

Academic Working Group on Sustainability

Annual Report 2014-2015

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

Campus
Sustainability Office

Contents

1	Members of the Academic Working Group on Sustainability 2014-15	2
2	Overview of Activities	2
3	Background	3
4	Results.....	4
4.1	Curriculum.....	4
4.2	Research.....	6
4.3	Approaches to Encouraging Sustainability in Teaching and Research.....	7
4.3.1	Academic Planning.....	7
4.3.2	Funds.....	7
4.3.3	Recognition Awards	8
4.3.4	Faculty Professional Development Opportunities	8
4.3.5	Course Releases/Reassignments.....	8
4.3.6	Resources	8
5	Conclusion.....	9
6	Appendix A – Research Process	10
7	Appendix B – Workshop Poster	11

1 Members of the Academic Working Group on Sustainability 2014-15

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Andrée Forest – Campus Sustainability Office (Administrative Support)

** The Working Group wishes to thank Cory Bellhouse for his excellent work collecting and compiling data.*

2 Overview of Activities

In recent years, there have been a range of conversations on campus related to how to address teaching and research in areas that span more than a single department. Examples are the University's conversation about the potential of an Indigenous course requirement and efforts to grow and support experiential learning throughout the curriculum. Understanding our institutional commitments related to teaching and research related to sustainability is another example of this type of discussion.

To this end, over the 2014-2015 year, the Academic Working Group on Sustainability's main work was to establish an understanding of:

- How The University of Winnipeg's teaching and research related to sustainability compared to teaching and research elsewhere in Canada;
- What is in place at other universities to support academic activity related to sustainability.

The purpose of this work has been to identify existing strengths and potential opportunities in curriculum and research related to sustainability at the University.

This process involved:¹

- Updating and addressing gaps in UWinnipeg data collected last academic year;
- Reviewing data from those universities for which it is available.
- Comparing UWinnipeg data to other Canadian universities.

Overall, the number of sustainability-related courses and research programs as a proportion of all courses and research programs at UWinnipeg is within the top half of reference institutions; however,

¹ A more complete description of the research process is included in Appendix A.

the percentage of departments offering sustainability courses and those with at least one sustainability-related research program tends to be low compared to our comparison group. In other words, sustainability teaching and research at UWinnipeg appears to be relatively concentrated in specific academic departments.

Over the next year, the Campus Sustainability Office will undertake a major review of current institutional sustainability-related policies, indicators, and targets while developing a new institutional sustainability strategy. Through this process, the Academic Working Group on Sustainability will be drawing on the data presented in this report as it considers where sustainability-related teaching and research fit into this strategy. In this academic year, the Working Group hosted a short series of *Sustainability in the Curriculum* dialogues as a step towards beginning this conversation.²

3 Background

The University of Winnipeg submitted its first STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System) report this year. As part of the reporting process, data on the sustainability content of UWinnipeg curriculum and research activity was collected with the support of the Academic Working Group on Sustainability. A key advantage to the STARS reporting system is that the reports of other STARS reporters can be consulted in order to develop an understanding of how different institutions compare on a range of sustainability issues, including those related to teaching and research.

In assigning credits, STARS is interested in the total number of sustainability focussed courses, sustainability related courses, and sustainability research projects within an institution as a proportion of the total number of courses or research projects. STARS is also interested in the proportion of academic departments that offer sustainability curriculum or have faculty engaged in sustainability research. STARS awards maximum credit to institutions when:

- 20 percent or more of all courses offered by the institution are sustainability courses and/or courses that include sustainability;
- 90 percent or more of academic departments or their equivalent offer at least one sustainability course or course that includes sustainability;
- 15 percent or more of faculty and staff that are engaged in research are engaged in sustainability research;
- and 75 percent or more of departments that conduct research are engaged in sustainability research.

UWinnipeg has not itself made an institutional commitment about whether a particular proportion of sustainability courses or sustainability research is desirable, and it is not assumed that we will make such a commitment in the future. Still, it is useful to understand UWinnipeg's performance in STARS indicators in relation to other Canadian universities.

