



# Higher Education Sustainability Officer Position and Salary Survey

January 2008

Report produced by

**AASHE**  
*Association for the Advancement of  
Sustainability in Higher Education*

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AASHE is an association of colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada working to create a sustainable future. It was founded in 2006 with a mission to promote sustainability in all sectors of higher education - from governance and operations to curriculum and outreach - through education, communication, research and professional development. AASHE defines sustainability in an inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice, secure livelihoods, and a better world for all generations.

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# Introduction

More and more institutions of higher education are hiring sustainability officers to manage and coordinate their sustainability initiatives. To promote greater understanding of this emerging career field, AASHE conducted a survey of campus sustainability officers. The *Higher Education Sustainability Officer Position and Salary Survey* provides information about the roles, salaries, and positions of college and university sustainability officers. We hope it will serve to encourage and enable more higher education institutions to hire dedicated campus sustainability officers.

The Survey expands and updates the information captured in the 2005 *EFS-West Salary Survey of Sustainability and Environmental Coordinators*. The 2005 survey reported salary information from 36 sustainability officers from colleges and universities in the United States and Canada and is available at [www.aashe.net/resources/sust\\_professionals.php](http://www.aashe.net/resources/sust_professionals.php).

This report is organized into three sections.

- **Part one** reviews the survey methodology and characteristics of survey respondents.
- **Part two** provides information about the nature of the sustainability officer position, including when and how the position was created, what tasks the officer performs, the department where the officer is housed, to whom the officer reports, and how the position is funded.
- **Part three** presents salary information.

## Survey Methodology

The survey was conducted in early 2007 using the online tool SurveyMonkey. AASHE promoted the survey through direct outreach to its list of sustainability officers, in its weekly newsletter, and in posts to the Green Schools email discussion list.

We received 70 responses to the survey. We then omitted respondents who reported spending more than 50 percent of their time on a single issue, as the survey was aimed at staff who work on sustainability broadly, rather than those who work primarily on a specific aspect (e.g., an energy or recycling manager). In addition, we omitted one response from a sustainability officer employed by an entity other than a higher education institution. Finally, we deleted two duplicate entries and used the more recent response in each case.

After filtering, there were 62 usable responses. This represents over three quarters of the 80 or so dedicated campus sustainability officers that AASHE was aware of at the time of the survey. Thirty-two respondents were from four-year public institutions. Twenty-seven respondents were from private four-year institutions. Two respondents were from public community colleges or two-year institutions. Since there were so few responses from community colleges, we did not analyze this group independently. Instead, when information is separated by school type, all public institution responses are presented together.

Respondents represented schools from 24 states and 5 Canadian provinces. Schools located in small towns and dense urban areas were both well represented. Seven respondents were from Canada and

the remaining 55 were from the United States. All of the Canadian responses were from public schools. Results from both countries are reported together throughout the report.

Fifty-one of the respondents were full-time sustainability officers. Of the remaining 11 respondents, five work approximately 75 percent of full-time, five work 50 percent, and one works about 20 percent. Results have been adjusted for full-time equivalence where appropriate.

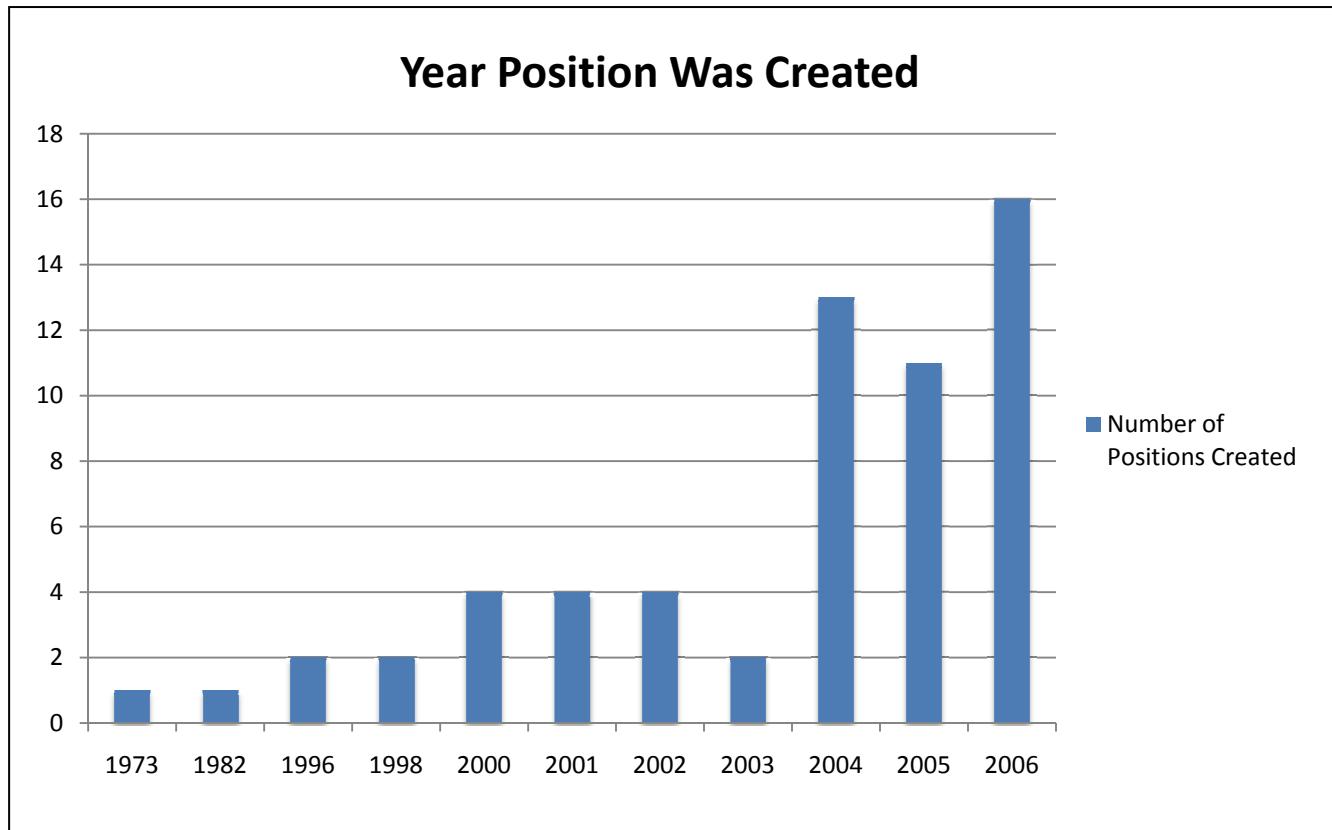
Some respondents did not answer all questions in the survey. Most commonly, information about salary was omitted. As long as the respondent met the other criteria outlined above, his or her responses were used as available. Due to these omissions, the total number of responses is not the same for all questions.

