

Winter 2025 Sustainability Studio: Sustainability Policy Development

By: Jeff Baker, Eric Hendry, Makenzie Cavanagh

Table of Contents

<i>Winter 2025 Sustainability Studio: Sustainability Policy Development</i>	1
Executive Summary	2
Introduction	3
Methodology	4
Project Outcomes	4
Project Barriers/Lessons Learned	5
Recommendations and Next Steps	5
Conclusions	6
Appendix A: Interviews	7
Interview summaries	7
Interview Questions	9

Executive Summary

We have created a Sustainability Policy Development Guide document as our project for the 2025 winter quarter. Our goal is that it will be used by policy creators and coordinators to ensure uniform, sustainable, policies being developed across the university. This project was sponsored by the Sustainability Engagement Institute (SEI) in response to the desire to develop one or multiple policies, owned by SEI, that help advance SEI and Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) goals. However, we have also identified a need for a more unified understanding of sustainability goals among policy makers. Although Western Washington University (WWU) includes sustainability among its core values (President's Office, 2025) and has had a Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) since 2017 (WWU, 2017), staff and faculty could benefit from a clearer, more consistent understanding of how policy and procedures can support these values and goals.

The SEI asked our team to develop two products in addition to this report. The first is a sustainable policy development guide ("Guide"). Initially, this guide was meant to be used to help with the development of policies owned by the SEI. The second is a list of proposed policy priorities meant to directly enhance WWU's sustainability profile, SAP goals, and Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) score. STARS is a self-reporting framework that universities use to measure and compare their sustainability efforts. The SAP is WWU's personalized document and main way we track our sustainability across the university.

The sustainability action plan was created to quantify critical sustainability goals at WWU. It uses STARS criteria as a template to develop these goals around standardized benchmarks of sustainability among 4 major categories: Academics, engagement, operations, and planning and administration. Within each of these categories, the SEI has tailored subcategories to specific needs at WWU.

As our interviews and research progressed, we found an opportunity to put sustainability into the policy development process at the foundation level. This opportunity shifted the scope of the project from the development of specific policies for the SEI to instead injecting SEI and SAP goals into all aspects of policy creation at WWU. The guide is now oriented towards non-SEI policy owner who are filling out their first application document, the policy impact form. This guide and sustainable impact statement will go hand in hand to ensure the development of policies accounts for sustainability impacts.

From our interviews with division policy coordinators, we have determined that adopting the guide through the use of a sustainability impact statement is a feasible and inexpensive option that will have little impact on university operations. Upon the decision to draft and push through active policy owned by the SEI, we recommend socializing and taking input

from the various university stakeholders before submitting the policy for review. This would allow time for changes to be made informally before starting the formal review and submission process.

Introduction

The SEI conceived this project as an exploration of how policy can be used to improve sustainability outcomes across the full range of all WWU's activities. Our goal was to create a document that can be used by policy creators and coordinators to assess the impact on sustainability at WWU, for each policy. We hope it will encourage more awareness of sustainability efforts on campus, ensure no competing values between departments, and prevent any regression of WWU's sustainability goals. Policy creation at WWU is a long and complicated process, requiring the time and attention of many individuals and institutional groups. The key players are as follows:

- Policy owners: Individuals who draft, edit, and implement policies.
- Policy Division Coordinators: Individuals who can identify stakeholders and policy relevance. The first reviewer of a policy impact statement.
- Director of University Policy: Dolapo Akinrinade, the second reviewer of a policy impact statement. Either approves the policy for review by the Vice President and the TRC or sends back to owner for revisions.
- Technical Review Committee (TRC): Checks for compliance with current university policy and state regulations.
- University Policy, Rules and Review Group (UPRRG): Responsive for institutional review of policy and to make recommendations to the president. Contains members of significant university unions, staff groups, and institutional organizations.

Between the creation of a policy impact statement, the first step in policy creation, and a policy being presented to the president for his signature, the final step before implementation, a policy will jump between all these key players multiple times to review, revise, and refine a policy.

