

## Switzerland

### “META-COURSE” - Implementation of a higher-education course on education for sustainable development

#### CONTACT

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<b>FOCUS</b>	Education/Learning	Research / Development
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#### DESCRIPTION

<i>Type</i>	Non-governmental in cooperation with the academic community
<i>Working language(s)</i>	French (German)
<i>Target group(s)</i>	French-Swiss and Swiss Universities
<i>Starting year &amp; duration</i>	2005 → the aim of the initiative is the general introduction of meta courses in the universities, which will assume responsibility for them by 2014
<i>Budget &amp; funding sources</i>	Private academic foundations initially and universities subsequently
<i>Partner organisations</i>	Universities and in some cases NGOs
<i>Stakeholders</i>	<p>Students and former students: they are invited to suggest topics for each course followed.</p> <p>Teachers: teachers in different disciplines interface with each other, very often discovering their colleagues' fields of activity. These exchanges should in some cases further collaboration in academic research on long-term social challenges (by nature interdisciplinary).</p> <p>Exchanges with civil society are encouraged and should help to ensure that the topics addressed remain rooted in reality.</p>

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#### OBJECTIVES

- Draw attention to the environmental and socio-economic dimensions inherent in a discipline (which are not always covered in a traditional course);
  - Further knowledge of the social, cultural, political, environmental, economic and technical context in which future graduates will move, with emphasis on reflection on the ethics of responsibility.
  - Encourage reflexive, critical and creative thought
  - Highlight the complex and systemic character of issues relating to sustainable development;
  - Stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers in relation to both teaching and research.
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**METHODOLOGY** General context: see <http://www.geduc.org/home/mission.html> - Other document: see Critères META-cours.doc

Metacourses are not supplementary courses; they involve the introduction of specific topics into a traditional course. This is an innovative concept which is based on exchanges between faculties and disciplines on questions of an ethical, political, legal, cultural, technical, economic, social or environmental nature.

Metacourses are aimed at highlighting the complex and systemic character of issues relating to sustainable development and furthering, through a transdisciplinary approach, awareness of the ethics of responsibility. The principle is simple: for an hour or two, a guest teacher takes part in the course of a faculty or discipline other than his or her own. He or she will throw new light on a topic and will have the task of encouraging reflection on the ethics of responsibility. In addition to opening students' minds to these challenges, this approach should encourage teachers to integrate new approaches into their teaching or research. This project involves the participation of four or five different stakeholders: the teacher responsible for the half-yearly or annual course, the guest teacher, GEDUC and the participants in the course.

Former students and civil society can play the role of fifth stakeholder, for they are encouraged to point to the gaps in certain courses to cope with the responsibility that future graduates will have to assume towards society.

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## RESULTS & EVALUATION

*Results* To reach the entire student population through at least one metacourse. Impacts envisaged: students and teachers will be made aware of global problems and the ethics of responsibility.

*Strengths* The practice initiated by the project is designed to become a permanent educational practice in universities.

*Weaknesses & risks* There are two main risks. The first is the difficulty of finding the time for a metacourse in an already crowded programme, but it should be made a priority and good explanations should succeed in convincing the teacher concerned. The second risk concerns the participation of students once the course has been announced: it has been noted that attendance declines when students learn that this course will not form part of an examination subject. This risk can be eliminated if open questions (bonus or compulsory) on the problems addressed in the metacourse are included in examinations.

*Why do you consider this a good practice?* Participative, simple, effective and inexpensive

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