## Nature of the Sustainability Officer Position

### Creating the Sustainability Officer Position

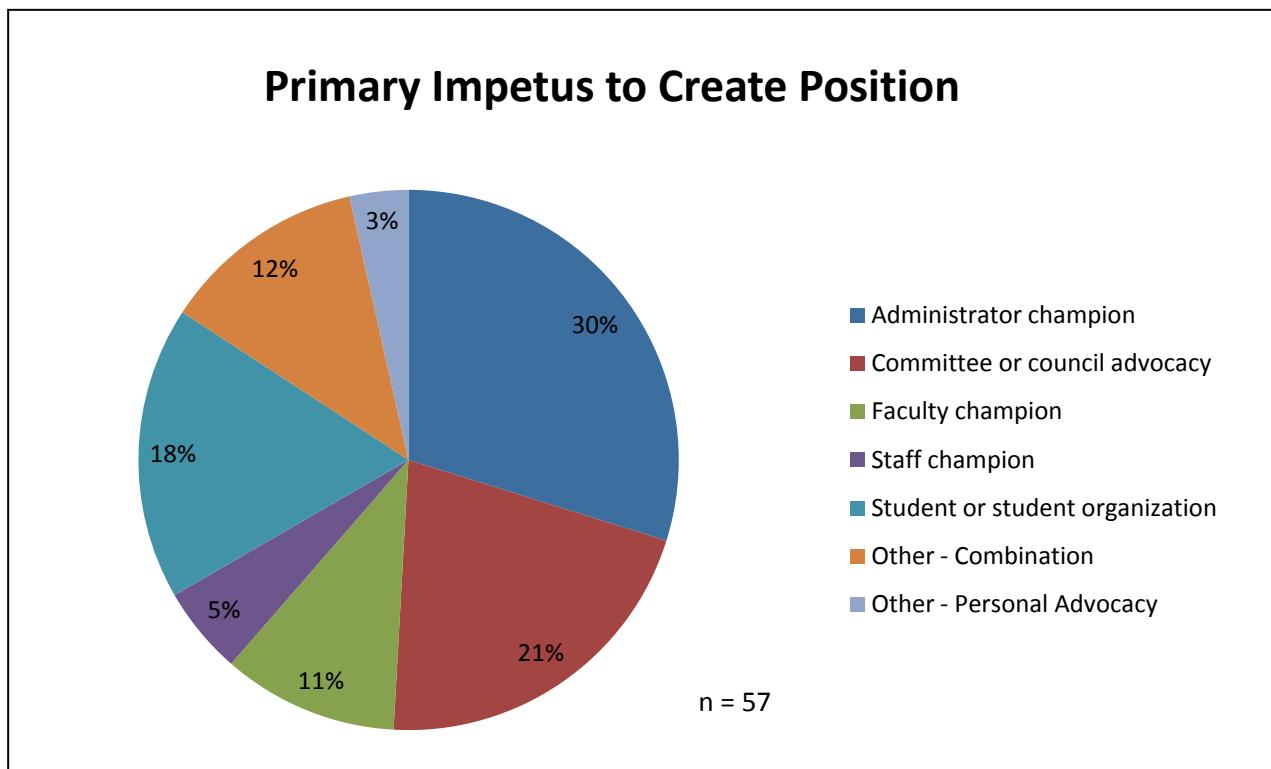
The first part of the survey focused on when and how sustainability officer positions were created. The responses show fast growth in the creation of sustainability officer positions in recent years. Of the 62 respondents, 90 percent of their positions were created within the last ten years and 74 percent were created within the last five years.

**Figure 1**



The survey asked officers, "What was the primary impetus that led to the creation of your position?" The most popular motivator for creating positions was an administrator champion. "Combination" and "Personal Advocacy" were not options on the survey, but were specified by several respondents who selected "Other."

**Figure 2**



## Job Functions

Sustainability officers perform a wide variety of tasks. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the newness of the position, their responsibilities vary significantly between institutions. The survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of time they spend performing various tasks. Figure 3 presents the average percentage of time devoted to each task by the 58 respondents to this question. Responses that did not equal 100 percent were adjusted to do so.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Time Spent on Primary Job Duties (n=58)**

Task, Issue or Role	Average Percentage of Time Spent	Standard Deviation <sup>1</sup>
Overall Sustainability Coordination	28.7	20.7
Work with Students	14.9	13.7
Energy Efficiency and Management	9.6	10.4
Recycling and Waste Reduction	8.4	13.8
Community Outreach	6.8	7.5
Data Collection and Reporting	6.0	5.1
Building Construction and Management	5.4	5.6
Research Issues	3.7	4.8
Other	3.1	9.8
Environmentally Preferable Purchasing	2.6	3.8
Transportation	2.6	3.6
Curricular Issues	2.3	3.4
Teaching Courses	2.2	4.4
Green Dining	1.9	2.7
Environmental Health and Safety	1.8	6.1

Tasks listed as "Other" include: administrative work, working with media, toxins reduction, contract management, staff supervision, and fundraising.

