

The President's Sustainability Commission

**Sustainability
Climate
Report: Survey
of Employees
and Students**

Fall 2023



**INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH
IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

Colorado State University's President's Sustainability Commission (PSC) has been conducting a set of sustainability culture surveys of a) the student body and b) the employee population since 2017. In Fall 2023, the surveys, based on the Fall 2021 surveys developed by the PSC's Engagement Sub-committee, were updated to reduce the number of open-ended questions and streamline demographic questions, while retaining the core survey questions used in longitudinal analyses. This report summarizes the qualitative and quantitative findings from the student and employee Fall 2023 Sustainability Climate Surveys.

Methods

The Fall 2023 surveys were conducted by Colorado State University's Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRISS) in collaboration with the PSC. The surveys followed the sampling methodology of the Fall 2021 distribution, with the student survey distributed to a representative sample of 1,500 students including both graduate and undergraduate students. The employee survey was distributed to a representative sample of 1,400 employees, including faculty, administrative professionals, state classified, part-time and temporary staff. IRISS obtained representative sampling frames from CSU Institutional Research, Planning and Effectiveness. Both surveys were administered via the online platform Qualtrics.

The student response rate was 12%, with 176 respondents answering at least one content question of the survey. The employee response rate was 25%, with 356 respondents answering at least one content question of the survey. Select demographics for the student and employee respondents are shown in the tables below. For a full breakdown of demographics, see Appendix A.

Student Demographics

Demographic Attributes	N
Class Level	
Freshman	49
Sophomore	28
Junior	28
Senior	36
Masters	17
Ph.D.	16
Post Bachelors	1
Professional	1
Student Level	
Undergraduate	142
Graduate	34

Employee Demographics

Demographic Attributes	N
Employment Category	
Regular	243
Special	83
Temporary	30
Full/Part Time Status	
Full Time	313
Part Time	43
Employment Type	
Administrative Professional	204
Faculty	63
Non-Student Hourly	6
Other Salaried Employee	12
State Classified	71

Findings

CSU students and employees continue to feel that sustainability is important to CSU, with 93% of both groups strongly or somewhat agreeing with the statement “sustainability is important to CSU” (Table 1). These findings align with the findings from the 2021 survey (93% of students, 92% of employees). CSU students and employees also continue to report that sustainability is personally important, with 95% of students and 97% of employees strongly or somewhat agreeing with the statement “sustainability is important to me” (see Appendix A). This is compared to 99% of students and 95% of employees in the 2021 survey. Further, just 1% of students somewhat disagreed and 0 student strongly disagreed that sustainability is important to them in 2023 (see Appendix A). This is compared to 0% in 2021, 2% in 2019, and 5% in 2017. These findings demonstrate that the CSU community continues to place value on sustainability.

Table 1.

Sustainability is important to CSU	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students	116	69%	41	24%	5	3%	4	2%	2	1%
Employees	213	62%	106	31%	17	5%	4	1%	4	1%

Related to what CSU students and employees designate as the most important sustainability initiatives that CSU should continue to invest in, students identified solar and wind energy production, increasing energy efficiency, and alternative transportation options and accessibility as the top three (Chart 1). Employees identified requiring CSU events to be zero-waste, more education on campus composting, and improving single stream recycle and waste diversion as the most important initiatives (Chart 2).

Chart 1.

Most Important Initiatives for Students

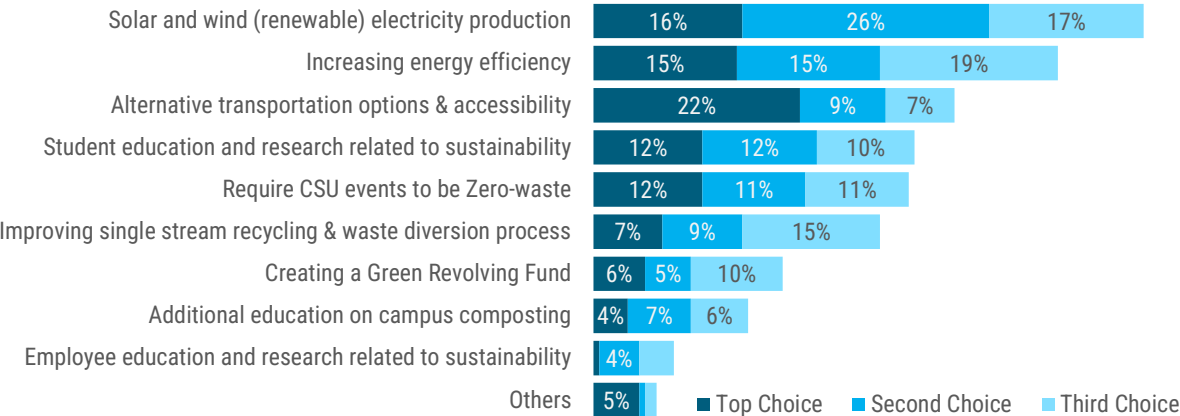
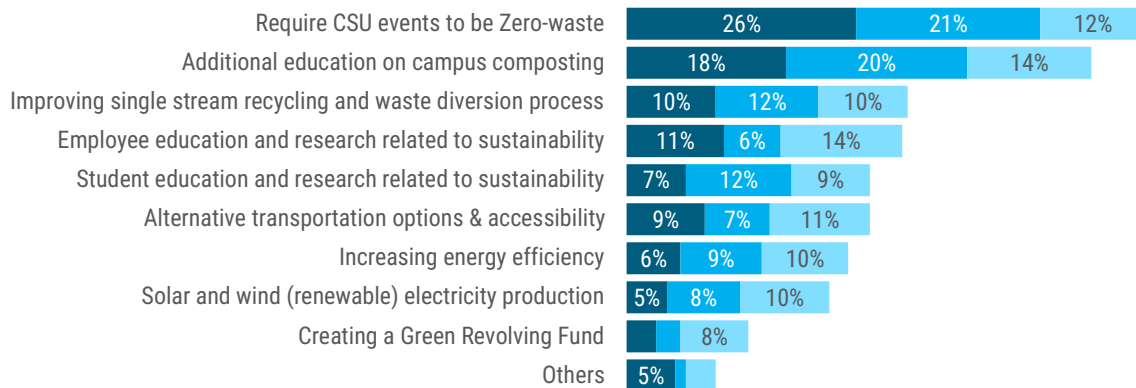


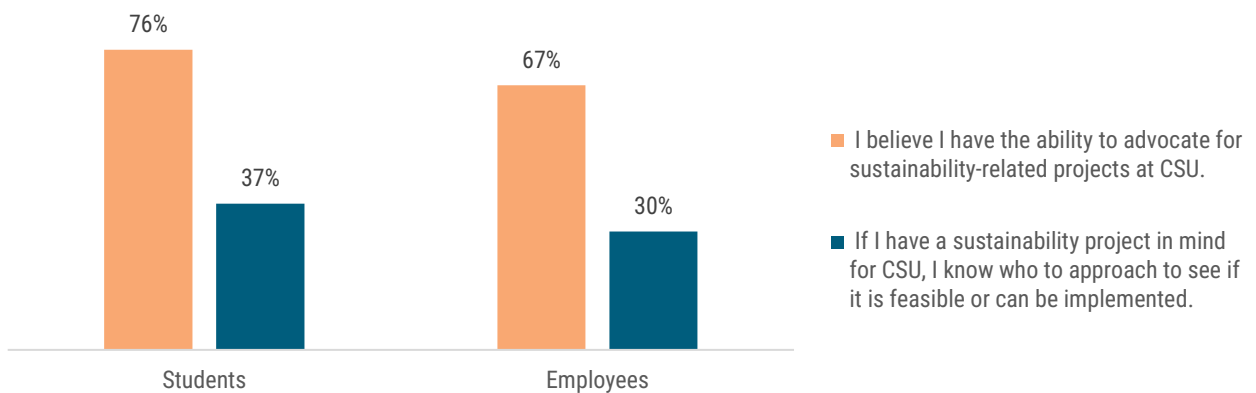
Chart 2.
Most Important Initiatives for Employees



Employees were asked an additional question about CSU’s use of resources related to sustainability efforts. The majority of employees (76%) said they would like to see CSU devote more financial resources to sustainability projects and initiatives on campus, such as a CSU Sustainability Fund. Also related to sustainability attitudes, students were asked how important their knowledge of sustainability will be to them in their career after CSU. Seventy-seven percent of students said it would be very or somewhat important. Just 3% said it would not be at all important to them. Relatedly, employees were asked how important their knowledge of sustainability is in their day-to-day work at CSU, and the majority (64%) said it is very or somewhat important. Just 3% said it was not at all important (see Appendix A).

