



Sustainability

We integrate sustainability into all aspects of university functions and invest in this commitment at the highest level of institutional decision-making.

Full Recommendation

Sustainability

Seven cross-campus working groups composed of over 200 faculty, staff, students and community members were formed to address our institutional key priorities—Academic Excellence, Community Building, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Research and Creative Scholarship, Sustainability, Internationalization, and Well-being.

Numerous campus engagement activities were conducted by the seven key priority working groups during spring 2022, with over 450 registrations across the 18 themed listening sessions centered around the seven priorities. In addition, over 350 student survey responses were received that answered specific priority questions from a student lens. Next, the working groups began analyzing data and incorporating community feedback as they worked toward identifying, developing and recommending achievable, metric-based goals that centered around these seven key priorities.

The Sustainability working group was charged with investigating how we can prioritize our commitment to protecting our natural resources and better educate our community about the importance of creating short- and long-term solutions to minimize the negative impacts of climate change on our local, state, national and global environments.

After a multiple-step review process, the following is the final draft of their submitted recommendation which includes possible strategies and metrics that were essential in informing the goals and objectives. Further, they serve as a starting point for prioritization and refinement of institutional initiatives as the strategic plan moves into implementation. In addition, if available, the Strengths, Opportunities, Aspiration and Results (SOAR) summary reports, as well spring 2022 process reports, are attached as unedited appendices to provide further clarity and context.

Finally, this work could not have been completed without our dedicated community members who shared their time, expertise and commitment to improving our institution as they built these recommendations. Working group contributors are recognized in full at the end of this document.

Recommendation

Goal: We integrate sustainability into all aspects of university functions and invest in this commitment at the highest level of institutional decision-making.

Sustainability Objective 1: Build a campus-wide culture of prioritizing sustainability that is consistently communicated by University leadership.

Objective 1 Possible Strategies:

- Cabinet Position
 - Add a Sustainability VP or Officer position to the President's Cabinet, supported by existing units, organizations and student groups focused on sustainability.
- Campus-Wide Committee
 - Establish a university-wide committee in support of a cabinet position charged with exploring, planning and coordinating sustainability efforts on campus.
- Purchasing
 - Take aspects of sustainability (e.g., greenhouse gas emissions, water and energy use, waste production) into account for all purchases.
- Resources Management
 - Employ life-cycle/circular economy/materials management to all supply chain decision-making.
- Investment
 - Prioritize the reduction of carbon emissions and encourage sustainable practices in the development of our investment strategies and financial decision-making.
- Talent (HR)
 - Commit to building sustainability and equity into job descriptions for all talent recruitment, employee positions and performance review processes.
- Communication
 - Report publicly and with pride on university-wide sustainability practices and integrate sustainability into campus branding, student recruitment and retention efforts.

Sustainability Objective 2: Every member of our WMU community develops climate change literacy—understanding systemic sustainability challenges, inequities and practices—via curricular, co-curricular, and employment experiences.

Objective 2 Possible Strategies:

- Learning Outcomes
 - Expand the representation of sustainability as a learning outcome across

all colleges and departments beyond that required in Western Essential Studies through outcomes that are explicitly focused on or are supportive of sustainability.

- Immersive Experiences
 - Increase opportunities for all students to easily access and participate in immersive sustainability experiences through study abroad, service-learning, research experiences, co-curricular experiences and internships.
- Planning
 - Require every college and department to develop a sustainability infusion plan within two years (similar to DEI plans).
- Climate Literacy
 - Create learning opportunities that are available to all campus community members to help understand both the status of our changing climate and individual and collective approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation.
- Support
 - Strengthen the sustainability learning community that guides and assists WMU in fulfilling our commitment to and growing our culture of sustainability.

Sustainability Objective 3: Achieve carbon neutrality¹ in alignment with the timeline set forth by the state of Michigan.

Objective 3 Possible Strategies:

- Pathway
 - Identify a feasible pathway to achieving carbon neutrality by 2040, integrating a “WMU Decarbonization Analysis” that analyzes the opportunities, barriers, trade-offs, existing plans (e.g., utilities/energy master plan) and cost savings.
- Plan
 - Incorporate and implement the decarbonization analysis/plan into an umbrella “WMU Campus Sustainability and Climate Action Plan” (developed in tandem) that details targets and milestones for all sustainability-related commitments.
- Transition
 - Prepare for a just transition to retrain employees and develop new skills as we reimagine and change energy systems, transportation systems and critical infrastructure in our shift away from carbon emission-heavy practices.

¹ **Carbon Neutrality:** “a state in which the GHG emissions released to the atmosphere by a stakeholder (individual, organization, company, country, etc.) have been reduced or avoided and the remaining ones are compensated with carbon credits. To achieve carbon neutrality, carbon credits from projects that reduce, avoid, or temporarily capture GHGs are accepted. Note that carbon neutrality is possible at stakeholder level, not at global/planetary level, where use of carbon credits (offsetting/compensation) is not possible.” *United Nations Climate Change*. Retrieved from <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/CNN%20Guidelines.pdf>

Sustainability Objective 4: Invest in continuous improvement of facilities, infrastructure and practices to achieve a more sustainable campus and healthier community.

