

Proposal for a Chancellor Appointed UCCS Sustainability Council

Created by the Faculty Assembly Sustainability Committee in collaboration with the Office of Sustainability and student leadership of the Green Action Fund

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Introduction

Sustainability refers to the practice of meeting our current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. It encompasses a holistic approach that balances environmental, social, and economic considerations to create a viable future for our planet and its inhabitants. The importance of sustainability stems from the urgent need to address the escalating environmental challenges, such as climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss, which threaten our ecosystems, economies, communities, and the well-being of individuals, with the greatest impacts typically felt by the most vulnerable populations.

Universities play a pivotal role in driving sustainability efforts. As hubs of innovation, research, and education, they have the unique capability to develop, test, and disseminate sustainable practices and technologies. Moreover, by educating future leaders, decision-makers, and citizens of the world, universities can embed sustainability into the fabric of society, fostering a more conscientious and responsible global community committed to preserving our planet for future generations.

Students are worried about climate change, and they want their campuses to prioritize and showcase sustainability efforts. In a 2023 survey of college students, 85% said that it is “somewhat important” or “very important” for their campus to prioritize sustainability, (“Actions and hopes of the sustainability-focused student,” insidehighered.com, 1/2/23), suggesting that strong sustainability principles and practices may be important for recruitment. Indeed, another 2023 survey found that approximately 30% of prospective students identified sustainability as a top three factor when choosing a college (“New insights on student attitudes towards sustainability in college life,” veritrove.com, 3/20/23).

The University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) has consistently been at the forefront of sustainability efforts in southern Colorado and beyond. Building upon this strong foundation and our rich history of supporting and advancing sustainability at UCCS and in our local and regional communities, there are numerous opportunities for growth and innovation. This document will provide a very brief overview of the significant sustainability achievements at UCCS to date, including the recent development of the UCCS 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan. Looking ahead, the proposal introduces an exciting development aligned with the UCCS Sustainability Strategic Plan: the creation of a Chancellor-appointed UCCS Sustainability Council. This council represents a significant opportunity to enhance and expand our sustainability initiatives, leveraging our past successes to shape a more sustainable future at UCCS and the surrounding regions. Doing so would also be in alignment with a broader movement at the

other University of Colorado campuses as well as at the system-level, and at universities across the nation.

Brief History of Sustainability Efforts on Campus

Substantive sustainability efforts at UCCS began in 2002 with the formation of the campus Sustainability Committee and the student organization Students for Environmental Awareness and Sustainability (SEAS). In 2005, UCCS was the first campus in the CU System to hire a dedicated sustainability officer with the creation of the Office of Sustainability. The next year, a campus-wide Minor in Sustainable Development (now Sustainability) was added. In 2007, UCCS formalized its first Sustainability Strategic Plan and that same year became an original signatory to the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. In 2008, UCCS students proposed and approved a \$5 per student solar fee to fund renewable energy projects on campus, and in 2011 this fee was revised and expanded to become the Green Action Fund, which since that time has supported more than 160 sustainability-related efforts at UCCS, ranging from clean transportation and water bottle stations to campus events and community outreach.

By 2008 UCCS was a pioneering participant in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's first systematic rating system for campus sustainability, the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS). UCCS has participated in every STARS reporting cycle since its formation, receiving a Silver rating in 2011 and Gold ratings in 2015, 2018, and 2021. With the adoption of a new campus-wide general education Compass Curriculum in 2010, UCCS became one of the only universities in the world to require all students to complete a sustainability-related course in order to graduate. By the late 2010s, a thriving Office of Sustainability featured three full-time staff (Director, Assistant Director, Outreach Director), more than a dozen student employees and interns, and a systems engineer (reporting to Facilities) devoted to advancing sustainability initiatives, operations, and engagement. Toward these ends, the Office of Sustainability regularly partnered with the campus Sustainability Committee, student groups such as SEAS, the faculty Director of the Sustainability Minor, the Green Action Fund, and an array of faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

UCCS Sustainability Strategic Plan

The UCCS 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan provides guidance and recommendations for UCCS's sustainability efforts through the end of the decade. The plan was approved by the Chancellor in Spring 2022 after a two-year development process involving the Office of Sustainability, the Sustainability Committee, SGA, and input from faculty, staff, and students gathered through tabling events, open forums, and surveys. The plan aligns with the CU System Strategic Plan 2021-2026; the UCCS Strategic Plan 2030; STARS, the Sustainability, Tracking, Rating, and Assessment System (STARS); and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan rests on four core strategies focusing on leadership; teaching and research; operations; and engagement with the wider community. These four strategies broadly reflect the social, economic, and environmental pillars of sustainability.

One of the plan's four strategies is to "foster a culture of sustainability at UCCS and beyond." To create this culture of sustainability, the plan calls for the creation of a "Chancellor appointed Sustainability Council to manage the implementation of the 2030 UCCS Sustainability Strategic Plan with no term end." This representative committee would help develop strategies for implementing the plan and identify

areas for improvement. The Sustainability Council would provide oversight of the plan's implementation and bring together key stakeholders from across campus to foster a greater culture of sustainability at UCCS. Members of the Sustainability Committee and the Office of Sustainability identified the creation of a Sustainability Council as an important step in executing the plan and strengthening UCCS's sustainability commitments.

Present Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainability Efforts at UCCS

UCCS boasts a proud history of sustainability achievements, and currently stands poised to elevate these successes to new levels. We have a unique opportunity to further strengthen our sustainability initiatives, drawing upon the wealth of knowledge and experience we have accumulated across our campus. At present, this expertise is somewhat de-centralized, and thus not maximally cohesive. Historically, sustainability efforts were often coordinated by the UCCS Office of Sustainability. Although this office remains a vital component of our sustainability efforts, it has been reduced in size compared to the late 2010's due to budgetary constraints. Regardless of that office's size, and because of the increasing scope, complexity, and cross-campus/cross-unit nature of issues that must be addressed in order to support and advance sustainability efforts at UCCS, a broader, campus-spanning structure is needed. This is the Sustainability Council that was described in the UCCS 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan.

Establishing a dedicated, chancellor-appointed Sustainability Council would represent a significant step forward. Doing so would provide numerous opportunities for strengthening sustainability efforts on campus and beyond. More specifically, this would provide a strategic approach and support structure for translating the goals outlined in the strategic plan into action. Of course, the strategic plan represents only a snapshot in time. It is anticipated that additional ideas and goals will be developed over the coming years by the numerous groups and entities on campus concerned with sustainability (e.g., Faculty Assembly Sustainability Committee, Office of Sustainability, Green Action Fund, Staff Council, Student Government, Facilities). The Council will be well-positioned to help implement these innovations and to coordinate the efforts of all these units, as well as to provide a structure for partnering between faculty, staff, and students on sustainability. Such efforts will be further boosted by creating and formalizing a stronger, more reliable connection and line of communication between these sustainability efforts and campus leadership. It is also anticipated that the Sustainability Council will be an effective means to identify more revenue-neutral or even revenue-positive measures that could contribute to campus budget health, another critical form of sustainability. The Sustainability Council would not only address current needs but also lay the groundwork for a sustainable and vibrant future for UCCS, enhancing the visibility and impact of our work, and reinforcing our position as a leader in sustainability on our campus, in the local community, and beyond.

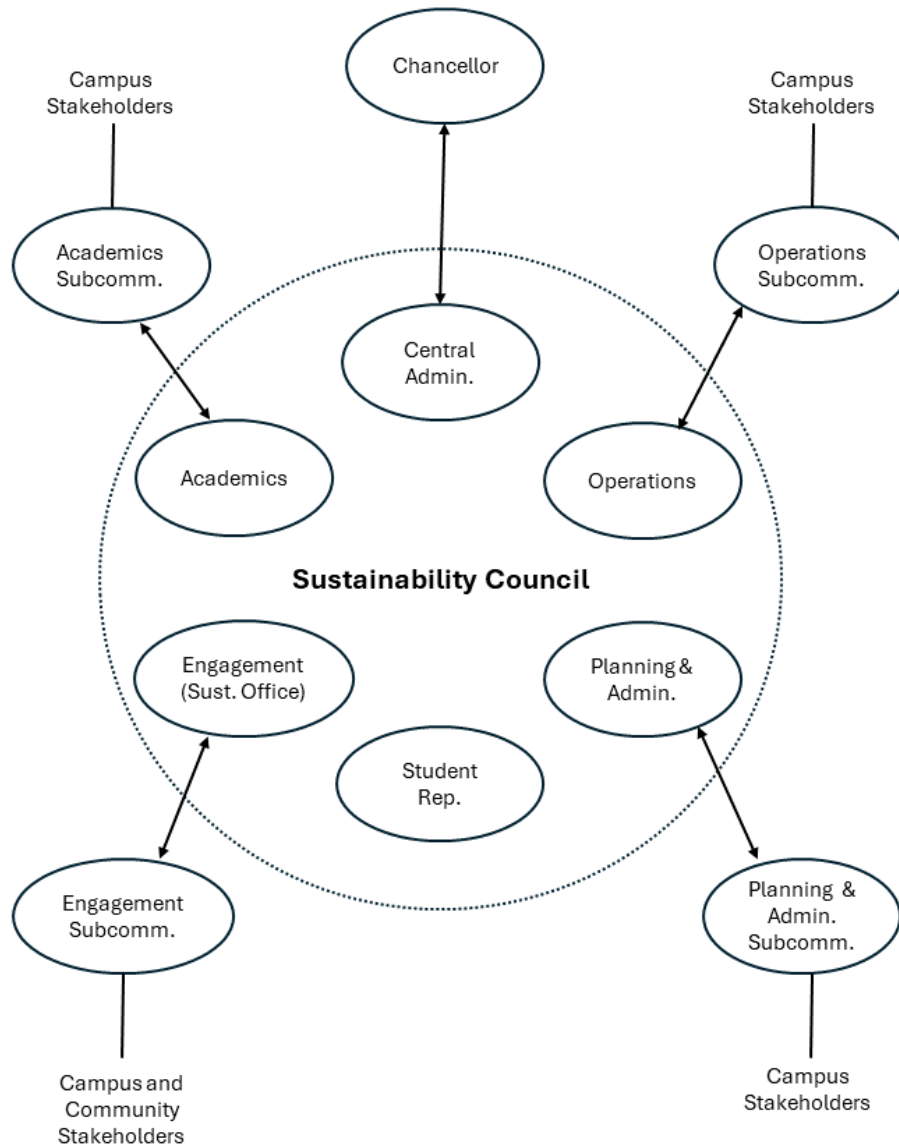
Chancellor Appointed UCCS Sustainability Council

