

# No Sustainability Without Justice

An Anthology on Racial Equity & Social Justice

Volume III, 2022



## aashe

The Association for the Advancement  
of Sustainability in Higher Education



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# Introduction

Systemic racism represents a major barrier to the effective resolution of sustainability challenges. Resolving these challenges requires understanding, cooperation and strategic action across industries and societies.

Volume III of *No Sustainability Without Justice: An Anthology on Racial Equity and Social Justice* shares perspectives on how racial equity, social justice, diversity and inclusion are integral components to sustainability, and are particularly relevant for higher education sustainability practitioners.

The six essays in this year's Anthology build upon the topics found in earlier volumes. They provide insights covering a variety of aspects of higher education.

- Essay 1, *Environmental Justice and the Race to Net Zero*, by Ijeoma Nwagwu and Shana Weber, addresses the need for developing and achieving net zero emissions targets that are just, fair and equitable to overburdened and BIPOC communities.
- Essay 2, *Applied & Engaged Learning for Equitable Sustainability & Social Justice*, by Geoffrey Habron, explores the positive impacts of integrating social justice applied learning projects into intro-level and advanced sustainability courses.
- Essay 3, *Disability Justice and Language Access in Climate and Resiliency Planning*, by Morgan Jericho, looks at the exclusion of disabled individuals, and their integral role in climate advocacy, resilience planning, and green jobs.
- Essay 4, *Accelerating University-Community Partnerships*, by Cynthia Medina, explores the deconstruction of power dynamics to accelerate partnerships to combat climate injustices in underserved communities.
- Essay 5, *Earning Justice*, by Paris Prince and Pedro Henriques Da Silva, outlines the positive returns through investment strategies that engage BIPOC managers and prioritize social impacts.
- Essay 6, *A Call for Solidarity*, by Victoria Ho, Lacey Raak and Nizhoni Chow-Garcia, provides insights on the rationale for, and implications of merging equity offices with sustainability.

Understanding the intersections of sustainability, racial equity and social justice continues to be critical as we work to address social challenges that leave the most marginalized individuals and communities behind. These essays demonstrate how the movement for racial equity and social justice is evolving, and provide opportunities for us to reflect on how we are showing up in the moment. Through these essays, we hope to provide useful answers and inspire members of the AASHE community to maintain focus on racial equity and social justice.

# Environmental Justice in the Race to Net Zero

*By Ijeoma Nwagwu and Shana Weber*



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## Introduction

The urgent need to reduce global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions has been driven home by the increasing frequency of extreme weather events – from floods, droughts, heatwaves, hurricanes to wildfires - which have not spared campuses and communities across the globe. People and communities of color already overburdened by pollution and inequity suffer these impacts disproportionately (Agyeman, Bullard & Evans 2002).

The academic community has been at the forefront of monitoring climate change and alerting humankind of the dangerous repercussions of failing to act to reduce global emissions, leveraging decades of research and best practices (ACUPCC, 2011). Higher education institutions are themselves beginning to take action to reduce emissions.

In the context of higher education and other sectors, “net zero” or “carbon neutrality” commitments are emerging as powerful drivers toward tangible mitigating actions. (For example, at the time of writing, over 1114 Universities and colleges from across the globe have signed the United Nations’ [Race to Zero for Universities and Colleges](#), 194 countries have signed the Paris Accord, and 58 percent of Fortune 500 company CEO’s have committed to net zero targets by or before 2050.) Many higher education institutions are demonstrating steadfast leadership by committing to net zero emissions targets, exemplifying sustainable energy infrastructure on their campuses, committing to low-emitting operational activities, re-evaluating the use of University investments and research dollars, preparing future leaders, and re-evaluating how they engage with communities around the world (including those burdened by environmental injustices).



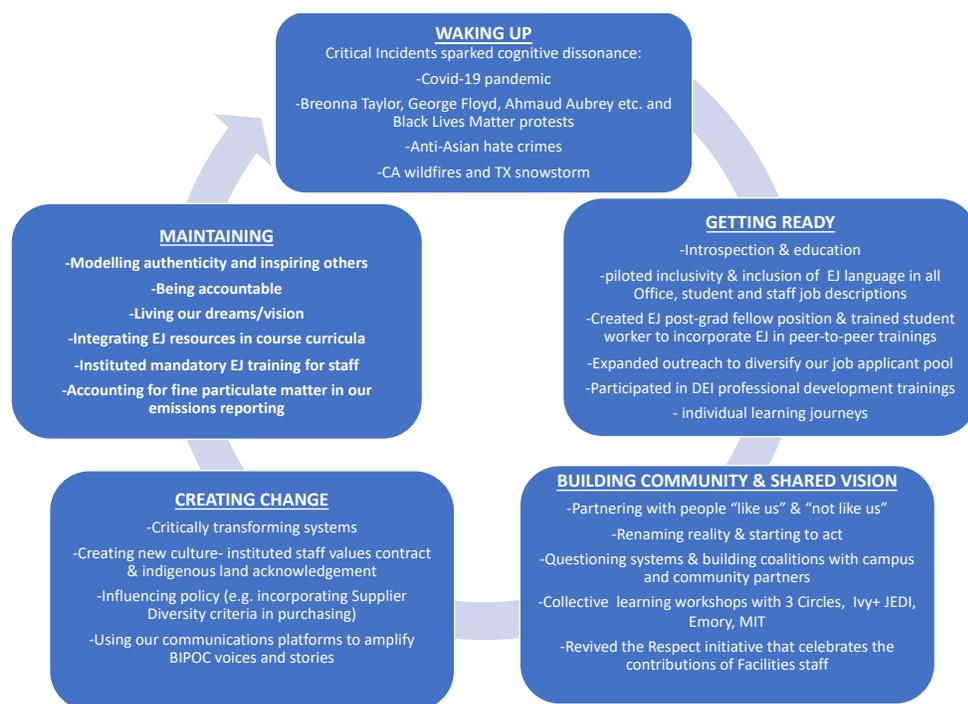
Installation showing the broad actions Princeton University is taking on campus to achieve net zero by 2046, the institution’s 300th anniversary.

This essay argues that pathways for achieving net zero targets in higher education must not only contribute to decarbonization but must also be just, fair and equitable in ways that are meaningful to overburdened and BIPOC (black, indigenous and people of color) communities. Traditional institutional staffing structures continue to separate justice considerations from applied climate action on campuses, even as many institutions diligently seek ways to become more inclusive and just. Nevertheless, higher education sustainability programs must grapple with the fact that the path to net zero is riddled with distinctive challenges, including the risk that strategies developed in the absence of justice considerations may make the situation worse for those most impacted.

This moment in history represents an awakening, an opportunity to examine how environmental justice concerns relate to institutional carbon neutrality practices in the moment in which higher education institutions are re-evaluating their histories, purpose and impact in the world. This is also a moment in which the sustainability field can realize its full scope of purpose, which, as the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) outline, encompasses equity, inclusion and justice for all. Structured listening and learning exercises to inform action are an important part of this work of reinvention for higher education sustainability professionals. Some of these opportunities have been explored from a pedagogical standpoint (King and Casanova, 2021), but there has been only limited exploration from a campus operational standpoint.

This essay explores how the sustainability leaders at Princeton University and other colleges and universities are grappling with this intersectional work, through frameworks and practices associated with achieving net zero carbon emissions. It asks: what are the opportunities - and challenges - to advancing environmental justice on the journey to net zero? And what are the immediate first steps as we build a genuine community-facing approach? We will explore possibilities and challenges around transformative action in the following areas:

- Curricular and co-curricular engagement
- Public engagement
- Air & transportation initiatives
- Energy infrastructure conversion
- Carbon offsets



Pathways Princeton University sustainability staff are exploring to advance environment justice (EJ). Adapted from Harro, B., (2000).

## The Net Zero Campus

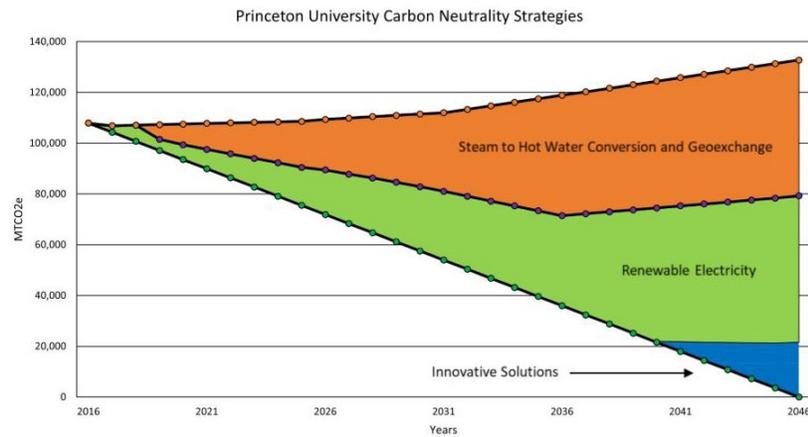
Since the launch of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment in late 2006, leaders of more than 800 institutions have signed on, vowing to achieve net zero as soon as possible. As of summer 2022, ten colleges have achieved net zero: Allegheny College, American University, Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby College, Colgate University, Colorado College, Dickinson University, Middlebury College and University of San Francisco (Carbon Neutral Colleges and Universities, 2022). Higher education institution (HEI) commitments to net zero help align emissions with the goal to keep global average temperature increases below 2 degree centigrade, consistent with the science-based targets under the [Paris Agreement](#).

There are a variety of ways to define "net zero" emissions or "carbon neutrality." Princeton University's working definition of net zero for its campus refers specifically to emitting no more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere than are permanently removed or stored each year (Larson et al., 2021). Princeton intends to reach net zero without the purchase of market offsets and is instead focusing on reducing both direct emissions from on-site energy production and fleet fuel use (Scope 1) and indirect emissions from purchased electricity (Scope 2). Princeton will achieve this by 2046, the university's 300th anniversary (Valenti, 2021), or sooner. Plans for reducing indirect (Scope 3) emissions from commuting, procurement and other activities are in early stages of development. For example, Princeton is currently in the process of developing market-driving strategies and goals to reduce the embodied carbon and community impacts associated with building materials.



Colorado College (top) and Dickinson University (bottom), are two of the ten colleges that have achieved net zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Princeton's pathway to carbon neutrality relies on strategies spanning new on-site energy infrastructure (e.g., installation of [campus-wide ground source heat pump](#) and geexchange technology and expansion of on-campus solar energy generation capacity to cover 19 percent of campus needs), investment in existing building energy-efficiency improvements, the purchase of new renewable electricity generation off-site, and actively cultivating energy conservation behaviors across the campus community. However, while our campus systems are highly efficient, we will continue to combust fossil fuels (natural gas) as our primary energy source until infrastructure conversions are completed over the next approximately 15 years. Our reliance on natural gas will decline dramatically over that timeframe.



Princeton University is on track to reach net zero campus greenhouse gas emissions by 2046 or sooner.

In recent years, emissions reduction efforts on campuses have focused primarily on Scope 1 and 2 emissions. However, institutions also have tremendous market influence and pollution-reducing impact through their procurement activities and other consumption areas (Scope 3). In order for higher education facilities and operations to achieve net zero, and potentially positively impact environmental justice, each scope of emissions needs to be understood and reduced.

## Scope 1, 2 & 3 Emissions

**Scope 1 emissions** are direct. They come from onsite combustion and mobile sources controlled or owned by an organization. Methods to reduce scope 1 emissions include implementing fuel-saving technologies and switching to geexchange technologies.

**Scope 2 emissions** are indirect and are generated in the production of purchased electricity and steam. Even though the greenhouse gasses are emitted at the facilities where the electricity or steam is generated, they are considered an organization's responsibility because they are a result of the organization's energy use. These emissions could be reduced through methods such as installing more efficient lightbulbs or purchasing renewable energy certificates.

**Scope 3 emissions** include all other indirect emissions, including those from the production, transport and disposal of purchased goods, employee business travel, and employee commuting. Scope 3 emissions often represent the majority of an organization's emissions and are typically most challenging to quantify and address. Institutions can reduce scope 3 emissions through more thoughtful procurement contracts, robust alternatives to air travel, community-based pollution reduction efforts and, though controversial, through the short-term purchase of carbon offsets.

## Environmental Justice

Strategies that higher education institutions employ to drive down carbon emissions toward net zero have important implications for environmental justice and present powerful opportunities for research and learning. There is a particular opportunity to design these strategies to benefit communities as an explicit desired outcome.

To better understand how environmental justice intersects with sustainability, as well as the historic separation in practice between these concepts, it is important to begin with a common understanding of the term “environmental justice.”

Environmental justice issues were powerfully amplified on the radar of higher education in 2020, with a national reckoning around police violence following the murders of George Floyd and many other Black people at the hands of the police. Weeks of powerful direct action to challenge these historic atrocities overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic. These shed light on the disproportionately negative impacts on the health of BIPOC and low income communities created by the concentration of industrial and waste sites in those communities among many other examples of systemic racism. This pattern of cumulative and disproportionate impact of environmental burdens on communities of color and the poor has been widely referred to as environmental racism or environmental injustice (Agyeman, Bullard, & Evans, 2002). Environmental injustice can be defined as the disproportionate exposure to environmental challenges in certain populations and communities, typically people of color and low-income areas.



Illustration from student-led environmental justice workshop.

“Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”

- Environmental Protection Agency, 2022

Historically, environmental justice concerns in the US came to light through protests by grassroots movements against the routine siting of toxic waste dumps, hazardous facilities and polluting industries in areas inhabited predominantly by people of color and the poor. The phenomenon has been well-documented in landmark studies such as the Government Accounting Office Report (GAO, 1983) indicating statistically that African-Americans comprised the majority population in three of the four communities of south-eastern US where hazardous waste landfills were located. Also, the landmark report Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States (United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 1987) raised awareness of what Bullard (1994) termed “environmental racism.”

Some scholars suggest that concentrated pollution is but one of many forms of violence following a long history of slavery, colonialism, as well as imperialism, formed around the notion of white supremacy, that has regarded people of color as disposable. Ruha Benjamin, Professor of African American Studies at Princeton, uses a concept of “afterlives” to convey that slavery has also left a legacy of social injustice which manifests in the vast economic, social, and health disparities seen today - skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration and impoverishment (Benjamin, 2018). According to Benjamin, oppression didn’t end with Emancipation, but rather evolved into mass incarceration, debt, and structural inequality in public systems, resulting in many Black people today not having the basic conditions for a healthy and economically prosperous life.



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## Environmental Justice & Sustainability in Higher Education

### A History of Separation

Unlike environmental (in)justice, which is gradually making its way into academic discourse and practice, sustainability has a long-standing focus for higher education in teaching, research and campus operations (McNaghten and Urry, 1998). Sustainability refers to ideas of living within the finite limits of the planet, or improving quality of life without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and of regenerating ecological systems.

Despite the breadth of the concept, sustainability in higher education has too often been seen and implemented mainly through a narrow environmental lens rather than the intersectional social, cultural, justice and ecological lenses that are required. The result is a principal focus on carbon reduction planning efforts that omit environmental justice principles or any analysis of community-scale implications. There has been a policy assumption that simply reducing emissions will also benefit all communities, including low-income and BIPOC communities. Scholars suggest, however, that there is a need to provide a more comprehensive, community-focused, framework for analyzing and promoting fairness and equity throughout the transition away from fossil fuels. (McCauley, Heffron 2018)

For over four decades, sustainability in higher education has manifested as an environmentally-focused and expert-oriented operational endeavor (Breen, 2010). This narrow approach sidesteps policy analyses and the deeper socio-cultural contexts in which institutions are embedded. Campus sustainability programs have been largely housed in operations departments and have focused on operational systems changes and/or individual action measures (e.g., ride a bike, buy local, use reusable water bottles, etc) in the absence of necessary whole-institution initiatives. This approach has failed to address the structural inequities and habitual decision-making that promote environmental and social degradation, particularly in the contexts of underserved communities that have not had a place at the table in the sustainability discourse.

Following the most recent push towards racial reckoning, higher education institutions are paying closer attention to diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice issues, with environmental justice emerging on the radar of many university sustainability experts. Environmental justice, however, is not yet considered an integrative dimension of institutional racial justice or sustainability strategy.

## Embedding Environmental Justice into Net Zero Efforts at Princeton

The starting point for Princeton University's efforts in this regard was a formal acknowledgement by its sustainability office, through its [Draft Environmental Justice Framework](#), that "sustainability is not a separate issue from racial justice. The two are, in fact, intertwined as many BIPOC communities are affected by Environmental racism." While progress accelerates to reduce Princeton's absolute campus carbon emissions to net zero by 2046 or sooner, the work of understanding what environmental justice means in relation to campus decarbonization operations and sustainability practice in higher education is just beginning.

It is important to integrate environmental justice concerns in our efforts to address the challenges of a warming climate. Such refocusing is critical in efforts to reach net zero for two reasons: First, to achieve environmental justice, the decision-making processes that higher education institutions exemplify for combating climate change should be deeply informed by both global and community-scale contexts, the latter of which inherently requires far more meaningful community partnerships and exchanges than are currently practiced. Second, without that community-scale understanding, campus sustainability initiatives could have unintended but damaging effects in communities already bearing disproportionate environmental burdens. For example, solar energy technologies require significant land use and use materials and processes that rely on toxic materials or waste flows. This raises important environmental justice considerations, such as how the impacts of the solar energy transition will be distributed (Mulvaney, 2013). Therefore, in the absence of environmental justice considerations embedded in both the planning and reporting processes, and despite the potential for reducing carbon emissions, such efforts may cause direct harm in low-income communities. To date, sustainability in higher education has not yet articulated these imperatives through industry standard metrics and progress reporting requirements.



Solar carport at Princeton University, demonstrating a multi-layered use of land that minimizes sprawl on surrounding communities.

Princeton University recently comprehensively revamped its [institutional equity and diversity efforts](#) to promote equal opportunity and campus diversity. In this context, “[intersectional environmentalism](#)” inclusive of environmental justice is conceptually better supported as a priority for its sustainability office. Similar patterns are emerging across higher education and represent the potential for a new integrative approach rather than the disconnected approach of the past. It remains, however, that there is very little embedded institutional expertise in the environmental justice space.

To understand what an equity framework for sustainability could look like, members of Princeton’s predominantly white Office of Sustainability collaborated with the Emory University and MIT sustainability teams to embark on a series of shared training and workshops, facilitated by the Three Circles Center based in Seattle. The objective was to understand personal positionality and potential programmatic contributions to making the sustainability space more equitable and anti-racist, while authentically amplifying BIPOC voices. With this training, each of the participating teams became more personally aware, and better prepared to support institutional planning, community-facing partner programs on campus, and student programming in this space.

As a result of these efforts, students at Princeton interested in sustainability and justice are bolstered by our sustainability offices to participate actively in legislative advocacy for environmental justice at the national and state government scales, thereby building their leadership and collaboration skills. Students participate in university-sponsored internships with grassroots environmental justice community organizations, raising interest within the Princeton University academic community in hiring faculty who conduct research in this space; and support peer learning opportunities to deepen student focus on issues of environmental racism/equity.



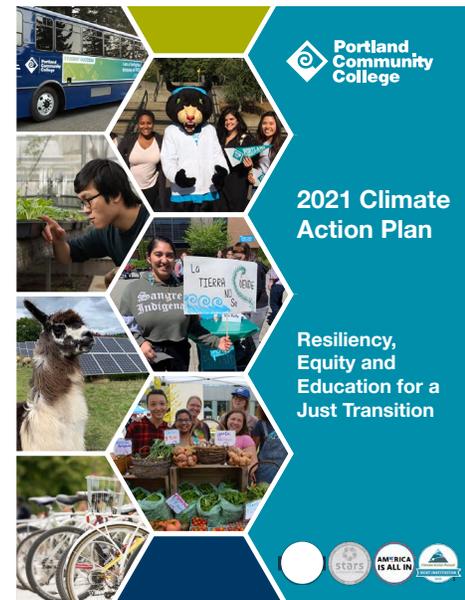
Princeton University Engineering Students visiting a new green infrastructure construction site on campus.

# Equitable Net Zero Strategies

There are several methods and strategies that institutions of higher education can employ to work toward both net zero and contribute to environmental justice. Approaches related to curricular and co-curricular engagement, public engagement, air and climate initiatives, and energy initiatives are outlined next.

## Curricular and Co-curricular Engagement

An important way to align net zero emissions targets with environmental justice efforts is to engage students, faculty, and staff in the learning process. At minimum, the campus community should be able to understand why certain environmental measures are being taken, and how these measures connect with and impact overburdened communities. More can be done. For example, Portland Community College's [2021 Climate Action Plan: Resiliency, Equity and Education for a Just Transition](#) is a five-year roadmap towards climate justice. The plan establishes a new carbon neutrality goal of 2040 and outlines clear pathways for equity-focused climate action to be woven throughout operations, academics, student engagement and future planning. It enables PCC to acknowledge its neighbors in frontline and vulnerable communities as among those most at risk from the global climate crisis. Supporting resiliency challenges in collaboration with communities forces PCC to answer the climate crisis with holistic and community-based solutions and to confront adaptation equitably on a local level.



The current attention on environmental justice presents an opportunity to deepen the climate action conversation. Princeton University's sustainability office has taken advantage of this opportunity by expanding institutional efforts to immerse students in community-engaged research, internships, and initiatives centered on net zero and environmental justice. An academic course focused on campus sustainability, Investigating an Ethos of Sustainability at Princeton, introduced environmental justice as a critical lens in the project-based explorations that students undertake in collaboration with a range of campus experts to reduce emissions on campus through reducing food waste, clothing waste, energy waste, choosing healthier materials, sustainable construction, etc. The framing of environmental justice was introduced - through a series of lectures, field visits and assignments. The students engaged with scholars and activists investigating and working toward environmental justice, and were required to research how their hyper-local Princeton-based project topics linked with community impacts around the world. For the final assignment, students tackled a real-time decision-making need at Princeton, and generated evidence-based, scalable or repeatable recommendations back to the institution.

## Public Engagement

Public engagement directly involves the public at large and local community members in college or university initiatives. Often campuses have an influential presence in their “college towns”. As such, colleges and universities play a potentially unique role as convener and partner within their broader communities to galvanize meaningful environmental justice and net zero efforts.

At Princeton, a group of undergraduate and graduate students have been working with a local nonprofit, Sustainable Princeton, to apply their research skills to community concerns such as the air pollution and noise generated by diesel-powered landscaping equipment. The group, known as the Climate Action Plan for Emission Reduction Strategies (CAPERS), collaborated with landscapers providing services within the Princeton municipality to generate a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental considerations involved in transitioning to cleaner, electric-powered equipment. Community members, including local high school students, co-generating knowledge with CAPERS to support engagement efforts toward sustainable landscaping. In addition to supporting the shift to electric lawn maintenance equipment, the group has effectively aided in the collection of geospatial data on stormwater inlets.

The framing of environmental justice has opened up new partnerships with campus departments and external partners. Sustainability professionals at Princeton University recently partnered with the university’s Office of State Affairs to host a series of campus tours for the [New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection’s Youth Inclusion Initiative](#), a program designed to help develop the next generation of environmental protection, conservation and sustainability leaders within underserved communities in New Jersey. The tours were extremely valuable to the university as well, given the new perspectives the youth brought to the variety of topics covered - including composting, school gardens, building efficiency and energy infrastructure transition. These shared experiences have strengthened the relevance and applicability of the solutions the campus strives to model.



Princeton University has launched a public messaging campaign highlighting its sustainability vision and actions to achieve net zero.

## Air and Transportation Initiatives

Effective and equitable air and transportation initiatives reduce air pollutants and carbon emissions at the same time, thereby positively impacting the health of local communities and regions. Addressing both air quality and greenhouse gas emissions is critical for protecting people from climate change and associated environmental disasters. Air pollution is arguably a more pressing issue for low-income and environmental justice communities than the broader greenhouse gas emissions issue. Low income individuals are more likely to be negatively impacted by both local air pollution and global climate change for multiple reasons, including lack of financial resources and safeguards, lack of knowledge or education about environmental issues, and pre-existing environmental degradation (Byrnes, Davis, 2021). Certain areas are more affected by climate-related disasters and air pollution than others. For example, people in Boston's Chinatown face disproportionately higher levels of dangerous air pollutants than all other areas of Greater Boston (Ryan, 2019). Chinatown is situated right between I-90 and I-93, two major roadways that have hundreds of thousands of travelers daily.

With transportation activities representing a large portion of New Jersey emissions, transitioning to greener transportation methods and improving current transportation infrastructure are two ways the state can improve (NJDEP, 2022). One of Princeton's main initiatives for 2022-23 is to transition away from diesel campus shuttle buses to a full fleet of electric buses. In this transition, the university will also park and charge the buses immediately adjacent to campus rather than in communities that the buses do not serve. For over 10 years the current diesel-powered buses were stored overnight parked in Hamilton, New Jersey, a community approximately 20 minutes drive from Princeton's main campus. By parking campus buses closer to the University, there is less air pollutant exposure to these adjacent communities, and emissions are reduced overall due to proximity.



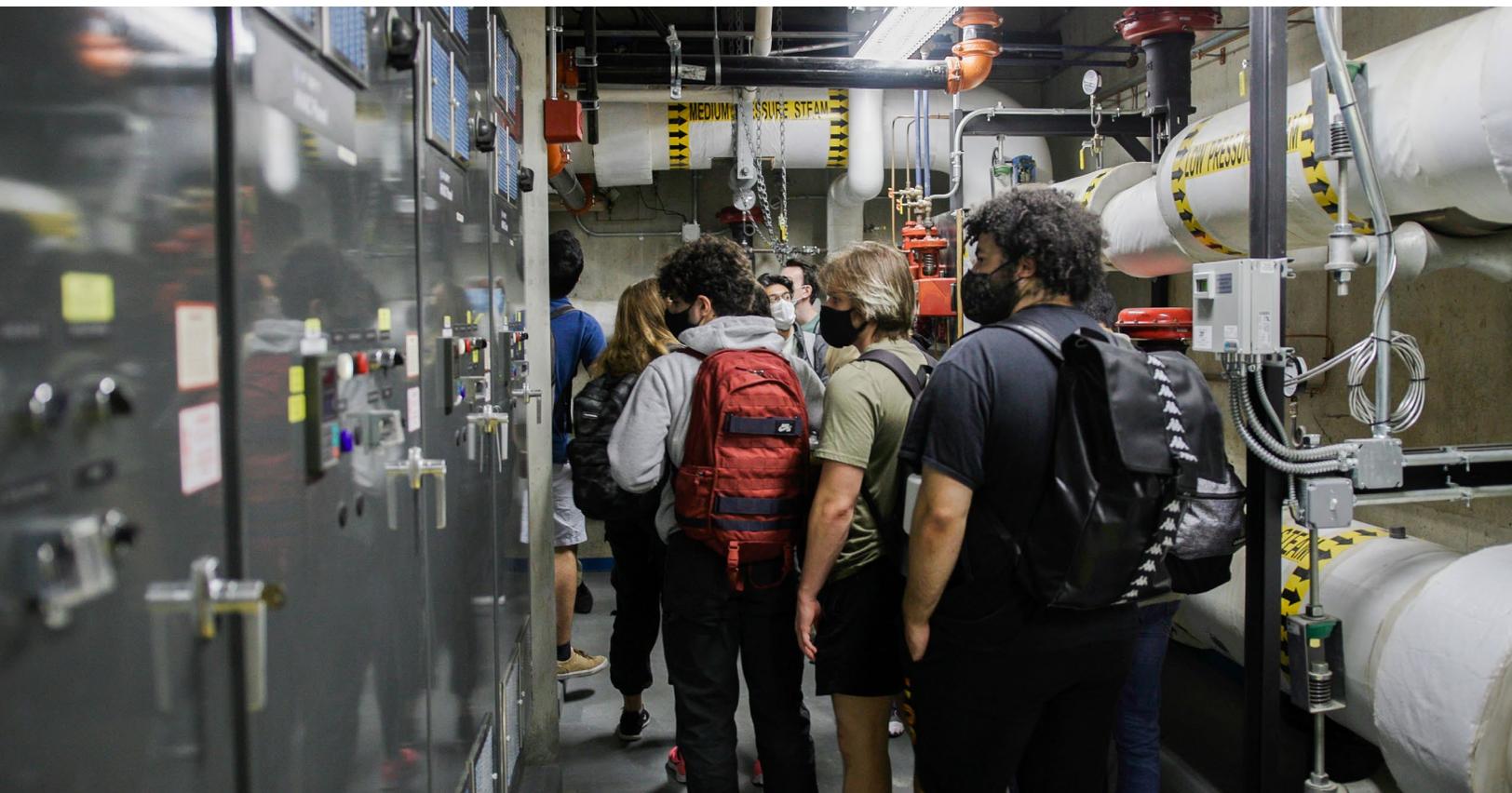
In 2023, Princeton University will have converted its entire bus fleet to electric as it transitions away from single-occupancy vehicles. This is the first bus at the factory.

Today's racial equity priorities are an invitation to not only report on institutional greenhouse gas emissions with global ramifications, but also fine particulate matter emissions, with local community and regional ramifications. Particulate emissions may be reported as part of existing regulatory requirements, but are typically not included in sustainability reporting. At Princeton, efforts are underway to include fine particulate matter emissions from Princeton's cogeneration facility in annual campus climate action performance updates to the public and university leadership. Modeling institutional transparency and rigorous standards around fine particulate emissions (alongside reporting greenhouse gas emissions) is a critical aspect of achieving the public health protection envisaged by the Clean Air Act of 1970, particularly for communities which have increased susceptibility to air pollution (Johnson, Graham, 2005).

## Energy Infrastructure Conversion

The energy sector is among the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States according to the EPA (2022). Underserved communities are disproportionately impacted by emissions from polluting power generation and transit corridors, as well as renewables which often put pressure on limited land and agricultural resources. Implementing conservation measures and switching to renewable energy sources in ways that are considerate of the concerns of environmental justice communities can make all the difference. For example, for its large biomass plant, Colgate University created a ticketing system to track the procurement of wood chips to ensure alignment with the university's sustainability and social justice standards ([STARS, 2017](#)). Such metrics can be replicated by other institutions in accordance with their own environmental and social justice standards.

For example, Princeton University has expanded its on-site solar PV generation to provide 20% of electricity for the campus as part of this broader infrastructure conversion. A relevant design principle has been to layer as many land uses as possible, to avoid sprawl and minimize impacts on surrounding communities. As a result, seven of Princeton's nine solar arrays are incorporated with other functions such as parking garages, rooftops, and surface parking areas. This model of multidimensional use of land is important to highlight from an environmental justice standpoint, considering that decarbonisation transitions can exacerbate vulnerability and inequality where land resources of poorer communities are strained or appropriated by green energy infrastructure such as sprawling solar installations (Savacool et al., 2021).



Students on experiential tour of the Princeton campus energy system.

## Carbon Offsets

One of the pathways many universities take to reducing their emissions is through purchasing offsets. These can be applied to scopes 1, 2 or 3 emissions, though use of offsets to address scope 3 emissions are becoming prevalent, given that institutions have limited direct control over those emissions at this time. Offsets constitute the largest source of emissions reduction claimed by many institutions (Barron et al., 2021a).

There are many different options in offset markets that an institution can consider, including offsetting university-related travel by investing in efficient trucking technologies as, investing in tree-planting and the associated accounting, or purchasing and “retiring” credits from regional greenhouse gas emissions cap programs as offered through the organization Climate Vault. Offsets can range from activities that remove from the atmosphere and store carbon, to activities that reduce carbon emissions at their source. All provide the function of reducing emissions elsewhere while the organization purchasing the offsets continues to emit, either directly or indirectly.

Many offsets are, even if verifiable, only short-term solutions at best. Eventually, all emissions sources must be reduced in absolute terms if we are to address the climate crisis. Offsets are challenged by verifiability, accountability and additionality concerns. They can also leave vulnerable communities exposed to air pollution by allowing local sources of pollution to continue to emit while paying for greenhouse gas reductions that may be on the other side of the planet (Barron et al., 2021b).

