

WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

2023 Sustainability Report



**SUSTAINABILITY
ENGAGEMENT
INSTITUTE**



MAKE WAVES.

Table of Contents

Preface	2
Sustainability Engagement Institute Annual Accomplishments (FY 23)	3
Regional and National Leadership	3
Campus Leadership and Outreach.....	4
Climate Leadership Certificate Program	4
Sustainability, Equity, and Justice Fund Program	5
Sustainable Communities Partnership.....	5
Viking Supported Agriculture (VSA)	6
Food Insecurity.....	6
Student Engagement	6
Staffing	7

Preface

This report focuses specifically on the work of the Sustainability Engagement Institute (SEI) during fiscal year 2023. First founded in 2006 as the Office of Sustainability, the Sustainability Engagement Institute develops educational opportunities and systems-change for a more sustainable, just future. We engage in initiatives that create economic vitality, promote well-being, protect the environment, and uphold social justice. Our intention is that this report serves both as motivation for celebrating the incredible sustainability work that has already been accomplished, and for getting more of the Western community more active in sustainability efforts moving forward. To tackle sustainability and climate change challenges into the future, together we will need to continue innovating, creating, rolling our sleeves up, dreaming, engaging heart and mind, and experimenting.

To learn more, ask a question, or get engaged, visit the SEI website at sustain.wvu.edu, or send us an email at sustain@wvu.edu.



**SUSTAINABILITY
ENGAGEMENT
INSTITUTE**



Sustainability Engagement Institute Annual Accomplishments (FY 23)

This fiscal year was the first year since the start of COVID-19 that the Sustainability Engagement Institute facilitated most of our programming in-person.

Significant accomplishments will be highlighted in the pages that follow, but a few things that rise to the top include:

- Compiling and submitting data for STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) reporting (WWU achieved a Silver rating)
- Funding 17 Sustainability, Equity, and Justice Fund (SEJF) projects
- Graduating the second Climate Leadership Certificate cohort of nine students and recruiting a record number of applicants for the third cohort.
- Co-convening a “Learning Together Through Climate Upheaval” series focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (six events throughout the year)
- Re-launching Western’s Sustainable Office Certification Program
- Facilitating five community-engaged climate resilience projects through the Sustainable Communities Partnership Program
- Facilitating a Sustainability Roundtable initiative to bring together students passionate about sustainability (five meetings)
- Chairing the President’s Sustainability Council, including facilitating three public listening sessions

Regional and National Leadership

SEI staff have continued to serve on the Washington and Oregon Higher Education Sustainability Conference (WOHESC) planning team, planning a conference at Oregon State University.

The Director of the SEI continues to serve on regional and national committees – AASHE Centers for Sustainability Across the Curriculum, and the State Board of Community and Technical Colleges Climate Solutions Steering Committee. The Associate Director supported a climate justice Curriculum for the Bioregion initiative led by faculty at Bellevue and North Seattle Colleges.

Campus Leadership and Outreach

SEI piloted a “How It Works” tour of the Post Point Wastewater Treatment Plant. This tour series is designed to offer students, staff, faculty, and community members an opportunity to expand place-based knowledge of local sustainable systems.

SEI’s Director continued chairing the President’s Sustainability Council. The work of the Council included initial assessment of current priorities for the Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) and compiling an SAP progress report. The priorities work included individual conversations between council members as well as three public engagement sessions.

SEI facilitated two campus sustainability tours (Viking Launch for 10 students, and All in for Climate Action tour in partnership with City of Bellingham).

We distributed quarterly SEI newsletters which highlighted opportunities for engagement and success stories across the university. Another mechanism for outreach was a significant increase in use of Instagram and the generation of regular outreach posters.

To raise awareness about sustainability on campus, and to help the campus and broader community see our institute as a supporter and resource for their work, we tabled nine times at various events throughout the year. Among others, these events included Info Fair, All in for Climate Action, a career fair, and the Earth Week Fair. The SEJF team also planned and facilitated 35+ class raps to get the word out to students within their classes. We also co-hosted the Environmental Career Fair with sustainability branding to help connect students with sustainability career options.

When COVID-19 started, the Office of Sustainability put the Sustainable Office Certification (SOC) on pause, since everybody was working from home. This year seemed like the right time to re-launch the program with updates to the system based on a changing landscape. The certification was updated, advertised to the campus community, and piloted within the SEI. The update included writing a small SEJF grant to fund some sustainability toolkit items for participants within the program.