The products created are a guide to assist all these players in the creation of policy. It would require the use of our guide for the creation of a sustainability impact statement: a written statement that goes along with the equity impact and fiscal impact statements. This guide should help promote a university-wide consensus on how to uphold Western's sustainable values. By creating this guide and putting it into use, we hope to provide a reminder to policy makers and coordinators to always keep WWU's commitment to sustainability.

Methodology

Our primary sources of data were interviews conducted with WWU staff and faculty, and sustainability representatives of other universities.

One key internal staff engagement was with Dolapo Akinrinade, the Director of University Policy at WWU. This meeting was highly productive and provided some of the most interesting insights about potential near-term impacts for this project and for the SEI. Her insights heavily influenced the Recommendations section. The list of interview questions will be listed in the appendix.

We also spoke with two Policy Development Coordinators (PDCs). These are the first staff members who review a policy impact statement as drafted by a policy owner at WWU. Their process knowledge and perspective on best practices were highly valuable to our understanding of how policy is created, approved, and implemented. These included:

- Business and Financial Affairs: Nicole Goodman
- Student Affairs: Lynne Walker

Project Outcomes

Our research gave us a comprehensive understanding of how policy works at WWU. It also gave us valuable insights into the challenges faced by policymakers, and the hurdles that must be overcome to bring a policy from concept to adoption, and to ensure successful implementation and enforcement thereafter.

We have created the sustainable policy development guide for the use of policy makers and division policy coordinators. It gives examples of ways that STARS and the SAP are affected by policy, and it provides clear criteria for evaluating the sustainability impact of a policy proposal. We highly recommend that the adoption of the sustainability guide be implemented through a sustainability impact statement which can be found on the first policy development form all policies are required to fill out.

This guide and its recommendation for its use in the policy impact statement e-form has come directly from the interviews that we conducted with division policy coordinators and the director of university policy. Major concerns they had with the scope of the group would be the implications of sustainable policy. The coordinators and the director of policy both felt that it would be difficult to design and implement sustainable policy themselves, but felt positively about the opportunity to make policy owners consider sustainability in their policy development process.

The update on the policy of policies is currently ongoing, which means the time is ripe to make these changes to the policy impact statement form. This also means we must move

fast to meet with the relevant stakeholders and continue to develop and refine the sustainable policy development guide.

The status of our project thus far, is a completed draft of the Sustainable Policy Development Guide. It is yet to be distributed. Three connections have been made through our interview process, described in the appendix, and areas for opportunity have been identified in our recommendations and next steps section.

Project Barriers/Lessons Learned

One significant challenge to timely progress on this project was the availability of key personnel for engagements. We learned that it could take a week, two weeks, or even longer to find a suitable time to interview a stakeholder. Although it will always be important to be methodical in selecting stakeholders for engagement, it might be advantageous to explore ways of accelerating the initial contact with potential partners on future projects in this area.

Recommendations and Next Steps

We have determined the following recommendations from our several interviews listed in order in the appendix. Through our interviews and experience of creating the guide, our group recommends policy developers and coordinators use the Guide, distribute it to staff and faculty, soliciting and consolidating feedback via surveys, and optimizing the guide for clarity and practical applicability. We want to hear feedback from policy creators and coordinators on how simple it is to use, how much time is spent using it, have they made changes to policies they are reviewing because of our guide, what they would change about it to make it more efficient etc. Next, we recommend socializing the idea of eventually mandating the use of the criteria in the Guide via a policy to be adopted later that mandates their use via the Policy Impact Statement at the beginning of the process, a suggestion from Lynne. Finally, we recommend periodically evaluating the effectiveness of the policy process by comparing policy to performance trends in STARS focus areas, such as learning outcomes and operational impacts, and using this analysis to further refine the guide and policy formation process, a Nicole suggestion.

