



Office of Sustainability
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Sustainability Advisory Council (SAC) – Executive Summary

Fall 2021 Update, November 9, 2021

1:00pm - 2:15pm

[Full recording available here](#)

Ashley Cheung	SAC Member
Cheryl Gittens	SAC Member
Mark Guthier	SAC Member
Jason King	SAC Member
Jocelyn Milner	SAC Member
Alex Pierce	SAC Member (Alternate)
Sarah Schutt	SAC Member
Natalie Tinsen	SAC Member
Deb Gurke	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Andrea Hicks	Office of Sustainability and Supporting Staff
Alex Frank	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

Summary Notes

I. Welcome & Goals for Today

- There are a few new SAC members this year
 - Ashley Cheung representing ASM
 - Joclyn Milner from the Office of the Provost
 - Jason King from Athletics
 - Natalie Tinsen transitioned from her role representing ASM to serving as the at-large undergraduate student
 - Our University Staff representative Jacob Dolence has left the university, so we are working with University Staff Congress to designate a new representative
- The student sub-committee is also continuing their work and welcomed five new members

II. What Happened Last Time – Review Sponsor Comments

- Our sponsors were impressed with the volume and detail of the SAC’s work
- They asked us to stage the recommendations of the SAC to identify quick wins and to establish the action groups to see to those wins – they want to better understand the “how”
- Their second ask was for us to develop a definition of what sustainability means in the context of the university

III. What Has Happened Since Last Time:

a. *Achieving quick wins*

- O’Brien Solar - located in Fitchburg, provides local renewable energy and access for student field trips, other educational and research opportunities
- Releasing a survey to assess sustainability culture and literacy across campus
- Designating the Office of Sustainability as a sponsor for student organizations
- Received Green Ribbon Schools Postsecondary Sustainability award from Department of Education
- Designated as Fair Trade University
- UW–Madison signed onto the Midwest Climate Collaborative as a founding member
- Continued Amplifying BIPOC Voices in Sustainability series and Sustain UW podcast

b. *Long-term planning*

- External review of SAC recommendations from EAB
 - “Overall, University of Wisconsin Madison has a robust Sustainability Draft Report that parallels its peers and wider trends across higher education...Many of the goals outlined in the plan, such as UW Madison’s goals of carbon neutrality, zero waste, and sustainable procurement are ambitious and in line with industry leaders... University of Wisconsin Madison leads its peers with the focus it places on the DEI and wellness aspects of sustainability, an area of growing importance worldwide as the definition of sustainability expands.”
- Nelson Institute sustainability workshop
- Standing up zero waste action group
- Continued work on the Resilience Commitment in advance of climate action and adaptation planning
- Beginning data collection for next STARS report

c. *Feedback*

- Has this all been packaged and promoted? How are we telling the story? I encourage you to continue to share this with SAC members so we can celebrate on all of our behalf.
- Several ways in which we’ve amplified these wins:
 - Office of Sustainability Newsletter
 - Coordinated internal and external communications with the University Communications team
 - Published successes in our most recent annual report

IV. Discussion – What’s Next?

a. Staging

- 1-year recommendations: “Quick wins” and, as appropriate, associated action groups
- 5-year recommendations: Action groups that need to be set up now but will focus on planning and further defining the scope of programs/ projects
- 10-year recommendations: Action groups that will be formed after the quick wins and/or planning in completed
- We’re staging this to align with our evaluation metrics, our staging charts our path to the highest STARS rating of Platinum.
- Staging process is on slides 10-15 in the meeting deck
- Year 1 Needs: Support and Guidance
 - We’ll be setting up one on one meetings with SAC members to discuss possible staff to serve on the different action groups
 - In addition to staff and/ or faculty, we envision a member of the student sub-committee will serve on each action group
 - We’ll also be asking for your support and guidance in identifying potential quick wins in your areas of expertise
 - We do not plan on asking SAC members to serve as chairs on these action groups

b. Discussion

- Does this staging provide clarity on how to implement our recommendations?
 - Yes, it does. I like the fact it outlines how we are measuring our success [using STARS] and tracking progress
 - I appreciate seeing it laid out this way and the articulation of the quick wins matched up to the staging and action items, it will be important to have the Office of Sustainability continue to assert priorities from your point of view. You are great at gathering input and expertise, but ultimately you’re the experts and you know both what the quick wins and highest gains are, and what we have capacity to do. You continuing to articulate and assert the direction of the working groups will be valuable.
 - This is really helpful as a distillation of the full document. It still has a lot of nuance and detail to hook people. This is all exciting and important, but have you talked about turning it the other way and starting with clearly identifying what is urgent? It still just seems like a list.
 - STARS ratings are consequences, but have we identified what the motivating thing of this work is? It’s been hard to get people hooked in because there are a lot of words. It may not generate the excitement it’s worthy of because of its detail.
 - If the endpoint is something aspirational, as opposed to just STARS platinum, that might give us more of that “wow” factor
 - Identifying what sustainability is and is not will help inform our community
 - It could be helpful to continue the color coding within the quick wins to demonstrate what those wins are addressing in the overall strategy/timeline
 - Question: Do these groups end at any point?