To safeguard its commitment to reducing absolute campus carbon emissions to net zero, Princeton is not planning to claim any reductions in scope 1 and 2 emissions via the purchase of market-based offsets. Princeton is, however, exploring what the institution can do now that is meaningful, additional, accountable and community-facing to reduce emissions while the institution takes the necessary years to transition its energy infrastructure. Given the environmental justice learning journey underway, Princeton (through its sustainability program) is endeavoring to understand what is important to environmental justice communities in New Jersey and what partnership role Princeton and other New Jersey higher education institutions can plan that is meaningful and lasting.

Conducting peer-reviewed offset projects from within the higher education sectors, recognized as an exemplary practice in STARS ([Carbon Mitigation Project Development](#)), can help to alleviate issues of verifiability and accountability in impacted communities. Conducting carbon offset projects designed to benefit under-resourced communities may alleviate inequity. Examples of socially focused, peer-reviewed carbon mitigation projects reported through STARS include community urban forestry projects at [Arizona State University](#) as well as [American University](#), and establishing tree plantations in partnership with Indigenous communities at [McGill University](#).

American University's strategic  
**CARBON OFFSETS**  
balance emissions

-  **Efficient cookstoves**  
in Kenya offset study-abroad air travel
-  **Planting trees**  
in DC helps offset commuting
-  **Sustainable trucking**  
operations offset university travel
-  **Landfill methane projects**  
offset natural gas use and landfill waste

Higher education institutions are also developing helpful tools to support the development of credible offset programs. To address accounting challenges, and offer a pathway for reaching net zero through offset projects that reduce the “heat island” effect impacting urban communities, Duke Carbon Offsets Initiative developed an [Urban Forestry Protocol](#). The protocol outlines the methodology for measuring the carbon offsets and documenting project co-benefits (i.e., the non-GHG related project benefits) generated from an urban tree planting project. As Duke’s efforts demonstrate, higher education institutions can play an important role in conceptualizing and implementing robust carbon offsets regimes that are designed to benefit overburdened communities.



The Duke University Carbon Offsets Initiative.

## Conclusion

Environmental and social justice issues are intertwined, and it is imperative that decisions around achieving net zero are made through an environmental justice lens. Our hope is that the programs and examples highlighted in this essay can provide ideas and inspiration for sustainability practitioners to consider environmental justice along their own journeys toward net zero.

## Acknowledgements

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# Applied & Engaged Learning for Equitable Sustainability & Social Justice

*By Geoffrey Habron*



**Dr. Geoffrey Habron (he/his)** attended mostly international schools in Thailand and Nicaragua before attending a predominantly white private high school and being one of the only Black students in Marine Science at the University of Miami. After serving as a Peace Corps fisheries volunteer in St. Lucia, he went on to study fisheries as a graduate student at Mississippi State University (M.S.) and Oregon State University (Ph.D.), where he was a teaching assistant for Multicultural Perspectives in Natural Resources. He then taught for 15 years at Michigan State University with a joint appointment in Fisheries and Wildlife and Sociology where he established a competency-based Sustainability Specialization using electronic portfolios which included Social Justice as one of the required competencies. Dr. Habron served as President of the Equal Opportunities section of the American Fisheries Society and campus advisor for the Minorities in Agriculture and Natural Resources Association. Since 2017, he has served as Professor of Sustainability Science in the Department of Earth, Environmental and Sustainability Science at Furman University, where he developed a course on Sustainability and Social Justice.

## Introduction

While sustainability often revolves around the triple bottom line of ecological integrity, economic vitality and social equity, efforts around ecological concerns often garner much of the attention, especially around issues of climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, recycling, ecosystem protection and agriculture. Sustainability has more recently taken much from the field of environmental justice, which looks at the disproportionate impacts of environmental ills such as the siting of landfills, chemical plants, and wastewater treatment facilities - on vulnerable populations (Bullard et al., 2008; Pellow, 2016). Only recently has the field begun including the disproportionate impacts and distributions of environmental goods on vulnerable populations as well, in the form of green gentrification (Gould and Lewis 2016) and now climate gentrification (Anguelovski et al., 2019). The enormity of both unequal climate change impacts and disproportionate racial and social strife, especially since 2020 after the killing of George Floyd in the United States and the global COVID 19 pandemic, raises the need to elevate the social equity dimensions within sustainability.

This essay provides an overview of the benefits of applied learning and describes two courses in Furman University's sustainability science program that use experiential applied learning to help students develop a deeper understanding of the role of justice and equity in sustainability.



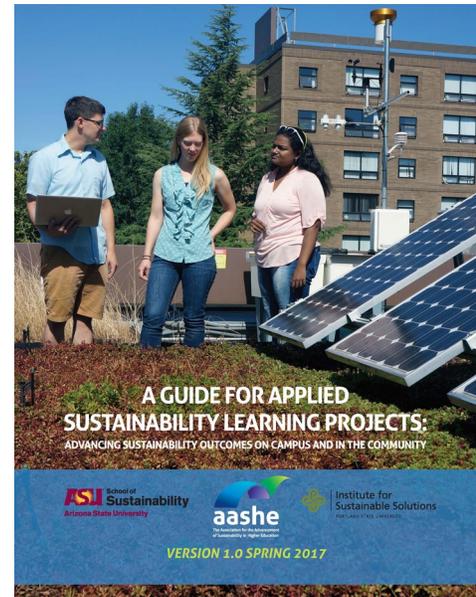
# Overview of Applied and Engaged Learning

While higher education institutions have much to do to develop more sustainable campuses, opportunities exist to move in this direction through curricular and applied learning programs that focus on addressing problems and providing solutions to issues of equity and justice. A great resource to develop these actions emerged from AASHE through [A Guide for Applied Sustainability Learning Projects](#) (Beaudoin and Brundiers, 2017). A key goal of the guide is to mindfully scaffold engaged learning to prepare students to participate in complex, unscripted, applied experiences that involve and impact off-campus communities. Implementing such experiences becomes ever more important given the complexity of global sustainability challenges—especially those with unequal impacts on vulnerable populations. After all, “navigating this turbulence requires college and university students that are imbued with a special set of skills and temperaments:

- a steely equanimity,
- adept at conflict management,
- familiar with notions of social change,
- well versed in the science of sustainability with a rootedness in values of justice and community, and
- more at home in the metaphorical turbulence of whitewater rafting than the placid predictability of canoeing on a gentle summer’s day” (Maniates, 2017:197).

To prepare students to navigate such unscripted and turbulent issues requires educators to curate experiences whereby students, “come to understand themselves not as “I have the right answer” elites, ready to assume their place in the halls (or cubicles) of power, but as “knowledge brokers” tasked with creating and disseminating knowledge in ways that privilege values of precaution, systems thinking, and advocacy for the defenseless—typically the poor, the environment, and future generations” (Maniates, 2017:197).

In the Sustainability Science Bachelors of Science program at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, we embrace the approach of preparing students to be knowledge brokers (Habron, 2019). At the introductory level, the program emphasizes the importance of key sustainability science competencies: systems thinking, futures thinking, strategic thinking, collaboration and values thinking (Brundiers et al., 2021; Wiek et al., 2016). We then infuse these competencies throughout the curriculum from knowledge and awareness to critical analysis and application, particularly at the third-year level courses in preparation for a required signature learning experience during the senior year. Signature work is when “students pursue an individual project related to a significant issue, problem, or question they define for themselves—immersing themselves in exploration, applying what they learn to real-world situations, and preparing to explain the significance of their work to others ([AAC&U Integrative Learning](#), 2022).



## Introductory Course Application: Sustainability and Social Justice

To address the relative inattention to social justice and equity that is prevalent in the sustainability field, Furman faculty developed a Sustainability and Social Justice course first offered in 2019. In addition to covering key concepts and principles, the course required students to engage in a campus project to further the institution's sustainability and social justice efforts. For each of the three course iterations, students have progressively worked toward improving Furman's sustainable purchasing practices with an emphasis on Furman branded apparel sold in the bookstore. This required students to visit the bookstore and record data regarding the brands and models of apparel, the countries of origin, the materials used to create the apparel, and any other information gleaned from the product labeling such as Fair Trade or fair labor designations.

Students then researched the brands and materials through online work as well as through use of the environmental, social and governance (ESG) reporting through the proprietary MSC Index database. This database was originally developed by investment company Morgan Stanley and is available through the Furman library. MSCI generates ESG data that guide investors toward assets that match their values while clarifying their risks. Students read the labor scores and investigated the controversies involved in publicly-traded companies such as labor law violations or claims of discriminatory practices. This brings principles to life and connects students' campus life with the lives of others throughout the world, most often those of women in countries such as China, India, Bangladesh, Dominican Republic and El Salvador.

Students then prepared findings to present both to the bookstore vendor, in this case Barnes and Noble, as well as university purchasing and branding officials. Students advocated for discrete actions such as dropping the brands with lower social scores, adding and promoting the brands and products with stronger social justice attributes, and formally joining organizations such as the Fair Labor Association with mechanisms and protocols for accountability and transparency through vendor supply chains. Students strongly encouraged adoption of more stringent supply chain standards than those already practiced by major brands, or even beyond the standards found in AASHE STARS. ([OP-11 Sustainable Procurement](#) recognizes written standards and policies for garments and linens as well as other commodities, and [EN-15 Trademark Licensing](#) recognizes membership in the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) or Fair Labor Association (FLA).)



Fair-trade related products at the Furman University Bookstore. Photo credit: Geoffrey Habron, Furman University

Such research and engagement with stakeholders and decision makers has led to conversations around the tradeoffs of supporting small local operations compared to larger entities that can afford to verify and trace their social justice footprint throughout the supply chain. It has also called into question the alignment of Furman University's official athletic wear provider (Nike) compared to alternatives with better labor practices and transparency (e.g., Adidas). However, given their length and timing, these sponsor contracts are difficult to alter midstream.

Students worked with several stakeholders throughout the process, which led to a final presentation with findings and recommendations (Figure 5). Those stakeholders included the Director of Creative Services and Brand Management, Director of Auxiliary Services, Vice President for University Communications, Senior Associate Athletic Director for External Affairs, Senior Associate Athletic Director for Business Affairs, General Manager of the Barnes and Noble College Bookstore, and the Associate Director of Sustainability Assessment. As a result, Furman requested that its licensing contractor survey existing vendors regarding their FLA membership status and willingness to join FLA with a pending decision to formally rejoin the FLA. In this way, students can see the results of their applied learning even if it did not achieve all of their requests for even more stringent standards and criteria beyond FLA certification. The overall project benefited from previous iterations of the course in terms of engagement with stakeholders and developing a framework for analysis. Subsequent offerings of the class will also utilize an applied project-based learning approach that could assess progress on implementation of the FLA measures or the course could move onto other sustainability social justice focus areas.



Student final presentation to campus sustainability stakeholders in the intermediate-level Sustainability and Social Justice course. Photo credit: Geoffrey Habron, Furman University

## Advanced Course Application: Sustainability Science Practicum

In addition to affecting change on-campus, sustainability education must expose students to applied experiences in the larger community off-campus. Furman launched a Sustainability Science Practicum in 2016 that each year works with a community entity seeking assistance and provides senior students the opportunity to engage in a required signature learning experience as an alternative to a traditional individual thesis. While the course typically works with partners in the immediate Greenville, South Carolina community, the 2021-2022 effort involved nine Sustainability Science students working to support an African-American community four hours away to improve its climate resilience.

[Bucksport, South Carolina](#) is a census designated place in Horry County comprising a population of 607 people that is 89 percent African-American. 22.6 percent of Bucksport residents live in poverty, with 50 percent living in mobile or manufactured homes. Residents hold a strong Gullah-Geechee cultural heritage with legacies tied to post-slavery resistance and survival. Located in the floodplains at the nexus of the Pee Dee and Waccamaw rivers, the Bucksport community has experienced a sudden onset of catastrophic flooding events since 2015, resulting in property damage and loss of population. As a consequence of racist policies and discrimination, many residents reside on heir's property, so they lack the necessary property deeds to receive disaster funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (NBC News, 2021). Many properties that experienced flooding also didn't reside in areas that had previously been officially designated as FEMA flood zones, so residents were surprised by their sudden risk of flooding (James, 2021). Even when flood maps are updated, they are based on past flood events and do not incorporate future risks due to climate change.



A Bucksport resident is taken from his flooded home. Photo by Janet Morgan/Myrtle Beach Herald, myhorrynews.com.

From August 2021 through April 2022, the nine members of the senior Sustainability Science Practicum course partnered with the Association for the Betterment of Bucksport and a coalition of organizational partners to develop three proposals to support equitable climate resilience and adaptation to protect assets subject to flooding. Unfortunately, a home elevation and weatherization project did not receive funding. However, a cultural preservation project in collaboration with Coastal Carolina University and the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce to support the Association for the Betterment of Bucksport was selected to receive \$61,000 from Horry County through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in January 2022. In addition, while a low-impact development project developed in partnership with the Carolina Wetlands Association failed to receive ARPA funding, American Rivers did receive \$19,000 from the Butler Conservation Fund to support the development of rain gardens in collaboration with Clemson University, The Coastal Conservation League, and Winyah Rivers Alliance.

The formal course ended in December 2021, but students continued to engage in the planning and implementation efforts during spring 2022, leading to a community event in April where residents could view and vote on their preferred rain garden sites. The project culminated with the June 2022 installation of [two small rain gardens](#) at the community center (Laguerre 2022) where Furman faculty and one student were able to engage with community members and partners. To illustrate the longer-term commitment to the community beyond the typical span of a college course, two Furman senior Sustainability Science students have begun to build upon these efforts for their thesis research during summer 2022. The success of the strong partnership network and activities in Bucksport provided groundwork to garner additional support from the expertise and focus of a five-year \$5M Carolinas Collaborative on Climate, Health and Equity team led by North Carolina State University, and funded in 2021 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



Furman student Anna Justice and Dan Hitchcock (Clemson University Extension) joined the Bucksport community in the installation of two small rain gardens. Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Habron, Furman University

Students were able to see tangible results of their work at two levels. The first yielded actual federal dollars for Bucksport achieved through Horry County governing processes. The students also learned that short term failure to achieve federal funds for the low impact development project still led to another source of money from American Rivers to support the effort. Finally, students were able to learn of the implementation of the rain gardens even after they had graduated, with one student still close enough in the area to actually participate in the rain garden installation and physically visit the site and meet the community members for the first time. Two of the students have leveraged their experience into community-oriented AmeriCorps positions upon graduation.

One student's final paper from the project was submitted to a peer-review journal for review. Subsequent efforts to support the community include applied and engaged thesis research in 2022 and over the next four years funded by the NOAA NC State Carolinas Collaborative on Climate Health and Equity grant. There is also an opportunity to build upon the previous course efforts in a 300-level Resilience and Adaptation sustainability science course offered in the spring of odd years, such as in 2023.



Work in progress at the James R. Frazier Community Center rain garden. Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Habron, Furman University

## Implications for other Campuses

Furman's experiences with these courses demonstrate the importance of developing and nurturing higher education's commitment to fostering the social justice dimensions of sustainability, with a particular focus on vulnerable, oftentimes marginalized communities and groups that have typically been disproportionately impacted both by environmental bads such as pollution, but also environmental goods such as efforts to improve environmental sustainability and climate resilience such as green infrastructure (rain gardens, tree planting). Those environmental benefits can sometimes fail to adequately involve communities or fail to recognize unintended consequences (e.g., green gentrification) that can lead to community displacement or increase cost of living. Unfortunately, those communities and groups often include Black, indigenous, people of color, women, and those in the Global South. Addressing these problems requires higher education institutions to develop student capacity to address these issues through mindful, scaffolded preparation. It also requires a commitment of resources, the willingness of campus decision-makers to listen to student findings, and a willingness to engage with and listen to communities and decision-makers beyond the control and purview of the institution itself.

Successful community-focused applied learning activities yield positive results for students, community members and institutions. At Furman, students revealed the opportunity for Furman to select a different athletic sponsor that would better reflect Furman’s commitment to social justice. It also resulted in Furman approaching current vendors to request membership in the Fair Labor Association, which necessitates Furman deciding whether to discontinue working with sometimes longstanding vendors who decide not to join. As a result, engagement with entities and issues outside of the institution could generate controversy for taking a stand for those with less power and influence such as the residents of Bucksport or female textile workers in Bangladesh. Regardless, the scaffolded and applied learning approach working directly with stakeholders to foster social justice demonstrates that experiential learning projects can help to “contribute to understanding or advancing sustainability” which is among the criteria for recognition in the STARS criteria under AASHE STARS’ [AC 8: Campus as a Living Laboratory](#).

