

Sustainability Survey Review

Two types of sustainability surveys have been administered over the last few years through Institutional Research (IR): a Sustainability Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors (SKAB) survey and a Commuter Patterns and Behavior survey (CPB). The SKAB gauges interest and actions on sustainability initiatives and was administered in fall 2018. CPB focuses on transportation modes and alternative mobility options and has been administered in the fall of 2009, 2013, 2016 and 2021. Additionally, the Office of Sustainability has partnered with Res Life and EAP in previous years to gather information on sustainability priorities, initiatives and actions. The SKAB in the 2022-2023 academic year.

The main purpose of the surveys is to inform campus sustainability policy, procedures and investment. The surveys are also used to satisfy best practices in sustainability as indicated in [AASHE's STARS](#) assessment credits [AC-06](#) Sustainability Literacy Assessment, [EN-06](#) Assessing Sustainability Culture and [OP-16](#) Commute Modal Split.

The following report provides a summary of the SKAB and the longitudinal trends of the CPB.

PART I: Sustainability Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors Survey

Executive Summary

Two versions of the survey, one for students and one for employees, were sent in the fall of 2018. In terms of top concerns and priorities, students cited climate change, human rights and health and well-being as the most important topics of sustainability while employees cited climate change, energy conservation and waste reduction as their top three. Both populations indicated that the most desired initiatives were the installation of water bottle filling stations, elimination of single use plastics and holding more farmer's markets.

Academically, students did not report completing much coursework or assignments related to sustainability other than concepts related to social justice. This aligned with results from the 2018 Student Opinion Survey where UAlbany ranked 4th among the university centers in understanding environmental and sustainability issues, although the difference from the other university centers was not statistically significant. In terms of their attitudes, students strongly agreed on the right to a clean environment and most agree that higher education should address the issue of sustainability (54%) and that UAlbany should be a leader in the field (59%). The majority of students (55%) strongly agree that they have altered their behavior to be more sustainability, with using a refillable bottle, recycling and turning off lights being the most prevalent, but were less inclined to encourage others to adopt such practices (40%). Students report that most know how to act sustainably (60%) and have the ability to do so (64%) with less agreement that it is convenient to engage in these practices on campus (48%). They hold the perception that sustainability is important and campus members care about sustainability, but have a lower perception about the commitment, actions and number of opportunities related to sustainability on campus. Students strongly agree that acting sustainably has value to them (35%) and makes them feel good (38%). While students report a high level of sustainability action, their perception is that others on campus do not engage in sustainable practices, nor do they perceive that others expect them to act sustainably. When asked about energy conservation efforts, the same patterns were

revealed as above, with students reporting that they act sustainably but do not have a strong perception that the campus engages in energy conservation behaviors, that others on campus engage in these behaviors or that it is an expectation from campus members for individuals to engage in energy conservation behaviors. On a side note, an independent survey conducted in the dorms by the Office of Sustainability Eco-Reps revealed that while students reported engaging in various energy conservation measures, those related to water conservation scored low.

The same attitudinal and behavioral questions were posed to employees with similar results. Key points derived from the survey are most campus members engage in sustainable actions, see its value and have the knowledge and capability to act sustainably but their impression that others do not engage in these actions, nor they encourage others to adopt these behaviors indicates that the campus could work to improve the culture of expectations and promote advocacy on sustainability. While there were many similarities between the student and employee results, the groups differed as to their top areas of concern with students focusing on climate change, human rights and well-being and employees focused on climate change, waste reduction and energy conservation.

The following sections will go into detail to the student and employee Sustainability Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors surveys, followed by an analysis of the Commuting Patterns and Behaviors surveys.

STUDENT SURVEY

Survey components and distribution

During the Fall 2018 semester, Institutional Research, Planning, and Effectiveness (IRPE) used stratified sampling of undergraduates, graduates, faculty and staff to create random samples, one for students and one for employees. For the sustainability survey, the samples consisted of 4,000 undergraduates, 1,500 undergraduates, and 1,236 faculty/staff. The survey used a combination of questions related to academics, opinion, behavior and priorities on sustainability issues. These included two questions inquiring about the most important aspects of sustainability and the most desired initiatives. These were questions asked in previous informal administrations by the Office of Sustainability in association with Res Life and EAP. Five of the questions on the student survey were taken from the NSSE Sustainability Education Consortium's supplemental module and the remaining questions were from a survey developed by Dr. Sean Vormwald from Onondaga Community College as part of his dissertation and was distributed at five other institutions of higher education.