Climate Leadership Certificate Program

The second cohort of nine students completed the Climate Leadership Certificate program in the spring. Further, SEI staff selected the third cohort of 14 students for this 1.5-year program, representing five of Western’s eight colleges. A record number of applicants applied for the program. As part of this program, nine community forums were facilitated, a five-day place-based orientation trip was implemented in which we visited with climate change practitioners in both Whatcom County and the Methow Valley, and we developed/refined summer practicum work placements for each student. We advised four students on their senior projects, including:

- An anaerobic digester feasibility study (2 students)
- The development of content for a waste education training program
- An analysis of opportunities for climate education within outdoor programming

Sustainability, Equity, and Justice Fund Program

Throughout the year 17 grants were awarded, for a total of \$340,992.38. Here is a list of grant titles that were funded:

- Professional Development for Urban Planning Students: Presenting & Networking at the WA American Planning Association (APA) Conference
- LEAD Reforestation Demonstration Project
- WOHESC 2023 Scholarships
- Growth, Resilience, and Belonging: Strengthening Membership and Experiences for Black and Brown Men at WWU
- Attending the American Planning Association (APA) National Conference 2023
- Indigenous Resilience: Sharing Our Stories for Mental Health Promotion
- QueerCon 2023
- Creating Community for Underrepresented Students in the Environmental Sciences
- Earth Day Fair Free Produce Table
- WWU FASA Heritage Night
- Advancing the Morse Leadership Institute's (MLI) Community Engagement Project Program
- Furniture Fest + Couchella
- Native Landscapes: Phase 1 – York Farm
- Campus Micromobility Counters
- Project ZeNETH: Construction Phase
- Sustainable Office Certification Toolkit
- Native Landscapes Phase II: Art Annex

The SEJF team hosted their annual showcase event in which eight project teams presented their past projects (40 attendees). This event's goal is to celebrate great work and inspire future grants.

The SEJF team hosted eight Idea Labs, which were designed to be a space for students, faculty, and staff to come workshop their project ideas.

Sustainable Communities Partnership

This year we completed work on a two-year Bullitt Foundation grant which allowed the program to focus on community-engaged climate resilience projects. We had two graduate students focusing on this work with the Associate Director. Over the course of the year five pilot projects were implemented, including:

- An Exploration of Recreation and Safety in Eastern Whatcom County
- Understanding Vulnerability and Adapting to Extreme Heat and Smoke in the City of Bellingham
- Firewise in Whatcom County
- Climate Change and Comprehensive Planning for Cities and Towns in Skagit County
- Studying Climate Adaptation and Planning for Fisherman's Cove and Marina on Lummi Reservation

These projects were celebrated in an end-of-year showcase event in which approximately 40 students, staff, faculty, and community partners came together.

Viking Supported Agriculture (VSA)

Again, SEI partnered with Viva Farms and Boldly Grown Farm to bring fresh, local, and organic produce shares to campus for much of the year. A record number of people participated. Seventeen students and employees subscribed to Viva Farms, and 18 for Boldly Grown Farm. The produce was delivered to our office space and distributed on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, depending on the farm.

Food Insecurity

SEI staff actively participated with the campus food insecurity group regarding the logistics and supply needs of the five volunteer-run on-campus food pantries, donated \$250 of bulk produce from Viva Farms to the Fairhaven College food pantry via VSA subscriber donations, and engaged group members in planning and logistics for a campus food recovery initiative. Also, through an SEJF grant, SEI staff procured and managed logistics for almost \$1,000 of fresh, local, and organic produce for the Free Produce Table hosted at the Earth Day Fair in Red Square.

Student Engagement

SEI staff participated in planning for a student-led set of Earth Week events. We continued to meet with student club leaders, student reporters, student employees, and other interested students whenever they approached our institute. The Student Ambassador collaborated regularly with the Associated Students Environment and Sustainability Programs (AS ESP) staff, Associated Students Vice President (AS VP) for Sustainability, Zero Waste staff, Student Housing Facility Assistant staff, Active Transportation staff, and the Outback Farm staff. Further, to ensure better collaboration and understanding between the Associated Students and SEI, regular meetings of SEI staff and the AS VP occurred. The SEI Student Ambassador worked hard to offer co-facilitation opportunities to sustainability focused students as a mechanism for deeper engagement.

SEI held five Sustainability Roundtable events that were developed to support students in collaborating on sustainability work across campus.

SEI participated in a Halloween Extravaganza event, “Cancel the Apocalypse,” which took place in the VU. Our goal was to address how inaction leads to a climate emergency, and how action can lead to better outcomes. This event engaged dozens of students who might not otherwise be exposed to sustainability programming on campus.

SEI staff and Western students regularly attend the Washington and Oregon Higher Education Sustainability Conference. Two vans full of SEI staff and engaged students traveled to Oregon State University for this year’s annual conference.

Staffing

Despite a challenging hiring landscape, we hired and worked with nine staff this year (one temporary employee and eight student employees). We work hard in the Sustainability Engagement Institute to support personal well-being in our staff team, and to build community. Our long student employee tenure is a testament to this work.