



Association of
UNIVERSITY LEADERS
FOR A
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

ULSF
Suite 402
2100 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
USA

phone: 202/778-6133
fax: 202/778-6138
email: ulsf@aol.com
www.ulsf.org

Dear Colleague,

We are pleased to provide you with the enclosed Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), a simple instrument designed to help colleges and universities assess the extent to which they are sustainable in their teaching and practice. The Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future (ULSF) has developed the SAQ in consultation with leaders in the field and through pilot tests at various institutions.

In constructing the questionnaire, we envisioned both a teaching tool and an assessment instrument. That is, by its very design and content we wanted the SAQ to offer its users a comprehensive definition of sustainability in higher education as well as to provide a snapshot of their institution on the path to sustainability.

We would like your suggestions on how the questionnaire might be improved. We appreciate your interest in using this instrument and we hope that it serves to further your institution's commitment to a sustainable future.

Sincerely,

The ULSF Staff



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Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)
for Colleges and Universities
October 1999 Draft
Standard Form

This 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. Scholarly Activities; 3. Institutional Operations; 4. Faculty and Staff Development and Rewards; 5. Outreach and Service; 6. Student Opportunities; 7. Institutional Mission and Structure. 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, ideally facilitated by a ULSF staff member.

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; 4. Facilitate a discussion in which the 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 or three 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. Also, we would like those who use the SAQ independent of ULSF consultants to let us know how participants responded by returning a copy of the SAQ with summarized responses and reporting briefly on reactions to and outcomes of the exercise. This is critical 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.

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, 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. But as the process of attempting to achieve sustainability will continuously reveal new challenges and questions -- pushing back the horizon, as it were -- a definitive definition is an impossibility. Any indicator framework, therefore, needs to be flexible and adaptable to these changing definitions. It needs to grow as our understanding grows, while continuing to serve its purpose as a simplifier and guide to complexity. It needs to maintain a trail of continuity from year to year and decade to decade. Most important, it needs to speak to people in ways understandable both to the rational mind, and to the intuition.

- Alan AtKisson, “The Compass of Sustainability: Framework for a Comprehensive Information System,” 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]:

1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

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.?

1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

Please comment on how this is done: _____

4. 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 attempts to instill in 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, etc.)
- e - the basic values and core assumptions that shape the content and methods of the academic disciplines

Comments: _____

Scholarly Activities

5. Estimate the amount of 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.).

- 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

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

6. 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?

_____ %

7. Does your institution have established multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary structures for research, education and policy development on sustainability issues?

_____ Yes _____ No If yes, please describe: _____

Institutional Operations

8. The chart below lists some of the operational practices emphasized by institutions moving toward sustainability. Please complete the chart and indicate the extent to which your institution has implemented these practices using the following scale: 1 - none; 2 - a little; 3 - quite a bit; 4 - a great deal; 5 - don't know.

<u>PRACTICES</u>	Rate from 1 – 5	Please comment
CO ₂ 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 and investing in environmentally and socially responsible companies		
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, etc.)		
Water conservation practices (including efficient shower heads and irrigation systems)		
Integrated Pest Management practices		
Source reduction of toxic materials and radioactive waste		
Sustainable landscaping (emphasizing native plants, biodiversity, minimizing lawn, etc.)		
Others (please specify):		

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

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

1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

Please provide examples of this integration: _____

Faculty and Staff Development and Rewards

11. To what extent do criteria for hiring, tenure and promotion recognize faculty member contributions to sustainability (in scholarship, teaching, or campus and community activities)?

1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

Describe how such considerations are weighed in these decisions: _____

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

1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

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

Outreach and Service

13. A sustainable institution supports sustainable communities in the surrounding region through partnerships with primary and secondary schools and relationships with local governments and businesses. It also seeks international cooperation in solving global environmental justice and sustainability problems 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.

1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

Please describe: _____

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

Student Opportunities

15. Institutions committed to sustainability provide students with particular opportunities and settings. Please check which of the following are present on your campus:

_____ Student Environmental Center

- _____ Ecology House or Sustainable Dormitory
- _____ Orientation programs on sustainability for students
- _____ Other: _____

16. 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: _____
-

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

- 1 (none) 2 (a little) 3 (quite a bit) 4 (a great deal) 5 (don't know)

Describe which groups are most involved and how: _____

Institutional Mission and Structure

18. 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: 1 – none; 2 - a little; 3 - quite a bit; 4 - a great deal; 5 - don't know]

- _____ the institution as a whole
- _____ your college or division
- _____ your unit/department
- _____ other units within the institution (please define: _____)

Comments: _____

19. 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 polices
- _____ Regularly conducted environmental audits
- _____ Other: _____

20. 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:

21. Please describe the greatest strengths and weaknesses of your institution in educating for sustainability.

22. a) What “next steps” are planned at your college or university to strengthen your commitment to sustainability?

b) What “next steps” would you like to see planned?

Please add any additional comments below: