

## What is sustainability?

There may be as many definitions of sustainability and sustainable development as there are groups trying to define it. All the definitions have to do with:



*Living within the limits*

*Understanding the interconnections among economy, society, and environment*

*Equitable distribution of resources and opportunities*

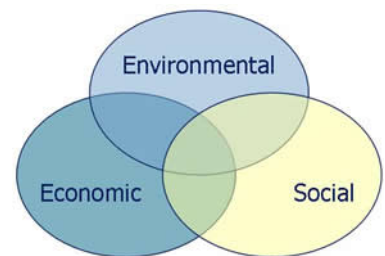
~Sustainable Measures, 2002

The consensus seems to be that “*there is no there there.*” As Provost Peter Bardaglio wrote in a welcome piece distributed during the orientation provided to new faculty joining Ithaca College, “*Sustainability is not a product but rather an ongoing process with no endpoint.*”

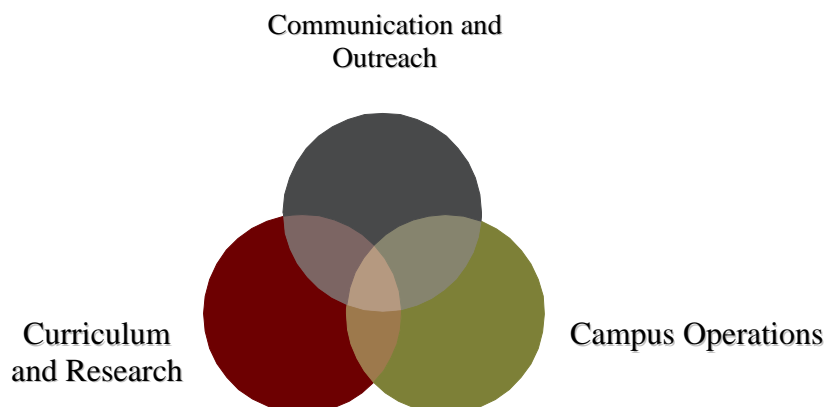
While sustainability is very real and the signs of our “positive growth” are everywhere on the Ithaca College campus, sustainability is not a “thing.” Sustainability is instead a *continuous improvement process* with no finish line; not a “*what*”, but a “*how*.”

The sustainability initiative at Ithaca College has utilized the Venn diagram (the overlapping circles) to convey what was described in 2000 by then Governor of Oregon, John Kitzhaber:

*“Imagine if you will, three overlapping circles: one representing environmental needs, one representing economic needs, and one representing community social needs. The area where the circles overlap is the area of sustainability, the areas of livability – the area where all the threads of quality of life come together. If we are to have it all, we must recognize that these three circles are not separate, unrelated entities.”*



The activities that must be undertaken to achieve campus sustainability are similarly not separate, unrelated activities. We utilize the same overlapping circle imagery to convey our belief that the power of our campus sustainability initiative is the strong interlink between the separate and distinct aspects of the College: curriculum and research, campus operations, and communication and outreach within our campus community, to our surrounding region, to other institutions, and to the world at large.



If you're still grappling with the meaning of sustainability – or sustainable development - here are some other definitions of sustainability that we like:



*“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

~ World Commission on Environment and Development. Our Common Future. (1987)

The Haudenosaunee Seventh Generation philosophy:

*Chiefs are instructed that when they deliberate on the serious matters of the Council, they are to consider the impact of their decisions on the seventh generation into the future.*

~ The website of the Haudenosaunee, comprised of the traditional leadership of the Five Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy: the Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk and Tuscarora Nations



*“Sustainable communities foster commitment to place, promote vitality, build resilience to stress, act as stewards, and forge connections beyond the community.”*

~ Northwest Policy Institute, Seattle, WA

What will become your definition of sustainability?

More to the point, what will be your *actions* to help move all of us farther down the path toward sustainability?