As the table shows, there were substantial differences between the responses. At least one, and in most cases several, officers reported spending zero percent of their time on each category.

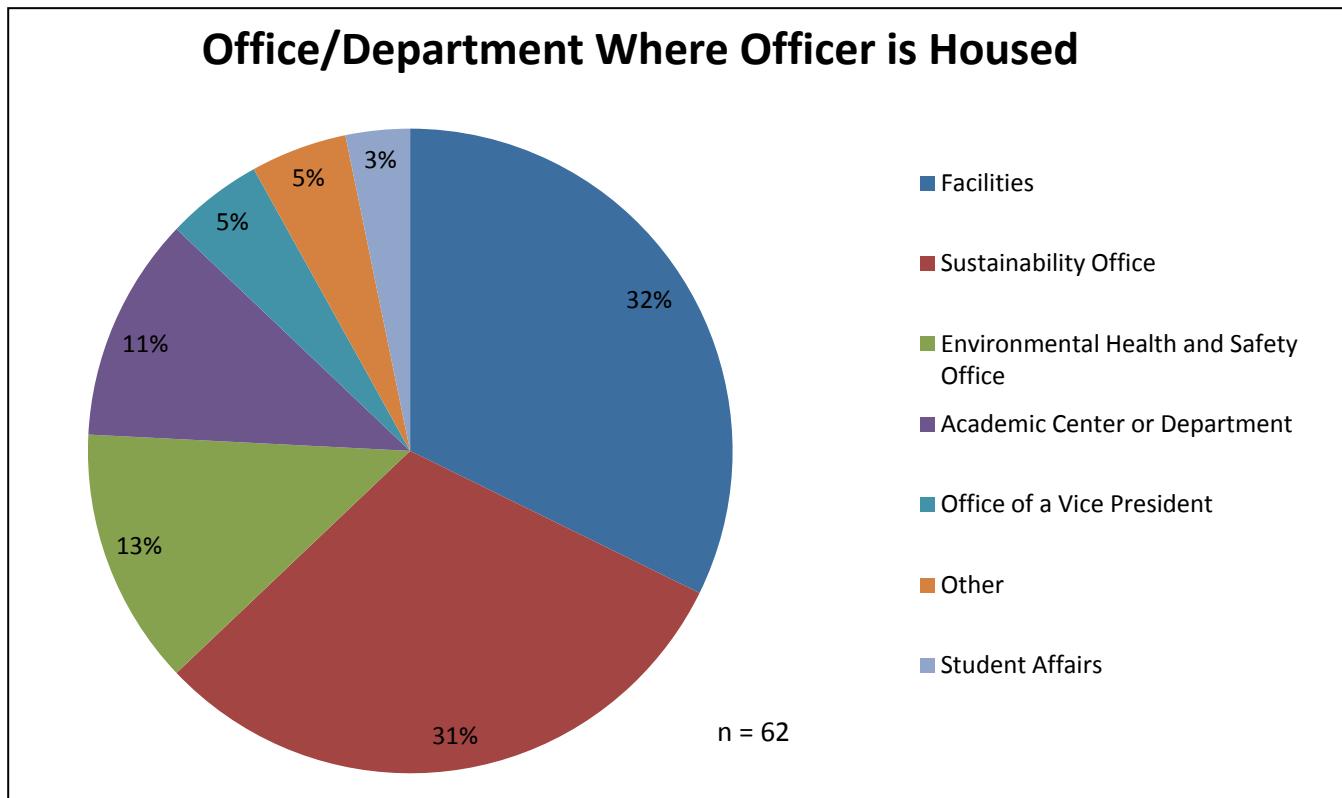
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<sup>1</sup> Standard deviation is a common statistical measure of the spread or dispersion of a set of data. It is calculated by taking the average of the squared difference between data points and the mean. Standard deviation is measured in the same units as the data. The standard deviation will be small if the data points are close to the average. Similarly, if many data points are far from the average, the standard deviation will be large. The standard deviation will be zero if all values in the data set are equal.

## **Reporting Lines and Organizational Locations**

The survey asked respondents to identify the department or office in which they are housed. All 62 respondents answered this question. The most popular response was “Facilities Services,” with 32.3 percent. “Sustainability Office” was almost as popular with 30.6 percent of the responses.

