

Academic Working Group on Sustainability

Annual Report FY2024

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

Campus
Sustainability Office

Background and Participation

The Academic Working Group on Sustainability (AWGS) was first introduced by the Campus Sustainability Council (CSC) to meet the academic objectives within the University of Winnipeg's (UW's) first sustainability strategy, in 2012. In the recent past, members have been involved in initiatives such as the Richardson College for the Environment Speaker Series as well as designating the first iteration of UW's sustainability courses. In 2021, the AWGS had nine new faculty members spanning several academic departments, which were all involved in sustainability related research and/or education. The last project AWGS members worked on was the development of a new mission statement which embraced the original intent of the AWGS. 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 the beginning of 2022, it was agreed that the group must be aligned to the University's strategic objectives in order to have a meaningful impact throughout our campus, therefore the group decided to disband while awaiting support and direction from upper administration. Due to this, the AWGS is currently inactive.

To reconvene the AWGS in an official manner and per the *Terms of Reference for the Campus Sustainability Council and Working Groups*, members are to be appointed annually by the University's Provost and Vice President, Academic (or their designate) in collaboration with the Deans of Academic Departments. As the new UW Strategic Plan is set to be published in FY2025, this brings a fresh opportunity to re-establish this group and to utilize existing institutional structures to support overarching university-wide objectives.

Moving Forward:

The University of Winnipeg has an abundance of opportunities to engage with future AWGS members within the coming years. These avenues for re-establishment include UW's commitment to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking and Assessment Rating System (STARS), the development of UW's next sustainability strategy, and meeting the objectives within the proposed 2025 institutional strategic plan.

AASHE's STARS provides a guiding framework for enhancing sustainability education, knowledge mobilization, and enhancing the student experience. If our institution is interested in achieving STARS Gold, we should prioritize initiatives that help obtain additional Academic (AC) credits and more importantly, that help bring increased value to our institution. Even without external certifications, these projects build a culture of interdisciplinary research and

help us remain a relevant and innovative post-secondary institution within Canada, that is able to attract faculty and students who would graduate from our institution with an increased understanding of how to translate knowledge and skills to be utilized in the ever-evolving workforce.

The second opportunity for the re-invigoration of the AWGS is within the development of UW's next sustainability strategy. The AWGS has the potential to act as a facilitating body within the strategy's development, helping gather academic support to obtain a true representative sample of faculty participation that will garner respect for the academic objectives within the document. As an administrative department within the University, the Campus Sustainability Office (CSO) must lean on faculty and upper administration for support to achieve adopted academic sustainability-related objectives.

The third example of an opportunity to utilize the AWGS, is through the 2025 institutional strategic plan. This plan currently has five pillars, where the AWGS has the potential to be directly involved in no less than three. The three pillars which the mission statement of the AWGS aligns are, fostering a thriving academic community of excellence, partnering for transformational research, and supporting reconciliation and Indigenous excellence. There are several objectives within these pillars that could be supported by the AWGS through the interdisciplinary nature of the group, and the shared understanding of sustainability and its inherent connection to real-world challenges. Members of the AWGS would also have the potential to be appointed to steering committees to assist in the creation of the subsequent action plans related to academics and research, which are said to be the guiding documents that will be used to support key objectives in the overarching strategy.

Although the group is not currently active, the AWGS remains an existing structure within our institution and was strategically placed to bring together an interdisciplinary team of faculty members. With adequate support, the AWGS will help leadership advance interdisciplinary teaching, research, and community engagement.

The new Campus Sustainability Coordinator welcomes guidance from the CSC regarding sustainability education and knowledge mobilization, and looks forward to facilitating the AWGS's reactivation and witnessing what the body can accomplish.



Sara Campbell

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