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PURDUE CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY SELF-STUDY OVERVIEW

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can play a critical role in advancing sustainability and climate goals by fostering awareness, education, discovery, and investment while providing professional development and career readiness opportunities for students. Sustainable universities not only function as models for other institutions and communities but also bear the responsibility to lead in the creation of a more sustainable world, promoting economic growth, value creation, and risk reduction. Purdue is well positioned to educate future leaders, conduct innovative research, and collaborate with governments, industries, and social groups to advance sustainability.

Leadership on these issues is especially appropriate and significant for flagship land-grant institutions, such as Purdue University, which have deep economic, educational, and social ties with, and a responsibility to, their states' citizens. Over the last fifteen years, Purdue has aimed to improve operational efficiency, advance understanding of key challenges through research, and educate future leaders. However, as an institution, Purdue is lagging in achievement in relation to its Big 10 peers. Though Purdue is on track for reaching its 5-year master plan goals for sustainability in Administrative Operations (AO), this does not represent sustainability across the whole campus. For example, out of the current 18 HEIs in the Big 10, Purdue ranked 17th on the latest "[Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System](#)" (STARS) report, with a total score of 54.05; the highest-ranked campus was the University of Maryland-College Park with 77.34, and the average score across the Big 10 was 64.14. Purdue was one of only two schools with a Silver, rather than Gold, level of achievement.

To understand campus strengths and weaknesses, the Institute for a Sustainable Future (ISF) is conducting in fall 2024 the first "Purdue Campus Sustainability Assessment," which analyzes past STARS reports and compares findings and rankings to those of other Big 10 universities. This assessment has two parts. The first is a high-level summary that not only provides analysis but also highlights current campus sustainability initiatives not necessarily captured in STARS reporting. The second output will be a technical report that refers to specific point categories in STARS and which will provide guidance to how to prepare for reporting on the next STARS report. Both are being led by Kayla Gurganus, research assistant for ISF and doctoral candidate in Political Science.

In addition, ISF is leading, with support of the Office of Research, Administrative Operations (AO), and the Provost's Office, the first-of-its-kind "Purdue Campus Sustainability Self-Study," to be conducted in the 2024-2025 academic year. The **goal** is to pursue six objectives and draft a five-year sustainability roadmap that will highlight opportunities to engage faculty, students, and staff, improve sustainability initiatives on campus, and outline ways to increase university rankings in STARS and other sustainability ranking programs. This self-study will identify areas for potential advancement that can contribute to a healthier, more resilient campus and community that builds on Purdue's legacy of sustainability and climate innovation while responding to growing opportunities to enrich initiatives in sustainable education.

The project aligns with the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), central to ISF's mission and the AASHE STARS framework, and utilizes a broad definition of sustainability that includes environmental, social, and economic dimensions. The initiative uses a data-driven approach to address sustainability challenges and involves campus-wide participation by involving faculty, staff and students in multiple aspects of the project. Objectives include conducting a campus-wide survey, researching sustainability-related courses and initiatives, developing a five-year sustainability roadmap, creating a data management strategy across various offices, and raising awareness of Purdue's sustainability achievements by providing public access to the findings.

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DETAILED OBJECTIVES

ISF organized an initial a Sustainability Working Group (SWG) in spring 2024 whose members worked to ensure the success of the first “State-wide Campus Sustainability Networking Workshop” that brought together faculty and professional staff from multiple universities across the state (and, virtually, across the US) to discuss current challenges and opportunities in campus sustainability. Subsequently, under the coordination of ISF, a proposal to conduct a year-long campus sustainability self-study was drafted, submitted and approved by individuals representing the Office of Research (OOR), the Provost’s Office, and Administrative Operations (AO). Following this approval, ISF formalized the SWG for the self-study project; it comprises representatives from all three organizations as well as representatives from various faculty, student, and staff groups (**Obj. 1**). The SWG is led by ISF Senior Managing Director Lynne Dahmen and ISF Research Scientist Valentina Negri. In addition to the SWG, the team has developed several working groups that are actively meeting on a regular basis to assess progress, assign tasks, and provide input on the self-study document and final report.

To increase efficiency in collecting campus data needed to report on sustainability (**Obj. 2**), the SWG is establishing viable protocols for monitoring, collecting, and analyzing data related to specific areas and goals as outlined in the AASHE STARS 3.0 reporting structure. This involves identifying relevant data streams, mapping them to responsible units on campus, and streamlining reporting processes. These procedures will be included in a report of guidelines. In addition, as part of this process, the team is paying particular focus on sustainability and educational offerings and outcomes (**Obj. 2.1**). The team is engaging faculty to collect information about educational outcomes related to sustainability and will organize a campus-wide one-day workshop on sustainability learning objectives and campus academic offerings in sustainability. An aspect of this effort is to explore ways to both document and advance curricular initiatives related to sustainability education.

The SWG is also conducting the first baseline sustainability literacy and culture (SLAC) assessment for students, faculty, and staff, using the work of both University of Michigan and Ohio State as guides. This includes adaptation for the Purdue context, evaluation of the survey, creation a Qualtrics version, administration and analysis (**Obj. 3**). The results to this survey will be analyzed and made publicly available through the report and through an academic article and presentations. The team is working with Purdue’s IDA+A group to develop, conduct and analyze the survey, which will be distributes to representative samples of each constituency.

To increase awareness of sustainability efforts and opportunities at Purdue (**Obj. 4**), the SWG is collaborating with partners to intensify communication and promotion efforts regarding current campus sustainability initiatives. For example, we are promoting AO’s new [Sustainable Labs Initiative](#); advancing campus-based research projects that connect faculty, students and campus organizations; and ISF has created a specific ‘Campus Sustainability Corner’ section of its newsletter to promote new and efforts.

The SWG will also be establishing the business case for various sustainability efforts by researching funding opportunities and conducting cost-benefit analyses of recommendations (**Obj. 5**). This involves engaging with campus units to present an overview of sustainability projects, establishing a business case for identified initiatives, and identifying potential sources of external funding.

Finally, the SWG will draft a five-year sustainability roadmap (**Obj. 6**) with recommended milestones for improving campus sustainability and resilience. This roadmap aligns with specific objectives in STARS and is tailored to Purdue’s context, integrating topics from the various objectives, and coordinating team efforts to finalize the self-study document.

Outputs of these efforts will include brief and technical versions of the “Purdue Campus Sustainability Assessment,” a comprehensive report of the self-study, a high-level five-year road map, a public listing of current academic offerings in sustainability, and at least two journal articles reflecting work on the sustainability assessment and the campus-wide survey.