Objective 4 Possible Strategies

- Zero Waste
 - Research and develop a WMU “Zero Waste” commitment, create a plan, integrate with other plans as needed and begin implementation within 3 years.
- Vendor Agreements
 - Research and update contractual vendor agreements and purchasing practices so that they honor WMU’s values and advance our carbon neutrality, zero waste and other sustainability-related goals and objectives.
- Food Systems
 - Continuously improve our support of food security, local food system resilience, sourcing from diverse, local producers, low carbon diet options and organic practices.
- Water
 - Continuously improving water use efficiency by utilizing low flow fixtures and irrigation systems and maximizing the benefits of rainwater capture, stormwater treatment and water infiltration.
- Outdoor Plans
 - Research and implement innovative best practices into an integrated “WMU Landscape Master Plan and Campus Master Plan” that values biodiversity, aims to improve water and air quality, fosters healthy ecosystems, provides accessible greenspaces and promotes enhanced community health and well-being.
- Healthy Indoor Environments
 - Research and implement innovative best practices to improve the health of campus spaces, such as providing natural light, cultivating indoor green walls, ensuring safe and adequate ventilation, adopting sustainable cleaning practices and using low VOC indoor equipment and products

Possible Metrics for Sustainability Objectives:

- Re-establish a university-wide Sustainability and Decarbonization Committee and establish a “campus as lab” program across colleges and divisions through the collaboration of schools, institutes, centers, the Office for Sustainability, the Climate Change Working Group and other related groups. (1 year).
- Complete a Decarbonization Status and Analysis Report (1.5 years).
- Complete a Campus Climate Action Implementation Plan (2.5 years).
- Complete a university-wide Sustainability and Decarbonization Action Plan (3.5 years).
- Develop Sustainability Infusion Plans across divisions (3.5 years).
- Infuse Landscape and Master Plans (3.5 years).
- Achieve platinum Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS) status by 2030.
- Achieve 50% greenhouse gas reductions from the 2011 baseline by 2030 toward a carbon neutrality goal of 2040.

Appendix A: Sustainability Working Group Summary

The WMU Strategic Planning Sustainability Working Group used the SOAR framework. The Group first conducted an internal SOAR session to orient Group members. Then three sessions were conducted with the campus community. Sessions were well attended by a mix of faculty, staff, and students. Data were collected from participants using Microsoft Teams whiteboards, transferred to spreadsheets, and grouped by common themes. A qualitative scoring method was developed, and it informed the analysis. The results of student survey data were also grouped by similar themes for comparison with SOAR themes.

Dominant SOAR and Survey themes became Objectives and Strategies, which then shaped the formation of the Goal statement. Information was organized in a two-page summary and shared with the Core Team and Steering Committee. Two rounds of presentation, discussion, and critique were conducted by the remaining by Working Group Chair, Core Team, Steering Committee, and DEI Committees. Detailed refinement with two volunteer members of the Steering Committee led to draft final revisions and draft final deliverables.

Key themes emerged during the course of this work. First, the Group grappled with the recognition that sustainability is most commonly generalized as environmental, social, and economic, or the “three-legged stool”. The group agreed that issues surrounding biodiversity and the ongoing biodiversity crisis were also important to elevate. The group generally set aside the economic leg of the stool and assumed that extensive University-wide work and implementation of the new WMU SRM budget model and branding would shape any economic sustainability objectives and strategies the Core team might place in the final WMU Strategic Plan.

The Group grappled with including WMU’s Carbon Neutrality commitment and target in the draft final recommendations. The Group agreed on the urgency of the climate crisis but questioned whether it deserved specific mention within broader sustainability themes. Ultimately, recommendations do foreground, and spotlight calls for continuous improvement on broad sustainability themes in the curriculum, strategic plans, communications practices, senior leadership responsibility centers, physical environment, accessibility, and clean energy systems. In addition, recommendations call to prioritize all sustainability commitments across all WMU Divisions, and they do call for an aggressive push to accelerate the WMU Carbon Neutrality target date consistent with persistent calls from student body leaders and faculty experts.

There was wide recognition within the group and across participating stakeholders that WMU is a higher education sustainability leader, but that we need to better share our stories and invest in communicating our sustainability strengths internally, externally, and toward prospective student audiences. The group senses that sustainability, climate, biodiversity, and related equity and justice issues will be key elements of future recruitment and retention strategies.

The Group felt that they had only scratched the surface on setting up new 10-year metrics but agreed that WMU is in a position to recommit itself to aggressive

sustainability and carbon neutrality goals, to develop up-to-date plans, to infuse sustainability across the University, to track and report on progress, and to capture new external funding in support transformational change as quickly as possible. WMU passed through a decade of commitments, plans, and implementation efforts. That cycle is due for a repeat, and with strong senior leadership, coordinating structures, and resource alignment, the group envisions that WMU can again emerge as the higher ed sustainability leader.

Sustainability Working Group Membership

Co-Chairs	
Denise Keele	Department of Political Science
Jeff Spoelstra	Office for Sustainability
Participants	
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Rich McMullen	Merze Tate College
DeVon Miller	Facilities Management
Juan Lopez	Student
Bob Brady	Human Resources
Carly Hagins	Richmond Institute for Design and Innovation
Cindy Hetrick	College of Arts and Sciences
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