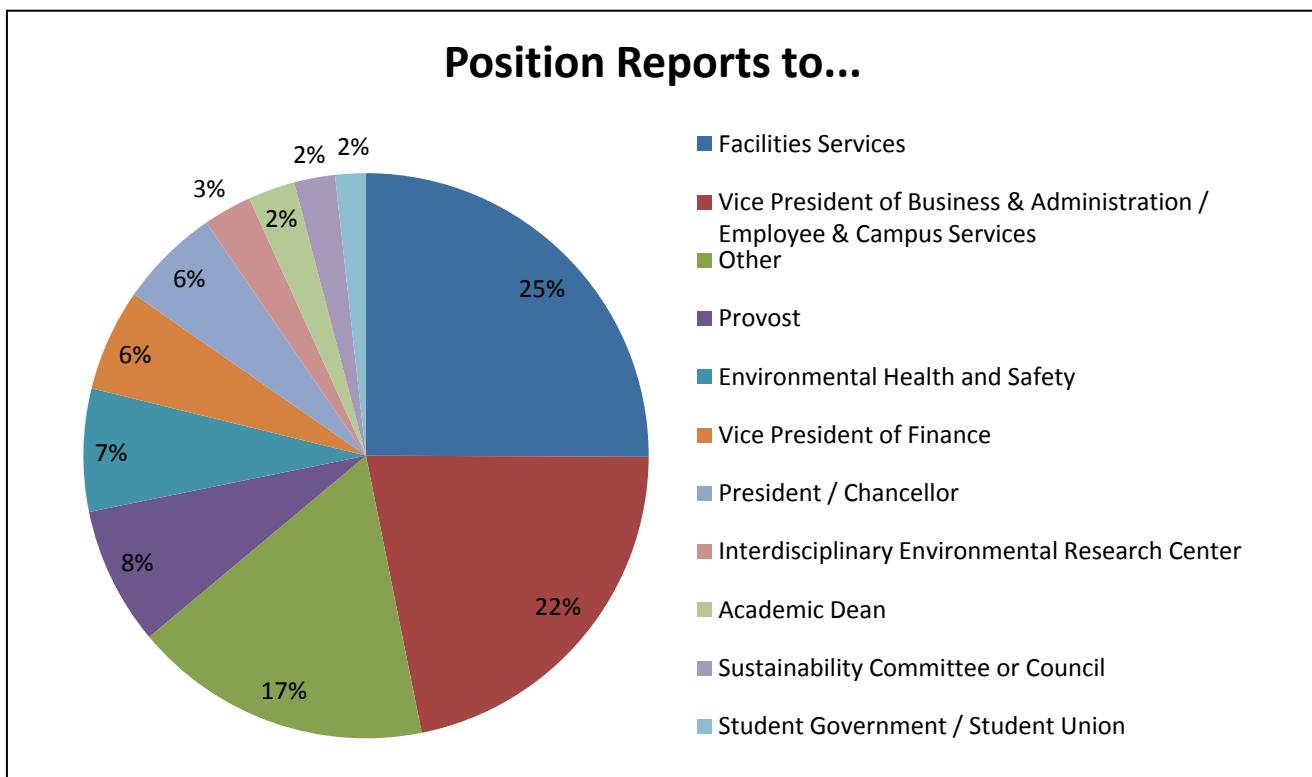
**Figure 4**



The survey also asked respondents to identify the individual to whom they or their offices report. There were 57 responses to this question. Thirty of the respondents (53 percent) report to two or more people. In some cases, joint reporting is seen a way to bridge the gap between the academic and operational sectors of the campus and to enable the officer to be effective in both spheres.

Figure 5 shows the variety of persons to whom sustainability officers report. For individuals who report to more than one person, we adjusted responses so they were counted only once in calculating the distribution. For example, if an officer reported to a provost and a president, we counted that as half an officer reporting to each, so the total added up to one individual. In the figure, 'Other' includes Student Government, Vice President for Student Affairs, Housing/Residence Life, and Vice President of Research.

**Figure 5**



## Funding Source

The survey asked officers for the percentage of their salary that was funded by the general fund, external grants, savings or expected savings from sustainability initiatives, student fees, a sustainability endowment, and/or alumni or private donations. Six respondents reported that their positions were funded from multiple sources and 55 respondents reported that their positions were funded from one source.

By a wide margin, the most popular funding source was the general fund. This is usually a positive indication since money from the general fund is more secure. In addition, it indicates officers are able to focus on sustainability initiatives instead of fundraising.

In the following charts, we adjusted the funding source(s) for full-time equivalence. For example, the funding source for a half-time officer was only counted at 50 percent.

**Figure 6**

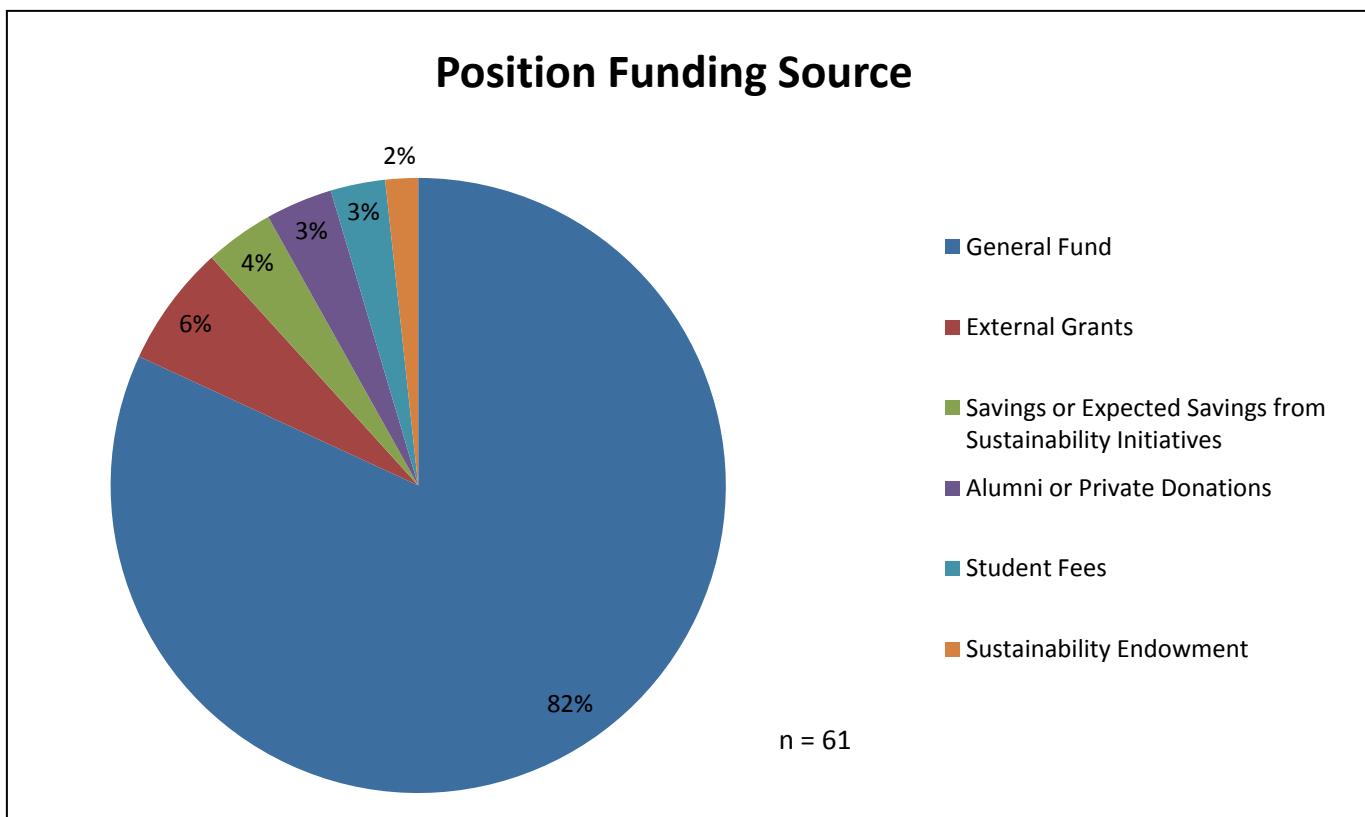
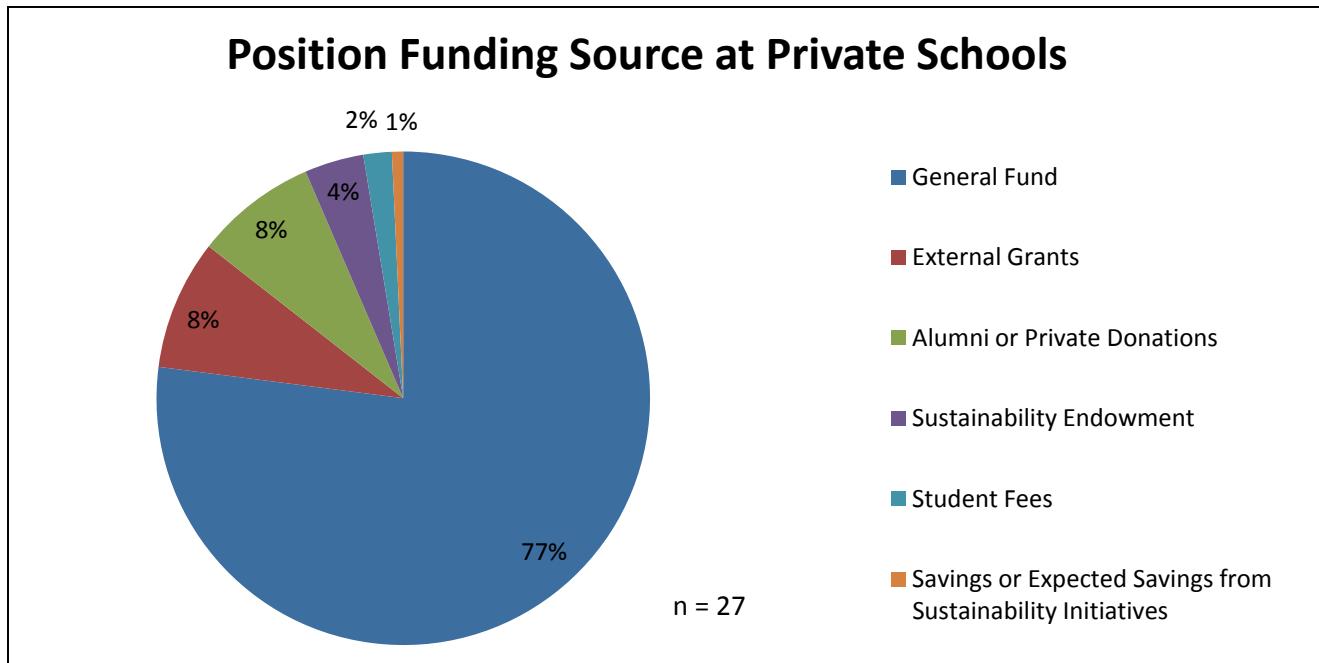
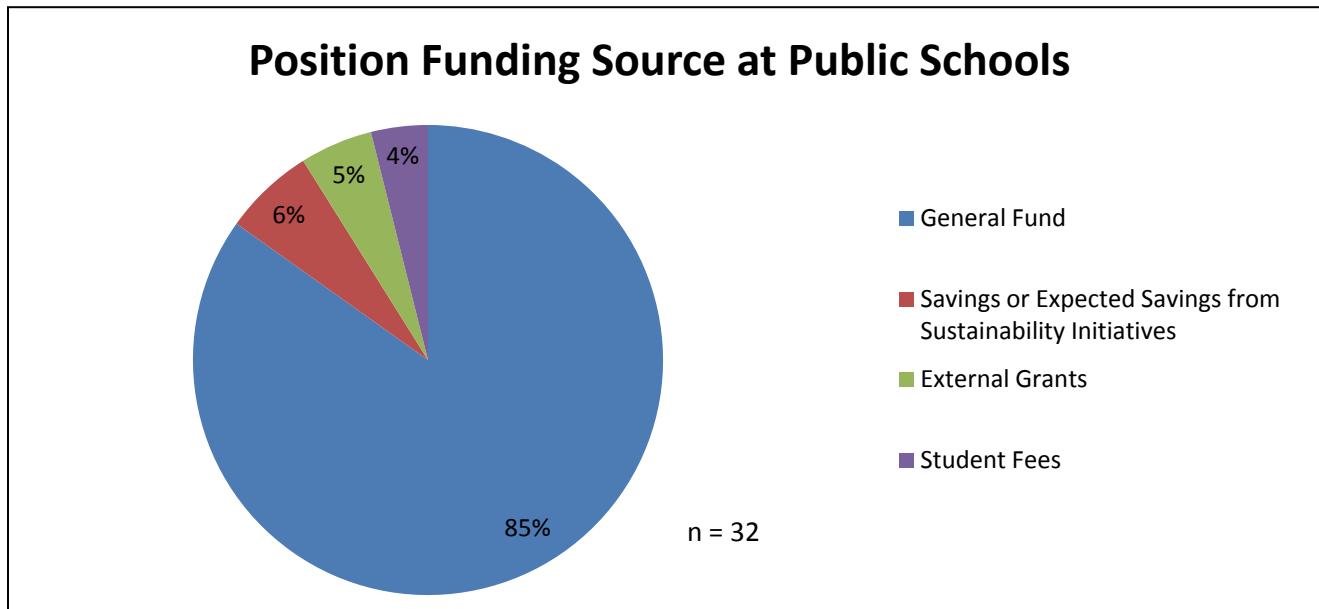


Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the funding source for sustainability officers at private schools and at public schools respectively.

**Figure 7**



**Figure 8**



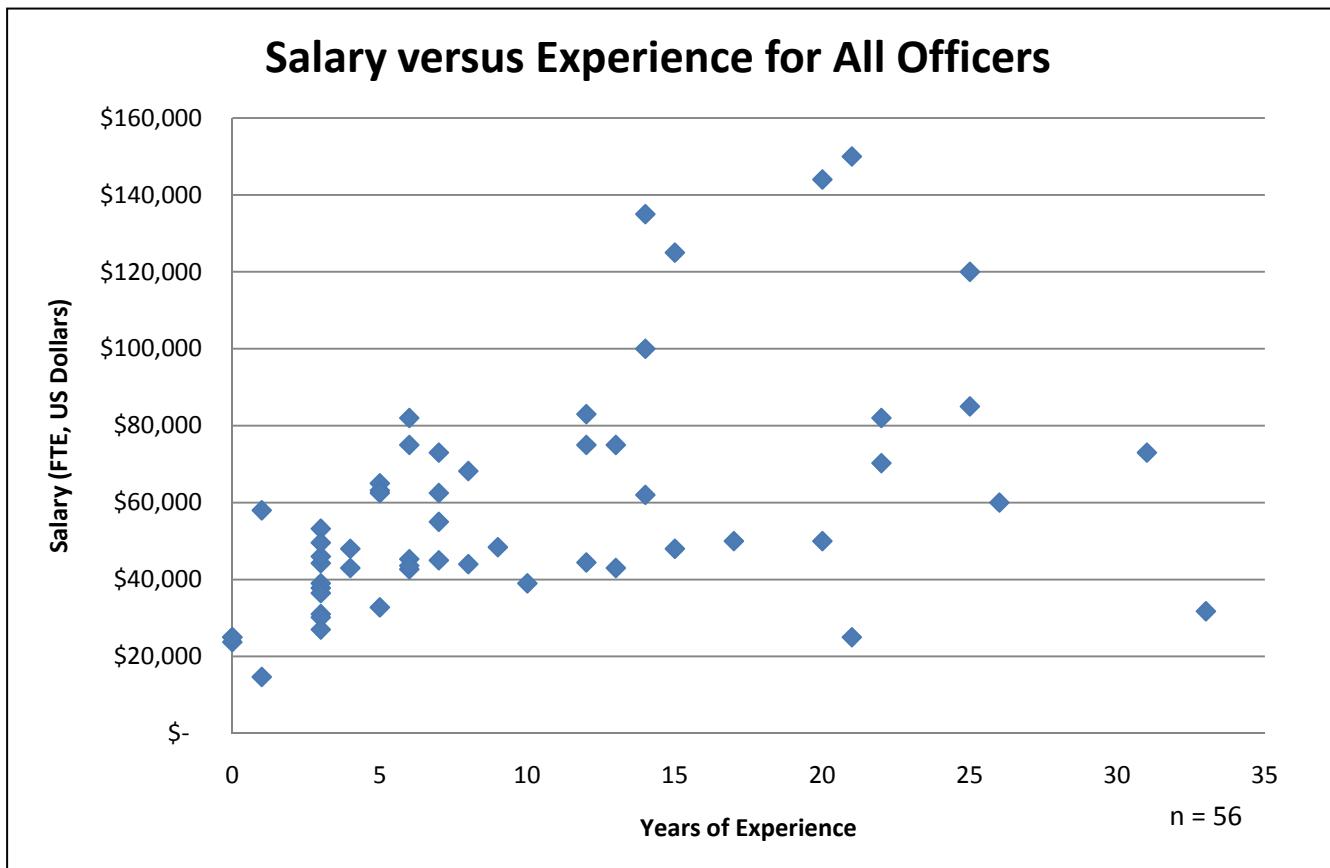
As the graphs show, the general fund is the most common funding source for officers at both public and private institutions. At some private schools, the officer position was funded through private donations and/or a sustainability endowment. No officers at public schools were funded in this way.

