



Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) **for Colleges and Universities**

The Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) is designed to assist you in assessing the extent to which your college or university is sustainable in its teaching, research, operations and outreach. “Sustainability” implies that the major activities on your campus are ecologically sound, socially just, economically viable and humane, and that they will continue to be so for future generations. Academic institutions vary considerably in how they approach sustainability: some concentrate on minimizing their ecological impact through changes in operations; others emphasize sustainability in the curriculum.

This survey of sustainability at your college or university asks you to give impressions of your institution’s accomplishments on seven critical dimensions of higher education:

| | |
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The SAQ is designed to stimulate discussion and further assessment by campus representatives who are knowledgeable about and responsible for the activities mentioned in each section.

If you wish to guide the process yourself, we suggest the following: 1. Assemble 10-15 representatives from critical campus constituencies, including students, faculty, staff, and administration; 2. Review the purpose and objectives of the exercise, the nature of

sustainability in higher education, etc.; 3. Take about 30 minutes for each person to fill out the questionnaire individually or for small groups to work on specified sections; 4. Facilitate a discussion in which the whole group reviews the questionnaire section by section and gathers impressions; 5. Brainstorm possible next steps to strengthening sustainability on your campus. Note: The exercise could take 2-3 hours or more, and may be best carried out over two sessions.

Directions: Please read through the definitions of sustainability and education for sustainability (p.3) and review the questions prior to completing the questionnaire. This will give you a sense of how we understand “sustainability.” Then answer each question to the best of your ability. Remember that this questionnaire is seeking your impressions on each dimension, so you need not have detailed information on all courses offered, transportation and recycling programs, etc., in order to complete it. If you lack enough information for a reliable impression, please indicate that you don’t know the answer to that question.

It is important to recognize that most institutions will not “score high.” Very few, if any, institutions embody sustainability on all these dimensions. Sustainability is not yet a major focus of the academic disciplines or the wider economy in which higher education functions. Thus it is difficult for any college or university to be very advanced in implementing sustainability.

Thank you.

Definitions of sustainable development, sustainability and education for sustainability:

- Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Brundtland Commission (United Nations), 1987)
- Sustainability is an evolving paradigm for planning and decision-making. Sustainability is a promise. It is a dynamic condition, which requires a basic understanding of the interconnections and interdependency among ecological, economic, and social systems.” (The Sustainability Education Center, 2002)
- Historically, the term “sustainable” arose among those with environmental concerns, and most of the literature and assessment instruments reflect this emphasis. However, it is increasingly recognized that sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing social justice issues. There can be no sustainable communities and institutions without social justice. So too is humane consideration toward the whole community of life an essential part of true sustainability. An academic institution committed to sustainability should help students understand the roots of today’s injustices and motivate them to seek justice and humaneness in full integration with understanding the roots of environmental degradation and modeling environmentally sustainable practices. (John B. Cobb Jr., “Sustainability and the Liberal Arts” conference, 1998)
- Education for sustainable development is a dynamic concept that utilizes all aspects of public awareness, education and training to create or enhance an understanding of the linkages among the issues of sustainable development and to develop the knowledge, skills, perspectives and values which will empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. (From the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development website, 2005)
- The concept of sustainability – which, at a minimum, addresses how humans can live on the planet over time in a manner that protects cultural and biological diversity, recognizes and appreciates ecological limits, offers just and accountable governments and economies for all, and draws on the human capacity for adaptive learning and innovation – offers a tremendous challenge for education. It requires educational institutions to rethink their missions and to re-structure their courses, research priorities, community outreach, and campus operations. By preparing students – and the whole campus community – to be more adept decision makers in the increasingly complex, dynamic, and uncertain future that we all face, integrating sustainability into all of the major activities of educational institutions also presents a tremendous opportunity. (Glasser & Calder, 2005)

