

# Assessing the State of Sustainability Education: A Case Study of Faculty Efforts at the University of Nevada, Reno

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# Assessing the State of Sustainability Education: A Case Study of Faculty Efforts at the University of Nevada, Reno

- UNR's Sustainability Committee
- The Working Group on Curriculum
- Survey of Undergraduate Teaching
- Main Survey Results
- Key Points and Conclusions
- Points of Discussion



# UNR's Sustainability Committee

Established in 2008 in order to support implementations of steps towards sustainability and the reporting duties within the ACUPCC

Position	Nominating Unit	Appointee
VPAF	President	Ron Zurek
Faculty	Faculty Senate	Hans-Peter Plag
Faculty	Faculty Senate	Scott Slovic
Faculty	Faculty Senate	David Crowther
Facilities Services	VPAF	Steve Mischissin
Facilities Services	VPAF	Mike Bennett
Parking & Trans.	VPAF	Melody Bayfield
EH&S	VPR	Stephanie Woolf
Academy for Env.	Provost	<i>Mike Collopy</i>
Student Services	VPSS	Russell Meyer
Classified Employee	SEC	Melanie England
Undergraduate	ASUN	Noah Millett
Graduate	GSA	Michelle Da Pra
Sustainability Coord.	VPAF	<i>John Sagebiel</i>
External	VPAF	Duane Sikorski

# Working Group on Curriculum

Charge: provide a chapter for the report:

- survey extent to which sustainability issues are covered in (under)graduate teaching;
- identify gaps and recommend extensions;
- identify obstacles and required support;
- draft a policy and recommend specific steps.

# Working Group on Curriculum

17 members from 14 Colleges and/or Department:

Name	Affiliation
Michael Collopy	Academy of the Environment
David Crowther	Curriculum, Teaching, & Learning
Jeffrey Englin	Resource Economy
Guy A Hoelzer	Biology
Jen Huntley-Smith	Academy for the Environment
Mary E Hylton	Social Work
Stephen K Lafer	Curriculum, Teaching, & Learning
Donica Mensing	School of Journalism
Paul Neill	Core Curriculum Office
Thomas J Nickles	Department of Philosophy
Hans-Peter Plag	NBMG & NSL
John Sagebiel	Environmental Health and Safety
Christopher Simon	Political Science
Scott Slovic	English
Julie Stoughton	Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences
James A Sundali	Managerial Sciences
Mark Waldo	English

# Survey of Undergraduate Teaching

## Survey Goals and Objectives:

- Faculty's intrinsic motivation:
  - relevance of sustainability for themselves;
  - interest in teaching sustainability .
- Faculty's practice:
  - teaching towards sustainability or not?
- Faculty's concerns:
  - obstacles, faculty perception of students' priorities.

Aim: collect some baseline data

# Survey of Undergraduate Teaching

## Introduction to the Survey Objectives

For our purposes in the following survey - and in the larger report to which the results of this survey will contribute - we would like to suggest that “sustainability curriculum” is any aspect of university teaching that helps to raise students’ awareness and understanding of the processes by which “our common future” might be enhanced by focusing on the **so-called “triple bottom line” of economy, environment, and society**. In particular, we are interested in determining the extent to which the current curriculum at UNR explicitly emphasizes the intersections between economic, environmental, and social issues in the context of sustainability, using qualitative and/or quantitative metrics for describing and evaluating the implications of these intersections.