We hope to develop and create the most appropriate and effective council structure and function in direct collaboration with the chancellor and central administration. A starting point is offered here, based on careful consideration of many factors including but not limited to the importance of creating a campus-spanning structure with strong ties to central administration, the UCCS 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan, and lessons learned (and graciously shared with us) by other campuses in the formation of such a council, while still acknowledging UCCS's unique culture and organization.

Who? In order to convey the wide-ranging importance of sustainability, and to ensure that the council can empower and enable sustainability efforts on campus, it is vital that both the council and the individual representatives be appointed by the chancellor. For the same reasons, and also to help foster communication, coordination, and collaboration, it will be important to have representation from central administration, faculty, staff, and students. Ideally, the knowledge, experience, and vision of the representatives will collectively span all aspects of the sustainability strategic plan and the core domains of the STARS program: leadership, academics, operations, planning and administration, and engagement. We recommend administrators overseeing each of the following domains select representatives in close collaboration with relevant governance groups (i.e., faculty assembly, staff association, and student government). We suggest the following representatives:

- A member of the Chancellor's cabinet to represent and facilitate communication with central administration; selected by the Chancellor
- A faculty member to represent teaching and research (academics), as well as faculty engagement; selected by Provost
- A representative for operations; selected by the AVC of Campus Planning & Facilities Management
- A representative for planning and administration; selected by the VCAF
- Student representative; Sustainability Senator from student government
- The director of the Office of Sustainability to represent engagement broadly (campus and local community), and also provide guidance and consultation to the council on sustainability issues

How? The breadth and inclusiveness of council representation will need to be balanced against the need for dynamic, nimble operation and decision-making capability. As such, we recommend the council membership remain as small as possible. But doing so creates two important challenges. First, a smaller council will by its nature lack full representation from all potential voices and stakeholders across all the relevant units on campus. Second, it may be difficult for a small group of representatives to devise and accomplish real work toward achievable goals. Both of these challenges can be addressed by the formation of subcommittees, each of which is tasked with formulating goals and tracking accomplishments in one of the core sustainability domains: academics, operations, planning and administration, and engagement. Individuals from across campus may serve on these subcommittees in order to ensure that the issues relevant to their respective units are heard, and to contribute time, energy, and passion towards making measurable progress on sustainability goals. These subcommittees would be chaired by the respective council representatives, who report back to the sustainability council.



What? The proposed Sustainability Council will take ownership of the implementation of the UCCS 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan. This council will not simply advise the chancellor. It will be a working council with strong ties to campus leadership, involving bidirectional communication. Relevant units and individuals across campus can be engaged through participation on subcommittees, which will have strong ties and two-way communication with the council through their committee chairpersons. We propose that the existing faculty assembly Sustainability Committee become the Academic subcommittee of the Sustainability Council, and that the Office of Sustainability shift to focus primarily on engagement efforts, including through leadership of the Engagement subcommittee by the Director of that office.

The council will meet regularly to plan, review, and strategize sustainability efforts for the entire campus. Each year, the council will develop goals and delegate each to the appropriate representative and subcommittee. Representatives will report progress and challenges back to the council on a regular

basis. In addition to enabling action, the council will lead tracking through the STARS assessment process, which will be linked directly to relevant units through subcommittee members and activities. One of the key ways in which the council will showcase sustainability efforts and accomplishments to the rest of campus and the local community will be through the annual Sustainability Summit.

Impact

UCCS has been a leader in sustainability for more than 2 decades. Historically, these efforts have predominantly been led “from the side” by the faculty assembly Sustainability Committee and by the Office of Sustainability. Given the tremendous importance and the increasingly inter-departmental nature of sustainability efforts, the campus needs a new, more centralized focal point. The Chancellor appointed Sustainability Commission will provide this focus without sacrificing broad campus involvement. In fact, it promises to foster more robust engagement by faculty, staff, and students by providing an over-arching support structure, and directly connecting sustainability efforts to central administration. This promises to improve communication, coordination, and collaboration between the numerous stakeholders on campus and beyond. Improved integration and efficiency is anticipated as well, through the delegation of better-aligned sustainability goals, actions, and data collection (including STARS assessments) to the subcommittees composed of the people who know their units’ potential contributions to sustainability the best. The council is also expected to increase visibility and impact of sustainability efforts across campus, in the local community, and with prospective students.

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