Sustainability Literacy and Cultural Behaviours

University of Saskatchewan

Survey Report

February 2023

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Methodology

From January 10 to February 7, 2023, the University of Saskatchewan's Office of Sustainability issued a survey intended to assess the sustainability literacy and cultural behaviours of the university community. It was conducted as part of the University's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating Systems (STARS) submission in 2023. The survey results will help inform the University's actions as related to sustainability in the coming years. The survey was programmed in the Voxco Online software by the University of Saskatchewan's Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research (CHASR). Email invitations and reminders were sent to 10,759 students, faculty, and staff at the University of Saskatchewan. The number of university members invited and the number who responded are presented below in Table 1.

Group	Invited	Participated	Response Rate
First-year students	1,500	90	6.0%
Second-year students	1,100	82	7.5%
Third-year students	1,150	89	7.7%
Fourth-year students	1,500	106	7.1%
Staff/Faculty	5,509	864	15.7%
Total	**10,759**	**1,231**	**11.4%**

Table 1

Findings

This section outlines the findings from the 2023 Sustainability Literacy and Cultural Behaviours survey. The first part of the survey focused on knowledge on sustainability topics, followed by six questions on respondents' abilities related to sustainability communication and engagement, and ended with a section on cultural sustainability perceptions and behaviours. The results will primarily be summarized using charts.

Knowledge on Sustainability

Respondents were asked to select from four options (i.e., society, democracy, environment, economy), which was *not* a dimension included in the most widely used concept of sustainability. More than two-thirds of respondents (67.7%; *n* = 831) indicated that democracy was not a dimension of sustainability.

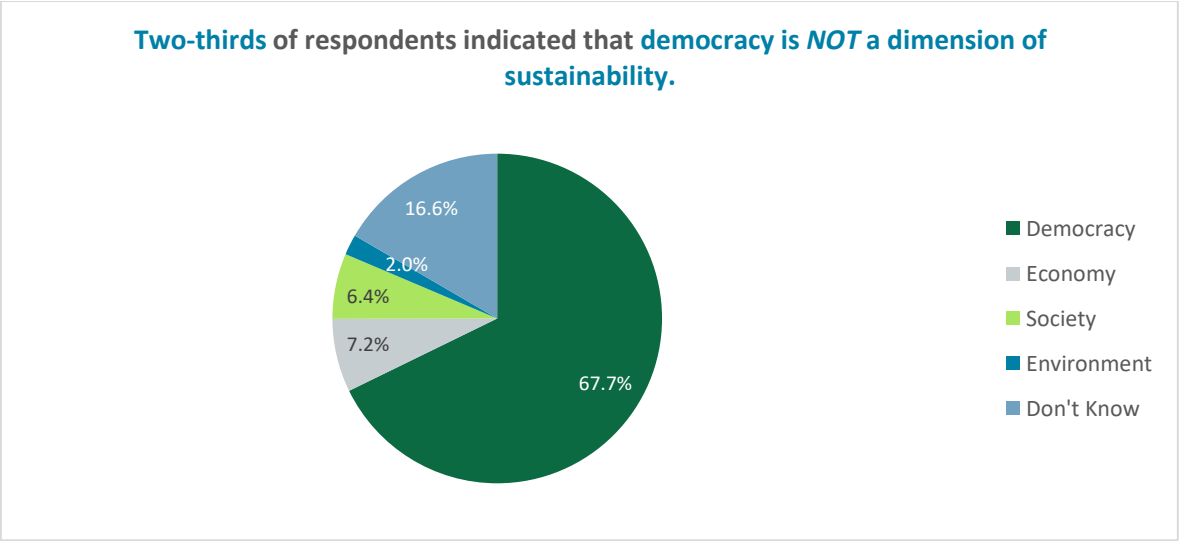

Figure 1

Respondents indicated that the most commonly used definition of sustainable development is “Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (81.5%; n = 1,002).

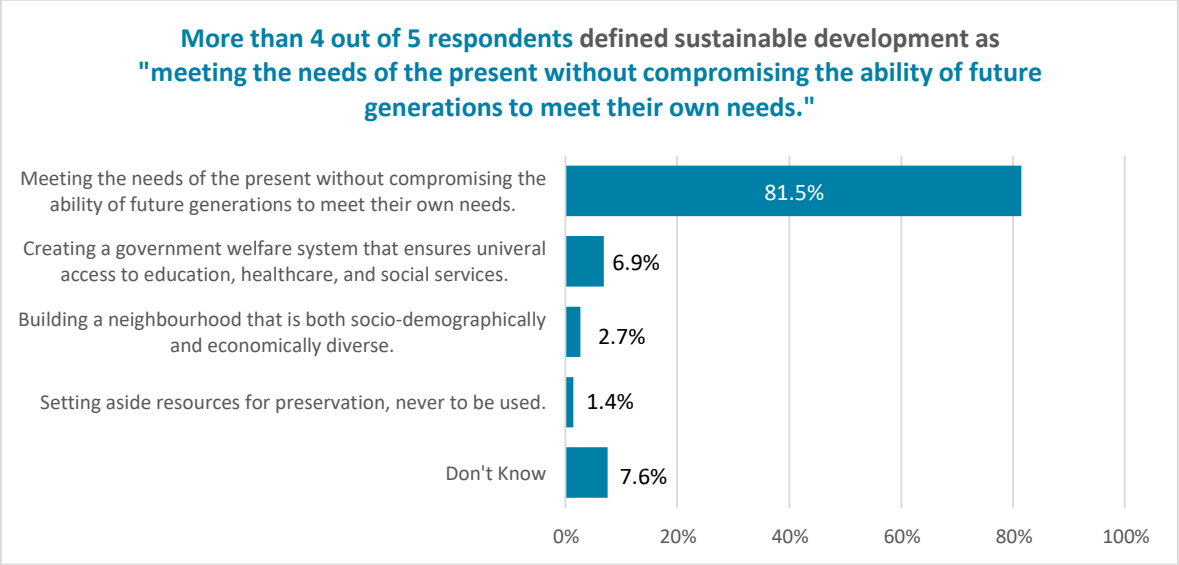

Figure 2

Respondents were asked to indicate if the statement, “Environmental justice is an effort to more fairly distribute both environmental burdens such as polluting and toxic industries and environmental benefits

such as clean air and water," is true or false. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64.8%; *n* = 796) evaluated the statement as true.

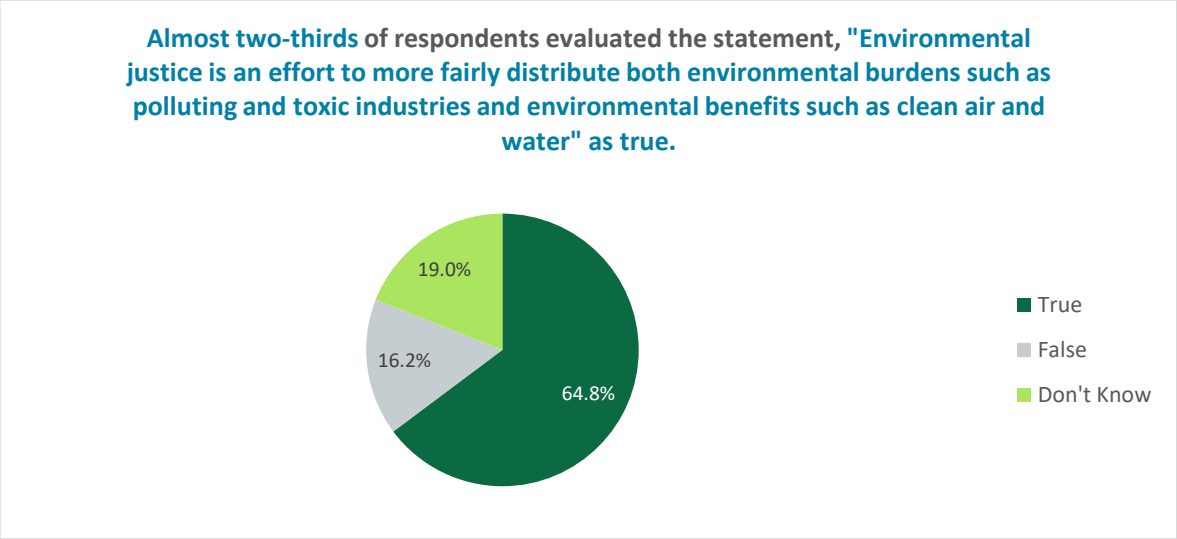

Figure 3

The following question noted that corporate responsibility requires a commitment to the triple bottom line. When asked the focus of the triple bottom line, most participants (81.8%; *n* = 1,005) indicated it refers to "a balance of environmental, social, and financial well-being."

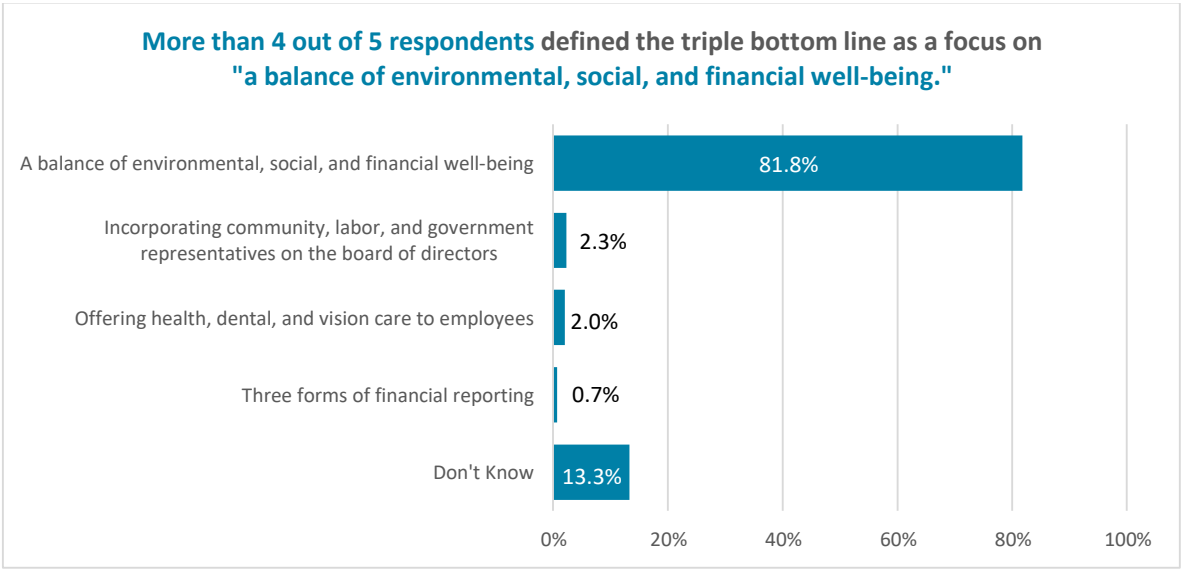

Figure 4

Most participants (72.4%; *n* = 890) indicated that the following statement about greenhouse gases was true, "Carbon dioxide is the most prevalent greenhouse gas."

