

# **Roosevelt University Strategic Sustainability Plan for 2024-29**

For consideration by the University Senate at the 19 April 2024 Meeting

Submitted to the Senate Executive Committee, 4 April 2024

## **Introduction to the Plan**

In 2010, Roosevelt University embarked upon an ambitious and far-sighted agenda to green its campus operations at the same time it launched new academic programs focused on the environment. In 2015, having made great progress on multiple fronts, the University approved its first Strategic Sustainability Plan to systematically guide our efforts across all facets of academic and physical operations. The present document represents our ongoing effort to assess our campus sustainability progress to date, here in 2024, and to map out a new set of priority initiatives for the next five years.

The analysis and recommendations below are detailed and comprehensive, and we acknowledge that our efforts have been and will continue to be constrained by tight budgets and scarce resources. Nevertheless, just as systematic planning is essential to the success of our work, so too is vision, courage, leadership, coordination, and material support.

### **The 2022-24 Strategic Sustainability Planning Team**

Students and Alumni: Kiera Carpenter (SUST '24), Julie Dinquel (SUST '24), Sophia Gallo (SOC '22), Kayla Nelson (PSYC '23), and Paeg Turner (PSYC & SUST '25)

Faculty: Mike Bryson, SUST

## **Student Statement on the Critical Importance of Sustainability Today**

Students of our generation are living through a climate crisis and are acutely aware that the choices they make today have a profound impact on all of our futures. Roosevelt is a university rooted in social justice which is inherently tied to sustainability. Students are drawn to Roosevelt for its socially conscious mission and are passionate about attending a university that aligns with their values. Sustainability is integral to our university's identity, reflecting our commitment to equity, fairness, and responsible stewardship of our planet.

Sustainable practices at the university level help protect the environment, promote equity, and enhance student well-being. Sustainability-focused initiatives empower students and play an essential role in fostering sustainable development. The university's forward-thinking sustainability imperatives can promote student participation and offer enrichment opportunities that focus on ways we can make a difference within the university, the community, and the world.

Learning about sustainability through initiatives such as food waste reduction, renewable energy, and the importance of diversity and inclusion, among many others, can jumpstart our student body's passion for caring about and understanding the integral role we play in enhancing Roosevelt's sustainable development. Sustainability seeks to meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations, and Roosevelt's students expect their university to embody sustainability's core values.

As students, faculty, and staff, we do not exist in a vacuum. Through our sustainability efforts, we can positively contribute to our community. Community engagement stands as a pillar of importance to many of us at Roosevelt. When we commit to sustainability, we commit to our community and its resiliency for the future.

-- Kiera Carpenter, Julie Dinquel, and Paege Turner

## **Sustainability at Roosevelt University: The Big Picture**

The concept as well as practice of sustainability at Roosevelt is grounded in the "Three Es" of Ethics, Economy, and Ecology. These in turn suggest **three critical imperatives** for RU to flourish now and in the future while staying true to its social justice mission:

**The Ethical Imperative:** Sustainability is central to the university's historic mission of social justice and therefore is an ethical obligation of the university to pursue.

**The Economic Imperative:** Sustainability at RU contributes to financial stability and institutional resilience in the long term by enhancing student recruitment and retention, increasing academic competitiveness, saving money, and conserving resources.

**The Ecological Imperative:** The current crises of climate change, toxic pollution, biodiversity loss, and pervasive environmental injustice demand action, research, education, innovation, and leadership on the part of colleges and universities.

Viewed properly, sustainability touches every part of the University's mission, identity and operation—from how our buildings use energy and water; to what students eat in the cafeteria

and how we manage our waste; to how faculty teach courses and perform research, what community partnerships we forge, and how we recruit and retain students.

**Our newly revised 2024-29 Strategic Sustainability Plan provides a comprehensive vision for the University** that connects academics, operations, outreach, and administration in a holistic and interdisciplinary way, and maps out concrete goals and initiatives to guide us through the next five years.

Since 2010, the University has endeavored to green its operations, facilities, academics, governance, and community partnerships. Through the adoption and implementation of its first Strategic Sustainability Plan during the 2014-15 academic year, Roosevelt began prioritizing its work in a rational way that involved the input and contributions of all constituents of the University. By doing so, it aimed to become a leading urban university helping drive one of the most important transformations of higher education now happening: the greening of American colleges and universities.

Higher education institutions are in many respects microcosms of society. Moreover, since colleges and universities educate future leaders, perform original research, influence policy, and support communities through outreach, they can either be drivers of progressive social change or supporters of the status quo. We must choose the former.



## RU'S COMMITMENT

"The task of envisioning and creating a truly sustainable world is immense and complex. **Colleges and universities** are not only well suited to engage in this important work through innovation, education, and community engagement, **they are obliged to do so.**"

"Such a worthy task is before us at Roosevelt, a distinctive urban university long committed to **advancing social justice and cultivating progressive leadership** in its home bioregion of Chicago and beyond."

-- President Maleksadeh, Dec. 2015 (from RU's first STARS sustainability assessment report; emphasis added)

If our communities are to become truly sustainable—if we are to change how we use land, produce power, consume resources, grow food, design products, transport people and goods, and mitigate climate change so that we may inherit a world worth living in—universities such as

Roosevelt must continue to set the agenda, develop solutions, and educate dynamic leaders for that sustainable future.

## Overview of the 2022-24 Strategic Sustainability Planning Process

The adoption of the 2015-20 Strategic Sustainability Plan was a watershed moment for Roosevelt, as it built upon the substantial achievements starting in 2010 to transform the university's operations and academics -- from the landscape restoration work at the Schaumburg Campus, to the LEED certification of our downtown Chicago buildings, to the adoption of sustainable operation practices such as energy conservation, to the development of new environmental academic programs and community partnerships. It also inspired RU's [first comprehensive campus sustainability audit](#), a year-long and extremely rigorous assessment process in 2015 that resulted in Roosevelt's achieving a Bronze-level designation from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.

However, as a result of budget constraints and staff reductions after 2016 and then the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic just as the first Plan's lifespan was ending in 2020, our sustainability momentum stalled to a significant degree, even as we pushed forward on selected initiatives with extremely limited resources through all-volunteer efforts. Recognizing the need to take stock and formulate new goals and initiatives, a Strategic Sustainability Planning Team of faculty and student volunteers formed in the Fall 2022 semester and conducted a year-long research and service project to assess our progress to date.

The following pages summarize the first step in that process: a systematic analysis of each the primary areas of campus sustainability, noting places where we've made significant strides forward, those where we've made moderate progress, and those where we need to redouble our efforts.



**2015-20 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN**

**TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR 2023 REVIEW:**

- Stalled progress since 2016
- Limitations of volunteer efforts by the devoted few
- Need for dedicated leadership, coordination, and accountability
- Resilience of student, faculty, employee, and alumni interest

ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY  
STRATEGIC SUSTAINABILITY  
PLAN 2015-2020

ROOSEVELT  
UNIVERSITY

The image shows the cover of a report titled '2015-20 SUSTAINABILITY PLAN'. The cover features a photograph of a blue building partially obscured by green trees. Below the photo, the text reads 'ROOSEVELT UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC SUSTAINABILITY PLAN 2015-2020' and includes the university's logo. To the left of the photo, there is a section titled 'TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR 2023 REVIEW:' followed by a bulleted list of four points: 'Stalled progress since 2016', 'Limitations of volunteer efforts by the devoted few', 'Need for dedicated leadership, coordination, and accountability', and 'Resilience of student, faculty, employee, and alumni interest'.

2015-2020 Goals Progress Breakdown (by STARS categories)

# SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS:

ACADEMICS	ENGAGEMENT	PLANNING & ADMIN	OPERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SUST Program moved to College of Arts &amp; Sciences in 2015, combined with SOC in 2017</li> <li>• Many service learning courses/research opportunities; collab w/ Mansfield, Loundy, FMNH</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked with Eden Place Nature Center &amp; Farms, Field Museum, Friends of the Chicago River, Resilience Studies Consortium, etc.</li> <li>• Fellowship for Activism and Community Engagement thru Mansfield (2021-), SUST 350 and Loundy (Fall 2022)</li> <li>• RU Green student org (longstanding) and SUST 250 Sustainable University EXL class (starting in 2016)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One of most diverse Midwest private schools, Hispanic Serving Institution Status</li> <li>• Ideas of social justice &amp; EXL gen ed requirement added in 2018; many SUST classes have EXL components</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retro commissioning of AUD/WB buildings and SCH campus                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ (Air handling Unit, WB cooling tower replacement, building automation systems (CHI), ATRU hot water heaters, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Campus wide composting at CHI in 2019</li> <li>• Adopted university green purchasing policy</li> <li>• DIVVY bike membership and discounts since 2015</li> <li>• SCH campus prairie restoration and native landscape maintenance</li> </ul>

2015-2020 Goals Progress Breakdown (by STARS categories)

# MODERATE PROGRESS

ACADEMICS	ENGAGEMENT	PLANNING & ADMIN	OPERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to update sustainability-focused and -related courses from 2015</li> <li>• Need to update faculty-related research since 2015</li> <li>• Need to hire a new tenure track professor (left in 2021)</li> <li>• Roosevelt Urban Sustainability Lab (AUD 526) founded in 2015, underutilized</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal work done to promote sustainability culture among students/staff/faculty other than "green pledge"; promotion of composting, and RU green/sustainability department initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintained some memberships to grant/rebate programs like AASHE while others have lapsed like USGBC. New memberships not sought</li> <li>• Unclear if social justice has expanded across curriculum; inventory on Ideas for Social Justice and EXL classes should be taken</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USEPA Green Power membership expiring next year</li> <li>• Bronze STARS rating expired in 2018, but AASHE membership active</li> <li>• Loose temperature and energy conservation policies, no real management plan</li> <li>• Waste and operations audits done, recommendations and promotion to improve waste disposal not yet completed</li> <li>• Green purchasing policy adopted but EAL program status unknown and fair trade certification started not completed</li> <li>• Water conservation signage updated at both campuses, but long term campaign not maintained</li> <li>• SCH Irrigation system installed underground for garden but not used since 2019</li> <li>• Greening of SCH campus not progressed since 2016, regressed in instances of community garden and arboretum certification</li> </ul>

2015-2020 Goals Progress Breakdown (by STARS categories)

# LITTLE TO NO PROGRESS

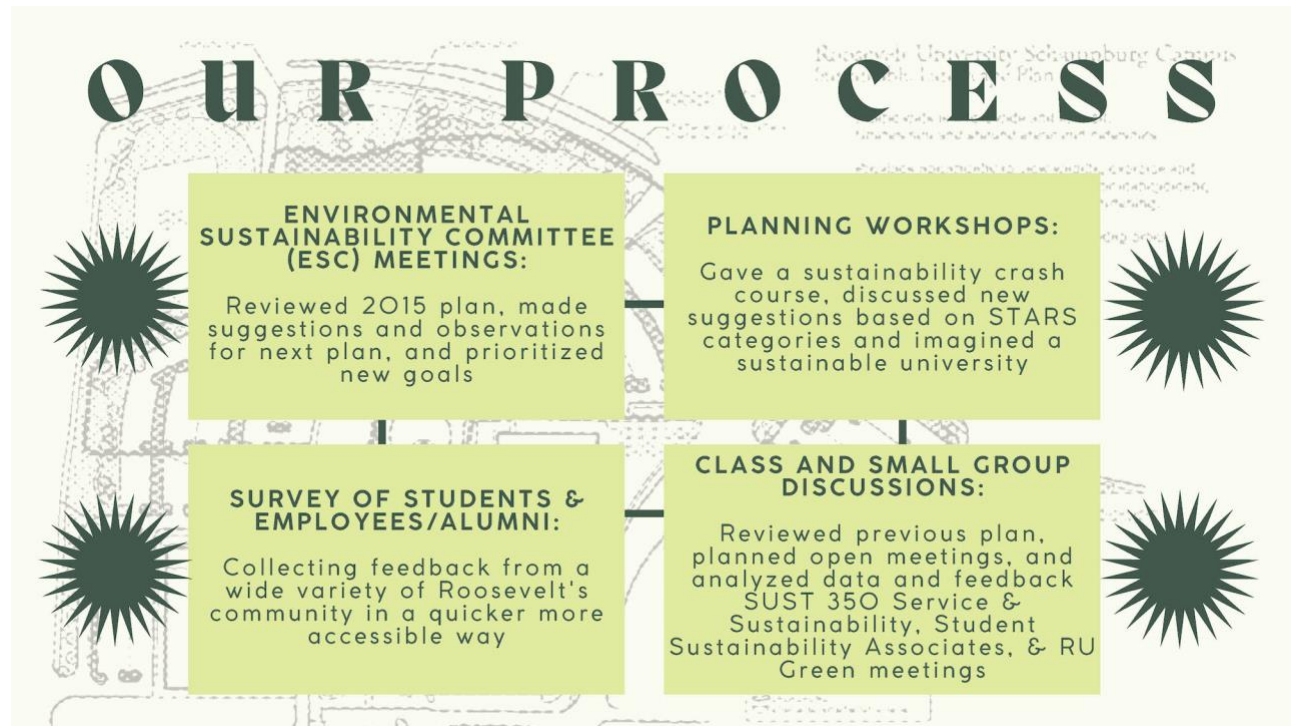
ACADEMICS	ENGAGEMENT	PLANNING & ADMIN	OPERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic sustainability office responsible for university sust work</li> <li>• Need more grant writing possibilities; unsuccessful proposals to NSF &amp; Arthur Vining Davis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very little to no sustainability integrated into orientation, except for student OLS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Office of Sustainability, sustainability coordinator, and sustainability funding/budget not completed                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Sust coordinator hired in 2015, let go in 2016</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaboration on health and well-being programs with HR and Res life not yet attempted</li> <li>• No data on increased use of stairwell, fitness center, or alternative transit. Some signage exists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate action plan not started</li> <li>• Retrofitting not continued to be pursued as credits weren't given for 2019 work</li> <li>• Local food opportunities and food donation system not implemented</li> <li>• 25-30% waste diversion rate at CHI campus</li> <li>• Review of university vendors not completed</li> <li>• Did not maintain annual Green Campus Princeton Review recognition</li> <li>• Did not maintain membership in USGBC and SERF</li> <li>• Did not purchase alt. fuel vehicles and instal refueling stations university wide or in athletics</li> <li>• WB rooftop garden unattended since 2020</li> <li>• No rainwater collection system developed at SCH</li> <li>• No campus wide composting at SCH</li> <li>• SCH campus landscape certifications ended in 2016</li> </ul>

**FULL LENGTH BREAK DOWN OF GOAL ASSESSMENT AVAILABLE HERE:**  
<https://tinyurl.com/yrjr5e7p>  
*This is a view-only document*

The above charts convey mixed results in our sustainability efforts since 2015. On one hand, we've made high-visibility breakthroughs, such as the establishment of campus-wide composting in Chicago in 2019 and the development of productive academic partnerships through service learning and student internships with many Chicago-area organizations. On the other hand, the WB rooftop and SCH community gardens have gone fallow, our waste diversion rates are stuck about 30%, and we have neglected to comprehensively document our wide range of sustainability activities since 2016. This lack of progress and, in some cases, backsliding is due to deep budget cuts (particularly to the Office of Physical Resources), loss of expertise from retirements and staff layoffs, lack of leadership and coordination, and overreliance upon volunteer work by students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

## Campus Outreach and Data Gathering

The 2022-23 campus sustainability planning team next gathered input, ideas, and feedback from all constituents of the university through multiple channels: surveys of students, faculty, staff, admin, and alumni (N = 268); in-person and online informational/planning workshops; meetings of the Environmental Sustainability Committee; formal presentations to the university community at the Loundy Human Rights Symposium (Fall 2022) and the Roosevelt Student Research & Inquiry Symposium (Spring 2023); and an [informational website that provides a comprehensive archive](#) of agenda, notes, and supporting documents for all this work.



## Goals and Priority Initiatives

Below is a distillation of this information expressed as a set of concrete initiatives for the next five years, noting the general level of priority (high or secondary) for each initiative. This list is not all-inclusive, but represents the most important and widely-cited initiatives gleaned from our planning surveys and workshops.

### Academic Initiatives

#### *High Priority:*

- Integrate sustainability, social justice, and Indigenous knowledge across academic programs
- Coordinate cross-disciplinary academic sustainability efforts with STEM Center, Office of Student Research, Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation, and other entities

#### *Secondary Priority:*

- Assess students' sustainability literacy across the university
- Increase number and diversity of faculty

## **Engagement Initiatives**

### *High Priority:*

- Use the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals to promote human rights & environmental health within and beyond the campus community
- Work with RU Green and other student organizations to offer student engagement events and activities
- Promote composting, recycling, and waste reduction to meet and exceed previous goal of 50% diversion rate
- Integrate sustainability into Athletics Department activities and operations

### *Secondary Priority:*

- Develop sustainability training sessions for students, faculty & staff
- Build and maintain partnerships with organizations to increase experiential learning opportunities
- Reinstate Service Day as an annual event
- Integrate sustainability education and training into New Student Orientation

## **Operations Initiatives**

### *High Priority:*

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions through conservation and clean energy policies
- Improve waste diversion rate (currently around 30%) by reducing waste and increasing campus-wide recycling and composting
- Enhance sustainability of the Dining Center by reducing food waste, expanding sustainably sourced food options, and achieving Fair Trade status
- Establish a Donation/Reuse center on campus
- Revitalize and expand the Wabash rooftop and Schaumburg community gardens

### *Secondary Priority:*

- Maintain USEPA Green Power membership
- Renew STARS rating and other certifications
- Increase use of clean energy (wind and solar)
- Maintain and enhance biodiversity at both campuses

## **Planning and Administration Initiatives**

### *High Priority:*

- Prioritize and fund sustainability efforts in RU's budget



- Create and staff an Office of Sustainability to coordinate campus-wide efforts
- Explore and secure external grants, rebates, and other funding sources

*Secondary Priority:*

- Adopt a climate action plan and establish accountability measures
- Make investments transparent and divest from fossil fuels

## **Assessment of Progress on Strategic Initiatives**

As with our first Strategic Sustainability Plan of 2015-20, the updated Plan is a guiding document that prioritizes the work we do at the University to enhance sustainability across all of our operations: academic, physical, administrative, and collaborative. This necessitates a process of self-reflection and evaluation on a regular basis.

The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), the leading professional organization on sustainability for colleges and universities worldwide, has developed a comprehensive and versatile tool called STARS: Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System. STARS provides a standardized and widely endorsed means for Roosevelt to document and assess its current and future work on all sustainability initiatives, and to benchmark itself against the many community colleges, four-year institutions, and comprehensive universities currently using the system. The STARS assessment covers four major areas, each of which contains several subcategories. The scope of these categories allows an institution to analyze its progress on sustainability measures across every facet of its operation.

- **Academics:** curriculum and research
- **Engagement:** campus and public
- **Operations:** air & climate, buildings, dining services, energy, grounds purchasing, transportation, waste, and water
- **Planning & Administration:** coordination, planning & governance; diversity and affordability; well-being & work; and investment

Utilizing STARS metrics provides a regular and systematic review of our progress on the Plan's goals and also inspire us to consider revisions to the Plan over time. STARS allows capture of consistent and comparable data; and its rating system (bronze, silver, gold, platinum), provides incentive for continuous improvement. Roosevelt achieved a bronze rating in 2015, a

certification that expired after 2018. When Roosevelt is ready to undertake its next formal STARS assessment, it may do so.

## **Selected Resources for Campus Sustainability Planning**

- [Campus Sustainability Planning @RooseveltU, 2022-24](#) information archive
- [Petition to Establish an Office of Sustainability @RU](#) (started by [RU Green](#) on 3/29/23)
- United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and AASHE's [Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, & Rating System](#) (STARS)
- The O.G. RU Strategic Sustainability Plan 2015-20 ([pdf](#))
- AASHE, "Beyond the Right Thing to Do: The Value of Sustainability in Higher Education" ([pdf](#))

## **Acknowledgments**

This strategic planning effort began as a team-based student project within Prof. Mike Bryson's SUST 350 Service & Sustainability class in the Fall 2022 semester. Student team members included Kiera Carpenter, Julie Dinquel, Sophia Gallo, and Jayla Turchin. They were joined by Kayla Nelson, sustainability student associate in the Department of Sociology & Sustainability in 2022-23; and Paegge Turner, sustainability student associate in the Department of Law, Society, & Sustainability in 2023-24. Along the way, dozens of students, faculty, staff, and alumni attended meetings and presentations, participated in workshops, completed surveys, and contributed detailed ideas and suggestions that have informed this document. The Planning Team sincerely thanks everyone throughout the RU community who took the time to contribute their ideas and encouragement for this project.

Team members Kiera Carpenter, Sophia Gallo, and Kayla Nelson were honored for their exemplary efforts during the 2022-23 year with the President's Social Justice Award for outstanding service on behalf of the university. A very special thank-you to Sophia Gallo (SOC '22) for her above-and-beyond research efforts and slideshow designs, both of which were integral to our campus outreach efforts.