



Office of Sustainability
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Sustainability Advisory Council (SAC) – Executive Summary

Planning & Administration Meeting, March 12th, 2021

11:00am - 12:30pm

[Full recording available here](#)

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|---------------------|---|
| Jessica Arp | Guest Speaker |
| Matt Mayrl | Guest Speaker |
| Tod Pritchard | Guest Speaker |
| Jacob Dolence | SAC Member |
| Cheryl Gittens | SAC Member |
| Emma Heins | SAC Member |
| John Horn | SAC Member |
| Jason King | SAC Member Alternate (Athletics) |
| Nick Novak | SAC Member Alternate (VCRGE) |
| Natalie Tinsen | SAC Member |
| Giri Venkataramanan | SAC Member |
| Nola Walker | SAC Member |
| Michael Williams | SAC Member |
| Josh Arnold | Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff |
| Alex Frank | Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff |
| Deb Gurke | Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff |
| Nathan Jandl | Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff |
| Jake McCulloch | Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff |
| Missy Nergard | Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff |

Office of Sustainability

University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, Wisconsin 53706

<http://sustainability.wisc.edu>

Summary Notes

I. Welcome & Goals for Today

a. *Operations Initial Prioritization Results*

- Planning and Design, Green Energy and Electricity, Sustainable Buildings, and Sustainable Landscape Management were all about equal in order of priority
- Pulse survey returned similar results with Sustainable Buildings and Green Energy and Electricity at the top

II. Context for Our Discussion

a. *Considerations for Sustainable Planning and Administration (Matt Mayrl)*

- When we talk about planning at the university, there are two buckets to consider: More formal planning and administrative efforts and the equally important informal process by which change is made at the university but which is often not as openly transparent.
 - Formal planning:
 - Just before the pandemic affected the university, we were in the final stages of publishing the university's [strategic framework for 2020-2025](#)
 - Senior leadership decided a lengthy document is not the approach for us; if we can't distill our priorities into something more digestible, it's going to be harder for folks to wrap their heads around it
 - There are five pillars within the framework: three never change--education, research, and service to community--while the other two pillars--high performing organizations and a vibrant campus culture--are the "how" of how we get to our core mission
 - A high performing organization strives for:
 - Greater performance within our financial benchmarks
 - Everything we do is resource-dependent; putting that front and center has been a focus of the Chancellor, because resource development and generation is not a dirty word but an important component of what we do and enables us to achieve our goals
 - Growing and strengthening of our workforce
 - Continuing to build partnerships with key agencies across the state
 - Practicing sustainability in all that we do
 - Nesting sustainability within the strategic framework puts it amongst the key ways that we build a strong organization and the how that we deliver our top three missions
 - Our primary contribution to local, national and global sustainability is driven by the bright young minds we curate and the research that we provide to the world
 - Informal planning:
 - Top down approaches only go so far (COVID tested the limits of that)
 - There's an art in setting the vision and harnessing the power of a decentralized management structure; it is both frustrating but beautiful

- Because of our decentralizing, we have the opportunity to gather intellect, feedback, direction, and autonomy from a lot of bright people
 - Forcing top-down edicts is not the best way to get the most of our organization; it's also about empowering people towards a common purpose
 - The way that Chancellor drives change informally is by consistency in the questions that she asks, by continually asking questions and nesting those questions in a plan to advance our mission
 - The Chancellor consistently asks about sustainability issues in all audiences; having that be continually raised as part of the conversation has helped put it more front and center of all decision makers across campus
 - This approach can ultimately have a much larger impact than sustainability being nested in the strategic framework
- b. *Considerations for Sustainable Planning and Administration (Jessica Arp)*
- The WFAA is an independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to support UW–Madison by building pride and affinity in our alumni and the public to secure resources for all of the operations on campus
 - Our All Ways Forward campaign has raised over \$3.6 Billion since it began in 2013
 - Our leadership shares the concern about the need for sustainability, climate change, and global warming; our leadership believes that fossil fuels and consumption are at the root of that issue and we are taking steps to address those concerns
 - When you look at investments, our professional investors manage the university's endowment until those funds are called upon by the unit, those investment professionals and our policies are designated and decided by the Investment Committee of our Board of Directors
 - Our individual investment team does not select or buy individual stocks as other institutions do with much larger endowments, but we hire outside managers to invest funds on our behalf in order to preserve the independence of the WFAA
 - We have historically not shared portfolio-specific asset information
 - This is in part because this is changing constantly with short-term and long-term investments, and also because we have certain nondisclosure requirements with the financial managers we hire
 - We can say generally that fossil fuel investments have been decreasing overtime based on market conditions
 - Our responsibility as investors is to make the best decisions for the long term value of those investments and endowments, highest possible return without undue risk in order to grow the value of gifts to the UW
 - Excluding certain assets at the demand of those who are not giving the money could be viewed as a violation of that fiduciary responsibility

