

GRADUATING GREEN

STEPS TOWARDS A SUSTAINABILITY GRADUATION REQUIREMENT AT UW

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INTRODUCTION

The UW is already a leader in sustainability in higher education, especially in terms of energy sources, waste diversion, and infrastructure. However, one area where the University is less focused on sustainability is in the curriculum. Our communities and societies are increasingly faced with complex, interconnected challenges which require long-term sustainable thinking. Knowledge, awareness, and application of sustainability in all career fields is becoming increasingly important. We need graduates and future leaders who are aware of these issues and know how to address them both in their field of study and personal lives. To address this issue, I researched and solicited feedback from the UW community on how to implement a sustainability graduation requirement and started building UW student support around the concept of a sustainability requirement.

METHODS: CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY & BUILDING SUPPORT

Interviews:

To get initial feedback, advice, and insight into the concept of a sustainability graduation requirement I have met with:

- UW faculty
- UW Provost & Vice Provost
- Academic advisors
- Alumni who worked on the Diversity Credit Initiative
- UW Sustainability staff

ASUW Resolution:

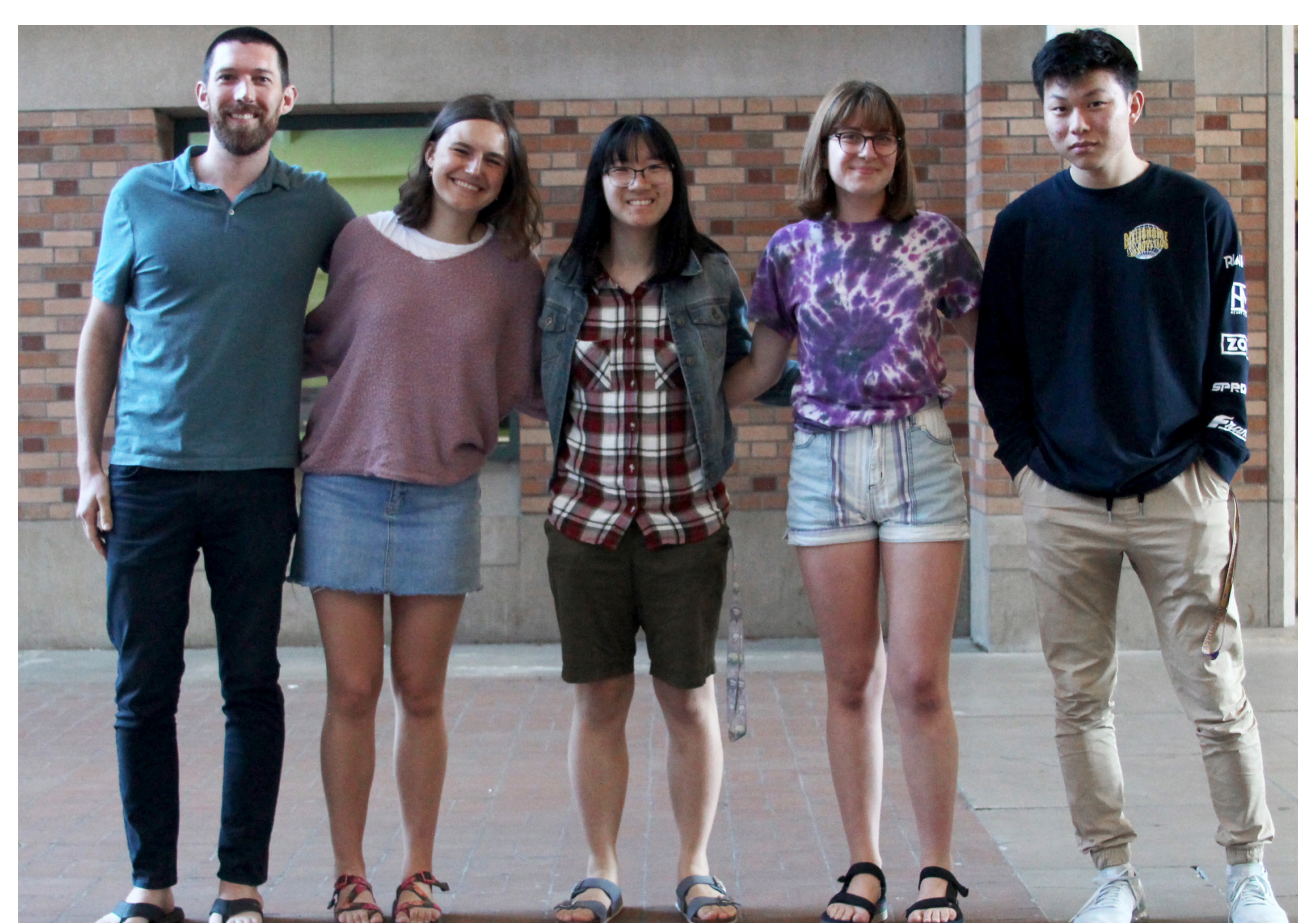
In order to increase visibility of my project and receive more formal student support, I proposed and passed a resolution through the ASUW Student Senate in support of the consideration of a sustainability graduation requirement.

Coalition Building & Building Support:

In order to ensure the continuation of my project, I formed a student coalition to carry on my project after I graduate. This involved advertising my project, speaking with UW student organizations, and organizing coalition meetings.

A photo of the Sustainability Credit Coalition (SCC), the coalition I founded to continue my project.

Our coalition is a registered student organization at the UW and has roughly nine regular members.



RESEARCH QUESTION

What measures can students at the University of Washington take towards implementing an undergraduate sustainability graduation requirement?

METHODS: RESEARCH

Precedents:

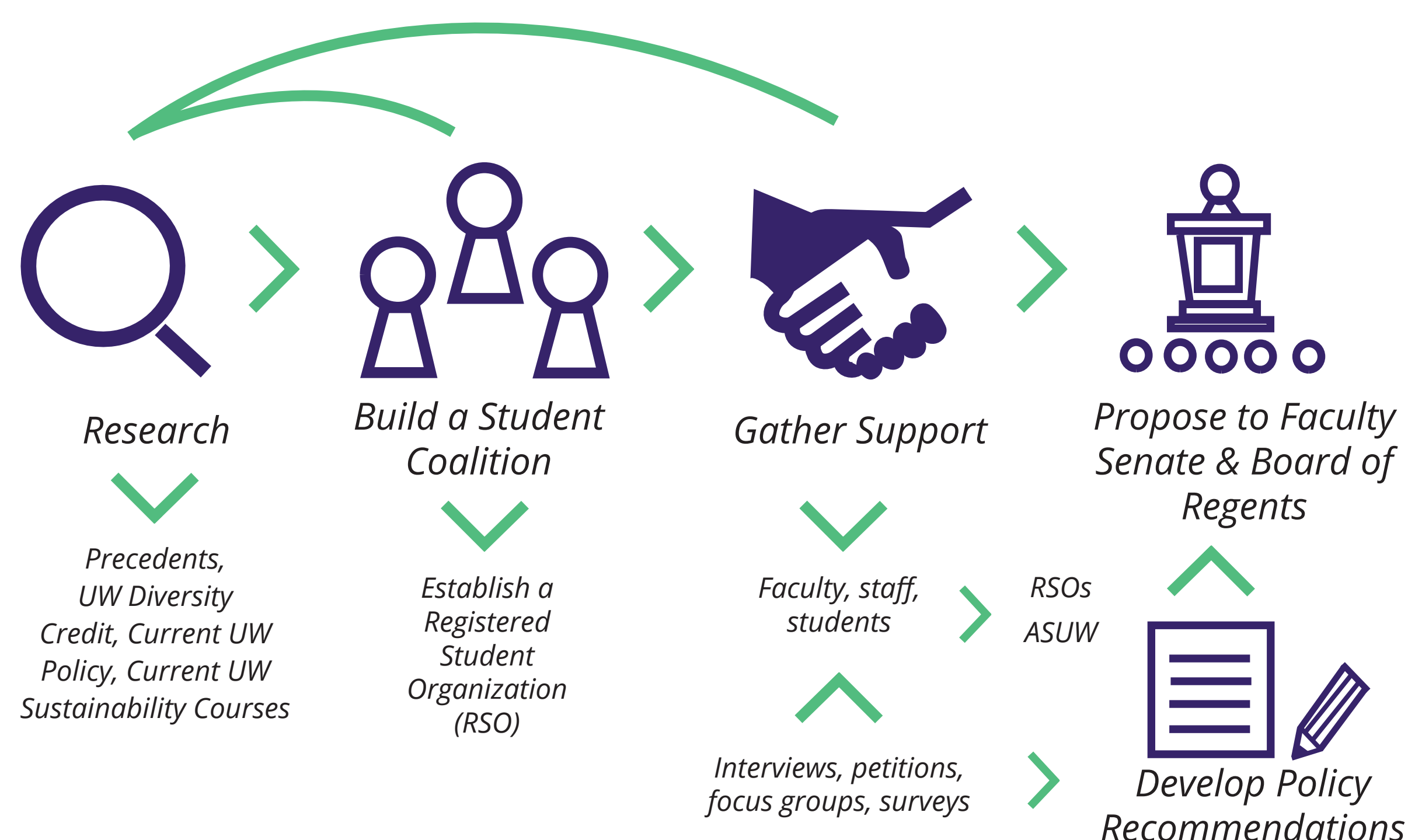
- Sustainability graduation requirement policy at other universities and colleges, particularly UW peer institutions.
- What work has already been done at the UW related to a sustainability graduation requirement.
- The UW Diversity Credit — a relatively recent student-led initiative that also changed UW undergraduate graduation requirement policy.

Current Policies:

In addition to precedents, I researched what current UW policies may already support the concept of a sustainability graduation requirement.

RECOMMENDED MODEL

(based on Interviews & UW Diversity Credit Case Study)

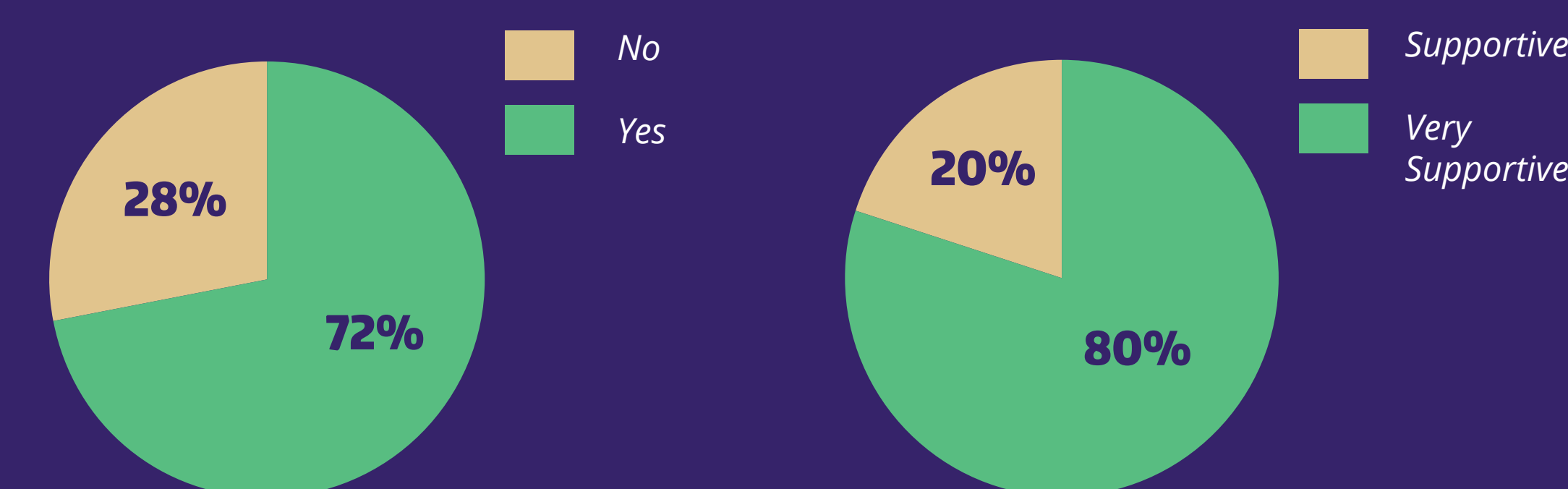


KEY FINDINGS

- Most universities with a sustainability graduation requirement are small, private liberal arts schools and are focused on the environmental aspect, and not as focused on the social or economic aspect of sustainability.
- Peer institutions with a sustainability graduation requirement include the University of Vermont, University of Minnesota, and the University of Georgia.
- UW has 961 “sustainability courses” and 2338 that “include sustainability,” according to its report submitted to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).
- An “S-credit” has been discussed before in the 2015 *Sustainability Across the Curriculum* report.
- The main concern is that another graduation requirement could increase the credit burden for some students.

INFORMAL POLL RESULTS

I created a poll soliciting student opinion on a sustainability graduation requirement. 45 responses were gathered, representing students from roughly 26 different majors. Most of the respondents were solicited during the 2019 UW Earth Day event, and thus results may be skewed in favor of sustainability and are not representative of the entire UW undergraduate body.



CONCLUSION

Although it will take several years, implementing a sustainability graduation requirement is definitely feasible at the UW. To succeed, students need to remain organized, committed, and be willing to listen to individuals who have reservations about the project. As for next steps, students need to gather campus-wide student support, solicit more feedback from the UW community, and develop policy recommendations to present to Faculty Senate.