organizations are planned within the course.

Post-course support:

- About half of the student teams will continue to implement their projects after the course ends. RAU and partner organizations offer:
 - o Individual mentorship
 - o Participation in Sustainable Entrepreneurship Day and RAU Idea Days
 - o Assistance in preparing project and graduation theses
 - o Connection to the mentor and expert network
 - o Support in applying for grants and competitions

Who is this course for?

- The course is open to students of all RAU faculties, regardless of their level of training.
- It is of particular interest to those who want to work in sustainable development, social entrepreneurship, environmental, or educational projects.

Format: offline / hybrid. Language of instruction: Russian and/or English.

Want to realize your idea and change the future? Join the course and become part of the sustainable change movement!

The Sustainable Development Challenge

An interdisciplinary course on sustainable development and the practical solution of urban and social challenges.

The Sustainable Development Challenge is a new format course that combines academic learning, practical project work, and an entrepreneurial approach. It is focused on achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals in the context of Armenia and the South Caucasus region. The course creates a holistic understanding of the interconnection of the economic, ecological, and social aspects of sustainable development, offering students tools and space for real transformation of the environment and society.

Course structure:

Interdisciplinary lectures

- Lecture topics cover:
 - o UN Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030)
 - o Global and local sustainability challenges
 - o Ecosystem approach and systems thinking

- o Intersection of social, ecological, and economic interests
 - o Sustainable development in different scientific disciplines
- Lectures are delivered by RAU faculty, as well as invited experts from the fields of sustainable entrepreneurship, public administration, science, and civil society.

Service Learning:

- Teamwork on a real social or environmental request in collaboration with local partners—NGOs, educational institutions, municipalities, social initiatives.
- Students choose a problem and develop solutions throughout the semester in cooperation with the selected organization.
- Examples of topics:
 - o Development of an environmental education campaign
 - o Proposals for improving the urban environment
 - o Concepts for sustainable educational programs
 - o Inclusive social initiatives

Entrepreneurial Track (Start-up Track):

- Students who wish to implement an entrepreneurial solution for sustainable development can submit an individual or team application to participate in the startup track.
- First semester:
 - o Team formation
 - o Development of a sustainable startup idea
 - o Workshops on design thinking, business modeling, and idea presentation
- Second semester:
 - o Support through individual mentorship and consultations
 - o Development of an MVP (minimum viable product) or prototype
 - o Preparation of a full business plan
 - o Final project presentation to an expert jury and investors

Course format:

- Duration: 2 semesters
- Format: in-person/hybrid
- Languages: Russian and English

- Target audience: students from all RAU faculties interested in sustainable development, social innovation, entrepreneurship, and teamwork.

Course completion outcome:

- Practical experience working with NGOs and sustainable businesses
- Skills in teamwork and social project design
- Implementation of one's own project or startup idea
- Opportunity to continue developing the initiative within RAU
- Support in writing graduation and course works based on the project

FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

A program for RAU faculty interested in integrating sustainable development principles into the educational process.

In order to effectively develop students' knowledge and competencies in sustainable development, faculty themselves must possess the relevant pedagogical, methodological, and substantive knowledge. RAU already has a number of faculty who actively work with sustainability topics within their courses or strive to do so and need methodological support. For this purpose, RAU organizes special seminars and meetings in the format of peer learning among faculty at least once per semester.

Program goals:

- Support for faculty who wish to integrate sustainable development topics into their courses
- Exchange of experience between representatives of different faculties and disciplines
- Joint study of approaches, theories, and methods of teaching sustainability
- A space for discussions, reflection, and interdisciplinary interaction

Event format:

- Workshops and training sessions on the didactics of sustainable development
- Thematic meetings: for example, “Theories and Concepts of Sustainability,” “Interdisciplinarity in Teaching,” “Education for Sustainable Development”
- Peer Learning: mutual learning based on the experience of colleagues from different departments
- Joint development of academic modules and exchange of methodological materials

Peer Learning Meetings

Regular faculty meetings are held in a peer learning format. These meetings are created for an informal, yet structured exchange of knowledge, experience, and pedagogical findings in the field of sustainable education. Each event focuses on one key topic and includes:

- Introductory presentations
- Small group work
- Open discussions and practice sharing

Key Directions for Teaching Sustainable Development at RAU

Discussion Document – Initiative of the Working Group on Sustainable Development

In various educational programs of the Russian-Armenian University, topics related to sustainable development are already addressed in many courses—in different forms and with varying depth of elaboration. In some cases, the word "sustainability" is explicitly present in the course title; in others, sustainable approaches and values are implicitly integrated into the course content, even if it is not reflected in the title. The RAU Working Group on Sustainable Development and Education for Sustainable Development initiated the development of a discussion document—with a proposal to identify and discuss the main topics for teaching sustainable development that are relevant for RAU as an interdisciplinary educational space.

Goal of the initiative:

- To create a basis for dialogue within the university about:
 - o Whether it is possible and desirable to develop a common understanding and approaches to teaching sustainable development,
 - o How to ensure the holistic transmission of this knowledge outside the scope of individual faculties or disciplines,
 - o How to form a unified educational space that supports the principles of sustainability in learning and practice.

Why is this needed for RAU?

- Sustainable development is a cross-cutting theme, covering ecology, economics, society, technology, governance, culture, and education.
- In a modern university, it is important not only to have separate disciplines on sustainability but also to integrate it systematically into different areas of learning.
- This requires internal dialogue among faculty, students, and administration: what topics to consider "basic," what competencies to impart, and what approaches to use.

Next steps:

- Holding open discussions with faculty from different areas
- Identifying existing courses and topics related to sustainable development
- Developing a recommendatory list of key topics and approaches
- Creating a map for integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals into RAU educational programs
- Supporting faculty in reviewing and updating course content

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RESEARCH

The Role of Science in Sustainable Development

Scientific research plays a key role in the transition to sustainable development, offering new knowledge, practical solutions, and innovative methodological approaches that combine theory and practice, promote public engagement, and stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration.

To respond to the global challenges of our time—from climate change to social justice—requires:

- A deep understanding of complex interconnections;
- Systems thinking;
- Ethical guidelines that transcend generations and national borders;
- And, most importantly, the active participation of universities as transformational knowledge centers.

RAU, as a leading university in the region, considers scientific research an integral part of its social and educational mission.

What do we mean by sustainability-oriented research?

Research at RAU related to sustainable development is aimed at:

- Understanding and analyzing the cause-and-effect relationships of global and local problems;
- Identifying problem areas and developing solutions;
- Contributing to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- Developing new tools and methods that stimulate innovation and social change.

This research goes beyond traditional academic boundaries and has a real impact on society, the economy, and politics.

Interdisciplinary Aspects of Postgraduate Studies (PhD/Aspirantura)

RAU actively develops interdisciplinary postgraduate programs, within which young researchers have the opportunity to work at the intersection of sciences, forming their own research trajectories in sustainable development. In this direction, RAU plans to:

- Implement joint projects with other universities and research centers;
- Support young scientists in topics related to the SDGs.

Themes of sustainable research at RAU (formed based on priorities):

- Climate, ecology, and biosafety
- Green technologies and sustainable production
- Energy and resource efficiency
- Social sustainability, migration, and human rights
- Sustainable development in law and politics
- Creative industries and digital transformation

Internal Coordination and Inter-Faculty Interaction

Within RAU's scientific and educational activities, sustainable development is viewed as a multidimensional and interdisciplinary task that requires a comprehensive approach and constant exchange of knowledge between faculties, departments, and administrative units. Each scientific field has its own priorities and views on sustainable development, so it is important to create platforms for dialogue and critical analysis where it is possible to:

- Exchange experience between disciplines;
- Build cooperation;
- Jointly develop interdisciplinary projects;
- Discuss both the positive impact of research on sustainability and potential risks and contradictions.

