



Office of Sustainability
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Sustainability Advisory Council (SAC) – Executive Summary

Academics & Research Meeting, December 11th, 2020

11:00am - 12:30pm

[Full recording available here](#)

Attendees

Steve Ackerman	SAC Member
Mo Bischof	SAC Member
Jacob Dolence	SAC Member
Mark Guthier	SAC Member
Sarah Schutt	SAC Member
Natalie Tinsen	SAC Member
Nola Walker	SAC Member
Alex Frank	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Deb Gurke	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Andrea Hicks	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Nathan Jandl	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Cathy Middlecamp	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Jake McCulloch	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Missy Nergard	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff

Summary Notes

I. Welcome & Goals for Today

a. Leadership

- The Office of Sustainability’s current Director of Sustainability Education and Research, Prof. Cathy Middlecamp, will be retiring. Prof. Andrea Hicks of Civil and Environmental Engineering will be taking on this role. Andrea’s work focuses on the environmental and sustainability impacts of emerging technologies

b. Last time

- Focused discussion on unifying principles/values
 - These comments also mean there will be some tweaks to our process. Think about in the next couple months how we will be folding our values into our final report and how to use these effectively

II. Context for Our Discussion

a. Considerations for Sustainability in Research (Steve Ackerman)

- We’re poised to expand efforts in sustainability related research with the new federal administration coming in

- Four key priorities of the new administration: COVID-19, Economic Recovery, Racial Equality, and Climate Change. All of these coincide with our sustainability priorities
- We're a leader among our peers in this realm but we need to leverage those efforts and grow that reputation
- b. *Considerations for Sustainability in Academics (Mo Bischof)*
 - This is the time for us to be bold. The shifts, pivots and flexibility that COVID has forced us to make lays the framework for taking bold and immediate action
 - Three themes that kept popping up for me:
 - Collaboration: Our very large, decentralized institution makes our work challenging, but with our history of interdisciplinary teaching, research, and outreach we have some great experience. What are those new and different opportunities to create those collaboration opportunities?
 - Communication / Celebration: How do we communicate and celebrate? I think about storytelling. We need to elevate the work that's already been done. How do we engage more faculty and instructors both curricular and co-curricular?
 - Commitment: We as an institution are amazingly committed to the Wisconsin Idea and I see that same commitment in this group. The Wisconsin Experience and its four pillars serves as a foundation for students for their personal and academic growth. Aligning our work with these pillars puts us in a good space.
- c. *Student Subcommittee Debrief (Natalie Tinsen)*
 - We had a very lively discussion last week around personal experience in academics. We came up with multiple examples to consider in the discussion today:
 - Developing a SustainabilityEdu similar to the AlcoholEdu that all students must participate in
 - Adapting learning outcomes for each class that touches sustainability and general education requirements relating to a basic, yet comprehensive, understanding of sustainability – as a whole, we want to make sure each graduate has baseline expertise in sustainability
 - Increasing sustainability classes that relate to other fields, not just environmental issues
 - Increasing visibility of those classes for students outside of environmental studies – it's often difficult to find sustainability courses that contribute to graduation requirements.

III. Focus Area Overview

- Reminder that focus areas came from listening sessions, our staff experience, and from the STARS gap analysis that compares UW–Madison results to peer school results (similar schools and Big 10)
 - Helped us identify specific areas we had gaps (by credit)
 - Looked at credits where we had particularly large gaps

IV. Group Discussions

- Following our discussion, what resonated with you?

- “If we want to recruit faculty in sustainability, as their core focus area, we need structures to support them”
- “Departmental-wide pushes for including sustainability courses/learning outcomes in their field”
- “I’m intrigued with Natalie’s suggestion of incorporating sustainability content into a course (or two) *in* the major”
 - This comment was in reference to the suggestion to identify or develop sustainability courses within each major, ensuring all students are taught how sustainability relates to their field of study
- “This concept of a sustainability institute to be a focal point of campus research and education”
- “I’m excited by the OPPORTUNITIES to advance sustainability efforts through this activity”
- “How can we more broadly learn as campus community members of the research and scholarship that is occurring in our own backyard at UW Madison?”
- “Moving forward with the goal of creating an Institute makes sense in so many ways, particularly by providing a “home” for research/education around Sustainability”
- “Allow staff to set a block of time to pursue sustainability initiatives”

V. Next Steps

- Please complete the survey ranking the academic focus areas
- The next three meetings will follow a similar model as today; be on the lookout for the draft focus areas for Engagement.
- Future meetings will be held at this time (second Friday of the month at 11:00am)