

## Report of the Chief Sustainability Officer

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### FOR INFORMATION

**PRESENTED BY:** Nancy Turner, Associate Vice-Provost, Teaching and Learning  
Aditi Garg, Educational Development Specialist

**DATE OF MEETING:** April 20, 2024

**SUBJECT:** **Fostering a Sustainable Future Through Education**

#### BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY:

Post-secondary institutions have a unique opportunity to effect change towards a more sustainable future as we can design our curriculum and offer experiences to ensure our students have developed the confidence and mastery to enact change after graduation. USask's Sustainability Strategy recognizes this opportunity through its Commitment #3 – Empower Action by supporting “a generation of learners and achievers to shift mindsets and expand skillets to accelerate action to achieve the SDGs.” By adopting the SDGs as a guiding framework, USask affirms its commitment to fostering a sustainable future through education.

Through *nakaatayihthaamoowin*, USask understand sustainability to mean protecting and honouring the wellness of all humanity and creation by taking care of the relationship with which we've been entrusted — with the land, with the air and water, with our students, colleagues, and neighbours — guided by mindfulness, respect, and reverence. This initiative is instrumental in steering learners towards a paradigm shift—a transformation in mindset and competencies crucial for catalyzing positive change aligned with the SDGs.

The cultivation of 'head, heart, and hand' skills among USask students is paramount. USask's approach involves a comprehensive development of curricula and pedagogical strategies, particularly [experiential learning](#), aimed at equipping students with the practical and ethical competencies to live sustainably and contribute to a just society.

Furthermore, the recognition of learning as a lifelong journey necessitates a bridge between the University and the broader community. The USask commitment to competency assessment and credentialing includes facilitating impactful community engagement and experiential learning opportunities, offering a symbiotic relationship between students and community partners through mentorship and feedback.

The articulation of [USask Competencies](#) is strategically designed to embed the values of [Our Learning Charter](#) into the University's curricular and co-curricular offerings.

#### Sustainability Competencies

1. Engaging in our intercultural society  
Students who thrive as members of a diverse society handle diversity in perspective, position and approach adeptly. They communicate and collaborate effectively within diverse groups and an increasingly global society.

2. Nurturing successful relationships  
Students who nurture successful relationships can describe their values and beliefs while embracing diversity in others. They are accountable for their actions, manage conflict, successfully prioritize and negotiate for successful results.
3. Leveraging technology  
Students who can leverage technology are able to use digital/technological tools and systems ethically, appropriately and effectively to complete tasks and accomplish goals.
4. Adaptive design and problem solving  
Students who effectively solve problems and create work that is adaptable are strong and creative thinkers. They exercise innovation, critical thinking, and risk taking in the design, implementation and evaluation of an approach to achieve a desired goal.
5. Communicating meaningfully  
Students engage in meaningful communication when they exchange ideas, facts and perspectives with others. They use different strategies to communicate depending on the context and audience.
6. Cultivating well-being  
Students effectively engage in cultivating well-being when they reflect on what they are doing and on their personal and academic needs and then make appropriate adjustments to be successful. They engage in thoughtful decision-making and are self-aware and reflective, so they can purposefully navigate adversity. Students respect personal limits and boundaries of themselves and others and persist in the face of change.

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

One of the key ways that USask is working to embed the competencies across the curriculum is through the Sustainability Faculty Fellows Program. The program was designed to fill the gap in systemic change within education for sustainable development, identifying faculty members as key drivers. Through interviews with over 30 USask sustainability educators, five essential teaching practices emerged:

*emphasizing student agency, interdisciplinary connections, reflective practices, community engagement, and changing mindsets towards sustainability.*

Thus, fellows were selected who were willing to take on the challenge of embedding these practices within their courses, fostering a curriculum that not only teaches sustainability but also practices it. The role demands qualities of empathy, leadership, and openness to new pedagogical approaches, with a commitment to developing academic leadership skills and engaging in a community of practice.

The effectiveness of this approach is evidenced through positive feedback from students, who reported increased confidence and knowledge regarding sustainability. Further, the colleges with Fellows reported changes to their strategic priorities, shifts in academic programs to allow sustainability credits, the embedding of SDGs across the curriculum, as well as other transformative practices. This indicates a shift towards more sustainability competencies for students.

The Fellows Program also demonstrates the importance of faculty leadership in embedding sustainability across the curriculum. It aims to create a lasting impact on the university's culture, preparing students to tackle global sustainability challenges, thereby contributing to a more sustainable and regenerative future. This initiative serves as a model for systemic change in higher education, highlighting the crucial role of strategic roles like fellows in fostering sustainability in teaching and learning.

## **FOR FEEDBACK & DISCUSSION AT THE MEETING:**

Given the diverse perspectives, professions and representation of Senate members from across all parts of Saskatchewan, feedback from members will be particularly important in furthering USask's understanding of how to ensure our graduates are well-equipped to meet the needs of Saskatchewan's community as we all move towards a sustainable future.

During the session at Senate, Senate members will be placed in small groups to discuss the following questions:

1. Consider a key sustainability issue that your field or community is facing. How might the work described across the commitments of USask's Sustainability strategy contribute to addressing the issue?
2. How might students who have developed the USask competencies (above) help address these issues? Are there additional ways we can support students to develop these competencies during their studies?
3. How might we partner to create sustainability focused [experiential learning](#) opportunities for students that contribute to your field or community?
4. How can USask strengthen its ties with local communities, Indigenous nations, and global partners to maximize reciprocal benefit and impact?