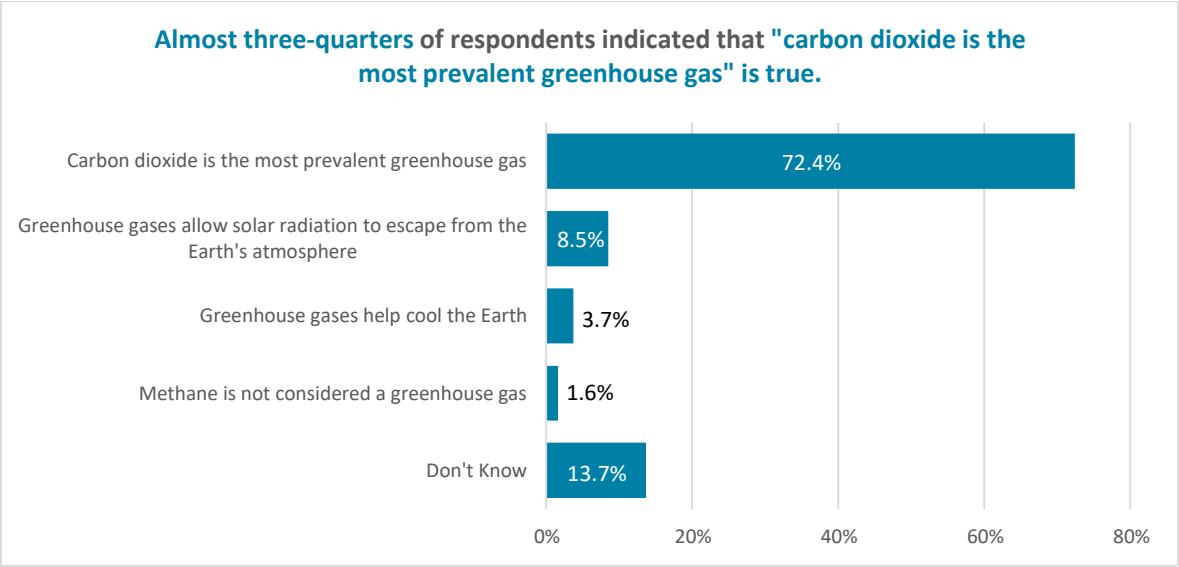

Figure 5

The majority of participants (67.4%; n = 829) indicated that the following statement about waste is false: "Compositing organic waste reduces the amount of plastics being landfilled."

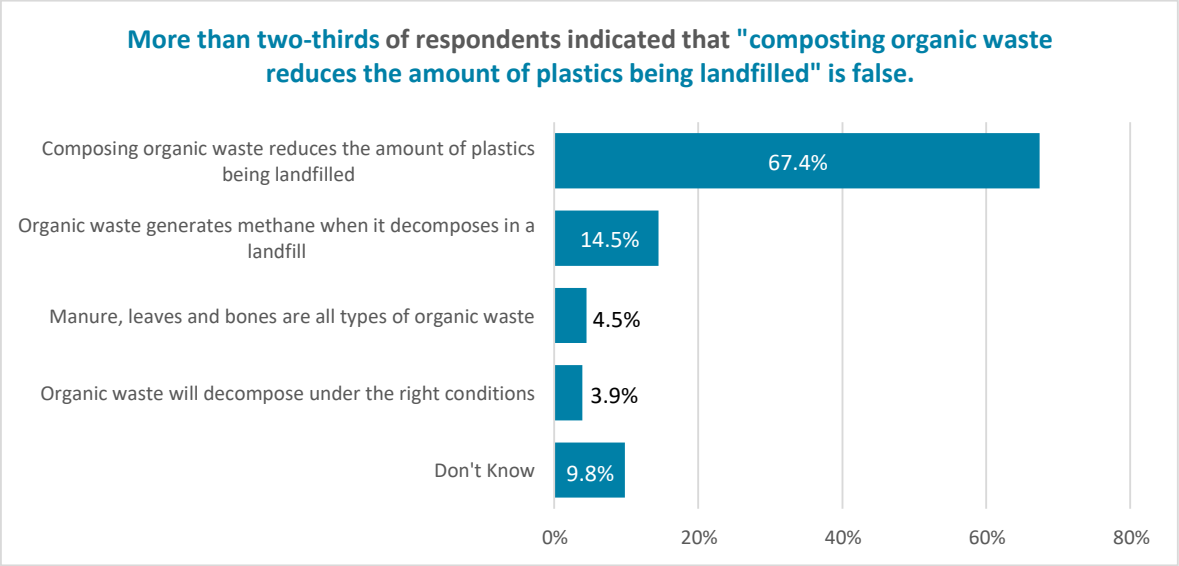

Figure 6

More than half of participants indicated that plastic bottles (85.5%; *n* = 1,052), cardboard boxes (79.5%; *n* = 979), metal cans (78.6%; *n* = 967), and glass jars (60.2%; *n* = 741) are accepted by the City of Saskatoon and the University of Saskatchewan campus single-stream recycling system.

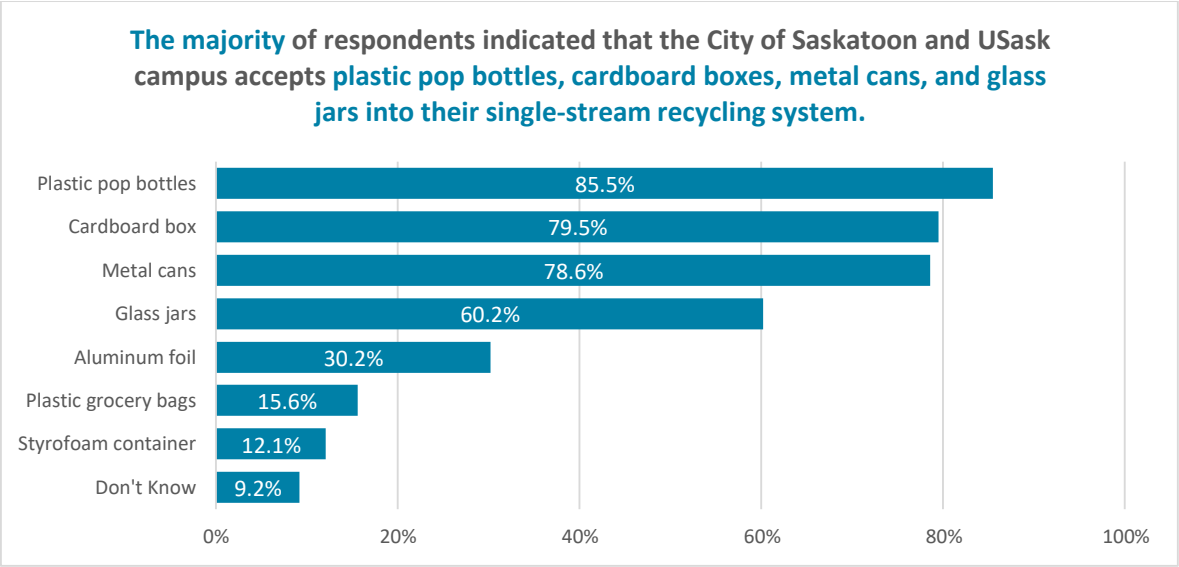

Figure 7

Participants were divided as to what electricity in Saskatchewan is primarily powered by, with the most common responses being natural gas (39.9%; *n* = 490) and coal (35.3%; *n* = 433)

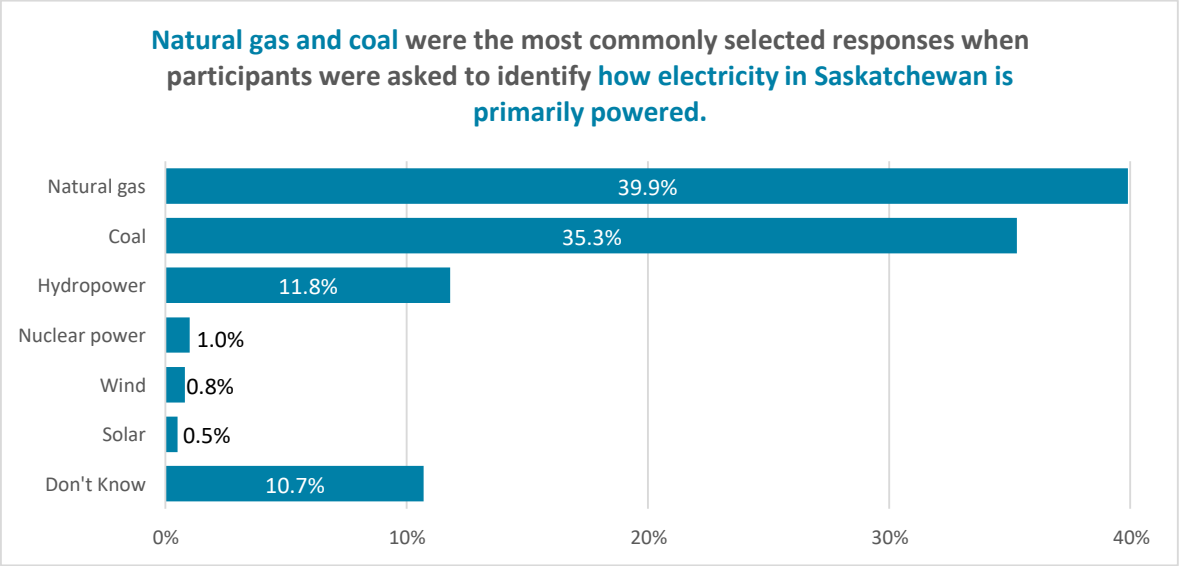

Figure 8

Respondents most commonly indicated that climate change is predicted to result in an expansion of deserts (71.9%; *n* = 882).

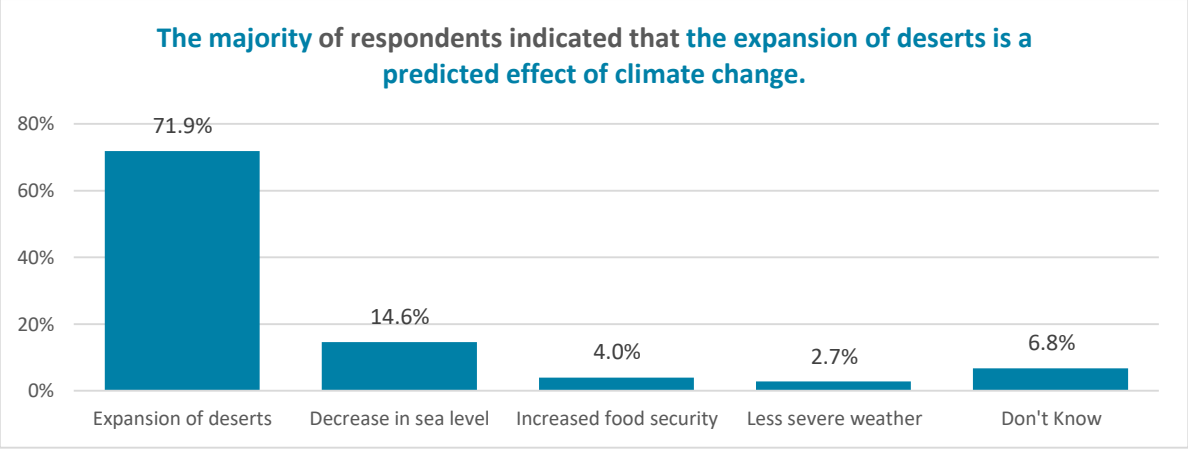

Figure 9

When asked which statement was true about the relationship between environmental issues and socioeconomic issues, two-thirds of respondents (66.5%; *n* = 817) selected "Poorer people are disproportionately impacted by climate change because they are more likely to be geographically restricted into areas threatened by water scarcity, vector-borne disease, and/or potential damage from storms and floods."

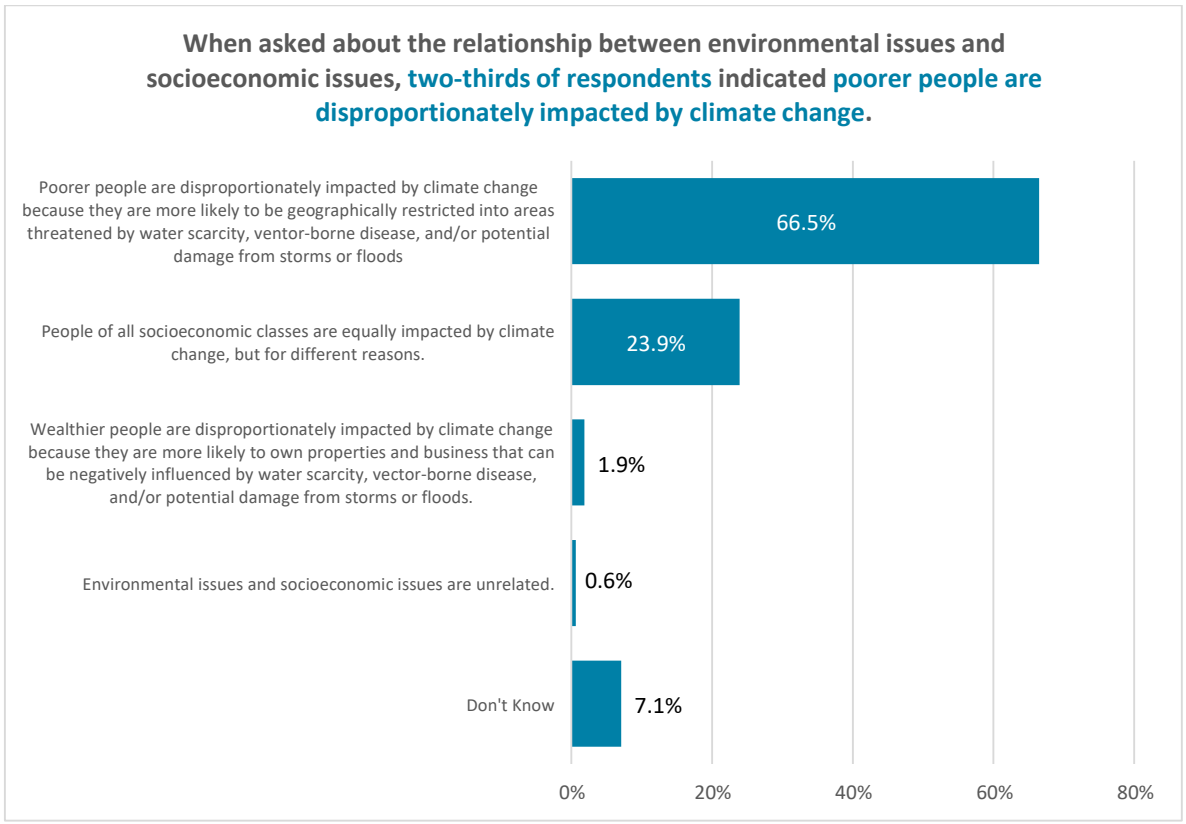

Figure 10

Two-thirds of respondents (67.4%; *n* = 828) stated that reducing consumption of all products would reduce their environmental footprint the most. Recycling all recyclable packaging was also fairly commonly endorsed (21.6%; *n* = 266) relative to the other response options.

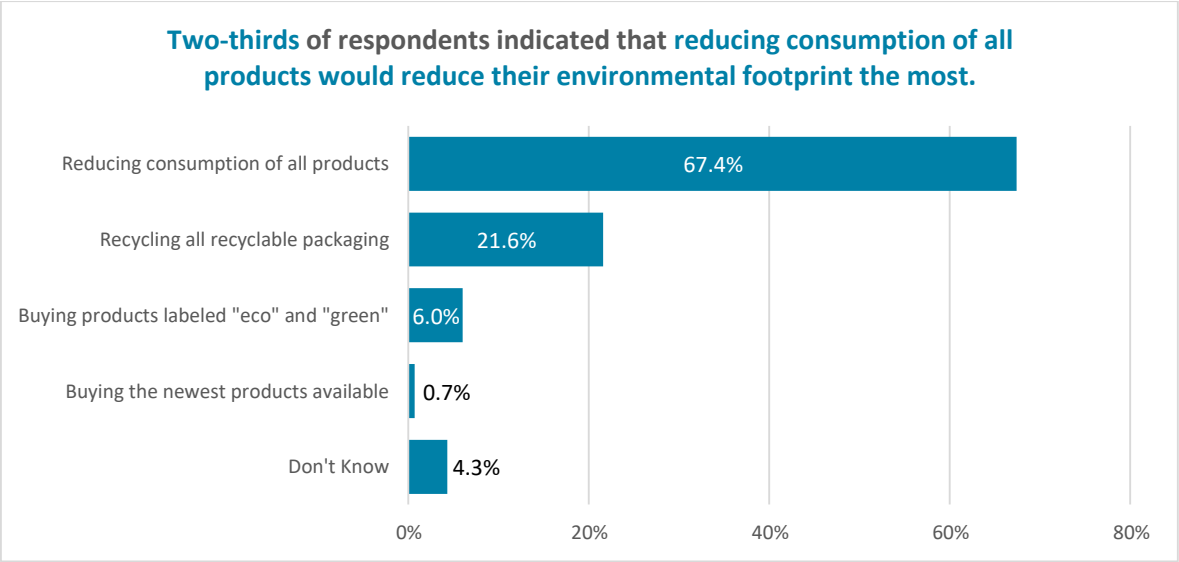

Figure 11

When asked what was agreed to in the "Paris Agreement" that came out of COP-21 in 2015, three out of five respondents (60.1%; *n* = 739) selected "To keep global temperature rise well below 2℃ pre-industrial levels and to pursue a path to limit warming to 1.5℃." A quarter of participants (25.1%; *n* = 309) responded with "Don't Know."

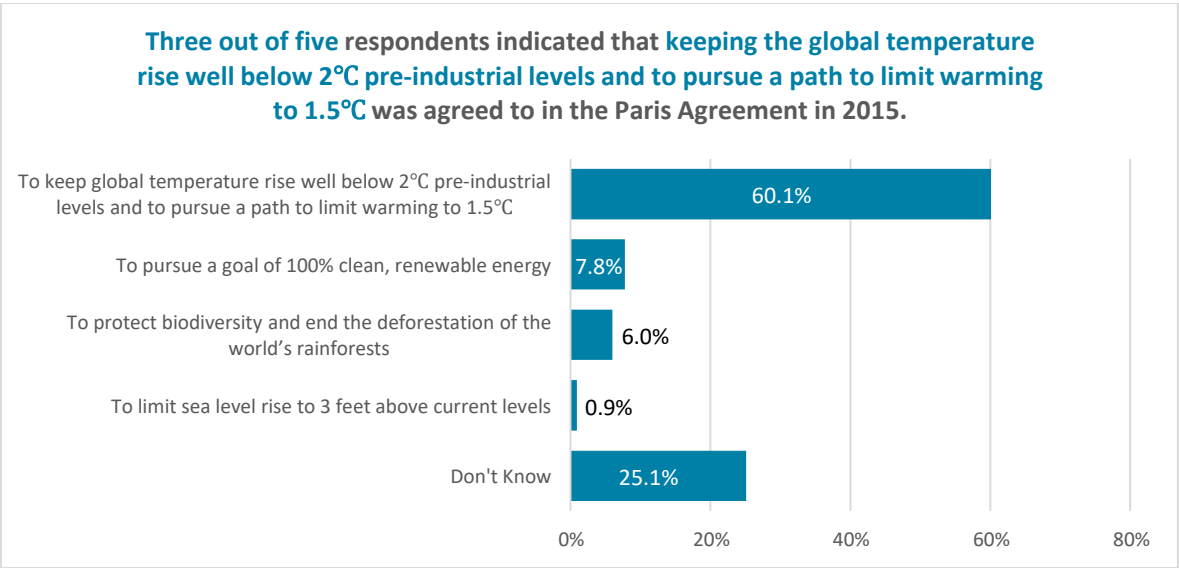

Figure 12

Perceived Abilities Related to Sustainability Communication and Engagement

Respondents were asked to evaluate their abilities in six questions pertaining to sustainability communication and engagement. In describing their ability to communicate sustainability concepts meaningfully to others, one-third or more of respondents indicated that they can write or speak on sustainability in a way that is inclusive and persuasive and can tailor their speaking or writing to the audience to further sustainability. Approximately half of respondents felt that they can listen and respond to alternate, divergent, or contradictory perspectives or ideas fully. Close to a quarter of respondents indicated that sustainability concepts are not expressed through their speaking or writing.

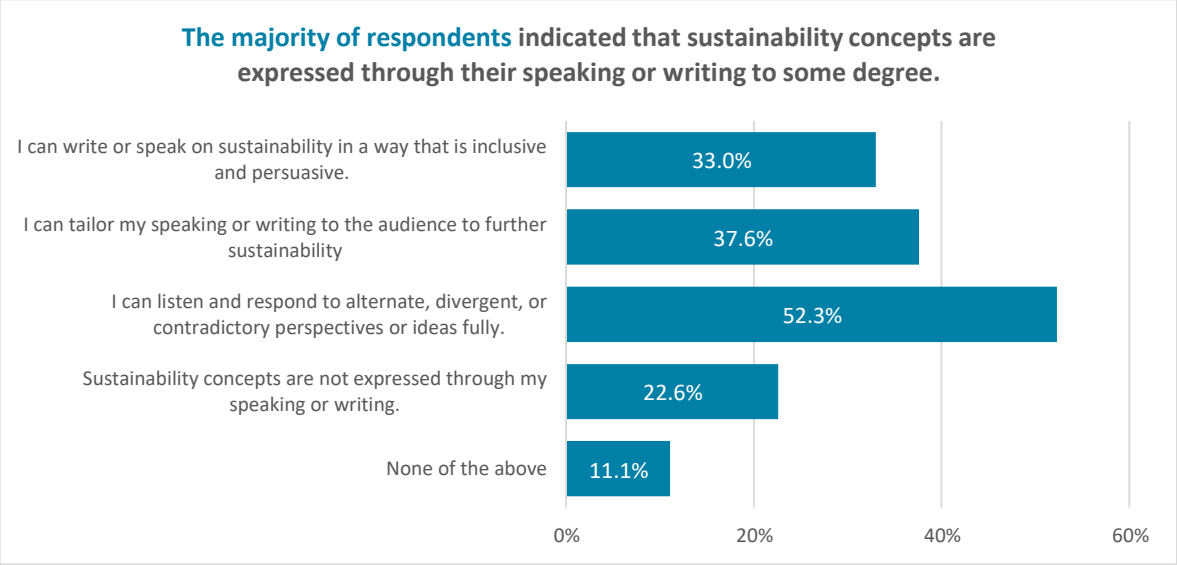

Figure 13

Next, respondents were asked to describe their ability to engage with issues of sustainability in our intercultural society. Most commonly, respondents indicated that they could apply knowledge and skills to meet global or local sustainability needs (43.1%; *n* = 530) and they can use a diversity of perspectives and approaches to solutions for sustainability (45.9%; *n* = 565).

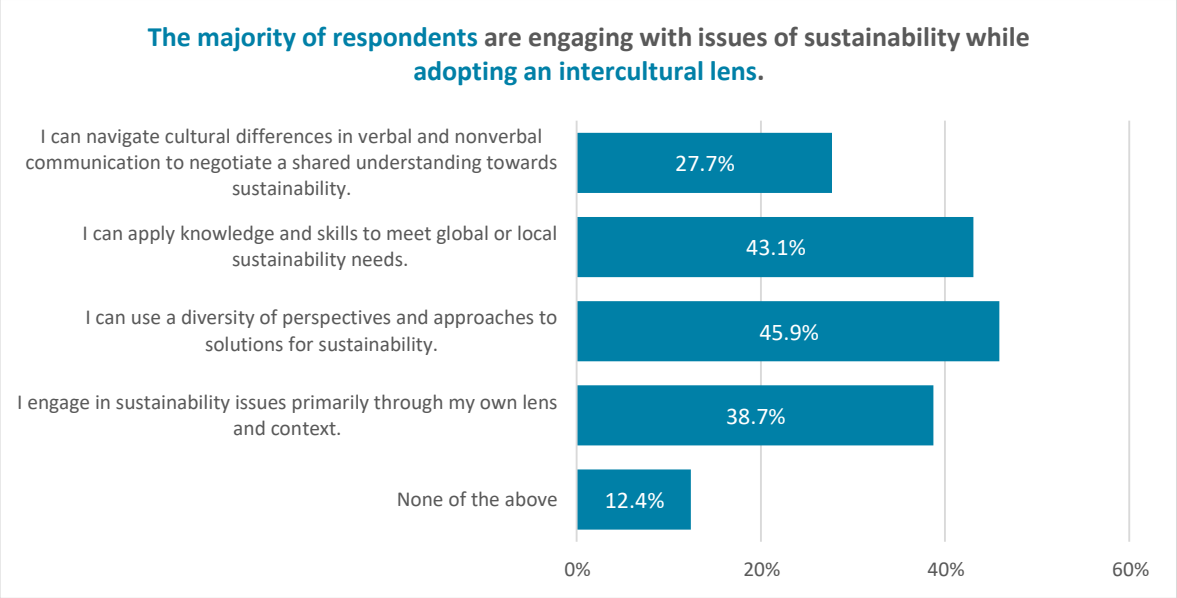

Figure 14

The items classified as under respondents' ability to nurture successful relationships in sustainability-related issues were endorsed by close to half (or more) of the survey participants. Few people preferred to work alone, finding group work tedious, frustrating, or stifling to their own work (9.5%; *n* = 117).

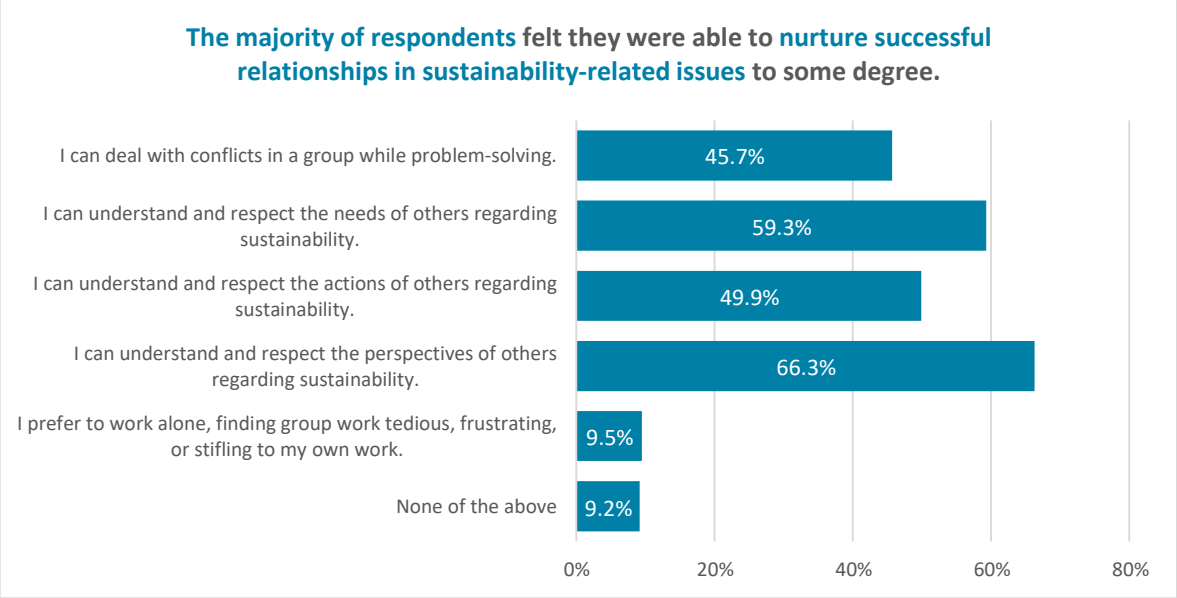

Figure 15

When describing their ability to leverage technology to their advantage in sustainability challenges, more than half of respondents felt they could consider the ethical implications for adopting or adapting technology and that they can utilize existing practices and technologies to address sustainability change.

Few participants (8.5%; *n* = 105) indicated that they can design new technology to address a sustainability challenge.

