

## Student Statement of Sustainability Support

Florida State University has long championed sustainability initiatives as an integral part of our campus culture. As students, we are committed to contributing to the continued growth and success of sustainability programs on our campus and in our community. The Presidential Scholars seek to improve our campus community through exploration, study, and service. A sustainable campus is a high priority of our students and has proven to be a worthwhile topic for study and service for the Presidential Scholars. We want to ascertain a means to provide support and energy to solutions for the entire community informed by the students and in collaboration with our faculty and administration.

Over the course of the 2022-2023 academic year, The Presidential Scholars read, studied, and presented Mitchell Thomashow's *The Nine Elements of a Sustainable Campus*. Thomashow relies on his extensive work in campus sustainability to categorize nine areas of engagement with campus sustainability: energy, food, materials, governance, investment, wellness, curriculum, interpretation, and aesthetics. As the Presidential Scholars investigated each of these nine elements in detail, a plan was devised to engage the entire campus community in a larger conversation about sustainability, and how we come together to create positive, sustainable change, using each of these elements as an entry point to sustainability on campus. Presidential Scholars has partnered with the Student Government Association and Sustainable Campus on this project.

A public roundtable event was held on February 1, 2023 on Florida State University's campus. The Presidential Scholars crafted discussion questions around each of the nine elements to engage our student body to learn their thoughts, ideas, and suggestions of how we can approach the various facets of sustainability successfully. Two scholars moderated nine tables, one for each element, in two 30-minute rounds of conversation using their carefully crafted questions. This modality was chosen for its ability to allow ideas to be proposed, dissected, enhanced, and formalized over the course of the conversation. It also allowed various perspectives to be brought to light to find common themes, obstacles, and opportunities.

An informational survey was also distributed around campus to collect further perspectives and ideas from students who were unable to attend the event. Of survey respondents, 99% of students supported the development of long-term sustainability goals at FSU. The Presidential Scholars combined these results with information from Thomashow's research for this high-level synthesis of sustainability action for our campus to create the following student sustainability support statement.

This paper reflects how students at Florida State University perceive sustainability on our campus and culminates with a call to action for administrative support of a Sustainability and Climate Action Plan. On behalf of the Presidential Scholars, the Student Government Association, and FSU Sustainable Campus, we present our Student Statement of Sustainability Support as we work together to chart our campus's path to the future.

## Nine Elements of a Sustainable Campus

Each of the nine elements presented below offer our students' perspectives of the elements. Each element includes a working definition of the element in the students' own words and a short summary statement of what we learned about students' perceptions of the element that warrant our attention as university administration.

### ***Energy***

Energy is required for all academic, extracurricular, and recreational activities offered by Florida State. From powering the projectors in our classrooms to charging the university's electric bus system, FSU relies on large energy sources to sustain its day-to-day operations. Energy—at its broadest level—refers to the various chemical or physical mechanisms used to produce heat and light. The use of energy on college campuses is not just a question of sustainability, but also one of cost efficiency and financial stability.

#### *What We Learned*

In recent years, FSU has made strides toward implementing sustainable energy sources in various campus facilities. Students value improvements in energy sustainability and efforts to reduce energy waste and improve efficiency. However, many FSU students expressed that they are entirely unaware of how the university sources and uses energy on campus and feel there is a lack of transparency in this aspect. Students also expressed a desire to make our campus more sustainable, but they feel that their individual efforts are ineffective without open support from the administration.

### ***Food***

Food focuses on creating sustainable food systems that promote health and wellness for both individuals and the environment. This involves reducing the ecological impact of food production and consumption, supporting local and regional food systems, and promoting healthy and sustainable food choices. It also includes initiatives such as composting and reducing food waste to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from landfills. In addition, the food element emphasizes the importance of food education and creating a culture of sustainability around food choices.

#### *What We Learned*

Food sustainability is crucial for supporting the health and well-being of students on campus. A well-rounded diet that includes sustainable food options can also contribute to better academic performance, concentration, and overall student success. Food sustainability—such as supporting local and regional food systems, reducing food waste, and promoting plant-based and organic options—can also foster community engagement on campus, help reduce the university's ecological footprint, and contribute to environmental stewardship. Students noted that food systems have significant environmental impacts, including pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and depletion of natural resources.

