

RESULTS REPORT – Survey of Knowledge and Attitudes About Environmental Sustainability Among Members of the ASU Community

The purpose of this survey was to get a sense of what ASU faculty, staff, and students know and feel about issues of sustainability, particularly the environmental component of sustainability. The survey was intended to benefit the campus community by providing information that may help to improve the effectiveness of sustainability education and outreach efforts.

Participants in the course SD 3535 *Outreach Skills for Sustainability*, including students and instructor Laura England, developed the survey. Select Survey's IR Survey tool, which insures complete anonymity of respondents, was used to implement the survey online. The survey was open February 12th-27th, 2013 and was publicized primarily through student, faculty and staff listservs. The number of respondents ranged from 747-854 (some respondents skipped questions); 66% of respondents were students, 15% were faculty, and 19% were staff.

A majority of the respondents expressed concern for issues of environmental sustainability, with particular concern about water and climate change. For many respondents, concern for sustainability influences their actions. Read below for detailed results related to:

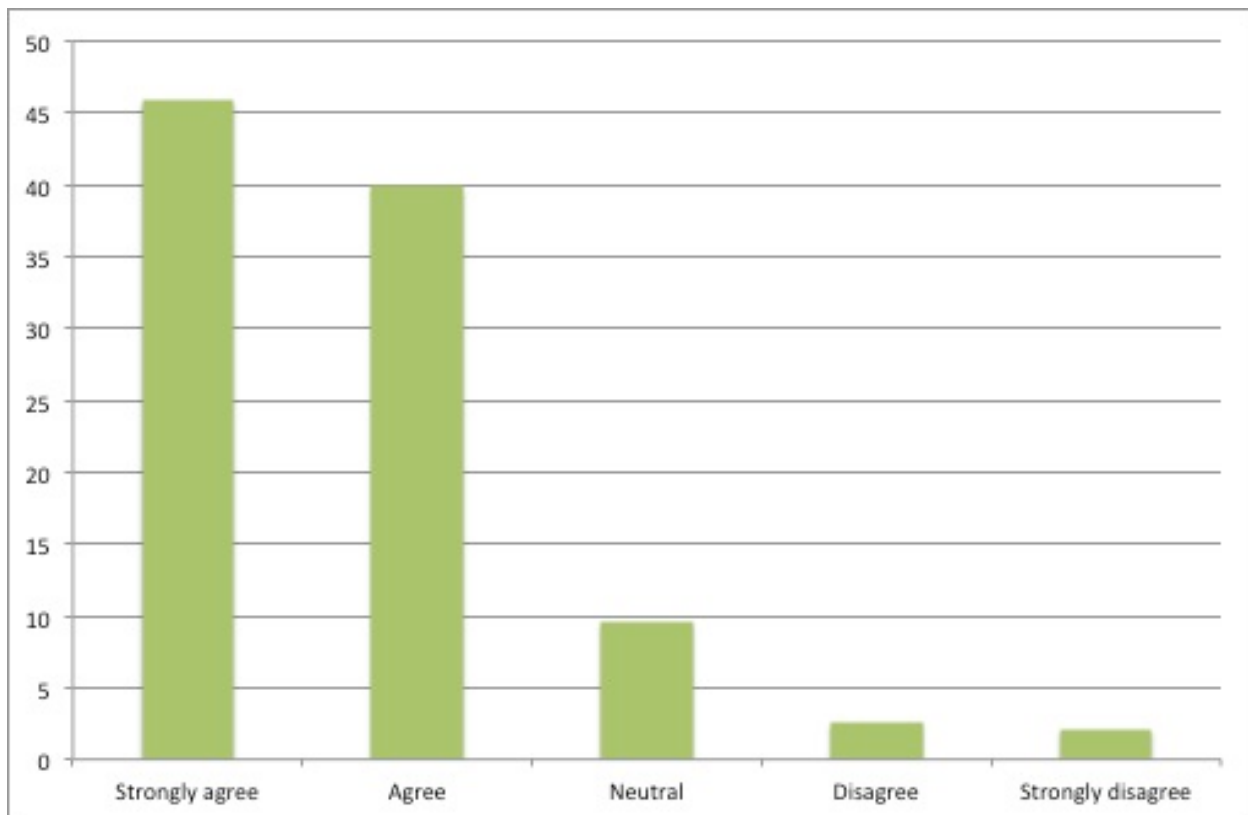
- Understanding of Sustainable Development
- Concern for Sustainability
- Water
- Climate Change
- Sustainability Actions
- Campus Sustainability

Please contact Laura England at engandle@appstate.edu for more information.

UNDERSTANDING OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (SD)

- Respondents have an incomplete understanding of sustainable development (SD). When asked what SD requires (“select all that apply”), 89% selected “a healthy environment with functioning ecosystems,” 78% selected “economic development that engages local populations,” and only 62% selected “social justice and equity.” All of these are part of sustainable development’s triple bottom line (AKA “the Three Es”). Some respondents demonstrated misunderstanding of SD in that 30% selected “ongoing global economic growth,” which is antithetical to SD.
- However, many respondents understand the connection between the environment and economy: 89.7% say (strongly agree or agree) that environmental conditions will play an increasingly important role in the future of our nation’s economy. And 85.8% say (strongly agree or agree) that the sustainability of a thriving economy is dependent upon a healthy environment and equitable society (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Q: *Indicate how you feel about the following statement: “The sustainability of a thriving economy is dependent upon a healthy environment and equitable society.”*



CONCERN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

- The majority of respondents (71%) say that sustainability is very important or important to their profession (current or intended).
- An even larger majority (88%) say that sustainability is very important or important to their personal/home lives.
- There was a disparity in optimism about the likelihood of solving environmental challenges as compared to creating equitable societies (see Figure 2).
- Water pollution ranked as respondents' top environmental concern at the local level while climate change was their top concern at the global level (see Figure 3).
- Access to clean water and safe drinking water ranked as respondents' top concern among a suite of social justice and equity issues (see Figure 4).

Figure 2. Qs: *How likely do you think it is that the global community will make progress in addressing environmental challenges over the next 20 years? AND How likely do you think it is that the global community will make progress in creating equitable societies over the next 20 years?*

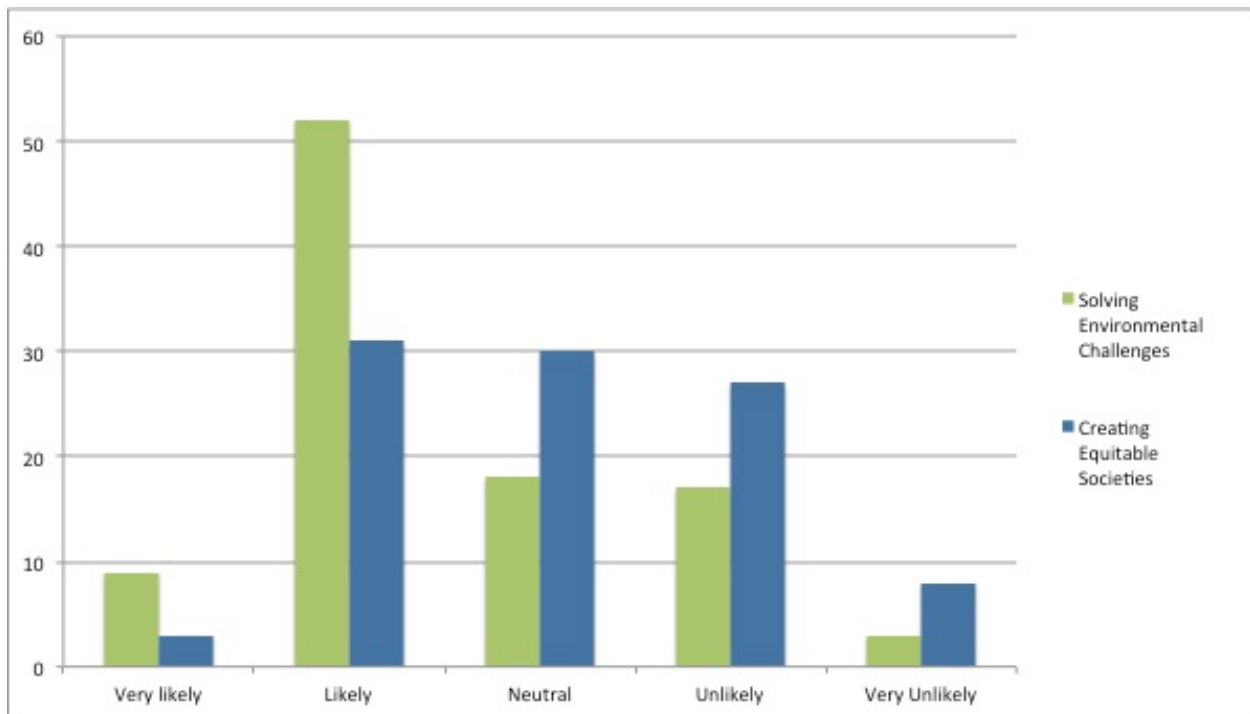


Figure 3. Qs: Which of the following environmental issues are you most concerned about having an impact on our local community or region? AND Which of the following environmental issues are you most concerned about having an impact at the global level. (Respondents were instructed to select no more than 4 issues in each question.)

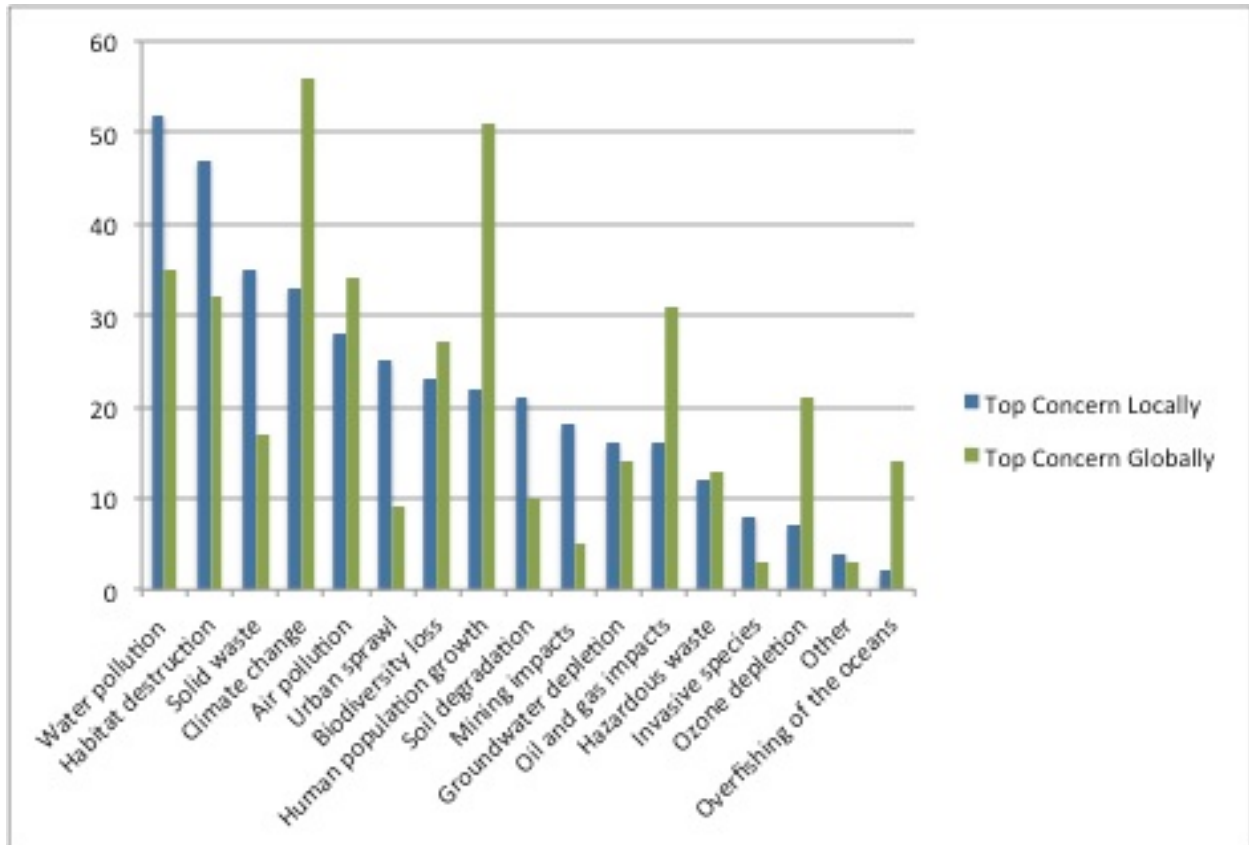
