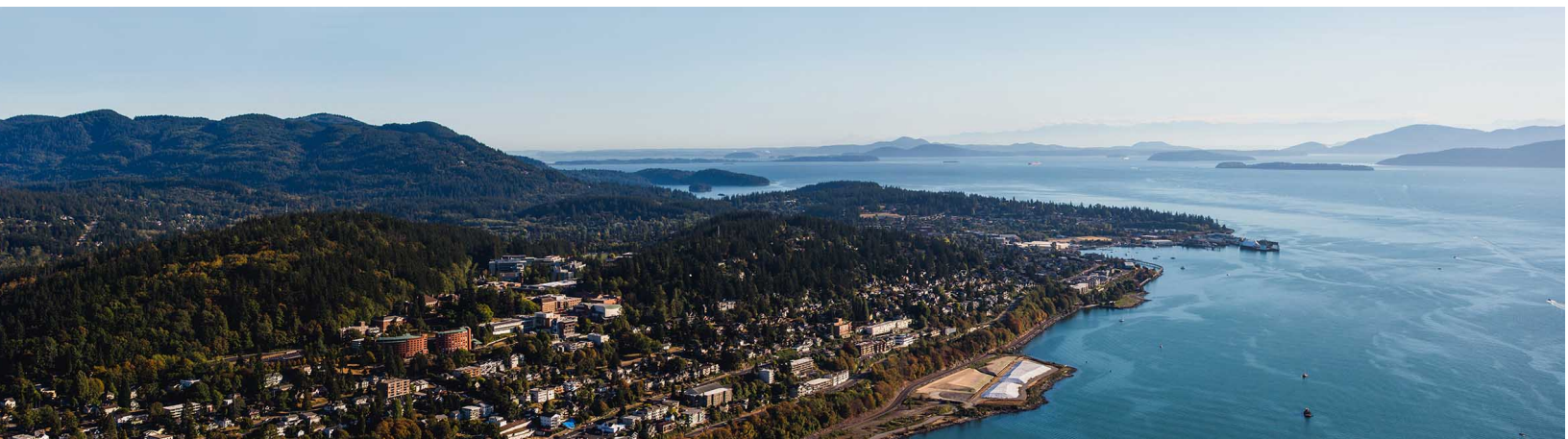


# Western Washington University

## Sustainability Report 2021



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## **Preface**

The 2021 Western Washington University Sustainability Report provides a review of some of the many sustainability initiatives and projects developed by Western students, staff, and faculty during the 2021 academic year.

The global COVID-19 pandemic that upended previously established activities and approaches offered new opportunities to revisit how we come together to accomplish educating and preparing students for the challenges of the climate crisis. Through remote and hybrid work, our campus took on the task of redesigning much of the curriculum and systems that serve our mission.

Despite the challenges associated with COVID-19, Western faculty, staff, and students have shown resilience by creating and developing new initiatives that continue to progress implementation of the university's Sustainability Action Plan. This work is a testament not only to our community's dedication to the ethos of sustainability but also to the well of creativity that flourishes in a collaborative, encouraging academic atmosphere.

## A New Start for Sustainability at Western

This year, Western Washington University officially announced the establishment of the Sustainability Engagement Institute. The new institute, which replaces the Office of Sustainability, connects and coordinates Western's sustainability and climate engagement efforts across three essential functions—education, co-curricular activities, and operations. The academic program in sustainability is also housed within the institute. Dr. Grace Wang, chair of the Department of Urban and Environmental Planning & Policy, serves as the institute director.

The institute will develop educational opportunities and systems-change for a more sustainable, just future grounded upon economic vitality, well-being, environmental protection, and social justice. The creation of the new institute fulfills a significant element of the university's Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) (Curriculum and Research chapter, goal 4); it is now responsible for supporting further implementation of the plan and advancing the university's actions to combat the climate crisis.

Thanks to everyone throughout Western who has supported the transition from office to institute. The institute will collaborate with friends and allies on SAP implementation and other initiatives that progress sustainability throughout the campus and community, encouraging the university community to come together for climate action.



# Sustainability Engagement Institute

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## Coming Together for Climate Action

*Sustainability Engagement Institute Mission Statement: The institute's mission is to develop 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. These actions will progress the goals of the university's Sustainability Action Plan.*

## **The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System**

Western, along with hundreds of other institutions around the country and world, participates in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS). This is a transparent, self-reporting system for tracking our sustainability progress.

Western last submitted data for STARS in 2019, at which point we received a silver rating among the options of bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. This is the rating we received in 2013 upon our initial submission as well. The STARS system was carefully considered and referenced in developing the SAP such that as we continue to work toward implementation of the SAP our STARS rating is likely to improve. Staff within the Sustainability Engagement Institute look forward to supporting staff, faculty, and students across the university in making sustainability improvements that will make meaningful change and contribute to our next STARS submission in 2022.

## **The Sustainability Action Plan**

Western's Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) is both a strategic and tactical document that brings together important initiatives and plans across campus, including Western's Climate Action Plan, the Sustainability Academy's White Paper, and Western's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS) report. The purview of the SAP includes ten areas of activity that reflect the framework of STARS, the standard for campus sustainability assessment.

The SAP addresses the continuing need for programs that improve and enhance Western's brand of sustainability, sets a vision for growing the intellectual and curricular scope of our influence, while continuing to operate in a budget constrained environment. The plan identifies goals, strategies, metrics, and benchmarks that collectively will support Western in being at the forefront of sustainable universities, and in responding to the current climate crisis.

Some of the recommendations within the SAP are immediately actionable, while others will require new technology and/or changes to the economic picture.

This report showcases initiatives and accomplishments in the past year that progressed the goals and objectives of the SAP's ten areas of activity: Campus and Community Engagement, Curriculum and Research, Student Life, Built Environment, Dining Services, Grounds, Procurement, Transportation, Waste, and Investments.

## CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### **Western Builds Community Resilience Climate Action Planning with Whatcom County** *(SAP Campus and Community Engagement Chapter, Objective 1.3)*

During the 2020-21 academic year, Whatcom County partnered with Western's Sustainable Communities Partnership program to support consistent and coordinated climate planning across jurisdictional boundaries within Whatcom County. This partnership, with staff support from the Port of Bellingham and the City of Bellingham, formed the collaborative Building Community Resilience Project to support Whatcom County cities in climate planning efforts. The project helped develop climate change mitigation and adaptation language into the participating cities' comprehensive plans.

### **Viking Supported Agriculture Provides Food to People in Times of Crisis** *(SAP Campus and Community Engagement Chapter, Objective 2.4)*

The Office of Sustainability facilitated the Viking Supported Agriculture (VSA) program, connecting the campus community to local food producers. Throughout the pandemic, students, faculty, and staff have been encouraged to sign-up to have boxes of farm-fresh items delivered directly to the office in High Street Hall. Getting good food to people in times of crisis and supporting local and sustainable agriculture is a critical activity both for our own health and the greater good of our community.



The Office of Sustainability also developed a donation program to help pay for weekly fresh produce to provide to students in need. Last year the donation program provided sixty weeks-worth of fresh produce for those who needed it.

### **Curriculum for the Bioregion Hosts Environmental Justice Workshop**

*(SAP Campus and Community Engagement Chapter, Objective 2.1)*

Grace Wang, director of the Sustainability Engagement Institute and chair of the Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy Department, led an environmental justice workshop hosted by the Faculty Learning Community initiative. The event offered Western faculty with valuable knowledge on how to integrate climate justice and civic engagement into classes, build student-led environmental justice curricular and co-curricular offerings on campus, and support students' climate justice activism.

### **Western Supports the Columbia Valley Park and Recreation District**

*(SAP Campus and Community Engagement Chapter, Objective 2.4; Curriculum Chapter, Objective 1.3)*

In summer 2020, the Columbia Valley Park and Recreation District (CVPRD) partnered with WWU's Sustainable Communities Partnership (SCP) to draft a comprehensive park plan. This plan will serve as a guide for park development, will show community members the purpose and goals of the CVPRD, and will make the CVPRD eligible for external funding. To complete the plan, community engagement was required. The SCP worked with Dr. Tammi Laninga and students in her Community Development and Participatory Methods course (ENVS 475) to facilitate the engagement process.





Over the fall, students in the course contributed a total of 530 hours to conduct engagement initiatives for the CVPRD. The student teams completed a survey of public demand, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews to identify community needs and desires for parks and recreation infrastructure. By offering different engagement approaches, the students gave community members multiple ways to be involved, which was particularly important during COVID-19 when in-person options were not possible.

## **CURRICULUM AND RESEARCH**

This academic year Western has provided increased access to opportunities for students to engage in the critical facets of sustainability. Every college and department across the university incorporates social justice and equity considerations in curriculum development. When students review the course catalog, they will find that there are forty-three courses focused on sustainability, thirty-four courses that are centered on social justice studies, and thirty-seven courses which include equity in the name. These courses are part of a university's emphasis on incorporating all the facets of sustainability into the curricula of every department and major.