### ***Materials***

Materials encompass the life history, sourcing, expenses, transport, and construction associated with the materials that a campus uses that often go unnoticed. Materials that catch one's eye are for a reason: they are aesthetically pleasing, technologically innovative, or are historic. Materials also can contribute to a sustainable campus in various ways.

### *What We Learned*

Students take cues from their university regarding prioritizing sustainability and look to the administration for increased transparency on materials that the university utilizes and how they impact the environment and sustainability goals. Students also commented on the importance of incorporating materials that improve student quality of life.

### ***Governance***

Governance is defined as the organization and political processes that allow for community decision-making and implementation. This means that governance involves cooperation and input from various campus stakeholders, and it is the process that results in official university guidelines, rules, and legislation that govern the entire university. With respect to a sustainable campus, governance provides universities with the opportunity to implement policies that encourage and reinforce sustainability.

### *What We Learned*

Sustainable practices on campus involve consistent cooperation between students and the university administration. Students observe that the relationship between leadership, coordination, and trust in our campus governing bodies is essential to good governance in sustainability. The involvement of multiple perspectives and stakeholder groups makes the governance process more difficult but is still necessary to evaluate the different available solutions for a diverse campus.

### ***Investment***

Investment can be defined as the allocation of financial resources with the aim of generating a return. In the context of a sustainable campus, investment refers to the strategic use of financial resources to support initiatives and projects that promote environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and economic viability.

### *What We Learned*

Students observed that university investment can contribute to a culture of sustainability on campus by providing the necessary financial resources to support sustainable initiatives and programs. Investment also has the potential to support the implementation of renewable energy systems, sustainable building practices, and other sustainable technologies.

### ***Wellness***

Wellness is defined as the promotion of physical and mental health through individual ability and the resources offered by the campus. Wellness also includes the physical and cultural environment of the campus itself, both for general happiness and academic success.

### *What We Learned*

Students observed that maintaining wellness long-term is vital to academic success, therefore, successful students require a healthy balance of sleep, exercise, and nourishing food. In addition, campus resources, opportunities, and infrastructure are necessary to promote wellness. These include opportunities for peer engagement, student health resources, and spaces that promote physical wellness. Students also stated that the campus's physical location, design, geography, and landscape are all essential to further promoting wellness.

## ***Curriculum***

Curriculum reflects what the university values through what it considers critical knowledge to comprehensively understand a subject. Curriculum exemplifies the importance of sustainability to a university, which translates to its campus. With the knowledge of the influence of sustainability on the world around us, a curriculum can be used to effectively incorporate sustainable practices around campus.

### *What We Learned*

Students feel there are strong barriers to making an impact in curriculum and other administratively determined university initiatives. However, students shared that collaboration can be fruitful for improving community understanding of a subject and incentives make a difference in those learning outcomes.

## ***Interpretation***

Interpretation broadly refers to the way an individual perceives the world, using their own lived experiences and perspectives to shape their conclusion. Linking interpretation to sustainable campuses, universities attempt to leave a multitude of environmental aspects to the imagination of visitors and encourage critical thought. Interpretative aspects of a sustainable college campus also open the pathway for conducive discussion surrounding a university's history and values, given that the definition means something different to every individual.

### *What We Learned*

Students are looking for greater visibility of sustainability resources and efforts, such as sustainable programs, policies, and goals that the university is actively participating in or promoting. There is an interest in more visible and accessible sustainability infrastructure, such as in the form of public art or renewable energy. Students also shared that they benefit from the use of social media and video to show the adverse effects of environmental irresponsibility—several students noted that this would be more impactful coming from student-run organizations so university administration can continue to and increase support for these entities.

## ***Aesthetics***

In relation to sustainability, a focus on aesthetics revolves around how the beauty of the natural world interacts with or is reflected by man-made structures and design. A sustainable campus that understands and interacts thoughtfully with aesthetics can better integrate with its natural surroundings, which can improve both contentment with and respect for the environment in students. By creating aesthetically pleasing spaces, campuses can intuitively guide their students toward a positive relationship with the environment.

