



Teaching With LINKS Sustainability Options



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I have been a user of LINKS Supply Chain Fundamentals for about 4 years, first using it in introductory undergraduate and graduate SCM courses while at the University of Oregon. I am now teaching a sustainable supply chain course for students concentrating in SCM at Colorado State University. The objective of the course is to get students to think critically about all aspects of the triple bottom line (financial, environmental and social) within supply chains. The course is built around discussing supply chain activities and how these impact sustainability and how sustainability impacts the supply chain.

Supply chain students at CSU had not been exposed to simulations in any of their courses. I was aware that LINKS recently introduced recycling and recovery decisions in the supply chain simulations. So I spoke with Randy about how something like this might be applied to my sustainable supply chain course. Randy suggested that I might use the simulation as a capstone assignment in the course.

Since the course emphasized making the case for/against sustainability (i.e., was it really worth it financially to address the other two aspects of sustainability?), running a simulation where they would have to do just that was a great way to tie everything together. The LINKS Supply Chain Management Fundamentals Simulation was run in the final four weeks of class with the students being able to not only make the standard LINKS sourcing, manufacturing, distribution and transportation decisions, but also decisions on recycling and recovery programs.

The students were required to write a final paper for the course making the case for or against the value of sustainability. They were able to not only use the assigned readings, course discussions, and information from industry guest speakers as support for their case, but also the experience they had from making the actual decisions and seeing results. I really feel they got more out of the class and their program, but also submitted much more thoughtful papers thanks to their experience with the simulation.

The feedback I have received from students has been positive. For example, one student commented, "I can honestly tell you that LINKS overwhelmed me so much in the beginning, but I learned so much from doing the simulation." Another said, "I enjoyed LINKS very much – it appealed to my finance/excel-oriented side." The consensus was that it was challenging and provided reinforcement for the information from all other course materials. I intend to continue using the simulation in this course.