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has urged that, “educating students to be socially responsible, informed, and engaged citizens in their workplaces, nation, and the global community should be an expected goal for every major. Achieving this goal will require that departments, programs, and disciplines define the public purposes of their respective fields, the civic inquiries most urgent to explore, and the best way to infuse civic learning outcomes” (AAC&U Civic Learning, 2022). Further, the AAC&U “exhorts educators and public leaders to advance an educational vision that would make civic learning and democratic engagement an expected part of undergraduate education” (Kanter and Ochoa, 2012). Institutions committed to racial equity and social justice should make such a commitment and implementation a clear-cut priority. Campuses should also engage in work to prepare students for such applied projects by developing smaller opportunities for students to ease their way into applied learning opportunities that are safer to fail. Institutions also need to provide students educational opportunities such as cultural competence and guidance about authentic community engagement through readings (e.g., Romero, 2021) and webinars such as the [Building and Sustaining Community Partnerships Workshop](#) through Hawaii Sea Grant, as was done in the upper level Sustainability Science Practicum class.



Bucksport community members at a completed rain garden. Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Habron, Furman University

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# Disability Justice and Language Access in Climate and Resiliency Planning

*By Morgan Jericho*



**Morgan Jericho (he/they)** is a Deaf person who obtained a master's degree in sustainability from University of South Florida with a concentration in entrepreneurship. He is currently the Associate Sustainability Coordinator at Gallaudet University, a bilingual institution that ensures the intellectual and professional advancement of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Morgan provides leadership at Gallaudet on EV charging infrastructure, waste management auditing, and supporting the creation of a new microgrid system. Prior to working at Gallaudet, he struggled to get involved in the sustainability movement as well as obtain professional experiences due to discrimination from sustainability professionals. He has made it his life's work to bridge the gap between the disabled community, particularly the deaf and hard of hearing, and the sustainability movement.

## Introduction

Individuals with disabilities, and the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) community in particular, are often left out of conversations relating to sustainability, disability justice, resiliency, and disaster management. Despite recent efforts to incorporate social justice and the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion into the higher education sustainability movement, disabled individuals continue to be excluded. This essay provides an overview of how disabled individuals are represented in society and how our perspectives and experiences are often overlooked in climate justice advocacy. It provides information on supporting and including disabled individuals and the DHH community overall and within higher education, particularly as it relates to climate resiliency and disaster management planning. The essay also suggests actions that individuals, campuses and organizations can take to ensure that the sustainability movement is accessible to disabled individuals.

The environmental justice movement too often leaves the DHH community out of conversations when it comes to educating and planning for resiliency from the impacts of climate change. For example, climate organizers often encourage going to protests, writing letters and making phone calls to elected officials, doing volunteer work in the field, and planning for natural disasters and recovery. However, due in part to the differences of communication modality within the DHH community, the members of the community can find it difficult to participate in these ways.



Deaf Youth participate in CorpsTHAT, a program that supports the inclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants in conservation corps and outdoor programs. Photo courtesy of CorpsTHAT.

Another example can be found on the [EPA's Environmental Justice webpage](#), where, at the time of this writing, environmental justice was defined as "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." Disability is notably absent.

Discrimination and exclusion is a daily reality for disabled environmentalists, as noted in a recent [Greenpeace Blog](#) (2022). At the COP 26 Climate Summit in Glasgow in 2021 for example, Israel's Energy Minister Karine Elharrar could not access the summit because it was not wheelchair accessible. In general, efforts to encourage sustainable actions such as biking more and eliminating plastic straws are often adopted without consideration for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities represented 15 percent of the world's population in 2022 ([The World Bank](#)), and experience adverse socioeconomic and environmental outcomes more intensely, often due to discrimination and marginalization. Despite this, people with disabilities are often unheard and unconsidered in the development of environmental policy. A shift in the attitudes and perspectives of abled people toward including the perspectives of disabled people and accommodating their needs is necessary.



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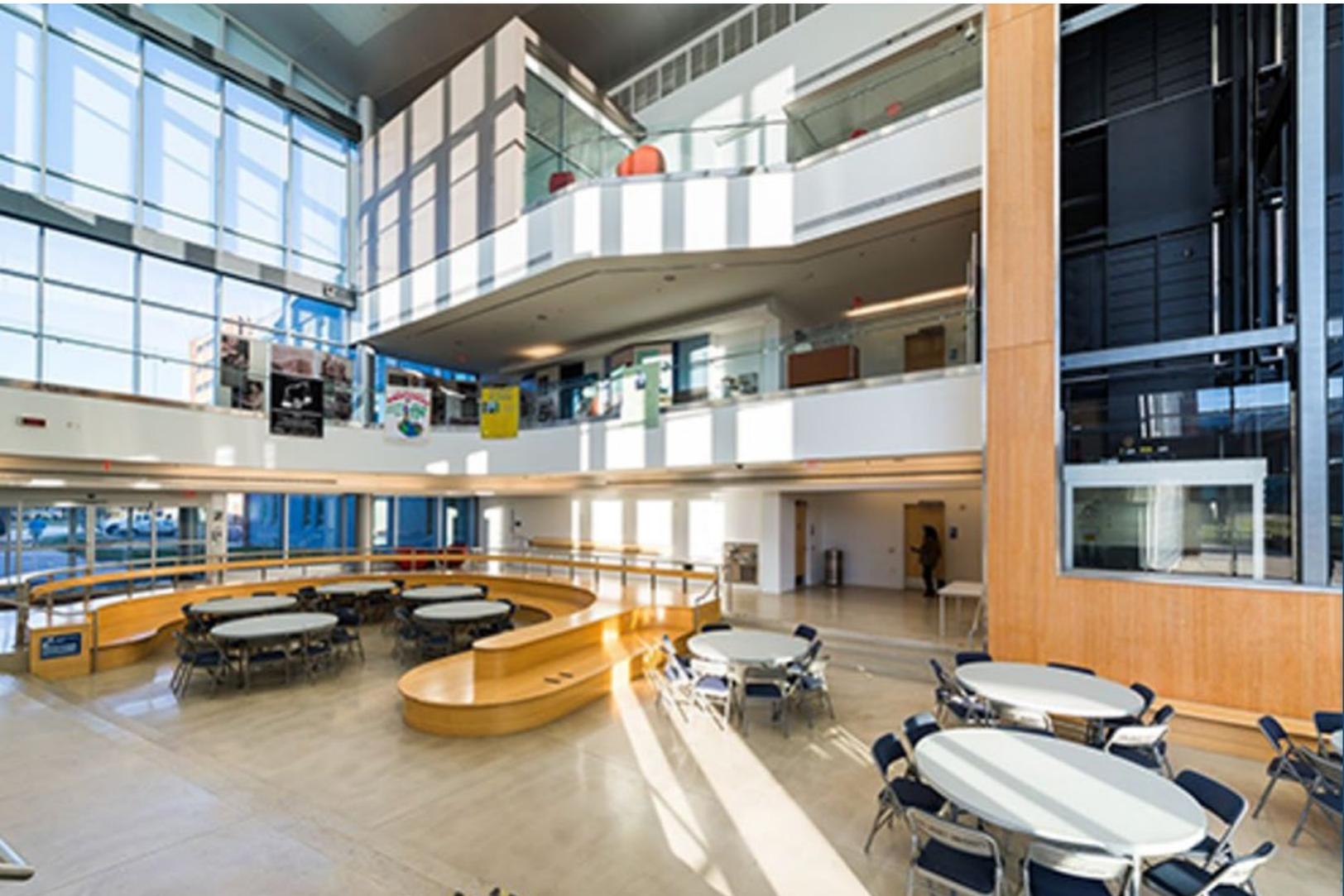
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Efforts to encourage sustainable actions like eliminating plastic straws or biking more can be alienating to individuals with disabilities.

# Equity & Inclusion for Disabled Communities in Higher Education

As a result of these experiences of discrimination and marginalization, by the time individuals with disabilities graduate high school and go into the workforce or go into college, they often have a limited understanding of how climate change could impact them personally. Higher education institutions, particularly those that are committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, should take proactive steps to ensure that members of the DHH community are not excluded.

Fortunately, there are programs and online resources available that aim to achieve better access for the DHH community. For example, programs and organizations like [DeafTEC](#), [National Deaf Center](#), [Atomic Hands](#), [Technology Access Program](#), and [CorpsTHAT](#) work hard on providing opportunities to build professional skills in the STEM field that can contribute to environmental sustainability. Rochester Institute of Technology's DeafTEC provides a helpful list of [accommodations](#) that help to enable full participation in campus life for the DHH community.



The James Lee Sorenson Language and Communication Center at Gallaudet University.

## From the Author

As a University of South Florida student, I had the opportunity to attend a climate policy advocacy conference to learn about legislative lobbying and policy processes. I had arranged interpreting services in advance through USF's disability office and I was excited to go. On that day of the conference, I arrived with two interpreters. I was met with conference attendees that avoided my presence and conversed instead with the interpreters about their climate action involvements. The interpreters informed attendees that they were there only for me, however several attendees thought that the interpreters brought me to the conference. My role as a student aspiring to be a sustainability professional was dismissed on several occasions. It was a hard day, and I had to leave the conference early. Despite the interpretation services provided to me, I had a negative experience due to a lack of empathy and understanding by individuals in attendance.



Support for disabled individuals extends beyond the need for technology and interpretation services; it also needs to be addressed culturally at the organizational and individual level, as the story above illustrates.

Dismissive behavior toward disabled individuals can be avoided with education and training. In particular, producing a communication guide for individuals with disabilities and sharing this with event managers and attendees would be a proactive step toward encouraging inclusion. University of Alaska Anchorage's [Communication Guide for Individuals with Disabilities](#) provides a good model and set of recommendations for other institutions.

Colleges and universities can support DHH students and communities directly by offering academic programs on language access, ASL or Deaf Studies. More broadly, institutions can create or refine curricular or co-curricular programs through a lens of inclusion and access by offering proactive support for disability access.

## Potential approaches to promote inclusivity in higher education sustainability

Invite disabled activists to give presentations to students who are taking sustainability courses.

Hire a disabled consultant with expertise in organizational change management to redesign organizational websites and/or practices to become more inclusive.

Anticipate the budgetary needs for accommodations in event planning. For example, reserve 10 percent of the annual event planning budget for accommodations to ensure that DHH individuals can participate fully.

Be willing to hire and train people with disabilities, with the goal of having them become creative partners in a collaborative environment.

## Disability Justice in Climate Resilience and Disaster Planning

Disabled individuals suffer disproportionately from climate change related emergencies, and their input is therefore critical in conversations about climate resilience and adaptation. For instance, people who are deaf or blind may not have equal access to warning alerts, and persons with mobility issues are not always able to access shelters. These challenges came up for Gallaudet College when Hurricane Irene hit Washington, DC in 2011. During the emergency response, Gallaudet took action to ensure that DHH, Deaf-Blind and wheelchair-using students and staff were kept comfortable in their dormitory rooms. While emergency lighting and power from generators was used on campus, students living off campus had trouble accessing resources to stay comfortable and informed due to loss of power and wifi. Students were able to go on campus to obtain the electricity and wifi connections they needed. To ensure that those that are most in need of emergency care receive it, emergency planners must proactively ensure that disabled individuals under all circumstances have access to disaster-relief resources.



As higher education sustainability leaders are increasingly involved in climate resilience planning, it is important for them to be aware of disability justice issues that can come up in disaster planning and management. Solutions that could be implemented include multimodal communication warning notifications; solar powered refrigeration for medication storage; transportation vehicles with modifications to accommodate wheelchairs; weighted blankets for anxiety reduction in shelters; and much more.

Climate action and disaster management requires actions at public, organizational, and individual levels. Disaster management and resiliency largely depend on municipalities to provide resources to residents within their communities. However, municipalities have limited resources and may focus on certain areas within their jurisdiction. Deaf people have the additional barrier of not being able to obtain information in a timely manner, which can reduce opportunities for them to obtain life-saving resources. Gallaudet's newly founded certificate and minor degree program in [Disaster and Emergency Planning](#) attempts to address these challenges by empowering DHH individuals to be leaders in the disaster management and planning field.

### Steps that colleges and universities can take to ensure inclusivity in emergency preparedness

Consult with disabled and DHH communities directly to understand their emergency needs, accessible communication modes and ways they can help.

Advocate for accessible disaster risk reduction efforts to ensure that persons with disabilities are not left behind.

Make sure warning communications are accessible through multiple communication modes, and that escape routes and shelters can accommodate persons with physical and language disabilities.

Implement inclusivity into disaster management and climate resilience academic programs so that future leaders of disaster management and planning can be better trained to practice inclusivity.

Engage with other DHH advocacy groups and organizations through funding and support. For example, colleges and universities can establish fundraising campaigns through organizations like [Off the Grid Missions](#), a non-profit organization dedicated to providing DHH individuals access to life-saving resources, especially in high-risk and remote regions around the world.

Create a campus committee, think tank, incubator or other program led by people with disabilities that aims to respond to community emergencies.

## Preparing Disabled Students for Green Jobs

Green jobs related to disaster preparedness and other sustainability challenges are crucial for building a more resilient society. It is important to remember diversity and inclusion practices in building green workforces. This involves giving everyone a chance to learn from people with disabilities when it comes to innovative solutions to climate change.

DHH people have skills and experience in various areas that could benefit the green workforce. Potential employees with disabilities can be creative partners for innovative solutions through their abilities to elevate access issues up front and provide first-hand expertise on ways to reach those most in need. These solutions come from having different perspectives on a problem that comes from their different lived experiences.

Recognizing and addressing the systemic challenges that the DHH community goes through in education will set up a path to giving additional education and training that will be beneficial in providing DHH people with professional skillsets that can contribute to a greener society.



## Concluding Thoughts

The rapid changes expected to result from climate change can feel overwhelming and unsettling. Fortunately, humankind has demonstrated a capability to adjust, innovate, and be resilient through trying times. A key aspect of resilience is the ability of individuals to recognize and move past their biases and presumptions about others so they are better able to collaborate in finding innovative solutions. Awareness of the challenges faced by the disabled community (including the DHH community) and action to address them will help grow a more inclusive and more effective sustainability movement.

At minimum, higher education institutions must make accommodations for DHH students and other community members. However, a much deeper level of understanding and engagement is needed. As the higher education sustainability movement evolves, I hope that disabled individuals are looked upon not only as a group whose needs must be met when considering sustainability and resiliency planning, but as leaders with unique lived experiences that can help to ensure that no one is left behind.



Deaf Youth participate in CorpsTHAT, a program that supports the inclusion of Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants in conservation corps and outdoor programs. Photo courtesy of CorpsTHAT.

# Accelerating University-Community Partnerships: Deconstructing Power Dynamics

*By Cynthia Medina*



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## Introduction

This essay addresses the importance of accelerating equitable community-university partnerships to combat climate change in underserved communities. By deconstructing power dynamics between higher education institutions and surrounding marginalized communities, opportunities can emerge that benefit students, youth and the community as a whole.

## Environmental Justice and Injustice

After more than a hundred of years of burning fossil fuels, we are experiencing shifts in weather patterns and temperatures across the globe that are causing extreme floods, droughts, fires, rising sea levels and biodiversity loss. These environmental alterations are creating unprecedented risks to low-income and marginalized populations, whose lack of access to resources intensifies their vulnerability to climate change (Levy & Patz, 2015). As a result, climate change disproportionately impacts historically marginalized communities and populations that include Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC).

The same communities that are historically segregated within cities (through housing policies like redlining for example) suffer disproportionately from the urban heat island effect and typically have among the highest temperatures in cities (Hoffman et al, 2020). These areas also tend to have less green spaces and access to parks than wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods (Cusick, 2020). Green spaces, trees, and bodies of water have a cooling effect on urban landscapes and mitigate heat impacts. In addition to less green spaces, communities of color are often located near environmentally harmful infrastructures, including major roadways, landfills, toxic waste sites, industrial facilities, and chemical plants. These risks can be categorized as environmental injustices and they result in inequitable and disproportionate exposure to toxic chemicals, contaminated air and water, unsafe workplaces and homes, and other environmental hazards experienced among low-income, BIPOC populations.