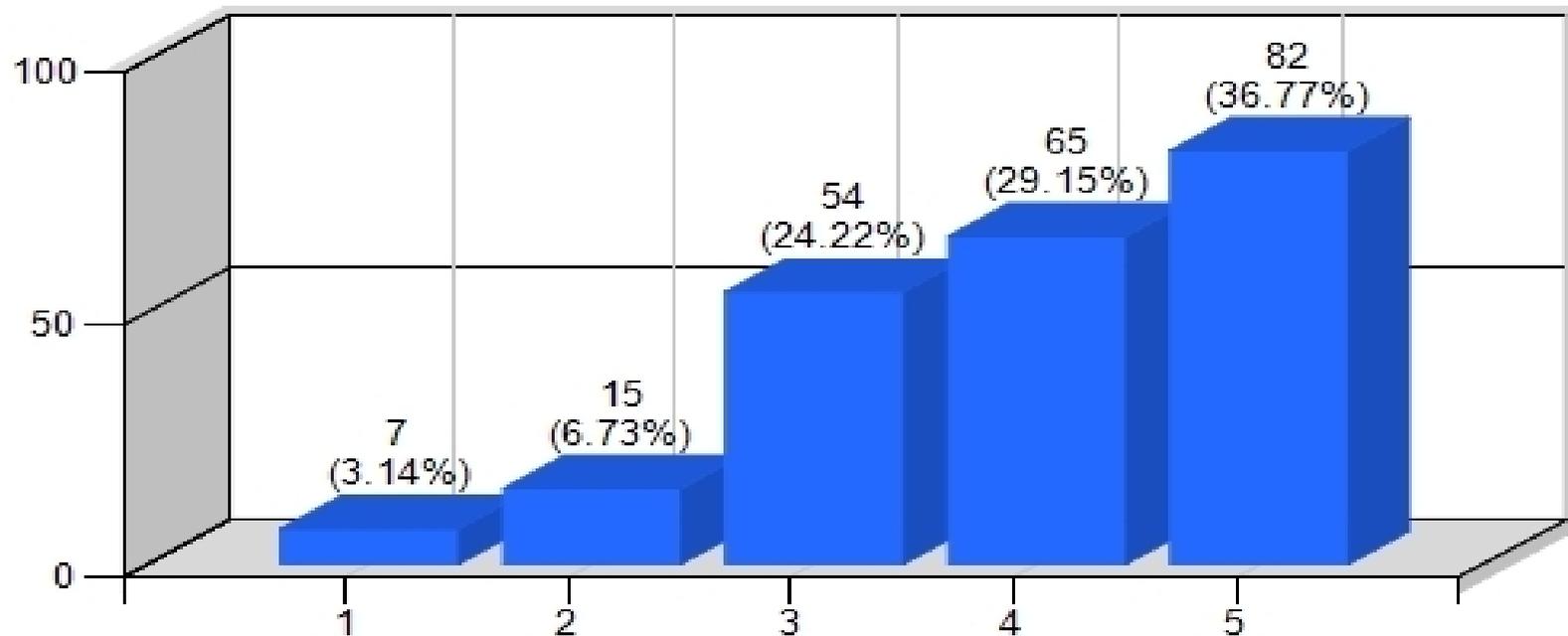
# Survey of Undergraduate Teaching

## Practical issues:

- no distinct list of people teaching undergraduate courses
- compromise: invited academic faculty and LOAs, excluded administrative faculty;
- in total 1433 invited.
- responses: 223, 15%
- no information on why people did not respond:
  - not involved in teaching,
  - not interested in sustainability
- Many respondents took considerable effort to write comments indicating a strong interest in the subject.

