

Chapter 2

The Opportunity for Growth of Sustainability Accounting and Reporting in the College Accounting Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides the reader with the following: 1) background on the numerous calls for the incorporation of sustainability topics into the college level accounting curriculums; 2) evidence that these calls have been largely neglected; and 3) further evidence for how the business community, regulators, and other professional organizations are demonstrating both the desire, and the need for, sustainability knowledge in our graduates. The intent is to support the belief that more higher education institutions (HEI) will indeed increase their incorporation of sustainability topics into their accounting curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the reader with the following: 1) background on the numerous calls for the incorporation of sustainability topics into the college level accounting curriculums; 2) evidence that these calls have been largely neglected; and 3) further evidence for how the business community, regulators, and other professional organizations are demonstrating both the desire, and the need for, sustainability knowledge in our graduates. The intent is to support the belief that more higher

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education institutions (HEI) will indeed increase their incorporation of sustainability topics into their accounting curriculum.

The next section covering previous literature, provides a review some of the earlier calls to add sustainability into the accounting curriculum from the 1990s, i.e., Gray et. al. (1994), Bebbington (1997) and Gordon (1998), continuing through and into the present. The United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education (UN PRME) a 2007 initiative to ensure future business leaders would have the skills needed to balance economic and sustainability goals added still another high-profile voice to the various calls for sustainability's inclusion into accounting and business curriculums. Just in this past decade, in 2013, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) issued a paper that encouraged accountants to use their expertise and skills to "help an organization link sustainability activity to strategies using accounting measures, tools, theories, and techniques" AICPA (Oct. 2013 page 6). Later that same year, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) added "diversity, sustainable development, environmental sustainability, and other emerging corporate and social responsibility issues" to its accreditation standards for accounting programs. (AACSB 2013) These various organizations didn't arrive at these similar calls by coincidence. They were responding to decades of suggested additions of sustainability in business education, and in practice (Mathews, 1997; Gray & Collison, 2002; America & Craig, 2004; Collison et al. 2007) to incorporate environmental and social dimensions into traditional financial reporting, management accounting and auditing courses that allow students the opportunity to consider accounting's real and potential impacts more broadly on society.

This chapter's third section will provide evidence of neglect from both the American Accounting Association's "Hasselback Accounting Faculty Directory" provided through their "Membership" link, <http://www.accountingfacultydirectory.org/>. This is the same data employed by Wertheim, P. et. al. (2022). Further evidence of sustainability's neglect is provided from a review of the course offerings at each of the 179 AACSB dual accredited accounting programs.

The fourth section will focus on current developments from both business and regulatory bodies, all of which provide evidence that sustainability accounting and reporting will continue to grow in importance over the coming decades.

The fifth and final section will share some observations from the chapter's author's work and express some conclusions drawn from the evidence provided in the earlier sections.

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