### *What We Learned*

It is possible to engage with aesthetics by making the narrative of sustainability more pleasant, transforming it from an obligation into an instinctive relationship. By allowing student input on transforming spaces into more aesthetically pleasing ones, campuses can encourage students to identify with and feel engaged with their surroundings in a way that naturally encourages more sustainable mindsets. The environment can be positioned as one that is worthy of consideration and maintenance. Aesthetically pleasing spaces are also intellectually stimulating, so beyond environmental sustainability, making spaces that are enjoyable to live in can be inspirational for students and improve creativity and motivation on campus.

## Summary of Student Support for Sustainability

Sustainability is a vital topic for students to understand and engage with because it will remain relevant no matter the direction their lives take in the future. Future employers may seek out candidates that have sustainability knowledge or require familiarity with sustainability endeavors. Students will also benefit from engaging with the university's sustainability initiatives because they involve participation from multiple disciplines and call for joint participation amongst students, administration, and community members. These are skills that students will need to learn and can apply in higher education and other industries.

It is vital for students to feel empowered to take individual action toward sustainability. Making individual changes can help to bolster larger university sustainability initiatives and contribute to a more overall sustainable campus for all.

Additionally, student support and collaboration are crucial elements for the success of sustainability initiatives on FSU's campus. By engaging students in the planning, implementation, and promotion of sustainable practices, the university can create a culture that promotes a healthy environment, economy, and society. Students play a vital role in advocating for sustainable choices, such as reducing waste and increasing awareness about the environmental, social, and health impacts of university emissions. Through student-led initiatives, collaborative efforts with university administration, and partnerships with local stakeholders, FSU can shape a sustainable campus that not only benefits the FSU community, but also develops a more sustainable future for the broader Tallahassee area and beyond.

Student support and collaboration are essential drivers for fostering a holistic approach to sustainability on campus, creating a positive impact on students' lives, and contributing to a more resilient campus community that equips students with knowledge and skills to make informed choices for a sustainable future.

Student collaboration on campus can also lead to an increase in interdisciplinary collaboration on campus. The student body makes up a very diverse group of people; student consultation and engagement open the opportunity for a breadth of perspectives and ideas, which expand the potential for university governance on sustainability. There are a plethora of student organizations and departments on campus dedicated to furthering sustainability on campus; however, support from the university administration is critical in making lasting change. Florida State University can lean on this enthusiastic show of support around sustainability to take steps toward a greener future.

A college campus is an excellent testing space for sustainability programs and initiatives because of the nature of universities being transitive and formational for students. University administration can take advantage of this unique circumstance and work collaboratively with students on campus on incorporating sustainability through governance. By working collectively with students, faculty, and staff, university administrators can work to identify areas where investment can be directed toward sustainable initiatives. Students are ready and willing to unite

to advocate for sustainability goals and are looking for faculty and administrative support in these future efforts.

The student perception of sustainability on campus also has influence on how much sustainability is valued. When students feel more included in the sustainability conversations, they feel more confident in utilizing campus sustainability resources and in getting involved with sustainability initiatives. Furthermore, FSU can improve the student perception of sustainability and cultivate a greater communal atmosphere of sustainable action by providing more possibilities for sustainability initiatives and engagement. As a university that has students who are committed and engaged to sustainability work, Florida State has a valuable and unique opportunity to engage with its students in new and innovative ways.

Integrating sustainability into campus initiatives can create a positive impact on students' lives and promote a culture of sustainability on campus and beyond. Student support and collaboration possess the ability to impact campus sustainability significantly. Collaboration itself promotes positive interactions among students, as well as faculty, staff, and administration. As Florida State University invests further in its academic and research pursuits, it is important to continually prioritize a campus that still includes its student body in its shape.

Florida State administration holds a responsibility to commit to and promote sustainable practices in all aspects for the betterment of the environment, student needs, and the greater Tallahassee community. Through the support and implementation of climate-friendly choices, sustainable food practices, transparency in energy and resource usage, local partnerships, student wellness, expansion of sustainability in the curriculum, and investment in clean, renewable energy, the administration can show that sustainability is a priority and collective goal for the entire university community.

We, the Presidential Scholars, along with the additional signatories below, request that the Florida State University administration show their commitment to sustainability by developing a Sustainability and Climate Action Plan and allocating financial resources and administrative capacity to work towards becoming leaders in environmental stewardship.

Signed,