



Office of Sustainability

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Sustainability Advisory Council – Spring Listening Session Summary

Listening Session #2A: *March 18th, 2020 12:00pm – 1:00pm*

Listening Session #2B: *March 23rd, 2020 7:00pm – 8:00pm*

Listening Session #2C (students only): *March 25th, 2020 7:00pm – 8:00pm*

[Full recordings available here](#)

Listening Session Structure

Since beginning its work in October of 2020, the Sustainability Advisory Council (SAC) has reviewed specific categories of campus sustainability as defined by the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS): Academics, Engagement, Operations, and Planning & Administration. For each category, the SAC developed, reviewed, and created a list of prioritized focus areas.

Three listening sessions were offered to solicit input from university and community members on these prioritized focus areas. Listening sessions included a short introduction summarizing the work of the SAC, the STARS categories, and the prioritized focus areas. The majority of the time was devoted to group discussions organized around the four STARS categories. In each group attendees responded to three questions:

1. What do you like about the SAC's prioritized focus areas?
2. What don't you like about the SAC's prioritized focus areas?
3. What would you change about the SAC's prioritized focus areas?

Facilitators guided the group discussions and took notes. For stakeholders unable to attend one of the live listening sessions, a survey was made available to collect their response to the same questions.

Below is a summary of listening session discussions and survey responses. If a topic was raised multiple times during a listening session or in a survey response, a number is included in parentheses next to the topic.

Themes and Notes

I. Support for Focus Areas

a. Overall

- Very well thought out

b. Academics

- Sustainability Institute (x2)
 - Good framework to bring together sustainability efforts across divisions
 - Sustainability should be a campus-wide effort, cross-disciplinary
- Sustainability Learning Requirement
 - There is a push for this in the business school
 - Like the idea of this being an activity, not a course
- Sustainability Research
 - Always needed as we reach the climate tipping point
- Campus as Living Lab
 - Ties learning (and perhaps a learning requirement) to our “place”
- Honors & Recognition
 - Rewards are good but the ongoing effort is more important
 - Low priority here makes sense (x2)
 - Getting recognition from leadership is important

c. Engagement

- Nature is an important educational environment
- Sustainability Leadership & Advocacy
 - Good opportunity for collaboration & learning from peers
 - Should be a top priority (x2)
- Sustainable Athletics (x2)
 - Good opportunity to amplify our efforts
- Sustainable Events
 - A chance to show-off
- Alumni Engagement
 - Important that we use all our resources

d. Operations

- Sustainable Planning and Design
- Green Energy and Electricity
 - Action items developed
 - Monitoring building energy use
 - Campus as a model for how to do this (x2)
- Sustainable Food
 - Should also address replacing labor with plastic / packaging
 - Connecting to farms
- Sustainable Procurement
 - Integration with social justice
 - End sourcing from prison labor

e. Planning & Administration

- Support for all and much inter-relation in this group
- Sustainability Integration
 - Key to making SAC priorities happen (x2)
- Social Sustainability

- Important to include every voice
- Sustainable Investments (x2)
 - Good way to align SAC with governance bodies on campus
- Green Revolving Fund
 - Good initiative, not really a focus area, should be off the list (x2)

II. Focus Areas that Should be Higher Priorities

a. Academics

- Campus as a Living Lab
 - Need to lead in putting learning into practice
- Sustainability Learning Requirement

b. Engagement

- Sustainability Onboarding and Training

c. Operations

- Sustainable Food

d. Planning and Administration

- Sustainable Investments (x4)
- Employee Engagement
 - This is a problem that all should be involved in solving

III. Items that are Missing

a. Overall

- Acknowledgement of the settler-colonialism framework in this process (x3)
- Recognize other cultures and worldviews (x5)
 - Include the knowledge of those who have lived in this place long before colonialism
 - Also in the education students receive
- There are links between sustainability and wellness (for our whole community, the plants and animals that comprise our living world) (x5)
- An enforcement plan and/or plan to ensure action against the strategy (x4)
 - Assessment through implementation
 - Metrics and KPIs (x2)

b. Academics

- How do we change the narrative that sustainability courses are only environmental courses? (x2)
- Sustainability Institute, Sustainability Faculty, and Campus as a Living Lab need to be better explained
- Nothing focuses on graduate students
- How do we build a campus-wide effort to educate and engage on sustainability? (x2)
 - Students have to seek it out but shouldn't have to find the time and effort to engage in this topic
 - How do we do this on such a decentralized campus?
- Don't force sustainability into courses where it doesn't add value / broaden the learning substantially
- Mental health impacts and considerations

- Financial impacts on students (don't increase costs to add a sustainability requirement)
- Incorporating Environmental Justice in Courses
- Diversity in faculty
- How do we implement (on campus) the leading research from our campus?

c. Engagement

- Should student org leaders be required to have sustainability training?
- Should alumni engagement be combined with student engagement
- A culture of sustainability needs to be embedded throughout campus
- Not just advocating for policies but finding ways to overcome state / administrative barriers

d. Operations

- Biodiversity (more than pollinators, also plants and soils)
- Water (stormwater and water quality)
- Low-hanging fruit for buildings
 - LEDs; low-flow fixtures; training for efficient operations (e.g., window use); building automation
- Incentives to purchase better / more efficient items (not always the cheapest) (x2)
- Freezer program similar to biosafety cabinet program
- More bike support infrastructure (racks, lockers, year-round biking support, place to change clothes)
- Improve sustainability of current energy sources before switching supply of energy
 - Investing in our own infrastructure
- Include footprint reduction / understanding of new space needs in master planning
- Build for longevity
- Set more tangible goals (e.g., % clean / renewable energy) (x2)
 - STARS Platinum
 - Second Nature Climate Commitment
- Incorporate native land practices
- Include more culturally relevant food options

e. Planning & Administration

- Coordination across units (perhaps a map of how they intersect with sustainability priorities)
- Social Sustainability / Diversity should not be a single recommendation, consider distributing across all areas (x4)
 - Ensure funding for these initiatives
- Add public health to social sustainability

IV. Implementation Considerations

a. Overall

- Incentives are important to spur action, particularly for students
- These changes require mindset changes, this is hard work and we should acknowledge the effort required
- It is important to listen to, and learn from, students

- Inclusivity, and intentional inclusivity is vital
- Connect and collaborate with the City and other Non-profits
- Clarify how they relate to STARS

b. Academics

- These shouldn't be a burden on students / faculty, implementation should allow flexibility (x2)

c. Engagement

- Mass communication is very difficult in our decentralized system
- Communication is good but action is better