### **Environmental Studies Splits to Better Serve Huxley College of the Environment Students** *(SAP Curriculum and Research Chapter, support for Goal 1)*

This fall 2021, the Environmental Studies department became two departments: The Environmental Studies Department (ENVS) and the Urban and Environmental Planning and Policy Department (UEPP). This move was driven by a united goal of serving all students better; it will ensure that the urban planning program can better meet accreditation standards and allow both departments to adapt curriculum to better fit student needs and interests.

As part of this division, the two new departments have opened new majors available to all students in 2021. These majors include Environmental Studies, Environmental Education, Environmental Policy, Geography, and Urban Planning and Sustainable Development.

### **Sustainability Engagement Institute Launches the Climate Leadership Certificate** *(SAP Curriculum and Research Chapter, Objective 1.3)*

The Office of Sustainability's Climate Leadership Certificate began its first year of programming in winter 2021, with a cohort of thirteen students studying disciplines from energy policy to regenerative agriculture. The certificate, an initiative spearheaded by Associate Director Lindsey MacDonald, provides the training and experience needed for students to apply a variety of skills to critical work in climate action and justice, as well as other vital areas of sustainability, including social justice, economic vitality, and well-being. Throughout the year-and-a-half long program, students engage in curriculum targeted at sustainability literacy, planning, and leadership, while also participating in hands-on practicum work with a variety of sustainability organizations in Whatcom County and the Methow Valley. The program develops leadership skills specifically catered to work

as a climate change professional, builds a network of professionals in the field of climate change and sustainability, and creates a strong community of peers fighting for a more just and sustainable society.

## **STUDENT LIFE**

### **Western Students Attend Washington Oregon Higher Education Sustainability Conference**

*(SAP student life chapter, Objective 2.1)*

The Sustainability, Equity, & Justice Fund provided funding for forty students to attend the Washington Oregon Higher Education Sustainability Conference (WOHESC), which took place virtually in March of 2021. The conference provided Western students with an invaluable opportunity to engage with and learn from a diverse set of voices on a variety of sustainability topics such as social equity, food security, carbon emissions, climate action and education, and sustainable program implementation on campus. They connected with students from other colleges and universities in the region, met with potential employers, and created connections within the field of sustainability throughout the Pacific Northwest.

### **Office of Sustainability Engages Student Ambassadors**

*(SAP student life chapter, Objective 2.1)*

Through the academic year, Alyssa Tsukada, a student employee within the Office of Sustainability, gathered 6-8 peers bi-weekly on Zoom to build community and learn topics that ranged from Black Lives Matter's intersection with climate justice to renewable energy. These students learned new sustainability content and developed community through convening around shared interests. Students who participated in this ambassador community have gone on to lead sustainability work on campus through paid positions, volunteer work, and student-club participation.

## **BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

### **New Water Bottle Refill Stations**

*(SAP Built Environment Chapter, Objective 2.7)*

Western's Facilities Management took advantage of the quieter campus during the past year to make significant changes that students, faculty, and staff have utilized upon their return. Among these improvements are the replacement of old water fountains with new water refill stations in the Arts Annex, Haggard Hall, Parks Hall and Performing Arts. These new water fountains provide increased access to free filtered water for students, staff, and faculty across campus.

### **Western is Now Running on Renewable Energy**

*(As described in Built Environment chapter introduction in SAP)*



Four years ago, a collaboration of Pacific Northwest institutions and municipalities was born to develop a new wind farm to produce clean energy for the institutions. The project, called Green Direct and run by Puget Sound Energy, was initiated once the partners, which include the City of Olympia, King County, Whatcom County, Port of Seattle, and Sound Transit, committed to purchase electricity from this dedicated, local, renewable energy resource. The result of the collaboration began in the winter of 2021 when the Skookumchuck Wind Facility went into operation. It can produce up to 137 megawatts (MW) of wind energy—equivalent to powering 30,000 homes. Another project for Green Direct, the Lund Hill Solar Project, is under development in Klickitat County, Washington. Capable of producing 150 megawatts of energy, this second project will be the largest solar project in the state of Washington. Western became one of the first universities to buy 100% renewable energy from new, additional wind and solar farms in a regulated electric market.