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Environmental injustices, caused by decades of discriminatory practices and policies, have cascading effects on health at the individual and community level (Kaufman & Hajat, 2021). Due to disinvestment in the community and limited access to resources caused by racist policies, “vulnerable populations are more susceptible to disease, have preexisting conditions, and live in communities that do not promote good health and well-being” (McGill, 2016). This includes inadequate access to medical care, lack of job security, lack of green spaces for children to play, lack of access to healthy food, and lack of safety within the neighborhood due to crime and violence. These injustices have denied low-income, BIPOC communities the right to clean air, water and an economic environment in which to thrive. Continuous inequities have caused health disparities in asthma, obesity, lung cancer, mental health and developmental problems (Landrigan et al., 2010). Underserved, low-income and BIPOC communities that have contributed the least to climate change continue to be most affected by the climate crisis. It is, therefore, important to recognize the interconnectedness of climate change and racial injustice plaguing underserved BIPOC communities.

Higher education is uniquely positioned to leverage resources and expertise to advance community needs and co-develop climate solutions. Indeed, it is difficult to sustain systematic success in reimagining their communities without cooperation from institutions and organizations (White, 2009). As a result, environmental justice organizations have been trying to partner with colleges and universities to help address these environmental injustices and lead innovative climate solutions for decades.

“At the macro level, the institutions’ dominance appears overwhelming and the community feels vulnerable. However, at the micro level—that is, within the context of specific partnerships—there is opportunity for the community to exercise its will through personal interaction.”

- Byron White, *Navigating the power dynamics between institutions and their communities* (2009)

However, communities often find university research and/or engagement efforts to be extractive in nature (Wilmsen, 2008). While their stated missions typically emphasize community engagement and working for the betterment of society, universities are often viewed as being inequitable in their approaches to work with communities and even within their own capital development efforts. It is important to acknowledge that engagement with marginalized communities has often not been beneficial for communities. Common challenges in such engagement include: failing to establish long-term, sustainable relationships; leaving barriers in accessing resources unquestioned; and not responding to community recommended changes to research agendas. Integration and advancement of climate justice work within higher education requires community partners’ collaboration and input to collectively build resilient, sustainable communities and campuses, and improve health for all.

## Community-University Partnerships

### *Extractive*

Community partners are not given decision-making power within projects

The university fails to establish long-term relationships. Partnerships are only sustained for the duration of the project.

There is a lack of transparency and accessibility of projects and resources.

Once a project is completed, there is no dissemination process. The data retrieved from the community is often no longer accessible.

### *Non-extractive*

Equitable compensation for partners' expertise and participation

Long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships are developed and sustained.

There is equal decision-making power before a project is launched and throughout its implementation.

Project findings are disseminated to the community and can be accessed and utilized with ease.

The 2021 essay from this series, [Change comes from the margins: Sustainability efforts in community-campus partnerships](#), acknowledges the importance of higher education's role in cultivating resilient community collaborations and the impacts of deep listening (Jovanovic & Kinefuchi, 2021). This essay builds upon these insights. In order to create sustainable change, universities and colleges must deconstruct power dynamics and create campus-wide frameworks to facilitate just partnerships.



University of Illinois Chicago E2S Climate Hub: Open forum on paths toward sustainable and just engagement

# Higher Education & Community Partnerships for Climate Justice

As climate change poses a threat to everyone worldwide, it presents an important opportunity to co-create solutions to address injustices together. Recently, higher education has taken a leadership role in climate mitigation - reducing its emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gasses (Dyer & Andrews, 2011). As universities and colleges develop climate solutions for their respective campuses, the impacts of climate change should be considered in the context of the communities which surround them. To support climate resilience, higher education institutions should endeavor to co-develop climate solutions with these communities. Partnerships between higher education and communities can mitigate the impacts of climate change, advance climate resilience and build sustainable communities. However, outdated university practices that continue to produce extractive and episodic engagements with communities have resulted in a hesitancy to partner with higher education among community organizations. Communities are often sought out specifically for their input but, too often, they are given minimal to no decision-making power in developing, designing or implementing research projects and plans.

Universities and colleges need to take responsibility for building sustainable partnerships to support community-based organizations engaging in climate work through a lens of racial and social equity, and for ensuring that such engagements are non-extractive toward people or the environment. Although university research practices involve rigorous human subjects reviews, too many communities have been left without the power to control how their information will be used, and without seeing any real and lasting improvements in community wellbeing. Climate resilience cannot be achieved without equitable community collaboration and input.



University of Illinois Chicago E2S Climate Hub: Open forum on paths toward sustainable and just engagement

# UIC-Urban Growers Collective Partnership

The emerging collaboration between University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and the Urban Growers Collective (UGC) demonstrates some of the tools and resources that were applied to partner with communities for impactful change and just transitions.

University of Illinois Chicago's Office of Planning, Sustainability and Project Management (PSPM) received funding from the Institute for Policy and Civic Engagement (IPCE) to organize an event called *Creating a Circular Economy for Just Climate Action* in April 2021. The event highlighted the barriers to creating sustainable and mutually beneficial university-community partnerships. As a result of this event, a long-term partnership between the UIC Climate Justice Partnerships team, within PSPM, and Urban Growers Collective (UGC), a Black and women-led non-profit farm located on Chicago's South side, was catalyzed. UGC's mission is to address inequity and structural racism in food systems through urban agriculture. Recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis aligned with the goals of both organizations. In response to the 2021 event, UGC and UIC began working collaboratively to create a mutually beneficial and non-extractive alternative to traditional university-community partnerships.

In the 2021-22 academic year, the Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice project was formally launched by the UIC Climate Justice Partnerships (CJP) team in partnership with UGC. A female and BIPOC graduate research assistant from a local underserved Chicago community co-led the project and provided personal insights about the inequities and institutional hierarchies that limit POC from accessing university resources and expertise. Monthly meetings focused on supporting UGC efforts, partnering on funding opportunities, and engaging the UIC academic network and UGC community partners in collaborative, community-led work. The project sought to reduce challenges of initiating and sustaining university-community partnerships by increasing transparency through the development of an asset map of community and university resources and implementation of best practices to facilitate equitable and reciprocal partnerships. The list of the best practices was drafted based on literature searches, practices observed from the UIC and UGC partnership, and interviews held with community and university folks who had conducted climate or environmental justice work in the past two years. Though these best practices were created specifically to support community-university partnerships to combat climate and environmental injustices, they can be broadly applied to any partnership focusing on addressing injustices.

## Partnership Timeline & Summary:

**April 2021** - First UIC forum: *Creating a Circular Economy for Just Climate Action*

**Summer 2021** - Partnership formed between UIC Sustainability team and Urban Growers Collective

**2021-2022** - Formal launch of the *Accelerating University-Community Partnerships for Climate Justice project*. Interviews held with community and university partners to gain information on climate and environmental justice projects and challenges

**April 2022** - Second UIC forum: *E2S (Energy, Environment and Sustainability) Climate Hub: Paths Towards Just and Sustainable Community Engagement*. Discussion started on barriers in creating a community centric MOU

**May 2022** - Best practices and asset map of climate and environmental justice work in the community and UIC finalized, guided by community feedback through interviews and second UIC forum.

## Best practices for non-extractive, equitable partnerships

**Build thoughtful inclusivity** - Intentionally build partnerships with marginalized communities; create an inclusive environment to work collectively in addressing community needs.

**Establish expectations** - Have a clear understanding of roles and goals of the partnership. Establish expectations and any limitations.

**Commit to long-term sustainability** - Begin building relationships with the community before launching any project. Commit to and sustain partnership long after project completion.

**Prioritize partnerships** - Coordinate regular, scheduled meetings to share resources and opportunities to continuously prioritize partnerships.

**Equitable funding distribution** - Create equitable funding distribution by authorizing communities to allocate funding to directly support their needs.

**Leverage Resources** - Recognize positionality, as a research-academic institution, and leverage resources to be more accessible, applicable, and transparent to power community needs.

Source: Elizabeth Kócs, et al., 2022



UIC staff and students volunteering on campus.

The partners found that creation of an asset map and list of best practices were important first steps, but these steps were not enough to correct decades of oppressive systems imposed by higher education institutions, and others within the university thought similarly. In response to this realization, the project team has had additional conversations with other UIC faculty, staff and departments who shared similar goals in creating transformative frameworks for engagements with our surrounding communities. These conversations have unified once-siloed units into synergistic collaborators, and helped determine next steps in 2022.



UIC E2S Climate Hub: Open forum on paths toward sustainable and just engagement

In April 2022, UIC held a second annual forum, the *E2S (Energy, Environment and Sustainability) Climate Hub: Paths Towards Just and Sustainable Community Engagement*, where community and university representatives convened in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood. The project team's internal partnership with UIC-PACT (Partnerships for Antiracist Campus Transformation), a collaboration of members from across campus that strive to identify various community needs and organize the university's expertise and response, was initiated based on our common goals in eliminating institutional roadblocks to equitable engagements. During the open forum, our team disseminated findings from the project and garnered community input through several methodologies. The forum worked to establish a standard framework to support equitable community engagement. This was accomplished through group activities and discussions of challenges in creating a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that was facilitated by UIC-PACT. In this way, the forum served as a crucial step in building partnerships between communities and UIC. The MOU discussion portion of the event prompted community-centric solutions to barriers of community engagement that includes:

- The need to build relationships before the creation of an MOU.
- Creating a structured process for the community to identify problems they want researched by the university.
- Demonstrating that the community is valued and compensated within a budget.
- Acknowledging equal and equitable ownership of data and projects between university-community partners.
- Centering youth voices in the community to create opportunities for youth input and engagement
- Intentionally being transparent, communicating without jargon (acronyms).

## Equitable Partnerships for Student Opportunities

As early career professionals and decision-makers, students are poised to lead equitable and just transitions and transform traditional, outdated systems of oppression. Inviting and equitably compensating community members - true experts in situ - to share knowledge with university students produces an enriching learning environment and prepares students with the skills needed to achieve climate justice goals. Students can be engaged through volunteer programs, internship programs, research assistantships, and enriched learning environments such as experiential learning courses. Organizing sustainable volunteer programs within community-university partnerships can enhance connections and opportunities.

Internship programs in particular can be conduits for students in the community to access university opportunities and resources and catalyze academic and career goals, which continue to be gatekept. For example, the University of Illinois Energy Resource Center (ERC) STEM Scholars program hosts high school students from around Chicago in six-week programs with hands-on learning related to STEM twice a year. A subset of the participants are offered a paid summer internship to expose students to a professional work environment and furthering their interests in clean energy, environmental conservation, climate and energy justice and STEM. As higher education establishes equitable partnerships with community-based organizations, an integral part is developing internship programs that create a channel for students within the community to access university resources and activate careers.



IUPUI students volunteering during the IUPUI Day of Caring. Photo credit: Liz Kaye, IU Studios

## Closing

As a sector with resources and expertise, higher education has an obligation to intentionally and equitably collaborate with BIPOC marginalized communities to catalyze climate solutions and generate opportunities for university and community students to transform oppressive systems.

The traditional hierarchy of higher education research practices perpetuates inequitable authority, influence, and access to resources. Too often, the disadvantaged communities upon which researchers rely for their data and research efforts have little input into the research and derive very little benefit from it. These kinds of power imbalances have led communities and higher education to work in silos, making only modest success in addressing the climate crisis. Deconstructing power dynamics through equitable higher education and community partnerships is foundational to co-creating collaborative climate solutions while fostering opportunities for students, both in the community and in higher education.

By implementing non-extractive, collaborative, and racial justice approaches, institutions of higher education can begin to deconstruct the power dynamics creating a divide between them and surrounding communities, and reimagine new pathways for partnerships that foster reciprocal, equitable, and sustainable relationships.



Convocation for the Consortium for Hispanic-Serving Institutions at University of Illinois Chicago.

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# Earning Justice: The Returns on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Investing

*By Paris Prince and Pedro Henriques Da Silva*



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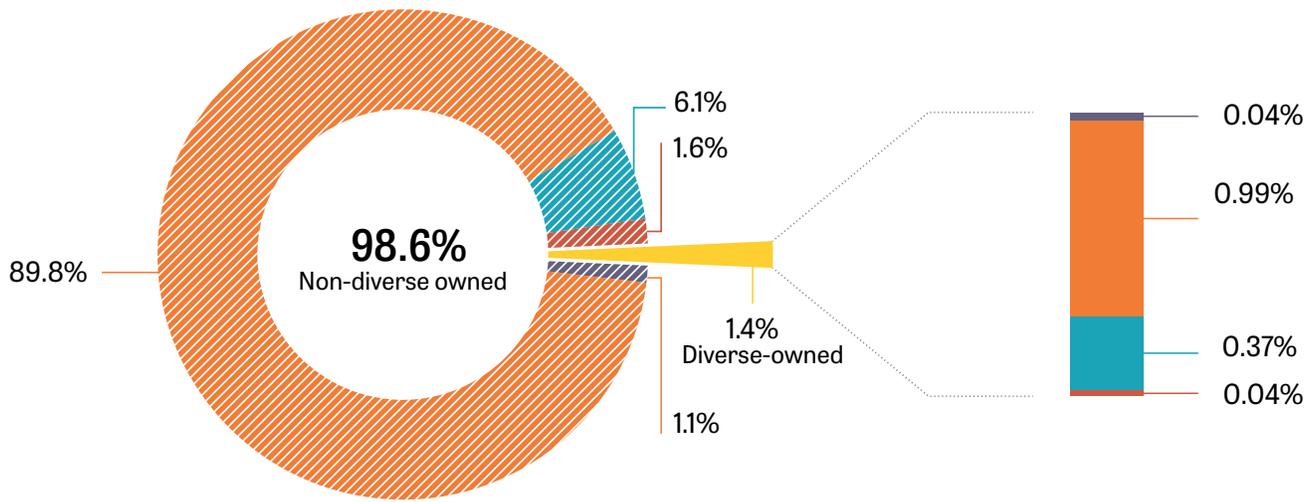
**Pedro Henriques Da Silva (he/him)** is an innovator, child of immigrants, and Associate at Global Endowment Management (GEM), a leading outsourced chief investment office (OCIO) that provides institutional investment capabilities for endowments, foundations, and other long-term investors. At GEM, Pedro supports versatile impact investment work on behalf of mission-led institutional clients. He leads work on impact measurement and theories of change for the firm's investments, and helped design GEM's frameworks for applying racial and social equity lenses to its portfolio. Prior to joining GEM, he was an educator through Teach for America. Pedro uses his current role, foundation in social science, and formative personal background to help move capital towards positive social and ecological outcomes. In addition to his role at GEM, Pedro serves on the Board of Directors to the Sierra Club Foundation. He holds a BA in Economics from Reed College, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and completed the General Course at the London School of Economics.

# The Case for Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion in Higher Education Endowment Investing

The most effective climate solutions center on diverse communities, advancing racial, economic, and environmental justice while solving clean energy challenges (Henriques da Silva, 2022). Yet racial inequity has been, and remains, a core driver of many of the world’s most pressing social and environmental challenges. Of the investment industry’s \$72 trillion in assets, 98.7 percent is managed by teams without diverse representation, and only one percent is managed by women and people of color (Knight Foundation, 2021). Even less is managed by people who are Black. While most of us are aware of our nation’s racial wealth gap, its persistence among even the wealthiest households illustrates how pervasive it is. Even among the top one percent of American households, the median net worth for Black families is one million dollars, while the median for white families is \$12 million (Nixon, Higgins, 2020).

This paper is intended to catalyze more diverse investment leadership and promote the redirection of higher education endowment capital and employee retirement investment options into pathways that accelerate measurable action for racial equity (e.g., by investing through BIPOC-owned investment firms or investing in companies that positively impact social justice and equity).

