

SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

2018 Campus Sustainability Survey: Results and Trends

A Report from the Environmental and Social Sustainability Lab (2019)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF FOOD, AGRICULTURAL,
AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

In Collaboration with the
Ohio State University
Sustainability Institute

About the Environmental and Social Sustainability Lab

The Environmental and Social Sustainability (ESS) Lab is a collaborative community of scholars working to build scientific understanding of environmental and social sustainability in an interdisciplinary context. Housed within the School of Environmental and Natural Resources within The College of Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences, we are staffed by a core group of affiliated faculty members, students, and research staff representing a broad range of social science expertise. Our mission is to support a viable socio-ecological future through applied social science research, and to serve as a hub of sustainability research at Ohio State.

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Suggested Citation

Walpole, E.H., Herziger, A., and Wilson, R.S. 2019. *2018 Campus Sustainability Survey: Results and Trends. A Report by the Environmental and Social Sustainability Lab*. The Ohio State University, School of Environment and Natural Resources.

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Executive Summary

The Ohio State Campus Sustainability Survey represents a joint effort on the parts of numerous campus partners to measure current and longitudinal trends in undergraduate behaviors, beliefs, values, attitudes, and knowledge regarding sustainability at The Ohio State University. This report explores the results of that effort in 2018, through online survey responses from 3,293 Undergraduate students from the Columbus campus (out of 20,500 randomly selected students originally contacted; a response rate of approximately 16%).

Engagement in sustainable behaviors:

In total, undergraduate student engagement in sustainability-related behaviors such as carrying a reusable water bottle, turning off the lights in an empty room, recycling, and utilizing public transportation are quite high. Furthermore, by comparing these results to a similar survey conducted in 2014¹ it can be estimated that **engagement in pro-environmental behaviors has increased by a substantial margin in the past 4 years**. However, opportunities to further promote campus sustainability goals may present themselves in emphasizing lower-engagement, low-cost behaviors, such water conservation and turning personal electronics off or into low-power mode when not in use, **which could also inform Ohio State sustainability goals 7a, 7b, and 7c** (For more on these results, please see Section 1).

Sustainability knowledge:

Similarly, when assessed through quiz-type questions, **student knowledge of sustainability-related topics has increased by approximately 10% since 2014**. However, some misconceptions remain on the causes of pollution and environmental degradation (please see Section 2).

Plans are in place to continue measuring changes in sustainability knowledge, engagement in sustainable behaviors, and sustainability attitudes and values among a

¹ The sustainability survey conducted in the Spring of 2014 followed-up on similar surveys distributed in 2012 and 2013 by the ESS Lab, and was part of a 10-year longitudinal investigation of sustainability-related topics and behavior that resulted in several publications. (Following a lag of 4 years, we are now reinitiating this effort in 2018). The 2014 survey was sent to 20,000 Columbus-campus Ohio State students and shared some elements of the behavior and knowledge scales used in the 2018 survey.

panel of Undergraduate students annually. This data are intended to help broadly inform and assess sustainability efforts taking place at Ohio State.

Student awareness and support for campus initiatives:

In addition to including items for longitudinal assessment, the 2018 survey also contained several items developed in collaboration with the Sustainability Institute (formerly the Sustainable and Resilient Economy Discovery Theme and Office of Energy and Environment, which have since merged together), the ENGIE campus energy partnership, the Office of Student Life, and Facilities Operations and Development. Together, these collaborative items inform student support for on-campus initiatives, engagement in sustainability-related activities such as student organizations, volunteer activities, and events. Finally, we collected data to inform the development of a sustainability curriculum at Ohio State in partnership with the Sustainability Education and Learning Committee, as well as data related to Ohio State sustainability goal #1.

While the items contained in these sections are diverse, some key takeaways include that there is a great deal of variation between students regarding how much they know about, or are engaged in, various sustainability initiatives and opportunities on and off-campus (please see Section 4 for more details). However, **students seemed to be consistently interested in becoming more involved in academic, research, and professional opportunities related to sustainability**, particularly those including skills-based content. In one specific finding related to Ohio State's sustainability goals (#7f), while student engagement in **recycling** is very high (see page 17) and students often believe they recycle properly, we identified several common misunderstandings regarding what materials can be recycled or not on campus (please see page 19).

There was also a moderate amount of interest for a variety of sustainability course types, including general education courses, and major-specific courses. (Please see Section 5). Potential areas to explore more in the future could include **increasing student awareness of sustainability initiatives and resources on campus**, as well as **providing more easily accessible academic and professional opportunities** for students related to sustainability at Ohio State.



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