- Donors represent the widest array of folks possible, despite many differences they may all have, they all care about the university and are giving because they support priorities here
 - One of the biggest challenges we face as a fundraising organization is growing polarization and opinions about what the university is doing, how money is spent, etc., we need to think about that as we make decisions as an organization about where money is allocated
 - We do believe that UW-Madison can play a key part in solving these challenges that we face in sustainability and climate change and we have a number of development directors working in these areas, including the Nelson Institute of Environmental Studies and a number of other areas of the university
 - We believe that we can also increase the influence that we can have here by honoring the intent of the donors and where their money goes and have confidence in donors of the future that we will maximize their gift
 - Any changes that would happen to our policies about the Board, investments, would need to be created and approved by our investments committee.
 - That would include divestment or any specific asset class and those discussions have happened over time and happen regularly
 - This will continue to be an important part of the conversation as we know it is incredibly important to stakeholders within and external to the university
- c. *Considerations for Sustainable Planning and Administration (Cheryl Gittens)*
- The role of the Chief Diversity Officer supports the mission of the university as it works to create a diverse, inclusive, and excellent learning and work environment for all students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners at the university
 - It is through collaboration, consultation, seeding new initiatives, and coordinating programs, services, and events that our division supports the campus in achieving its diversity goals
 - Institutional Statement on Diversity: <https://diversity.wisc.edu/>
 - This embodies and embraces the work of sustainability
 - I want to acknowledge the broad scope of what our office tries to address when we think and talk about diversity: how is it defined? Who are we representing?
 - Our work represents race, ethnicity, sex, gender, gender identity or expression, marital status, age, sexual orientation, country of origin, language, (dis)ability, socioeconomic status, and affiliations that are based on culture, political, religious or other identities--diversity is broad in what it represents in our global society
 - One of the roles of the Chief Diversity Office is to oversee the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement (DDEEA), many use “inclusion” as a placeholder but we thought it was important to include educational achievement as it was a foundation of the way our division was formed
 - Focusing on strengthening, broadening, and promoting student diversity ensures that we can establish a pathway for a diverse citizenry to join UW–Madison
 - DDEEA is an enterprise to support and embody the university’s commitment to diversity, equity, and education in principle and in practice, in our efforts we

value community, inclusion, organizational excellence, transparency, accountability, and social justice

- The breadth of our commitment and our contributions to diversity, equity and inclusion work span a lot of territory and include efforts to create a more diverse community through education and professional pathway programs, scholarship, recruitment initiatives, policy oversight, engagement with shared governance committees, compliance and oversight of things like affirmative action and employee disability resources and services
 - We provide outreach and engagement and grassroots opportunities on campus and in the community, we see ourselves as campus partners to educate, to represent thought leadership in diversity and inclusion, to recognize where there may be barriers that should be reduced to ensure that we can create an accessible and inclusive environment for all
 - One of our primary goals this year has been to engage our campus community in inclusive education to help understand the shared value of diversity and inclusion across campus
 - It is through inclusion and education efforts we can cover the most ground in changing our campus climate to assure that there is diverse representation in thought and idea in planning, in policy, and in planning and policy execution that we are effective in being the excellent institution that we are.
 - I will conclude by saying the diversity and inclusion efforts of our campus are here to be partners in creating an environment for all people, through that representation we are the most innovative and excellent institution that we can be.
- d. *Student Subcommittee Debrief (Natalie Tinsen, Michael Williams, and Emma Heins)*
- The student subcommittee identified Sustainability Integration as one of the top priorities
 - Committee believes sustainability should not only be kept at the forefront of decision-making, but implications after the fact ought to be considered as well
 - Social Sustainability should be a tenet in all decision making
 - Divestment was a major topic of discussion. Almost every student talked about getting as much transparency as possible in the [WFAA] portfolio; we want to put our money where our mouth is and have very clear divestment targets

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)
- We are matching the performance or nearly just below many of our peers in this category
- Note on Social Sustainability focus area: The action items you see here could fit in many of the other focus areas we've covered, think about whether this is its own focus area, or a theme that could be applied to everything we do

IV. Group Discussions

- The informal process of strategic planning that comes from our voices and priorities is extremely important
- I'm thinking a lot about the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion and how that work has transpired around the world
 - Sustainability seems to be following a similar path in that to truly express it as a value/ priority, it needs to become strategy and articulated as such, it cannot be a separate entity, but become a lens that we use when approaching decisions on campus so that we can truly integrate it in our work
 - It's important that we rely on a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches
- How important sustainability is to the campus and what opportunities we have ahead of us
- Sustainability is a core value of the institution and there needs to be clear and consistent expectation of what we mean by that, there's a need for key leadership focused on sustainability
- We need to redesign the narrative of sustainability, it's not just energy, it's creating inclusive environments and so much more
- Social sustainability should be spread throughout our priorities, not a standalone item
- I was able to break down social sustainability for my own understanding and I appreciate everyone helping me get there
- This is a large initiative that requires resources, if we're serious about this we need serious resources
- Great brainstorming about the possibilities for sustainability investments, perhaps having a student on the board and encouraging an endowment for sustainability
- Valuing sustainability and maintaining this momentum we're building from humanity to energy
- There's always been these reasons to not divest, that there aren't the resources or funding to do so, I want to move away from that narrative, I think back on historical events funding was used an argument for many different things such as why slavery should not be abolished.
 - This focus on funding over human lives and mental health and happiness and prosperity was something I was thinking about a lot during this discussion

V. Next Steps

- a. Please complete the [follow-up survey](#) by Tuesday (3/16) as it will be informing our next round of listening sessions.
- b. Invite your colleagues/ student to participate in our [listening sessions](#)
- c. Look for draft pre-read materials in early April