## Breakdown of study sample firm AUM by asset classes



HF non-diverse
  MF non-diverse
  PE non-diverse
  RE non-diverse

HF diverse
  MF diverse
  PE diverse
  RE diverse

HF = Hedge Funds ; MF = Mutual Funds ; PE = Private Equity ; RE = Real Estate

Source: [Knight Foundation, 2021](#)



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By **investing with diversity and equity in mind**, institutions stand to:

**Increase endowment returns** - Research demonstrates that women managers and managers of color outperform investment benchmarks (Jones, 2021).

- Higher levels of diversity at companies correlate to improved financial performance (Morgan Stanley, 2020).
- Diverse-led investment management teams perform as well or better than non-diverse peers, even after controlling for fund-level and firm-level characteristics (National Association of Investment Companies, 2020).
- In addition to improving investment performance (Gompers, Kovvali, 2018), diverse investment team members are more likely to themselves back diverse teams (Stone, 2020).

**Solve several problems at once** - Investing with a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion lens can help accelerate climate efforts (Henriques da Silva, 2022).

- Helps bridge the racial wealth gap that has cost the US economy \$51 trillion in lost surplus since 1990, and could cost the US as much as 6 percent of its real GDP over the next six years (Noel et al., 2019).
- Supports innovative solutions that may not otherwise be devised. Women and people of color often create products and services that address problems more frequently faced by women and people of color, and in turn, these solutions often end up benefiting everyone.

**Mitigate risk** - Perpetuating racial inequity in investment practices, intentionally or unintentionally, exposes portfolios to additional risk (Henriques da Silva, 2022; Morgan Stanley, 2020):

- Investment risk – Non-diverse teams are less likely to outperform, will post lower revenues, and will have more challenges attracting younger talent.
- Regulatory risk – government agencies are putting increasing pressure on companies to improve transparency and initiatives around diversity and inclusion. (KPMG, 2021)
- Social risk – Social movements can embroil institutions and firms in negative attention, which can affect stock price, valuations, and goodwill over multiple time periods.

## Framework for Implementation - A Call to Action

The collective action of university endowments could be instrumental in demonstrating the value of racial equity investing to institutional investors. JEDI investing offers higher education leaders an opportunity to go beyond educating students of color, to investing in them, their futures, their communities, and a society that is more sustainable. A clear commitment to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion from trustees, boards and presidents, and across all sectors of the university, including endowment investment management, will lead to greater institutional resilience and relevance. The intersection of environmental and social justice issues directly affects endowment performance, and the sustainability of the higher education business model. However, emerging opportunities to advance racial equity through endowment investing decisions are underappreciated as a vehicle to drive systemic change.

To realize the potential of the nation's \$675 billion in endowed higher education institution assets (National Council for Education Statistics, 2022), investors should consider the JEDI implementation framework below.

<b>Learn</b>	<p>Commit to discussing racial equity at investment committee meetings.</p> <p>Assess how institutional investments provide solutions to or perpetuate racial inequality.</p> <p>Conduct bias training as perceptions of race can inform both business and investment operations through hiring and retention, manager selection and risk assessment.</p> <p>Review existing data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A <a href="#">recent study</a> by Aon and the National Association of Investment Companies (2020) found that from 200-2019, diverse private equity funds outperformed the Burgiss Median Quartile in 78.57% of vintage years studied.</li><li>• Studies and reports published by several other organizations, including <a href="#">West River Group</a>, the <a href="#">Knight Foundation</a>, and <a href="#">Stanford University</a> have shown that diverse funds are disproportionately represented in top quartile performance figures</li></ul>
<b>Build Consensus</b>	<p>Achieve buy-in from stakeholders about your institution's racial equity goals, investment strategies and next steps.</p>

## Update Standards

Update your institution's investment policy to reflect your diversity and inclusion priorities

Ensure there is no language in [your investment policy](#) that could bias against you or your investment allocator investing in BIPOC-led firms.

Develop definitions for key terms, and/or seek definitions for diversity and equity from BIPOC-led research or academic organizations.

Consider developing or adopting frameworks for racial, social and/or gender equity and diversity. There are separate frameworks and approaches, such as [Gender Smart JEDI investing toolkit](#).

Set [actionable parameters](#) (Hull, 2020) based on the reach of your institution.

## Engage

Determine what approach, if any, investment managers apply to diversity, racial and social equity within their firms, portfolio, and industry.

Engage with companies as a shareholder on issues that relate directly to diversity, equity and inclusion. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Requesting that companies connect executive pay to diversity and inclusion related outcomes.
- Requiring transparency from your external allocators as to how they engage with or evaluate managers on these issues (if you invest in commingled funds).
- Shareholder and proxy voting on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Use investor voice in partnership with organizations focused on racial justice to advance anti-racist public policy through investor statements, pledges and public comments to spur collective action.

Offer internships in the investment office for underrepresented students to aid in diversifying the field, or create a student-managed fund focused on diversity of the team as well as a racial equity investment strategy.

## Invest for Impact

Evaluate the impact of specific industries on various BIPOC communities, and leverage these insights to inform your investments.

Invest in companies and funds with a proven social impact record.

Allocate to community development financial institutions (CDFIs), which offer stable cash or fixed income like investment returns while providing financial services to help low-income, low-wealth, and other disadvantaged people in their communities.

<p><b>Evaluate &amp; Share</b></p>	<p>Evaluate progress at regular intervals.</p> <p>Disclose information on your diversity and inclusion investment strategy and progress to encourage transparency and accountability.</p>
<p><b>Promote Racial Equity</b></p>	<p>Engage with racially diverse consultants. Ask your asset managers about their approach to internal diversity and inclusion, BIPOC ownership of the firm, how firms owned by BIPOC are included in searches, and how race and social identity is factored into the investment processes and economic projections.</p> <p>Hire BIPOC individuals in investment roles, or include BIPOC individuals in your investment committee.</p> <p>Provide BIPOC team members with opportunities for leadership, and support the initiatives they lead within and on behalf of your organization—this can be a catalyst for change.</p> <p>Leverage the extensive and growing <a href="#">list of existing resources</a> for investing in more BIPOC and women managers.</p> <p>Center your approach on specific BIPOC communities, informed by best available research.</p> <p>Select allocators who take the above actions (if you work with external advisors, consultants, or investment offices).</p>

While diversity of investment management teams is important, measuring diversity alone doesn't always capture how investments interact with specific groups of people who have been marginalized, excluded, or harmed by systemic inequities. To address this, higher education institutions can work with their investment managers to develop and/or adopt racial and social equity investment frameworks.

Global Endowment Management (GEM) provides institutional investment capabilities for a number of higher education endowments and foundations. In 2019, GEM launched an integrated, cross-team approach to research racial and social equity in the investment industry and to develop racial and social equity lens frameworks the firm could apply to all of its investments. Each framework centers on groups that face or have faced significant structural or systemic inequities, both in our society and within capital markets. The frameworks are applied during investment diligence, and assessed separately at the firm leadership and investment level for each investment manager. You can learn more about GEM's racial and social equity lens frameworks [here](#).

**Non-exhaustive list of JEDI-focused mutual funds and companies**

- [Adasina Social Capital](#)
- [Impact Shares - NACP ETF](#)
- [Community Investment Management](#)
- [Reinventure Capital](#)
- [Nia Impact Capital](#)
- [Low Income Investment Fund](#)

# Endowments Leading the Way

Below are some examples of institutions with whom the authors have worked that have made proactive commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion in their investment processes.

## Warren Wilson College

In 2015, Warren Wilson College’s endowment fund undertook steps to be more intentional in the management of its investments. As part of a comprehensive response to a student-led effort to divest the portfolio of carbon, the endowment fund managers created a [Responsible Investment Policy](#) to guide the endowment fund, its consultant and underlying asset managers. A core part of the policy is the endowment fund’s commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Letters of authorization are a valuable tool for shareholder engagement. When used correctly, institutions can use these letters to allow other organizations to take action on their behalf.

During the 2021-2022 shareholder engagement season, Warren Wilson College signed 32 letters of authorization (Warren Wilson College, 2022). for all outcomes at companies where WWC authorized engagements (Intentional Endowments Network, 2022). These agreements included:

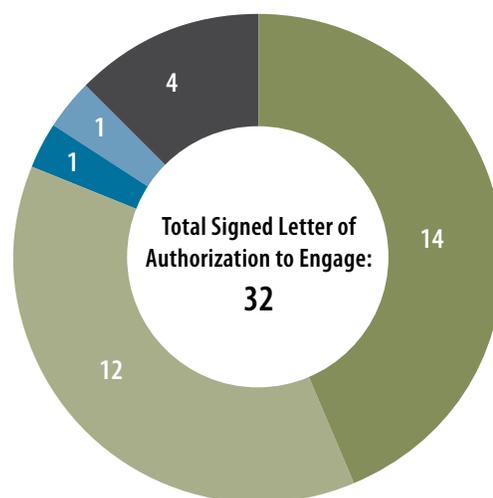
- setting next zero emissions targets and interim emissions targets,
- performing net zero scenario analysis;
- publicly reporting EEO-1 data;
- publicly disclosing workforce retention, recruitment and promotion data, and
- working with local communities to address environmental justice concerns.



Byron Hall at Warren Wilson College.

### Highlights

- New DEI-focused Responsible Investment Policy to guide investment managers
- Recent increase in women and BIPOC investment managers
- Shift to proxy voting and shareholder resolutions



Resolution Not Filed, Engagement Successful Prior to Filing: 14

Resolution Filed and Withdrawn, Engagement Successful: 12

Resolution Filed, Currently In Dialogue: 4

Resolution Went to Vote: 1

Resolution Not Filed or Withdrawn, Due to Shifts in Engagement Strategy and/or Changes in Shareholding, Share Value, or the Authorization Process: 1

Source: Intentional Endowments Network, 2022

Additionally, Warren Wilson College's Responsible Investment Policy statement highlights that the investment committee and their investment consultant "seek to utilize a diverse group of investment managers including minority- and women-owned investment management firms." The college has sixteen investment management firms across various asset classes. Of these, three are led by people of color; two are woman-owned; and another, a manager's collective, is majority owned by people of color and women. Warren Wilson College has been successful in partnering with diverse managers by expanding its search pool. Specifically, the endowment fund does not rely on just its consultant but utilizes professional and social networks of investment firms of color, relationships and subject matter experts to assist. Warren Wilson College looks for investment firms of color in all asset classes. For example, one of Warren Wilson College's asset managers is 5 Stone Green Capital, an African American owned green real estate fund that invests in the intersection of communities of color, green technology, and sustainable infrastructure.

Over the next several years, Warren Wilson College's endowment fund is looking to:

- Add additional asset management firms of color to its endowment fund management, particularly African American- and Latino-owned asset managers;
- Engage with every asset manager that manages money for Warren Wilson on incorporating racial equity, diversity and inclusion principles into their respective investment management processes when evaluating the underlying companies for investment;
- Ramp up the endowment's shareholder engagement and proxy voting efforts to support racial equity and diversity and inclusion issues with the asset managers and underlying companies in which the endowment fund has a stake;
- Amend the college's Responsible Investment Policy to uniquely highlight the importance of racial equity as a focus for the endowment fund and its sustainability.



EcoDorm at Warren Wilson College.

## University of California

Diversity is one of the pillars of the University of California's [Sustainable Investment Framework](#). Since 2015, the Office of the Chief Investment Officer has: strengthened its commitment to diversity within its own team; engaged in dialogue with investment partners around diversity and inclusion policies; and sought to increase access to top-performing firms owned by women, African Americans and Hispanic/Latino individuals (University of California, Office of the Chief Investment Officer. (2020). In 2020, the office began publishing [annual reports on diversity and inclusion](#) ("D&I") strategy and progress. Key features of the University of California's diversity and inclusion strategy include:

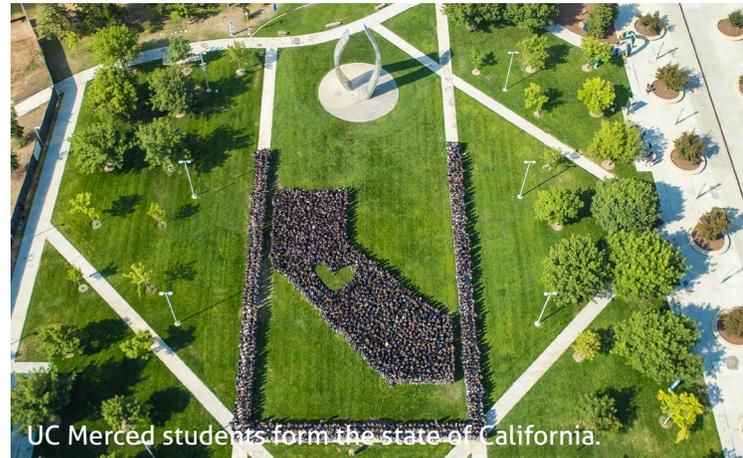
**Executive Leadership, Team Diversity and Metrics:** D&I has been added to the Chief Investment Officer's performance goals, creating a senior professional level position to develop D&I programs and forming a diversity advisory committee. To increase accountability for progress, UC Investments' employee demographics trends are annually tracked and reported.

**Partner Firms:** UC Investments engages with existing investment partners around D&I to communicate the importance of diversity and inclusion through a demographics survey of partner firms in every asset class. The survey helped to establish a baseline and will be used to track the results over time as an indicator of progress.

**Learning:** The UC Investments team participated in "emerging managers" conferences organized by third parties, including GCM Grosvenor, Texas Teachers Retirement System and the Hispanic Heritage Foundation. UC Investments also established formal relationships with associations of minority investment professionals such as the National Association of Investment Companies, New America Alliance and Asian American Association of Investment Managers.

**"Diversified Returns" Program:** University of California launched this program in 2020 in order to access the superior returns often associated with firms owned or led by women and people of color. Diversified Returns consist of three pillars:

- Ensure a diverse pool of qualified potential partners in all searches for investment partners.
- Track and report the demographics of investment partners and compare it to the baseline
- Identify and address cognitive, racial and gender biases and train investors "to overcome their biases by revamping their investment criteria and strategies and ensuring they are knowledgeable about the success of firms led by people of color" (Lyons-Padilla, 2019).



UC Merced students form the state of California.

### Highlights

- Diversity is one of the pillars of the UC Sustainable Investment Framework
- Increase in investment managers who are women, African Americans and Hispanic/Latino
- Senior-level position formed to develop D&I programs
- "Diversified Returns" Program

## Howard University

At Howard University, a private Historically Black College in Washington DC, the endowment has approximately 65 continuing money managers on its roster. As of June 30, 2020, minority firms managed 14.9% of Howard's endowment assets and 16.6% of total pools managed by the investment office. (Bogunjoko, 2020)

Howard University's investment policy statement outlines the university's commitment to promote diversity and actively search for diverse owned asset managers and service providers. The investment office believes that "minority managers have added value to the program and the investment office" and directs its consultants to seek such managers throughout the investment process. (Bogunjoko, 2020), In their search for diverse talent, the investment office has also participated in seeding new diverse managers through one of its investments and has worked with diverse broker dealers to execute trades. Howard University plans to continue their search for more diverse managers to include on their roster, monitor and report on their progress, and strengthen institutional buy-in by engaging the Board for supporting these managers.



### Highlights

- Over 16 percent of total investment pools
- Active program for seeking diverse-owned managers and service providers

## The University of Chicago

In 2008, The University of Chicago launched efforts to increase the racial and gender diversity of the investment managers that manage the endowment. This was a collaboration between the University's Office of Business Diversity, Office of Investments (led by the institution's Chief Investment Officer), and key supporters from the Board of Trustees.

To build out a network of diverse managers, the University first dedicated a section of its [Business Diversity Professional Services Symposium](#) to diverse investment managers specifically. The Symposium is an annual gathering of diverse-owned businesses that the University hosts to increase supplier diversity. Through the Symposium, the University connected with diverse managers across asset classes. The Office of Investments then conducted due diligence and allocated capital to those managers that met the investments criteria.



### Highlights

- Section of business diversity symposium dedicated to diverse investment managers
- University's endowment employs 33 diverse managers and has \$1.7 billion of its endowment allocated to diverse managers

The University had \$200 million allocated across five diverse managers in 2010. As of June 2020, the University's endowment employs 33 diverse managers and has \$1.7 billion of its endowment allocated to diverse managers, totaling 16 percent of its overall portfolio. (Bengabsia, 2020) The University shares that increasing the diversity of its investment managers has been beneficial to the endowment overall. Specifically, the Office of Business Diversity reports:

"Diverse investment managers bring a unique set of perspectives that increase cognitive diversity across the University's investment portfolio. This increases the opportunity set for the overall portfolio of managers, improving the chances for outperformance, but moreover, it exposes the University to investment themes and ideas that can be leveraged beyond just the mandate of the managers. For example, one of the managers in the program has a unique investment thesis, investing in 'disruptive innovation' across an array of sectors and using unique inputs. University staff are studying the thesis in depth and are looking to apply it through other thematic investments across the broader portfolio, as it aligns well with the University's long horizon and growth orientation. Exposure to such perspectives can improve decision-making and ultimately lead to superior results." (Bengabsia, 2020). University of Chicago's efforts are also highlighted in [Racial Equity Investing: Opportunities for Impact & Alpha](#) (Bengabsia, 2020).

## New York University

Since 2017, the NYU Stern Center for Business and Human Rights has been working to promote greater diversity among asset managers that are investing university endowment funds. In this work, it has partnered with the Diverse Asset Managers Initiative (DAMI), RFK Human Rights, and Knight Foundation among others.

In 2018, the Center and its partners co-hosted a convening at NYU of representatives from 13 large university endowments. The agenda focused on understanding current challenges to enhancing diversity among fund managers and tactics to overcome them. Following this meeting, the Center encouraged schools to systematically track and report on the percentage of their portfolios managed by firms owned by women and people of color. (Bogunjoko, 2020).



New York University

### Highlights

- Partnership with the Diverse Asset Managers Initiative and RFK Human Rights
- Co-hosted a convening on the challenges to enhancing diversity among fund managers and tactics to overcome them
- Developed and implemented a survey to gather diversity data

To support university and college efforts to increase work with diverse-owned managers, the Center worked with Knight Foundation and Global Economics Group to develop a survey to gather diversity data from 50 of the largest university endowments and a few other schools that have expressed interest in improving diversity among their fund managers. An [interim report](#) on the survey's findings was released in June 2022, and the Center is now working with its partner organizations to gather data from other institutions. Once additional data is collected, the Center will work with participating universities to establish an approach for measuring progress.

The Center continues to facilitate cross-university collaboration to share best practices and develop strategies for identifying high-performing diverse-owned managers. Additionally, the Center brings lessons from this work to the MBA classroom to ensure that future investment professionals understand barriers to diversity in asset management, recognize how those barriers result in missed opportunity, and are armed with a toolkit for countering practices that perpetuate the underrepresentation of women and people of color in investment.

## Closing

Higher education endowments are increasingly examining how their investments align with their institutional mission, values, and sustainability goals. Selecting investment managers that are BIPOC-owned is a good first step. To maximize positive impacts from institutional investments, it's critical to work with these managers to guide investment decisions toward funds and businesses that promote racial justice and social responsibility.



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# A Call for Solidarity: Integrating Equity and Sustainability Through a Joint Office

*By Victoria Ho, Lacey Raak and Nizhoni Chow-Garcia*



**Victoria Ho (she/her/they/them)** is OCAD University's Sustainability Coordinator within the Office of Diversity, Equity & Sustainability Initiatives (ODESI) in Toronto/Tkaronto, Ontario. Victoria's role is to work collaboratively with staff, students, and faculty to embed sustainability into curriculum, building operations, and administration. Victoria was born in southern Ontario to a Cantonese family. Her middle school introduction to sweatshops and the related labour and environmental injustices that burdened Asian workers for North American consumers eventually led Victoria to educational and professional pursuits to address social justice across supply chains. Victoria has an B.Soc.Sc in International Development & Globalization from University of Ottawa and a Master in Environmental Studies (Planning) from York University. Victoria is a Board member of the Ontario College and University Sustainability Professionals (OCUSP) and can be found riding a Miyata 1000 bicycle.

**Lacey Raak (she/her)** is Sustainability Director within California State University Monterey Bay's Office of Inclusive Excellence and Sustainability. A graduate of the University of Minnesota (BA) and the Middlebury Institute of International Studies (MA International Environmental Policy), Lacey completed research and study in the United Kingdom; Amman, Jordan; and Chiapas, Mexico. She received a Fulbright Research Award to Indonesia, studying the National Sustainability Development Strategy and implementation in East Kalimantan. She has led higher education conference workshops, community discussions and policy initiatives with Seaside, CA that promote equity, justice and inclusion within the field of sustainability. She serves as chair of the Seaside Environmental Commission. Her earliest experiences of injustice were felt in rural Minnesota. Through reflection and immersion in uncomfortable spaces and places, Lacey continues to strive for more equitable and sustainable communities.

**Nizhoni Chow-Garcia (she/her)**, Ph.D., is Diné, born to the Tódich'í'nnii (Bitter Water People) and To'tsohnnii (Big Water People) clans. She earned her undergraduate degree from UCLA and her Ph.D. from the University of Rochester and now serves as the Director of Inclusive Excellence at CSU Monterey Bay. Her academic and professional areas of interest are broadly in the field of diversity and inclusion and more specifically in working to increase the success of Native Americans in higher education, supporting women and students of color in STEM, and engaging in critical Indigenous frameworks and methodologies. Her work has been recognized as the 2017 NASPA Melvane D. Hardee Dissertation of the Year Award and the 2017 ACPA Marylu McEwen Dissertation of the Year Award. Nizhoni can usually be found running and swimming with her two boys, beading, and learning the ukulele.

## Introduction

A climate justice-approach to sustainability recognizes that the climate crisis is a social justice issue rooted in the systemic exploitation of low-income individuals, communities of color and Indigenous Peoples. Colonial-capitalist expansion in pursuit of resource accumulation displaces Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands, topples ecological balances, and creates a global power imbalance in access to clean air and water, food, and decent livelihoods (Agyeman et al., 2003; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Goodyear-Kaopua, 2009).

Recognizing and addressing these past and present harms are necessary to build broad-based participation and trust in contemporary sustainability efforts. Choosing to separate sustainability discourses from conversations about Indigenous sovereignty, racial injustice, and climate change may risk perpetuating a broader cultural amnesia about the roots of climate crisis. However, the possible reward of acting upon this recognition is a richer, more culturally expansive and interconnected movement informed by a multiplicity of perspectives and approaches to addressing our shared climate crisis.

Inspired by the need for solidarity between sustainability and social justice efforts, this essay describes the rationale for, and implications of, merging equity offices with sustainability through the experiences of two North American universities. While a merged office may not be the right decision for every organization, our experiences illustrate that equity and sustainability are interrelated and enriched when approached side by side. In addition to guidance around merging offices, this essay also offers insights on expanding engagement between sustainability offices and those focused on diversity, equity and inclusion. We will discuss the processes and key considerations involved in integrating sustainability and equity offices and offer some closing reflections and questions for the reader to consider.



Tea light holders made of wood offcuts. Designed by OCAD U students commissioned by ODESI to reimagine swag.

# History and Context

## California State University, Monterey Bay

The [founding vision](#) of California State University Monterey Bay is grounded in equity and social justice. Prior to becoming a University, the land was used as a military base and for ranching. The Ohlone-Costanoan and Rumsen peoples, who served as stewards of the land, were forcibly removed in the 1800s. Today, CSUMB serves about 7,500 students and has 25 undergraduate majors and nine graduate majors.



California State University  
**MONTEREY BAY**



- About 7,500 students
- Sustainability office merged with Inclusive Excellence in 2020

A three-person Office of Inclusive Excellence was established in 2013. The Office was led by an Associate Vice President (AVP) who reported directly to the President. The Sustainability Office was founded in 2015, within campus planning and development/facilities with reporting to the Director of Campus Planning and Development. The Sustainability Director reached out to the AVP of Equity and Inclusion in the first weeks of starting her position in 2015. Over the next 4 years, they met twice a month and collaborated on change management trainings and found connections in their work. When the AVP left and a new person moved into the role, the regular meetings and connections continued. The process of merging into one office began around 2020 as a proposed reporting line change for the Sustainability Director. This change in reporting structure was appealing for two reasons. First, although many sustainability concerns are directly connected to facilities systems (water, energy, transportation, etc.), having the position within facilities did not inherently support a systemic culture of sustainability. Second, the management style found in facilities typically (though not always) focuses on project-oriented work flows, while the management style often found in diversity and equity offices tends to focus more on navigating the challenges of organizational culture transformation.

“As fields of operation and action, Sustainability and Inclusive Excellence function similarly at CSUMB and within Higher Education in general. Both areas work broadly across campus to integrate and support a campus culture that emulates its values. ”

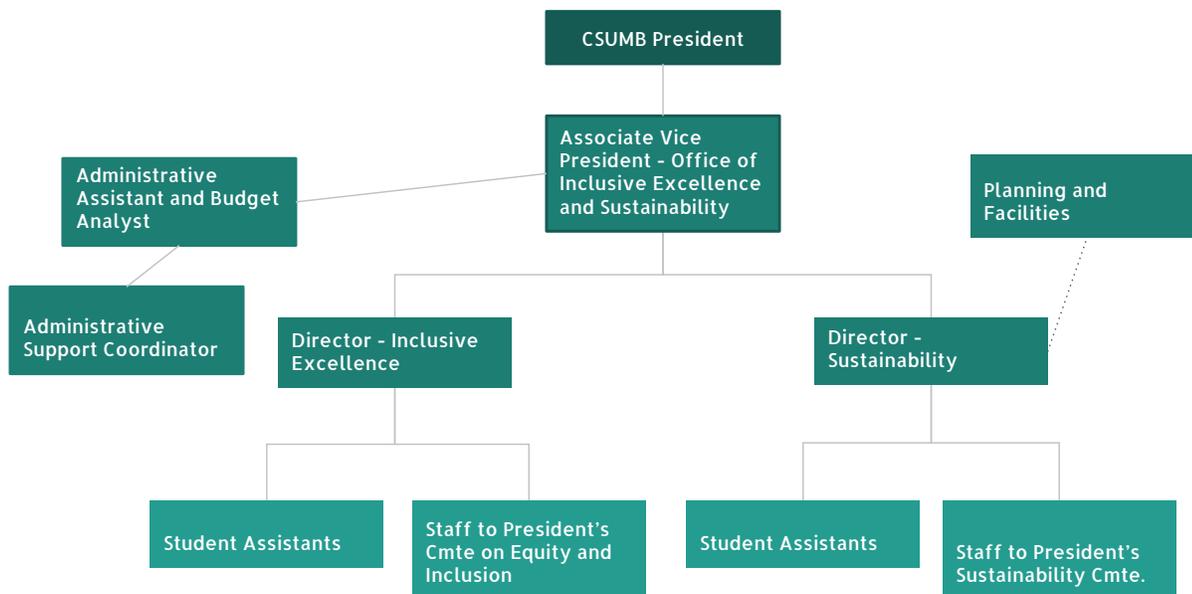
- Brian Corpening, Associate Vice President for Inclusive Excellence (2020)

When the reporting line changed in summer 2020, the Office of Inclusive Excellence and Sustainability (OIES) was formed. It was not all smooth. Although there was support for this at the Executive level, staff within the Office of Inclusive Excellence (a Director and Analyst) were surprised by the integration of sustainability, and they should have been brought into the conversations earlier in the process. Budgets and all other administrative aspects of the office remained somewhat separate for the first two years, which resulted in some ambiguity related to working relationships and day-to-day functions. These challenges were exacerbated by the reduced in-person interaction due to increased reliance on remote work during the COVID 19 pandemic, which overlapped with the first two years of the merger.



CSUMB students attend a sustainability retreat.

### Organization Chart for CSU Monterey Bay's Office of Inclusive Excellence and Sustainability



# OCAD University

OCAD University is located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada and exists on the ancestral and traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe and the Huron-Wendat, who are the original custodians of the land on which the University operates. Today, OCAD U engages with sustainability and decolonization as priority areas within its Academic and Strategic Plans. Previously called Ontario College of Art & Design, OCAD U is a comparatively small university with about 4,500 undergraduate students and about 300 graduate students.



- About 4,500 students
- The Office of Diversity, Equity & Sustainability (ODESI) was formed in 2015

The Office of Diversity, Equity & Sustainability Initiatives (ODESI) is an independent office reporting to the President with a mandate to support organizational change strategies that promote a culture of inclusion and acknowledge and redress systemic, structural and historical disadvantage in employment and educational policy and practice. This organizational change mandate also encompasses a sustainability framework centred on justice and a better quality of life for all. ODESI aims to foster whole university re-imagining.

The development of a home for sustainability evolved over the course of a decade. Different administrative departments and faculties had piloted sustainability-focused staff roles within their areas, but a permanent position and home did not exist until 2015. At that time, the three-staff Diversity & Equity Initiatives Office began the process of restructuring and reimagining itself as a community-driven and independent human rights office (referred to as Title IX in the US) that provides a leadership and advisory role while building capacity across units to recognize that responsibility for sustainability and equity is vital within every staff, student, and faculty member's roles.

## Organization Chart of ODESI and Direct Reporting to OCAD University Office of the President



As a result of this collaborative reimagining process, an understanding emerged that sustainability employs the same kind of whole institution approach as is necessary to advance diversity<sup>1</sup> and equity, the Office officially became the Office of Diversity, Equity & Sustainability Initiatives in 2015. As well, the creation of ODESI coincided with the formalizing of the OCAD U Sustainability Committee that evolved from a Working Group to a Committee with Terms of Reference and reporting lines to the President.

ODESI is now a four-person team composed of a Director, a Manager, a Programs, Outreach & Human Rights Advisor, and a Sustainability Coordinator. In the spirit of collaboration and a whole university approach, the Sustainability Coordinator may undertake secondments by directing staff hours to other departments, for example working with the Faculty Curriculum Development Centre two days a week to support the development of curriculum and sustainability curriculum strategies.

Deep consultation was foundational to creating ODESI, as was an openness to adapting to community feedback as necessary. Advocacy by faculty members underpinned how the Office was structured in relation to the rest of the university. In particular, Black, Indigenous, and Racialized faculty provided input as community members who are the most adversely affected by inequitable systems and therefore have the most at stake in organizational design. An independent and arms-length office was necessary to be able to promote accountability and transparency to the OCAD U community.

Integrating the equity and sustainability offices helped to highlight that sustainability and climate justice issues are bound up in or closely connected to equity issues. As the joint office was being developed, the term 'just sustainability' (Agyeman et al., 2003) described this framework at OCAD U with the purpose of creating new ways of understanding and acting that build social capacity and promote positive transformation and change.

**"Sustainability thought leaders recognized the deep value of incorporating sustainability into an Office with well-established constituent-driven and participatory approaches to all aspects of its work. Since equity is a process and approach (as well as an outcome), equity offices are a natural home for sustainability as they have the expertise, mandate and structures in place to centre community-driven and participatory approaches to strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation."**

**- Amanda Hotrum, Director, ODESI (2014)**

<sup>1</sup> The term 'diversity' can be problematic in service of equity. Tina Lopes and Barb Thomas (2006, p.266) describe its meaning: "This word gained popularity in the 1990s as a way to refer to, but not quite mean, 'equality'. It suggests the range of human characteristics found in any workplace or community. It also implies 'cross-cultural communication,' 'dealing with difference,' and 'creating harmonious workplaces.' Diversity, as a concept, does not provide a framework to examine power and racism or to identify the elements of racial equity."

# Planning, Accountability and Reporting

## California State University, Monterey Bay

The equity and sustainability leaders each currently rely on different external standards and frameworks from within their own separate fields of professional expertise. For example, the Sustainability Director uses the [Living Community Challenge](#) and the [Living Building Challenge](#) (both of which incorporate elements of equity and justice), as well as [STARS](#) and Second Nature's [Climate Leadership Commitments](#) (which are also working to improve and enhance the integration of social justice and equity). On the other hand, the diversity, equity and inclusion staff use the Inclusive Excellence Framework (Williams et al., 2005). The campus is examining the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) as a potential tool to better integrate the intersections of justice, equity and sustainability. Finding frameworks to support this intersectional field of work is an area for ongoing exploration and growth.

