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| **Discipline:** All | **Type:** In-Class Exercise, Guest Speaker, Discussion  | **Time Commitment:** 50-60 Minutes | **Category**: Intro to SLS and Creating Sustainable Communities; GT1000 |
| **OVERVIEW:**This tool, intended to be used towards the beginning of the semester, helps instructors frame their course to students in relation to SLS and our mission of educating students to help “create sustainable communities.” It also prompts students to begin exploring additional opportunities for connecting to SLS, this semester and beyond. This tool was contributed by Jennifer Hirsch. |
| **INSTRUCTIONS:** 1. Introduce students to SLS and talk with them about your course’s SLS affiliation and how it contributes to the SLS mission and vision - to educate students to contribute to the task of creating sustainable communities where humans and nature flourish, in Georgia, the U.S., and around the globe ([read full text here](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/mission-vision-approach)).
2. Invite an SLS guest speaker to come talk to your students.
3. Have the students familiarize themselves with SLS’s activities.
4. Incentivize students to [get involved with SLS](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/get-involved) and connect what they’re learning in your course to other aspects of “creating sustainable communities.”
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| **SLS STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES & ASSESSMENT:**The Serve-Learn-Sustain toolkit teaching tools are designed to help students achieve not only SLS student learning outcomes (SLOs), but the unique learning outcomes for your own courses. Reflection, concept maps, rubrics, and other assessment methods are shown to improve student learning. For resources on how to assess your students’ work, please review our [Assessment Tools](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/tool-category/assessment). **See the end of this tool for further details.** |

**Want Help?**

Jennifer Hirsch is the contact for this tool. You can reach her at jennifer.hirsch@gatech.edu.

Introduction to SLS & Sustainable Communities

**Introduce Your Students to SLS (20 min)**

Explain to your students that your course is one of approximately 100 courses affiliated with SLS this year, and that you want to take a little time for them to understand how the course material is related to SLS’s focus on “creating sustainable communities” and think about more ways to get involved.

Introduce them to SLS:

* Show them the [SLS website home page](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/).
* Give them a sense of the broad way in which we define “sustainability” and “sustainable communities,” by walking them through our [Introduction to SLS and Sustainable Communities PowerPoint](https://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Toolkit-Docs/introduction_to_sls_and_sustainable_communities.pptx) and/or showing them the breadth of photos in our [Gallery](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/gallery).

Then, explain what your course has to do with “creating sustainable communities” and what knowledge and skills they can expect to acquire that will help prepare them to participate in this work, now and in their future careers.

* Show them your SLS course description – find it in our [SLS Courses](https://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/sls-courses) page (this will also show students how to find other SLS courses and programs).
* If your course relates to any of our [Big Ideas](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/big-ideas) – introduce them to those ideas (and to this tool as well, in the process. Point out some complementary Big Ideas and click on them to show students what they mean, which faculty have written about them, and other courses they could look into to learn about the concepts.

**Invite an SLS Speaker to Your Class (10 min or more)**

SLS regularly sends speakers to classes. We can speak from 10 minutes to a full class; we can even plan and teach a unit with you. Short talks are generally given by SLS Student Assistants, who have been involved in varied and interesting ways with SLS and are great ambassadors to other students. They share their experiences, show photos of SLS courses and activities, and talk about ways to get involved. In GT 1000 courses, they have also facilitated hour-long discussions. You can get a sense of the types of experiences they share by looking at our [Student Profiles](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Toolkit-Docs/sls_student_profiles.pdf), highlighting students who have been very engaged. SLS faculty and staff can present or help you develop units on topics such as, "What is a sustainable community?" and "What does sustainability have to do with equity?"

Please email SLS your speaker request with as much advance notice as possible. If you have difficulty arranging a speaker for the requested day and time, an alternative you could share our [Welcome to Serve-Learn-Sustain](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8_Kp9QjjqU&feature=youtu.be) video, supplemented with a review of several [Student Profiles](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Toolkit-Docs/sls_student_profiles.pdf).

