

Academic Working Group on Sustainability

Annual Report FY2023

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

Campus
Sustainability Office

Membership and Participation

In previous years, the Academic Working Group on Sustainability (AWGS) included faculty members from Criminal Justice, Education, Geography and Environmental Studies, History and Urban and Inner-City Studies. However, the group has been on hiatus since 2022 and there are currently no active faculty members. The Campus Sustainability Coordinator remains available to convene and support the AWGS in pursuit of any academic-related strategic objectives established by university leadership. Sustainability staff continue to receive direction and support from Campus Sustainability Council on initiatives aimed at sustainability research and education.

Background on the Academic Working Group on Sustainability

The University's Academic Working Group on Sustainability (AWGS) was first established in 2012 as part of the objectives outlined in the new Campus Sustainability Strategy. Since then, the group has contributed to projects like the Sustainability Course Inventory, the Student Sustainability Leadership Program, and the Richardson College for the Environment Speaker Series. However, group member turnover and the demands of teaching and research during the pandemic stalled the group's work in the Fall 2020 Semester. In November of 2021, the AWGS was renewed with the arrival of nine new members. Over the course of several meetings, members developed a new mission statement which encompasses the original intent of the group established by the Campus Sustainability Council and provides direction for our future initiatives. The current mission statement reads as follows:

The Academic Working Group on Sustainability is an advocacy body that provides opportunities for faculty, students, and community to be leaders in sustainability education and research. We work to ensure that sustainability and other ideas relating to social and environmental justice, and Indigenization remain central to teaching, research, and learning at the University of Winnipeg.

In 2021, the AWGS agreed to focus on the following goals:

1. Host workshops that help interested faculty to integrate sustainability concepts into courses across many departments, drawing on models for faculty engagement and development established by other universities.
2. Develop a collaborative research project led by AWGS members and supported by the Campus Sustainability Office staff that tracks the impact of these workshops.
3. Advocate for sustainability as a key issue in future administrative strategy and mandates like the Integrated Academic and Research Plan.
4. Provide academic oversight to sustainability-related co-curricular learning and leadership development opportunities for students.
5. Explore the possibility of establishing a sustainability-related alternative credentialing program at the University of Winnipeg

Inactivity in FY2022

Early in 2022, the AWGS met to explore activities for the coming academic year. Unfortunately, members did not see a benefit in planning interdisciplinary discussion events or research spotlights for faculty (as the AWGS has done in the past) just for the sole sake of keeping the group active. Members feel the work of the AWGS must be aligned with the broader strategic direction of the University and provide real benefits to those involved.

The Sustainability Office remains in contact with several faculty who are interested in creating more co-curricular learning and leadership opportunities for students and enhancing in-class sustainability education. However, we are waiting to reconvene these individuals around the AWGS table until upper administrators and other academic stakeholders share an understanding of the purpose and objectives of this working group. As part of developing this shared understanding, the Campus Sustainability Coordinator presented it to the Dean's and Director's Council in March, highlighting how the AWGS might be used to make progress in some of the University's core strategic areas. The presentation was well received, but it was agreed that more fulsome discussions should happen once the University's new Provost and Vice-President, Academic.

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's STARS certification system provides post-secondary institutions with a clear framework for enhancing sustainability education, knowledge mobilization and student leadership development. If our institution is serious about achieving a higher STARS ranking, we need to empower the AWGS to work on projects relating to specific credits in this area, including faculty peer-to-peer mentorship on incorporating sustainability concepts into course syllabi, and creating co-curricular experiential learning and sustainability sector-relevant professional development initiatives for students. Regardless of third-party certifications like STARS, working in projects in these areas will result in higher sustainability literacy and employability for our students.

Although the group is not currently active, the AWGS has the potential to support strategic objective relating to co-curricular student development, and interdisciplinary knowledge mobilization. is ideally situated to bring together an interdisciplinary cross section of faculty, with clear direction from university leadership, the AWGS can help develop new programs and initiatives that will increase our University's impact in sustainability research, sustainability education and sustainability career readiness.



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