



LET'S TALK TRASH: IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Background

- With a world population projected to reach 9 billion by 2050, the planet is approaching the limit of its ability to provide.
- Higher education institutions (HEIs) are forces of change that can lead the global sustainability transformation to combat climate change.
- Campuses serve as experimental locations where new methods to reduce environmental impacts can be tested and implemented.
- HEIs must redesign existing structures and rethink aspects of production and consumption, thus they face many barriers to the implementation of sustainability at such a large scale.

Research Question

What are the barriers to the integration of sustainability in higher education and the best practices to overcome them?

Internship & Methods

- Interned with UW Recycling.
- Conducted the UW's first Zero Waste Assessment with the Post-Landfill Action Network (PLAN).
- Interviewed and surveyed 46 campus stakeholders about waste infrastructure, policies, and procedures on campus.



Figure 1. Assessment findings and recommendations for the UW to achieve zero waste were written into a report composed with the help of PLAN.

- Data collected was used to create a report detailing long-term zero waste solutions for the UW to implement (See Figure 1).
- Performed a literature review on effective ways to implement sustainability. Compared results with case study data.

Assessment & Review Results

Major Barriers to Sustainability



Insufficient Sustainability Data: There is a shortage of reliable tools to measure sustainability progress. There is little known about broader trends in HEI environmental performance.



Greenwashing & Communication: Universities fall victim to the external pressures of branding and rankings, shifting their efforts to maintain a reputation-oriented focus (See Figure 2).



Absence of Sustainability Context in Academics: There is no framework to facilitate sustainability in academics. Trying to include sustainability in specific disciplines becomes a burden that falls on faculty.

Assessing Stakeholder Awareness of Sustainable Purchasing Policies

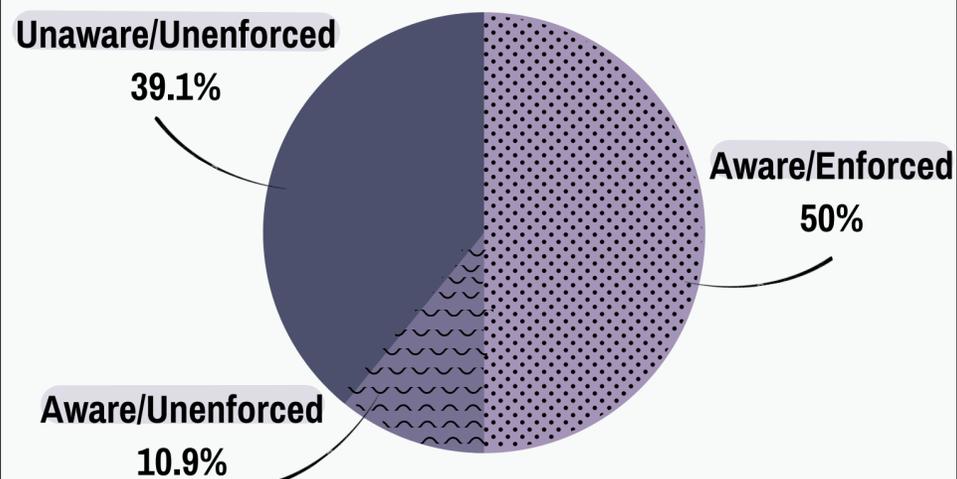


Figure 2. I asked 46 UW stakeholders if they're aware of the university's sustainable purchasing policies. Assessment results indicate a disconnect between the campus and stakeholders. This a result of a lack in communication about the sustainability initiatives that are implemented at the institutional level.

Results cont.

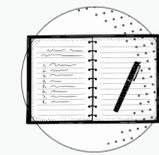
Best Practices & Recommendations



Tracking & Assessment Tools: Establishing regular assessment strategies of HEI sustainability performance provides the ability to set progress baselines and identify best practices.



Reporting: Dissemination of information to stakeholders is critical to spreading awareness and creating a shared understanding of what sustainability means to a campus.



Generating Sustainability Competencies: Providing sustainability pedagogy resources for faculty and creating key sustainability learning objectives for each academic discipline.

Significance & Broader Implications

- Results identify the gaps in sustainability performance at the UW.
- Report serves as the foundation for establishing and enforcing more ambitious zero waste initiatives at the UW.
- Results emphasize the significant role that campus stakeholders play in the successful integration of sustainability.
- Next steps include conducting outreach to stakeholders to help them implement PLAN report recommendations.
- Sharing the UW's zero waste journey can inspire others to develop a plan to help their respective universities combat climate change.

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