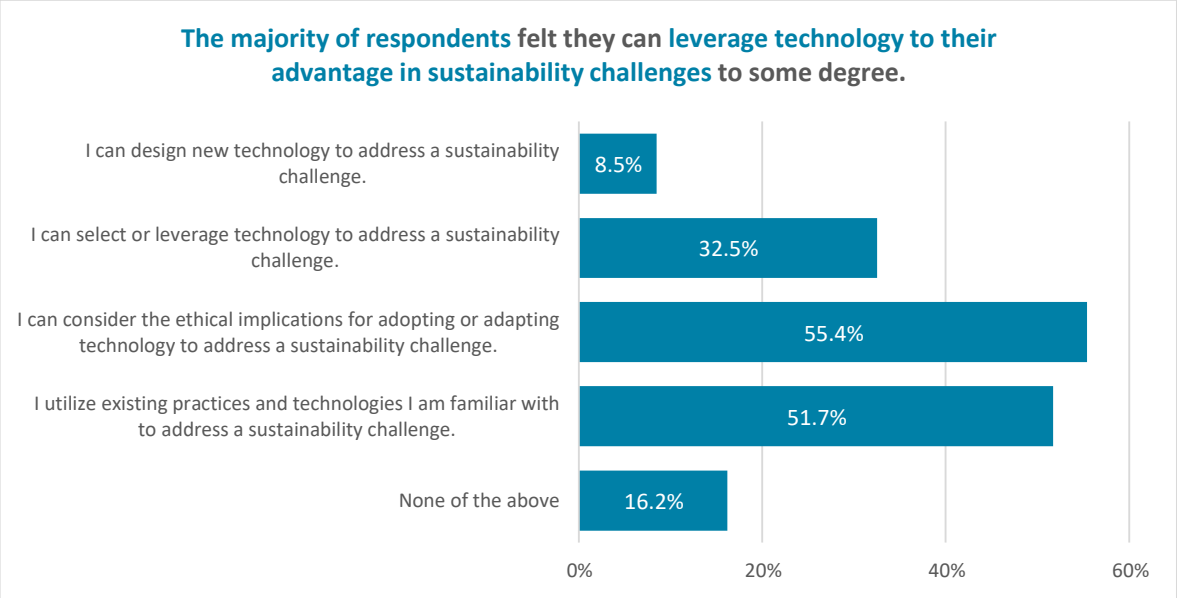

Figure 16

Approximately a third of respondents (for each item) believed they can adapt their skills, abilities, and/or theories to new situations to address sustainability challenges in original ways.

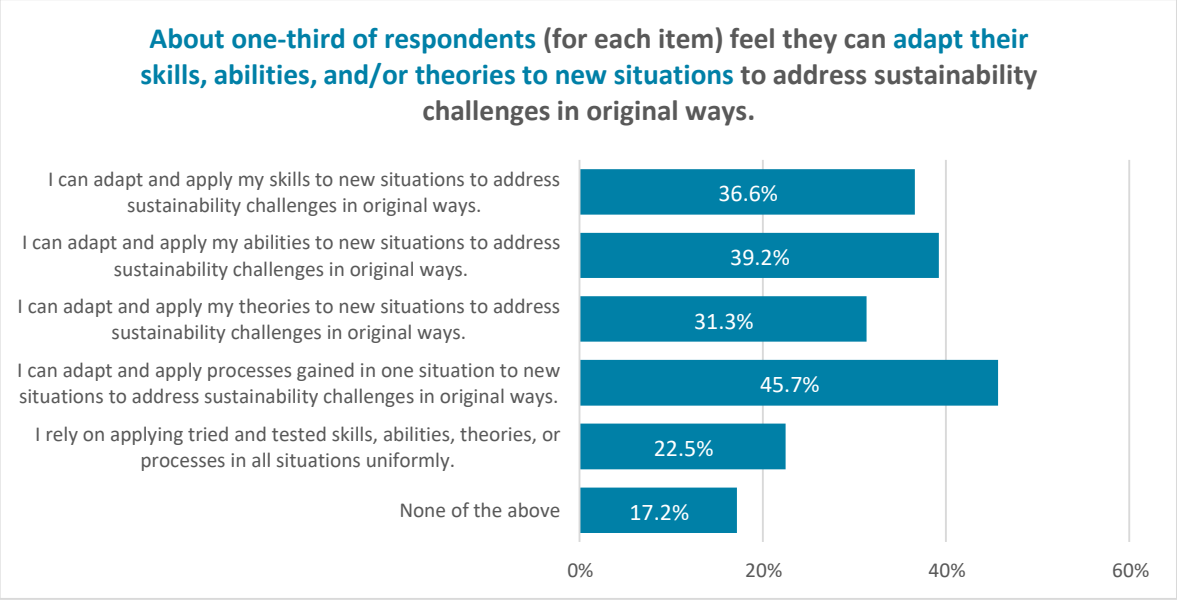

Figure 17

When asked about their ability to cultivate resilience within the field of sustainability, most commonly respondents indicated that they can continually evaluate their motivations and actions to deal with their feelings and emotions regarding sustainability (51.6%; *n* = 635).

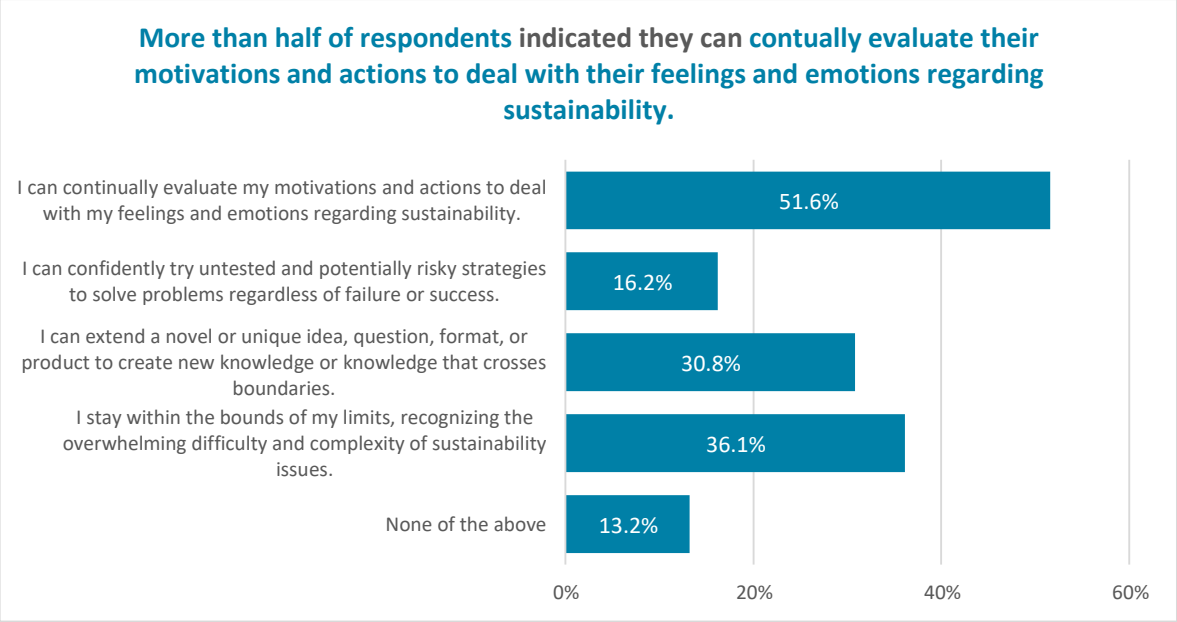

Figure 18

Cultural Perceptions and Behaviours

The next section focused on understanding respondents' cultural perceptions and behaviours around sustainability. Two-thirds of respondents indicated that environmental issues are either "very important" or "extremely important" to them personally.

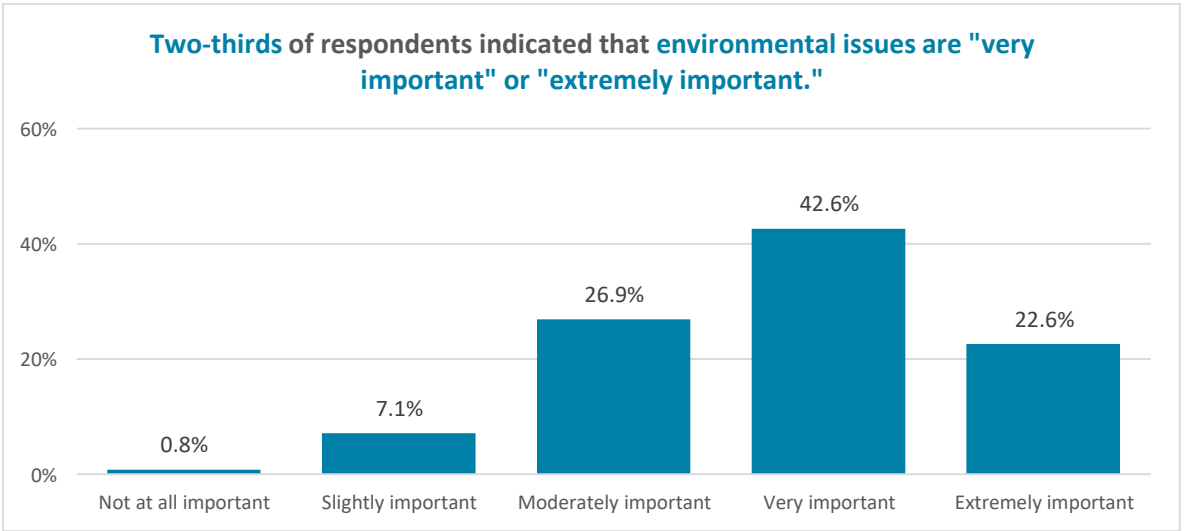

Figure 19

Most commonly, respondents stated that their lifestyle was moderately environmentally sustainable (55.7%; *n* = 686). However, most people appeared to want to live a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle than they actually do, with 52.8% (*n* = 649) noting that they would like to live a very environmentally sustainable lifestyle.