Internally, there are separate presidential-level, inter-departmental committees on Sustainability and Equity and Inclusion. The two committees are continuing to identify opportunities for mutual support. For example, the Sustainability Committee has established an "intersections working group", which we hope to expand to be a joint sub-committee consisting of representatives from both presidential-level committees. Likewise, the Equity and Inclusion Committee has been leading the process of developing unit-level Inclusive Excellence Plans and it encourages units to include sustainability within those plans. Managing these complex committees is challenging and having both directors (sustainability and equity and inclusion) in the same department helps provide mutual support and personal camaraderie.

Prior to the move, when housed within facilities, the sustainability department was 3 steps below executive level leadership (president and provost). Now, the sustainability department is one step below executive level leadership. With a new supervisor, the sustainability officer is also more supported in communicating with leadership. This has helped open conversations that had previously not moved beyond the facilities department.

In addition, CSUMB's 2020 [Inclusive Sustainability Plan](#) integrates environmental and social elements through specific goals and strategies. When the Campus Sustainability Plan was developed to be an "Inclusive Sustainability Plan", changing the term and language used helped shift the overall thinking of sustainability as a "technical, expert-oriented activity focused on aspects such as built environment, climate, energy, food and water, to more of a concern with inclusive sustainability, which centers on issues of power dynamics, difference, and ethical considerations" (Lu et. al, 2017).



## Inclusive Sustainability

To support the natural environment and all people living within it

Plan  
2020



## OCAD University

Externally, OCAD U publicly reports to the [Council of Ontario Universities](#) on sustainability-related research, scholarship, and capital projects. The institution responds to provincial government reporting requirements such as providing data on annual greenhouse gas emissions, energy conservation and demand management planning. OCAD U also references the [AASHE STARS](#) framework to benchmark and map out future opportunities. To support a broad definition of sustainability and the myriad ways in which faculties and departments can participate, multiple trainings throughout the year are provided on the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNSDGs). The UNSDGs further reinforce ODESI's approach to sustainability and equity by taking an intersectional approach to sustainability that links environmental action to socioeconomic outcomes such as addressing poverty, access to decent work, and affordable energy.

Internally, ODESI reports directly to the President. OCAD U's equity work is guided by the [Educational & Employment Equity Committee \(EEEC\)](#), which is an advisory committee to the President, with representation from the academic Senate and the Board of Governors. Its mandate is to create an equitable and accessible educational and employment environment, diversify curriculum and teaching methods, and ensure recruitment and retention of underrepresented student groups as well as faculty and staff. Members include the President, faculty, staff, students and senior administrators.

The [OCAD U Sustainability Committee](#) is nestled as a sub-committee within the EEEEC. It is co-chaired by faculty members and supported by a membership of faculty, staff, and students. The Sustainability Committee develops strategic organizational planning and provides recommendations such as for the Academic & Strategic Plan, technical criteria for major capital projects, and for curricular transformation.

Unlike CSUMB's Office of Inclusive Excellence and Sustainability, ODESI participates in the administration of human rights policies and related obligations in the daily resolution of complaints. Though this short essay will not go into detail about the implications of including a sustainability portfolio within an office that includes the human rights complaint mechanism, it is an important variable to be aware of in terms of the department's strategic focus, perceptions about the role of the office, and campus relationships. Human Rights responsibilities (referred to as Title IX in the US) are included in OCAD U's ODESI, but are managed separately (by University personnel) at CSUMB.



Parts of a whole. Unassembled wood scraps prior to being re-formed into usable candle holders. Courtesy of OCAD University.

## Comparing CSUMB and OCAD U

### *Similarities*

- Both offices report to the President
- Both sustainability officers still have involvement in facilities-related work
- Neither sustainability officer has professional staff that report to them
- All staff in both offices work highly collaboratively throughout the organization

### *Differences*

- OCAD U created a combined office where previously there was no sustainability office; whereas CSUMB had Sustainability move into the Office of Inclusive Excellence
- A portion of OCAD U sustainability officer's hours are devoted to other areas via secondments, vs. CSUMB has a static placement within one office (OIES) and dotted line reporting with Facilities
- Human Rights responsibilities (referred to as Title IX in the US) are included in OCAD U's ODESI, but are managed separately (by University Personnel) at CSUMB



OCAD U students, staff, and faculty pose in front of Roberto Chiotti's off-grid straw bale house during a Sustainability Committee annual retreat.

## Interaction with Facilities

Most campuses have their sustainability staff housed within a facilities unit, as noted in AASHE's staffing survey reports (Urbanski, 2020). There is good reason for this, as many sustainability improvements rely on shifts in operations and relate to the physical environment (buildings, cars, water, waste and energy systems). When CSUMB merged, this was an important consideration. To help mitigate the risk of losing access to the facilities "world", a memo signed by the heads of Administration and Finance as well as the Office of Inclusive Excellence allowed for dotted line reporting between the Sustainability Director and Facilities.

At OCAD U, the sustainability officer works with facilities and administrative units on projects and overarching strategy development such as for waste management, procurement strategies and RfX criteria, materials reuse, and sustainable landscaping. This relationship between sustainability and the various facilities and administrative portfolios is maintained in part through an active Sustainability Committee and in part through regular outreach and participation in working groups. With the creation of ODESI, a newly written Sustainability Coordinator position was posted with the expectation of cross-departmental collaboration defined in the job description.

When sustainability resides outside of facilities, seamless information flow is not guaranteed. On the next page are some suggested actions for sustainability staff located outside of facilities that will ensure continued collaboration between sustainability staff and facilities.

### Tips for collaboration between sustainability and facilities staff

**Ask to be invited to facilities staff meetings** - This is a great opportunity to hear updates on projects and learn about what is being planned for the future.

**Build sustainability review into procedures, processes and projects** - Design review for small and large capital projects, facilities-managed contracts, etc. This was in place at CSUMB before the merge and sustainability staff continue to be included.

**Maintain (or build) relationships with facilities staff** - Check in with facilities colleagues regularly to stay updated on what might be happening "below the surface".

**Share resources where possible** - For example, if your office has the budget to hire students, ask facilities about their needs and prepare a proposal for a student position that addresses that need through a sustainability lens.

**Take advantage of other opportunities** - Ask to be on hiring committees for new facilities staff and engage regularly with facilities staff that serve on a campus sustainability committee.

# Shared Reflections on Managing Change

**Collectively Identify What is Best for Your Institution** - Practitioners at both institutions have found that creating an integrated office is just one method of raising the profile of the intertwining nature of equity and sustainability. It can generate conversation, build trust in your process, and open up research opportunities. Nevertheless, an office reorganization is not a cure-all; it is the responsibility of all sustainability practitioners to reflect and examine how their day-to-day work as well as long term strategies can more meaningfully integrate the work of inclusion, equity and justice. As the figure to the right illustrates, sustainability officers across the sector “rarely engage” with their campus Diversity Offices (not even reaching the top 10), however, engagement was slightly higher in 2020 than in 2017. It is essential that sustainability officers continue to increase engagement with their diversity offices, but what that looks like can vary.

**Meet People Where They Are At** - Campus stakeholders in our experiences have responded in a variety of ways to the integration of sustainability and equity in a single office. Some are deeply aware and appreciative of the effort to collaborate and align the work of sustainability and DEI, while others are skeptical and reluctant. Reluctance from people of color is understandable especially given the historic (and ever-present) racism within the environmental field. For this reason, it is important to meet people where they are, try to understand any concerns, and highlight the benefits of centering the shared values of a new joined department or even a joint work event, project or program. Principled disagreement is normal and can open up heartfelt and important conversations.

## Level of Engagement: Sustainability Staff across Campus



■ 2020 Weighted Average ■ 2017 Weighted Average

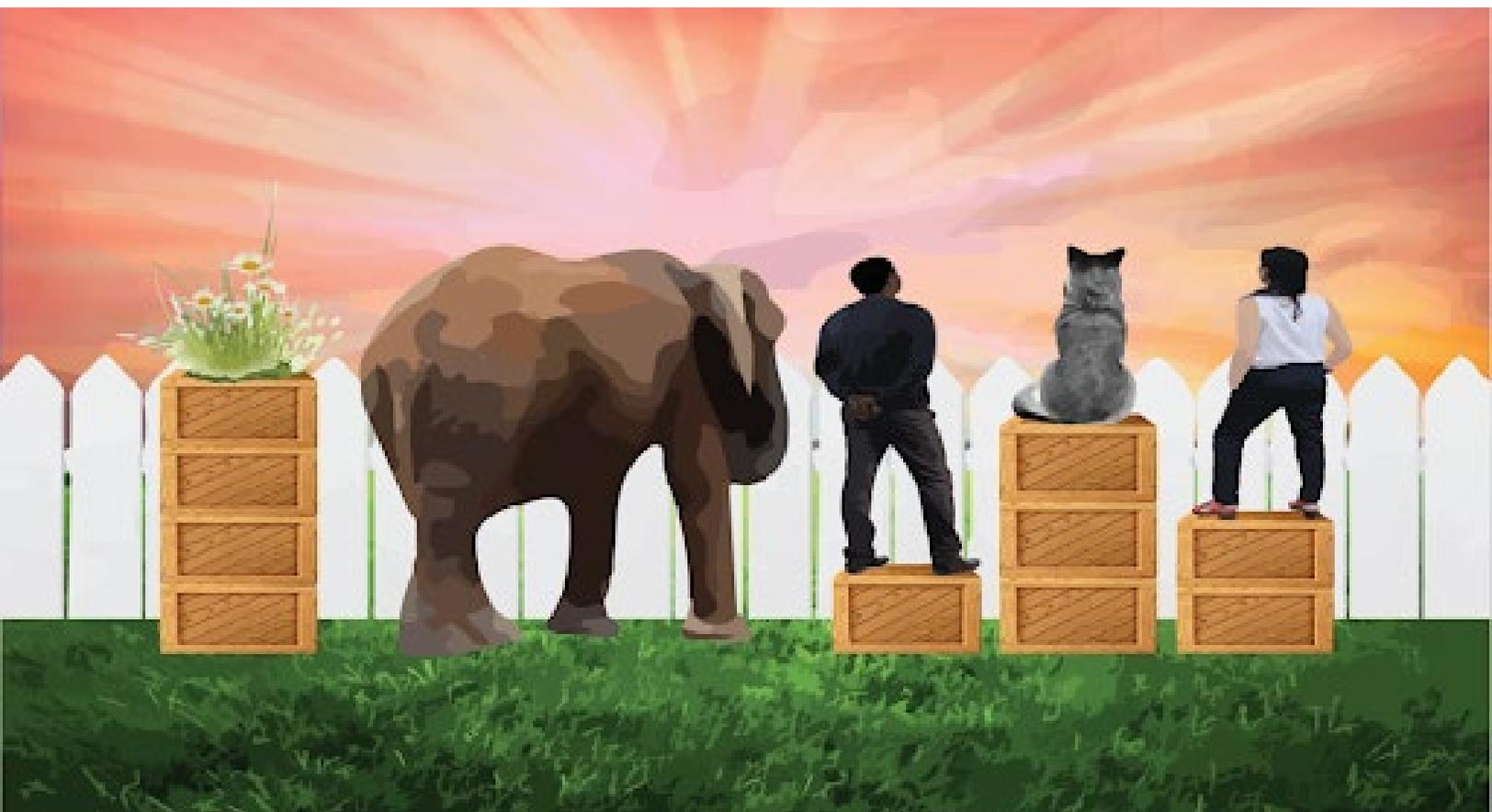
Very Engaged - Almost daily interaction, 3.6 and higher  
 Frequently Engaged - Several interactions per month, 2.6 - 3.5  
 Occasionally Engaged- Several interactions per quarter, 1.6 - 2.5  
 Rarely Engaged - A few interactions per year, 1.5 and below

Data from recent higher education staffing surveys shows that engagement between sustainability offices and diversity, equity and inclusion or similar offices is low compared to other offices and units.

**Value Relationships and Manage Expectations** - Making a continual commitment to both operationalize sustainability solutions while addressing broad socioeconomic systems can be challenging for both internal staff and external campus partners. The issues can raise feelings that overwhelm. Especially during the pandemic years, cognitive overload and burnout are real factors that can limit people's ability to embrace different approaches to thinking, planning, collaborating, designing, and more. Also, Indigenous and racialized staff may already be stretched by too many institutional requests to 'diversify' various university portfolios. It is unrealistic to expect all campus and community partners to embrace the "other" (i.e., sustainability partners to fully embrace DEI work and vice versa). To address issues of overwhelm and burden, place emphasis on building reciprocal relationships and identifying areas of mutual gain with both internal team members as well as with the core-stakeholders that are vested and very involved in the work.

**Consider Benefits/Challenges Collectively** - Work together with all staff in the department that would be impacted by the merger. Changes that are initiated at an executive level often don't fully account for impacts to staff who become responsible for implementing the policies.

The topical benefits and challenges presented on the next two pages illustrate topical questions and considerations that came up during our experiences. These questions may be helpful for institutions that may be considering this type of approach.



CSUMB student art that expresses elements of equity through the depiction of endangered species.

## Topical Considerations: Merging Equity and Sustainability Offices

### Organizational context and top-level support

What is the impetus for this merger? Is there a strategic mandate? Does a potential merger align with your organization's values?

Gain support from top-level administrators AND staff within impacted offices, as well as sustainability/DEI champions.

Make links to your institution's strategic plan. Readiness for a merged office may be indicated in the goals, values, and principles. If the language doesn't already exist in the institution's stated commitments, you may face barriers when developing a rationale for a merged office.

### Generating support from the campus community

Would this merger be supported by the campus broadly and by top administration as well as staff in the DEI/sustainability office and campus DEI/sustainability champions? How will these changes be communicated to the campus community? Will people of color be provided opportunities to weigh in?

Share top level support if already achieved.

Engage student, faculty, staff student groups, particularly those with a DEI focus.

### Organizational structure

Where should the office be in your organization's reporting structure in order to have a campus-wide impact on students, staff, and faculty? Where might the office gain traction toward organizational change? Will a move provide more access to key decision makers?

Consider the departments with whom the sustainability office has existing trust, visibility, and/or influence. A merger can be unnecessarily arduous if it is not a good organizational fit.

A merge may be more feasible with a smaller sustainability office (such as just one person).

### Shared mission & vision

Is the mission and vision for each division in alignment? Can disparate mission/vision statements be consolidated with ease?

Connect the work of both equity and sustainability to the campus's guiding strategic framework.

Ensure that representatives of both divisions are represented in early visioning exercises (and have early visioning exercises).

# Topical Considerations: Merging Equity and Sustainability Offices

*continued*

## Financial considerations

What are the financial implications of the merger and how can these reinforce the office? What additional resources may be needed?

A merger can deepen the work but may stretch your existing staff capacity. Be aware of how an expanded departmental mandate may require additional staff and resources to implement your goals.

If one existing budget is significantly larger than the other, consider if/how that may change when merging.

## Marketing & communication

How would the office's collective mission and vision be articulated in the website, university publications, programming, etc.? How and in what ways would this include broad-based participation and thereby cultural transformation?

Identify the reporting structure that will support you to spread your message effectively.

Make note of where messaging needs to change if a merger is approved.

## Scope of work

How will work change through an integrated office? Would integration result in delegating operationally-focused (or other) tasks to Facilities or elsewhere, while adopting more social-justice and culture-focused projects internally? Will you focus on integrating social justice into operations, such as through social and sustainable procurement criteria?

Lack of clearly defined roles can cause resentment or confusion about when to reach out or how to budget for collaborative projects. Be prepared for regular negotiation within your role of when to lead and when to support.

## Individual reflexivity

How do your personal experiences and identities influence the work? Can you be comfortable with the ambiguity or complexity of working on these issues as interconnected, complex systems? Are you willing to contend with the personal work needed to approach these issues?

Identify skills of individual staff members that can be amplified.

Identify gaps within the division to determine if new training is needed.

## Closing

As sustainability requires a whole institution approach, it made sense for our institutions to align sustainability and equity more closely within the higher education context. While this approach may not be appropriate for every campus, the reinforcement of this coupling or thoughtful integration of these two subjects can allow for greater and deeper transformation – personal, interpersonal, and institutional. Regardless of whether full integration is right for your campus right now, we encourage all sustainability practitioners to engage more closely with DEI practitioners and begin to identify ways to build relationships that speak to the value and need for this intersectional work, in solidarity.

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