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DEFINING ON-CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY AT SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

Sustainability Workshop 2022/2023 Members
Sarah Lawrence College

DEFINING ON-CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY AT SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

A Sustainability Strategy Report
Made by the 2022/2023 Sustainability Workshop

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Lastly, we would like to thank the students of Sarah Lawrence College, without whose input we would not be able to conduct this conversation of sustainability. We hope this report encourages student engagement, conversations, and actions regarding sustainability on campus, and socio-ecological welfare.

The Sustainability Workshop (2022/2023) thanks you!

DEFINING ON-CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY
AT SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE

INTRODUCTION

SCOPE: DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

This report is a student-led project, from the Sustainability Workshop, a SLICE course that offers students the opportunity to explore the multiple ways in which "sustainability" can be fostered and developed at Sarah Lawrence College. Students work in small groups on a variety of projects and produce research and educational material that can lead to concrete and actionable proposals for the administration and our community to consider.

Throughout the course of the 2022/2023 academic year, students of the Sustainability Workshop have struggled to understand what "sustainability" means to Sarah Lawrence College. While "sustainability" can refer to a broad range of climate and eco-conscious related activity, without a common working definition of what on-campus sustainability is to Sarah Lawrence College, implementation of environmentally-focused policies have become ad hoc initiatives that have lived and died with incoming and departing student bodies, rather than lasting programs that would foster and develop an environmentally responsible campus.

Given these challenges, students have worked together to compile this report to define what sustainability needs to be at Sarah Lawrence College.

Discussions from our Workshop led us to recognize that any working definition of "sustainability" that would succeed in fostering an environmentally responsible campus needs to address the following needs of the current campus community, without compromising the needs of a future community.
> (1) Social and ecological needs of current students,
> (2) Social and ecological needs of future students,
> (3) Fulfilling the needs of both while promoting economic security for Sarah Lawrence.

These needs are defined within the methodological framework of the field of Environmental Sociology. Particularly, *"*[Ecological well-being refers to the harmonious relationship between **people and their ecological system**, which leads to a successful management, distribution, and sustainability of environmental resources for current and future generations](#).*"* Social needs represent a body of interactions encompassing ecological well-being: "[Because an ecological system includes its inhabitants, the quality of life of humans is directly tied to the health of the environment and vice-versa](#)." When ecological well-being is not guaranteed, social well-being and social needs are affected. Social and ecological needs are therefore an indicator of quality of life.

To address these three concerns, and to define what sustainability needs are at Sarah Lawrence College, we pursued the following three workflows. Each of these workflows provided qualitative context as to what elements and conditions need to be present for "sustainability", as defined by the aforementioned three concerns, to exist within higher education institutions – and particularly within Sarah Lawrence College.

1. **Peer benchmarking:** To understand how New York State higher education institutions define sustainability, we compared Sarah Lawrence College to 5 other New York State peers in higher education to understand industry standards of campus sustainability across the following 4 categories: Sustainability Strategy, Reporting of Sustainability Strategy, Community Engagement,

and Accountability. The results of the peer benchmarking are found within the: <u>WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS – WHAT'S AT STAKE?</u> section of this report.

2. **Materiality Assessment**: We conducted surveys with engaged student communities to understand what material issues were important to their quality of life at Sarah Lawrence College and how they would rank the college's prioritization of these issues. We also contextualized current community voices in relation to previous student work on sustainability initiatives. Insights from past and current campus communities has led us to conclude that sustainability is a quality of life issue. The results of the Materiality Assessment are found within the second section of this report: <u>CURRENT STATE ASSESSMENT</u>. There is potential for expanding materiality assessments beyond engaged student communities in future reports.

3. **Sustainability Workshop's Working Groups**: Student Working Groups emerged to immediately address quality of life issues experienced due to a lack of environmentally responsible policies on campus. These Working Groups have since developed into de facto strategic pillars of campus sustainability. The methodology and work of Student Working Groups are detailed in the <u>STUDENT SOLUTIONS</u> section of this report. It is important to note that under the current structure (or lack thereof) of Sarah Lawrence College's campus sustainability, the onus of defining sustainability, compiling a sustainability strategy, implementing the strategy, and reporting progress on the strategy falls on the student body – the exact population that is directly affected by the lack of campus sustainability. Because the student body shifts significantly approximately every two years due to transfer and graduation, campus sustainability – and so campus quality of life – is in the precarious position of being reinvented every two years. This lack of consistency in addressing student social and ecological needs has spurred the creation of this report as an effort to document and publicize existing resources and prior efforts within the space of defining campus sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College.

This report will share the methodology and results of each of these workflows, and in doing so culminate in short-term and long-term strategic recommendations specific to defining and implementing sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College. These recommendations are intended to inform the structure and operations of the 2023/2024 Sustainability Workshop.

We recommend that eventually a fourth workflow of Reporting and Disclosures be added as The College progresses with enacting sustainability initiatives. A potential outline of what that workflow would look like is outlined in the <u>STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS</u> section of this report.

These workflows have led us to the following definition of sustainability at Sarah Lawrence:
We, the students of the Sarah Lawrence College Sustainability Workshop, define sustainability as committing, acting, and reporting on how the college fulfills the needs of the current campus community without compromising the needs and resources of the future campus community to ensure a balance between economic security, social well-being, and ecological well-being.

The needs of the current community, as defined in this report, are based on reports by our <u>student community</u> that social and ecological well-being are intertwined. The focus of sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College should be to ensure the potential for maximized social well-being by maximizing ecological well-being.

● **Socio-ecological well-being is defined throughout this report as an indicator of quality of life.**
● The needs of future generations of students will be defined by students themselves every two years, as the student body shifts due to student transfer and graduation.

- The needs of the current generation of students (2022/2023) are defined by the Working Groups of the Sustainability Workshop, outlined in the Student Solutions section, under WORKING GROUPS.

WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS – What's at Stake?

Threats to social and ecological well-being are exacerbated by impending global climate change. Other higher education institutions have provided campus community informed solutions. The failure of Sarah Lawrence College to provide campus community informed solutions poses a reputational and existential risk to the college.

NATIONAL, STATE, & COUNTY LEVEL CLIMATE PRIORITIES

Socio-ecological well-being is threatened by the effects of climate change. Increasing frequency of long lasting and record breaking heat waves means an increased number of heat-related illnesses and deaths. Worsening air quality is expected to be a detriment to public health by increasing respiratory conditions such as asthma, lung disease, bronchial symptoms, lung inflammation, and reduced lung function. Unprecedented rates of drying are projected to increase unequal access to food and water. Extreme weather events are also expected to increase rates of climate migration, displacement, and housing instability and insecurity.

As of 2021, the US has created a National Climate Task Force to combat the aforementioned climate change issues. The National Climate Task Force has committed to the following:
- Reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 50-52% below 2005 levels by 2030
- Using only carbon-pollution free electricity by 2035.
- Reaching a net-zero economy by 2050.
- Distributing 40% of the benefits from federal investments in renewable energy and climate change to under-resourced communities.

Under the Biden Administration, climate issues have been prioritized for **advocacy, action, and investment.** Clean energy is now the largest job creator in America's energy sector. Over 3 million Americans were employed in clean energy during 2021, earning wages 25% over the national average. The U.S. has also joined the Global Methane Pledge, an international partnership to reduce methane emissions by 30% from 2020 levels by 2030. Further legislation addressing climate change includes the Inflation Reduction Act, Solar Power in your Community, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and development in the Department of Energy's Clean Energy Corps.

This legislation and public action represents a national shift in priorities.

New York State has taken action on this priority shift towards a green future. As of 2019, the state signed into law, The Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act which requires the state to "reduce economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions 40 percent by 2030 and no less than 85 percent by 2050 from 1990 levels", by focusing on the implementation of the following four impacts: "Improving quality of life, protecting environment, ensuring equity and inclusion, and growing economic opportunities." The policy is co-enacted by a Climate Action Council, and Climate Justice Working Groups. It is largely focused on the implementation of **equitable climate justice** to improve the quality of life of all New Yorkers.

Enacting equitable climate justice has further been a concern of the **Westchester County Climate Action Plan** – which addresses: "the threat climate change poses to communities and creates a roadmap for sustainable, environmentally conscious solutions."

Our country, state, and county are all currently mobilizing at an expeditious rate towards becoming a society where clean energy and sustainable practices are cultural and economic norms. If Sarah Lawrence College, as an institution, is not proactive in aligning with the Nation's current and future climate based tasks, it will fail to adhere to rising cultural and economic expectations. Incoming students will expect Sarah Lawrence College to provide amenities and services aligned with the national priorities on sustainably oriented values. **Failure to provide this minimum standard has the potential to put the college at a reputational and existential risk.**

INDUSTRY LEVEL: PEER BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

Other higher education institutions have provided solutions aimed at adapting to changing climate, setting climate targets, and addressing changing community quality of life concerns resulting from climate change. There has been an industry shift in prioritizing sustainability. If there is no movement towards addressing community quality of life – including concerns of socio-ecological well-being, there is huge potential for Sarah Lawrence College to miss out on attracting potential future members of its community.

Upon conducting a peer benchmark of sustainability in higher education institutions in relation to Sarah Lawrence College, we have compiled a list of industry standards regarding the definition and implementation of sustainability that are table stakes for other New York State colleges and universities. These industry standards represent the current state of sustainability programs in higher education, and can serve to guide the college towards setting an immediate, intermediate, and long-term sustainability strategy. This peer benchmark is intended to contextualize the methods by which other higher education institutions in New York address and balance the following tripartite concerns: (1) Social and ecological needs of current students, (2) Social and ecological needs of future students, (3) How to fulfill the needs of both while promoting economic growth.

To encompass a broad scope, the selected peer group comprises three New York City schools (New York University, Columbia University, and Bronx Community College), and three suburban schools (Fordham University, Ithaca College, and Sarah Lawrence College). The selection of peers is intended to provide Sarah Lawrence College with a range of institutional comparisons within New York state ranging from larger financial size to smaller financial size. It is important to note that peers of a larger financial size – such as NYU or Columbia – are not directly comparable to Sarah Lawrence College, but provide The College with an idea of what sustainability strategy could look like. They are the "North Star" peers. Publicly disclosed information was used to rank the sustainability strategy of peers in terms of leaders, compliers, and non-compliers and ultimately provide a realistic scope for defining Sarah Lawrence College's sustainability strategy. Because the implementation of sustainability is dependent on accessibility of resources, publicly disclosed information provides a reasonable method of ranking peers.

- **Leaders**: NYU, Ithaca
- **Compliers**: Columbia, Fordham
- **Non-Compliers**: Bronx Community College, Sarah Lawrence College

The full benchmark can be found here: 📗 PEER BENCHMARK

Qualitative benchmarking was conducted across four categories: Sustainability Strategy, Reporting of Sustainability Strategy, Community Engagement, and Accountability.

Together, public disclosure of these four categories informed our definition of "sustainability" within the space of higher education as not simply solitary initiatives, but as an embedded program where all departments – Administration, Facilities, Resource, Transportation, Education, etc. – are involved in addressing students' social and ecological well-being. Thus, higher-ed institutions that have an embedded "sustainability" program define sustainability as a quality of life issue that requires integration within the mission, vision, and values of the institution. We define the presence of this embedded program as **successfully integrated sustainability** on the basis that it maintains longevity despite shifting campus communities. It is the factor that has distinguished compliers from non-compliers, classifying a successfully integrated sustainability strategy as an industry standard.

Leaders and Compliers

The following are key elements that contribute to **successfully integrated sustainability** as extracted from the peer benchmarking process. These elements were present in both leaders and compliers.
- We found that disclosure of data collection, data availability, and data transparency was the undercurrent of all successfully integrated sustainability programs. We found that institutional investment into data collection, data transparency and open access was correlated both with increased student access to resources of on-campus sustainability and increased active engagement from the student community. Increased active engagement from the student community was correlated with long-term quality of life issues within the institution being addressed.
  - We found that successfully integrated sustainability programs were correlated with higher student involvement and retention. Successfully integrated sustainability is an existential issue for higher-ed institutions.
- We found that successfully integrated sustainability programs were not necessarily correlated with schools with larger endowments or university budgets. Both Fordham and Ithaca College – comparable peers in terms of financial size to Sarah Lawrence – were classified as compliers.
- We also found that New York City schools were not necessarily correlated with a more successfully integrated sustainability program, as compared to non-NYC schools.

These key elements distinguished leaders and compliers from non-compliers. Because we did not find disclosure of data collection, data availability, and data transparency, **Sarah Lawrence College, in this context, is a non-complier.**

Compliers

The following industry standards emerged from the peer benchmark as minimum compliance metrics for higher-ed institutions:
- **Community Engagement:** <u>Compliers need to engage the student community in sustainability strategy and implementation.</u> This can take the form of collective association through Student Sustainability Councils with a budget, as well as representational and legislative power. It can also take the form of curricular integrations through student workshops, like the one responsible for this report. The minimum compliance definition for community engagement is the student community. Leaders, however, have also incorporated faculty and employee communities into this definition of community engagement. These tiers of community engagement should inform Sarah Lawrence College Sustainability Strategy in the long run.

- **Sustainability Strategy** needs to be implemented by an Office of Sustainability composed of dedicated sustainability professionals. This strategy needs to be interdepartmentally engaged across at least 5 issue areas: Food and Waste, Energy, Buildings and Materials, Transportation, and Campus Grounds and Water Conservation. This does not currently exist at Sarah Lawrence College. While we recognize that this might be a longer term goal of the college, we recommend that the pursuit of sustainability be an interdepartmental process to address all aspects of student quality of life.
- **Annual Reporting of Sustainability Strategy** needs to be done in accordance with the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) reporting system: The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS). STARS Reporting is the industry standard. Higher education institutions self-report in accordance with STARS template, and are evaluated by AASHE and awarded a Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum Rating based on compliance level. Leaders within our peer set are active recipients of Gold STARS Ratings. Compliers publish regular reports and circulate these reports among the student community to engage feedback to inform sustainability strategy in the future. Sarah Lawrence College is currently enrolled as an AASHE member, but has not submitted for STARS reporting.
- **Accountability**: Successfully integrated sustainability needs to work towards the commitments outlined in the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). These commitments represent macro-goals for the college. Addressing these commitments addresses ecological needs of current and future students. The Commitments are outlined below:
    1. "Set a target date for achieving climate neutrality as soon as possible.
    2. Set interim targets for goals and actions that will lead to climate neutrality.
    3. Commit actions to make climate neutrality and sustainability a part of the curriculum and other educational experiences.
    4. Commit actions to expand research or other efforts necessary to achieve climate neutrality.
    5. Set mechanisms for tracking progress on goals and actions."

Non-Compliers

Non-compliers were categorized on the basis of not meeting these requirements. Failure to meet these requirements correlate to lower retention rates amongst student communities. Sarah Lawrence College's retention rate is publicly disclosed to be 70% — the lowest amongst the peer set and one of the lower retention rates in Sarah Lawrence history over the past 5 years. NYU, a leader within this space, has maintained over 5 years, a retention rate of approximately 90%. Fordham – a complier and a comparable size and financial peer of Sarah Lawrence – has currently a retention rate of 89% – and has maintained the retention rate within the high 80% range. We found this correlation between higher retention and the aforementioned 4 requirements of sustainability held across institutions of various financial sizes. **The nearly 20% differential is significant.**

This is a correlational relationship. We acknowledge that retention rates are influenced by a variety of factors, including social life and financial aid among others. However, after collecting qualitative data from 21 students across Sarah Lawrence College's sustainability community, we have found discrepancy between perceived prioritization of sustainability between students and The College. Students suggest that the lack of successfully integrated sustainability indicates that students' social and ecological needs do not inform institutional actions. This disparity affects students' quality of life, and can lead to increased student dissatisfaction. Without institutional address, at worst, increased student dissatisfaction could contribute to decreased retention. However, it is crucial to note that a statistically

significant study needs to be conducted in order to conclusively state a causal relationship. More details can be found in the [CURRENT STUDENT VOICES](#) section of this report.

Sarah Lawrence College is classified as a non-complier within this peer set. Existing ["Environment & Sustainability"](#) pages only consider sustainability through a career focused lens and do not include campus-focused insights or initiatives. Given that comparable peers within the New York higher education industry are making strides within the space of on-campus sustainability, the lack of a **successfully integrated sustainability strategy** poses a reputational, and so an existential risk to the school. This report will make specific recommendations on what form a **successfully integrated sustainability strategy** can take on Sarah Lawrence College's campus, as well as identify challenges to implementation.

From this peer benchmarking process we can conclude that defining sustainability at The College must first be based in an **overarching and integrated systems approach.** This integrated approach seeks to optimize economic health and create a stable environment for the college to continue operating and thriving.

Sarah Lawrence College is in the business of educating future leaders. As such, it has the potential to imbue future leaders with the value of sustainability, while maximizing socio-ecological welfare in the campus community. By educating student leaders who understand welfare needs of their on campus community and actively work with the college to ensure those needs are met, Sarah Lawrence College will be living up to its motto: "Wisdom with understanding".

Sarah Lawrence College has the opportunity to be an institutional leader that creates community leaders.

CURRENT STATE ASSESSMENT

OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABILITY PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED

The potential for an integrated sustainability strategy to ensure that quality of life is maximized for the campus community requires an assessment of whether community social and ecological needs are currently being met.

In order to understand community social and ecological needs, we have dedicated the following section to a comprehensive review of community voices. We have defined **comprehensive community voices** as those of **Sarah Lawrence College's community stakeholders** – defined by a three-tiered view of The College Community; Tier 1 being those who are most directly affected by sustainability issues on campus and Tier 3 being those who are indirectly affected:
- **Tier 1: Students**: Sarah Lawrence College students have, until 2022, been guaranteed on-campus housing – with a majority of students living on campus. As campus residents, students' quality of life – as defined by their social and ecological needs – is directly impacted by campus sustainability strategy and operations. Uncertainty over student quality of life is correlated with a lower retention rate.
- **Tier 2: Faculty and Employees**: Sarah Lawrence College faculty and employees interact with the campus on a daily basis. Ensuring access to a clean and safe environment maintains the health and well-being of Sarah Lawrence College's workforce. Uncertainty regarding access to a clean and safe environment can inhibit the college's ability to attract faculty and employees.
- **Tier 3: Surrounding community:** Sarah Lawrence College sits in between [Yonkers](#) and [Bronxville](#) – both of which have engaged and institutionalized sustainability initiatives. Sarah Lawrence students also work in both the village of Bronxville and the city of Yonkers. As such, The College has a vested interest in contributing to the existing climate action goals of both areas.

Students in the Sustainability Workshop voice feelings that administrative concerns seem to be structured in reverse – with a high priority on the input of voices outside of the Sarah Lawrence College community — prioritizing Bronxville residents, trustees, and only then faculty and students. Students report that a significant challenge of student-led advocacy work is the sense that student concerns are not as valued as that of outside input.

This report focused on immediate needs – and so primarily deals with Tier 1 impacts. As such, we first looked at previous work from Sarah Lawrence College students on issues of campus sustainability and then conducted a **materiality assessment** of our Tier 1 community. A **materiality assessment** is an assessment of which sustainability issues community stakeholders see as most salient to their quality of life.

