

Proposal to Establish a Sustainability Shared Goal
Educational Policies Committee Sustainability Shared Goal Task Force
(Requesting Bloomington Faculty Council endorsement)

Preamble

This proposed Shared Goal started with our students. Of note, IU Student Government Enrolled Proclamation 110, passed in 2021¹, calls for the creation of a shared sustainability learning goal, arguing in part:

“Indiana University students are graduating into a world that is undergoing rapid ecological degradation; The climate crisis is already impacting our lives and will continue to do so; Addressing the climate crisis will require drastic climate action from all industries.”

(See Appendix A). During the December 7, 2021, meeting of the Bloomington Faculty Council at which the Proposal was first discussed, IU Student Body President Ky Freeman read statements of students that urged the BFC to endorse the Proposal. (Appendix B) Students explained that sustainability and climate are part of the world that they will enter upon graduation, not just personally but professionally. They ask us as educators for the tools to confront these existential challenges.

Leo Banks, IUSG Director for Sustainability, powerfully told the BFC members, the BFC Executive Committee, and the interim Provost²:

“Climate change ... is *the* defining issue for our generation. If we don’t solve it, it won’t be solved. This is something that needs to be addressed in our education.”

Our students are not alone in these concerns. Notably, in 2020, *this* body passed the BFC Resolution for Enhancing Sustainability at IU Bloomington, stating, “The BFC will work to ... actively support ... both current and future academic, research, and service programs in and related to sustainability.” (Appendix C). The IU Bicentennial Strategic Plan contained the language aligned with these goals:

Core Values:

- “Sustainability, stewardship, and accountability for the natural, human, and economic resources and relationships entrusted to IU”

Strategic Priorities:

- “Developing sustainability understanding through comprehensive programming and engagement with the campus as a laboratory for sustainable practices”

Indiana University, its faculty, administrators, and students have a stated commitment to sustainability education. BFC members, acting as independent representatives of the faculty, should affirm this commitment.

As a final note, the Sustainability as a Shared Goal Task Force (hereinafter, the Task Force) stresses that the Proposal set forth below does *not* require any department or school to create a new course *nor* a new course requirement. It asks for curricular review, offers consultation, and recommends curricular innovation, such as including sustainability-related data sets in courses focused on quantitative learning, connecting study of policymaking to those focused on environmental justice and climate action, or contemplating historical

¹ IU Graduate and Professional Student Government passed a similar resolution to that of IUSG, also in 2020.

² A recording of the December 7, 2021, BFC Meeting can be accessed [here](#). Mr. Banks’s comments begin at 1:41:50.

engagement with the rights of nature. Thoughtful educators will surely find creative and meaningful ways with which to make connections to sustainability in their classrooms.

The Task Force appreciates your consideration and welcomes your questions and concerns. Please contact [Sarah Mincey](#), [Brian Winterman](#), or [Kelly Eskew](#) to discuss further.

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## Introduction

There is a pressing need to bolster Indiana University Bloomington's General Education (Gen Ed) requirements for undergraduates to include sustainability literacy. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report warns that we are on track to reach 2.7 degrees Celsius of global warming (4.86 F) by 2050. This is a catastrophic prediction from the world's scientists. UN Secretary General António Guterres called the Report "a red alert for the planet." IU President Pamela Whitten recently stated that "Indiana University [is] actively finding solutions, leading conversations, and engaging the community locally and internationally" on the issue of climate change. A Shared Goal on Sustainability continues this important commitment and progress.

Institutions of higher education, like IUB, are uniquely positioned to develop an educated citizenry to address the existential crisis of global environmental change. Many of IUB's peer institutions have implemented general education requirements focused on sustainability literacy - Michigan State, the University of Minnesota, and the University of Nebraska among them. Indiana University should not be left behind. Thus, a multi-disciplinary task force that included students was convened by the Educational Policies Committee (EPC) of the Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC) to develop a proposal on a Sustainability Shared Goal.

The following suggested Shared Goal policy is based on learning outcomes suggested by the Association for the Advancement of the Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). It neither requires the addition of a new course, nor additional credit hours, but can be, the Task Force believes, implemented through current curricular offerings, potentially with more explicit reference to core concepts in most units and the innovative curricular adjustments that engaged faculty are always engaged in, year over year. If approved, the Task Force recommends that an implementation group, with representatives of the schools, be convened to continue that discussion.