Date: _____

Name: _____ Position: _____

Institution: _____

CURRICULUM

1. Indicate the extent to which your institution offers courses which address topics related to sustainability. (Such topics could include globalization and sustainable development; environmental policy and management; environmental philosophy; nature writing; land ethics and sustainable agriculture; urban ecology and social justice; population, women and development; sustainable production and consumption; and many others.)
[Please circle the appropriate number on this and the following questions]:

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please list any courses you are aware of in which such topics are taught: _____

2. What courses do you regard as essential that are not being taught?

3. Indicate the extent to which sustainability is a focus woven into traditional disciplinary education in science, math, literature, history, the arts, etc.?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please comment on how this is done: _____

4. Are undergraduates required to take a course on issues related to the environment or sustainability?

_____ No _____ Yes If yes, please describe: _____

5. The shift to sustainability requires critical thinking about the role of the institution in its social and ecological systems. Circle which of the following your institution (through individual, group or departmental efforts) attempts to teach its students:
- a - how the campus functions in the ecosystem (e.g. its sources of food, water, energy, as well as the endpoint of waste and garbage)
 - b - a sense of place: the natural features, biota, history and culture of the region
 - c - the institution's contribution to a sustainable economy and sustainable local communities
 - d - how the institution views and treats its employees (such as staff and faculty involvement in decision-making, their status and benefits)
 - e - the basic values and core assumptions that shape the content and methods of the academic disciplines

Comments: _____

RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

6. a) Estimate the amount of faculty research or scholarship being done in the various disciplines in the area of sustainability (for example, renewable energy, sustainable building design, ecological economics, indigenous wisdom and technologies, population and development, total environmental quality management, etc.).
- 0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please list any faculty research or scholarly activities you are aware of related to sustainability:

- b) Estimate the amount of student research or scholarship being done in the various disciplines in the area of sustainability.
- 0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please list any student research or scholarly activities you are aware of related to sustainability:

7. a) What percentage of faculty members teach or do research on sustainability issues?
 _____ %

b) What percentage of faculty members do you estimate would be interested in teaching and research on sustainability issues?
 _____ %

8. Does your institution have established multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary structures (such as an institute or center) for research, education and policy development on sustainability issues?
 _____ No _____ Yes If yes, please describe: _____

OPERATIONS

9. The chart below lists some of the operational practices emphasized by institutions moving toward sustainability. Please complete the chart, adding a check (√) for prime project areas and for more information needed, and indicating the extent to which your institution has implemented these practices using the following scale: 0 – don’t know; 1 – none; 2 – a little; 3 – quite a bit; 4 – a great deal.

| <u>Practices</u> | Rate from 0 – 4 | Prime project area | Need more info. | Please comment (and attach additional information) |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| <u>Building construction and renovation</u> based on green design principles (LEED, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Energy conservation</u> practices (including lighting, heating, cooling, ventilation, windows, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Waste reduction</u> practices (such as e-communications, double-sided copying, “waste free lunch” program, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Recycling</u> of solid waste (including paper, plastic, metal, e-waste, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Sustainable food</u> program (such as local, organic, and/or fair trade food) | | | | |
| <u>Water conservation</u> practices (including efficient toilets, minimal irrigation, harvested rainwater, etc.) | | | | |

| <u>Practices</u> | Rate from 0 – 4 | Prime project area | Need more info. | Please comment (and attach additional information) |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| <u>Sustainable landscaping</u> (emphasizing Integrated Pest Management practices, native plants, biodiversity, minimizing lawn, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Sustainable transportation</u> program (including bicycle/pedestrian friendly systems, car pools, bus pass programs, biodiesel projects, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Green purchasing</u> from environmentally and socially responsible companies (products are non-toxic, water and energy conserving, etc.) | | | | |
| <u>Reduction of toxic materials</u> and radioactive waste | | | | |
| <u>Environmental or sustainability assessments / audits</u> | | | | |
| Others (please specify): | | | | |

