

Business leaders gathered at Valparaiso University this fall for a conference that aimed to enhance companies' sustainability and corporate responsibility efforts – areas that are increasingly crucial to success in today's marketplace – by providing training and a greater understanding of sustainability reporting (<http://www.vu-gri.org/>).

Hosted Oct. 23 by Valpo's MBA program and the College of Business Administration (www.valpo.edu/cba), a series of speakers drew over 400 business leaders and interested individuals from Northwest Indiana and around the country. Attendees learned about the Global Reporting Initiative, which provides the world's leading standard in sustainability reporting guidelines, and how to more effectively develop individual corporate sustainability reports in accordance with those guidelines.

Conference organizer Elizabeth Gingerich, associate professor of business law and co-editor of Valpo's [Journal of Values-Based Leadership](#) (pictured below), said businesses that demonstrate they value the importance of sustainability can reap significant benefits.



“By strengthening the three pillars of sustainability – people, planet and profit – companies are significantly impacting their bottom lines,” Gingerich said. “Consumers, investors and other stakeholders are becoming more sophisticated in their decisions about with whom they choose to do business. An increasing number of people are not just looking at whether a company talks about sustainability and corporate social responsibility; they want an independent assessment of the impact that company is making.”

The array of speakers at the October conference addressed:

The business case for sustainability; Measuring, managing and reporting a company's economic, environmental and social performance; The challenges of reporting; Sustainability strategy planning; Reporting in the utilities, mining and public agency sectors; and Certified training in Global Reporting Initiative reporting.

GRI sustainability reporting guidelines are used by two-thirds of Fortune 1000 companies to evaluate their economic, environmental and social performance achievements and deficits affecting various stakeholders. In 2008, Valpo became the third institution of higher education in the United States

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and fourth in the world invited to participate in GRI's Matchmaker program (www.globalreporting.org/matchmaker), an initiative that connects corporations with professors and students learning about and critiquing sustainable business practices. The Matchmaker program strengthens GRI reporting by having a university critique the reports of both a company and the independent engineering or financial auditor that assessed it. Gingerich, in collaboration with several faculty and students, completed Valpo's first assessment of a company (Ecological Designs Inc.) and its independent auditor (Symbiotic Engineering Inc.) through the Matchmaker program in the summer of 2008. "Corporations that make a commitment to reporting on their level of sustainable operations find that they are in a better position to secure more business or to attract new investors," Gingerich said. "We teach Valpo business students that values-based leadership and environmental stewardship are crucial components of business success, and hosting this conference is a perfect fit with that mission."

"The Matchmaker initiative perfectly aligns with our own emphasis on [values-based leadership](#) and environmental stewardship as crucial components of business success," Bruce MacLean, Director of the Valparaiso University Graduate School of Business, said. Through Valparaiso University's efforts with the Matchmaker program, Master of Business Administration (MBA) Sustainability students will gain experience with sustainability reporting and become familiar with GRI guidelines.