## Definitions

*Sustainability*, as defined by the United Nations is the reconciliation of environmental, social, and economic demands – the "three pillars" of sustainability – for the immediate and future wellbeing of individuals and communities.

*Sustainability literacy* is an integrated, interdisciplinary understanding of the interactions between people and the environment to improve well-being, ensure equity for present and future generations, and safeguard the planet's life-supporting ecosystems. Students will be able to define sustainability and major sustainability challenges; understand carrying capacity of ecosystems; apply concepts of sustainable development to address global sustainability challenges; and evaluate actions through a systems perspective that acknowledges the interconnections between the economy, social institutions and the environment.

### Example learning outcomes

Academic units will evaluate, monitor, and regularly report on the achievement of sustainability literacy among their students.

The sustainability learning outcomes suggested by AASHE are derived by experts in the field and include the following (see Appendix D for examples of accounting of program learning outcomes and competencies). It is recommended that schools, programs, and courses work from these learning outcomes as they develop and customize outcomes for their own students:

1. Students will be able to define sustainability and identify major sustainability challenges;
2. Students will understand the concept of carrying capacity of ecosystems;
3. Students will be able to apply concepts of sustainable development to address sustainability challenges in a global context; and,
4. Students will identify and evaluate their professional and personal actions with the knowledge and appreciation of interconnections among economic, environmental, and social perspectives. Or “students will be able to evaluate actions through a systems perspective that acknowledges the interconnections between the economy, social institutions and the environment.”

These example learning outcomes are referred to as the Sustainability Learning Outcomes, or LOs, below.

### Oversight of Implementation (and beyond)

For the first two to three years, the task force recommends that the BFC establish a subcommittee of the General Education Committee (GEC) to oversee the implementation of the sustainability shared goal, henceforth referred to as Implementation Working Group. The Implementation Working Group, which may benefit from including the continued service of the Shared Goal Task Force and its leadership, to:

- a) Provide guidance to schools as they evaluate and report on sustainability in their curricula,
- b) Gather reports from schools,
- c) Offer feedback to schools regarding ways to improve sustainability literacy,
- d) Summarize evaluation reports from across campus in order to provide a broader view of sustainability literacy and the approaches taken by each school,
- e) Advise BFC and other relevant units on ways to improve sustainability literacy, and
- f) Collaborate with the Office of Sustainability and other units to assess improvements in literacy over time and stay abreast of sustainability literacy standards and practices.

After a period of implementation, oversight might be turned over to the GEC or perhaps a subcommittee of GEC that could evaluate all shared goals.

## Implementation & Timeline

The task force has identified three most likely avenues for students to learn about sustainability:

1. **General Education Courses:** The task force worked with Bloomington Assessment & Research (BAR) to create a data dashboard that shows what students by school and major have taken sustainability-related Gen Ed courses (see Appendix E). As noted above, around 25% of IUB undergraduates learn about sustainability through Gen Ed courses. These courses were evaluated and determined as sustainability courses by the Office of Sustainability in accordance with the standards by the Sustainability Tracking and Assessment Rating System (STARS), the primary sustainability metric for higher education.
2. **Program-specific Courses:** Many undergraduate programs teach about sustainability in their own courses and in the context of their discipline, which is the ideal way for students to learn these concepts.
3. **Co-curricular Activities:** Some schools may already offer co-curricular activities that teach sustainability.

After policy adoption, the Task Force recommends that during AY2022-2023, schools evaluate to what degree sustainability literacy is being taught to their students and identify opportunities to improve. The results of this evaluation should then be reported to the Implementation Working Group, which will offer feedback to units. By AY2023-2024, schools should have a long-term plan for evaluating, monitoring, and reporting changes in sustainability literacy learning opportunities among their students.

### **Evaluation, Monitoring, and Reporting**

Each school will develop a plan to evaluate and monitor sustainability literacy in their unit, based partly on guidance from the Implementation Working Group. This plan will focus primarily on the teaching and learning of the Sustainability Learning Outcomes.

In addition to the Sustainability Learning Outcomes, the Task Force recommends that programs and instructors use the course-level learning outcomes suggested by the Task Force as guidance at the course and program level (Appendix F).

After the initial evaluation report has been submitted, schools should continue to evaluate, monitor, and report on a regular basis to be determined by the schools along with the Implementation Working Group.

## **Sustainability as a Shared Goal: Discussion and Process**

### **Justification**

The climate crisis - an existential crisis as defined by the Paris Agreement on climate change (2015); the International Panel on Climate Change Report (2018 and 2021); and the Fourth National Climate Assessment Report by the US Global Change Research Program (2018) - places a moral obligation on institutions of higher education to act to ensure graduates have the knowledge and skills to contribute to collective sustainability solutions. While not everyone can be or should be a sustainability professional, everyone should understand the basic principles of sustainability, just as we would hope every student leaving IU understands the nature and value of inclusion and equity without having to be a professional in gender studies or community-based justice in order to contribute to the public good.

At IU, we are well positioned to achieve this basic understanding among our graduates given that there is grassroots interest, expertise, and resources for sustainability education across the disciplines at our institution. A 2019 IUSG survey found that 85.6% of IUB students believe their major already addresses the three tenets of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental sustainability (Appendix G). Indeed, this shared goal is readily attainable given myriad curricular and co-curricular opportunities at IUB; 61 departments already offer sustainability related courses according to the University's [sustainability reporting](#). And of those courses, at least 34 are General Education classes. According to data from AY16-20, close to 25% of IUB undergrads already take one of those sustainability related Gen Ed courses during their undergraduate experience. (Appendix E). IUB faculty expertise runs deep in sustainability – over 160 faculty from across ten schools are affiliates of the [Integrated Program in the Environment](#) and the [Environmental Resilience Institute](#) where sustainability scholarship is a primary focus.

Despite these significant resources, IU lacks an explicit focus on sustainability among our general education learning outcomes which earns the university a “failing grade” of 1.92/8.00 in the Association for the Advancement of the Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS). AASHE is the leading organization focused on sustainability in higher ed, empowering higher education faculty, administrators, staff and students to be effective drivers of sustainability innovation. The organization provides the STARS ratings, a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. Among the components measured within STARS are sustainability learning outcomes (Appendix H), a component that can be measurably improved through the initiative outline herein.

### **Task Force Membership**

This task force was strategically assembled to include expertise in sustainability education standards and practices, a variety of subject areas in the undergraduate curriculum, course and program design and evaluation, assessment of student learning outcomes, best practices in teaching and learning, and the background and purpose of General Education Shared Goals.

Members include Sarah Mincey, Environmental Resilience Institute and Integrated Program in the Environment (co-chair); Brian Winterman, IUB Libraries (co-chair); Andrew Predmore, University Director of Sustainability; Andrew Libby, Human Biology; Mary Embry, Apparel Merchandising; Kelly Eskew, Business Law and Ethics and Chair of the Campus Sustainability Advisory Council; Bailey Hillis, IPE Undergraduate Assistant; Amani Khoury, IUSG Sustainability Coordinator.

## ***Guiding Principles***

The work of the task force was informed by the following principles, which we hope will make implementation of a sustainability shared goal more practical for units as well as more meaningful and substantive for learners.

*Defining “Required”:* The Task Force suggests that the best approach to requiring a sustainability shared goal is to require schools and programs to evaluate, monitor, and report on their efforts to teach sustainability rather than requiring students to take a single course or module, though we acknowledge that the single course or module approach might be the most viable approach for some schools or programs.

*Effectively Learning Sustainability:* There are multiple aspects of sustainability that are important for students to learn. The Task Force has focused on approaches that try to ensure students learn multiple aspects of sustainability to meet the shared goal rather than a single module or exercise. Also, the task force thinks that, whenever possible, sustainability is most effectively learned iteratively and in the context of a discipline.

## **Appendices**

- A. Indiana University Student Government Congress Enrolled Proclamation 110, approved March 20, 2021: “A PROCLAMATION calling for the creation of a shared sustainability learning goal across all Indiana University departments”
- B. Student statements on Sustainability as a Shared Goal, presented by IUSG President Ky Freeman, at the December 7, 2021, meeting of the Bloomington Faculty Council
- C. Bloomington Faculty Council Resolution for Enhancing Sustainability at IU Bloomington, April 27, 2020
- D. Examples of program evaluations
- E. Screenshot of Dashboard for Tracking Enrollment in Sustainability Gen Ed Courses
- F. Suggested Sustainability Learning Objectives and Competencies
- G. Sustainability Survey Report/IUSG Data Collection Project
- H. Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking and Rating System (STARS) Learning Outcomes