WORKING GROUP ON SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

RAU actively develops a sustainability strategy, including ambitious goals in scientific research aimed at addressing current global and local challenges. Within this course, the Working Group on Sustainability Research (WG Sustainability Research) has been established at the RAU Center for Sustainable Development. Its mission is to facilitate the formation and promotion of research related to sustainable development, as well as to strengthen academic and inter-faculty dialogue on these issues.

Tasks of the working group:

- Support researchers working on sustainable development topics;
- Identify priority research areas corresponding to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- Develop proposals for the inclusion of sustainable themes in postgraduate programs and scientific projects;
- Facilitate a transdisciplinary approach and cooperation with external partners (NGOs, business, authorities);
- Increase the visibility of RAU's sustainability research on the international stage.

The Working Group is open to the participation of faculty, researchers, and postgraduate students from all RAU faculties interested in developing science capable of bringing real positive changes to society and the environment.

EDUCATIONAL OFFERINGS AND COURSES

Courses

The Sustainable Development Challenge – a course that provides students from various universities, including RAU, with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in practice in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary format. Within the theme "Sustainable Development, UN Sustainable Development Goals, and Urban Change," students, together with institutions, organizations, and companies, implement sustainable projects in the Service Learning track. In the Start-up track, students develop and implement their own business ideas for sustainable (urban) development.

Sustainable Entrepreneurship – a block-format course that provides space for planning and implementing one's own startups, associations, NGOs, initiatives, and ideas.

Garage – an interactive course in English in collaboration with leading universities, which helps students develop, form, and perfect their entrepreneurial ideas.

Courage for Sustainable Development – a series of lectures with invited speakers and RAU faculty dedicated to key environmental and socio-economic changes in the world. Students examine sustainable development strategies from different perspectives and implement their own socio-ecological projects.

The Inner Side of Sustainable Development: The Role of Emotions, Values, and Worldviews – a course consisting of theoretical sessions and a practical experimental week, which helps to understand, reflect on, and deepen the inner aspects of sustainable development.

Additional Offerings and Events

Joint Efforts – a regular event organized jointly with partner universities, providing students with a platform to present their ideas, projects, and startups, receive feedback, and create a network of like-minded people.

Network of Entrepreneurship Support Centers – a network that provides experience exchange, inspiration, and new ideas through events such as "Startup Day," "RAU Showcase," and "Entrepreneurial Test-Day (ECN TryOut)". The goal of the Network of Entrepreneurship Support Centers is to promote entrepreneurial thinking and activity among students and raise awareness of entrepreneurship as a career path.

Student Innovation Center – a student platform for developing and implementing projects, initiatives, and business ideas with a positive ecological and social impact. The Center offers weekly consultations on projects, knowledge support, tools, and methods of implementation. It organizes numerous events and workshops for idea generation and skill development.

ECOLOGICAL GOVERNANCE

The Russian-Armenian University strives to contribute to the sustainable use of natural resources and the preservation of the ecological foundations of life for future generations. As a responsible educational institution, RAU undertakes the commitment to actively participate in environmental protection and develop as a sustainable organization.

The University's ecological strategy includes:

- Rational use of natural resources through the implementation of ecologically effective solutions in operational activities;
- Formation and support of ecologically conscious thinking and behavior;
- Design and reconstruction of buildings taking into account ecological criteria;
- "Green" procurement;
- Development of science and education aimed at sustainable development.

A specialized University unit is responsible for coordinating ecological and sustainable governance activities. Furthermore, responsible persons for ecological matters are designated in each department or at each RAU site, who ensure feedback and control over the implementation of ecological initiatives.

RAU SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DAY

Sustainable development can and should inspire, bring joy, and become a source of new ideas! This is the idea that the Russian-Armenian University strives to convey to its guests within

the framework of the annual Sustainable Development Day, which takes place in the spring semester and is dedicated to a relevant theme each time.

RAU Sustainable Development Day is a platform for students, faculty, researchers, initiative groups, and external partners who contribute to sustainable development in the fields of science, education, eco-campus, and community engagement. Sustainable development is the focus of attention for one day. Inspiring speeches, engaging discussions, idea exchange, good moods, and new perspectives—all of this makes the Sustainable Development Day a true celebration of meaning, action, and cooperation.