PREVIOUS STUDENT VOICES:

Previous work from Sarah Lawrence College students was put together in 2016, under the following: [A Sustainable Campus for the Future: Proposals for Sarah Lawrence College](#). These proposals indicate that sustainability initiatives at Sarah Lawrence College were particularly thriving from the period of 2004 - 2011 during which the college accomplished the following:

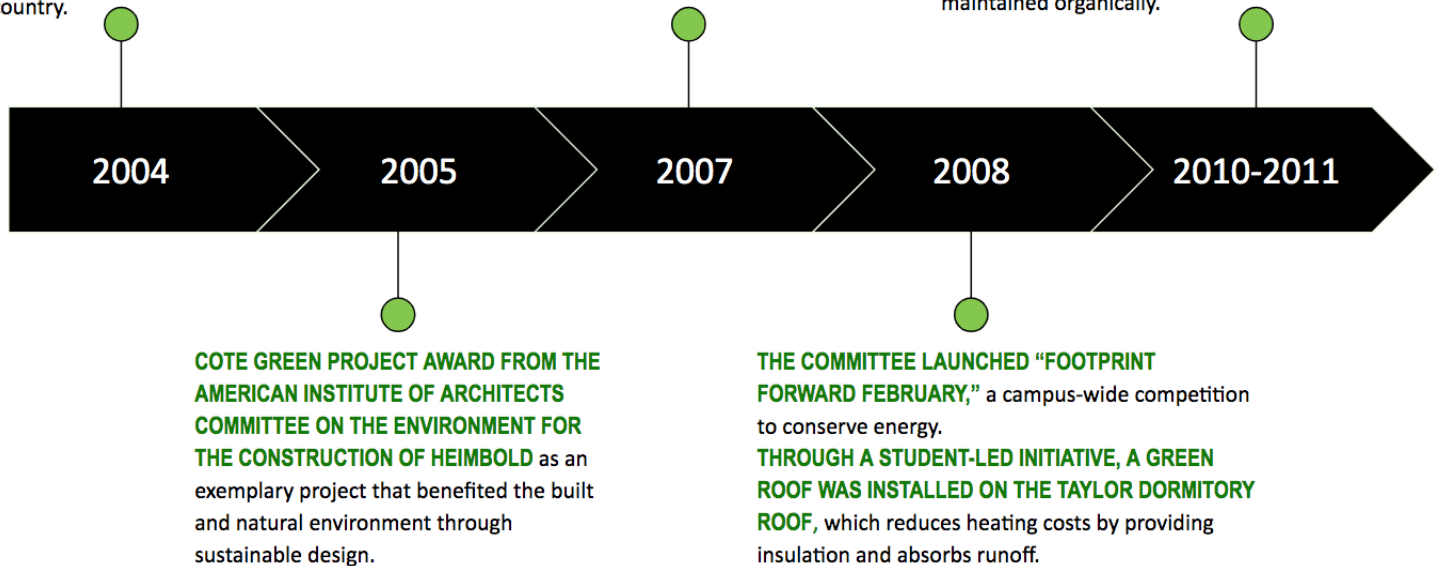**THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE HEIMBOLD VISUAL ARTS CENTER:**
– the college's first LEED-certified building (Leadership and Energy and Environmental Design) +
– the first LEED-certified college visual arts building to be built in the country.

FOUNDING OF THE SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE: originally created with five faculty members, seven administrators (one representing each office, two from Facilities), seven undergraduate students, and two graduate students.

SARAH LAWRENCE FEATURED IN PRINCETON REVIEW'S "GUIDE TO 286 GREEN COLLEGES."
– highlighted Warren Green's renovation.
– reported 10 % of food budget spent on local/organic food, 22% waste diversion rate, 2% of school energy from renewable resources, 80% of school cleaning products green-certified, and 60% of school grounds maintained organically.

| 2004 | 2005 | 2007 | 2008 | 2010-2011 |

COTE GREEN PROJECT AWARD FROM THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF HEIMBOLD as an exemplary project that benefited the built and natural environment through sustainable design.

THE COMMITTEE LAUNCHED "FOOTPRINT FORWARD FEBRUARY," a campus-wide competition to conserve energy.
THROUGH A STUDENT-LED INITIATIVE, A GREEN ROOF WAS INSTALLED ON THE TAYLOR DORMITORY ROOF, which reduces heating costs by providing insulation and absorbs runoff.

However, 2016 students note in A Sustainable Campus for the Future: Proposals for Sarah Lawrence College, that these sustainability initiatives came to a halt after 2010. They identify that sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College needs to be reprioritized through the following actions:

- Generating Renewable Energy on the Sarah Lawrence College Campus
- Composting
- Environmentally Sustainable Transportation Practices
- Adding a Green Roof or Biowall to Campus
- Reducing Sarah Lawrence's Use of Plastics
- Sustainable Landscaping at Sarah Lawrence College
- Water Sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College
- Sustainable Lighting, Computer, and Appliance Installation

The Sustainability Workshop has reviewed these proposals and have found minimal evidence of The College's consideration of, actions towards, and report-back on these proposals. We recognize that since the construction of the Barbara Walters Campus Center, the implementation guidelines of these actions have changed. As such, we have structured our Working Groups to contextualize prior proposals made in 2016, and provided updated guidelines on each of the issue areas identified previously in this report. Specific proposals of this Sustainability Workshop will be found in the STUDENT SOLUTIONS section of this report.

CURRENT STUDENT VOICES:

Review of these proposals have also found minimal evidence of students' knowledge of prior sustainability initiatives on campus. We conducted a Materiality Assessment to understand what students think of sustainability on campus. This Materiality Assessment is a collection of 21 student voices and captures insights into how students think about and react to sustainability on campus. Given that sustainability has not been institutionally defined, this Materiality Assessment left "sustainability" up to students to define and scope. Conducting this Materiality Assessment allowed this workshop to begin to gather a common definition of what "sustainability" needs are to the current student community. It is essential to note that this Materiality Assessment was a pilot assessment. Although this assessment was emailed to students on sustainability related email lists and student organizations, we received minimal engagement from these communities. This survey mostly samples students who were a part of the workshop or acquaintances of students in the workshop. For a more accurate reflection of student needs, future workshop students should work to formulate a survey that is reviewed by the IRB and includes a definition of sustainability as well as a large sample group across campus.

