

Report of the Chief Sustainability Officer

FOR INFORMATION

Presented by: Janelle Hutchinson, Chief Sustainability Officer

Date of Meeting: October 26, 2024

Subject: **Update Report – Sustainability at USask**

Background:

On April 20, 2024, at the request of the Senate Education Committee, two presentations were made to Senate which included 1) an update on USask's progress towards its sustainability strategy by Janelle Hutchinson and 2) an overview of work to integrate sustainability into teaching and learning practices by Nancy Turner and Aditi Garg.

The first presentation highlighted work across the five commitments within the strategy, identifying key successes in building awareness of and competencies to support the sustainable development goals (SDGs) across multiple audiences and key challenges in identifying funding paths to support intensive decarbonization. The second presentation highlighted how USask is deliberately constructing learning experiences across disciplines, so that USask graduates will have the skills and competencies upon graduation to build and support a sustainable future.

Key feedback was sought from Senate members regarding how to ensure USask graduates are best positioned to meet current sustainability challenges that are observed in members' fields or communities and how experiential learning opportunities and partnerships might maximize reciprocal benefit and impact.

Senate members feedback was comprehensive and offered insight across seven themes:

- Sustainability of facilities and long-term investments
 - Need to make upfront investments to achieve long-term savings; challenging to access government funding for these purposes. Important to build in efficiencies from the start. Future neighborhood planning and design will be critical to long-term changes.
- Agricultural practices and food security
 - Must find ways to balance feeding the world with environmental challenges; technology will play an increasing role. Also need policy initiatives to reduce food waste and distribute food equitably; food is key to healthy communities.
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
 - Environment, animal and human health are all interconnected; must create ways for students to think innovatively, be taught those skills.

- Mental health and well-being
 - Create sustainable living places for people to work, and work with the people who need to live and work there; more needs to be taught about how to achieve this.
- Equity and access
 - Need to go beyond built infrastructure and think about the underlying principles – are there racist principles upon which all of the assumptions are built? Need to teach students how to be disruptors and move both students and educators towards a full understanding of what sustainability is, which includes anti-racism education.
- Partnerships and experiential learning
 - Put real world challenges in front of students and let them practice applying competencies to real world problems.
- Practical solutions for housing and poverty
 - Support students in breaking down stigmas about impoverished areas of Saskatoon; have students experience the communities so they have greater perspectives and can move towards designing solutions.

Next Steps and Timelines:

USask has been incorporating Senate members feedback into the design and implementation of key teaching and learning initiatives beginning in 2024-25:

1) Sustainability and EDI Faculty Fellowships (2024-2026)

An inaugural 2-year cohort of Sustainability Faculty Fellows concluded in spring 2024, culminating with the publication of their open education resource [“Cultivating Change: A Prairie Guide to Sustainability Teaching and Learning Practices.”](#)

Given the positive feedback and successful student outcomes of the inaugural cohort, USask has launched 2 new cohorts of fellows this summer:

- Sustainability Faculty Fellowship

4 individuals have been selected from across Arts and Science, Edwards, Engineering and the School of Environment and Sustainability for this two-year fellowship. During 2024-25, these fellows will design and offer a course where students are taking action on a sustainability topic; a mapping of the feedback from the Senate members with potential educational strategies and links to the relevant SDGs will be shared to help inspire action and align with needs within local industries and communities.

- EDI Faculty Fellowship (inaugural cohort)

Six individuals have been selected from across Arts and Science, Edwards, Engineering, Kinesiology and Medicine for this two-year fellowship. During 2024-25, fellows will be reflecting on key principles within equity, diversion, inclusion, Indigenization and open education practices to ultimately support a course design to support learners’ development of EDI competencies or an Indigenization priority. Senate members feedback about the importance of equity and access emphasized the importance of developing intentional resources to support this work.

2) Enhancing Sustainability Experiences in the Curriculum Initiative (2024-2028)

Feedback from Senate highlighted the need to “embed sustainability into all curricula” and across the themes identified, the importance of increasing learners’ knowledge and skills regarding various dimensions of sustainability was repeatedly emphasized. In fall 2024, USask launched a pilot program with the Edwards School of Business to review and document sustainability related content within every course across each of the school’s programs. Once the baseline inventory is established, the school will determine sustainability-related curricular priorities to meet the ultimate goal of ensuring that every Edwards student has the opportunity to develop sustainability competencies through their program.

New resources are being sought in 2025-26 which would allow this initiative to expand beyond the pilot phase and, ideally, to complete the curricular review, goal setting, and implementation of intentionally designed content across all colleges and schools between 2025-2028. Hearing from Senators about the various challenges that their fields and communities are facing reinforced the need to make wide-spread curricular changes, with the ultimate goal of ensuring graduates are well-positioned to make positive impact in their communities.

3) Opportunities for learning within our community

USask has sought funding through the federal government’s *Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Funding Program* – the funding was requested to support community-engaged learning, which occurs when students experience learning through experiences and partnerships across the community. The specific purpose for this proposed initiative was to support the development of a new generation of socially and environmentally conscious leaders through community partnerships; one of the themes from the Senate feedback was the importance of creating pathways to give students practical experiences in the community. Unfortunately, USask recently learned that this initiative was not selected for this Funding Program but given Senate’s feedback on the importance of community-based learning, USask will continue to seek out funding sources to support enhanced opportunities for students to learn and develop sustainability competencies through community partnerships.

Alignment with the *University Plan*:

Critical Path to Sustainability: USask Sustainability Strategy 2021-2030 was endorsed by USask’s three governing bodies in 2021 and outlines five commitments and 17 goals to guide action. Sustainability appears as a strand within USask’s “weave” strategic framework, which emphasizes how progress towards our sustainability strategy supports all three of our commitments of *Courageous Curiosity*, *Boundless Collaboration* and *Inspired Communities*.