

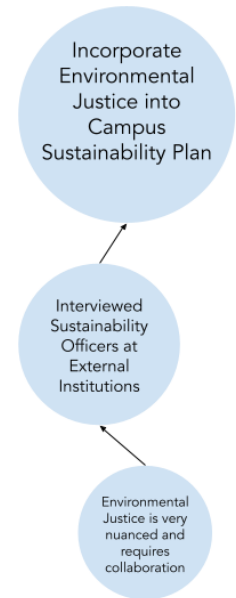
Incorporating Environmental Justice into UC Berkeley's Sustainability Plan

Overview of our research methods and conclusions in our research project to determine strategies and goals to better center environmental justice into UC Berkeley's 2020 Sustainability Plan.

Written by: Daisy Chu, Jakob Evans, Hayley Lai, Varsha Madapoosi, Chloe Olsen, and Jade Pannetier

Overview of Our Goals

The primary purpose of this project is to incorporate environmental justice into UC Berkeley's Campus Sustainability Plan. This plan outlines sustainability goals for the campus and initiatives that the campus will undertake to meet them. While environmental justice can be found in some aspects of the plan, there are many areas that can be built off of to foster environmental justice on and off the UC Berkeley campus. To research how UC Berkeley can better center environmental justice in its operations, our research team interviewed sustainability managers at universities around the world and learned about their current operations and future plans. Environmental justice can mean many things, and by collaborating with a diverse range of institutions, we observed the complexities that environmental justice poses. One common thread we saw through these conversations, though, was that universities have leagues to go in making sustainability accessible and transparent, and that universities must utilize their institutions to create a working relationship with indigeneous peoples. Together, as a research team, we are creating detailed recommendations for our Office of Sustainability on how each point in their campus sustainability plan can utilize UC Berkeley's institutional power for environmental justice.



Overview of Research Methods to Analyze the Current Sustainability Report

To ensure that we were well-informed about the nature of the current sustainability report, we conducted interviews with UC Berkeley's Chief Sustainability Officer and a literature review of the current report.

1. Interview with Chief Sustainability Officer

We conducted a one-hour introductory interview with the Chief Sustainability Officer in October 2020, to develop a stronger understanding of the UC Berkeley sustainability report. After a brief presentation from the Chief Sustainability Officer on the report, we asked follow-up questions. Sample questions include: "What is the best way for us to propose recommendations?", "Are there any sections you would like us to focus on? What section(s) need the most development from the university?", "What deadlines are approaching for specific goals? How do we plan on meeting them/or pushing them back?". We had follow-up meetings in January and March of 2021, where our team provided updates on our recommendations and gathered feedback from the Chief Sustainability Officer on our progress. These meetings helped us center ourselves in a strong understanding of current sustainability endeavors by the UC Berkeley Office of Sustainability.

2. Review of the Sustainability Report

We reviewed the current sustainability report by reading through it as a group to get a broad understanding and then analyzing it individually to identify how it could better center environmental justice. We created a pluses and deltas chart and added sections that we thought were quite strong to the pluses and sections that could be improved to the deltas. This analysis allowed us to have a strong foundation to evaluate the current strategies listed in the report, and prepared us to create recommendations from this initial baseline.



Findings of Analyzing the Current Sustainability Report

From our analysis of the current sustainability report, we found "Culture and Learning" and "Health and Sustainability" to be the sections that could best integrate environmental justice. These

sections have the most focus on community engagement and student-focused solutions and thus we decided to focus on these two sections for our recommendation report.

We also found that although the report had broad overarching goals, it did not provide tangible steps or measures for the University to follow in order to reach them. Thus, in our research, we analyzed other universities's sustainability reports to look for where they were able to implement some of these broader goals and integrate environmental justice into them. We hoped to center our analysis in partnerships with existing organizations/initiatives and community drive examples to uplift the goals presented in the sustainability report.

Based on our introductory conversations with the Office of Sustainability, we found that it was imperative to continue this partnership to ensure that our work is well-intentioned and serves the right audiences/purpose.

Overview of Research Methods for External Institutions

Our research involved reaching out to other universities to draw inspiration from and learn the ways in which we could improve environmental justice on the Berkeley campus. We researched universities that highlighted sustainability and environmental justice as an important aspect of their campus values. This was performed by looking at their websites, reading their sustainability reports, and compiling areas of environmental justice, strengths, and weaknesses into a shared chart. If we recognized that a university had strong sustainability practices or noted aspects of their website that we wanted to learn more about, we reached out to the corresponding office of sustainability via email to set up an interview.

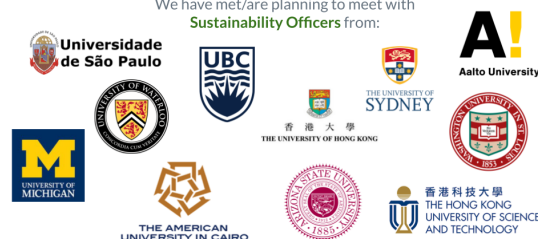
The universities we have interviewed over the course of this project are *University of Waterloo*, *University of British Columbia*, *University of Sydney*, *Washington University in St. Louis*, *Arizona State University*, *University of Michigan*, *American University in Cairo*, *Aalto University*, *Hong Kong University*, and *Hong Kong University of Science and Technology*. Most of these interviews were conducted over Zoom, although some involved only email. We generally focused on questions pertaining to the universities' reports, including a presence or absence of environmental justice, student engagement, and environmental initiatives on campus involving energy, food, waste, and transportation. Often interviewees would recommend universities for us to reach out to that they believed were leaders in sustainability.

Findings of Researching External Institutions

From these interviews, we were able to gather a more comprehensive overview of how environmental justice was currently viewed and targeted across various campuses, cities, and countries. There were a wide range of sustainability-based initiatives ranging from Living Lab research opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to implementations of diverse steering committees. However, what we discovered, more importantly, was that there were seldom any definite long-term environmental-social initiatives, projects, task forces, and or policies set in place to specifically target the issue of environmental injustice around the respective communities. As it seems, since environmental justice is still regarded as a newly emerging topic within the environmental sector, there is little to no guidance for what needs to be done in order to tackle such a complex issue that involves many different

Drawing Inspiration from Institutions

We have met/are planning to meet with Sustainability Officers from:



stakeholders. Moreover, every campus had a distinct definition of environmental justice and a dissimilar perspective of what it entailed, thus priorities varied from campus to campus.

For the universities that had developed environmental justice plans or even started spearheading their programs, there was a general consensus that collaboration among the staff, students, alumni, and community members was imperative for campuses to examine their targets and find ways in which they could further expand their reach and impact. Furthermore, environmental justice is encompassed in all aspects of campus life and therefore needed to be incorporated in the following areas (to name a few): academic classes, research projects, extracurricular activities (including that of volunteering), student organizations, university logistics and operations (sourcing of food, equipment, resources), and decision-making processes.

Creating Our Recommendations

Our written recommendations method consisted of reading through the goals and key strategies for the sections of the plan that pertained to UC Berkeley, and creating recommendations in a paragraph format that could center the report more so on environmental justice. We based our recommendations on a variety of sources, including personal accounts, interviews with universities, other campus resources, and online research. After looking towards other universities' sustainability reports for inspiration, we also included the relevant UN SDGs, campus partners, and different stakeholder sections for each recommendation to offer more resources in which the Office of Sustainability would be able to use if they were interested in incorporating specific recommendations into the UC Berkeley Climate Action Plan.

There were several peer review processes, in which members of our group were able to suggest grammatical edits as well as bring new ideas and perspectives to the previous drafts of recommendations. After meeting with our research committee's mentor, we added more references to other outside sources to build on our research, as we mainly focused our recommendations on our experiences as students of UC Berkeley, and highlighted parts of each recommendation that we believed the UC Berkeley Office of Sustainability would be able to carry out. We also converted our recommendations to a condensed bullet point format on a separate document, so it would be easier for readers to process our research before reading our completed paragraphs. In our final step of our written recommendations, we drew inspiration from the formats of other sustainability reports, and organized our paragraphs into a clean, visually appealing document.

Examples of Recommendations We Created

Strategy 1: Increase transparency of the academic and research offerings of departments and programs teaching sustainability material and offering related minors and majors.

Stakeholders: OURS, Academic Senate, ASUC

Climate Benefit:

To increase transparency of academic offerings that teach sustainability-related material, there could be a dedicated section of the [Berkeley Academic Guide](#) page to a Sustainable Development Goals chart, similar to [the University of Copenhagen's](#). Courses from all departments could be listed under each relevant goal and organized in a way that allows a student to view what sustainability-related classes are available to them under a specific goal.

An additional way to increase transparency would be providing an [environmental/sustainability category](#) under the “Search By Department Subject” in the Berkeley Academic Guide. On the [Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarships](#) website, there could be a dedicated section to environmental research.

Berkeley students could further their efforts to engage in and support environmental justice through [curriculum and academics](#). Some Universities that currently offer an Environmental Justice major and could be used as sources of inspiration include [UC Davis](#), [Unity College](#), and the [University of Washington](#). Also, a sustainability diploma could be created, [similar to the University of Waterloo](#), and include environmental justice courses as part of the major requirement.

Strategy 1: Engage in the Light the Way campaign focusing on research for the environment to understand the depths of environmental change; speed up strategies for mitigation and adaptation, and ensure that vulnerable populations benefit from solutions.

Stakeholders: Light the Way Campaign, Research Labs + Centers

Climate Benefit:

To ensure that our [funding sources](#) are reflecting equitable and justice-centered missions, we must adopt a democratized and [transparent approach](#) in seeking funding and allocating funds. Key stakeholders, including students, professors, and faculty must be actively involved in funding for the Light the Way campaign, and their feedback must be taken into account when accepting funding from donors. These stakeholders should also represent a diverse campus interest and be inclusive to BIPOC communities.

In addition to adopting this [democratized approach to accepting funding for research](#), the Office of Sustainability should try to ensure that [research proposals are centered around equity and justice](#), focused on climate resiliency, environmental justice, and long-term sustainable solutions for mitigation and adaptation. These research proposals should also be followed up frequently to ensure that the plan is progressing and its focus hasn’t wavered. At key points in the research stages, researchers should be asked to share their findings with the community to ensure that the funded research is accessible to all and is not kept behind a wall of academia. Sharing out progress and key findings can also help spark other research ideas and proposals, allowing for increased sustainability efforts.

The Light the Way Campaign is an excellent avenue to further sustainability research on campus, but it is important to ensure that the [donors’ values align with the university and its key stakeholders](#) as well as ensuring that the [research is focused on furthering environmental equity](#). [Information should be posted](#) on the Light the Way campaign website as to which research projects and groups these funds have gone into, including a short description of this research and in what ways do vulnerable populations benefit, whether that be the inclusion of BIPOC in the research project or how a project is centered around environmental justice. [Transparency](#) should be created between students, faculty, and staff and UC Berkeley as to how the funds are supporting environmental justice on campus.

Strategy 4: Set policy and guidelines for purchasing sustainable and nutritious staples for Basic Needs Center and Food Pantry.

Stakeholders: Basic Needs Center, SERC

Climate Benefit:

An essential notion of environmental justice is that healthy and environmentally-sound lifestyles have to be accessible to all from undergraduate and graduate students to faculty members and staff. Serving as an emergency food relief supply, the Food Pantry should make the quality and sustainability of the food it provides a priority. [The College & University Food Bank Alliance](#) provides resources on national research studies that have been previously conducted as well as methods to address food insecurity for undergraduate students. Guidelines for [The Basic Needs Center and Food Pantry](#) could draw inspiration from the broader food and beverage choice [campus policies](#) in terms of nutrition standards. At the [University of Maryland's Campus Pantry](#), they have specific objectives to create “a safe space to distribute good quality and nutritious emergency food” to all students, faculty, and staff members.

Moreover, a [free nutrition coaching service](#) is provided that “empowers and supports members of the University of Maryland College Park community with the knowledge and skills needed to make and implement healthy nutrition choices today and for a lifetime.” Regarding sustainability concerns, a baseline should be set regarding the amount of third-party certified foodstuff currently purchased by the Food Pantry from its main suppliers UFI/ACCFB/Daylight foods and have an ultimate aim of increasing this share. The [procurement of fresh produce](#) should also target smaller businesses and more local vendors located preferably in the Bay Area or California as a whole.

Next Steps

A few steps still need to be completed in order for our project to reach its final form. First, our work reaching out to other universities to engage in discussions and draw inspiration from them is not over. At each meeting that we organize with a new university, we get the opportunity to discover a new way to approach sustainability and environmental challenges: each new discussion we conduct has new insights to offer. We thus plan on carrying on meetings to further expand the horizon from which we draw our inspiration, out of this wealth of university initiatives that already exist or are slowly taking shape. The UC Berkeley Sustainability Plan is composed of 5 sections. While the process of writing and reviewing recommendations in the “Culture and Learning” as well as the “Health and Sustainability” sections is coming to end, the Plan also contains 3 remaining sections: “Built and Natural Environment”, “Sustainable Services” and “Climate and resiliency” for which research still needs to be conducted.

Lastly, our project is only a first step in the attempt to instill an environmental justice perspective in UC Berkeley's sustainability efforts. We hope that our work provides the basis for further discussion on this topic, as well as the implementation of real-world solutions. Though it is slowly gaining traction across universities, a lot of work still needs to be done in order for environmental justice to be considered in a more systematic manner: we also wish to continue raising awareness on the importance of using an environmental justice perspective to sustainability efforts, now that the discussion has been set in motion.