## Salary Information

There were 56 usable responses to questions about salary. Results include responses from Canadian and U.S. sustainability officers. At the time of the survey, the Canadian and U.S. dollar were of roughly equal value so answers reported in Canadian dollars were not adjusted. Salaries for part-time officers were adjusted for full-time equivalence.

Figure 9 looks at salary versus experience for all officers.

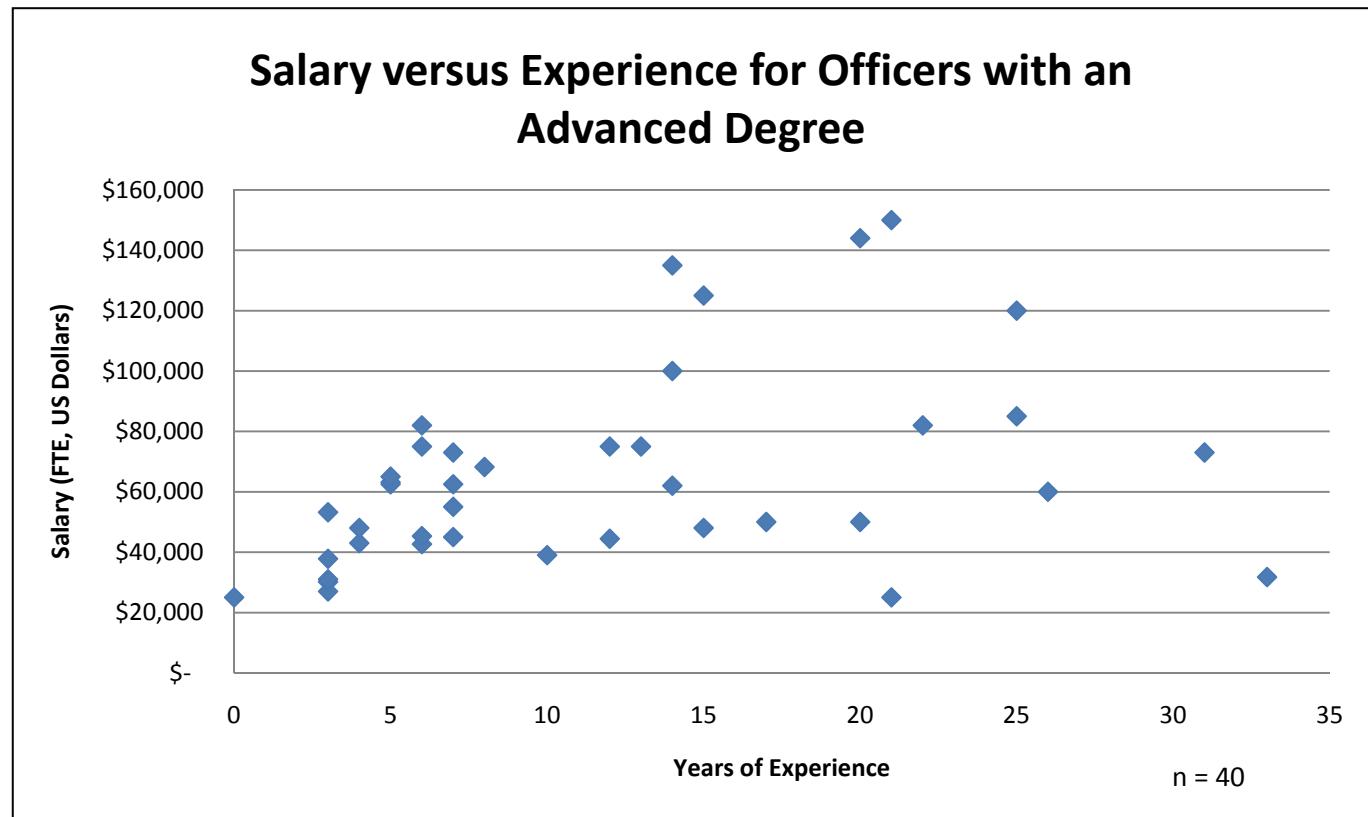
**Figure 9**



As might be expected, higher salaries tend to correspond with more years of experience.

Forty survey respondents had completed an advanced degree. Two had a Ph.D., three had an MBA, one had a J.D., 29 had one Master's degree, and five had a second Master's. The following graph and table shows the relationship between years of experience and salary for sustainability officers with an advanced degree.