**Have Students Familiarize Themselves with SLS’s Activities (approx. 10 min.)**

Have the students take out their laptops and explore the SLS website for about 5 minutes to see what interests them. Here are some ways you can structure this short activity:

* Have the students type their major – or another discipline that interests them – into the Search bar in the top right corner (e.g., “business” or “mechanical engineering”) and then explore some of the entries that come up. This brings up a variety of content, from courses to big ideas to reflections to case studies and other teaching tools.
* Ask students to find a community organization listed on the SLS website and perform independent research to learn more about that organization and how that organization’s goals link to ideas about sustainable communities and the main themes of your particular course.
* Give very little direction; simply encourage them to browse content that catches their eye.
* Ask them to look in depth at one particular section, such as the [Big Ideas](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/big-ideas) or our blog, [Reflections](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/reflections) – which includes a number of posts written by students.

Then, ask students to share some of the content that interests them.

**Incentivize Students to Get Involved with SLS (approx. 10 min.)**

Every semester, SLS offers a robust co-curricular event and workshop series, some of them focused on a yearly theme, such as Environmental Justice (2016-17) and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals (2017-18). These interdisciplinary activities, involving diverse stakeholders from GT and beyond, are intended to complement classroom learning and allow instructors to expose students to broader learning related to sustainable communities than their course alone can accommodate.

Show students the current [Events and Workshops series](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/events-and-workshops) and look at it all together. Then, ask the students which activities seem most interesting to them and point out ones that you think have the most potential to connect with content you are teaching in your class.

We encourage you to incentivize your students to participate in some of these activities, by offering extra credit for students who write reflection pieces connecting course content to an SLS event, tying events to course assignments, or making some other creative connection – such as a Scheller instructor who offered a 100% quiz grade to students who completed an SLS Buzz Course (short course).

Wrap up by encouraging students to get involved in SLS activities; to check out other SLS courses for future semesters; and to commit, together with you, to regularly revisiting the broad question of how the course is preparing students to contribute to the task of “creating sustainable communities” throughout the semester.

Additional Resources on Sustainable Communities

Encourage your students to learn more about “sustainable communities” by checking out some of SLS’ favorite resources. This list includes resources that are accessible to an undergraduate audience. At SLS, we emphasize that no one yet knows what sustainable communities will actually look like. But a lot of smart people are trying to figure this out! Read what some of them think – and join the movement!

**What is a Sustainable Community?**

Some prominent national organizations have short documents describing their definitions of “sustainable community.” Here are a few that align overall with the SLS Sustainable Communities framework: [Institute for Sustainable Communities](https://sustain.org/), [STAR Communities](http://www.starcommunities.org/education/principles/), and [National Resources Defense Council](https://www.nrdc.org/) (also, check out this great article about NRDC from *The Atlantic*).

If you’re looking for an academic article, check out “[Toward an interactional approach to sustainable community development](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S074301679800076X?via%3Dihub),” by Jeffrey Bridger and A.E. Luloff, upon which part of our SLS framework is based.

If you’d like a case study of creating a sustainable community, check out the ReGenesis case study from Spartanburg, SC. See the [ReGenesis tool](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/regenesis-case-study-creating-sustainable-community-through-collaborative-problem-solving) in our Teaching Toolkit. The tool includes a link to the case study it’s based on, which can also be assigned on its own.

It’s sometimes helpful to go back to the basics. In this case, that would be the document that launched the global sustainability movement, [*Our Common Future*](http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf), aka The Brundtland Report, published by the United Nations in 1987 (300 pgs). For a five-page excerpt with a helpful introduction, see “’Towards Sustainable Development,’” in *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader,* 3rd Edition, eds. Stephen M. Wheeler and Timothy Beatley, Routledge, 2014, pp.66-70. Want a copy? Request one from SLS.