10. What do you see when you walk around campus that tells you this is an institution committed to sustainability?

11. To what extent are your operations practices integrated into the educational and scholarly activities of the school?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please provide examples of this integration: _____

FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND REWARDS

12. a) To what extent does criteria for hiring recognize faculty member contributions to sustainability (in scholarship, teaching, or campus and community activities)?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Describe how such considerations are weighed in these decisions: _____

b) To what extent do criteria for tenure and promotion recognize faculty member contributions to sustainability?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Describe how such considerations are weighed in these decisions: _____

13. To what extent do criteria for hiring and promotion recognize staff member contributions to sustainability (in regular responsibilities and campus and community activities)?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Describe how such considerations are weighed in these decisions: _____

14. To what extent does your college or university provide significant faculty and staff development opportunities to enhance understanding, teaching and research in sustainability?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please describe recent faculty or staff development opportunities in these areas: _____

OUTREACH AND SERVICE

15. A sustainable institution supports sustainable community development in its local area and in the surrounding region through projects and partnerships with primary and secondary schools, local governments and businesses. It may also seek international cooperation in solving global environmental justice and sustainability challenges through conferences, student/faculty exchanges, etc. To what extent is your institution involved in sustainable development work through formal partnerships or relationships at regional, national or international levels?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Please describe: _____

16. What local sustainability related community service, service learning and/or internship programs exist at your institution?

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

17. Institutions committed to sustainability provide students with specific opportunities and settings. Please check (✓) which of the following are present on your campus:

- _____ Student Environmental Center
- _____ Ecology House or Sustainable Dormitory
- _____ Orientation program(s) on sustainability for students
- _____ Student Group(s) with an environmental or sustainability focus
- _____ Other: _____

18. How does your college or university encourage students to consider sustainability issues when choosing a career path? [Please check (√) below where applicable]

_____ job fairs and career counseling focused on work in sustainable enterprises

_____ pledge of social and environmental responsibility

_____ other: _____

19. To what extent are student groups across campus directly involved in sustainability initiatives?

0 (don't know) 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal)

Describe which groups are most involved and how: _____

ADMINISTRATION, MISSION AND PLANNING

20. To what extent do the formal written statements describing the purposes and objectives of the units listed below reflect a commitment to sustainability? (Such statements include policy and planning documents, annual reports, brochures, catalogues, etc.)

[Please rate using the following scale: 0 – don't know; 1 – none; 2 – a little; 3 – quite a bit; 4 - a great deal]

_____ the institution as a whole

_____ your college or division

_____ your unit/department

_____ other units within the institution (please define: _____)

Comments: _____

21. Institutions committed to sustainability create certain positions and committees, as well as engage in certain practices, which reinforce this commitment. Please check (√) which of the following are present on your campus:

- Environmental Council or Task Force
- Environmental Coordinator- ()student or ()staff member
- Dean of Environmental Programs or Director of Sustainability Programs (a high level officer responsible for these activities)
- Energy Officer
- Green Purchasing Coordinator
- Institutional Declaration of Commitment to Sustainability/Environmental Responsibility
- Orientation programs on sustainability for faculty and staff
- Socially responsible investment practices and policies
- Regularly conducted environmental audits
- Other: _____

22. How is a concern for, and commitment to, sustainability given broad visibility on your campus (for example, with guest speakers, conferences, Earth Day celebrations, etc.)? Please describe key events that have happened in the past year:

23. a) Please describe the greatest strengths of your institution in terms of sustainability.

b) Please describe the greatest weaknesses of your institution in terms of sustainability.

24. a) Please describe the key factors that support the advancement of environmental and sustainability issues on your campus?

b) What factors do you think account for resistance to or lack of responsiveness to these concerns?

25. a) What “next steps” are planned at your college or university to strengthen your commitment to sustainability (such as an energy conservation initiative, a sustainable food program, a course requirement on sustainability, or a new strategic plan reflecting sustainability)?

b) What “next steps” do you feel ought to be taken?

Please add any additional comments below: