



VI. METHODOLOGY, REVIEW PROCESS, AND RATIONALE

Methodology

The National Wildlife Federation's State of the Campus Environment, a National Report Card on Environmental Performance and Sustainability in Higher Education, is based on questionnaires administered via the World Wide Web to presidents, provosts and facilities chiefs of accredited degree-granting US higher education institutions. The surveying was conducted 12.6.2000—4.19.2001 by Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) through its web polling site, PSRAOnline.com. In consultation with the National Wildlife Federation, PSRA designed the questionnaires, including the web interface, managed the fieldwork, and processed the data collected.

Schools and their administrators were identified through Higher Education Publication's 2000 Higher Education Directory, which lists accredited four- and two-year degree-granting US colleges and universities¹⁴ and the name and contact information for administrators at these schools. The Directory lists 3,907 institutions, all of which were included in this study.¹⁵

At each school, we attempted to administer three separate surveys: one to the campus president or executive officer, one to the provost or chief academic officer, and a third to the chief of facilities or plant operations. The codebook indicates which questions were posed to which administrator. In general, the president was contacted to answer questions about the campus' overall environmental management strategy; the provost about how environmental issues are addressed in the curriculum; and the facilities chief about the details of campus programs for waste, energy, grounds, and transportation.

At the start of the study, each school's president was sent a hard copy letter explaining the study and inviting him or her to participate in the president's survey. This communication was followed up by e-mail invitations to the provost and facilities chief. The 2000 Higher Education Directory listed email addresses for 2,392 provosts and 1,283 facilities chiefs, as well as 2,780 presidents. For all respondents for whom we had an e-mail address (including presidents), up to three reminder messages were sent to encourage participation. For respondents for whom we did not have an e-mail address, we attempted

¹⁴ For purposes of inclusion in the Higher Education Directory, accreditation means any of the following: the institution is accredited at the college level by an accrediting agency recognized by the US Secretary of Education; the institution holds pre-accredited status with such an agency (whose pre-accreditation status is recognized by the US Secretary of Education); or the institution is accredited at the college level by an agency recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA)/Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (COPRA).

¹⁵ The Directory also lists college and university system offices, but these were excluded in favor of surveying only individual institutions. In the case of schools organized within a system, all affiliated institutions were invited separately to participate in the study. Respondents were instructed to answer the questions for their campus only. Thus, for this study, "school" and "institution" mean "campus."

to identify one by asking a referral question at the end of the survey if we were able to contact another administrator at the school. For example, if we had the e-mail address for a school's provost but not for the president or facilities chief, we asked the provost to provide the names and e-mail addresses of the president and facilities chief. This technique yielded additional contact information in 354 of the cases in which we asked for it (10 presidents, 56 provosts, 288 facilities chiefs).

Each respondent was assigned a unique username and password pair to gain access to the survey and identify his or her responses. Users could take the survey at any time of day or night, seven days a week, and could stop the survey at any time and return later to finish. Contacts with the website were monitored for indication of technical trouble, and users were able to e-mail PSRAOnline with any questions or problems.

Of the 3,907 schools listed in the 2000 Higher Education Directory, all presidents were sent at least a hard copy letter. In addition, we were able to locate e-mail addresses (through either the Directory or referrals at the end of the questionnaire) for 2,582 presidents, and these presidents were sent reminder e-mails as appropriate. A total of 471 presidents responded to the survey. We were able to locate e-mail addresses for 2,432 provosts and 1,475 facilities chiefs. A total of 320 provosts and 325 facilities chiefs completed the questionnaire. The margin of error for results from the facilities and provost module is ± 5 and for the president module is ± 4 .

We were able to collect data from one respondent at 689 schools. At 183 schools we collected data from two respondents, and at 19 schools we collected data from the president, provost and facilities chief. Hence, we collected data from at least one respondent at 891 schools, representing almost 22% of all of the institutions of higher education in the US. We believe the sample is not overly skewed towards respondents who wanted to utilize the survey to highlight exemplary programs for three reasons. First, several campuses with exemplary programs that we already know about did not respond to the survey. Second, significant numbers of respondents admitted to having little or no programming, such as recycling in place. Third, in some of the comments received, respondents admit to struggling with environmental programming and feel their campus is just beginning.

Data collected in the online questionnaires were supplemented by data on institutional characteristics, enrollment, staff and expenditures available in the 2000 Higher Education Directory, as well as through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), administered by the Bureau of the Census for the National Center for Education Statistics. The latest IPEDS data available was the for the 1997–1998 academic year (1995–1996 for financial data).

Review Process

The survey followed an extensive review process. Over the course of the spring and summer of 2000, National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program staff developed and refined the survey in consultation with over 140 internal and external peers. With support from the Nathan Cummings Foundation and host campuses, NWF was also able to test and refine many of the indicators used in the survey at several of the Campus Ecology training clinics held in various parts of the country. NWF solicited feedback from leaders in higher education associations, environmental organizations, and dozens of campus-based administrators, faculty, students, and other environmental professionals.

The National Wildlife Federation compiled, organized by category, and carefully reviewed feedback received through meetings, conference calls, mail, and e-mail. Many people generously offered hours of their time in clarifying comments, refining technical components, and reviewing and helping redraft particular sections of the survey. They are noted in the acknowledgement section under special assistance. The survey went through three substantive revisions before the pilot as NWF worked with PSRA and peers to refine indicators for environmental management, curriculum, landscaping, transportation, energy, and materials. Balancing the need to collect detailed qualitative and quantitative information with the desire for a high response rate necessitated many tough decisions about what to include and leave out of the survey.

Once drafted, two simultaneous pilots of the survey were conducted. The first pilot was randomly distributed by PSRA to 75 college presidents, provosts, and chief administrators at 25 campuses. The second pilot was undertaken by a number of the schools affiliated with the Economicology Consortium in late fall 2000. Economicology is a consortium of colleges and universities that, with support from Mr. Peter Wege, founder and president of the Wege Foundation, provides a forum for sharing of information, evaluating success, and promoting accountability for environmental performance. The Wege Foundation made it possible for NWF staff to spend a day in Michigan with Economicology representatives (including facilities chiefs, business officers, and college presidents), after several of the schools had piloted the survey, to discuss and refine the instrument. Once changes from these pilot processes were incorporated, PSRA began distributing the survey. Because of changes to the survey after the pilot, some of the data from the Economicology schools (specifically from the facilities and presidents sections at the University of Michigan) was not included in the final survey. We thank the University of Michigan and all of the Economicology schools for their assistance with the pilot and apologize that we were not able to include all of the pilot data in the final survey.

Rationale

This project was conceived to address an important gap in available information on higher education performance. While extensive information is available on most other aspects of performance—enrollments, costs, state regulations, competitiveness, and demographics, for example, no such source on environmental performance exists. Little has been known, until now, about broader trends in environmental performance and sustainability in higher education and, consequently, there has been no baseline from which to measure progress across a range of issues. The National Wildlife Federation felt it important to conduct a national survey on campus environmental performance and sustainability in order to begin to fill this gap in information, create a baseline from which to measure change over time, identify opportunities, highlight outstanding precedent, and generate healthy debate.

Recognizing the vital importance of leadership for sustainability in higher education, the National Wildlife Federation launched the Campus Ecology Program twelve years ago. With the support of generous foundations and members, we have since worked with groups at over a third of the nation's colleges and universities, providing consultation, training clinics, publications, and fellowships. This survey project is part of the National Wildlife Federation's larger mission to educate, inspire, and assist individuals and organizations of diverse cultures to conserve wildlife and other natural resources, and to protect the earth's environment in order to achieve a peaceful, equitable and sustainable future.

