A SHARED VISION

PORTLAND STATE AS THE SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY OF THE FUTURE

REPORT ON PILOT ENVISIONING EXERCISE

2010–2011
INTRODUCTION

“Envisioning is a skill that can be developed, like any other skill.”

Donella H. Meadows, leading envisioning scholar

If Portland State University is to become a model and engine of change for leading society toward a sustainable and desirable future, then we must create a shared vision. A common vision of what the model University will look like is the first step in a united effort to take us from here to there.

The Institute for Sustainable Solutions introduced the envisioning process to the PSU community in November 2010. In order to lay the path to a more unified vision, ISS wanted to bring the Portland and PSU communities together to discuss what a sustainable Portland State University of the future would look like.

PSU’s envisioning process brought together a representative sample of the community and provided a forum where creative ideas could be openly shared. This report describes the first steps that were taken in what is designed to be an ongoing exercise.

With practice, participation, and continued input, the process can lead us toward a shared vision of our ideal University of the future.

SPECIAL THANKS

To the students, staff, faculty, and community members who participated in the envisioning event and survey.

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**Initial Data Gathering**

PSU’s envisioning process employed Q-methodology\(^1\), in which participants provide initial information that informs a final survey. Ideally, the initial information gathering for this methodology would be in-person to facilitate direct, face-to-face communication. However, due to the large quantity of people that were targeted, a hybrid of in-person (an envisioning event on November 6, 2010) and online participation (an open-ended survey) was used. Participants were informed that this initial information gathering was designed to be open and unconstrained, allowing free brainstorming about the future of the University without regard to the steps necessary to get there.

The survey was sent out in a campus-wide email at the beginning of November, and held open until late December. In order to capture the opinions of community members, the survey was also sent out to many of the University’s community partners. The primary means for this outreach was through the list serves of PSU’s IGERT\(^2\) program, Center for Academic Excellence (CAE), Community and Watersheds program, and the Institute for Sustainable Solutions. Upon filling out this survey, participants were asked to leave their emails so they could be reached for the second survey. Finally, three $100 gift certificates (one to the Portland Farmers Market and two to the Bookstore) were used to encourage participation in both rounds of the survey.

**Refinement and Second Survey**

The next step was to refine and consolidate participants’ ideas into a series of recurring statements to create the follow-up survey, according to Q-methodology. To this end, ISS staff and graduate students developed a process for cataloging and combining the responses into more condensed forms. Categorization was based on an ecological economics framework, which classifies our assets into four basic groups: built, human, social, and natural.\(^3\)

A list of fifty-five refined statements was finalized and inserted into a survey format. Participants could rate each statement based on their level of agreement (one being strong disagreement and five being high agreement). In addition to the statements, eight quotations from the event and the survey were inserted, and participants could rate these quotations between one (strong disagreement) and ten (high agreement). The quotations allowed for feedback from participants about certain details from the initial brainstorm that were removed or simplified through the refinement process. The survey concluded with demographic questions to allow for statistical analysis.

This second survey was distributed through a campus-wide email, as well as the same list serves as the first survey. It was left open for one month, after which ISS staff analyzed the data to determine highly rated visions, poorly rated visions, and areas of agreement and disagreement.

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\(^1\) Q Methodology is a research method used to determine various people’s opinions about a given topic. [http://www.qmethod.org/faq?1](http://www.qmethod.org/faq?1)

\(^2\) [http://www.pdx.edu/esur-igert/about-igert](http://www.pdx.edu/esur-igert/about-igert)

\(^3\) Robert Costanza et al., *An Introduction to Ecological Economics* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 1997), 275.
RESULTS

The data from the initial steps of the envisioning process was analyzed according to different populations that took the survey: faculty, staff, undergraduate student, graduate student, and “other.” The “other” category combines community members, alumni, and members of local organizations; this group represents those that participated in the survey but did not have large enough representation to warrant their own category. Each of these groups has a unique relationship to PSU, sometimes resulting in diverging perspectives between populations.

Data was analyzed by the percentage of fours (somewhat important) and fives (extremely important) marked for each statement, and the percentage of nines (somewhat important) and tens (extremely important) for each quotation. This was done to determine which statements and quotations were the most important to each population; this process removed neutral, negative, and non-responses, showing where consensus emerged within and across populations.

**Analysis of Statements**

On the whole, participants shared strong support of statements pertaining to education for all, learning resources, interactive education, PSU as a resource, sufficient pay for faculty and staff, ethics of conservation, transportation, reduce, reuse, recycle, and local and healthy foods⁴ (Table 1).

The highest rated vision statements were all found to be general, pragmatic, and straightforward in nature. Respondents were more likely to select extremely important (five) or somewhat important (four) for general statements that did not present extreme views of the future. These statements may be seen as more attainable and perhaps less likely to impact daily life. In addition, the highly rated visions tended to be pragmatic; respondents may have been drawn to these visions because they connect directly with daily life and/or provide a perceived general benefit to the individual or the greater good.

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⁴These phrases are abbreviated versions of the longer statements.
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Table 1: Highest ranked statements (across populations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human capital</th>
<th>Built capital</th>
<th>Natural capital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education is available for a wide range of populations</td>
<td>Transportation to and from campus is sufficient, affordable, and easy</td>
<td>Reduce, reuse, recycle are standard operating procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient amounts of learning resources are available and easily accessible</td>
<td>The landscape supports environmental/human health</td>
<td>Healthy food options pervade the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education is interactive and emphasizes student-teacher interaction</td>
<td>Mobility and infrastructure for non-motorized forms of transit are maximized</td>
<td>PSU has a large variety of vendors selling local and healthy products</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Percentage of respondents for whom the statement was extremely or somewhat important |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 85.1                            | 91.4            | 89.1            |
| 84.4                            | 86.9            | 81.4            |
| 80.6                            | 85.9            | 76              |

Lastly, many of the highly rated statements used clear and common language, suggesting that a large portion of the population understood the nature of the statement and how it would move PSU toward a sustainable future.

Respondents rated more specific, extreme vision statements with low importance. Statements concerning a paperless campus, eliminating cars or idling vehicles on campus, in-house consulting, a strong athletic program, and no smoking on campus were all rated poorly. These statements may have been viewed as demanding too much personal sacrifice, unattainable, or personally undesirable.

The vision statement analysis shows that populations have some differing priorities for sustainability. PSU staff members had the highest percentage of fours and fives on seven of the seventeen statements in the Built category, more so than any other population. These statements included: the University’s systems, such as HR and financial aid, are easy to navigate, products on campus have minimum amount of packaging, and campus buildings are sustainable.

In the Human category, community members (the “other” group) felt more strongly about University research impacting the local and global economy than did other groups. Flexible degree programs was a strong vision
RESULTS

shared by both community members and the undergraduate population. Increasing online and hybrid classes was rated much lower by faculty and graduate students than other populations, suggesting that they have a strong connection with face-to-face learning. Also, staff ranked using the campus and community to teach much higher than other populations. This trend is notable, because although PSU faculty and students are known for their service learning beyond the PSU campus, staff are less involved in community learning, yet resonated most with this statement.

Graduate students and faculty had lower ratings for nearly all of the statements in the Natural category, as compared to the other populations. Undergraduate students posted 10% more fours and fives for the statement that the campus should be rich in biodiversity and wildlife; however, beyond that departure, there were no statements where one sub-group was significantly higher or lower than the rest of the group.

Finally, in the Social category, the largest divergences were among PSU faculty members. They felt that rewards for exceptional students, faculty, and staff were more important than other populations, but were the lowest population to rank working with local businesses as important (Figure 2).
**Quotation Analysis**

In general, survey responses to the quotations were much less agreed-upon by the entire community than the vision statements. None of the quotes reached an overall importance ranking (nine and ten rankings) higher than 57%; in contrast to, for example, the reduce, reuse, recycle vision statement, which received a 94% importance (fours and fives) ranking overall. This may be because the quotations were lengthy and contained a significant amount of detail. In addition, the ranking system (one to ten) provided respondents with more gradients of choice, which allowed a higher variance of responses.