**Sustainable Communities Initiatives**

[**Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient Cities**](http://www.100resilientcities.org/)**,** [**STAR Communities**](http://www.starcommunities.org/)**, and** [**U.N. University Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development**](http://www.rcenetwork.org/portal/) **(RCE)**

The City of Atlanta is a Rockefeller Foundation 100 Resilient Cities participant (we were the 99th city!) and the city also has a [3-STAR Community Certification](https://reporting.starcommunities.org/communities/4-atlanta-georgia) from the STAR Communities program. Georgia Tech, under the leadership of SLS, is working with diverse stakeholders on a new Greater Atlanta U.N. University RCE – a regional network to implement the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals by promoting sustainability education. [Read about our work here](http://serve-learn-sustain.gatech.edu/greater-atlanta-un-rce) – and email SLS to get involved (we even have a college Youth Network!). All of these programs approach sustainability from an integrated perspective linking environment, economy, and society.

**Web Resources**

[**What does a ‘Sustainable Community’ Actually Look Like?” by Kaid Benfield**](https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/03/what-does-a-sustainable-community-actually-look-like/72376/) **and** [**Just Sustainabilities by Julian Agyeman.**](http://julianagyeman.com/blog/)

Benfield writes for the general public from a city planning perspective, on a variety of topics related to sustainable communities.

Agyeman is a planning professor at Tufts and writes primarily for an academic audience (appropriate for upper level undergraduates and graduate students). Both he and Benfield address sustainability from an integrated perspective linking environment, economy, and society.

[**Next City**](https://nextcity.org/)

This online outlet provides coverage of urban issues facing cities around the world, with a strong focus on sustainability issues including environment, economy, and equity.

[**Project for Public Spaces**](https://www.pps.org/) **in NYC and** [**City Repair**](http://www.cityrepair.org/) **in Oregon**

Project for Public Spaces defines placemaking as: “With community-based participation at its center, an effective Placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being” ([Placemaking 101](https://www.pps.org/reference/reference-categories/placemaking-tools/)). They, and City Repair, are two of the best-known placemaking organizations in the country and pay attention simultaneously to the built and natural environments, and to people and culture as key catalysts in the creation of healthy places.

**Books, you say? Can’t leave those out!**

[*Engineering and Sustainable Community Development*](https://www.amazon.com/Engineering-Sustainable-Community-Development-Technology/dp/1608450708/ref%3Dsr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1506377334&sr=1-1&keywords=engineering+and+sustainable+community+development)*,* by Juan Lucena from Colorado School of Mines, is the only academic book on this list. It is actually intended to be used as a textbook for teaching engineering in ways that will help students contribute to sustainable community development, including social justice. It is relatively easy to read and includes some very helpful case studies.

[*Sustainable Happiness: Live Simply, Live Well, Make a Difference*](https://www.amazon.com/Sustainable-Happiness-Live-Simply-Difference/dp/1626563292/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1506375840&sr=8-1&keywords=sustainable+happiness), edited by Sarah Van Gelder and the staff of *YES!* magazine,is a book of short, easy-to-read essays based partly on research, partly on personal stories by key thinkers and shapers of the sustainability and community engagement fields.

[State of the World books](http://www.worldwatch.org/bookstore/state-of-the-world), published yearly by Worldwatch Institute, focus on a different sustainability theme every year and commission chapters by some of the field’s top thinkers from around the world.

[*Flourishing: A Frank Conversation About Sustainability*](https://www.amazon.com/Flourishing-Frank-Conversation-About-Sustainability/dp/0804784159/ref%3Dsr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1506377077&sr=8-1&keywords=flourishing+a+frank+conversation+about+sustainability), by John Ehrenfeld and Andrew Hoffman, features an extended interview with John Ehrenfeld, former Director of the MIT Program on Technology, Business, and Environment and a pioneer in the business sustainability field. Ehrenfeld discusses the evolution of his thinking over the years and dares the business world, and all of us, to think more boldly and more systemically about the deep changes we need to make to create a sustainable society.

SLS Student Learning Outcomes

1. Identify relationships among ecological, social, and economic systems.
2. Demonstrate skills needed to work effectively in different types of communities.
3. Evaluate how decisions impact the sustainability of communities.
4. Describe how to use their discipline to make communities more sustainable.\*

\* *Note:* SLO 4 is intended to be used by upper division, project-based courses such as Capstone.