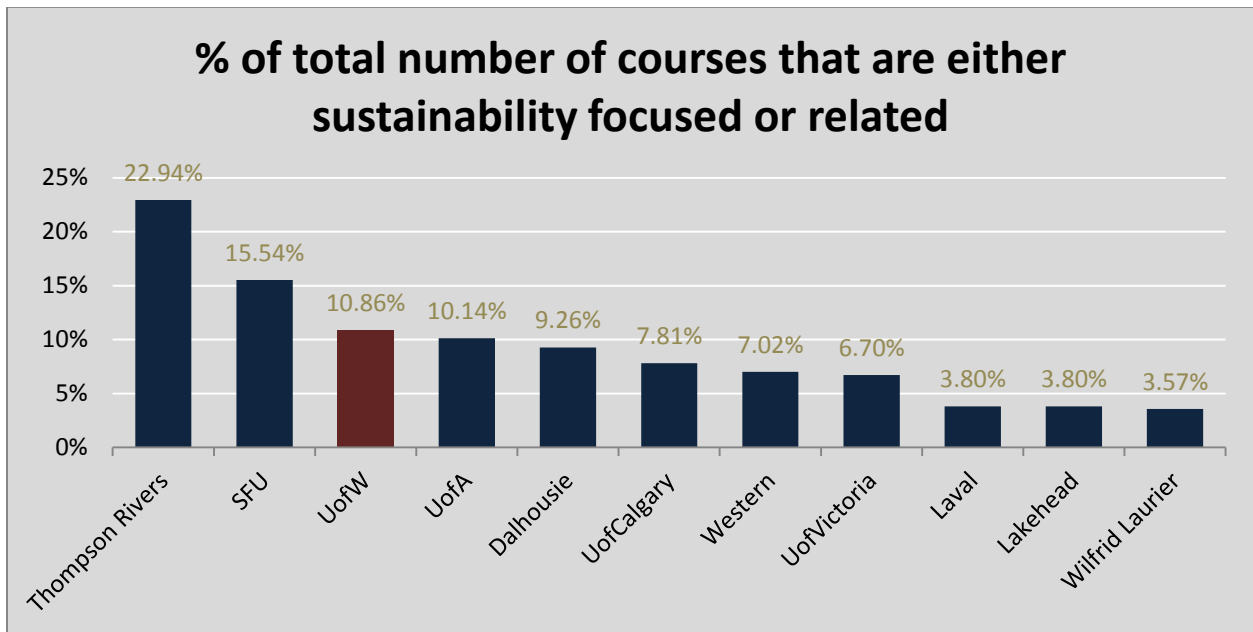
² Series poster included in Appendix B

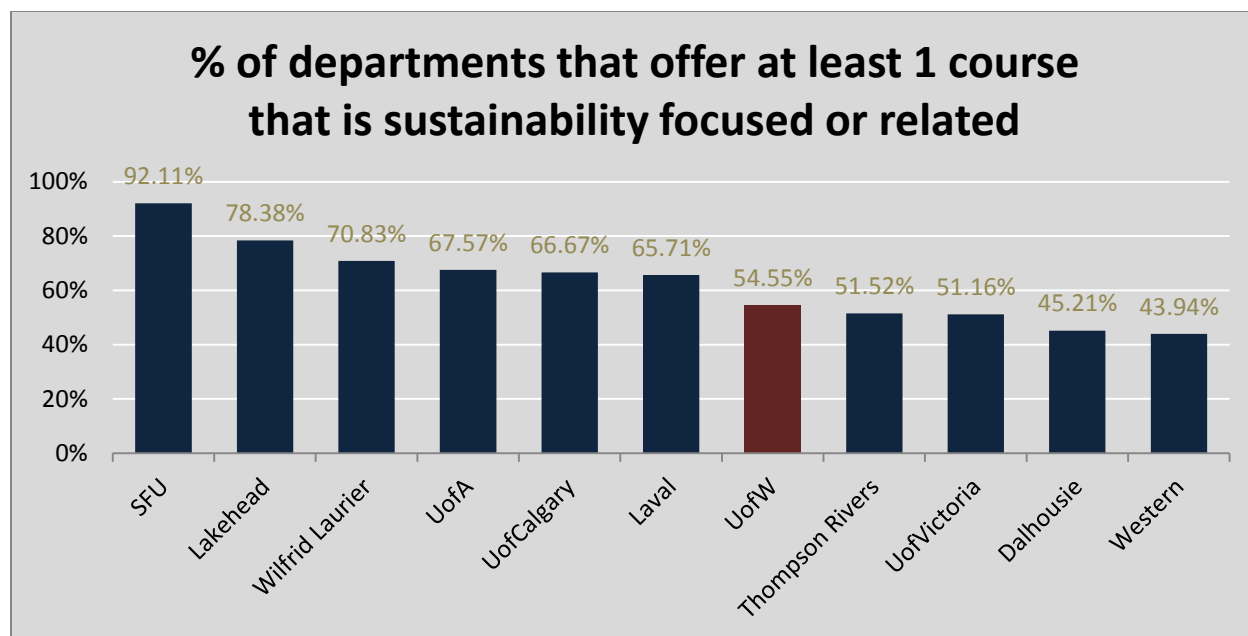
4 Results

STARS reports were consulted to collect data on academic activity related to sustainability for 10 institutions: a 'peer group' consisting of primarily undergraduate universities with STARS reports (Lakehead and Thompson Rivers), and a 'gold group' consisting of Canadian institutions with STARS Gold ratings (Dalhousie, Simon Fraser, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Victoria, Laval, Wilfrid Laurier, and Western). It is important to understand that not all Canadian universities report through STARS, so the sample size is necessarily limited. This is especially the case for universities that are considered to be 'primarily undergraduate'. The 'gold group' was chosen as it is thought to represent current best practice. Results are summarized below.

4.1 Curriculum

