



# SUSTAINABILITY CULTURAL INDICATORS PROGRAM (SCIP) 2021

Measuring sustainability awareness & behaviors at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

The Sustainability Cultural Indicators Program (SCIP) is a multi-year project designed to measure and track the **culture of sustainability** at the University of Michigan. The program launched in 2012 at the university's Ann Arbor campus and was extended to the Dearborn and Flint campuses in 2021.

SCIP's purpose is to inform U-M administrators and others responsible for day-to-day operations of the university, including its academic programs. Furthermore, it is intended to serve as a model, demonstrating how behavioral research can be used to address critical environmental issues. **Culture of sustainability** is meant to reflect a set of attitudes, behaviors, levels of understanding, degrees of engagement, and commitment among a population, such as members of a university community.

The findings from SCIP 2021 are largely descriptive in that survey responses are reported for the three key groups in U-M's community—its students, staff, and faculty. SCIP uses two separate web questionnaires—one for staff and faculty, and one for students—with questions built around the U-M 2025 sustainability goal areas: *climate action*, *waste prevention*, *healthy environments*, and *community awareness*. During Fall 2021, 3489 students, 743 staff, and 830 faculty participated in the Ann Arbor campus survey representing a 27.2% overall response rate.

An important new component of the SCIP questionnaires included questions about U-M's commitment to carbon neutrality. Initial results show that understandings of carbon neutrality among members of the university community are limited across the three U-M campuses. However, more than 75% of respondents indicated that U-M is serious about achieving carbon neutrality, and they were committed to modifying their own behaviors to help U-M achieve carbon neutrality.

The results of SCIP 2021 show that there is considerable room for improvement in the pro-environment behaviors, levels of awareness, and degrees of engagement among members of the university community. Although positive changes have occurred in some areas, such as individual efforts to reduce waste and expressions of commitment, a fundamental question remains—*Is the pace of changing sustainability culture at U-M adequate?*

## COLLABORATION & OUTREACH

Following each cycle of data collection and analysis, the SCIP research team hosts an update and key findings session for representatives from multiple U-M campus offices that lead sustainability efforts. These meetings are important for starting conversations about how to best use SCIP data to inform efforts. A set of SCIP case studies show how results have been used to support campus operations, teaching, and student and faculty research.

Externally, SCIP is promoted by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) to members as an example of assessing sustainability culture. Since 2013, more than 400 individuals have downloaded copies of the SCIP questionnaires to support work at their institutions to assess sustainability culture. SCIP investigators have published several journal articles and book chapters. Internationally, SCIP has been replicated at the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil and is being considered for one of Egypt's new universities.

For more information please visit us at [graham.umich.edu/scip](https://graham.umich.edu/scip)

# TOP 10 TAKE-AWAYS FROM THE 2021 SCIP SURVEY

#1 

Students' mode of travel to and from campus is more in line with the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions than the ways staff and faculty travel to work. Not surprisingly, students were more likely to walk, bike, or ride the bus to campus, whereas staff and faculty relied on driving as the dominant means of travel to and from campus.

#2 

Knowledge about alternative travel and transportation modes is limited. In Ann Arbor, students and staff knew less than faculty about what transportation options are available to them.

#3 

Students spend much more time on campus than either staff or faculty. In the Fall semester, students averaged 5.3 days per week on campus whereas the weekly averages for staff and faculty were 2.8 days and 3.4 days, respectively. All groups anticipated their time on campus would increase slightly in the months ahead.

#4 

Faculty tend to do better at preventing waste and conserving energy than either staff or students. They were more likely than students and staff to recycle, turn off lights, and use power saving settings on computers.

#5 

Participation in sustainability organizations and events on campus during the early part of Fall 2021 was low. Staff were somewhat more involved than either students or faculty. Although the numbers were low, students most often mentioned their participating in Zero Waste events, including those at the Big House.

#6 

Staff were most aware of what U-M is doing vis-à-vis sustainability. Compared to staff reports in the previous SCIP survey, the current staff knew more about U-M's sustainability initiatives. Students knew significantly less about U-M's sustainability initiatives than their 2018 counterparts did.

#7 

Sustainability engagement outside the University increased significantly since the inception of SCIP. Compared to their counterparts in 2012, students, staff, and faculty were more likely to vote for candidates with pro-environmental values, donate money to such candidates or to environmental organizations, and volunteer for an environmental organization.

#8 

Compared to participants from earlier SCIP surveys, participants in 2021 have stronger feelings about climate change. They were more likely to believe that climate change is happening and caused by human activity. Current participants also felt that climate change is of greater importance to them than participants from earlier surveys did.

#9 

Faculty members expressed a higher degree of commitment to sustainability and to changing their behaviors to achieve carbon neutrality than staff or students. All groups expressed higher levels of commitment to sustainability than their counterparts did in 2012.

#10 

The President's Commission on Carbon Neutrality and its recommendations were not on the radar of a significant number of survey participants. Whereas one-fourth of the faculty and staff were unaware of the university's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality, more than half of the students said they were unaware of U-M's commitment. However, three-quarters of all respondents believed that U-M is serious about achieving carbon neutrality and most expressed commitment to modifying their own behaviors to help U-M achieve that goal.

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