We also recommend further research into other schools and their sustainability programs. Using other schools as examples for our own proposals could have given us better leverage and a stronger case when presenting our project to Dolapo. In the future, reaching out to schools with exemplary STARS scores and sustainable policy development would be helpful for future proposals and implementation.

Specific policy change recommendations are detailed in the accompanying product, “Proposed Policy Priorities”, which we developed in accordance with the SEI’s initial scope

document. These proposals are based on a combination of team research into best practices, analysis of other institutions' successes, review of WWU processes and SAP progress, and feedback from interviewed stakeholders who work in policy at Western.

Conclusions

The research and work we did on this project allowed us to create and determine the feasibility of changing the policy development process to include sustainability as an impact statement. This would mean that sustainability is accounted for by all policy owners and that the SAP is addressed when creating policy.

The results of this project include a better understanding of how policy is implemented and a wealth of valuable insights from people whose daily work includes extensive negotiation, prioritization, and compromise. It is our hope that the guidelines we developed will be used to aid current and future staff and faculty in achieving a more positive lifetime impact in direct and indirect ways: by changing how WWU does business and with whom, but most importantly, by ensuring that everyone who comes here to learn leaves knowing why sustainability is important and how to apply its core principles to every aspect of work and life.

Appendix A: Interviews

- Interview List:
 - Nicole Goodman: Western Washington University Policy Coordinator
 - Lynne Walker: Western Washington University Policy Coordinator
 - Dolapo Akinrinade: Western Washington University Director of University policy
- Interview Questions:
 - What do you see as the greatest current challenges to implementing sustainability policies?
 - Can you give an example of how this issue has affected your organization?
 - If you could change one thing about the current process for creating and updating policy, what would it be?
 - How does the SAP impact the policy review process?
 - How many policies do you receive for review per quarter/per year?
 - How many policies out of all submitted for review end are implemented by the university?
 - Are there any trends or recent similarities that are apparent with policies submitted for review?
 - How does the president's sustainability council impact the policy review process?
 - How does the current policy development process enable/ensure the values of the university?
 - Is sustainability, as related to the functioning of the university, a criterion for approval or denial of a policy impact statement? What impact might it have on a final draft proposal. Where are these opportunities for improvement?
 - STARS inquiry: Are you aware that STARS is the main measure of sustainability for WWU? What categories of STARS are relevant to your department? (Pull examples?)

Interview summaries

Nicole Goodman (University Compliance Manager/ HIPPA Privacy Officer, Internal Controls Coordinator)

2/24

Nicole was very interested in our project from the initial conversation and will be happy to help with any future projects connected to this one. She has a lot of knowledge regarding

how our university complies with our policies. She writes many policies, updates them, and keeps them in use and relevant. She represents a huge portion of how policy is made and is complied with at this school. She spoke to us about her own guide she uses personally, she calls it her equity guide (see link to document in appendix). I think it is something very similar to what we are trying to create. This guide serves as a great example to base the structure of our guide on. She drafted her guide from South Carolina University's equity lenses and tweaked it to better fit WWU's needs. Now she uses it only personally and unofficially but is looking to get it approved to be used by all policy coordinators, officially. Our guide will focus on sustainability and have a wider audience of people using it. She suggested that after a sustainable policies guide is adopted, a group should promote the adoption of a policy that requires the sustainability guide to be used. Finally, she gave great advice on people to reach out to and people to not reach out to during our research process. She confirmed that Dolapo was the right person to interview and get insight from. She also informed us that directly approaching the UPRRG may not give us our desired results. She said any future student groups wanting to meet with the UPRRG should contact Tanya Alexander first.

Lynne Walker (Liaison for division-wide communication and coordination, assistant to the vice president of student affairs)

2/26

Lynne has great insight on the process of moving a policy towards getting approved. She informed us about policy impact forms (see link to form in appendix) which seem to be crucial when creating policy. When making a policy, policy impact forms must include procedures which explain how the policy will be carried out and enforced. She told us these procedures will be where real changes happen within policy. These policy impact forms are also how the stakeholders for each policy are determined. Her suggestion for our project or a future project would be to add a box to the policy impact form that includes a sustainability check for the policy being created. She thinks it would be a good way for people to start thinking about sustainability without taking up too much of their work time.