However, salient parts from the 2022/2023 Sustainability Workshop are starting points for future workshop students to construct future materiality assessments. Key themes from students surveyed throughout the 2022/2023 academic year are shared below:

- **We found that while 60% of students ranked an average to high importance of on-campus sustainability in their decision to come to Sarah Lawrence, 90% of students indicated they were not satisfied with the work of the college on sustainability issues.** This discrepancy indicates that while sustainability is expected of the college, the college largely underdelivers on this expectation.
- **84.2% of students reported that their experience with on-campus sustainability has not lined up with messaging from college.** This indicates that the college not only under-delivers on an expectation of sustainability, but also implicitly over-promises on sustainability. We have found that the public circulation of out of date sustainability content and the minimal circulation of updated sustainability content has contributed to the discrepancy between expectations and actions. This poses a threat to attracting and retaining students.
- Students overwhelmingly value sustainability in their personal life, but do not think the college values sustainability. **60% of students believe that sustainability is of below average importance to the school. In comparison, 85% of students believe sustainability to be of extremely high importance to their quality of life.** This misalignment of student and college priorities translates to students feeling unsupported in their needs, indicating a potential stressor for students' quality of life.
- Students report feeling particularly frustrated with a lack of information on existing sustainability efforts which impact their quality of life. One student reported: "...the [sustainability] info is not up-to-date and I am trying to get information that is not 3 years old." We have found that a lack of transparent communication about existing initiatives is correlated with increased student dissatisfaction. Students report that the lack of updated information is sufficient for the assumption that nothing is being done on the part of administration to address their socio-ecological concerns and needs.
- Students have also identified frustrations with the continued lack of a sustainability director. One student reports: "There's only so much we as students can do. When it comes to administrative interaction, we have gone however far we can go." 2016 proposals had previously identified that: "Attention was drawn to the absence of an Sarah Lawrence College sustainability office and/or coordinator" and made recommendations for hiring a sustainability coordinator. These

recommendations have since been reiterated in G.R.O.W's 2022 petition for the hiring of a sustainability director. Notable specific outlined benefits of the Sustainability Director were identified to be:

- Higher student enrollment and applications
- Access to sustainability grants for environmental and related initiatives
- Better reputation and ranking
- Donations from trustees who are excited about the Climate Justice Cluster
- Lower costs associated with environmental/energy waste

The complete results from our Materiality Assessment can be found here:
⊞ What do you think of On Campus Sustainability? (Responses)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IS NON-NEGOTIABLE:

From the peer benchmark, it is understood that **successfully integrated sustainability strategy** is based on community engagement. Sarah Lawrence College students largely feel left out of the college's decision making – decisions which largely and directly affect their social and ecological well-being, and so affect their quality of life. **Students report that while they need to be involved with the college's decision making process around socio-ecological issues, they do not know the avenues to do so.**

Although the sustainability subcommittee purports to offer space for student involvement, it largely consists of conversation around ad hoc initiatives, and does not factor student engagement for the purpose of defining sustainability, committing to a sustainability strategy, reporting progress on that strategy, and sharing accountability on that progress to a wider student community. This subcommittee and its structure is further not effectively communicated to students, and does not have decision making power. Online information on the sustainability subcommittee is out of date – with the "updates" from 2008.

At its core, community engagement makes space for community voices to be reflected and prioritized in sustainability strategy. Community engagement also necessitates that progress on sustainability strategy is shared with communities, and their feedback is integrated into strategy updates and revisions. **Community engagement is collaborative**. Students have been doing their part to bring these issues to administrative attention. However, they have not received actionable and accountable support from The College.

STUDENT SOLUTIONS

WORKING GROUPS

The following table is a summary of the Sustainability Workshop's Working Groups. Each of these Working Groups addresses a social or ecological issue that impedes student quality of life. **A more detailed version on the specific initiatives the Sustainability Workshop implemented through 2022 to 2023, can be found:** 🔲 **WORKING GROUPS**

	SOCIAL	
WORKING GROUP	**Energy on Campus**	**Waste on Campus**
PURPOSE OF WORKING GROUP	The campus' CO2 emissions and energy efficiency are a major concern for many current and prospective students. There is very little available information on the college's energy usage.	This group exists to both decrease the waste that accumulates at the end of each semester, and also to figure out how to better implement composting on campus (with the intention of being able to eliminate food waste from waste collection on campus).

	ECOLOGICAL			
WORKING GROUP	**Leaf-Blowing on Campus**	**Landscaping on Campus**	**Greenhouse on Campus**	**Nature on Campus**
PURPOSE OF WORKING GROUP	The leaf blowing practices at Sarah Lawrence College have become a major impediment to student wellness on campus. The purpose of this group is to investigate the environmental ramifications of The College's landscaping practices, as well as the impact on student life and health.	Current methods of The College's ecosystem maintenance disrupt the ability of the environment to provide benefits, and come at a financial cost to the campus. The purpose of this group is to provide landscaping solutions to better support the environment and student well-being.	The purpose of this group is to create a space for community members to engage with plant life on campus and explore the opportunity to learn more about the environment.	This group exists to address both aesthetic and flood mitigation issues that threaten retention and quality of life. Lack of organized sustainability, and lack of communication and integration with campus operations and landscaping contractors has generated this issue.

The lack of **successfully integrated sustainability** is a reported issue that affects student's social and ecological well-being – and so is a quality of life issue. While students of the Sustainability Workshop have dedicated the 2022/2023 academic year to mitigating those quality of life issues, they have faced significant barriers in implementing their ideas.

These barriers have been threefold:
- **Lack of Data Availability and Transparency**
- **Lack of Institutional Sustainability**
- **Lack of Financial Transparency and Financial Prioritization**

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING WORKING GROUP INITIATIVES:

The following are barriers to implementation of the aforementioned initiatives that students of the Sustainability Workshop of the 2022/2023 academic year faced. These barriers informed strategy recommendations formulated by the Sustainability Workshop to guide the actions of the 2023/2024 Workshop students in their efforts to work with the administration to prioritize and define sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College. Specific suggestions can be found in the STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS Section of this Report.

Lack of Data Transparency and Availability:

A lack of transparency over available data has particularly affected the operations of the Energy on Campus Working Group, reporting: "[There is an] inability to access certain energy information about buildings. Without being able to break down the data, it makes it difficult to pinpoint where the school is spending the most on energy, and where exactly our solutions would be most useful and effective." The Energy Group further identifies this barrier as: "due in part to the lack of a complete climate report, which other colleges of the same size tend to have; these reports include breakdowns of energy use, type of energy used, and other data." Till date, The College has not conducted an energy audit.

Further challenges in the acquisition of energy use records included having to manually digitize what had previously been physical receipts handed to members of the Energy Group after signing an NDA. Erring on the side of caution with the NDA meant the Energy On Campus Working Group could not collaborate with other Working Groups in digitizing, formatting, and analyzing this data. Suggestions for methods of data transparency can be found in the STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS.

Lack of Institutionalized Sustainability

We have found that there is no one person or office within the administration responsible for sustainability, which makes collaboration with the administration difficult from a student community perspective. **We do not know who to go to**. When we do find the relevant people, they most always do not have the time to speak to us. This leaves students with minimal to no information on what socio-ecological issues are already being addressed, and what socio-ecological issues are not even considered. At an administrative level, there is no institutional definition of sustainability – meaning there is no institutionalized investment into sustainability. Students who want to pursue implementing sustainability initiatives are not adequately supported.

