



ULSF

Association of

UNIVERSITY LEADERS  
FOR A  
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

## **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: 1. Curriculum; 2. Research and Scholarship; 3. Operations; 4. Faculty and Staff Development and Rewards; 5. Outreach and Service; 6. Student Opportunities; 7. Institutional Mission, Structure and Planning. 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. It is intended to be part of a group exercise.

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 (p.3) and all 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 all institutions will “score low.” Very few, if any, institutions embody sustainability on all these dimensions. Sustainability is not 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.

**We would prefer that the person(s) initiating this exercise be in contact with a ULSF staff member prior to their first meeting. We invite those who use the SAQ independent of ULSF consultants to let us know how participants responded by reporting briefly on reactions to and outcomes of the exercise. This is helpful for our ongoing research and assessment work. Note: Since the questions are primarily qualitative and impressionistic, we cannot use the responses to rate or compare institutions.**

Thank you.

*This questionnaire was developed as part of ULSF’s Sustainability in Higher Education Indicators Project from February 1998 through June 1999. The SAQ has been continually updated since then. We are grateful for the advice of numerous experts in the field who were part of an informal Advisory Group for the duration of the project and gave constructive feedback on the design and content of the SAQ. For a list of the Advisory Group, go to <[www.ulsf.org/programs\\_saq\\_advgroup.htm](http://www.ulsf.org/programs_saq_advgroup.htm)>. The SAQ can be downloaded from the web at <[www.ulsf.org/programs\\_saq.html](http://www.ulsf.org/programs_saq.html)>.*

**Definitions of 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

- 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

- Sustainability is an ideal end-state. Like democracy, it is a lofty goal whose perfect realization eludes us. For this reason, there will always be competing definitions of sustainability. We know these definitions will always include the well-being of people, nature, our economy, and our social institutions, working together effectively over the long term.

- Alan AtKisson, “The Compass of Sustainability,” 1998

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
CO <sub>2</sub> and air pollution reduction practices (including alternative fuel use, renewable energy sources, emission control devices, etc.)				
Indoor air quality standards and practices				
Building construction and renovation based on ecological design principles				
Energy conservation practices (in offices, laboratories, libraries, classrooms and dormitories)				
Local or organic food purchasing program				
Purchasing from environmentally and socially responsible companies (including buying and using 100% post consumer chlorine free paper)				

<u>Practices</u>	Rate from 0 – 4	Prime project area	Need more info.	Please comment
Waste reduction practices				
Recycling of solid waste (including paper, plastic, metal, etc.)				
Transportation program (including bicycle/ pedestrian friendly systems, car pools, bus pass programs, electric/natural gas campus vehicles)				
Water conservation practices (including efficient shower heads and irrigation systems)				
Integrated Pest Management practices (including reduction of pesticides to control weeds)				
Source reduction of toxic materials and radioactive waste				
Sustainable landscaping (emphasizing native plants, biodiversity, minimizing lawn, etc.)				
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 partnerships with primary and secondary schools and relationships with 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 community work or partnerships at local, 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 sustainability related community service, service learning and/or internship programs exist at your institution?

---

---

---

---

### STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

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: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

### INSTITUTIONAL MISSION, STRUCTURE 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. Please describe the greatest strengths and weaknesses of your institution in educating for sustainability.

---

---

---

---

24. a) What “next steps” are planned at your college or university to strengthen your commitment to sustainability (such as an EMS, 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: