



## **Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ)** **for K-12 Schools**

The Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) for K-12 Schools<sup>1</sup> is designed to assist you in assessing the extent to which your school is sustainable in its teaching, administration, campus operations and outreach. “Sustainability” implies that the major activities on your campus are environmentally sound, socially just, economically viable, and that they will continue to be so for future generations. Academic institutions vary considerably in how they approach sustainability: some concentrate on minimizing their environmental impact through changes in operations; others emphasize sustainability in the curriculum.

This survey asks you to give impressions of your institution’s accomplishments in five critical areas:

1. <u>Curriculum</u> .....	4
2. <u>Campus, Facilities and Operations</u> .....	6
3. <u>Community Outreach and Service</u> .....	8
4. <u>Student Opportunities</u> .....	9
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The SAQ can be used for your own internal assessment – to stimulate discussion and plan next steps – or to assist in an external evaluation by a consultant. Note: If you are filling this out for an external evaluation, please attach further information and documentation where applicable.

**Recommended Directions:** If you wish to guide the process yourself, we suggest the following process: 1. Assemble 10-15 representatives from critical campus constituencies, including students, faculty, staff, and administration; 2. Review the purpose and objectives of the exercise and the concept of sustainability in education; 3.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the Sustainability Assessment Questionnaire for Colleges and Universities by the Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future ([www.ulsf.org](http://www.ulsf.org))

Take about 30 minutes for each person to fill out the questionnaire individually or for small groups to work through specified sections; 4. Facilitate a discussion in which the whole group reviews the questionnaire section by section and gathers impressions; 5. Brainstorm possible next steps to strengthening sustainability on your campus. Note: The exercise could take 2-3 hours or more, and may be best carried out over two sessions.

Please read through the definitions of sustainability and education for sustainability (p.3) and review the questions prior to completing the questionnaire. This will give you a sense of how we understand the concept of “sustainability” and its applicability to education. Then answer each question to the best of your ability. This questionnaire is seeking your impressions in each area. You need not have detailed information on all courses offered, transportation habits, recycling figures, etc., in order to complete it, but the more data you have the better.

It is important to recognize that most institutions will not “score high.” Very few, if any, institutions embody sustainability on all these dimensions. Sustainability is not yet a major focus of the academic disciplines or the wider economy in which education functions. Thus it is difficult for any school to be very advanced in implementing sustainability.

Thank you.

**Definitions of sustainable development, sustainability and education for sustainability:**

- Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (Brundtland Commission (United Nations), 1987)
- Historically, the term “sustainable” arose among those with environmental concerns, and most of the literature and assessment instruments reflect this emphasis. However, it is increasingly recognized that sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing social justice issues. There can be no sustainable communities and institutions without social justice. So too is humane consideration toward the whole community of life an essential part of true sustainability. An academic institution committed to sustainability should help students understand the roots of today’s injustices and motivate them to seek justice and humaneness in full integration with understanding the roots of environmental degradation and modeling environmentally sustainable practices. (John B. Cobb Jr., “Sustainability and the Liberal Arts” conference, 1998)
- Sustainability is an evolving paradigm for planning and decision-making. Sustainability is a promise. It is a dynamic condition, which requires a basic understanding of the interconnections and interdependency among ecological, economic, and social systems.” (The Sustainability Education Center, 2002)
- Education for sustainable development is a dynamic concept that utilizes all aspects of public awareness, education and training to create or enhance an understanding of the linkages among the issues of sustainable development and to develop the knowledge, skills, perspectives and values which will empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating and enjoying a sustainable future. (From the UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development website, 2005)
- The concept of sustainability – which, at a minimum, addresses how humans can live on the planet over time in a manner that protects cultural and biological diversity, recognizes and appreciates ecological limits, offers just and accountable governments and economies for all, and draws on the human capacity for adaptive learning and innovation – offers a tremendous challenge for education. It requires educational institutions to rethink their missions and to re-structure their courses, research priorities, community outreach, and campus operations. By preparing students – and the whole campus community – to be more adept decision makers in the increasingly complex, dynamic, and uncertain future that we all face, integrating sustainability into all of the major activities of educational institutions also presents a tremendous opportunity. (Glasser & Calder, 2005)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

CURRICULUM

1. Indicate the extent to which your school offers courses that address topics related to sustainability. (Such topics could include ecology and environmental science; globalization and sustainable development; environmental policy and management; nature writing; land ethics and sustainable agriculture; urban ecology and social justice; population, women and development; global poverty; ecological economics; and many others.) [Please circle the appropriate number on this and the following questions]:

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please list (or attach) any courses in which such topics are taught: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What courses do you regard as essential that are not being taught?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Indicate the extent to which sustainability is a focus woven into traditional disciplinary education in science, math, English, history, the arts, etc.?

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please comment on how this is done: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. To what extent are students exposed to outdoor and experiential education?

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please list and describe (or attach) any examples: \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Are students required to take a course on issues related to the environment or sustainability?

\_\_\_\_\_ No    \_\_\_\_\_ Yes    If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

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6. The shift to sustainability requires critical thinking about the role of the institution in its social, economic and ecological systems. Circle which of the following your institution (through individual, group or departmental efforts) attempts to teach its students:

a - how the campus functions in the ecosystem (e.g. its sources of food, water, energy, as well as the endpoint of waste and garbage)

b - a sense of place: the natural features, biota, history and culture of the region

c - the institution's contribution to a sustainable economy and sustainable local communities

d - an understanding of the interconnections and interdependencies among ecological, economic, and social systems.

e - how the institution views and treats its employees (such as staff and faculty involvement in decision-making, their status and benefits)

f - the basic values and core assumptions that shape the content and methods of the academic disciplines

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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7. a) Estimate the amount of faculty research being done in the various disciplines in the area of sustainability (for example, renewable energy, sustainable building design, ecological economics, indigenous wisdom and technologies, population and development, environmental management, etc.).

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please list (or attach) any faculty research activities you are aware of related to sustainability:

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b) Estimate the amount of student research being done in the various disciplines in the area of sustainability.

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please list (or attach) any student research activities you are aware of related to sustainability:

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8. a) What percentage of faculty members teach or do research on sustainability issues?

\_\_\_\_\_ %

b) What percentage of faculty members do you estimate would be interested in teaching and research on sustainability issues?

\_\_\_\_\_ %

9. Does your school have established interdisciplinary opportunities for teaching or research on sustainability issues?

\_\_\_\_\_ No    \_\_\_\_\_ Yes    If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

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**CAMPUS, FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS**

10. The chart below lists the operational practices emphasized by schools moving toward sustainability. Please complete the chart, adding a check (√) for prime project areas and for more information needed, and indicating the extent to which your institution has implemented these practices using the following scale: 0 – don't know; 1 – none; 2 – a little; 3 – quite a bit; 4 – a great deal.

<u>Practices</u>	Rate from 0 – 4	Prime project area	Need more info.	Please comment (and attach additional information)
<u>Building construction and renovation</u> based on green design principles (LEED, etc.)				
<u>Energy conservation</u> practices (including lighting, heating, cooling, ventilation, windows, etc.)				

<u>Practices</u>	Rate from 0 – 4	Prime project area	Need more info.	Please comment (and attach additional information)
<u>Waste reduction</u> practices (such as e-communications, double-sided copying, “waste free lunch” program, etc.)				
<u>Recycling</u> of solid waste (including paper, plastic, metal, e-waste, etc.)				
<u>Sustainable food</u> program (such as local, organic, and/or fair trade food)				
<u>Water conservation</u> practices (including efficient toilets, minimal irrigation, harvested rainwater, etc.)				
<u>Sustainable landscaping</u> (emphasizing Integrated Pest Management practices, native plants, biodiversity, minimizing lawn, etc.)				
<u>Sustainable transportation</u> program (including bicycle/pedestrian friendly systems, car pools, bus pass programs, biodiesel projects, etc.)				
<u>Green purchasing</u> from environmentally and socially responsible companies (products are non-toxic, water and energy conserving, etc.)				
<u>Reduction of toxic materials</u>				
<u>Environmental or sustainability assessments / audits</u>				
Others (please specify):				

11. What do you see when you walk around campus that tells you this is an institution committed to sustainability?

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12. To what extent are your operations practices integrated into the educational activities of the school?

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please provide examples of this integration: \_\_\_\_\_

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13. What other campus related projects, if any, are planned or in place on your campus (such as a community garden, art project, nature trail, etc.)? Please describe.

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**COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND SERVICE**

14. A sustainable school supports sustainable community development in its local area and in the surrounding region through partnerships with other primary and secondary schools and relationships with local governments and businesses. It may also seek international cooperation in solving global environmental justice and sustainability challenges through field study projects, student/faculty exchanges, etc. To what extent is your institution involved in sustainable community work or partnerships at local, regional, national or international levels?

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

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15. What sustainability related community service, service learning and/or internship programs exist at your institution? Please list or attach.

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**STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES**

16. Schools committed to sustainability provide students with specific opportunities and settings. Please check (√) which of the following are present on your campus:

- Orientation program(s) on sustainability for students
- Student Group(s) with an environmental or sustainability focus
- Sustainable Dormitory
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. To what extent are student groups on campus directly involved in sustainability initiatives?

- 0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Describe which groups are most involved and how: \_\_\_\_\_

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18. Does your school encourage students to consider sustainability issues when choosing a college?

- No     Yes    If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

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**ADMINISTRATION, MISSION AND PLANNING**

19. To what extent do the formal written statements describing the mission, purposes and objectives of the school reflect a commitment to sustainability? (Such statements include mission statements; policies, such as energy or waste management; planning documents;

annual reports; brochures or catalogues; etc.) [Please rate using the following scale: 0 – don't know; 1 – none; 2 – a little; 3 – quite a bit; 4 - a great deal]

- \_\_\_\_\_ the school as a whole
- \_\_\_\_\_ your office or division
- \_\_\_\_\_ your department
- \_\_\_\_\_ other areas within the institution (please define: \_\_\_\_\_)

Please describe (and attach examples where applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

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20. Schools committed to sustainability often create specified positions and/or committees, as well as engage in specific practices, which reinforce this commitment. Please check (✓) which, if any, of the following are present on your campus:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Environmental/Sustainability Committee, Council or Task Force
- \_\_\_\_\_ Environmental Coordinator – ( ) student, ( ) faculty, or ( ) staff member
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dean of Environmental Programs or Director of Sustainability Programs (a high level position responsible for these activities)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Institutional declaration or pledge of commitment to sustainability
- \_\_\_\_\_ Orientation programs on sustainability for faculty and staff
- \_\_\_\_\_ Socially responsible investment practices and policies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Regularly conducted environmental or sustainability audits
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

21. Does your school have an environmental or sustainability master plan, or is “sustainability” part of your school’s strategic visioning process?

\_\_\_\_\_ No    \_\_\_\_\_ Yes    If yes, please describe (and attach): \_\_\_\_\_

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22. To what extent do criteria for hiring or promotion recognize faculty and staff member contributions to sustainability and/or environmental literacy on campus?

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Describe how such considerations are weighed in these decisions: \_\_\_\_\_

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23. To what extent does your school provide faculty and staff development opportunities to enhance understanding, practice and teaching of sustainability?

0 (don't know)    1 (none)    2 (a little)    3 (quite a bit)    4 (a great deal)

Please describe recent faculty or staff development opportunities in these areas: \_\_\_\_\_

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24. Does your institution give broad visibility to sustainability issues? (for example, by inviting guest speakers, holding conferences, celebrating Earth Day, etc.) If so, please describe key events that have happened in the past year:

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25. a) Please describe the greatest strengths of your institution in relation to sustainability.

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b) Please describe the greatest weaknesses of your institution in relation to sustainability.

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26. a) Please describe the key factors that support the advancement of environmental and sustainability issues on your campus?

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b) What factors do you think account for resistance to or lack of responsiveness to these concerns?

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27. a) What next steps, if any, are planned at your school to strengthen your commitment to sustainability (such as an energy conservation initiative, a sustainable food program, a course requirement on sustainability, or a new strategic plan reflecting sustainability)?

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b) What “next steps” do you feel ought to be taken?

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Please add any additional comments below: