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The Culture of Sustainability at Southern Miss

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The University of Southern Mississippi

The Culture of Sustainability at Southern Miss

by

Amy Ball

A Thesis
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The University of Southern Mississippi
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Bachelor of Arts
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THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Approved by

Jeffrey Kaufmann, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor
Professor of Anthropology

Ann Marie Kinnell, Ph.D., Chair
Department of Anthropology and
Sociology

Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Abstract

The sustainability movement has been studied in general before, but little research has been done on topic of the sustainability movement at universities. This study aims to contribute to the larger conversation on sustainability by looking at the ideas and motivations behind participation in the movement among students at the University of Southern Mississippi. This is done primarily through interviews performed by the researcher with a number of students in a club on campus dedicated to spreading knowledge of and participation in sustainable activities, known as the Sustainability Advocates. Background information about the sustainability movement on campus is provided by an interview with Haley McMinn, the assistant director of the Office of Sustainability at USM, and survey information she provided. Ultimately it was found that students involved in the movement initially emphasize the pragmatic aspects of sustainability, but have as the core of their participation in the movement a desire to inspire larger social change. Also, it would appear that in this case, the university is the forerunner of sustainability in the larger Hattiesburg community, part of a trend supported by the literature. This research is intended to contribute to the body of anthropological and other research on the topic of sustainability.

Key words: sustainability, social movements, universities, college students

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

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THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
Origin and Definition of Sustainability	3
Advancement of the Movement	5
Sustainable Behaviors.....	7
Cultural Factors	8
Sustainability on College Campuses	10
Methodology	12
Interview	12
Survey.....	14
Results and Discussion	14
Origin of Sustainability at USM	15
Tenets of Sustainability	16
Survey Data.....	16
Other Interviews	19
What does Sustainability Mean?	20
What is Sustainable Behavior and Why Perform It?	21
Why are You Sustainable?	25
What about the City?.....	27
Other Factors and Future Research.....	28
Conclusion.....	30

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

References.....	32
Appendices.....	35
Appendix A.....	35
Appendix B.....	36
Appendix C.....	39

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Introduction

In ecology, the word sustainability describes the ability of a biological organism to remain healthy and productive over time. Sustainability as a movement seeks to reduce the human impact on the earth's biological systems while increasing the quality of human life. A study of this movement must focus on the many aspects of humanity's interaction with its environment, including social, environmental, and economic factors. Humans have always had the ability to change the environment to suit themselves, and this ability has only grown with advents in human thought and ingenuity, such as the industrial revolution. But it is only in the past century or so that this impact on our environment has been widely questioned as a positive thing. In the social sciences, there has been some research into the sustainability movement, but little of that research has been in the field of anthropology. There is a need to add more literature on the subject of motivations for engaging in the movement, from the student perspective in particular.

The environmental movement began in the mid-20th century, and since its advent, some of these consequences have been recognized and environmental knowledge more widely spread. The origins of what is now known as the sustainability movement came about at the World Commission on Environment and Development on sustainability issues in 1987. This conference, though not the first international meeting to focus on issues concerning the environment, was the first to use the term sustainability. It could be considered a part of the very beginning of what is known as the sustainability movement, though its concerns were not really

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

addressed for some time after the conference. A line frequently quoted from the report of this conference defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland, 1987).

Like similar movements have done, the sustainability movement has since spread to a wide variety of settings. Of particular interest is that of a university. Universities typically have large populations of socially and even politically active young people who may come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. Such a scene tends to accelerate the growth of such movements. Yet the topic of sustainability in a college or university setting has garnered little intensive research. There is some focus on attitudes toward sustainability, and other research focuses on sustainable projects, but little studying directly the effect of the sustainability movement on a college campus. However, the associations between communities such as these and various social movements tend to be extensive, and students are known for being ardent participants in social movements as well. Research has shown that such behaviors are even on the rise among the student age group (Blocker, 2011).

The research presented here is a case study of this movement in the smaller instance of The University of Southern Mississippi. From my position as a student here, I have been able to explore efficiently the sustainability movement on the USM campus. Specifically, I have attempted to understand the presence of the sustainability movement on campus by analyzing the prevalence of and attitudes toward sustainable behaviors among the university population, as well as the

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

overall sustainability of the campus. I have tried to discern what impact campus administration and student organizations attempt to have on these attitudes and behaviors, as well as actual effects. To do this, I use a combination of interviews and survey results. In this research, I have contributed to the larger understanding of the impact of the sustainability movement.

Literature Review

Origin and Definition of Sustainability

The ecological movement has been around for decades, but the sustainability movement is something greater. Among those who think about such matters, it is believed that the current path that humanity is on is ultimately unsustainable (Fricker, 1998). Sustainability as it pertains to the environment is loosely defined as providing for the needs of humanity without harming the environment. As one expert in the field of sustainability put it, "More specifically, environmental sustainability could be defined as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity," (Morelli, 2011, p. 22). This definition of environmental sustainability was coined to facilitate the implementation of policies and programs to advance sustainable development as described in *Our Common Future*. As noted in the

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

introduction, *Our Common Future* is the published report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, and is also often called the Brundtland Report after the chairperson (Brundtland, 1987). It is a compilation of reports exploring the many problems of environmental sustainability that existed at the time. It served as a message to the rest of the world, such as university campuses like USM, saying that the world was heading down an unsustainable path. Within the pages of the report are studies for solutions to the environmental problems which plagued and still plague the world today, a call for a global cooperation. It was not the first to deal with environmental issues, but it was the first with the intent to look at them in such a multilateral way. The definition it gives for sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland 1987, p. 41).

The word sustainability itself has since lost some meaning due to overuse, but it can be better understood by its relation to a few other terms. The sustainability movement is typically thought of in environmental terms, but there is a broader definition which also includes both social and economic factors (Morelli, 2011). Environmental problems cannot be solved alone; they must be examined alongside both social and economic problems (Newport, 2003). It is important to note all these aspects of sustainability in its definition because they have equal potential to negatively affect human life. It can be argued that a sustainable environment is necessary to a stable socioeconomic system, while it is just as likely true that a sustainable environment can subsist regardless of the presence of human society or economic exchange (Morelli, 2011). However, environmental

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

sustainability is still first among these three in the eyes of most of the world, and is what is most associated with the larger term. "Whether one considers sustainability to exist as a three-legged table consisting of the environment, the economy, and society, or as a dualistic relationship between human beings and the ecosystem they inhabit, there should at least be agreement that ensuring the provision of clean air, clean water, and clean and productive land is foundational to a responsible socioeconomic system," (Morelli, 2011, 21).

Advancement of the Movement

As Laidly (2013) mentions, the voice of the environmental movement has lost traction in the past years in the United States, despite environmental policies becoming a part of the national landscape. Such policies do indeed seem ubiquitous in our modern society, but there is still debate and fear over whether our environment is in danger, and fear that not enough is being done. There are many reasons this may be so. One is that there exists a clearer image of what is unsustainable than what is sustainable, and that is environmental degradation in its broadest sense. Environmental degradation can be simply described as any disturbance in the environment that is perceived to be negative, and is on the United Nation's list of high level threats (United Nations, 2004). Thus the environmental sustainability movement not only aims to advocate sustainable development as defined by the Our Common Future, but also to change ideas of how we should interact with the world (Fricker, 1998). Laidly says that the foggy picture of

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

sustainability may be due to the abstract nature of the concept, and the lack of immediacy of its concerns. He describes climate change as a socially constructed concept that is understood through many different social, political, and cultural lenses, within which many individuals and institutions are invested (2013). Fricker also suggests that people are unwilling to think about the abstract concept of sustainability as it relates to their life, especially if they perceive a resultant drop in their quality of life as a result (1998). By the time such people realize a need for any action, it is likely to be too late for any action to be useful. Even adding in the additional social and cultural aspects of sustainability, the *concept* of sustainability is not one that is easy to communicate. Because it is so abstract, or removed from everyday experience, it is typically only listened to by those already in the sustainability movement, who are well versed in the language used to describe sustainability. Most literature about the concept is scholarly in nature, and tends to focus on the environment (Newport, 2003). This may tend to restrict the spread of understanding of the movement to those already interested or invested in the movement or the topic of the environment.

This makes it difficult for the sustainability movement to grow when, according to Fricker, the success of the sustainability movement depends on support from communities. Luckily, there seems to be an increase in acceptance of it despite the fuzzy definition (Fricker, 1998). There have been some successful attempts to integrate the idea of sustainability into the greater population by programs focusing on “healthy communities” and “quality of life,” so there are sustainable trends emerging in many institutions. In examining the trend of

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

environmentalism, at least in the United States, the rise in such values is attributed to the rise in “postmaterial” upper middle class individuals, a group which grew significantly after world war two, who often have a high amount of cultural capital (Laidly, 2013).

Sustainable Behaviors

There are many behaviors which are associated with and promoted by the environmental sustainability movement. These behaviors can include attempting to conserve natural resources, keep track of and discuss topics related to the environment, and working toward equity in the access to such resources. “..., sustainable behavior should include actions resulting in the conservation of the physical environment, and also behaviors aimed at protecting other individuals and groups, especially the most vulnerable,” (Corral-Verdugo, 2011, p. 95-96). This defines sustainable behavior as not only ecologically minded, but socially minded, aimed toward the betterment of human living as well as protection of the environment of the environment. The reasons people have for doing any particular ecologically sustainable behavior may rely on the belief in the intrinsic value of the environment, or the needs of humans, or both. This latter belief can be seen as wanting to protect one’s self or loved ones, or as a more altruistic concern for society as a whole (Schultz, 1999). While those within the movement are more likely to participate due to environmental reasons, those outside the movement might be best approached for more egotistical reasons. Both would respond to

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

altruistic appeals, though likely more within the movement would be likely. The motivations for these behaviors generally tend to be intrinsic in nature. Those that value external rewards for such behaviors are more likely to be less concerned with the environment and more materialistic (Corral-Verdugo, 2011).

However, just knowing about sustainable practices is not enough to actually be motivated to perform them. Despite this, lack of such information is a prime reason most people do not perform sustainable behaviors. Information that is presented at a proper time in a proper manner can be effective in at least making known what can be done (Kennedy et al., 2009). Beyond a lack of interest or information on the topic, there are a number of other constraints that also affect a person's participation in sustainable activities. One of these is a lack of time, especially as work hours have increased over time. Even if substituting sustainable activities for not would save time, a perception of them taking more time can affect overall willingness to participate (Kennedy et al., 2009). These constraints might not even need to be in place to prevent people from participating in these activities. This is where it is useful or even necessary to connect ecologically sustainable activities to more basic aspects of life, such as family connections or money (Kennedy et al., 2009).

Cultural Factors

This importance of culture in the progression of the sustainable movement is stressed by Packalén (2010). He notes that the ability of culture to arouse

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

sensibilities is a vital component in making people more likely to behave in a sustainable manner. According to Packalén, agents of culture such as music, art, and literature should orient themselves to this goal if it is to succeed. According to Barlett, one way in which sustainability has been advocated is in strengthening the idea of humanity as a part of the world, in which what we do has an effect on the world (2008). She mentions a specific instance when she realized that the oil leaking from a car does not just go away, but it enters and reacts with the ecosystem. “...there is no “away” to which to throw my used motor oil—or anything else” (Barlett, 2008, p. 1079). She argues that a sort of “reenchantment” with reason such as this is needed to effect change. It should be interesting to note the ways in which the students and staff at USM use such tools to appeal to the student body to be more sustainable.

In addition to the numerous methods by which sustainability is advocated, there are various cultural factors that may affect and individuals' participation in such behaviors. One example is that Anglos tend to be more likely to look at technical innovation, and Hispanics concentrating more on communal aspects. One study found that U.S. respondents to a multinational survey scored lower on the NEP (New Environmental paradigm) than most of the other countries surveyed among these some less developed. It also noted that the sustainability movement is developing at a pace at least as high in Latin American countries as in the United States (Schultz, 1999). Other research has shown a similarity in environmental movements in other, poorer countries, meaning economic or cultural power does not factor into such attitudes as much as previously thought (Laidly, 2013). In fact,

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

the United States as a nation could be seen as behind, as is did not agree with the Rio Accord, while many less wealthy countries did. Laidly's study found that those determined to have both low economic and low cultural capital were more likely to find environmental concerns exaggerated and to find measures to address these concerns costly and unnecessary. It was also found that those with high cultural capital were likely to favor these environmental concerns and policies, regardless of economic capital (Laidly, 2013).

Sustainability on College Campuses

Among university students the sustainability movement takes on a different light. Young people are known for being particularly active in such movements and altruistic behavior in college students is on the rise (Blocker, 2011). Therefore, the sustainability movement is likely to be intensified in such an environment. However, the same constraints apply to this group as do the general population in regards to their participation in the sustainability movement, when it comes to spending time or money to perform more environmentally. A perceived lack of money can prevent some from participating in sustainable activities such as buying organic food, typically more expensive, even if they perceive them as morally good and the same applies to time and sustainable activities (Kennedy et al., 2009). A case study of institutions in the United Kingdom found that in addition to physical limitations of space and budget, there is a lack of awareness of sustainability and culture of non-

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

environmentalism prevailing on the campuses surveyed (Dahle and Neumayer, 2001)

By contrast, in a study done on university students ethical attitudes toward the environment, it was stated, "..., it can be said that the majority of the participants are aware of the socio-economic and cultural factors underlying environmental problems and believe that solutions to these problems depend on the elimination of these factors," (Ozdemir, 2012, p. 380). Students are aware of the attitudes underlying the movement and the behaviors promoted by it. Other research (Sahin et al., 2011) confirms that "the students with more favorable feelings toward sustainability and more ecocentric values toward the environment readily take more sustainable actions." It appears to be readily agreed that the main requirement for sustainability on a college campus is not just financial and other physical limitations, but the willingness to perform these behaviors on the part of the students and others on campus.

However, it is not the general population of a university alone that needs to be active in advocating for and performing these behaviors in the name of the movement. It has been noted that there is a vacuum in higher education of leaders in sustainability, though some institutions have made progress in introducing the environmental aspect of the movement. Newport says that this is because those proponents of sustainability in higher education come largely from environmental backgrounds, so universities tend to adopt these policies first (2003). Many universities make an attempt to affect changes in sustainable behavior by students, but most are still at an early stage in spreading awareness and action (Barlett,

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

2008). The University of Florida has found that studies which integrate all three aspects into studies of sustainability may give a more comprehensive understanding of this complex situation (Newport, 2003). Barlett notes that the advancement of sustainable behaviors at college campuses is contingent on the participation of faculty (2008). From these authors, it can be assumed that those in positions of authority at universities are integral to the university populations' participation in the sustainability movement.

Methodology

For my research into the sustainability movement on the USM campus, I use two different methods. The main method is semi-structured interviews with a number of students within an on-campus organization supporting sustainability. The second method is an analysis of the general trends of data collected by a survey performed by the university. This study was focused on student attitudes toward sustainability. It will act as support for the more subjective interviews, which will focus more on the specific reasons for supporting sustainability of the individual interviewees.

Interview

As stated, qualitative interviews of those involved in sustainability on campus will be the base of my research. The main subjects of this interview are the

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

members of the student organization on the USM campus known as the Sustainability Advocates. This group is relatively new, only formed within the last two years, and is made up of members of the USM community who are already invested in the sustainability movement. From these members, I attempt to determine the pattern of involvement within the movement. Specifically, I want to know why they are involved in the movement, both as individuals and as a group, and what the main focus is within the movement as it is on campus. I estimated that I would be able to get two to four interviews from this quarter, based on group size and involvement. I was in the end able to get three interviews. One of my interviewees is among the earliest of the group, and had the greatest hand in getting the club running of any of those students interviewed. The other two were from students who are generally active participants in the club. Using the information gleaned from these interviews, I attempt to determine what factors may contribute to an interest or involvement in ecologically sustainable practices and the sustainability movement. I also interviewed one of the people in the office of sustainability at USM, who is also one of the staff supporters of the group. From this I gained some small insight into the ways campus officials try to enact change on campus in the name of sustainability. All interviews were conducted in early to mid-June 2015. All but one of the interviews was conducted by email; the remaining interview was conducted by video chat. The form used to obtain consent from the interviewees can be found in Appendix B.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Survey

The second and supporting method I use is a survey, though not one I performed myself. What I found was that there is a survey that the USM Office of Sustainability administered in 2011. There were 24 questions on the survey. The first four were general demographic data, and the next four on the respondent's perception of sustainability and recycling at USM. The next 11 are concrete questions about what and how often certain sustainable activities were performed. The final group of questions dealt primarily with the motivations and inhibition to perform sustainable behavior. This data is quantified and involves a wider group of participants, so the answers to these questions provide some reliable background for the interviews I perform. A summary of the results of the survey can be found in Appendix C.

Results and Discussion

To begin this section, I will review my first interview, the one with an individual within the Office of Sustainability at USM. The individual I chose to speak with is Haley McMinn, the Assistant Director of the Office of Sustainability and also one of the staff supporters of the Sustainability Advocates. From my interview with her, I was able to get an idea of how the institution has come to embrace sustainability and the part it plays in the student culture of sustainability.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Origin of sustainability at USM

First, some brief history referenced by McMinn. In 2007, the American College and University President's Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) was formed, demonstrating the first big push for more ecological sustainability in the university setting. Participation in this commitment entails the development of a comprehensive plan to achieve climate neutrality, including the adoption of tangible actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through the construction of LEED certified buildings (Mission and History). McMinn describes this participation as the catalyst for the creation of USM's Office of Sustainability in 2008. The person responsible for this was on Larry Lee (Lee, 2008), who argued for the university's participation in the ACUPCC to the Faculty Senate. With the signing of this commitment by the then-president of the university, Martha Saunders, the Office of Sustainability was formed, spearheading a number of projects (University, 2008). This was the official beginning of the culture of sustainability at USM. Now, the office of sustainability is very involved on campus, with things like running the campus recycling program, arranging other campus initiatives such as the EcoEagle bike program, and working closely with student groups such as the Sustainability Advocates and the student legislature to make the campus and its students more sustainable (Office of Sustainability).

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Tenets of Sustainability

Of note is the way sustainability is defined by the Office of Sustainability at USM in particular. McMinn described to me the tenets of sustainability, the three positions by which to view sustainability. The first is through concern for the environment, which is what one usually thinks of when talking about things like recycling and energy efficiency. The second aspect of sustainability is the economic, defined most simply as the economic benefits of sustainable behaviors. McMinn points this out as the simplest way to appeal to college students to behave more sustainably on an individual level, like turning off lights when leaving the room and saving on the electricity bill. The last tenet, and the most important to this research, is the social aspect of sustainability. This is a difficult way to reach students, because it represents fundamental changes in the way the world is perceived. It is the presence of this change at USM that I am researching. I continue to focus on the social and cultural aspects of this topic in further interviews.

Survey Data

As mentioned in the methods section, I managed to obtain some survey data collected by the office of sustainability several years ago that aimed to discover something about the perspectives on sustainability and the sustainable behaviors of the USM community. This study was performed once in 2011, several years after the desire of the university's president to make USM a sustainable campus was realized

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

and the Office of Sustainability was formed. In addition to those questions I look at on the attitudes of the university community toward sustainability on campus, there are a number of questions that ask about perceived sustainability of specific areas of campus. This demonstrates the continued efforts in the several years after the initial commitment to be a more sustainable campus.

The 293 survey respondents likely contained a higher number of people involved with sustainability than in the full population of the USM community, but for the purposes of my research it still serves as a good background. The demographic I look at most closely with my interviews is the student population, which makes up roughly half of the survey respondents, likely overlapping with the similar percentage in the 18-29 age bracket. Additionally, three quarters of the respondents were female. Though I do not discuss this in this research, this last detail of gender responsiveness to this survey is of particular note if you explore the results through the lens of feminist ecological theory, such as that exhibited by Plumwood (1993).

According to the data, when asked what came to mind with the word sustainability, about 60% of the respondents thought of conservation/recycling/preservation, and nearly 90% of the respondent's believed that there were sustainability issues that needed to be addressed on campus. When asked what 3 sustainability issues were most important at USM, *energy consumption* was rated the most important by far at around 77%, *litter/trash* at almost 60%, and *flooding* and *eco-friendly construction* each at around 40%. These are largely pragmatic concerns.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

When asked how often they did certain sustainable activities, most replied always or daily on a spectrum from never. This was most prominent in the act of turning off a light at nearly 70% choosing always. Contrast this to completely powering down computer equipment, the only one of the question where *Sometimes* was the most popular choice at nearly 40% and *Always* was not the most popular choice at 35% with a similar but even more marked difference in unplugging secondary electronic devices. This would indicate strong participation in sustainable activities that appear convenient, compared to behaviors which are less so, even when both address the same pragmatic concern of reducing energy consumption.

When asked why they didn't perform sustainable practices, the top reasons chosen were, in order, *not convenient*, *need more information*, or *too expensive*. This would seem to agree with results of earlier questions, where personal convenience and cost are more common barriers to doing sustainable actions rather than a simple lack of knowledge. When asked why they do participate, the top reasons were, in order, *you feel like you are making a difference*, *it feels personally rewarding*, and *economic benefits*, with less than 10% saying they were not motivated. These answers show that those who perform these behaviors see their performance as more selfless than selfish, indicating something of that volunteer spirit so prevalent on university campuses. When each respondent was asked what level of impact they think they have on the overall success of sustainability programs, nearly half chose *moderate*, 13% *high*, and almost 35% *low*, with only 3% choosing *none*, indicating a healthy degree of satisfaction that these sustainable behaviors do in fact make a difference.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

This quantitative data shows qualitative aspect of the way sustainability is perceived in the USM campus. The very existence of the survey and the nature of the questions show the university's interest in making changes to the campus to make it more sustainable. Also, this survey came out of the Office of Sustainability, which was formed as a direct response to a call for universities to participate in the sustainability movement by making these changes. Likewise, the nearly 300 respondents to the survey, the majority of whom can said to be supportive of sustainability, also indicates at significant presence of people involved in sustainability on USM's campus, if not the wider community.

Other Interviews

My other interviews were with students involved with the Sustainability Advocates. I myself am a member of that group, making it easy for me to approach them via email. I do not know them well enough, however, to have knowledge of their individual backgrounds and reasons for joining the group, at least not until this research. There were four main areas my interview questions focused on, the first three aimed at the interviewees themselves. I tried to get some idea of their ideas of what the sustainability movement represents, the behaviors they associate with it and the reasons they perform them, and what aspects of their background led them to the movement. The last of my questions were directed toward their perception of how the university, and to some extent the city, fit into this idea of sustainability.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

What does sustainability mean?

I lead each interview with a couple of questions directed toward their understanding of words surrounding the sustainability movement, such as sustainability, environmentalism, recycling, and so on, also asking why they think these ideas are important. The basic definition of sustainability was stated by all respondents, that for the environment and humans to go on living, we must make of that environment and its resources more responsibly. The consequences of not being sustainable were emphasized, such as a loss of biodiversity and climate change. These ecological concerns were noted as being human concerns as well, demonstrating the social and economic tenets of sustainability as well as the environmental.

One of my interviewees has been involved in sustainability for a lot longer, and was one of the founding members of the group. She went further with the idea that we should be more sustainable, rather, saying that the world does not currently embody *any* definition of sustainability (personal communication, June, 8 2015). This implies to me that a definition of sustainability in the minds of those who care about it does not just include the traditional assumptions of being kind to the environment and using resources wisely, but that it is a state to be attained. One of my interviewees also noted that sustainability and environmentalism and related ideas are characterized by being proactive rather than reactive (personal communication, June 3, 2015). Sustainability necessitates a change in attitude and perception to elicit a change in behavior. The social tenet of sustainability described by McMinn would seem to be embodied most by this activist spirit of the movement.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

This would explain why this area of sustainability seems to be the hardest by which to reach people. Simply acknowledging the validity of the environmental and other pragmatic logic by which the movement operates is one thing, but a more intensive shift in perspective must take place for further involvement in the movement, and a community wide shift in perspective must occur in order for the movement to have any desired impact.

What is sustainable behavior and why perform it?

I next inquired into the more concrete reality of sustainability with a few questions directed at sustainable behavior, i.e. the individual actions that can be taken in support of this idea of sustainability? When asked about sustainable behaviors, the interviewees all repeated the idea of reducing waste, in the more concrete forms of using less water and electricity, and especially recycling. Also present was talk of using cars less and biking and walking more, behaviors which speak not only of reducing waste but also minimizing use, restrictive behaviors in a sense. Of course, these are not seen as restrictive so much as sensible. These are also cost cutting measures, balancing out more expensive sustainable activities. One respondent pointed out that performing sustainable activities in the short term can contribute to greater economic saving in the long term. For instance, a number of people doing something as simple as using reusable water bottles can mean less plastic waste to pick up and dispose of later (personal communication, June 14, 2012). Even without economic benefits, another interviewee said that being less wasteful through recycling and creative use and reuse of materials is very satisfying.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

She acknowledges this feeling of well-being as one factor that contributes to her sustainable behavior in addition to economic and environmental reasons (personal communication, June, 8 2015).

As can be seen above, in my questioning of these members of the Sustainability Advocates as to reasons for doing these behaviors, I referred to the tenets of sustainability as described by McMinn. The environment was most emphasized at this point in all the interviews. This concern was seen both in broader environmental concerns such as pollution, but also in some concrete examples. One interviewee cited the experience of visiting New Zealand and seeing visible evidence of climate change in the receding glaciers (personal communication, June 3, 2015).

One factor, the social, was referenced more when I asked for reasons people may not perform sustainable activities. All those interviewed are relatively active in the sustainability movement, so the answers to this question are necessarily restricted to that perspective. Still, the activist nature of this movement requires some understanding of what impedes the desired shift to a more sustainable world. There are many factors that may prevent the performance of sustainable activities, such as cost or safety. One respondent said that though she tried to walk or ride her bike whenever possible, but safety concerns lead her to drive home from night classes. She also noted that many ecologically friendly products are more expensive (personal communication, June 14, 2012).

These are legitimate reasons not to perform sustainable activities, but they are relatively easy to solve compared to the issue of awareness. Some of the

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

interviewees expressed that people do not always perform sustainable actions because they are too expensive or out of a lack of caring about ecological factors, but that there was simply a lack of awareness of sustainability, especially in those who have no family or other background awareness of it (personal communication, June 3, 2015). Many people may be aware that there are certain ecological problems, but not recognize the human component in their causes, or the human consequences. Even if these ecological, economic, and social consequences are recognized, there may be no evident actions that could help to alleviate them.

Naturally, this topic led to the discussion of what the three interviewed do to incite the types of behaviors considered sustainable. Merely being a member of a club called the Sustainability Advocates implies some actions, but I wanted to know some of the particulars. Specifically, the topic of recycling was mentioned at least in passing in all the interviews. Because of this, I asked about an event known as the Recyclathon that the sustainability advocates had recently won, in which various on-campus groups competed to collect the most recycling over a four-week period. (This event is actually part of a nationwide recycling event through the ACUPCC commitment.) I asked whether they thought programs like this actually did anything to change people's perspectives on sustainability. All interviewees thought the effects of this and similar programs were generally positive, inciting more action on the part of the USM community. It was noted however, that these sorts of programs do not always incite lasting change in the behavior of the participants, and that such events mostly draw those that already have an interest in sustainable practices (personal communication, June 2, 2012). I also heard about how a recent change in

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

the city recycling program had affected one interviewee, necessitating an adjustment of her own recycling regime. She also mentioned hearing others in the city complaining of the changes (personal communication, June, 8 2015).

A couple of my interviewees cited a significant level of action, beyond basic actions such as recycling when possible and using reusable water bottles, and participation in widely-advertised programs to incite sustainable behavior. One of these is the same person mentioned earlier as being one of the founding members of the Sustainability Advocates. The activity of these two alone shows a certain level of involvement in the movement, but they cite additional attempts to effect change in the perception of sustainability and increase sustainable behavior (personal communication, February 13, 2015). The founding member described several sustainable behaviors in addition to those that the other interviewees mentioned, such as placing a bucket in the shower to collect water that would otherwise be wasted for other uses (personal communication, June, 8 2015).

Another interviewee was vocal about reducing waste by using buying less such as maintaining a smaller wardrobe, and buying more responsibly, such as buying ethically and ecologically produced clothing and other goods (personal communication, June 3, 2015). These two individuals are examples of more intensive involvement in sustainable actions, which is not representative of the entire membership of the Sustainability advocates. Even so, these sustainable ideals are present in all those interviewed and in the club as a whole, limited perhaps by time and experience.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Why are you sustainable?

In my third set of questions I asked about the backgrounds of each interviewee, trying to see what motivated them to become active in the sustainability movement in the first place. As Barlett (2008, p. 1085) describes, childhood experiences contribute to later dimensions of meaning, such as in the case of proximity to a natural setting like a forest as a child leading to an interest in botany as an adult. Other means of attaching meaning to actions may also have impact, such as religion. Each person had slightly different ideas of what sustainability meant and levels of involvement in the movement, so I have developed some idea of the personal circumstances that led to these various present situations. This section in no means seeks to say that anyone with particular life experiences will go on to be involved in environmental or other similar movements. Instead, I am simply portraying something of what these individuals perceive as being most instrumental in their personal involvement in the movement on campus through the Sustainability Advocates.

Regardless of their individual backgrounds, all those interviewed described and increased interest in sustainable activities past childhood. One interviewee said that he primarily became interested in sustainability and environmentalism when introduced to environmental issues like climate change. He also described living in Germany for several years, where recycling is not only much easier to do than in the United States, but more encouraged or expected (personal communication June 2, 2012). One respondent said that her interest in environmental issues was present in childhood, perhaps beginning with the concept of leaving a place better than you

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

found it in Girl Scouts. She also says that the erosion of wetlands became important to her after seeing how they contributed to the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana and Mississippi (personal communication, June 14, 2012). In her case, seeing the effects of unsustainable or ecologically unfriendly practices spurred her participation in the sustainability movement.

Another interviewee describes how sustainable activities were always a part of her childhood. Things like recycling, composting and carpooling were expected, and waste was actively discouraged. Her family even grew their own Christmas trees. However, despite her family's background of sustainable behaviors, she did not actively try to be sustainable. It was only when she began her first job that she saw how different the perspectives of her peers were regarding things like waste, and spending. She also cites an environmental issue with spurring her interest in environmentalism and sustainability, when she saw firsthand the effects of climate change in receding New Zealand glaciers, It is experiences such as this and seeing how wasteful others are compared to her own family, that caused her to become more active in sustainability as a movement, She became more conscious of her personal sustainability as well as advocating for larger change (personal communication, June 3, 2015).

The final respondent is a founding member of the club, and very actively involved in performing and advocating for sustainable activities. In here case, her background involved no particular propensity for sustainability. In fact, she notes that her family still doesn't really get why she is so active in the movement, though she's been interested in it since childhood. As she tells it, she just became intensely

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

interested in the environment and sustainability as a child, even winning her seventh grade science fair for a project on environmentally friendly methods of getting rid of fire ants. That she became so involved at a young age despite of lack of family involvement is indicative that a sustainable background is not the only factor that encouraged sustainable behaviors and advocacy (personal communication, June, 8 2015).

What about the city?

My final questions inquired not about the interviewees themselves, but their perceptions of how the university and the city can be seen through the lens of the sustainability movement. I wanted to know what role they perceived the university as having in encouraging sustainable behaviors, and why these actions are or are not present in the university, and on a slightly larger scale, in the city of Hattiesburg. My interviewees, if they knew anything about the sustainability of the city at all, were still more knowledgeable of the sustainability of the university. This is expected, as all are members of the university community and the club all are involved in primarily focuses its sustainability efforts on this community.

As one interviewee noted, there are not many opportunities for USM students or Hattiesburg residents to do sustainable activities like recycling (personal communication, June 2, 2012). Despite this, there are still some measurable differences between the campus and the city regarding sustainability. Some of my respondents pointed out how much easier it is to walk or bike on campus than off campus, with more sidewalks and bike racks. The existing

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

sidewalks in the city are mostly limited to the areas directly next to campus, and there are virtually no bike racks off-campus. One respondent pointed out that as a bike commuter to campus; she was limited in her choices of living accommodations to an apartment just off of the longleaf trace, one of the few bike friendly routes in the city (personal communication, June 3, 2015). Also noted was how much easier it is to recycle on campus than in the city, as well as a few other sustainable university practices.

When I asked why my respondents thought the university was noticeable more sustainable than the city, those that had an opinion were generally in agreement that the young student demographic of the community was primarily responsible. As I noted in the literature review, previous research has shown that universities are typically the first institutions to introduce sustainable practices to an area, and this case would seem to reflect that. My interviewees cite the malleability of the students' ideals and perspectives as the driving factor of this phenomenon at USM, making them more likely to learn about and start performing sustainable ideas and actions.

Other Factors and Future Research

I sampled only a tiny portion of those involved in sustainability at USM, an even smaller portion of the larger USM community. Thus I cannot easily explore all the factors that might come into play in people's attitudes and behaviors in this

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

movement here. A larger study involving more people on campus would be valuable in gaining a more objective picture of sustainability on campus. Demographic factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status would be more effectively analyzed with a larger group. Gender would be of particular interest to me because of the seeming prevalence of women in the movement here. Of the few people I interviewed, all but one were women, this due largely to the fact that all the staff supervisors and regularly attending members of the Sustainability Advocates are women. This would seem to show that women are the driving force behind sustainability, at least on the student side. There is also the fact that the survey results show a higher percentage of female respondents, again indicating a larger interest in sustainability at USM among women.

The feminist movement has a definite overlap with issues of environmentalism and nature, thus with sustainability. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (Plumwood, 1993) is one of the better known texts on this subject. It does not deal with the concept of sustainability specifically, but does illustrate through the lens of a feminist critique of reason the main faults in our ideas about how to deal with nature. These faults are at the core of what the sustainability movement seeks to fix. There has been some research on this subject, as Marshall (2011) describes the dearth of women in leadership roles in the field of corporate social responsibility, specifically in the area of sustainability. Combined with other research such as that of women in volunteerism and sustainability on college campuses, this would be a valuable avenue of research to continue in further study of sustainability at USM.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

I would also recommend looking at the sustainability movement within the city as a contrast to the university. I touched on this in my analysis, but I did not include any interviews with individuals involved in the things like recycling off-campus. Gathering similar data on residents of Hattiesburg not affiliated with the university would give a more complex and comprehensive picture of the sustainability movement on campus as part of the larger sustainability movement, and is what I myself would choose to do if I continued this research.

Conclusion

In the research presented above, a few conclusions can be drawn. First, it seems obvious that most involvement in the sustainability movement is drawn from pragmatic concerns of reducing waste and impact on the environment, as well as other environmental concerns. As explained by McMinn in my interview with her, that final element of the movement, that of effecting social change, is indeed the most difficult to drive forward. Yet it is that aspect which is most crucial to the definition of sustainability itself. Of those students interviewed all presented first with a pragmatic view of sustainability and sustainable behaviors as a response to environmental, and to a lesser extent, economic problems. In addition, many continued on this line of thought to address the social aspect of sustainability. This social aspect is the one most embodied in the advocating of sustainable behaviors by these individuals through the Sustainability Advocates, a proactive response to environmental concerns.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Additionally, certain other aspects of the sustainability movement as it manifests at USM have been made clear. The prevalence of female participation in the movement, and the general trend of student activism and university promoting in this movement is particularly evident. It would appear that the conclusion that others research has drawn is correct, that universities are the forerunners of sustainable practices within communities.

With this research, I have presented a clear picture of the sustainability movement as it presents itself on the USM campus. Through the use of interview and survey data, I have tried to get some idea of what the concept of sustainability means, as well as how sustainability is performed here at USM.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

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THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Appendices

Appendix A



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15052001
PROJECT TITLE: The Culture of Sustainability at Southern Miss
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Amy Ball
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Arts and Letters
DEPARTMENT: Anthropology and Sociology
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 06/03/2015 to 06/02/2016
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Appendix B

The following is the form I used to obtain consent from the participants in my research.

The Culture of Sustainability at Southern Miss

This is a study on the attitudes of Southern Miss students involved in the sustainability movement on campus towards the concept of sustainability and sustainable behaviors. Your participation includes an interview conducted by email on your personal attitudes of sustainability and sustainable behaviors, and those aspects of your personal history that pertain to these attitudes. Questions will also be asked of your perception on the sustainability movement as seen on campus and in the city of Hattiesburg. This study is being performed as part of my thesis in partial fulfillment of an undergraduate degree in Anthropology at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Participation will be limited to email correspondence or a skype or other video-chat interview. If you prefer to do a video chat interview, we will arrange a time to talk via video-chat for a single interview lasting no more than an hour. If you choose the email option, you will answer the initial questions attached to the email as thoroughly as possible. If clarification on the questions is desired, further correspondence is encouraged. The researcher may also ask follow-up questions in further correspondence. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. There will be no penalty for withdrawing from the study at any time.

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Confidentiality will be maintained upon the request of the respondent. The names of the respondents will not be connected to the emailed responses, and these responses will be kept in a password protected file. The responses will be destroyed upon completion and approval of the study.

If you have any questions about this study at any time, please feel free to contact either me, Amy Ball, at 601-667-5579, or amy.ball@eagles.usm.edu, or my thesis advisor Dr. Jeffery Kaufmann at 601-266-6810, or jeffrey.kaufmann@usm.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the chair of the Institutional Review Board at The University of Southern Mississippi.

Have you read this consent form or it has it been read to you?

Yes_____ No_____

Have all of your questions about the form and the research been answered?

Yes_____ No_____

Do you understand the nature of the research in which you are about to participate?

Yes_____ No_____

Do you agree to participate in this study?

Yes_____ No_____

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Do you give us permission to attach your name to your responses if they are quoted or summarized in any papers, reports or articles produced from this study? (If you check no, your name will not be used, and the researcher will follow the steps described above to be sure your responses remain confidential.)

Yes_____ No_____

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Appendix C

The following is a summary of the full results of the survey performed by the Office of Sustainability.

1. What is your University affiliation?

Faculty	13.31%
Staff	38.23%
Student	47.44%
Community Member	1.02%

Answered: 293, Skipped: 0

2. As a staff or faculty member, is your office/department located in Cook Library?

Yes	16.56%
No	83.44%

Answered: 151, Skipped: 142

3. Choose your age bracket.

18-29	45.73%
30-39	20.48%
40-49	11.60%
50 and above	22.18%

Answered: 293, Skipped: 0

4. What is your gender?

Male	76.45%
Female	23.21%

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Other	0.34%
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Answered: 293, Skipped: 0

5. When you hear the term "sustainability" what answer best comes to mind?

(choose only one)

Maintaining Status Quo	7.96%
Ability to Sustain Life on Earth	19.03%
Natural Resources/ Environment Related	28.37%
Conservation/ Recycling/ Preserving	61.94%
Don't Know	2.08%

Answered 289, Skipped: 4

6. Do you believe there are environmental/sustainability issues currently facing the Southern Miss Hattiesburg campus?

Yes	86.16%
No	13.84%

Answered: 289, Skipped: 4

7. If yes, in your opinion, what are the top 3 most important environmental issues currently facing Southern Miss Campuses?

Litter/Trash	59.92%
Flooding	36.84%
Water Quality	17.00%
Air Quality	15.38%
Eco-Friendly(green) Construction	36.84%

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Open/Green Space	12.96%
Alternative Transportation (non-fossil fuel)	28.34%
Energy Consumption/ Management	76.52%
Don't know	1.62%

Answered: 247, Skipped: 46

8. How would you rate your general recycling knowledge?

Poor	3.93%
Fair	12.50%
Average	37.14%
Good	36.79%
Excellent	9.64%

Answered: 280, Skipped: 13

9. How often do you recycle paper, plastic, cans, etc?

Daily	43.57%
Weekly	25.71 %
Monthly	18.93%
Never	11.79%

Answered: 280, Skipped: 13

10. If you responded 'daily', 'weekly', or 'monthly', to the previous question, where do you recycle?

Work	23.91 %
Home	26.09%

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Both	50.00%
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Answered: 276, Skipped: 17

11. What do you think of the location of the recycling containers in Cook Library?

Well placed	10.71%
Decently placed	53.21%
Hard to Find	28.57%
Out of the Way	7.50%

Answered: 280, Skipped: 13

12. How often do you utilize a reusable bottle instead of a disposable plastic bottle for drinks? (e.g. aluminum bottle, bpa free plastic bottle, sigg, etc.)

Daily	49.64%
Weekly	20.36%
Monthly	16.43%
Never	13.57%

Answered: 280, Skipped: 13

13. How often do you turn off the lights when you leave a room?

Always	67.50%
Sometimes	29.64%
Rarely	1.79%
Never	1.07%

Answered: 280, Skipped: 13

14. How often do you fully power down your computer equipment?

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Always	35.00%
Sometimes	39.29%
Rarely	19.29%
Never	6.43%

Answered: 280, Skipped: 13

15. How often do you unplug secondary electronic equipment (i.e. chargers, radios, small appliances)?

Always	18.93%
Sometimes	41.07%
Rarely	30.00%
Never	10.00%

Answered: 230, Skipped: 13

16. Which do you prefer in your workplace setting: natural lighting or overhead lighting?

All Natural Light	13.93%
Mostly Natural Light	50.00%
Neutral	24.29%
Mostly Overhead Light	9.29%
All Overhead Light	2.50%

Answered: 230, Skipped: 13

17. How important is it to you that Southern Miss's new buildings be designed to conserve water and energy?

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Very important	55.43%
Important	34.08%
Somewhat Important	9.36%
Not Important	1.12%

Answered: 267, Skipped: 26

18. Which of the following sustainable services are offered at Cook Library (check all that apply)?

Discounted Double Sided Printing	36.33%
Scanner	55.06%
Electronic Notifications	67.04%
Access to Online Library Account	83.15%
Access to E-Books, journals and databases	87.27%
Copy Machines with E-mail Capabilities	35.58%

Answered: 267, Skipped: 26

19. Which of the following sustainable operations are on-going at Cook Library (check all that apply)?

Recycling	89.51%
Low-Flow Toilets	1835%
Retro-fit Energy Efficient Lighting	15.36%
Motion Sensor Lighting	23.60%
E-PEAT certified computer systems	9.36%

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Computer Management System (i.e., power-down, reboot. etc.)	44.19%
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Answered: 267, Skipped: 26

20. Which of the following prevent you from participating in sustainable practices?

Too expensive	10.49%
Need more information	23.60%
Too busy	15.36%
Not convenient	31.46%
I do not think there is an issue and do not participate	2.25%
I do participate	52.06%

Answered: 267 Skipped: 26

21. Which of the following reasons motivate you to participate?

It feels you are making a difference	66.29%
It personally rewarding	41.20%
Economic Benefits	33.33%
I am not motivated	6.74%

Answered: 267 Skipped: 26

22. Which of the following statements best represent your attitude toward energy and waste reduction at Southern Miss?

It saves money	52.06%
Clearly identified benefits	34.03%

THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY AT SOUTHERN MISS

Support long as it's convenient	13.11%
Incentive	0.75%

Answered: 267 Skipped: 26

23. What level of impact do you feel your individual actions have on the overall success of the sustainability initiatives on campus? (i.e. energy consumption, recycling, awareness)

High	13.86%
Moderate	48.31%
Low	34.83%
None	3.00%

Answered: 267 Skipped: 26

24. Which source(s) do you think is (are) most effective to convey information related to sustainability services and best practices? (check all that apply)

USM Mailout	79.03%
Office of Sustainability Webpage	24.72%
University Libraries Webpage	23.22%
Posters/ Flyers	41.57%
Social Media	73.03%
List servs	20.22%
Word of Mouth	50.19%
Newsletter	21.35%

Answered: 267 Skipped: 26