



Executive Summary

Sustainability Survey

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Berea College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

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Introduction

Alumni members of *Forum 40404* responded in January 2018 to a survey designed to explore their experiences, values, and ideas related to sustainability. *Forum 40404* is the name given to the group of 227 alumni who currently serve as a volunteer survey panel. The volunteers attended the College spanning over six decades (back to the 1950s). As a way to listen to alumni voices, the staff of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment is designing brief surveys for the purpose of gaining alumni input.

When *Forum 40404* members were asked why they volunteered for the survey panel, the most common reasons were 1) *to give back and stay connected*; 2) *to help current and future students*; and 3) *to be an alumni voice*.

The following is a summary of the results of the Sustainability Survey (122/227 or 54% response rate).

Results

The first section of the survey introduced the term *sustainability* to respondents as follows:

“Sustainability” as a concept that can mean different things to different people. For example, one might be thinking of: simple living, good stewardship of resources, or minimizing human impact on the environment. Currently at Berea College, we use the following definition of “sustainability.”

The capacity of individuals, communities, and societies to coexist in a manner that maintains social justice, environmental integrity, and economic well-being today and for future generations.

This introduction was followed by a set of statements for which respondents rated their agreement. This was included to gauge the respondent’s ideas/values toward environmental/sustainable issues. Two of the statements out of seven were such that by agreeing with them the respondent was skeptical about environmental threats.

The statements are included below in rank order according to the percentage of respondents who rated clear agreement--they chose 4 or 5 on the 5-point agreement scale.

- *Protecting the natural world is important.* (98.3%)
- *Solving environmental problems is necessary for sustainable societies.* (91.8%)
- *Achieving sustainability requires individuals to reduce all kinds of waste (materials, water, energy, etc.).* (90.2%)
- *Being sustainable requires shifting to the use of renewable resources as much as possible.* (87.7%)
- *Human actions are contributing to changes in our atmosphere and climate systems.* (82.8%)
- *In general, many of the claims about environmental threats are exaggerated.* (18.0%)
- *Claims about global warming and its effects do not seem reasonable to me.* (16.4%)

The following table shows the same data by graduation/attendance date category. The most recent alumni demonstrated the highest levels of agreement for environmentally positive statements. However, not all respondents were positive, for example, 20 respondents agreed that *Claims about global warming and its effects do not seem reasonable to me* (three of these respondents were students in the 2000s).

Number and Percentage of Respondents who rated agreement of "4" or "5" on a 5-point agreement scale (also included an "unsure" option)	All Respondents (N = 122)		1950-1959 & 1960-1969 (N = 17)		1970-1979 (N = 19)		1980-1989 (N = 22)		1990-1999 (N = 20)		2000-2009 (N = 21)		2010-2016 (N = 15)	
	Human actions are contributing to changes in our atmosphere and climate systems.	101	82.8%	15	88.2%	13	68.4%	18	81.8%	15	75.0%	19	90.5%	15
Claims about global warming and its effects do not seem reasonable to me.	20	16.4%	4	23.5%	3	15.8%	6	27.3%	4	20.0%	2	9.5%	1	6.7%
Being sustainable requires shifting to the use of renewable resources as much as possible.	107	87.7%	16	94.1%	17	89.5%	18	81.8%	16	80.0%	18	85.7%	15	100.0%
In general, many of the claims about environmental threats are exaggerated.	22	18.0%	3	17.6%	3	15.8%	6	27.3%	4	20.0%	4	19.0%	2	13.3%
Achieving sustainability requires individuals to reduce all kinds of waste (materials, water, energy, etc.).	110	90.2%	17	100.0%	16	84.2%	19	86.4%	17	85.0%	19	90.5%	14	93.3%
Protecting the natural world is important.	120	98.4%	17	100.0%	19	100.0%	22	100.0%	19	95.0%	21	100.0%	14	93.3%
Solving environmental problems is necessary for sustainability societies.	112	91.8%	17	100.0%	17	89.5%	20	90.9%	16	80.0%	19	90.5%	15	100.0%

The next item asked the respondent: *If you were responsible for the College's sustainability budget, how would you allocate the funds among the following areas (total must be 100%)?*

The choices given were for the major areas listed in the table below. Also, the table includes the average percentage of budget allocated for each area (across respondents) as well as the minimum and maximum allocations given:

	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Number who indicated	0%
Creating more academic opportunities (curriculum) for students.	33.3%	0%	75%	6	4.9%
Purchasing sustainable energy technology (solar, geothermal, etc.)	32.5%	0%	85%	5	4.1%
Increasing agricultural infrastructure to produce more local food.	31.6%	0%	100%	4	3.3%
Other, please describe.	2.6%	5%	45%	105	86.1%

The average allocation by each area above is divided nearly into thirds. The 17 respondents who chose to list *other* areas for resource allocation gave several suggestions. For example, a graduate from the 1970s suggested that the College initiate creative exchanges with other countries using sustainable resources and another suggested putting part of the budget allocation into career

planning. A graduate from the 1990s recommended sending students around the world to experience and survey the need for sustainability. A 2000s graduate wants the College to use local/community resources before outsourcing (e.g., buying appliances, food, etc.). A more recent graduate (in the last seven years) suggested putting a portion of the budget allocation into lobbying.

Respondents were then asked two open-ended questions.

1: *While attending Berea college, describe up to three experiences (such as special programs/events, labor/service, and academic coursework) involving sustainability that had an impact on your attitudes, knowledge, or behavior. Please be specific (e.g., name of academic course, event, program, etc.).*

Respondents reported a wide variety of experiences in which they learned about sustainability--in courses (*Issues and Values*, sociology, economics, political science, agriculture, industrial arts/technology), in labor assignments (food service, College forest, gardens, in the Admissions Office and at Brushy Fork Institute, in the Bonner Scholars program), at Mountain Day; and, by participating in recycling efforts, living in the Ecovillage, attending weekly chapel (social justice issues), hiking and exploring near Berea, participation in volunteer/service activities, working in renovated buildings, and attending convocations.

A few specific examples follow (females in red, males in blue):

- In the course, *Issues and Values* (1974), we had readings and discussion about fossil fuels, population explosion, migration, and climate issues. It was the first time I had been exposed to those issues in a way that I learned I could make a difference.
- Use of no till methods to grow selected crops on the College farm.
- Mountain Day. Having the opportunity to get out and enjoy the mountain and outdoors. These resources cannot be fenced off in the name of protection but used and enjoyed so importance becomes self-evident.
- Recycling, always accessible and instilled a practice I am committed to.

2: *Describe anything you have experienced (or knowledge that you have acquired) **after** your attendance at Berea college that has had the largest impact on your current thinking regarding sustainability issues.*

Respondents mentioned reading about environmental challenges (climate change), traveling and experiencing other cultures and societies, personal observations (e.g., lower bird numbers, plant and insect species moving from south to north), living in intentionally sustainable ways (gardening, using reclaimed materials, etc.) and working in organizations that helped them learned key concepts (e.g., Soil Conservation District).

The following comments are illustrative of respondents who have been categorized by high or low total agreement on the statement ratings section of the survey.

High Agreement Rating for Environmentally Positive Statements:

- *Traveling to West Africa and the West Indies. Both gave me a better appreciation of how the U.S. tried to address these issues in a conscious systematic way.*
- *I currently serve on a Green Team at the School of Theology where I teach as we are part of the Green Seminary Initiative, a program in which dozens of seminaries across the country are involved.*
- *As Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America program on Wisconsin Avenue in Washington, DC, I became aware of the plight of our inner city poor.... Changes in weather patterns, agriculture reforms needs, education and health that disproportionately affect the poor countries and communities complicate climate change policies.*

Low Agreement Rating for Environmentally Positive Statements:

- *Many if not most of the same people that claim we need to move to lower or zero pollution energy sources refuse to even discuss the idea of various nuclear sources of power, whether we're talking small, portable, and safe Thorium reactors to bring dependable power to remote areas or larger scale plants to provide the energy that a modern society requires.*
- *In my opinion, sustainability consists of more than the environmental component. There is an economic component which requires as much attention as the environmental side. I believe the environment is not as fragile as some argue and forsaking the economic impact of long-term environmental protection is not sustainable.*
- *I've worked with the coal mine industry, and now I work in worth the renewable energy industry. There is no clear line of which is right and wrong. All the energy industries are beneficial and can be operated in a safe sustainable manner. I feel that is the lesson that needs to be taught. It's easy to focus on just the good, or the bad parts of an industry; but it needs to be looked at as a whole. No news agency's talk about the hazardous environmental waste created from the production and disposal of electric car batteries or the waste from solar panels; but most of that is done quietly overseas.*

Summary

Overall, a high percentage of respondents regardless of their year of graduation/attendance, rated the seven environmental statements in line with current predominant scientific thought.

Respondents, when asked to indicate how they would allocate budget to sustainability divided fairly evenly resources across academics, sustainable energy technology, and supporting local food infrastructure.

The experiences while in school that contributed to their understanding of sustainability were right in line with the College's academic curriculum, labor, and student life programs/activities.

When asked about experiences that they have had since attending the College, alumni cited examples in keeping with what a liberal arts education aims to accomplish—further study/reading, experiencing other ways of living, personal inquiry and observation, and being a life-long learner at home and in one's career.