

# Sustainability Knowledge, Barriers, and Motivations of UW-Eau Claire Students

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## Problem

UW-Eau Claire is one of the greenest campuses in the country as rated by the Princeton Review 5 years in a row. It has multiple sustainability-minded organizations on campus (e.g., The Student Office of Sustainability (SOS), The Housing Office of Sustainability, and The Campus Sustainability Network). However, multiple offices mean multiple identities, which can potentially confuse students because of a lack of one cohesive voice. For example, despite its \$200,000 yearly budget paid by students' own segregated fees, 31.8% of students in a recent survey stated they did not know, or were unsure, that our campus had a SOS. Nearly 19% did not know of any activities the SOS performed (see associated CERCA poster: Hoege et al.).

Despite the large on-campus presence of sustainability organizations, and the thousands of dollars spent over the years to increase behavioral prevalence, there are still many students on campus who fail to perform sustainable behaviors (e.g., 39% do not always separate trash from recyclables, 62% don't use reusable grocery bags when shopping, and 83% have likely placed trash in the wrong bins in Davies).

Therefore, the purposes of our study were to determine

- a baseline of student knowledge of sustainability that future on-campus sustainability fellows can use as a comparator to determine; the efficacy of continued sustainability education
- why students do and do not perform sustainable behaviors; and,
- what some potential motivators could be to increase their behavioral intentions.

Our overall goal is to find ways to help the campus community better live-up to our aspiration of "being green."

## Methods

### The Survey

Students in CJ 374 (Integrated Strategic Communication Campaign Design and Analysis) surveyed 779 Eau Claire students via an online survey. Four open-ended questions assessed students' knowledge about sustainability, and their barriers and motivations to adopting sustainable behaviors.

### Analysis

To analyze the open-ended data, the research team first open-coded the responses creating preliminary coding categories. Then, the team developed a formal coding scheme. Research assistants were trained on this coding scheme, and pairs of research assistants coded all the responses into categories. Coders then resolved any disagreements in their coding until 100% agreement was reached for each question.

## Key Takeaways

### Marketing a more comprehensive definition of sustainability needs to be emphasized

- Students have an unclear definition of what sustainability is.
- The most prevalent responses mention maintenance, followed by environmental considerations. These definitions don't take into account a future orientation, and also fail to mention social and economic pillars that are commonly cited as being pillars of sustainability.

### Messaging needs to highlight the "ease" of performing sustainable behaviors - and environmental changes need to be implemented on campus to help foster more behaviors

- The top reason students say they don't perform sustainable behaviors is due to inconvenience.
- For example, students in residence halls must walk cardboard to the basement to be recycled. Bins should be placed on every floor to make recycling of cardboard more convenient for students.

### Benefits of living a more sustainable life must be explained

- Students indicate they would be more likely to perform sustainable behaviors if they were provided evidence of its efficacy.
- "REAL" numbers need to be provided to students to show them why being sustainable is in their personal interests.

### Incentives for performing sustainable behaviors must be provided

- Provide rewards to students for doing the behaviors you want them to do.
- For example, the dorm that uses the least amount of water per student might get a pizza party.

### Create a mechanism that "forces" students to think about sustainability issues

- For example, an energy counter/computer that shows real-time energy consumption on-campus. This could be shown in a prominent place in Davies Center, and be a permanent display that students can interact with.
- Require one R3 of the LE Core be a sustainability-related course.

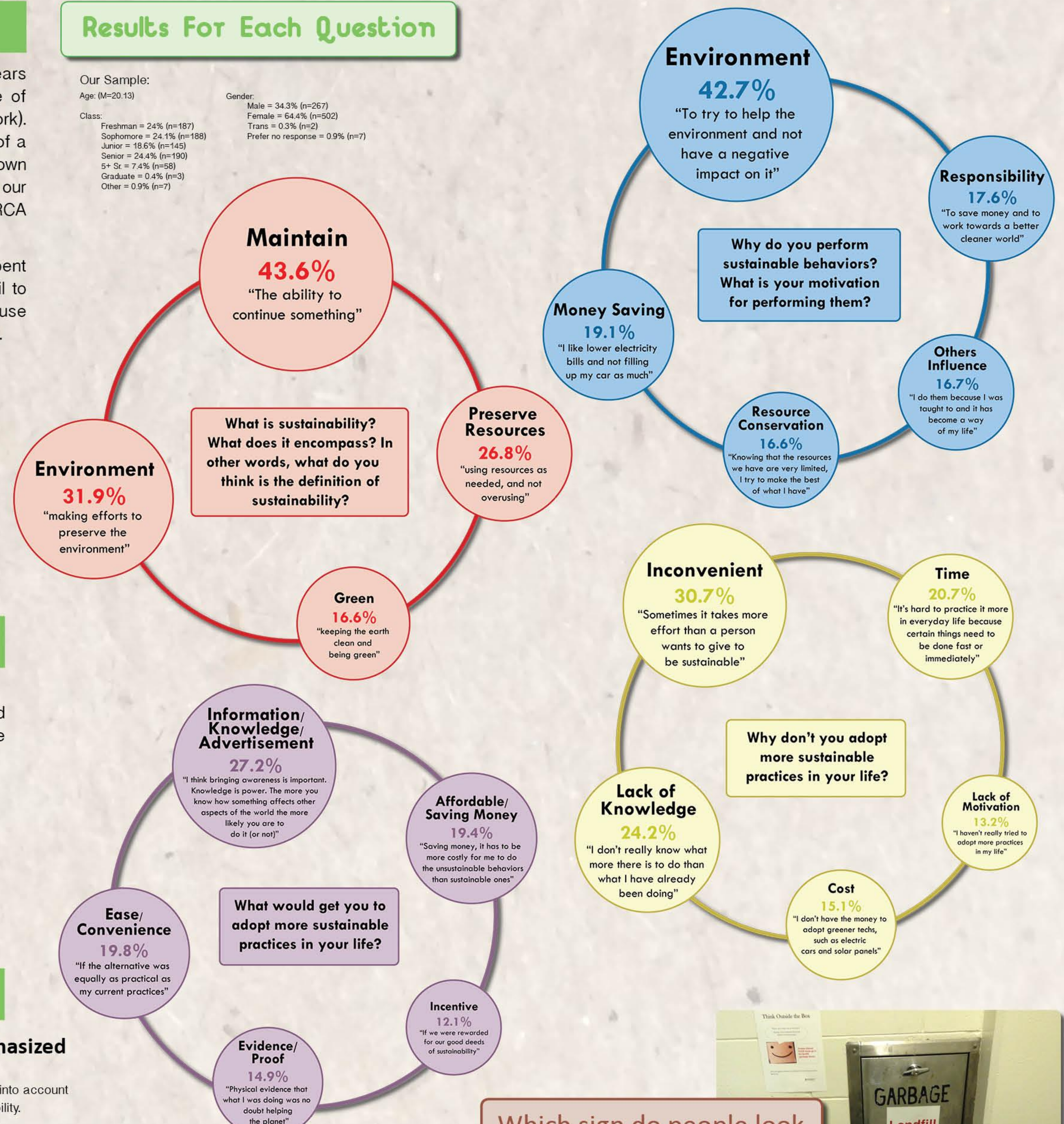
## Results For Each Question

Our Sample:

Age: (M=20.13)

Class:  
Freshman = 24% (n=187)  
Sophomore = 24.1% (n=188)  
Junior = 18.6% (n=145)  
Senior = 24.4% (n=190)  
5+ Sr = 7.4% (n=58)  
Graduate = 0.4% (n=3)  
Other = 0.9% (n=7)

Gender:  
Male = 34.3% (n=267)  
Female = 64.4% (n=502)  
Trans = 0.3% (n=2)  
Prefer no response = 0.9% (n=7)



Which sign do people look at to throw things away?