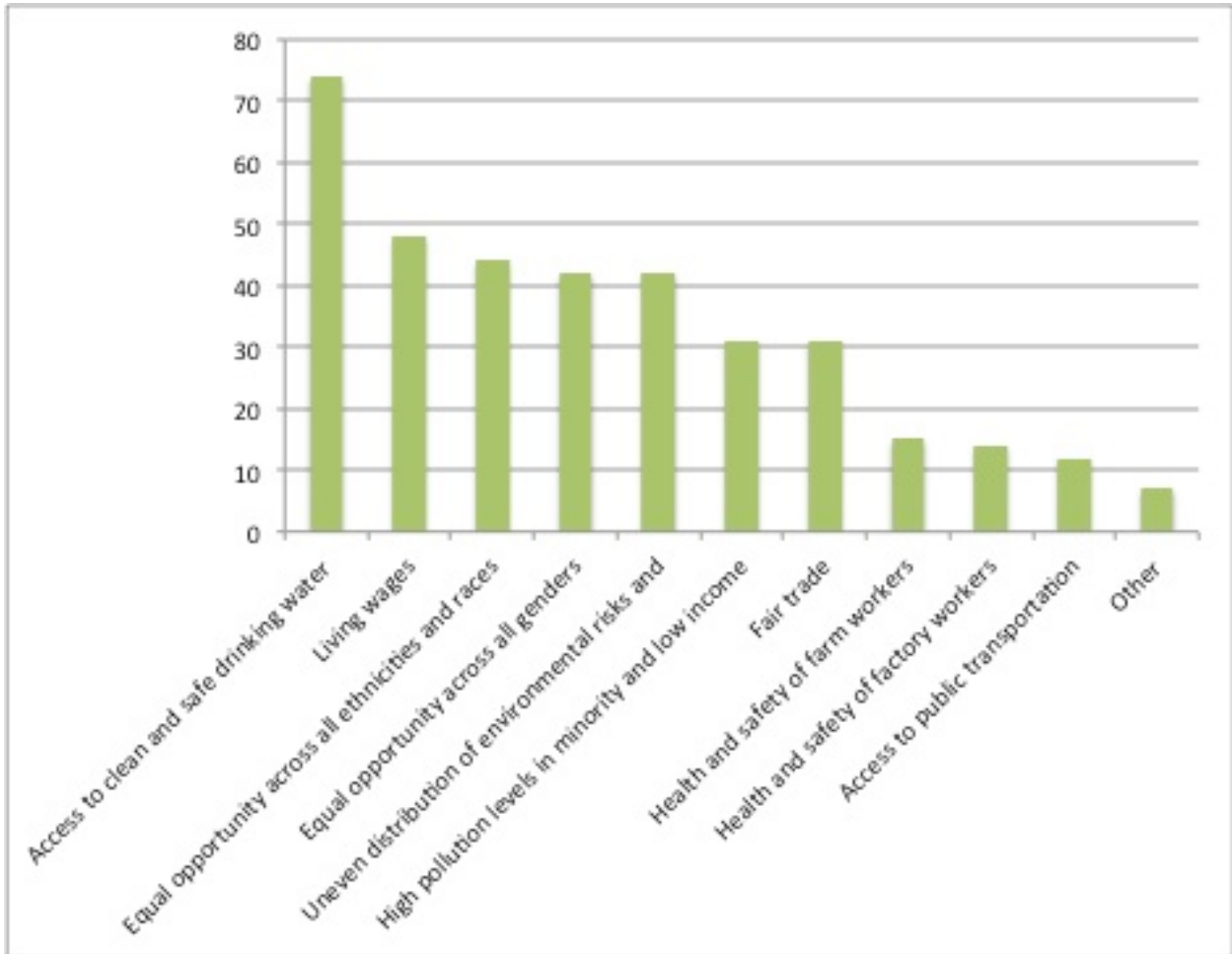


Figure 4. Q: Which of the following social justice and equity issues are you most concerned about? (Respondents were instructed to select no more than 4 issues).



WATER

- Water pollution ranked as respondents' #1 environmental concern at the local level (52% chose it), and #3 environmental issue of concern at the global level (35% chose it) – see Figure 3.
- Access to safe/clean drinking water ranked as respondents' #1 concern among a suite of social justice and equity issues (74% chose it) – see Figure 4.
- Despite respondents' apparent concern about water issues, only 21% knew that the source of tap water for campus. Is the Norris Branch Reservoir.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Climate change was ranked as the #1 issue of concern for the global environment (56% chose it), and #4 issue of concern for the local environment (33% chose it) – see Figure 3.
- A majority of respondents (67%) strongly agree or agree that climate change is one of the most serious threats to health and safety – see Figure 5.
- An even larger majority of respondents (83.8%) say (strongly agree or agree) that human actions, including emissions of greenhouse gases, are the cause of climate change – see Figure 6.
- Despite respondents' apparent concern about climate change, only 23% of respondents knew that 350 ppm is considered by many scientists to be the safe upper limit of atmospheric concentrations of CO₂.

Figure 5. Q: *Indicate how you feel about the following statement: "Climate change is one of the most serious threats to the health and safety of my family and my community."*

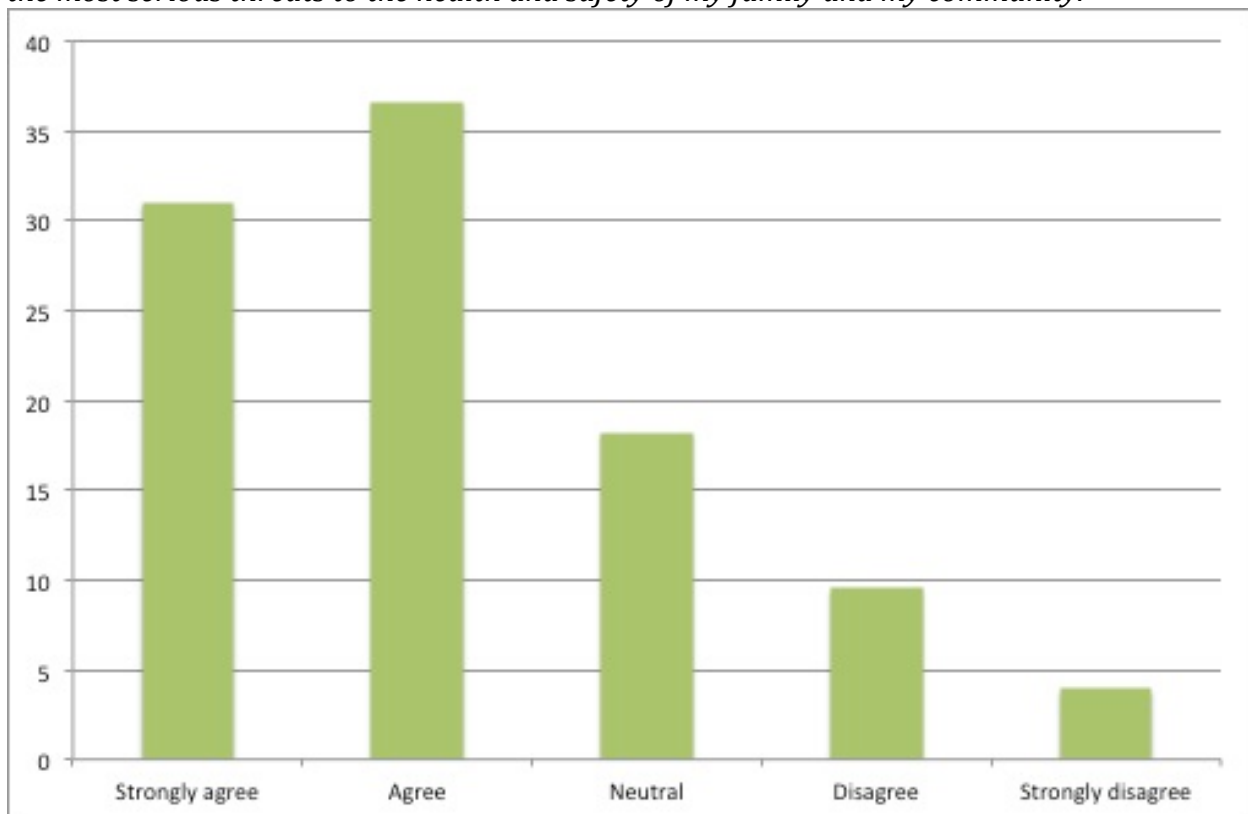
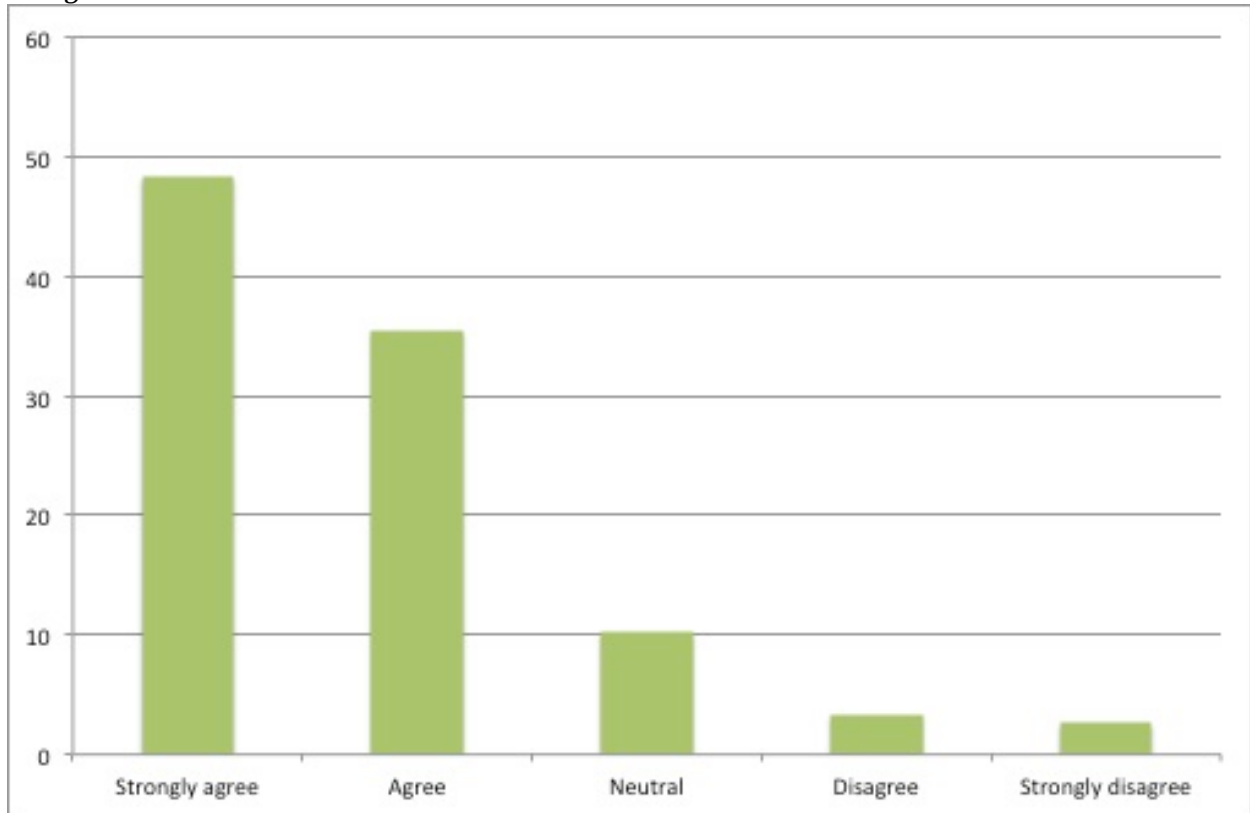


Figure 6. Q: Indicate how you feel about the following statement: "Human actions, including emissions of greenhouse gases, are causing warming of the planet, melting of glaciers, and rising sea levels."



SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS

- When asked which types of actions are the most critical to achieving sustainability, respondents ranked changes in individual behaviors as most important (59% chose it) followed by government intervention (27% chose it).
- When asked how sustainability figures into their everyday decisions, 56% of respondents said sustainability is part of everything they do OR factors in a lot (see Figure 7).
- Respondents ranked the most important sustainability activities as reducing household energy use (58% chose), buying local (55%), and recycling (53%), while the top sustainability activities that respondents participate in include recycling (90%), reducing household energy use (77%), and buying less stuff (67%) – see Figure 8.
- A majority of respondents say (strongly agree or agree) they would participate in sustainable practices more if they had more time (59.2%), more money (71.1%), or a clearer way to measure and see the difference it makes (53.7%) – see Figure 9.

Figure 7. Q: How does concern for sustainability figure into your everyday decisions?

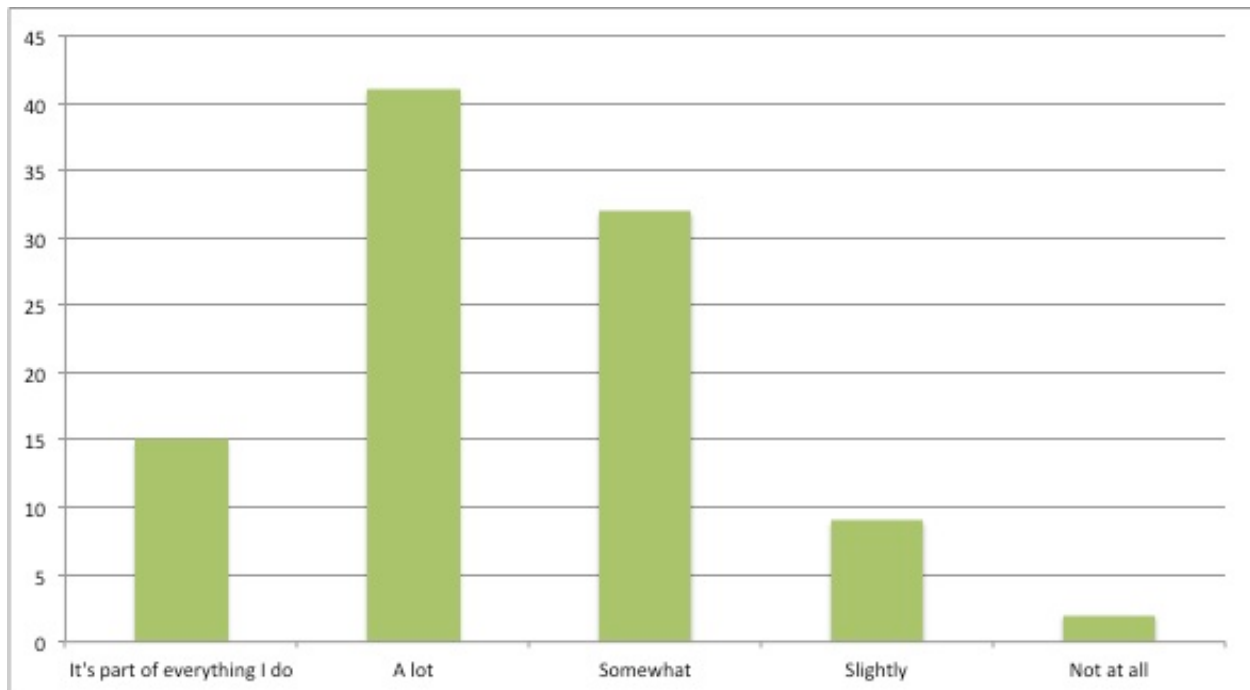


Figure 8. Qs: Which activities do you think make the most difference in terms of individuals contributing to sustainability? (Respondents were instructed to select no more than 3 activities) AND Which of the following sustainability activities do you participate in? (Respondents were instructed to select all that apply.)

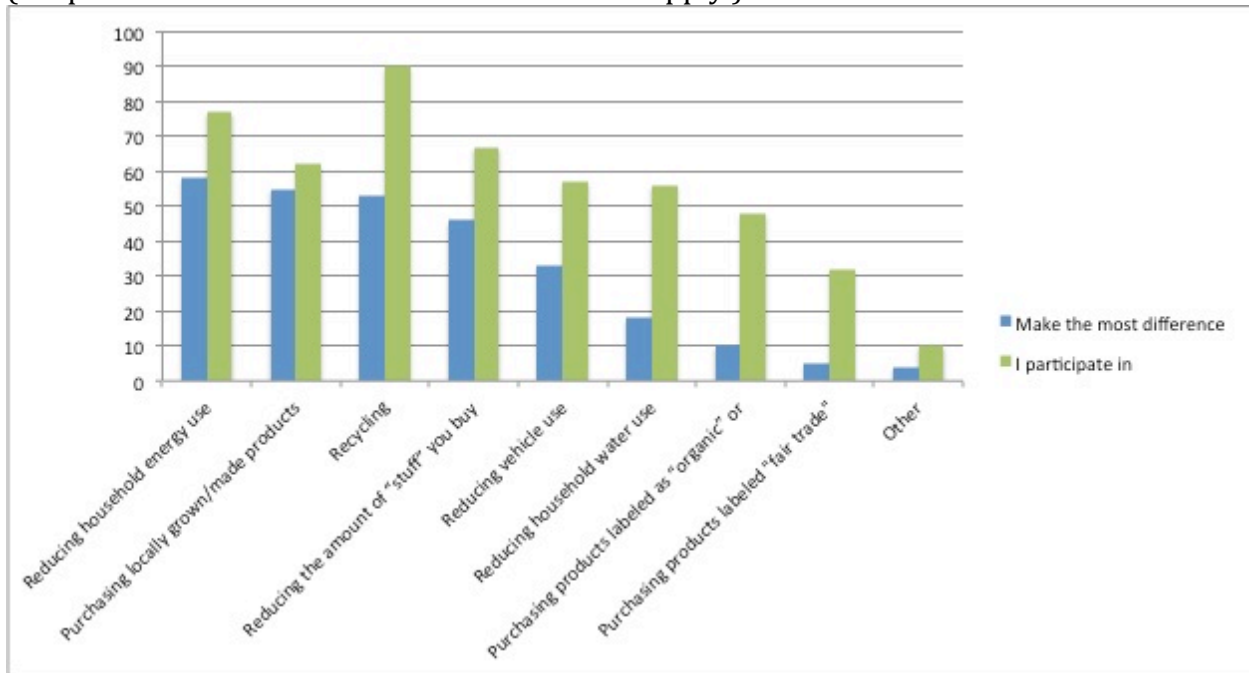
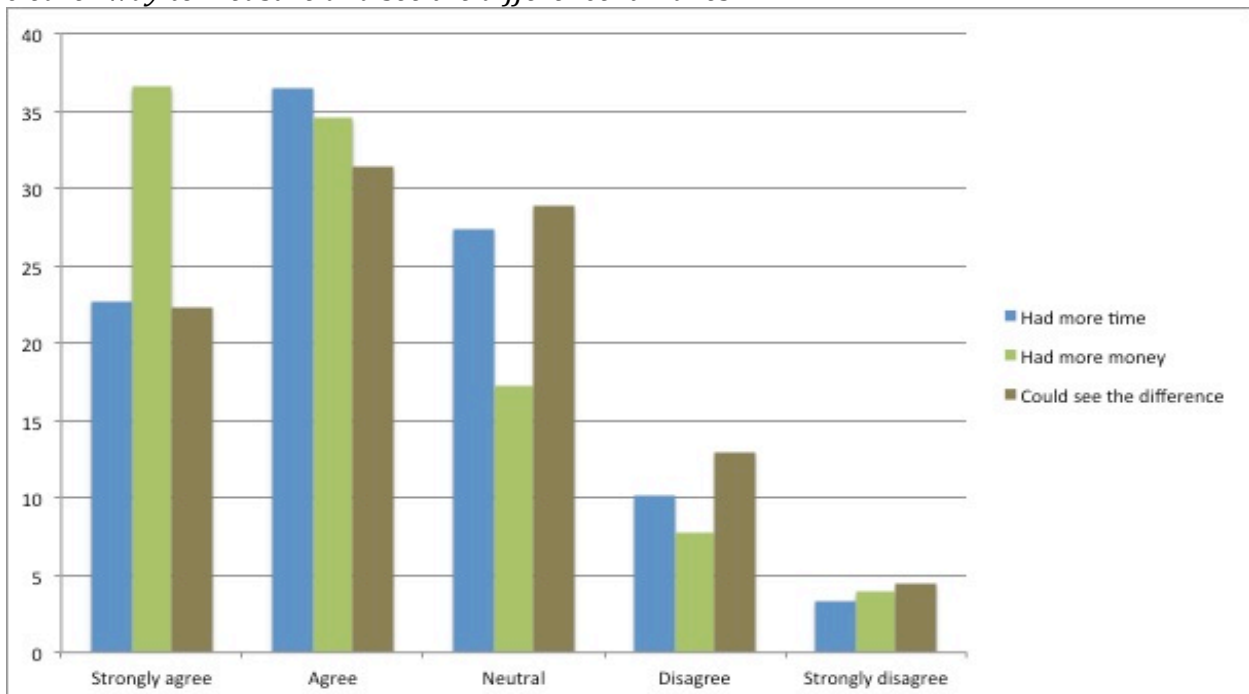


Figure 9. Q: Indicate how you feel about the following statements: "I would participate in sustainable practices more if I had more money," "I would participate in sustainable practices more if I had more time," AND "I would participate in sustainable practices more if I had a clearer way to measure and see the difference it makes."



CAMPUS SUSTAINABILITY

- Respondents lack awareness about the existence of several significant campus sustainability initiatives (see Figure 10). Fewer than half of respondents were aware of:
 - ASU’s sustainability graduation pledge (27%)
 - ASU’s commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2050 (34%)
 - ASU’s commitment to becoming a zero waste campus by 2022 (44%)
 - Students fees of \$10 per semester toward renewable energy projects to offset the use of fossil fuels (45%)

Figure 10. Q: Which of the following sustainability initiatives were you aware are happening on the ASU campus? (Respondents were instructed to select all that apply.)