**Figure 10**



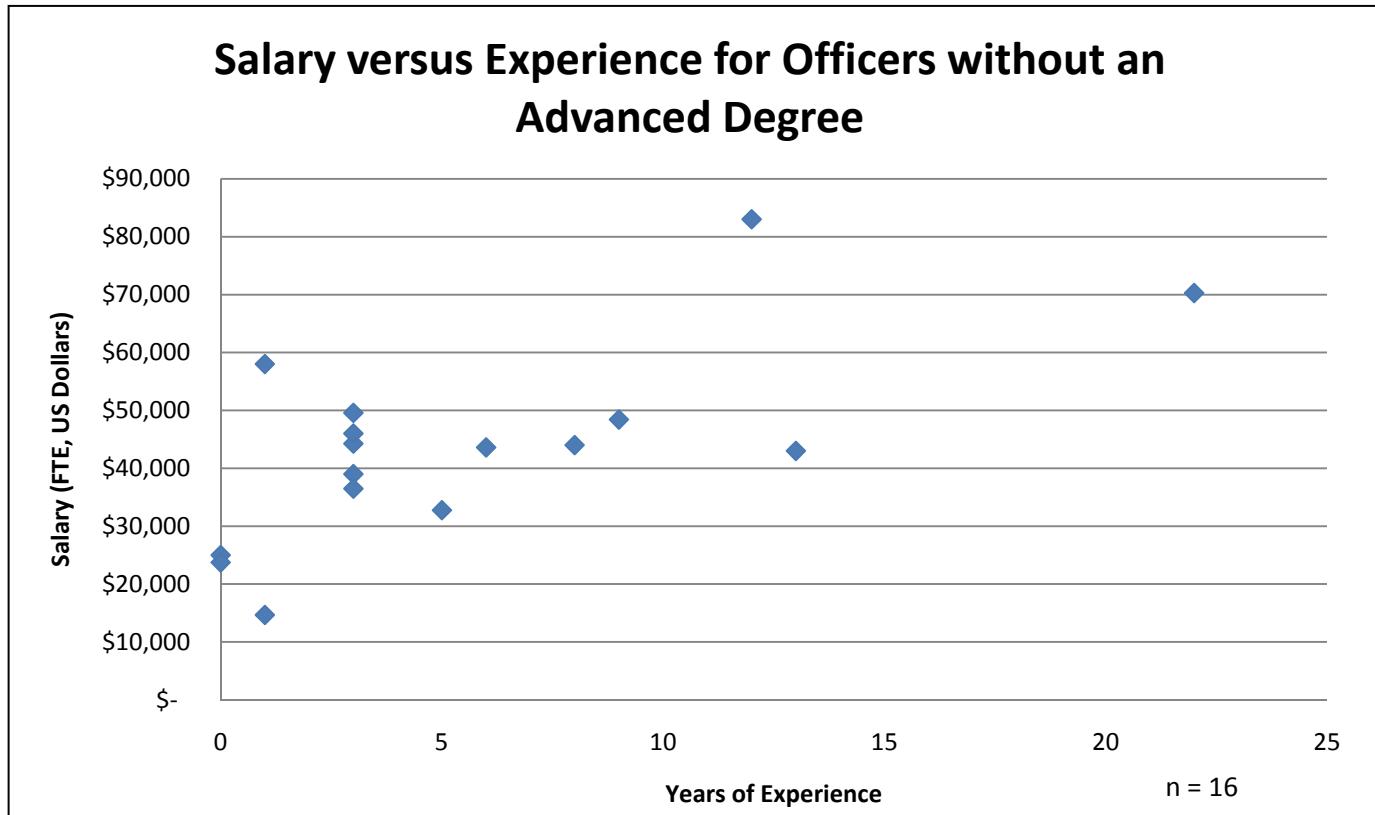
**Figure 11: Salary for Officers with an Advanced Degree**

Years of Experience	Number of Respondents	Average Salary (US dollars)	Standard Deviation
0-5	11	44,200	15,200
6-10	10	58,800	15,400
11-15	8	83,100	33,900
More than 15	11	79,200	42,700

Unsurprisingly, more years of experience tend to correlate with higher salaries. The salaries for officers with an advanced degree and more than ten years of experience varied widely. This could be due to several factors, including varied levels of responsibility for officers and differences in the cost of living where the campus is located.

Sixteen respondents had not completed an advanced degree. The following graph and table shows the relationship between salary and years of experience for those respondents.

**Figure 12**



**Figure 13: Salary for Officers without an Advanced Degree**

Years of Experience	Number of Respondents	Average Salary (US dollars)	Standard Deviation
0-2	4	30,400	19,000
3-5	6	41,300	6,300
More than 5	6	55,400	17,100

There is a clearly positive relationship between salary and years of experience for officers without an advanced degree. As expected, on average, officers with advanced degrees earn higher salaries than officers without advanced degrees.

The following table examines the relationship between salary and student enrollment. In general, there appears to be a positive relationship between student enrollment and salary.

**Figure 14: Salary and Student Enrollment**

Student Enrollment (FTE)	Number of Respondents	Average Salary (US dollars)	Standard Deviation
0-5,000	13	38,400	15,200
5,001-10,000	14	59,700	28,300
10,001-20,000	13	53,600	23,600
More than 20,000	16	79,900	34,100

The following tables (Figures 15 and 16) show the average salaries for officers with and without advanced degrees at public and private institutions. For all officers, the average salaries for public school respondents were higher.

**Figure 15: Salary at Private Institutions**

Education Level	Number of Respondents	Average Salary (US dollars)	Standard Deviation
Four-year degree	7	36,000	15,200
Advanced degree	18	52,500	24,700

**Figure 16: Salary at Public Institutions**

Education Level	Number of Respondents	Average Salary (US dollars)	Standard Deviation
Four-year degree	9	50,000	16,400
Advanced degree	22	75,700	34,500

Comparing the information from the 2007 survey to the information from the 2005 survey, it does not appear that salaries have changed significantly for sustainability officers in higher education. However, the updated data do demonstrate wider variation in the spread of salaries, particularly for officers with advanced degrees and several years of experience.

## Conclusion

While salary information has not changed significantly since the previous survey was completed, this report provides more detailed information about the nature of sustainability officer positions in higher education. The survey revealed some common themes among sustainability officers. Officer positions tend to have been created recently and are funded most commonly from the campus general fund.

Respondents had very different answers to questions about the nature of their positions. Officers are housed in a variety of offices and report to a variety of individuals. In addition, the tasks sustainability officers perform vary significantly between institutions.

Regardless of these differences, all sustainability officers fill an important role on campuses. They spearhead new sustainability initiatives and coordinate efforts among the entire campus community. Increasingly, campuses are realizing the benefits of hiring a sustainability officer by contributing to this growing profession.