The graphs below show where UWinnipeg's sustainability curriculum data falls among our selected comparison group. Overall, UWinnipeg falls well within the range of results registered by other universities.





Specific sustainability course inventories of other institutions were also examined to understand the distribution of sustainability content within different areas of academic study. UWinnipeg is well within range on the 'common' departments that offer sustainability content. The top departments in terms of content offered at UWinnipeg (in order, all >5%) are: Masters in Development Practice, Environmental Studies, Biology, Geography, International Development Studies, Anthropology, Business, and History. Many of those are on the 'common' department list, meaning UWinnipeg is keeping pace with other institutions. MDP is fairly unique to UWinnipeg.

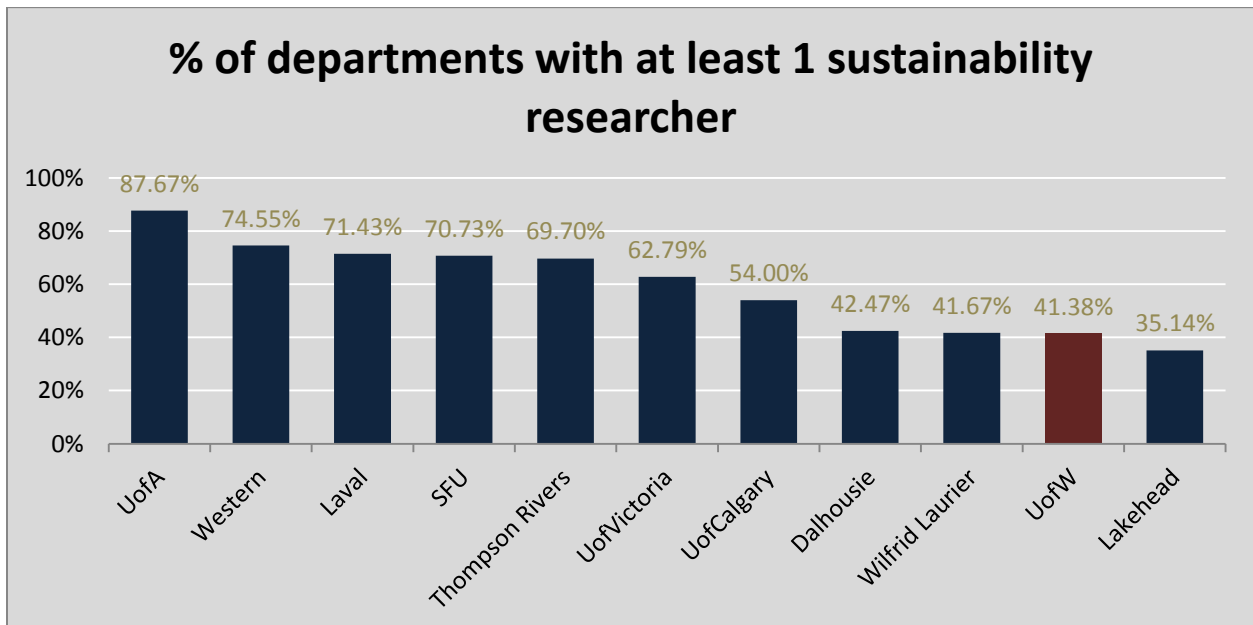
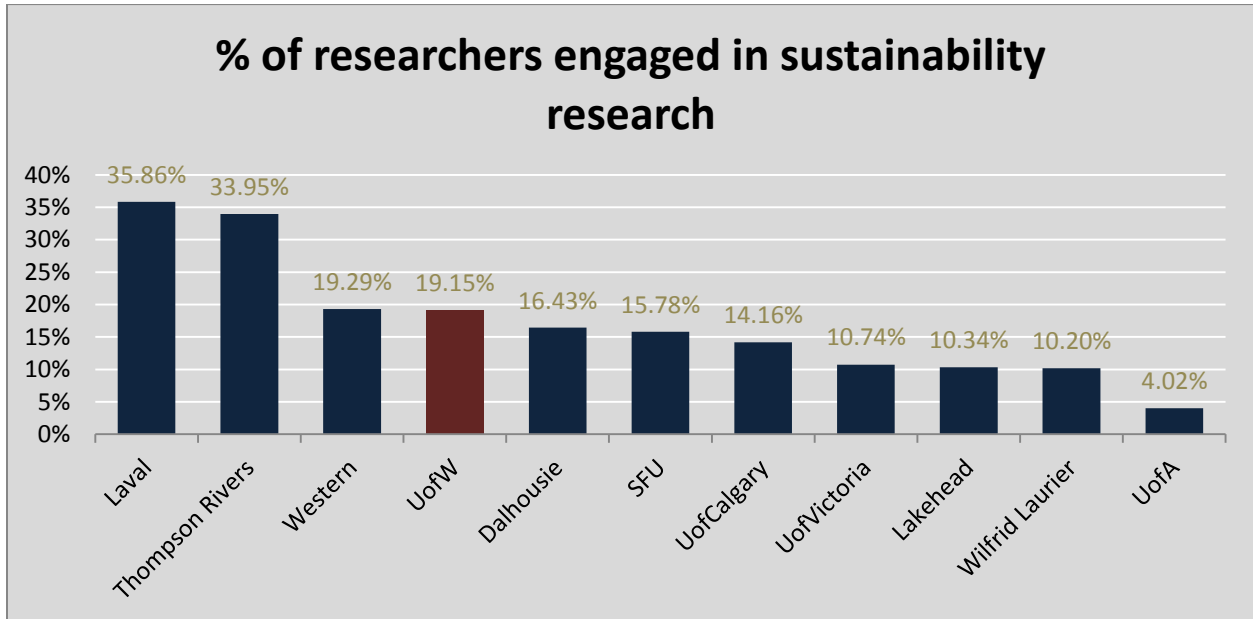
Range in % of Courses with Sustainability Content for Departments Most Likely to offer Such Courses:

- Anthropology (range: 0-6.25%; UW = 6.25%)
- Biology (range: 5.12%-13.50%; UW = 9.13%)
- Business (range: 1.40%-9.09%; UW = 6.25%)
- Chemistry (range: 0-3.07%; UW = 1.44%)
- Economics (range: 0.70%-4.55%; UW = 2.88%)
- Environmental Studies (range: 1.94%-12.34%; UW = 10.10%)
- Geography (range: 5.80%-20.06%; UW = 9.13%)
- History (range: 0.65%-6.13%; UW = 5.77%)
- Philosophy (range: 0-2.73%; UW = 1.92%)
- Politics (range: 0-3.07%; UW = 1.92%)
- Sociology (range: 0.48%-3.25%; UW = 0.48%)

On top of an Environmental Studies department, every institution studied except UWinnipeg also has an 'Environmental Sustainability' or equivalent department. The sustainability stream of our current Environmental Studies degree may represent the equivalent at UWinnipeg; however there may be merit to investigating this further.

4.2 Research

The graphs below show where UWinnipeg's sustainability research data falls within our selected comparison group. Overall, UWinnipeg registered a good number of research projects related to sustainability. These projects are significantly more concentrated in specific departments than is the case elsewhere.



The relative concentration of sustainability research in specific departments may point to an opportunity to grow interdisciplinary sustainability research at UWinnipeg.

4.3 Approaches to Encouraging Sustainability in Teaching and Research

Information related to incentives for sustainability teaching and research was also compiled. The following is a summary of the incentive structures in place elsewhere, as reported through STARS. These incentives include universities that are not reflected in the graphs above.

4.3.1 Academic Planning

- The University of Alberta has published a companion document to the Academic Plan entitled *Integrating Sustainability into the Academic Experience*.³
- Sustainability has been confirmed as one of the University of Calgary's core values as outlined in *Eyes High*, the institution's strategic vision, and has been further confirmed as one of 7 academic priorities in their 2012 Academic Plan.⁴
- The Building Sustainable Value Research Centre⁵ at the Richard Ivey School of Business at Western has an objective to establish one new sustainability course each year. A minimum number of sustainability-related courses are required to achieve the Sustainability Certificate in the HBA program.

4.3.2 Funds

- A portion of the Laval Sustainable Development Fund is dedicated to a program to help members of faculty enhance course content by incorporating a sustainable development dimension;
- Eligible projects under the University of Alberta Sustainability Enhancement Fund⁶ must improve sustainability on campus in the following areas: outreach and engagement, teaching, research and improvements to facilities and operations;
- Members of faculty may apply to the Thompson Rivers University Sustainability Grant Fund⁷ for any purposes related to the development of sustainability-related courses;
- The University of Alberta Community Service Learning Partnership Grant⁸ provides two-year partnerships between university instructors and community organizations in the Edmonton region that engage groups of UofA students across disciplines with a primary focus on either a social change project or community-based research. Its purpose is to incubate innovative learning projects;
- The Interdisciplinary Development Initiatives Program⁹ at Western provides seed funding for projects that further Western's research and teaching mission, attract scholars and graduate students to the University, and bring prestige to Western. From 2009-2012, funding (\$500,000) was awarded on a one-time basis for a three year period to the Centre for Environment and Sustainability. This funding resulted in furthering the Masters in Environment and Sustainability program and significantly increasing the enrollment rate for the 2013-2014 academic year.

³ <http://www.provost.ualberta.ca/~media/provost/Documents/Academic%20Plan/IntegratingSustainability.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/provost/files/provost/academicplan2012.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.ivey.uwo.ca/sustainability/>

⁶ <http://sustainability.ualberta.ca/sef>

⁷ <http://www.tru.ca/sustain/initiatives/funds.html>

⁸ <http://www.csl.ualberta.ca/en/Community%20Partners/CSL%20Grants.aspx>

⁹ <http://provost.uwo.ca/idi/index.html>

4.3.3 Recognition Awards

- Through the Sustainability ON Awards,¹⁰ UCalgary highlights the success of faculty, staff and students who are advancing sustainability including faculty who are finding innovative and inspiring ways to incorporate sustainability in the courses they teach.

4.3.4 Faculty Professional Development Opportunities

- A Faculty Development Workshop on “Broadening Participation in Sustainability Education and Research”¹¹ was offered at the University of Alberta to generate ideas and identify opportunities to broaden sustainability education and research at the University of Alberta;
- The University of Alberta’s Festival of Teaching¹² is a year-round celebration of excellence and innovation in teaching. The 2014 Festival of Teaching examined the question of sustainable teaching and learning;
- In 2014, the Centre for Place and Sustainability Studies at Lakehead¹³ coordinated a grant funded (SSHRC) workshop designed to build community among an interdisciplinary group of colleagues with diverse commitments to sustainability, broadly defined. All 23 participants were eligible to receive a research budget of \$10,000 to help further integrate sustainability into their work.

4.3.5 Course Releases/Reassignments

- At St. Mary’s University During the 2010-2011 academic year, the university teaching scholar¹⁴ program focused on ‘Sustainability Across the Curriculum.’ The teaching scholar was awarded one full year course release to work with her colleagues and faculty members across campus to encourage and assist them in integrating sustainability as a theme into their course curriculum and their course delivery;
- Dalhousie’s College of Sustainability¹⁵ has an arrangement where the College recruits faculty members from various faculties across the university to teach as core course instructors. These faculty members commit one-third of their teaching to the College of Sustainability for 3 years. The College sends the ‘home’ departments of these cross-appointed faculty members one-third of their salary to cover the part of their position that is committed to the College, for that three year period. Money is provided for Research Assistants who support the professors in the development of the new material/course content.¹⁶

4.3.6 Resources

- The Centre for Academic and Instructional Development¹⁷ at St. Mary’s University maintains a resource collection of books and journals available for loan to interested faculty members. This

¹⁰ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/sustainability/awards>

¹¹ <http://www.sustainability.ualberta.ca/en/EducationResearch/Initiatives.aspx>

¹² <http://www.ctl.ualberta.ca/teaching-events/festival-teaching>

¹³ <http://www.placecentre.org/>

¹⁴ <http://www.smu.ca/academics/caid-awards-and-grants.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/sustainability.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.dal.ca/faculty/sustainability/programs/ess/cross-appointed-faculty.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.smu.ca/academics/caid.html>

collection now contains a selection of resources to assist and support individuals with the integration of sustainability principles into their course curricula.

5 Conclusion

Overall, UWinnipeg data related to sustainability curriculum and research compares relatively favourably to STARS Gold institutions in Canada. Of note is that sustainability-related academic activity tends to be more concentrated in specific departments at UWinnipeg than it is elsewhere. It is also worth noting that among all the institutions studied, UWinnipeg is the only university that does not have an Environmental Sustainability department separate from its traditional Environmental Studies program. The “sustainability” stream of UWinnipeg’s Environmental Studies and Sciences department may be considered equivalent to the sustainability programs elsewhere; however, further research on this question may be warranted. UWinnipeg has also not developed any incentives or programs to grow the amount of academic activity related to sustainability. An exploration of the potential for these kinds of efforts will be part of the campus sustainability planning process in the coming academic year.

6 Appendix A – Research Process

In January 2014, Cory Bellhouse was hired on a casual basis to assist with a scan of the course calendar of the University of Winnipeg to determine how many courses had sustainability content. The initial criterion for ‘sustainability content’ was that a course had to mention the term ‘sustainability’ in an explicit and meaningful way in the course description. This scan turned up 35 courses that were sustainability focused or related. “Sustainability focused” means that the primary and explicit focus is on sustainability and/or on understanding or solving one or more major sustainability challenge “sustainability related” means that the course is primarily focused on a topic other than sustainability, but incorporates a unit or module on sustainability or a sustainability challenge, includes one or more sustainability-focused activities, or integrates sustainability issues throughout the course.

In the second phase of the project, Cory contacted department chairs and then selected contacts in all University departments to either confirm or expand the findings from the course calendar. This process took a month through March and April 2014, and turned up 105 courses that were sustainability focused or related (this includes the 35 identified through the course calendar).

In the 2014/2015 Academic year, the inventory that was constructed in the previous year was edited to address any gaps and to update information. This consisted of a more truncated version of last year's work - namely, adding new courses, descriptions of which were read to see if they had any potential sustainability content. This was followed, as last year, by an email sent to all department heads asking them to confirm or change last year's listings, with questions about new courses. Individual professors that taught courses that were likely to have sustainability content were also contacted, and this proved to have a much higher rate of engagement than simply emailing department heads. As a result, the inventory included 5 more sustainability-focused courses than last year, and 7 more sustainability-related courses. As well, two more departments were confirmed as having sustainability content, making for a total of 24 out of 48 departments with at least one sustainability course.

Over the two years of data collection, confirmation was received on the data included here from all but one department. Sustainability courses were confirmed or it was confirmed that there were no sustainability courses in the department.

On the matter of “what is sustainability?” – faculty and departments were asked to self-report on whether their course included sustainability in order to allow for a broad range of understandings of the term “sustainability.” Given the contested nature of the term, the Academic Working Group felt that rather than providing a single definition to faculty, it would be most appropriate to have members of faculty decide whether they felt their courses were sustainability-focused or related.

7 Appendix B – Workshop Poster

(note that the final workshop was postponed until the fall due to last-minute scheduling challenges)

The **Academic Working Group on Sustainability**,
and the **Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology**, present:

Sustainability in the Curriculum *exchanges*

Concepts of Sustainability

Sustainability as a term and concept is used liberally in nearly every academic discipline. But are we talking about the same thing? What does sustainability mean? How is it applied within and across disciplines? How is it applied in public debates? Brief reflections by panelists will start off this dialogue.

Wednesday February 25

12:30-1:20 / 4M39

Dawn Sutherland (Education)
Bruno Silvestre (Bus & Admin)
Andy Park (Biology)
Sandra Tomsons (Philosophy)

Teaching Sustainability

Sustainability is a broad concept that seeks to integrate social, economic, and ecological concerns. Members of faculty from various disciplines have modified existing courses or developed new ones to introduce concepts of sustainability to students. Brief reflections by panelists about how they've incorporated sustainability in unexpected ways will start off this dialogue.

Friday March 13

12:30-1:20 / 4M39

Jennifer Clary-Lemon (Rhetoric,
Writing, and Communications)
Royden Loewen (History)
Devin Latimer (Chemistry)

Course Delivery Alternatives

Regardless of course subject, faculty at the University use a variety of strategies to reduce the environmental impact of the courses they teach. Methods include hybrid teaching and paperless assignments. Join this dialogue to share ideas and strategies for lessening the resource intensity of your classes.

Friday March 27

12:30-1:20 / 4M39

Don Metz (Education)
Asha Janzen (Kinesiology)
Louis Svenningsen (CTLT)

An open invitation to all.
Bring ideas, thoughts, questions, and lunch.