

# UTC Survey for Climate Action Plan



Executive Summary

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

For further information contact:

Brad McAllister  
WAP Sustainability Consulting  
423.598.3329  
[brad@wapsustainability.com](mailto:brad@wapsustainability.com)

Dr. Susan Ritz  
UTC Center for Applied Social  
Research  
423.425-2390  
[Susan-Ritz@utc.edu](mailto:Susan-Ritz@utc.edu)

## PURPOSE OF THE DOCUMENT

In March and April of 2011, WAP Sustainability and UTC's Center for Applied Social Research partnered to survey the campus community to gather valuable data concerning the perceptions, level of understanding and the motivating factors with regards to sustainability and greenhouse gas mitigation efforts.

## Survey Methods and Respondent Demographics

Two different surveys were deployed via online means - one survey was targeted at students and the other was targeted at faculty and staff. In general the two surveys asked the same core questions. Slight differences were based on the classroom experience of each of the targeted survey populations.

The survey was designed to gather input in three key categories. They included 1) general awareness, 2) sustainability at UTC and 3) demographics. Subcategories included waste and recycling, alternative modes of transportation, water conservation, energy conservation and sustainable food options. Subcategories were based on their impact to the greenhouse gas footprint of the university.

A total of 554 students and 217 faculty/staff responded to their respective surveys. In general the responding population mirrored the campus community in terms of academic year and associated college. The Center for Applied Social Research considers this a very good response rate.

## What We Learned

### General Awareness

- Both faculty/staff and the student respondents considered themselves to have a moderate level of understanding concerning environmental sustainability. They also considered the issue to be of very high or somewhat high importance when compared to other issues such as poverty, terrorism, and economic instability.
- When asked what is included in "environmental sustainability," both groups responded at high levels for recycling, conserving the environment, "going green," and climate change. Few associated "Triple Bottom Line" with sustainability. Faculty/Staff were slightly more likely to associate climate change with sustainability than students.
- For both the faculty/staff and student population, 79% of respondents see climate change as a very serious or somewhat serious issue.

### Subcategories

The subcategories explored in the survey included waste and recycling, alternative modes of transportation, water conservation, energy conservation and sustainable food options. All were considered to be either somewhat or very important by both the faculty/staff and the student respondents. In terms of relative importance the 5 categories were ranked as follows by both the faculty/staff and student respondents:

- Highest - Energy Conservation
- Recycling
  - Water Conservation
  - Sustainable Food Options
- Lowest - Alternative Modes of Transportation

In terms of personal participation in conservation and sustainability efforts in each of the subcategories, most respondents in both target populations claimed to practice energy conservation, water conservation and recycling efforts all or most of the time. This trend was reversed for the other subcategories in which respondents claimed to only practice sustainable food options and alternative modes of transportation some of the time and never.

Many opportunities were cited to improve participation in environmentally appropriate behaviors. In general, increased convenience and availability, improved awareness of the benefits and options, and constant engagement through signage and other materials were highly cited. Additionally safety was a concern in the use of alternative modes of transportations. Price was a concern with sustainable food options. Incentives and the development of peer support groups were also cited, however, incentives and peer-support groups were more favorable to student respondents.

Respondents were asked to identify the top 3 ways that UTC could encourage the campus to help meet its sustainability goals. 18 distinct responses were given. The top 5 for both the student and faculty/staff respondents are listed below.

#### Faculty/Staff

- 1) Develop incentives for sustainable behavior.
- 2) Promote the sustainable attributes of programs on campus through signage.
- 3) Develop a UTC sustainability website.
- 4) Make sustainability a topic in current courses.
- 5) Campus sustainability as a focus at freshman orientation.

#### Students

- 1) Develop incentives for sustainable behavior.
- 2) Promote the sustainable attributes of programs on campus through signage.
- 3) Offer sustainability projects for course credit.
- 4) Develop clubs or student groups focused on sustainability.
- 5) Campus sustainability as a focus at freshman orientation.

#### Knowledge of UTC Efforts

When asked if they knew about UTC's greenhouse gas reduction and sustainability program, 47% of faculty/staff and 68% of students said that they were not familiar with the efforts. Additionally, 35% of faculty/staff and 25% of students said that they had heard about the efforts but did not know much about them.

#### Sustainability in the Classroom

About half of applicable faculty/staff respondents said that they incorporate environmental issues in the classroom. Additionally 54% of all faculty/staff respondents said that they would like to see more environmental and sustainability topics offered in the general curriculum.

Only a third of student respondents felt that their current course work adequately incorporates the environmental issues relevant to their major.

More than half of the student respondents stated that they wanted to see more environmental and sustainability topics in their coursework.