## DINING SERVICES

### Pop-Up Pantry Addresses Food Insecurity on Campus

*(SAP Dining Services Chapter, Objective 3.1)*

In the past year, Western’s Dining Services responded to new challenges imposed by the pandemic which increased food insecurity in our community. One of the ways that Dining Services addressed food insecurity was by supporting the pop-up pantry that was created in collaboration with the Office of Student Life, Student Representation and Governance, the Outback Farm, and the Office of Sustainability. Dining Services ordered and packed much of the food distributed by this pantry while it was active from summer of 2020 through spring of 2021. The Office of Sustainability worked with local farmers to procure organic vegetables that were offered along with recipe options at the pantry, and the Outback Farm also provided vegetables that they grew. Between the conversations and the recipe cards, students learned about local, sustainable food options while meeting their basic needs.

## GROUNDS

### Lyn Okse Electric Vehicle Gets Ready for Action

*(SAP Grounds Chapter, Objective 2.2)*

Lyn Okse roughly translates to “Lightning Ox” in Norwegian, and for the past five years engineering students at the Vehicle Research Institute have been designing and building this small rear-wheel drive electric truck to learn every aspect of electric vehicle design, development, and manufacture. The project, funded by the Sustainability, Equity, & Justice Fund, received regular input from Western’s facilities team in order to maximize the utility of the project. Thanks to these creative, committed students and the direction and support of Eric Leonhardt and Mark Dudzinski, the Grounds crew now has a Western-made vehicle to transport staff, equipment, and materials across campus and serve as a constant reminder of what collaboration can achieve.



## PROCUREMENT

## **Western supports Electric Vehicles**

*(SAP Procurement Chapter, as described in Procurement introduction)*

Facilities Management installed new electric vehicle charging stations in 2020, increasing access to this in-demand resource as more students, faculty, and staff adopt electric vehicles to lower their carbon footprint. The new EV charging stations are in Lot 10G directly behind the Fine Arts building.

## **Business Services releases new Copy Paper Catalog on Western Marketplace**

*(SAP Procurement Chapter, Objective 2.1)*

Starting this year, Western's Business Services is now offering a 100% recycled, multi-use copy paper that is highly compatible with University copiers/printer. In alignment with the SAP, the Copy Paper Catalog is now focused on providing the highest quality paper at the greatest value while progressing Western's commitment to fulfilling its sustainability and environmental responsibilities.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **COVID-19 Reduces Commuting Emissions**

*(SAP Transportation Chapter, Objective 3.1)*

Due to the move to remote operations for most students and employees during the 2020-2021 school year, there was a significant reduction in carbon emissions generated by commuting to campus. The pivot to mostly remote operations provided evidence that working remotely is a viable and valuable option for many employees. While data was not tracked on this issue, the qualitative success of this unplanned case study provides significant support for the viability of telecommuting.



### **Pay-by-Day Parking Permit Option is Introduced**

*(SAP Transportation Chapter, Objective 3.1)*

Transportation Services introduced a new pay-by-day permit option to accommodate the many Western employees who began working primarily remotely. The new permit costs a similar amount per day as the quarterly permit does and helped reduce the disincentive to commuting by alternatives to driving alone that prepaying for parking typically produces, while providing meaningful financial savings to our community.

## **WASTE**

### **Western Works to Reduce Waste Every Day**

*(SAP Waste Chapter and Objective 2.5)*

Western's Zero Waste Program moved from the Office of Sustainability to the Recycle Center in the past year and continues to collaborate with groups in the office as well as forming new connections. The Zero Waste program developed and implemented programs during the pandemic to encourage our community to shift its relationship with materials that were once referred to as waste. This included collaborating with the Recycle Center, the Residence Hall Reuse Program, and Off-Campus Living to facilitate Move-Out Madness, the annual event where students can find new homes for items they no longer use.

## **INVESTMENTS**

### **WWU Foundation Announces Selection of New Investment Manager**

*(SAP Investments Chapter, Objective 1.1, 3.2)*

The Western Washington University Foundation has begun using Russell Investments to provide investment oversight for its \$85 million endowment. Every five years, the Foundation engages in a robust process to review the performance of its current investment manager and to request proposals from other firms qualified to guide the investment decisions of the portfolio. When considering proposals, one of the main areas of evaluation was sustainable investing using ESG (environmental, social and governance) criteria. The Foundation made sustainable investing a main priority and spent a great deal of time looking at each firm's ability to provide sustainable investment solutions. The Foundation team also included students from the WWU Students for Renewable Energy club in the selection process. Student participation was the result of two years of relationship building between members of SRE and the Foundation.

This report was compiled, designed, and produced by Western Washington University's Sustainability Engagement Institute. 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. From our commitment to renewable energy and waste reduction to sustainability-minded courses and co-curricular activities, the institute incorporates sustainability into campus operations and academics, guided by the Sustainability Action Plan.

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