Imagine my shock as a newcomer in Canada, seeing people bring their own mugs to coffee shops and reusable bags to grocery stores. These practices were not commonly seen growing up in Jakarta, Indonesia, where I was accustomed to a fast-paced lifestyle and the convenience of single-use plastics. At the time, I was unaware of the impact our actions have on the planet and our responsibility to care for the environment.

During my undergraduate studies at Gustavson, I was introduced to the concept of sustainability and its interconnectedness with business operations. Through case studies and group discussions, I gained a deeper understanding of the environment and how business can be a force for good. Then, thanks to the co-op program, I was able to explore a career in sustainability and put theory to practice with Synergy Enterprises, a sustainability management and consulting firm based in Victoria, BC.

Synergy Enterprises was founded on the principle that businesses can empower climate action and lead the world towards a regenerative and sustainable future. As a co-op student, I had the opportunity to learn from, and work with, sustainability experts who were enabling businesses to reduce their impact on the planet. Now, in my current role as the communications and project manager at Synergy, I am responsible for managing projects to help businesses measure carbon emissions, develop decarbonization strategies, become carbon neutral and communicate results.

It is incredibly satisfying to be part of a team that is passionate about working with businesses to protect, preserve and restore our natural environment and local communities. Every day brings new challenges and learning opportunities. From working with airports on carbon management initiatives to advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by managing a nationwide program for tourism organizations, I feel our work is creating an impact across a diverse range of business sectors.

It is essential to acknowledge that the mandate of business has shifted over time. Companies must recognize their role in addressing climate change and take steps to mitigate their environmental impact, adopt low-carbon operations and demonstrate transparency with customers, employees, investors and other key partners.

Some ways my team works with businesses to help them contribute to a low-carbon future include: adopting and promoting sustainable practices, such as reducing energy and water consumption, minimizing waste and using eco-friendly products and materials; developing a pathway towards net-zero emissions and an action plan to achieve it; engaging with key partners to align sustainability goals and objectives; implementing green procurement policies and mandating sustainability standards via contractual clauses or other mechanisms; and investing in sustainable innovation, such as green technologies or products with a lower environmental footprint.

Today’s sustainable business tools are a critical starting point for much-needed transition, although they may not be enough on their own—business needs to keep innovating and finding new ways towards regenerating the systems they rely on. I am honoured and proud to be part of the process.

So, how did I go from having no background in sustainability to working for a company that empowers businesses to create change towards a regenerative future? By being curious and willing to learn, which enabled me to share what I’ve learned to inspire action. “

I studied at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. Exchange is a chance to experience school in a different country, but also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spend months travelling to new places, meet people from around the world, engage in a different culture, try new foods, try new things and truly grow as a person.

Tokyo Point of View
by BCom student Aisha Hunter-Bellavia

I studied at Waseda University in Tokyo, Japan. Exchange is a chance to experience school in a different country, but also a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spend months travelling to new places, meet people from around the world, engage in a different culture, try new foods, try new things and truly grow as a person.