Lack of administrative capacity and knowledge to address sustainability on campus is a challenge *__all__* Working Groups faced. The Energy On Campus Working Group reports institutional friction in accessing energy use data. Lack of staff availability or miscommunication between staff was a barrier to transparency over what data was available. Due to the small number of staff in the facilities department,

it was extremely difficult to ascertain a functional understanding of the college's energy systems. The Leaf-Blowing on Campus Working Group traced barriers to research and implementation to a staff/capacity issue, reporting that: "Challenges we've identified include the short-staffing of campus facilities and consequent lack of responses. Maureen Gallagher oversees all the tasks of operations and facilities, making discussions with her slow-going—an understandable, but clear barrier to progress." **The scope of on-campus sustainability is not realistically the task of a singular person.** Students found Maureen Gallagher to generally be the only person to begin providing students with support. **We recognize Mo's contribution to the Sustainability Workshop's Working Groups, and appreciate the time she has taken throughout the year.** However, the common thread with our challenges seems to be the lack of a Sustainability Director or Department within Administration. The Leaf-blowing on Campus Group reports: "There is no organized chain of command for us to communicate with, and the staff we are able to talk to have a lot of other responsibilities that often take priority." There have been previous petitions – and even a job description – for a sustainability coordinator position, through the 2017-2018 academic year, however, this position was never filled for reasons not disclosed officially to students. We understand that an office of sustainability, and particularly hiring additional staff to address the issue of sustainability on campus is a larger conversation regarding the financial state of the college. However, the college's inability to define sustainability priorities, and more broadly what activities they would consider under the scope of sustainability, means that the limited administrative support inhibits implementation of socio-ecological focused programs on the campus – jeopardizing the very mission of this Sustainability Workshop. It becomes impossible for students to "produce research and educational material that can lead to concrete and actionable proposals for the administration and our community to consider", if we do not have staff support to help us produce data driven research particular to Sarah Lawrence College.

Lack of Financial Transparency and Financial Prioritization:

The lack of directed sustainability strategy and reporting, from an office of sustainability, means a lack of budgetary support for sustainability initiatives. Working Groups have found campus sustainability to not be a priority – financially or otherwise. The Waste on Campus Working Group reports: "Any composting initiatives have been brought to a halt due to a lack of budget or resources to be able to initiate them. Our group has found and put together ideas for potential composting plans for The College, but future brainstorming needs to be done to figure out how to raise the money to implement it." Implementation is dependent on financial prioritization of sustainability and financial transparency on the part of the administration. The Nature on Campus Working Group reports that financial transparency was an additional barrier to implementation: "Funding is an important part of our project as we need to find where the funds for the updates would come from. [Library Director] Mustafa Sakarya is willing to give some funds to the project but it's unclear how much exactly. The rest would likely have to come from the school. We also need to work with the school's landscaping company, Flora, and it's unclear what exactly we're allowed to do with agriculture in regards to their contract." We recognize that financial investments might be a long-term goal of the college. However, there are opportunities for communication, reorganization, and engagement that can be completed in the short term to pave the way for effective green financing.

Students report barriers create the following structure:
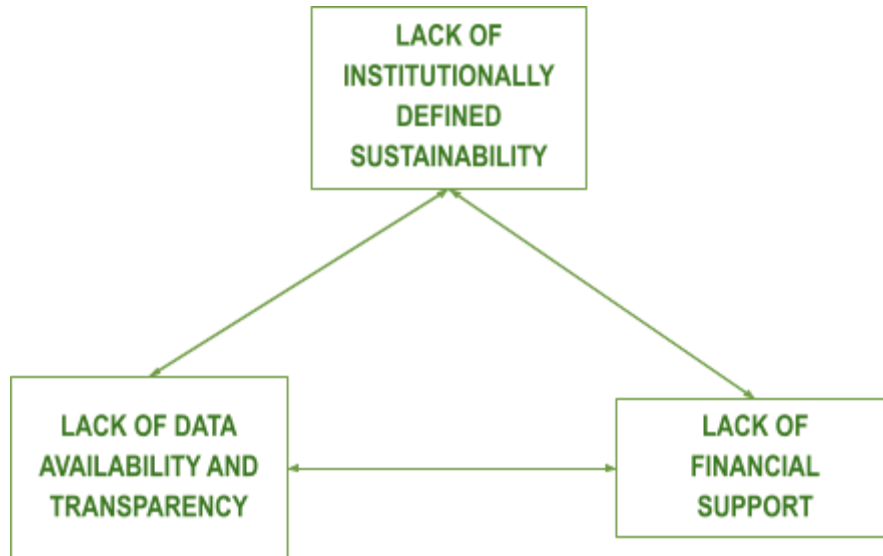
While attempting to hold the administration accountable to ensure changes are implemented, students have realized a lack of institutionally defined sustainability means that minimal data on social and ecological student concerns are collected. This creates an institutional barrier to implementation – exacerbated generationally across student classes by the lack of financial prioritization of socio-ecological student needs. Together these barriers create a system where students are able to advocate for changes to be made, but are unable to ensure these changes are implemented generationally.

Students are caught in a cycle of a lack of prioritization and transparency – at a cost to their socio-ecological well-being, and indeed, quality of life. This is an issue Sarah Lawrence College students have experienced and reported year over year. Their frustrations have been detailed in the CURRENT STATE ASSESSMENT section of this report.

STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT TERM:

Short-term strategy recommendations are student facing means of addressing the barrier that the lack of data transparency and availability posed to the function of the 2022/2023 Sustainability Workshop. These short-term recommendations serve to direct the course of three years to act towards the institutional incorporation of the definition of sustainability provided by this report, and in doing so, are intended to transform Sarah Lawrence College from a non-complier to a complier within the space of higher education on-campus sustainability. They do not require significant financial investment on the part of the college. Instead, they focus on building systems of accessible, transparent, and accountable communication across the college's departments and student community. Building these communication channels that drive community engagement is the first step in addressing on-campus sustainability. It is essential to note that minimal financial investment will be required during the period of implementing short term strategic recommendations. However, this investment is predicted to be on an ad hoc basis and is strictly to be used for communication transparency and data collection purposes.