Quotations that mentioned “students” were ranked very well among undergraduate students and poorly by all of the other populations. Almost 100% of undergraduate students selected the vision of students having a say in the direction, investment, and future of the University as extremely or somewhat important, while only 36% of the other populations (graduate students, faculty, staff, and other) thought this quotation was extremely or somewhat important (Figure 3). Quotations in the Natural category had the highest percentage of respondents mark nine or ten. These included consideration of all outside materials brought onto campus, and all food on campus being regional and promoting health and well-being.
The envisioning process is designed to be ongoing and adapting, and this initial work represents the beginning of that process. The information gathered so far provides an initial direction for immediate program needs, such as the “Solutions Generator” (see below). It also revealed some areas of consensus and divergence that will inform the strategic direction of sustainability at PSU, and provided a series of lessons learned for how to adapt this process so that the PSU and Portland communities can be more actively engaged. The goal is not to reach a fixed end, but rather to continuously move toward a common vision shared by all parts of the University and the community.

**Solutions Generator**

Participants in the initial survey expressed a desire to take immediate action to make campus more sustainable. This resulted in the creation of the “Solutions Generator,” a program in which interdisciplinary teams of faculty, staff, students, and community members can submit proposals for innovative solutions to pressing sustainability issues on campus. The most prominent themes from the survey (Waste reduction, Energy Conservation, Social Equity, and Community Food Systems) were used as the Solutions Generator program’s core focus areas. In February 2011, the first call for proposals resulted in awards for 12 projects, including a sustainable farm partnership and a “Take Back the Tap” program to reduce plastic water bottle waste.

**Data Gathering**

This process consisted of two major forms of input—the envisioning event and an online survey. Since this envisioning process is meant to be continuous, it is vital that the lessons learned are used for future planning. Ideally, the in-person event would have been the primary form of input and idea generation. However, in this case, the survey had much higher levels of participation. This was due to the quick timeline for planning the event, and the fact that there was only one opportunity for face-to-face exchange. In the future, a series of smaller forums could be held in order to provide more time for people to interact face-to-face and provide input. For participants who cannot attend these events, the survey option should also be made available. Ideally, the survey would account for a smaller percentage of the total input. In addition, a long-term, three to five year envisioning plan needs to be established and communicated to participants so they are clear about the purpose of the process and the plans for the results.
Survey Design
The second survey was an effective exercise for synthesizing the original results into a manageable format. Some of the best practices that should be maintained or incorporated in future surveys are:

- A thorough pretest should identify confusing questions and other glitches.
- Odd numbers should be used when people are rating the visions (1-5 or 1-7).
- For each number, there should be a word association. For example, 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5=strongly agree.
- Provide an "I don’t know" option for participants who don’t have an opinion or don’t want to respond to a question.

Sustainable Campus vs. Sustainable University
Envisioning is meant to take participants out of their everyday context, helping them consider a future that is not impaired by present-day constraints. Although the organizers aimed to prepare participants for this mindset, the results suggest that this was not completely effective. Many responses to the first survey addressed current conditions and challenges on campus—such as leaky toilets, failing infrastructure, and noisy streets—as opposed to providing information about the best possible future for PSU, including how that University operates, treats its employees, values nature, and engages with the surrounding community. Although this was not the case for all responses, it is an important reminder that more work needs to be done to effectively frame the process.

Moving toward a Shared Vision
This report focuses mainly on the results that were drawn from this pilot, and how those results can support the development of long-term sustainability goals at PSU. However, it is also important to note that alongside these results a great deal was learned about how to best engage the University in an ongoing envisioning process. Some of these results included high levels of agreement for resource conservation and wide support for pragmatic and simple visions. As long-term directions are charted, it is important to understand the content and typology of shared visions, but also the areas where populations diverge and ideas conflict. Consequently, the next significant step is to understand where and why populations diverge when responding to the specific visions, and how or if those statements can be revised to create more unity. In this process, we also hope to uncover new areas of agreement that will help move the University closer to a sustainable and desirable future.

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*The envisioning process requires that people be taken into a new “mind-space,” pushing them to not think about immediate constraints and instead imagine the future that they really want. Although the survey provided language to get respondents into that “mind space,” the process is difficult and—for full effect—usually requires a more in-depth and hands-on process.*
APPENDIX I

Survey questions and categories for the Envisioning Survey

Built Capital (Campus Infrastructure):
This section refers to the infrastructure and buildings on campus.

QUOTATION #1:
“We envision PSU to be a net-exporter of renewable energy and non-user of non-renewable energy and products; a leader in implementing and using energy management methods—monitoring, managing, and displaying in real time energy consumption and creation; and a model for electric cars, charging stations, fewer parking structures, renewable power generation, and living, net-zero buildings.”
—Energy working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)

STATEMENTS:
1. Transportation to and from campus is sufficient, affordable, and easy.
2. Mobility and infrastructure for non-motorized forms of transit (walking, biking, etc.) is maximized.
3. Low and zero carbon vehicles are the norm.
4. Affordable living options are abundant in the University area.
5. The campus is clean and well-maintained, coherent, and aesthetically pleasing.
6. The landscape supports environmental/human health.
7. A large variety of pleasant inside and outside study space.
8. The University’s systems (HR, financial aid, etc) are easy to navigate.
9. The University library is recognized for its completeness.
10. The campus does not produce pollution or waste.
11. The entire campus is paperless.
12. Products sold on campus use the minimum amount of packaging.
13. Each building is sustainable (natural light, accessible, efficient, green life inside and out, etc.).
14. The University EcoDistrict is a model for net zero energy, water, and waste.
15. No cars allowed on campus.
16. All campus equipment is energy conserving and utilizes green/renewable energy whenever possible.
17. The campus population is exposed to and aware of campus utility use.

Social Capital (Culture and Interactions):
Social Capital refers to the quality of interactions and networks/institutions associated with the University.

QUOTATION #1:
“Student interests need to come first because we are here to serve students and provide them with the tools to build a better world.”
—Diversity working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)
QUOTATION #2:
“The University is structured and positioned as a ‘learning community’ where everyone is recognized as a valuable contributor, long-term partnerships and relationships are fostered, faculty members are defined as community liaisons or stewards, and education has the primary purpose of solving real-world problems.”
—Community working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)

STATEMENTS:
1. The concept of community is valued and encouraged.
2. PSU relies heavily on in-house consulting, minimizing outside consultants.
3. PSU works closely with local businesses.
4. Benefiting the local and global community is a key value.
5. Adequate incentives are available for sustainable practices.
6. Diversity is valued and supported.
7. Inclusion and equality are highly valued and supported in the University.
8. The University as a strong sense of “place” and community.
9. Rigorous research and scholarship are valued and rewarded.
10. Cross-departmental interaction and cooperation is easy, common, and productive.
11. All aspects of sustainability are embraced in education and operations.
12. An ethic of conservation is held throughout the University.
13. Healthy lifestyles are supported and promoted.
14. An awareness of problems and potential solutions at multiple scales from local to global problems is pervasive.
15. Local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies view the University as a resource.
16. Departments share equipment, faculty, and resources.
17. Proper rewards exist for exceptional students, faculty, and staff.
18. The financial system is self-sustaining and robust.
19. Faculty and staff are sufficiently paid.

HUMAN CAPITAL (PEOPLE AND EDUCATION):
This section refers to the people, education, and skills development within the University.

QUOTATION #1:
“Instead of students coming in and expecting to be consumers of passive knowledge, they arrive and realize that they are bringing assets and that they have a say in the direction, investment, and future of the University.”
—Academics and operations working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)

QUOTATION #2:
“Students are engaged in a reflective discussion about the wider potential of the university experience as it relates to personal empowerment, civic engagement, and critical thinking.”
—Student engagement working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)

STATEMENTS:
1. A solutions-focused approach to learning, involving students in solving real-world problems in collaboration with communities at multiple scales, is the norm.
2. Education involves applied learning in the local and global community, and applied learning opportunities are abundant.
3. Systems thinking is the norm in research and in the curriculum.
4. Faculty and students engage in transdisciplinary research with faculty and students of other departments and universities.
APPENDIX I

5. New teaching technologies are balanced with traditional methodologies.

6. The University offers a suite of on-line and hybrid classes that provide increased flexibility, while also maintaining quality.