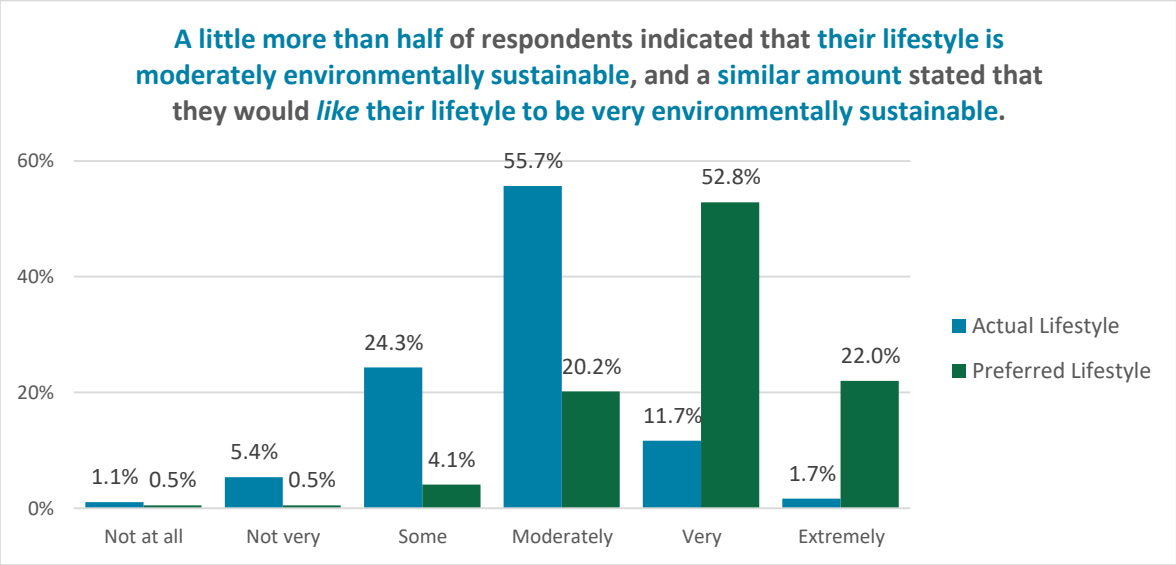

Figure 20

Participants were asked to rank their environmentally sustainable actions on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (always). More than two-thirds of respondents reported that they "frequently" or "always" turn off lights not in use (94.2%), reuse containers and bags (94.2%), use a reusable drinking mug (74.3%), print double-sided (71.9%), wash clothes in cold water (70.8%), and adjust the thermostat to save energy (69.5%).

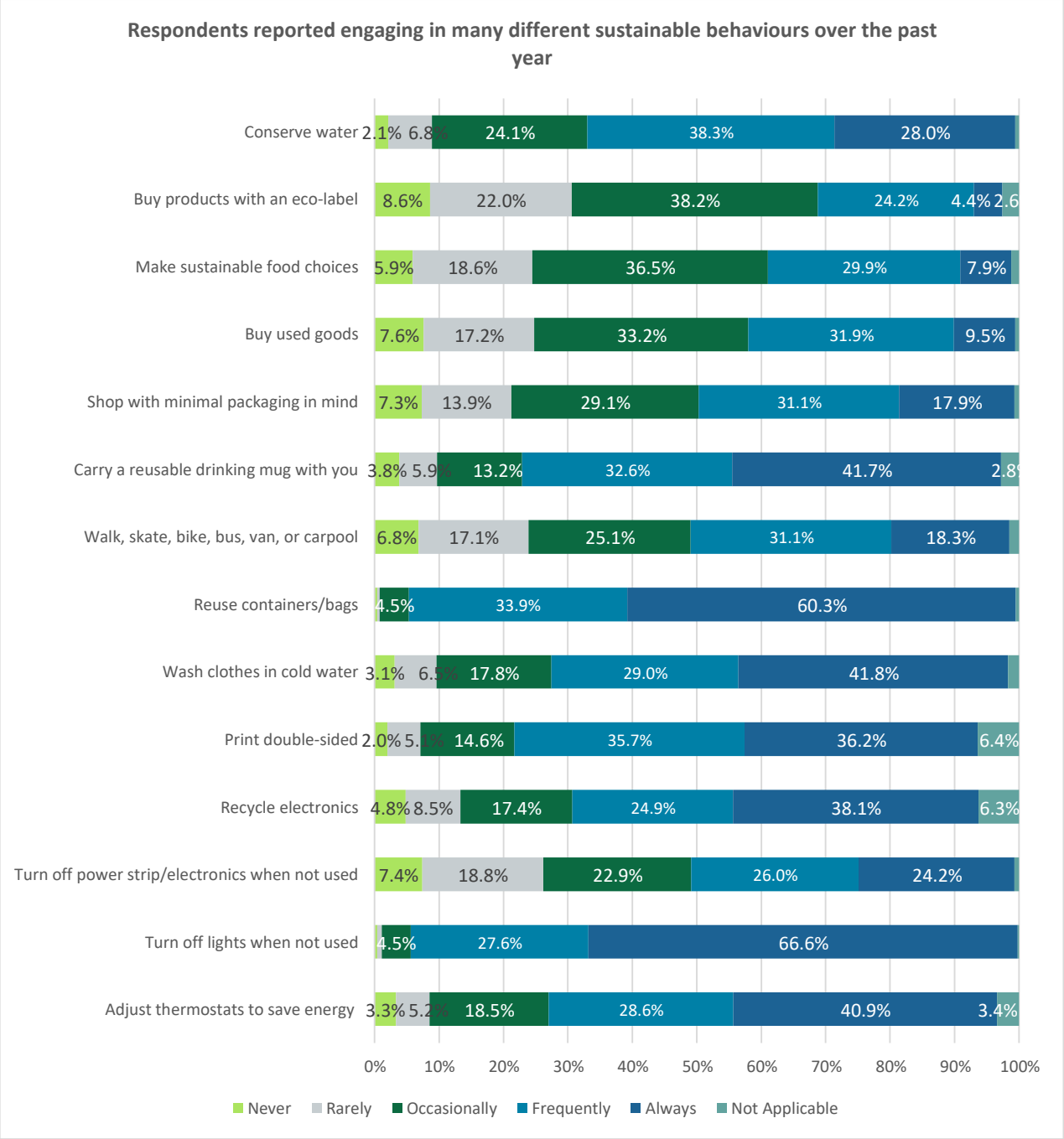

Figure 21

Participants were asked if they had taken part in any voluntary service in areas related to sustainability/ environmental/eco-social justice issues in the past year. Overall, 14.9% of respondents (*n* = 183) had engaged in voluntary service.

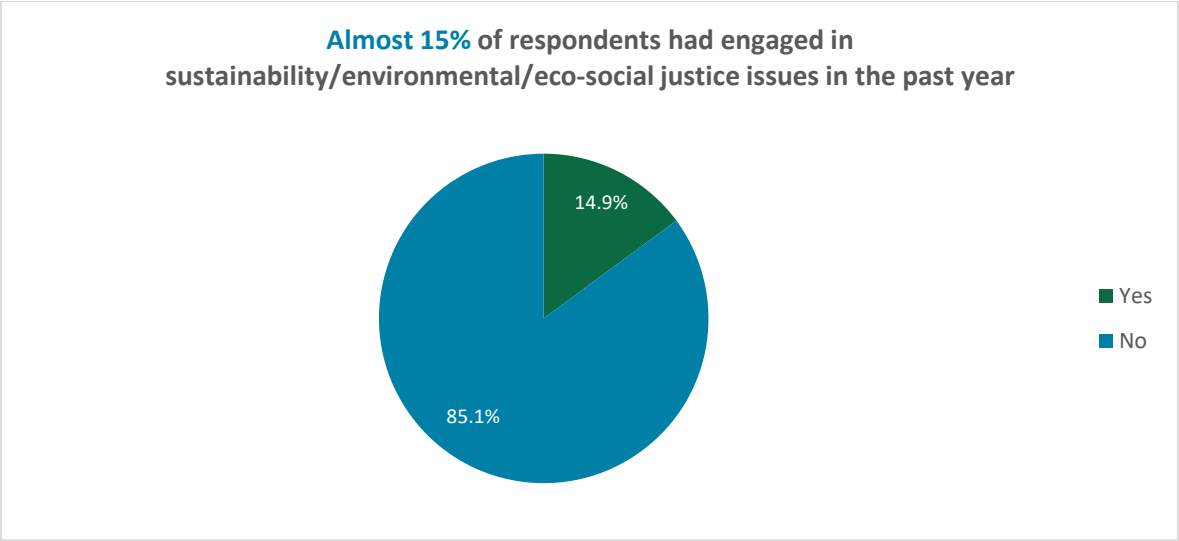

Figure 22

Most respondents were not at all involved in environmentally sustainable events on campus (56.2%; *n* = 691); however, the remaining 44% of respondents were at least somewhat involved in sustainability events on campus. Similarly, close to half of respondents were not at all involved in environmentally sustainable events in the broader community (44.9%; *n* = 552).

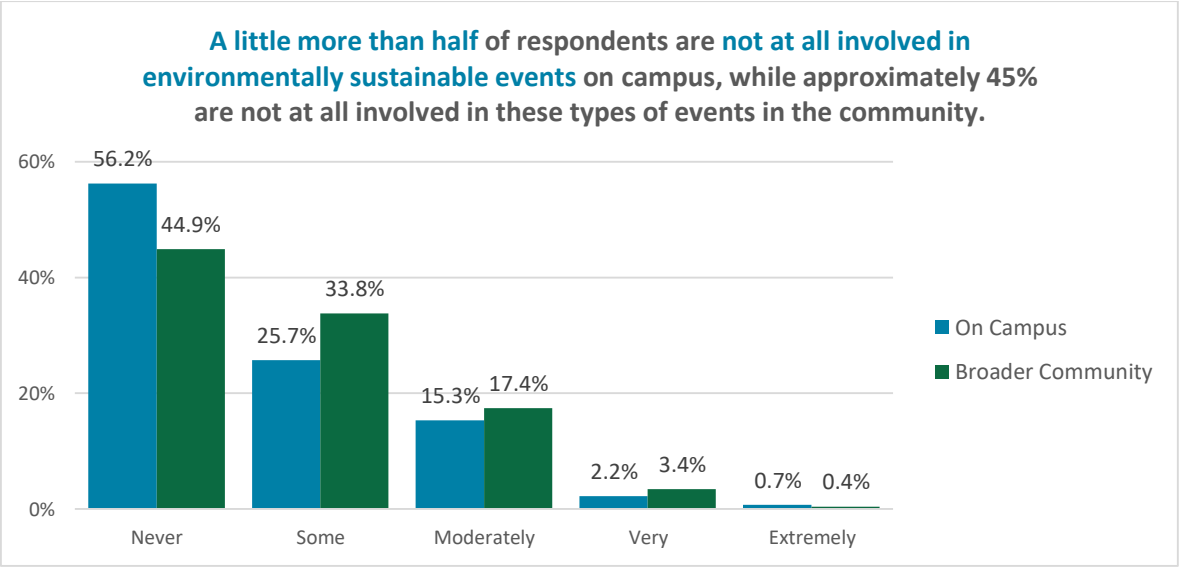

Figure 23

Participants were asked about various sustainability events, programs, services, projects, plans and policies they were aware of or took part in. The findings can be found in Figures 24 to 28.

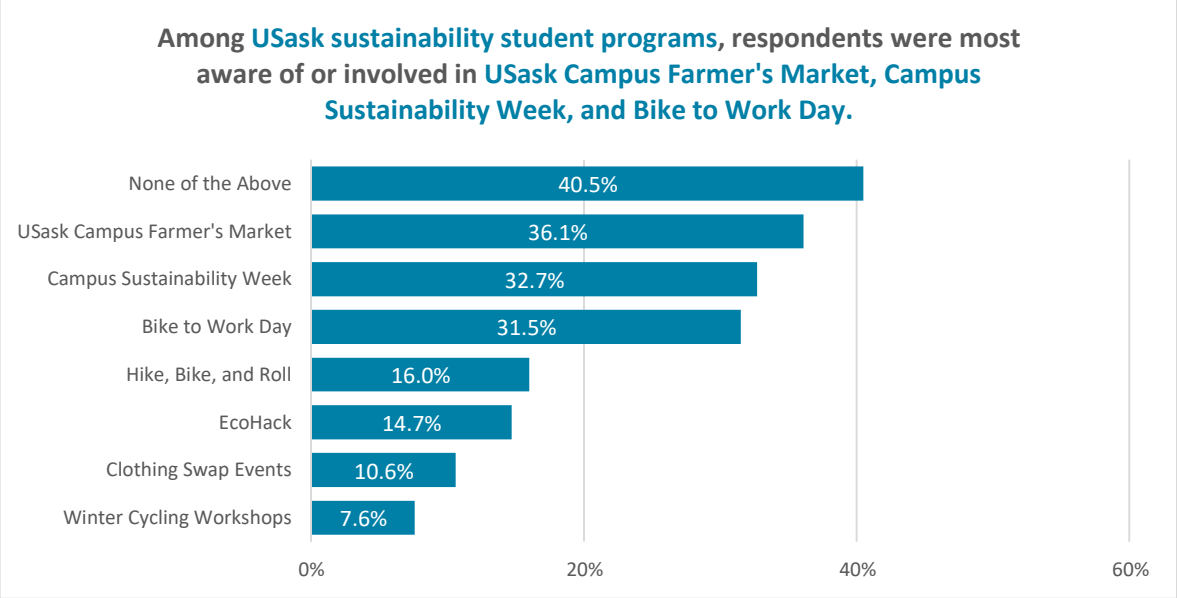

Figure 24

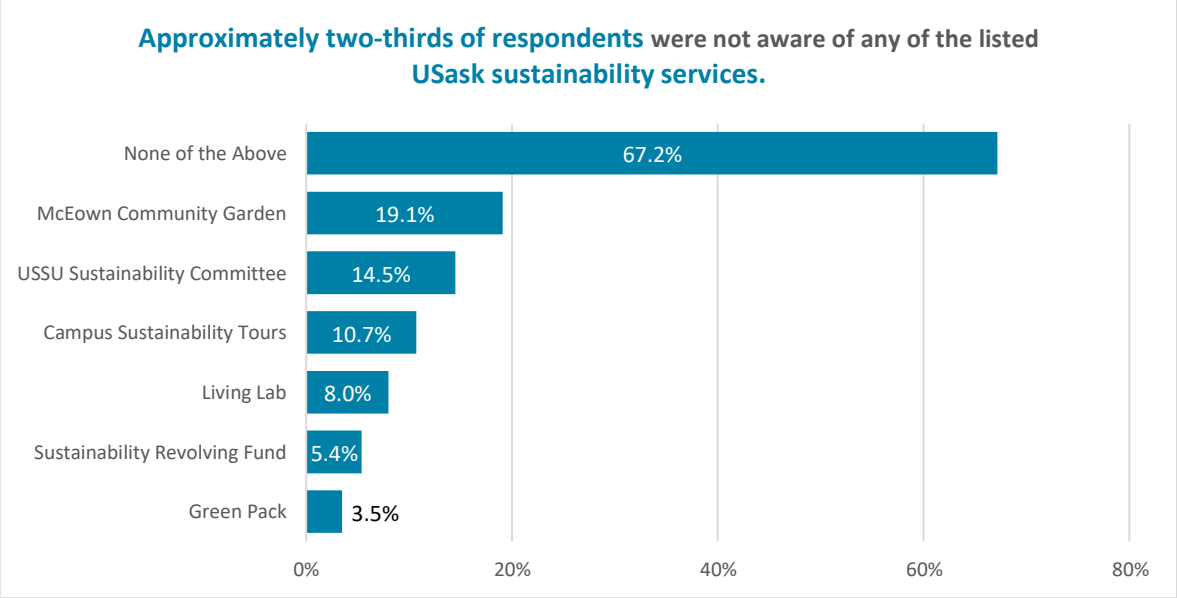

Figure 25

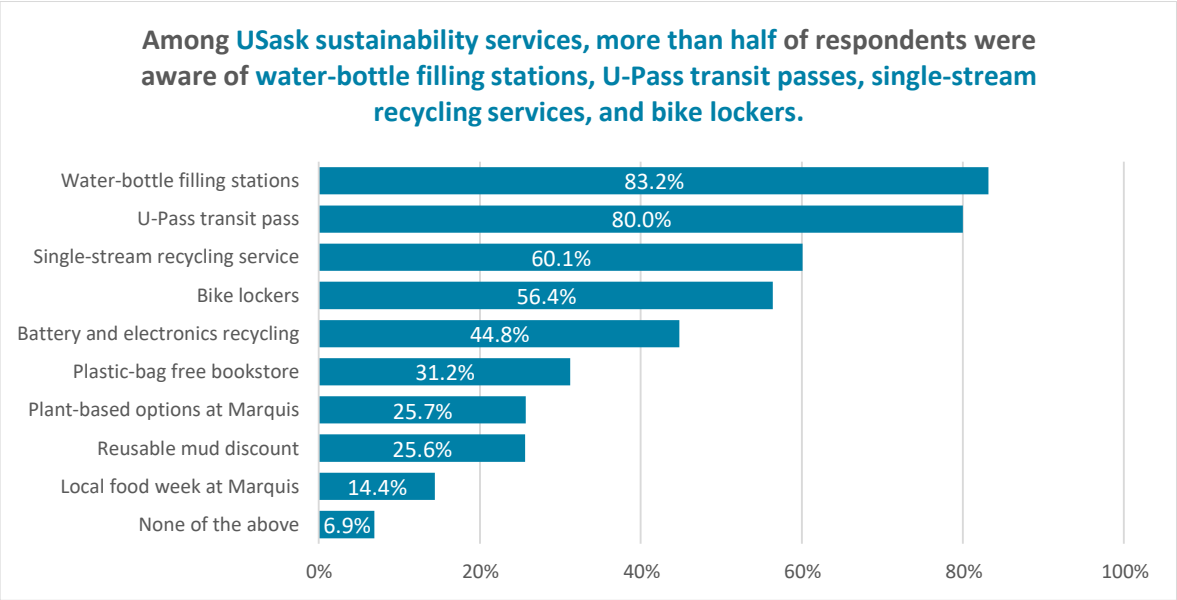

Figure 26

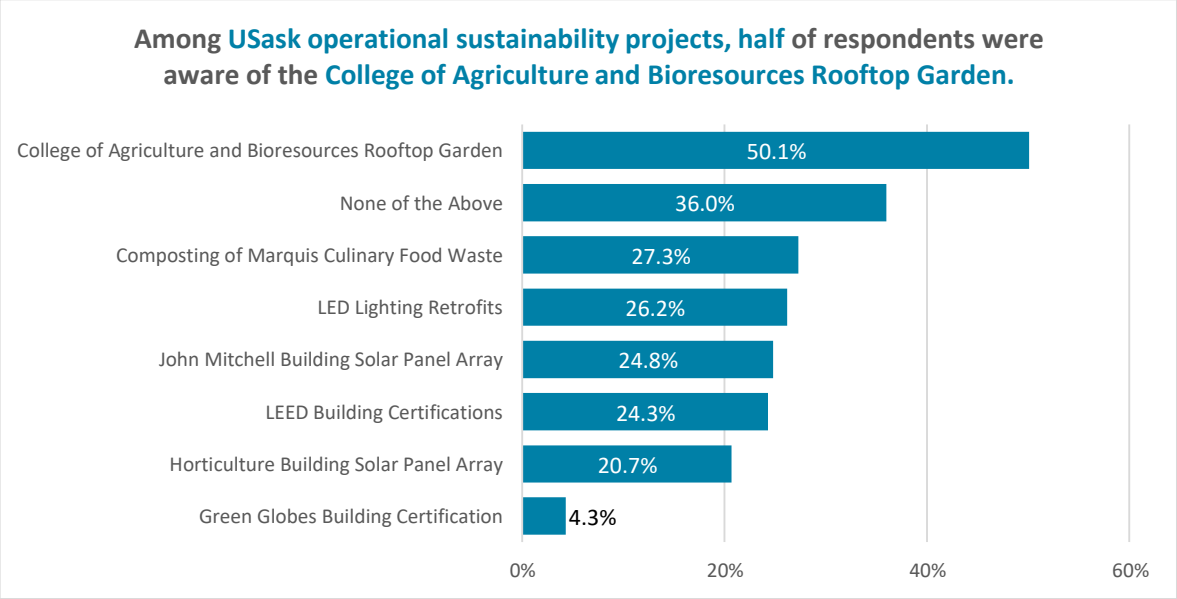

Figure 27

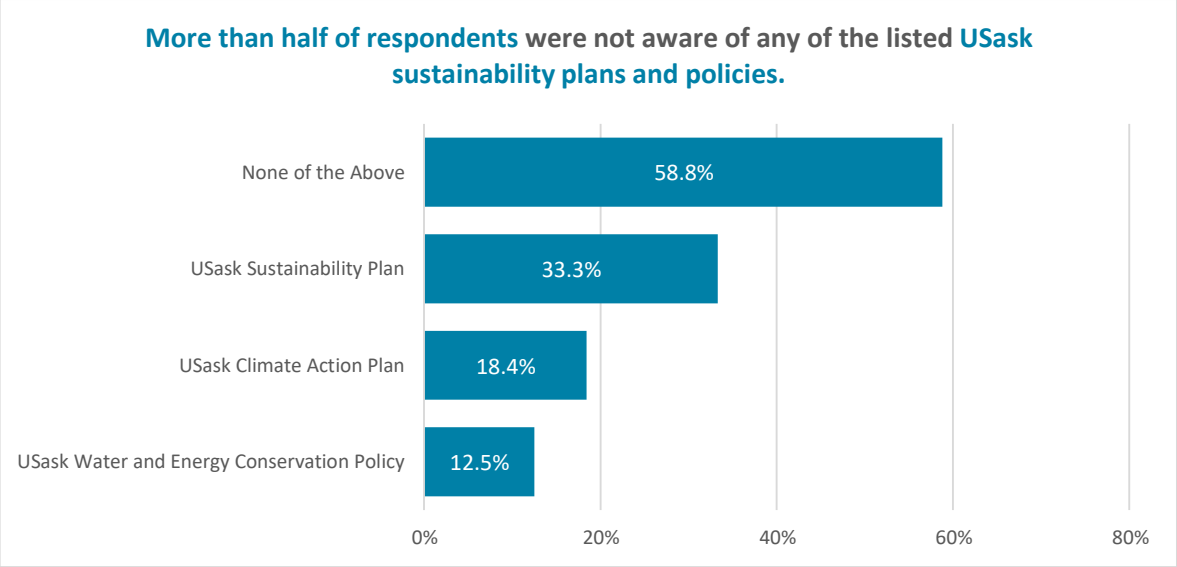

Figure 28

Next, respondents were asked three questions about USask sustainability – its importance and impact on decision-making. While the large majority of respondents (88.7% and 86.7%, respectively) agreed or strongly agreed that it is important to them that USask has a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and that they try to make environmentally sustainable choices in the way they live, only around 10% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they chose USask in part because of its reputation for sustainability.

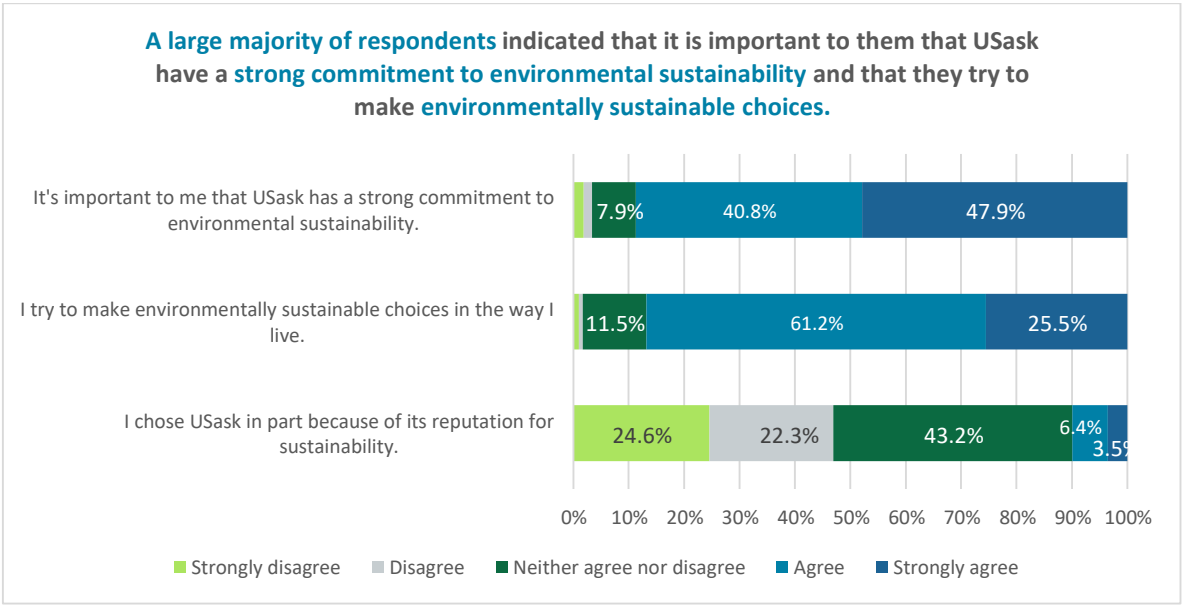

Figure 29

The final question asked respondents which sources informed their answers for the survey. Most participants stated their sources were news articles (60.9%; *n* = 750), news websites/blogs (50.6%; *n* = 623), social media (46.9%; *n* = 577), or they guessed (40.0%; *n* = 492).

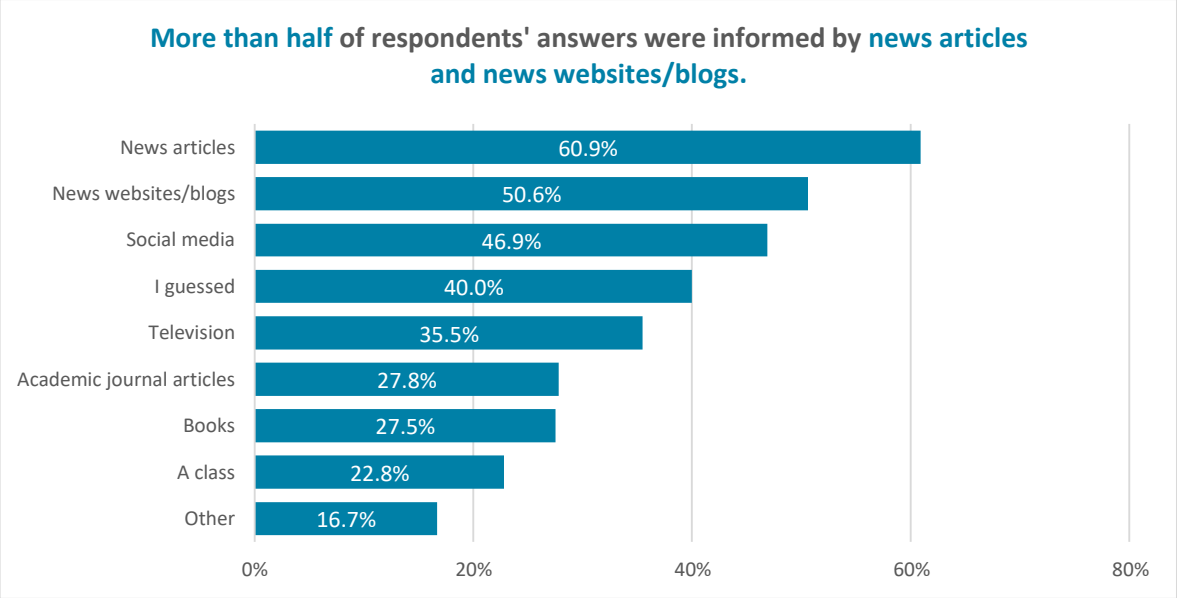

Figure 30

The most common "other" responses as to what informed respondents' answer were information received in emails and word-of-mouth.

Conclusions

The purpose of these surveys was to assess the sustainability literacy and cultural behaviours of the University of Saskatchewan community. The results will be used to inform the University's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Ratings System (STARS) 2023 submission, as well as the University's actions as related to sustainability in the coming years.

Questions on sustainability knowledge suggests that members of the University of Saskatchewan community are fairly knowledgeable about sustainability-related topics. For most questions, at least two-thirds of participants responded correctly. A high proportion (>80%) correctly identified definitions of sustainable development and the triple bottom line. The items that can be recycled by USask and the City of Saskatoon were largely correctly identified, although aluminum foil appears to be a relatively unknown recyclable material, with only 30.2% of respondents noting that it is accepted in the recycling system.

Perceived abilities related to sustainability communication and engagement varied widely among respondents. However, most respondents reported some degree of ability. That is, less than half of respondents selected the option denoting that they do not engage in the asked-about behaviour or

"none of above". Almost half of respondents reported being able to use a diversity of perspectives and approaches to solutions for sustainability (45.9%) and being able to adapt and apply processes gained in one situation to new situations to address sustainability challenges in original ways (45.7%). More than half of respondents indicated they can listen and respond to alternate, divergent, or contradictory perspectives or ideas fully (52.3%), can understand the needs (59.3%) and perspectives (66.3%) of others regarding sustainability, can consider the ethical implications for adopting or adapting technology to address a sustainability challenge (55.4%), can utilize practices and technologies they are familiar with to address a sustainability challenge (51.7%), and can continually evaluate their motivations and actions to deal with their feelings and emotions regarding sustainability (51.6%).

Most respondents stated that environmental issues were very important (42.6%) or extremely important (22.6%) to them, with most respondents (55.7%) living moderately environmentally sustainable lifestyles. However, nearly 75% stated that they would like to lead very or extremely sustainable lifestyles. Additionally, 86.7% of respondents agreed that they try to make sustainable choices and 88.7% agreed that it is important to them that the University is committed to environmental sustainability. However, only 10% of respondents chose the University of Saskatchewan for its sustainability reputation.

Approximately 44% of respondents were at least somewhat involved in sustainability events on campus, and 55% were at least somewhat involved in sustainability events in the community. Overall, participants were most aware of the water-bottle filling stations (83.2%), U-Pass transit (80.0%), single stream recycling services (60.1%), bike lockers (56.4%), rooftop garden (50.1%), and battery and electronic recycling (44.8%). Most participants stated their information sources were from news articles (60.9%), news websites/blogs (50.6%), social media (46.9%), or they indicated they had guessed at the survey answers (40.0%).

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