- Not necessarily. Rather, the work would be integrated into the appropriate campus units, the meeting of the action groups may wind down, but the work would not.
 - I think it's great we've distilled down to Culture, Purpose, Practice and the nine topic areas, but it would be helpful to think about the messaging from an external point of view and coming up with a value proposition. What is the "stop drop and roll" of these sustainability priorities? What is the "brush your teeth twice a day" mantra? What can we say in one phrase that will knit together all this work? We need that public relations, marketing, branding, statement piece.
 - From your experience, what factors will contribute to the success of this approach?
 - Each of the work groups should develop an agreed upon objective statement that outlines the goal of their group. The Office of Sustainability should identify the broader primary objective for that group when they begin.
 - With an eye to delivering reports to our sponsors, I'd ensure that the groups are meeting regularly with an eye to how they're meeting and contributing to the goals of the SAC.
 - Outside accountability and involvement from students and a clear understanding and communication of what's going on [in the working groups]. We need to keep students informed and included in the conversation and ensure that they feel like they can provide input.
 - What challenges could we face in implementing this approach? How might we overcome them?
 - Keeping on track with this schedule. What are the forces that will be pushing us to stay on track? Ensuring that there is continuous momentum.
 - Projects fail at the beginning not at the end. In addition to being clear about working group objects, we should provide a framework for the group's accountabilities and success metrics.
 - Question: Have we identified how the SAC/ the Office of Sustainability will interact or engage with each of the work groups?
 - OS Staff/ Office of Strategic Consulting will project manage each group and support the chair to make sure things are getting done. The question of staff resources is very relevant and something we continue to assess.
- c. *Sustainability Definition*
- We know this is long, but we hope this reflects the work of SAC this past year and most importantly is somewhat instructive in how we can implement our recommendations.
 - Can we live with this for now, insofar as it can be used as a working definition when communicating with our sponsors about the work of the action groups?
 - To what end are we defining sustainability? It's so broad. Are we clear on seeing a vision of what it means for us to achieve a sustainable campus? It feels like there's something missing that helps us know when we've arrived there.

- One of the pushbacks is that it includes too much, or it is too vague. We agree. We are trying to touch on a lot. What we're doing here is identifying some touchstone items of what needs to be involved in sustainability as a process. We see sustainability as a process, not an end result.
- It's very important to have something this detailed as a founding document, but there's absolutely no way I'd be able to recite this. This is where the world of academia clashes with the consumer/ end user whose behavior we need to change and whose affinity and buy in we need. I'd push us to get to a "snackable" definition. I think you could take the phrase already in there, something like, "for those of us working in sustainability work groups, we're implementing things that will achieve equitable, just, and healthy management of our planetary environment to ensure thriving of future generations." One sentence. All the rest is just the "how." We need a core phrase we can all say and recite or it's gonna be super hard for work groups to move ahead on taking action. There's gotta be a "so what, for what?" question that we can ask and answer immediately.
- There needs to be one statement and this [working definition] can be the embellishment on that statement. We need that headline that people can associate with. I'm not convinced that sustainability is a process. That suggests to me that we're content to be processing and not to become sustainable or more sustainable.
- Process says it's iterative, we learn as we go, it's evolving. What we think is sustainable today, I hope it pales in comparison to what sustainable means 25 years from now.
- I like the word process in this. It's continually striving for sustainability. It's not something we can achieve and be done with, it needs to be continually worked on. The student subcommittee met and one of the main takeaways was that this definition definitely pertains to healthy management of our planetary environment. But it doesn't state why sustainability is important to humans. It's not just for planetary health, but also for the survival of humans. Stressing the necessity of sustainability for the human race is something that the subcommittee wanted to see in this definition. They also wanted to reduce the amount of times the word "sustainability" is used.
- I wonder if it is more digestible to frame this as mission/vision/guiding principles for public-facing communication.
- I'm not sure that we've defined sustainability specific to UW–Madison yet. We could substitute any university here. Is there any tidbit we could include to set us apart?

V. Communications

- When approved by our sponsors, how can we best support you and your teams in communicating these plans? Ranked in order by SAC:
 - Keep you in the loop with press releases, articles, etc.
 - Send you language to include in emails to staff, colleagues, etc.
 - Maintain internal website/ drive for communication updates and materials
 - Make contact with your communications team
 - Provide talking points to you individually
 - Leverage particular social media channels
- Are there any other communications or outreach strategies that we should keep in mind?
 - Maybe we could host some kind of event/ panel to inform the campus and community about the SAC's work and other sustainability initiatives on campus.

VI. Next Steps

- Update recommendations and distribute feedback
- Share updated recommendations with sponsors
- Engage with SAC member to identify/ recruit action group leads
- Next meeting in January