Dolapo Akinrinade (Director of University Policy)

3/5

Dolapo is the Director of University Policy at WWU. She is a member of the University Policy and Rules Review Group (UPRRG) and holds a significant position within the university's hierarchy organization. She ensures policy development at WWU is in line with our institutional goals as well as being in line with legal requirements. Our meeting with her started with a discussion of how policy is created and enforced at WWU. She believed that the creation of a policy, requiring the use of a sustainability guide, and navigating through

the development process would be extremely difficult and may not be acceptable to other UPRRG members. We then shifted the conversation to the creation process itself, where we believe to have found an opportunity for sustainability to be a criteria of policy creation. She was quite receptive of this idea and shared that the UPRRG and herself were now entering a phase of review for the policy of policies, which is tied directly to the policy creation process. The policy of policies is the rules and steps WWU follows to create, update, and remove policies. This means that the next few months will be the best possible time for our and future groups to get sustainability implemented in the policy creation process. She also shared that she was working on creating an equity toolkit for policy creation, which is essentially the same task that we recommend a future group create in future work on this project but a sustainability toolkit. Our interview concluded with her suggesting what channels for future inquiry and approval should go through. She suggested that Jack Herring, the head of the Provost Department, would be a great person to reach out to for future groups. She also mentioned she would bring up our group's work with her next meeting with the president of her department.

Interview Questions

1. **What do you see as the greatest current challenges to implementing sustainability policies?**
2. **Can you give an example of how this issue has affected your organization?**
3. **If you could change one thing about the current process for creating and updating policy, what would it be?**
4. **How does the SAP impact the policy review process?**
5. **How many policies do you receive for review per quarter/per year?**
6. **How many policies out of all submitted for review end are implemented by the university?**
7. **Are there any trends or recent similarities that are apparent with policies submitted for review?**
8. **How does the president's sustainability council impact the policy review process?**
9. **How does the current policy development process enable/ensure the values of the university?**
10. **Is sustainability, as related to the functioning of the university, a criterion for approval or denial of a policy impact statement? What impact might it have on a final draft proposal. Where are these opportunities for improvement?**
11. **STARS inquiry: Are you aware that STARS is the main measure of sustainability for WWU? What categories of STARS are relevant to your department? (Pull examples?)**

- Equity Lense Link
[file:///C:/Users/macke/Downloads/BFA%20Policy%20Equity%20Lens%20Tool%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/macke/Downloads/BFA%20Policy%20Equity%20Lens%20Tool%20(1).pdf)
- Policy Impact Statement Form Link
https://esign.wvu.edu/forms/Policies%20and%20Procedures-%20WWU/_policy_impact_statement_new_maj_4.aspx
- Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes
<p>Group time and work</p> <p>Guiding direction provided by our client. It is important for us to ensure that we are creating a deliverable that meets her standards and expectations for this project.</p> <p>Stakeholder feedback</p> <p>Research</p> <p>Having discussions with</p>	<p>Understanding statutes at WWU</p> <p>Understanding other examples of policy framework</p> <p>Drafting a policy guide document, proposing, and getting approval</p>	<p>Final policy guide document</p> <p>List of parties contacted – for records and for use in any future updates</p> <p>Final review of all research and work done towards project</p>	<p>Streamlined policy development for all policy makers, whether that be students or faculty.</p> <p>Deliverable should allow for sustainability goals to be met with less resistance.</p> <p>Improved STARS score for WWU</p>	<p>Sustainable policy development amongst the university institutions</p> <p>Sustainable values integrated into multiple facets of WWU student and Faculty</p> <p>Sustainable policies will be created at WWU in an efficient manner across the university.</p>

sustainability committee on how to unify university priorities.				
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