The student survey yielded 544 responses, 58% were undergraduates, 39% were graduate students, 2% reported as staff and 1% as other. Demographics included: Freshman (14%), Sophomore (11%), Junior (18%), Senior (15%), on campus (31%) and off-campus students (69%). For on-campus students 3% were from Alumni, 6% Colonial, 2% Dutch, 6.5% Indigenous, 6% State, 4%, Empire Commons, 2.5% Liberty and 2% Freedom. 61% identified as female and 37% as male. In terms of political orientation 47% reported they were Democrats, 9% Republican and 42% not aligned with a political party. Ideological leaning percentages were: Very Liberal (13%), Liberal (31%), Somewhat liberal (16%), Moderate (29%), Somewhat Conservative (6.5%), Conservative (4%), and Very Conservative (1%).

Demographically, the respondents were fairly representative of the campus population. Variations of the sample from the target population include gauging slightly more female, a higher representation of graduate and off-campus students, and an underrepresentation of State Quad residents.

Priorities

Students were given 24 topics related to sustainability and asked to pick the three most important. The choices receiving the highest percentages were climate change (11%), human rights (8%), health and well-being (7%). Students were asked which initiatives out of 15 choices they would most like to see implemented in the next two years. The top selections were installing water bottle filling stations (12.75%), eliminating single use plastic (10%), and hosting more Farmer's Markets (9.8%)

Knowledge

Students were asked several questions that reflected on sustainability related coursework they have completed. These questions were from the [Sustainability Education Consortium](#), a NSSE supplemental content module. Most students (70%) report never having done an assignment that evaluates the sustainability of an activity. 30% report that they often complete assignments that evaluate the impact on future generations and 35% report that they have never done so. Most have also not participated in a campus or community sustainability project (62%) or gone on a field trip to their bioregion (70%). Students report some emphasis in classes on the following subjects: taking responsibility for the welfare of their communities, learning about sustainability, understanding local economies/ecosystems, articulating a just and sustainable society, understanding the economic dimensions of sustainability and acquiring skills to help organizations become more sustainable. They report more experience with understanding the consequences of choices and issues of social justice. While not included in this survey, it should be noted that UAlbany ranked 4th out of the university centers with regards to understanding environmental and sustainability issues in the [2018 Student Opinion Survey](#).

Attitudes

The survey asked participants several questions regarding their attitudes towards the right to a clean environment and its impact on quality of life and freedoms. Students strongly agreed to most of the questions asserting these rights with percentages in the 60 – 70% range. The statements with the highest amount of agreement were that equal rights for all people strengthens communities (64%), access to clean water is a human right (75%), clean air is a part of a good life (76%), and our present consumption of natural resources will result in serious environmental consequences (64%). 51% strongly agreed that they would be willing to put forth extra effort to reduce their environmental footprint and 46% strongly agreed that the well-being of others affected them. Also revealed in this section are student's attitudes on UAlbany's leadership in sustainability. 54% strongly agreed that it was important to them that institutions of higher education address issues of sustainability and 38% strongly agreed and 21% agreed that it was important to them that UAlbany be a leader in sustainability. Students also expressed a preference for communal action with most strongly agreeing that everyone needs to do their part to help with campus sustainability (48%) and collective action can make a difference on campus sustainability issues (51%). Consumerism is not sustainable received the lowest amount of agreement with 30% reporting that they neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

Behaviors

Next students were asked about their sustainable behaviors with most reporting that they engage in such practices but were less inclined to encourage others to adopt such practices. 55% of students report that they have often altered their behavior to be more sustainable. They strongly agree or agree

in percentages between 40-60% that they recycle, use a reusable bottle, minimize waste, turn off the lights, use natural light, try to minimize the electricity they use, power down their computer and use alternative mobility options. It should be noted that using a refillable bottle (59%), recycling (49%) and turning off lights (46%) received the highest percentages. They somewhat agree that they consider the impact of their actions on sustainability and act in ways that have a positive impact. They neither agree nor disagree that they should encourage other people to adopt sustainable behaviors or eat local/organic food on campus.

Perceptions of UAlbany's efforts

Students were asked about their perception of sustainability culture and actions on campus. While they agree that the campus is engaged in sustainability, the largest percentages were in the "somewhat agree" vs. the "strongly agree" or "agree" category. Their perception is that UAlbany encourages people to act in ways that improve sustainability, that sustainability is important at UAlbany and people care about sustainability at UAlbany. The highest percentages in the agreed category were that UAlbany encourages people to act in ways that improve campus sustainability (28%) and that the importance of sustainability is communicated (26%). They somewhat agree that UAlbany is genuinely committed to sustainability, implements practices, measures practices, has policies and plans, has learning opportunities for students, creates an atmosphere where people are expected to act in ways to improve campus sustainability and provides incentives for courses and research. The item with the lowest agreement rate is providing sustainability related learning opportunities for employees where 39% neither agree nor disagree.

Perceptions of other's expectations and value in sustainable acts

Respondents were asked about the impact of sustainable behaviors on mental health and the expectations of sustainable actions by others. In general, they report that acting sustainably has value and makes them feel good. While students report a high level of sustainability action, their perception is that others on campus do not engage in sustainable practices. Students strongly agree that they feel good about acting in ways that improve sustainability (38%), that it's important to act this way (42%), it has a positive impact (36%), helps make a difference on an important topic (30%), is worthwhile behavior (37%) and has value (35%). They agree that it is easy to act sustainably, it doesn't take much extra effort and enjoy acting in ways to improve sustainability. They somewhat agree that it is convenient to act sustainably. They neither agree nor disagree that their friends, students in their major, UAlbany students in general, professors and campus leaders think they should act sustainably. They neither agree nor disagree in percentages ranging from 30-35%, that others act sustainably including students in their major, UAlbany students, their friends, professors and campus leaders.

Perceptions on UAlbany energy conservation

When inquiring about the campus energy conservation efforts, the highest percentages were found in the "somewhat agree" to "agree" categories. Students agree (20-27% range) that the campus implements energy conservation practices and policies, communicates the importance of conservation, encourages people to conserve and provides recognition for conservation. They somewhat agree (20-25%) that UAlbany is committed to energy conservation, is doing a good job on energy conservation, sees energy conservation as important, cares about energy conservation and tracks energy use. The

least held agreement was on whether the campus provides learning opportunities on energy conservation for employees with 35% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Overview

This survey asked many of the same questions as the student one, with one exception: the section employing the Sustainability Education Consortium questions inquiring about perceptions of what was learned in a class was eliminated. This survey yielded 192 responses, 37% were faculty, 48% were staff, 8% were administrators, 3% graduate students and 3% selected other. There was a mix of veteran and new employees with 42% working at the university between 1 and 5 years, 16% between 6 and 10 years and 41% with over 10 years. 58% were female and 40% male. In terms of political identity and ideology: 49% were Democrat, 7% Republican and 27% not belonging to a party. Ideologies ranged from: Very Liberal (16%), Liberal (24%), Somewhat liberal (13%), Moderate (18%), Somewhat Conservative (7%), Conservative (5%), and Very Conservative (1%).

Priorities

Employees were given the same choices as students and asked to select their top topics of concern. Their top results were Climate Change (10%), Energy Conservation (9%), Waste Reduction (8%), and Health and Well-being (8%). The top initiatives employees would like to see in the next two years were: installing water bottle filling stations (12.5%), eliminating single use plastic (10%), implementing the use of reusable containers in food court (10%) and holding more Farmer's Markets (9.7%).

Attitudes

Employees were asked a series of questions about their perceptions of sustainable actions, selecting the extent to which they either agreed or disagreed with statements. Faculty strongly agreed with several statements including equal rights for all people strengthens a community, community cooperation is necessary to solve problems, clean water is universal human right, willing to put forth effort to reduce impact, unsustainable economy value personal wealth at the cost of others, many people can work together to solve global problems, clean air is part of life, present consumption of natural resources will result in serious env challenges for the future, well-being of others affect me, biological diversity is good, important for sustainability to be addressed by colleges. They agreed that it is important for UAlbany to be a leader in sustainability (60%). They neither agreed nor disagreed that consumerism is not sustainable.

Behaviors

They strongly agree that they recycle, use a reusable bottle, minimize waste, turn off the lights, use natural light, try to minimize the electricity they use, power down their computer and use alternative mobility options (40 – 60% range). They somewhat agree that they consider the impact of their actions on sustainability, act in ways that have a positive impact. They neither agree nor disagree that they should encourage other people to adopt sustainable behaviors or eat local/organic food on campus.

Perceptions of UAlbany's efforts

Employees agree that UAlbany encourages people to act in ways that improve and that sustainability is important at UAlbany and people care about sustainability at UAlbany (45 – 50%). The strongest reaction was 38% agreed that UAlbany is genuinely committed to sustainability, 34% agree that the campus implements practices aimed at improving sustainability and 35% agree that the campus communicates the importance of sustainability to the campus community. They neither agree nor disagree that the campus provides sustainability related learning opportunities for employees.

Perceptions of other's expectations and value in sustainable acts

Employees were asked about whether others on campus or in their social circle have expectations of sustainable behavior. They strongly agree that it feels good about acting in ways that improve sustainability, it's important to act this way, it has a positive impact, helps make a difference on an important topic, is worthwhile behavior and has value. They agree that it is easy to act sustainably, it doesn't take much extra effort, enjoy acting in ways to improve sustainability.

They have a more favorable viewpoint of others acting in a sustainable way than students with only 20 – 30% neither agreeing nor disagreeing that others act sustainably including their supervisors and colleagues, UAlbany students and campus leaders. 40% agree that they enjoy acting in ways that improve campus sustainability in my everyday behavior, feel good about acting in ways that improve campus sustainability in my everyday behavior and 47% report that they act in ways that improve campus sustainability in my everyday behavior.

They somewhat agree (39%) that it is convenient to act sustainably. They neither agree nor disagree that their friends think they should act sustainably or that students in their major, UAlbany students in general, professors, or campus leaders think they should act sustainably. They also neither agree nor disagree that students in the major do act sustainably, UAlbany students, their friends, professors or campus leaders act sustainably.

Perceptions on UAlbany energy conservation

Employees were polled on their perceptions of energy conservation on campus. 40% agree that UAlbany encourages people to conserve energy on campus and that it is convenient to conserve. They neither agree nor disagree that their friends, students in their major, UAlbany students in general and campus leaders think they should conserve. (range was between 30 – 40%). They also neither agree nor disagree that their friends at UAlbany, their professors and campus leaders conserve. 33% report that it is important to conserve energy and 36% indicated that conserving energy has a positive impact and conserving energy is worthwhile.

PART II - Commuter Patterns and Behavior survey

Executive Summary

This survey was developed as part of a grant project awarded in 2009. Dr. Kate Lawson in the Department of Geography and Planning collaborated with the Office of Sustainability to create a commuting patterns and behavior survey, building upon a similar survey that was administered by the NYS Office of General Services at the Harriman Campus. Two surveys were conducted, one geared towards students and the other towards employees. Subsequently, the survey was distributed by

Institutional Research in the fall of 2009, 2013 and 2016. The trends revealed through these administrations are described below. Note: the percentages cited in this report reflect the 2016 responses and unless noted, are reflective of the percentages in previous surveys.

STUDENT SURVEY

Only geographic information was gathered from students which revealed that 58% of the respondents lived off campus. Of the on-campus residents, 32% were from the 5 quads and 11% from the apartments.

Modes of transportation

The largest percentage of students reported traveling between 2 and 3 miles to get to campus at 18%, with 17% travelling between 3 and 5 miles. The most common answer for the length of commute is 11 to 15 minutes at 30%. Students tend to commute via alternative mobility methods with the bus accounting for 48% of the daily transportation (UAlbany bus at 17% and CDTA at 31%). 36% report commuting alone on a daily basis, 5% reported that they carpool, 16% walk and 1% ride a bike. 55% say that transportation was a consideration in their housing choice and 59% say it will be a factor in their next decision. The 59% represents an increase in those responding in the affirmative from the previous survey administrations where only 35% said it would be a decision in the future. 91% drive a gas-powered car and 8% drive a hybrid or electric car. 75% of students indicated that they were not at all likely or unlikely to purchase an electric vehicle in the next three years and 70% reported that installing charging stations on campus would not make them likely to purchase an electric vehicle. When asked about desired charging locations, 69% identified the 4 quads.

Obstacles to alternative mobility

Main concerns with regards to transportation are: the availability of parking, availability of bike lanes, and safety while walking/biking. Obstacles to using alternative forms of mobility cited most often are living too far from school to walk or bike, driving being convenient, not knowing a person to carpool and Adverse weather conditions. Incentives or conditions that would make students likely to use alternative mobility, include if the buses ran on a more frequent schedule and if the length of commute was similar to the length by car.

Preferences for services

The top three desired improvements in bus service include shorter waiting time between buses (70%), faster service (e.g. express buses) (65%) and better and larger waiting shelters (60%). The most popular bus destinations are downtown Albany (70%) and Crossgates Mall (64%). A rewards program for taking transit/walking/biking/carpooling, preferred parking for carpoolers, and enhanced bus routes (Ex: BRT) were the most desired services.

Knowledge and use of services

While there is sufficient information on parking/taking transit to campus, with 55-60% stating they knew where to get the information, only 30% indicated they knew where to find information on walking or biking to campus and 9% knew how to find information on getting carpool partners. Most knew about the universal access to buses (85%) and 49% knew about the GPS tracking service on UAlbany buses but most did not know about the bicycle registration (74%), and sharing programs (bike (78%) , car (84%),

carpooling (87%). On the GPS tracking system of UAlbany's shuttles, students reported that it made it easier to use the shuttles, decreased wait times and increased use of the buses.

EMPLOYEE SURVEY

In terms of the demographics of the employee survey, the respondents skewed female (61%) vs male (39%). In terms of age and years' experience the highest percentage were found in the 50 to 59 age range (30%) and employed at the university between 10 and 19 years (28%). Service categories were: 44% professional staff, 37% faculty, 10% classified staff, 8% research foundation and 2% responded other.

Modes of transportation

The majority of campus employees (74%) drive alone as their primary mode of commuting daily. Other modality rates reported are: 3% carpool, 7% take the bus (either CDTA, 4%, or UAlbany, 3%), 2% ride a bike and 3% walk. The largest percentage of employees (22%) travel between 5 and 10 miles and their commute takes over 20 minutes (26%). Almost all drive a gas-powered vehicle (90%). Most drive (89%) when travelling between campuses. Transportation has become more of a factor in housing decisions with 52% indicating it was a factor in the 2016 survey, up from 48% in 2009. When asked if they will purchase an electric vehicle in the next three years, 38% said not likely at all, 32% said unlikely, and 21% as likely as not. 61% reported that installing charging stations on campus were unlikely to increase their likelihood of purchasing an electric vehicle. The podium was the most preferred spot for charging stations (52%).

Obstacles to alternative mobility

Most employees own a bike (54%) but report the commuting distance as the main factor in preventing them from biking to work (66%), followed by adverse weather (49%) and lack of bike lanes (46%). The biggest transportation concerns include: the availability of parking, availability of bike lanes, and safety while walking and biking. Obstacles to using alternative mobility options include driving being the most convenient option, having to travel to additional place before or after work, and living too far from campus to walk as the main reasons why campus employees do not use alternative forms of transportation.

Preferences for services

Most desired services with regards to busing are more frequent schedules, having the length of the commute by bus similar to the length by car, and if a bus stop was within a five-minute walk from home. The most popular destinations for the bus are the train station (53%), downtown Albany (49%) and the airport (46%) with the train (+14) and airport (+10) gaining the most percentage points between 2009 and 2016. The services employees indicated they would use the following services if offered; working from home, a compressed work week, and free taxi rides home in an emergency. (Note: the campus participates in the NY511 program which has a guaranteed ride home option that provides this service)

Knowledge and use of services

Based on the trends, it can be concluded that there is a lack of information by employees on the following transportation services at UAlbany: GPS bus locator service, bicycle registration, and sharing programs (bike, car, carpooling) and guaranteed ride home. Respondents indicated that knew where to obtain information on parking (90%) but less on taking transit to campus (55%) and fewer still on walking/biking to campus (30%) and finding a carpool partner (22%). Only 39% of employees were aware of the GPS tracking system for the buses with 7% using the service on their phone and 13% using the monitors throughout campus to track the buses. The effectiveness of the GPS bus tracking system has changed from the 2013 to 2016 survey. In 2013, shortly after the implementation of the system, 74% reported that it made it easier to use the buses, 53% said that it decreased wait time, 63% were able to use the buses more frequently and 50% indicated that it allowed them to use the bus in situations where they were not able to before. These numbers dropped in the 2016 survey with 51% saying it made it easier to use the bus, 33% reported that it decreased wait times, 26% said it allowed them to take the bus more frequently and 24% reported that they used the bus in new situations.