These communication channels are twofold:
1. **Community Engagement:**
    a. Students of future Sustainability Workshops need to increase engagement with the broader student community to corroborate the social and ecological needs that the 2022/2023 Sustainability Workshop has outlined in this report. This includes conducting a statistically significant Materiality Assessment, in compliance with IRB guidelines.
    b. Students of future Sustainability Workshops need to dedicate time to constructing inter-departmental collaboration to form a standing committee on sustainability with explicit voting power. This committee needs to prioritize accessing available data, digitizing that data, and analyzing that data to better understand solutions to students' socio-ecological concerns, and help Working Groups to implement student solutions.
        i. In doing so, there needs to be clear disclosure of administrative committee structures.
        ii. This could look like transforming the existing subcommittee into a representational democratic system – where students have voting and legislative power.
        iii. Meeting notes must be recorded on the existing google drive, and be available for the reference of students, staff, and faculty.
2. **Sustainability Strategy:**
    a. Administration needs to work with students to build a sustainability strategy that includes the following elements: Strategic Pillars, Commitments/Goals, Actions on those Commitments (that is, Programs and Policies), and Interdepartmental Engagement.
    b. Students of future Sustainability Workshops need to prioritize publishing an annual sustainability report, much like this one.
        i. Annual sustainability reports should build off the work of the 2022/2023 Sustainability Workshop, and at a minimum consist of updates on workflows outlined within the Table Of Contents of this report.
        ii. Administration needs to collaborate with students to create a landing page or website to house annual sustainability reports to publicly share resources regarding on-campus sustainability. This could look like a google site or a page

on Sarah Lawrence College's website. If it takes the latter format, it cannot be excessively buried under other pages – it must be easy to locate.

1. A site for sustainability must be organized into a "Mission/Vision/Values'' format. It must include commitments made by the college and Strategic Pillars that are based on student defined socio-ecological needs. All active student bodies related to on-campus sustainability, must be linked under the relevant strategic pillar. For content and design standards, refer to sustainability of leaders within the space, found in row 13 of our Peer Benchmark:
   🟩 PEER BENCHMARK

c. Administration needs to collaborate with students to implement a mechanism for student community feedback regarding on-campus sustainability. This could look like an end of year survey on the state of sustainability on campus.
   i. This survey must be circulated and recirculated until a minimum amount of responses (defined by future workshops) has been received.
   ii. This survey must be distributed through multiple platforms.

LONG TERM:

Long term strategic recommendations are administrative focused and intended to address the lack of financial prioritization and the lack of institutionalized sustainability. They chart out the path for the Sarah Lawrence College administration to ensure mechanisms to ensure the longevity and embeddedness of "sustainability" as a means to address students' ever changing socio-ecological needs. These recommendations do require financial investment on the part of the college, and so are recommended to be implemented after short term strategic recommendations have successfully been completed three years consecutively. This translates to three additional Sustainability Reports being published on a public facing Sarah Lawrence College sustainability website which shares at a minimum: Sustainability Mission, Vision, and Values statement, as well as Strategic Pillars that are based on student-defined socio-ecological needs, and finally all active student bodies related to on-campus sustainability. Only after these communication channels have been established and subsequently embedded, will long-term institutional financial investment make sense for the college to pursue.

This long-term institutional financial investment is twofold:

3. **Annual reporting:**
   a. As students of future Sustainability Workshops work with the administration to make sustainability related data available and transparent, there is potential for students of the Sustainability Workshop to transform annual reports to comply with Industry Reporting standards outlined in the AASHE STARS Reporting frameworks. The STARS credit checklist asks higher education institutions to disclose and report on 5 areas: Academics, Engagement, Operations, Planning and Administration, and Innovation and Leadership – to measure the degree of embedded sustainability. Prior to submitting this report to AASHE, we recommend that the sustainability report be reviewed by students of the Sustainability Workshop using the following template from AASHE.
      🟩 Copy of STARS 2.2 Review Template (07.Feb.2023)

4. **Accountability:**
   a. Accountability lies in part in the hands of good governance. As the college moves into long-term financial investment into "sustainability" we recommend that the tasks outlined above – from community engagement, enacting a sustainability strategy, to

annual reporting – be encompassed within a "Department of Sustainability". This Department would comprise of at least one data analyst and two sustainability strategists with prior experience in higher education institutions. It would engage interdepartmentally to conduct engagement with student communities, enact and structure sustainability strategic pillars that respond to the socio-ecological needs of the student community, and publish annual sustainability reports in compliance with STARS reporting, circulated to the student community for feedback.

    i.   For information on what these departments can look like at peer institutions, refer to row 15 of 📗 PEER BENCHMARK . Peers color coded in green or yellow can be used as reference points for this purpose.

    ii.   Throughout this year it has become apparent that the scope of engaging with, strategizing on, and enacting sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College cannot be a one person task. Students of the 2022/2023 Sustainability Workshop have found themselves working multiple workflows at once, often needing to meet outside the class to complete data, planning, or reporting tasks. Institutional investment into sustainability governance cannot therefore be limited to one person. There is a need for a team of dedicated professionals.

MEASURING SUCCESS:

After first implementing engaged communication and then embedding this workflow at an institutional level through financial investment, we can expect the following measures of success:

Collaboration:
Collaboration between students and the administration is a metric of success for embedding socio-ecological needs of students within the institutional scope of Sarah Lawrence College's on-campus sustainability. Collaboration depends on the elimination of logistical and bureaucratic barriers. This means direct and clear communication with the student body, making it as easy as possible for students to get in touch with the relevant administrators.

Increases in the number of collaborative interactions between the administration and the student body – rather than interactions that serve to defer responsibility or delay action – can be used as a measure of success of collaboration. This measure results from students feeling an administrative interest in their socio-ecological needs and a possibility of change.

> *Takeaway: The presence of increased collaborative interactions between students and the administration has the potential to mitigate Sarah Lawrence College's low retention rate.*

Transparency:
Transparency refers to the public disclosure of and access to information regarding students' socio-ecological needs. This includes but is not limited to, transparency over data availability, operations, and the administrations' finances. The implementation of transparency would involve identifying and eliminating barriers to information access as well as **providing previously unavailable information and data**. Because the practice of transparency is primarily one of accessible data disclosure, it equips students with a comprehensive understanding of the way that socio-ecological needs are addressed by the college. In addition to present focus on the current functions of the college, transparency also refers to a future focused question of what the college's priorities will be in the long run. This understanding is essential for students to develop realistic sustainability strategy pillars for the school to meet their socio-ecological needs.

As such, the level of transparency can be used to measure the administration's interest in and commitment to responding to students' socio-ecological needs. Administrative support in providing transparency is the crucial element that allows students' advocacy of their socio-ecological needs to transform into actionable proposals. Without this transparency it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for students to develop "research and educational material that can lead to concrete and actionable proposals for the administration".

> *Takeaway: Administrative support in providing transparency over the way that socio-ecological needs are addressed by The College is necessary for sustainability advocacy to progress into actionable proposals.*

Follow-through:
Student advocacy of socio-ecological needs and subsequent development of actionable proposals must be transformed into actionable change. This can only be accomplished with accountable administrative follow-through.

