I. Goal: The goal of this activity is to educate college students about sustainability, as viewed through the lens of the three pillars of sustainability.

II. Methodology: This symposium is run as a panel consisting of three speakers, each of whom will represent one of the three pillars of sustainability—environmental, economic, and social interests. One of the main objectives of this symposium is to show how true sustainability required achieving a balance between these three opposing interests. There will be an introduction, and then each speaker will give a short presentation on sustainability issues as viewed from their pillar. Afterwards there will be breakout groups where students will come-up with ideas on how to address different issues related to sustainability.

III. The Three Pillars of Sustainability

a. Social Sustainability (social equity)
   i. The ability of a social system, such as a country, family, or organization, to function at a defined level of social well-being and harmony indefinitely.
   ii. Problems like war, endemic poverty, widespread injustice, and low education rates are symptoms a system is socially unsustainable.
   iii. Recognizes that there poverty/hunger and the environment are connected issues

b. Economic Sustainability
   i. The ability of an economy to support a defined level of economic production indefinitely.
   ii. The world’s biggest apparent problem, which endangers progress on the environmental sustainability problem.
   iii. Questions the idea of growth—how realistic is it to base economic indicators (GNP, GDP) on growth in a finite world?
   iv. Is the alternative, a steady-state economy, realistic?
   v. Alternative economic/social indicators: Genuine Progress Index (GPI), China’s “Green GDP”, “Natural Capitalism”

c. Environmental Sustainability
   i. The ability of the environment to support a defined level of environmental quality and natural resource extraction rates indefinitely.
   ii. This is the world’s biggest actual problem, though since the consequences of not solving the problem now are delayed, the problem receives too low a priority to solve.
   iii. Crucial issues: climate change and the biodiversity crisis, compounded by exponential human population growth, consumption and poverty

IV. Outcomes

a. Students should gain a better understanding of the intricacies of sustainability

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1. [http://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/ThreePillarsOfSustainability.htm](http://www.thwink.org/sustain/glossary/ThreePillarsOfSustainability.htm)
2. [http://rprogress.org/sustainability_indicators/genuine_progress_indicator.htm](http://rprogress.org/sustainability_indicators/genuine_progress_indicator.htm) and [http://www.gpiatlantic.org/gpi.htm](http://www.gpiatlantic.org/gpi.htm)
3. [http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,THE_JF,,CHN,,4dcb94e12,0.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,THE_JF,,CHN,,4dcb94e12,0.html)
Sustainability Symposium Lesson Plans
Mike Matthews

b. Students should gain a better understanding of the interplay of society, economics and the environment

c. Students should gain a better understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of various economic/social indicators.