7. Research has an impact on local and global policy.

8. Sustainable practices and issues are an integral component of all education paths.

9. Education is interactive and emphasizes student-teacher interaction.

10. There are a large variety of on-campus activities for networking and information exchange.

11. The campus and surrounding community are used in teaching.

12. Education is affordable for a wide range of populations.

13. There is a strong athletics program at all levels (participatory, intramural, intercollegiate).

14. Sufficient amounts of learning resources (exceptional libraries, academic counselors, etc.) are available and easily accessible.

15. Research is well-funded.

16. Degree programs are flexible and provide students with more control.

17. PSU is a leader in research and development for sustainability strategies.

Natural Capital (Ecological Systems and Practices): This section refers to the natural and ecological systems and practices associated with the University.

QUOTATION #1:
“We see a campus community that is thoughtful and considerate about everything we bring onto campus (building materials, paper, coffee cups), favoring local materials and resources, maximizing positive impact on the environment, and minimizing the negative impact to nature.”
—Materials management working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)

QUOTATION #2:
“All food on this campus has a regional connection, promotes the health and well-being of the campus population, and contributes to a thriving local economy, healthy natural environment, and socially just practices. In addition, all undergraduates will experience the joy and empowerment that comes from actively participating in growing, preparing and preserving food.”
—Food working group (at the November 6th envisioning event)

STATEMENTS:
1. The campus is rich in biodiversity and wildlife.
2. The campus has a large number and variety of gardens that grow produce for University consumption.
3. The University consumes mainly locally-grown produce.
4. The campus has a large variety of vendors selling local and healthy products.
5. Resource conservation is embedded in all practices.
6. All practices include an awareness of sustainability issues.
7. All practices are motivated by conservation.
8. Everything is recyclable and or compostable.
9. No idling vehicles are allowed on or around campus.
10. There is no smoking anywhere on campus.
11. Healthy food options pervade the University.
12. Reduce, reuse, and recycle are standard operating procedures.
13. There is zero waste in all campus operations.
14. Living systems are incorporated into campus planning.
Graphs of survey responses ranked by percentage of agreement and strong agreement

**Built - Percentage of 4s and 5s, 5 being strong agreement**

- Transportation to and from campus
- Non-motorized forms of transit
- Low and zero carbon vehicles
- Affordable living options
- Clean, coherent, aesthetically pleasing
- Landscape supports health
- Pleasent study spaces
- Easy navigation of systems
- Completeness of library

**Built Quotes - Percentage of 9s and 10s, 10 being strong agreement**

- No pollution or waste
- Paperless campus
- Minimum packaging
- Buildings are sustainable
- University EcoDistrict is a model
- No cars on campus
- Green campus equipment
- Awareness of campus utility use

- Model and leader in renewable energy
- Support of alternative transit

- Other
- Faculty
- Staff
- Graduate
- Undergraduate
APPENDIX II

Social - Percentage of 4s and 5s, 5 being strong agreement

Social Quotes - Percentage of 9s and 10s, 10 being strong agreement
**APPENDIX II**

**Natural - Percentage of 4s and 5s, 5 being strong agreement**

- Campus and biodiversity: 100%
- Large number of campus gardens: 100%
- Locally-grown produce: 100%
- Local and healthy food: 100%
- Awareness of sustainability issues: 100%
- Motivated by conservation: 100%
- Everything recyclable or compostable: 100%

- No smoking: 0%
- Healthy food on campus: 0%
- Reduce, reuse, recycle standard: 0%
- Zero waste: 0%
- Living systems in campus: 0%
- No idling vehicles: 0%

**Natural Quotes - Percentage of 9s and 10s, 10 being strong agreement**

- Consideration of outside materials: 70%
- Food on campus: 70%

- No idling vehicles: 35%
- No smoking: 35%
- Reduce, reuse, recycle standard: 35%
- Zero waste: 35%
- Living systems in campus: 35%
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