Administrative follow-through is defined as **both** measuring results of adopted proposals and assessing whether the results of those adopted proposals have solved for the socio-ecological needs initially identified by students. Assessment of results requires regular input and feedback from students, and as such requires the administration's commitment to transparency, particularly in regards to communicating to students on the progress and status of proposals. They also require the administration to provide an **accessible and effective** method of engaging students, to reach a statistically significant number of feedback responses. Without statistically significant student engagement, follow through cannot be considered successful.

> *Takeaway: To act on sustainability proposals and meet students' socio-ecological needs, administrative follow-through is necessary. It is dependent on first providing transparent status updates on the progress of actions outlined in proposals and then engaging students to provide feedback on actions. The presence of this follow-through represents the successful transition of sustainability from proposal to action.*

These measures of success are **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** – to determine **longevity** – i.e: whether the sustainability strategy can serve students' socio-ecological needs generation over generation. If these KPIs are not met, it is an indication that students' socio-ecological needs are not being met, and so serves as an indication that Sarah Lawrence College's on-campus sustainability program is not successful.

These KPIs are necessary conditions of successful on-campus sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

PROBLEM:

There has been a consistent lack of defining what sustainability is to Sarah Lawrence College, thus inhibiting the longevity of on-campus sustainability initiatives attempted at the college.

IMPACT OF PROBLEM:

With every incoming class, there is a shift in what socio-ecological issues affect student life, and so a shift in what sustainability issues students want to pursue. The lack of an administrative definition of sustainability impedes the long term progress towards addressing student's socio-ecological needs – and so increases student dissatisfaction at Sarah Lawrence College. There is a potential for this dissatisfaction to be a driver of increasing transfer rates – with Sarah Lawrence College's retention being 70%, as of 2021 – nearly 20% lower on average as other NY State peers with more developed student engagement and sustainability initiatives. This retention rate is also a historical low for the college, which reported retention rates of 89% for the class of 2016, and 82% for the class of 2020. While further research into whether this is a causal relationship for the current generation of students is needed, it is important to note that Sarah Lawrence College is significantly behind other NY State peers when it comes to student satisfaction and sustainability. Where other schools provide resources and solutions to address the ever changing socio-ecological needs of students in the midst of climate change, Sarah Lawrence College largely leaves students unsupported through a lack of institutional definition of sustainability, a lack of data availability and transparency over socio-ecological related concerns, and a lack of financial prioritization of the student community.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM:

Over the course of the 2022/2023 academic year, students had formed Working Groups to address their socio-ecological needs. But implementing proposals from these working groups requires administrative support and collaboration – which has been a challenge for these working groups. To address this larger issue, we have created this report to define sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College based on the current needs of this generation of students.

We, the students of the Sarah Lawrence College Sustainability Workshop, define sustainability as committing, acting, and reporting on how the college fulfills the needs of the current campus community without compromising the needs and resources of the future campus community to ensure a balance between economic security, social well-being, and ecological well-being. The needs of the current community has been defined in this report as focusing primarily on the needs of the current generation of students (2022/2023), and concludes, using frameworks from the field of environmental sociology as well as student voices, that social and ecological well-being are intertwined. The focus of sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College should be to ensure the potential for maximized social well-being by maximizing ecological well-being. **Socio-ecological well-being is defined throughout this report as an indicator of quality of life.** This is corroborated by academic literature on Environmental Sociology.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP

Based on the challenges we faced in implementing this definition of sustainability, we recommend the 2023/2024 Sustainability Workshop work towards implementing the following long term and short term strategic goals for Sarah Lawrence College. **We want to connect what we are learning to the community**

we are a part of. This comes in conflict when we do not have institutional support – from communication to financial support. These recommendations are intended to outline the ways in which the college can directly address students' needs.

Short term:
1. Students need to conduct a statistically significant Materiality Assessment in compliance with IRB guidelines.
2. Students and administration need to form a standing committee on sustainability with explicit voting power.
3. Administration needs to work with students to build a sustainability strategy that includes the following elements: Strategic Pillars, Commitments/Goals, Actions on those Commitments (that is, Programs and Policies), and Interdepartmental Engagement.
4. Students need to publish an Annual Sustainability Report shared on a public website dedicated to on-campus sustainability at Sarah Lawrence College.
5. Administration needs to create and distribute a survey for student community feedback regarding on-campus sustainability.

Long term:
1. Published Annual reports need to comply with Industry Reporting standards outlined in the AASHE STARS Reporting frameworks and be submitted to AASHE for review.
2. Community engagement, enacting a sustainability strategy, and annual reporting need to be within the roles and responsibilities of a "Department of Sustainability".

WHAT IS SUCCESS?

Successful on-campus sustainability is measured through whether it is conducted in a collaborative and transparent manner with administrative follow-through to meet students' socio-ecological needs while maximizing economic security for Sarah Lawrence College.

APPENDIX

RESOURCES

Presentations

Any gm.slc.edu email account will have viewing access to the following spreadsheets.
- 🟨 SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP 2022/2023 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY [PRESENTATION FOR CRIST…
- 🟨 [COPY] Workshop Climate Teach-In Presentation

Workflows

Any gm.slc.edu email account will have viewing access to the following spreadsheets.
- 🟩 PEER BENCHMARK
- 🟩 What do you think of On Campus Sustainability? (Responses)
- 🟩 WORKING GROUPS

AASHE and STARS Reporting Resources

- 🟩 Copy of STARS 2.2 Review Template (07.Feb.2023))
- 🟩 STARS 2.2 Credit Checklist
- AASHE Campus Sustainability Hub
- Benchmarking Tool - The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System

REFERENCES

- A Sustainable Campus for the Future: Proposals for Sarah Lawrence College
- Beyond the Right Thing to Do: The Value of Sustainability in Higher Education
- Bronxville Green Committee
- Building a Better America | The White House
- Clean Energy Corps
- Ecological Well-Being (PDF)
- Environment & Sustainability | Sarah Lawrence College
- Global Methane Pledge
- https://www.forbes.com/colleges/sarah-lawrence-college/?sh=228476cc7502
- How Do Campus Sustainability Initiatives Affect College Admissions?
- Inflation Reduction Act Guidebook | Clean Energy | The White House
- Inflation Reduction Act Guidebook | Clean Energy | The White House
- IRB FAQs for Survey Researchers - AAPOR
- Mayor's Office of Sustainability | City of Yonkers, NY
- National Climate Task Force | The White House
- SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTOR LETTER
- Sustainability Committee - GryphonLink - Sarah Lawrence College
- Sarah Lawrence Addresses Retention Rates — The Phoenix
- The Presidents' Climate Leadership Commitments - Second Nature

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