A possible area where CSU could improve its efforts related to sustainability is providing more guidance to both students and employees related to individuals spearheading sustainability initiatives on campus. While the majority of students (76%) and employees (67%) said they believe they have the ability to advocate for sustainability-related projects at CSU, a minority in both groups said they know who to approach to see if their sustainability project is feasible or can be implemented (37% of students, 30% of employees) (Chart 3).

Chart 3.
Implementing Sustainability Initiatives on Campus



Related to sustainability behaviors, the majority of CSU students and employees attend sustainability events on campus once a semester or more (61% for both). Additionally, the majority of CSU students (74%) reported engaging in volunteer activities once a semester or more. A slim majority of employees (52%) said in the past year they have attended sustainability-related educational or professional development events or training on campus once a semester or more (see Appendix A). Both CSU students and employees continue to participate in a variety of sustainability practices at CSU, reflecting a trend from prior years. Most frequently identified practices by students were using a reusable water bottle (95%), turning off lights in unoccupied rooms (93%), and recycling (92%). Most frequently identified practices by employees were recycling (96%), printing less (78%), and composting (50%) (Table 2, see Appendix A for full table).

Chart 2. Top Three Sustainability Practices

I participate in the following sustainable practices at CSU	Responses	
	N	%
STUDENTS		
Using a reusable water bottle	160	95%
Turning off lights in unoccupied rooms	158	93%
Recycling	155	92%
EMPLOYEES		
Recycling	325	96%
Printing less	264	78%
Composting	169	50%

CSU students and employees show improvement in their familiarity with operational, environmental, and social sustainability initiatives on campus, with the majority of students and employees saying they are extremely, very, or somewhat familiar with these types of initiatives. This is compared with 2021, where a minority of both employees and students said they were aware of these initiatives. Interestingly, a minority of students (44%) said that CSU’s sustainability reputation was important in their decision to attend CSU (see Appendix A). This could point to a need for CSU to increase marketing and awareness around their sustainability initiatives to prospective students.

CSU continues to improve in its rates of students and employees saying that CSU is successful at communicating that the university operates on traditional and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne and Ute Nations and Peoples, with 82% of students and 81% of employees saying CSU is extremely, very, or somewhat successful. These results compare to 76% of students and just 46% of employees in 2021, and 51% of students and 31% of employees in 2019. Students and employees were also asked about the success of CSU in placing equal value on the environment, economy, and social equity. A strong majority of students (89%) and employees (88%) said that CSU was extremely, very, or somewhat successful in these efforts (see Appendix A).

Students and employees were asked, in an open-ended question, if there was anything else related to sustainability at CSU they would like to share. Responses to this question were qualitatively analyzed using thematic coding. Both students and employees said they would like to see increased use of recycling and composting around campus (12% of respondents to this

question; Student N=7, Employee N=6). Both students and employees mentioned the challenges they face regarding transportation to and from campus as well as parking on campus (6% of respondents to this question; Student N=4, Employee N=3). Additionally, 19% of students that responded to the question mentioned concerns with how much water is used to irrigate the various lawns and fields around campus (N=5), and 15% expressed concerns over CSU's efforts to present itself as a sustainable campus without making more difficult sustainability-related commitments (N=4). Of employee respondents to this question, 6% discussed the need to update or retrofit buildings on campus using more sustainable materials and methods. Six percent of employee respondents to this question also expressed concerns over how hierarchies in employment structure at CSU might inhibit sustainability efforts. For a full count of thematic codes related to this question see Appendix A.

Conclusion

The Fall 2023 survey demonstrates that CSU students and employees continue to place a high value on sustainability personally and believe that CSU centers sustainability in the campus ethos. Students and employees are aware of and engaged in various sustainability-related efforts and initiatives on campus and feel empowered to bring forth their own sustainability initiatives at CSU. One area of improvement for sustainability efforts at CSU is to provide more guidance to both students and employees related to who campus community members can approach when they have an idea related to a sustainability project to ensure the project is feasible at the university.

Appendix A

Respondent Demographics

Student Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	N	%
American Indian or Alaska Native	7	3%
Asian	5	2%
Black or African American	3	13%
Hispanic or Latino	23	6%
International	10	3%
Multi-Racial	6	1%
No response, prefer not to answer	7	4%
White	121	69%

Gender	N	%
Female	118	67%
Male	58	33%

Note: race/ethnicity & gender categories in student and employee demographics due to nature of data from Institutional Research

Employee Demographics

Race/Ethnicity (N=361)	N	%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4	1%
Asian	21	6%
Black or African American	8	2%
Hispanic or Latino	34	9%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0%
Other	9	2%
No response, prefer not to answer	26	7%
White	259	72%

Gender	N	%
Male	103	31%
Female	209	63%
Transgender	1	0%
Non-binary	4	1%
Self-identify	2	1%
Prefer not to answer	19	6%

Sustainability Attitudes

Student Sustainability Attitudes

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements (N=168)	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sustainability is important to CSU.	116	69%	41	24%	5	3%	4	2%	2	1%
Sustainability is important to me.	112	67%	47	28%	7	4%	2	1%	0	0%
I believe I have the ability to advocate for sustainability-related projects at CSU.	55	33%	72	43%	32	19%	8	5%	1	1%
If I have a sustainability project in mind for CSU, I know who to approach to see if it is feasible or can be implemented.	27	16%	35	21%	35	21%	42	25%	29	17%

How important was CSU's sustainability reputation in your decision to attend CSU? (N=163)	Very Important		Somewhat Important		Neutral		Not Very Important		Not At All Important	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	19	12%	52	32%	48	29%	22	13%	22	13%

Employee Sustainability Attitudes

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements (N=343)	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Sustainability is important to CSU.	213	62%	106	31%	17	5%	4	1%	4	1%
Sustainability is important to the students who attend CSU.	138	40%	144	42%	51	15%	7	2%	3	1%
I believe I have the ability to advocate for sustainability-related projects at CSU.	106	31%	126	37%	81	24%	22	6%	9	3%
If I have a sustainability project in mind for CSU, I know who to approach to see if it is feasible or can be implemented.	55	16%	47	14%	91	26%	93	27%	58	17%
Sustainability is important to me.	258	75%	75	22%	7	2%	1	0%	583	1%

Sustainability Behaviors

Student Sustainable Practices

I participate in the following sustainable practices at CSU: (N=169)	Responses	
	N	%
Using a reusable water bottle	160	95%
Turning off lights in unoccupied rooms	158	93%
Recycling	155	92%
Utilizing alternative transportation (e.g., bike, bus, carpooling)	138	82%
Printing less	136	80%
Composting	72	43%
Setting the thermostat warmer in the summer and cooler in the winter to minimize energy use	71	42%
Participating in a sustainability-related college or department program, student organization, or campus event	44	26%
Participating in the CSU Symposium for Inclusive Excellence or other sustainability trainings/lectures at CSU	21	12%
*Other	5	3%

**Note: Other includes themes such as divesting from fossil fuels, sustainable landscaping practices, and adding more bus lines to the south of the city.*

Student Volunteer Practices

How many times within the past year have you engaged in any volunteer activities? (N=163)	Never		Once A Semester		Two To Four Times A Semesters		Five To Ten Times A Semester		More Than Ten Times A Semester	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	42	26%	51	31%	47	29%	9	6%	14	9%

Employee Sustainability Practices

I participate in the following sustainable practices at CSU: (N=338)	Responses	
	N	%
Recycling	325	96%
Printing less	264	78%
Composting	169	50%
Utilizing alternative transportation (e.g., bike, bus, carpooling)	153	45%
Setting the thermostat warmer in the summer and cooler in the winter to minimize energy use	151	45%
I integrate sustainability initiatives into my position as an employee	145	43%
Participating in the CSU Symposium for Inclusive Excellence or other sustainability trainings/lectures at CSU	86	25%
Participating in a sustainability-related college or department program, student organization, or campus event	67	20%
Other	31	9%
I teach a module/section about sustainability in my course	28	8%
I teach a course focused on sustainability	10	3%

**Note: Other includes themes such as making CSU buildings more efficient, reducing water use on campus, more charging stations for hybrid cars, ending relations with corporations that exploit the environment, and offering more options to purchase local food.*

Student Sustainability Activities

How frequently do you attend sustainability events on campus including lectures, Earth Week activities, or student organization events? (N=163)	Never		Once A Semester		Two To Four Times A Semesters		Five To Ten Times A Semester		More Than Ten Times A Semester	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	63	39%	64	39%	27	17%	4	2%	5	3%

Employee Sustainability Activities

How frequently do you attend sustainability events on campus including lectures, Earth Week activities, or student organization events? (N=333)	Never		Once A Semester		Two To Four Times A Semesters		Five To Ten Times A Semester		More Than Ten Times A Semester	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	130	39%	148	44%	48	14%	6	2%	1	0%

Sustainability Awareness

Student Awareness: Operational

How familiar are you with operational / environmental sustainability initiatives on campus like the Eco Actions campaign, LEED buildings, and renewable electricity projects, etc.? (N=163)	Extremely Familiar		Very Familiar		Somewhat Familiar		Not Very Familiar		Not At All Familiar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	8	5%	24	15%	68	42%	46	28%	17	10%

How familiar are you with alternative transportation options to/from campus including Transfort, MAX, e-scooters and e-bikes, biking, etc.? (N=163)	Extremely Familiar		Very Familiar		Somewhat Familiar		Not Very Familiar		Not At All Familiar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	44	27%	69	42%	38	23%	12	7%	0	0%

Employee Awareness: Operational

How familiar are you with operational / environmental sustainability initiatives on campus like the Eco Actions campaign, LEED buildings, and renewable electricity projects, etc.? (N=337)	Extremely Familiar		Very Familiar		Somewhat Familiar		Not Very Familiar		Not At All Familiar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	14	4%	42	12%	148	44%	88	26%	45	13%

How familiar are you with alternative transportation options to/from campus including Transfort, MAX, e-scooters and e-bikes, biking, etc.? (N=336)	Extremely Familiar		Very Familiar		Somewhat Familiar		Not Very Familiar		Not At All Familiar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	61	18%	133	40%	104	31%	28	8%	10	3%

Student Awareness: Social

How familiar are you with social sustainability initiatives on campus like CSU efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion, first generation student support, living wages for CSU employees, etc.? projects, etc.? (N=163)	Extremely Familiar		Very Familiar		Somewhat Familiar		Not Very Familiar		Not At All Familiar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	17	10%	39	24%	71	44%	32	20%	4	2%

Employee Awareness: Social

How familiar are you with social sustainability initiatives on campus like CSU efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion, first generation student support, living wages for CSU employees, etc.? projects, etc.? (N=335)	Extremely Familiar		Very Familiar		Somewhat Familiar		Not Very Familiar		Not At All Familiar	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	30	9%	93	28%	141	42%	52	16%	19	6%

Employee Understanding of Sustainability

Since you started working at CSU, how much has your understanding of sustainability increased?(N=334)	Completely		A Great Deal		Somewhat		Very Little		Not At All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	10	3%	104	31%	145	43%	61	18%	14	4%

General Perspectives on Sustainability at CSU

Theme	Student		Employee		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Recycling/Composting	7	26%	6	7%	13	12%
Transportation	4	15%	3	4%	7	6%
Water Use	5	19%			5	5%
Infrastructure Improvements			5	6%	5	5%
Employee/Structure-Related Barriers to Sustainability			5	6%	5	5%
Greenwashing	4	15%			4	4%
Land Acknowledgement	3	11%			3	3%
Fossil Fuel Divestment	3	11%			3	3%
Student-Related Barriers to Sustainability			3	4%	3	3%
Advertising			3	4%	3	3%
Sustainability Education			2	2%	2	2%