# Main Results (1)

**Please rate your level of concern about sustainability issues?  
(223 Responses)**

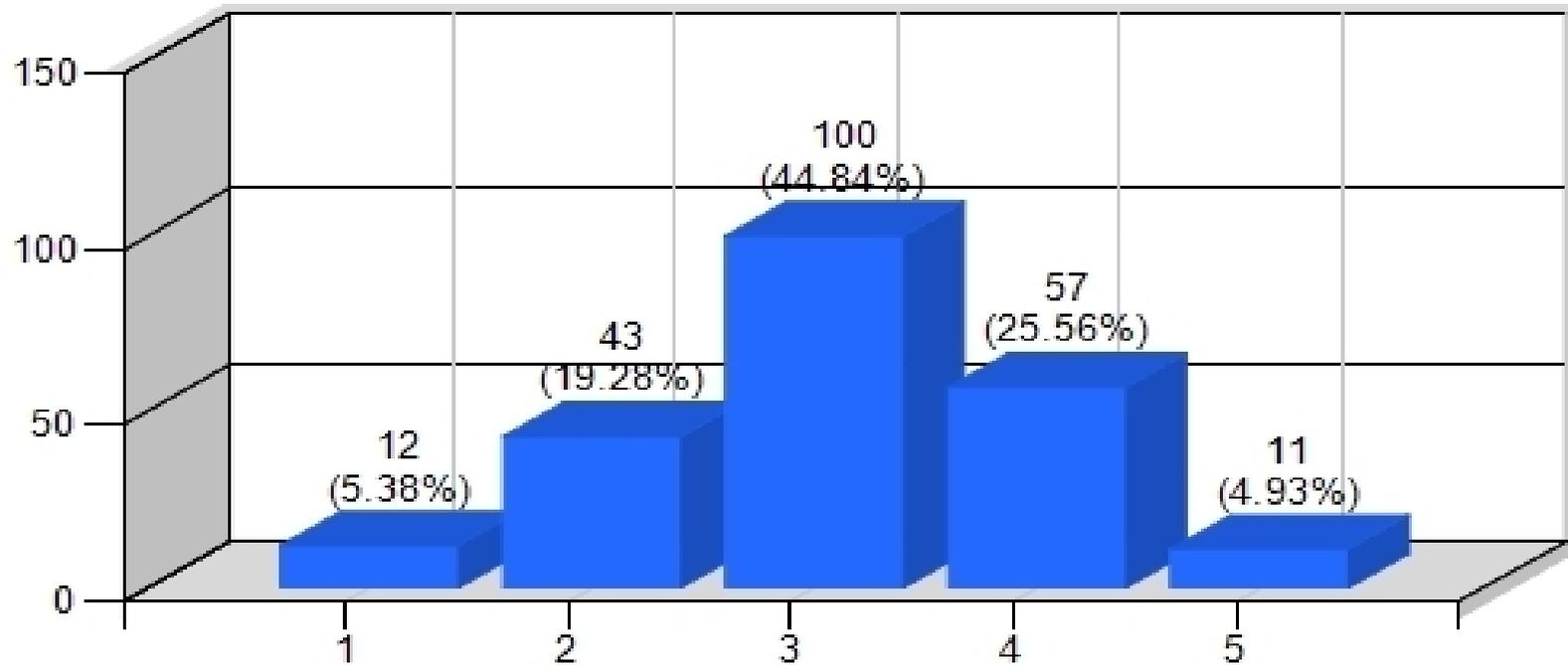


Over 65% rated their concern a 4 or 5

Very few consider sustainability an unimportant issue

## Main Results (2)

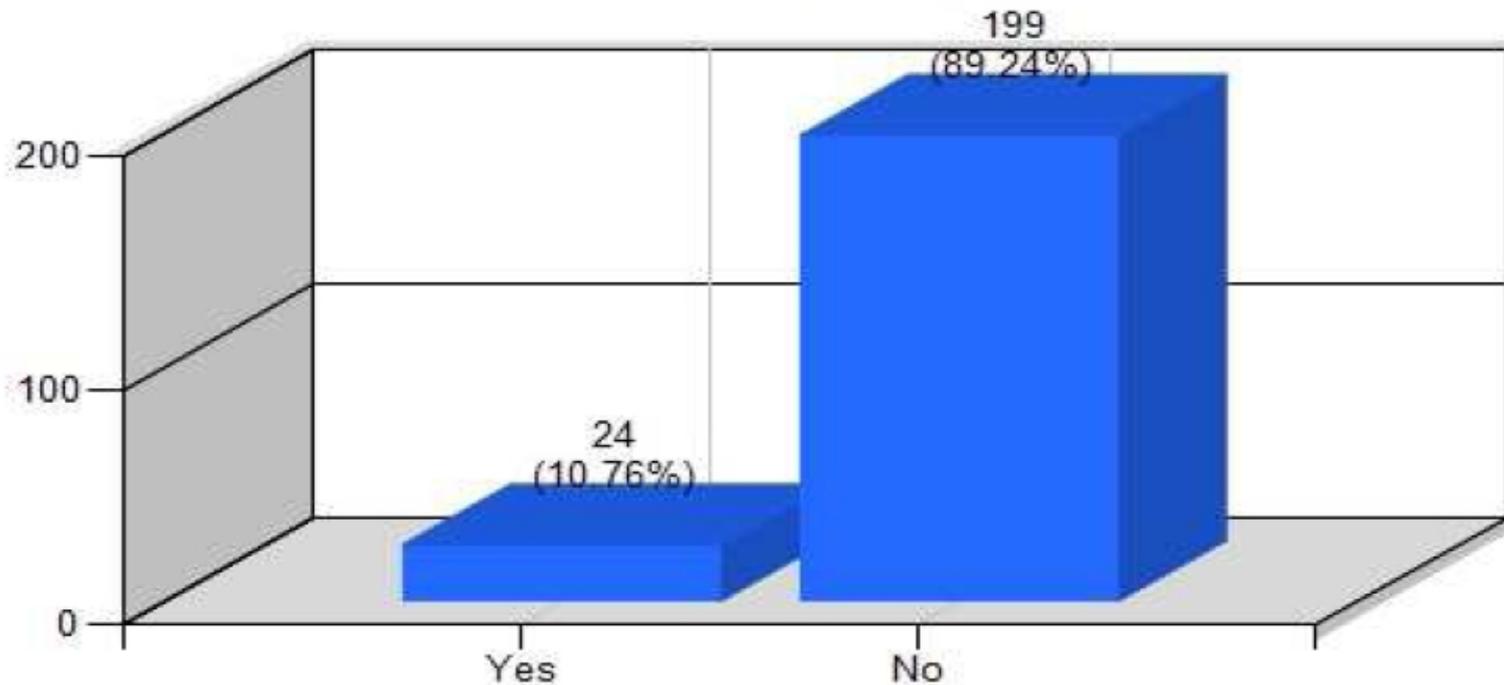
**How would you rate the students' level of concern about sustainability issues?  
(223 Responses)**



- Almost normal distribution
- This is the faculty's' perception;
- Students will be surveyed with this question.

## Main Results (3)

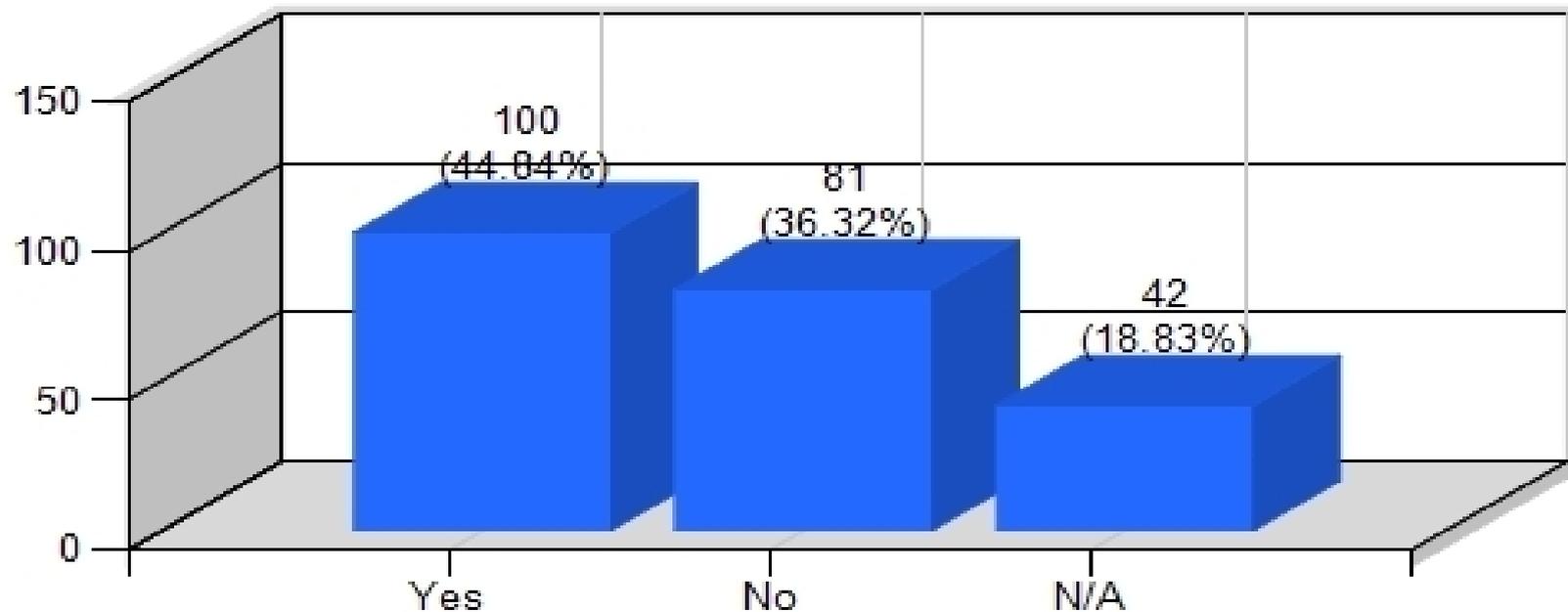
**Do any of the classes you teach have sustainability as the main topic?  
(223 Responses)**



- 11% have courses with sustainability as main topic
- Listed courses range from sciences, engineering, anthropology, literature, policy, health, drama, archaeology.

## Main Results (4)

**In courses that do not have sustainability as the main topic, do you integrate explicit references to sustainability issues?  
(223 Responses)**

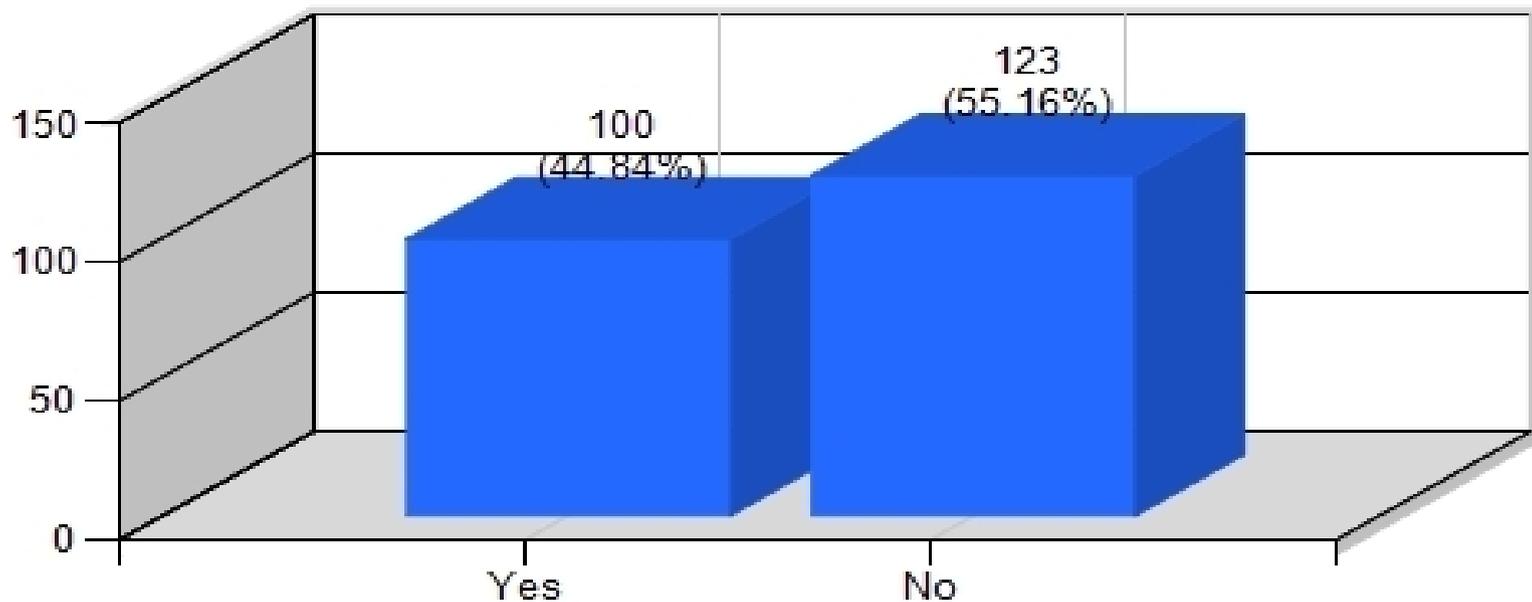


- 45% of respondents do include sustainability.
- Comments indicate a wide range of topics in economic, social, and environmental domains

## Main Results (5)

**Would you be interested in focusing current courses on sustainability or developing new courses?**

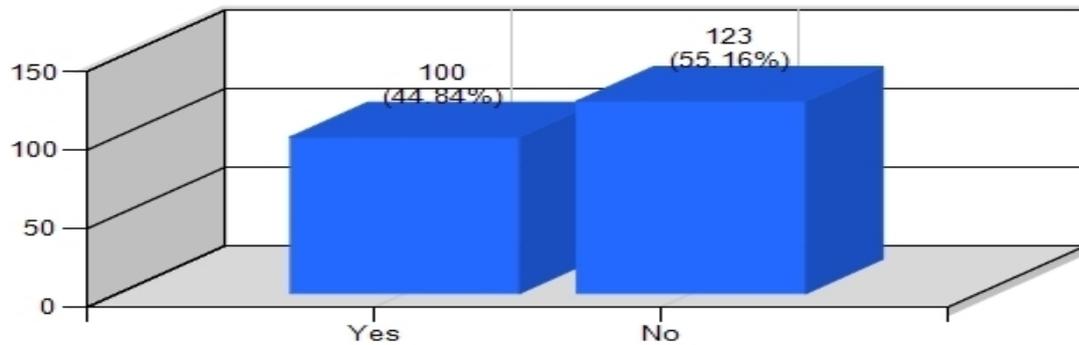
**(223 Responses)**



# Main Results (6)

**Would you be interested in focusing current courses on sustainability or developing new courses?**

**(223 Responses)**

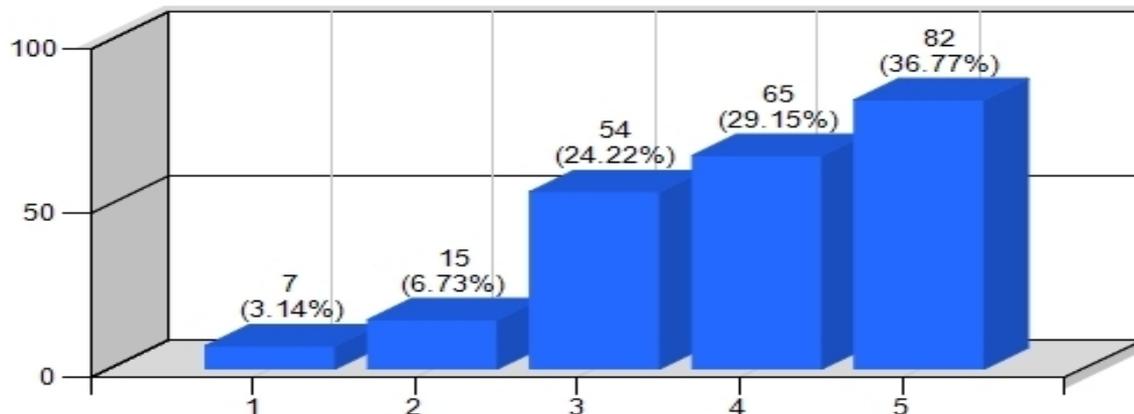


Is there a disconnect of personal concern and focus in teaching?

Should this disconnect exist to avoid a 'personnel agenda' in teaching?

**Please rate your level of concern about sustainability issues?**

**(223 Responses)**



# Main Results (7)

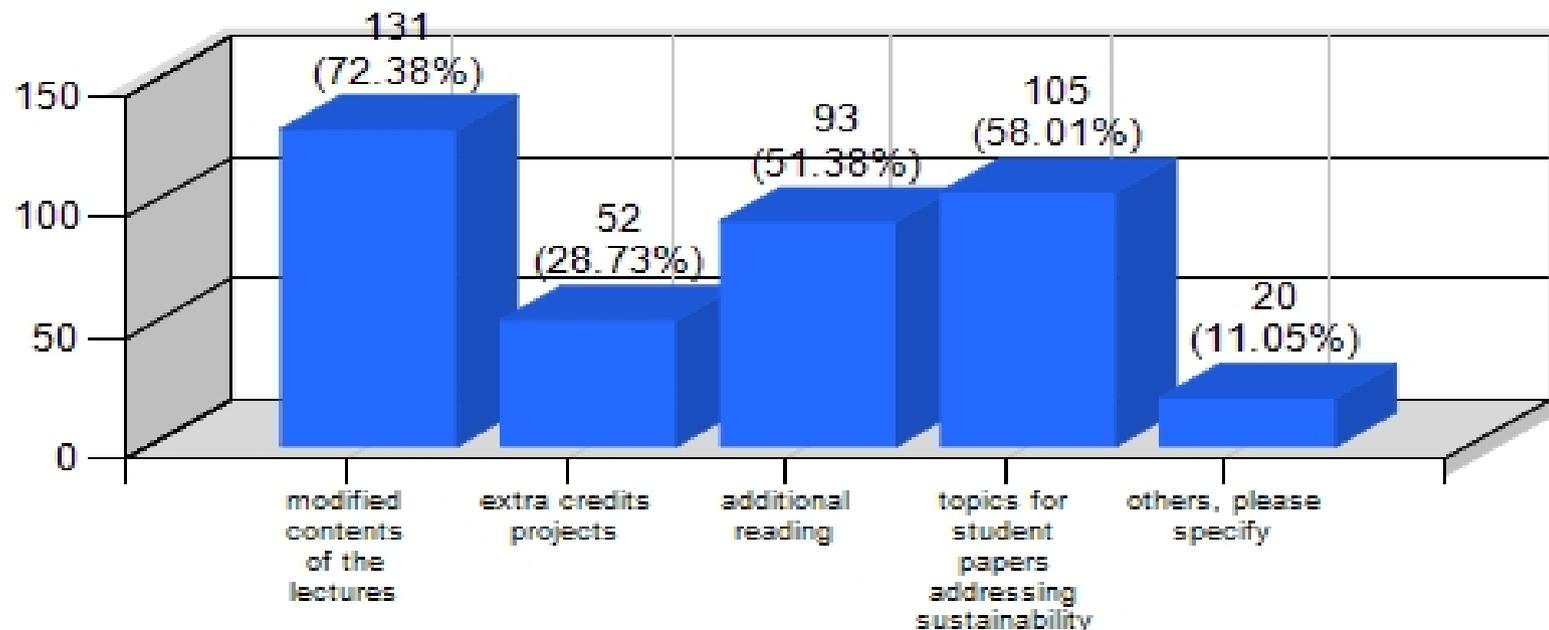
- Question: What would help/support you in developing new courses or modifying existing courses to have a stronger focus on sustainability issues?
- 89 Responses, many very interesting comments.

Some examples:

- Attend a workshop where people share models of how they integrate the subjects into their courses. (multiple)
- Time, money & change in teaching assignment. (multiple)
- A push to offer such courses from above, ie. administrative/dean level. Programs on campus which reflect these desires, such as incentive programs to force people/faculty/students to drive less, for example.
- guidelines reference materials guest speakers (multiple)
- Simpler paperwork and more rapid approval of course and curriculum changes. Easier approval of core courses, especially capstone courses.
- Readings and discussion with peers.
- Definition of priorities of sustainability by NSHE and our state employment partners!

# Main Results (8)

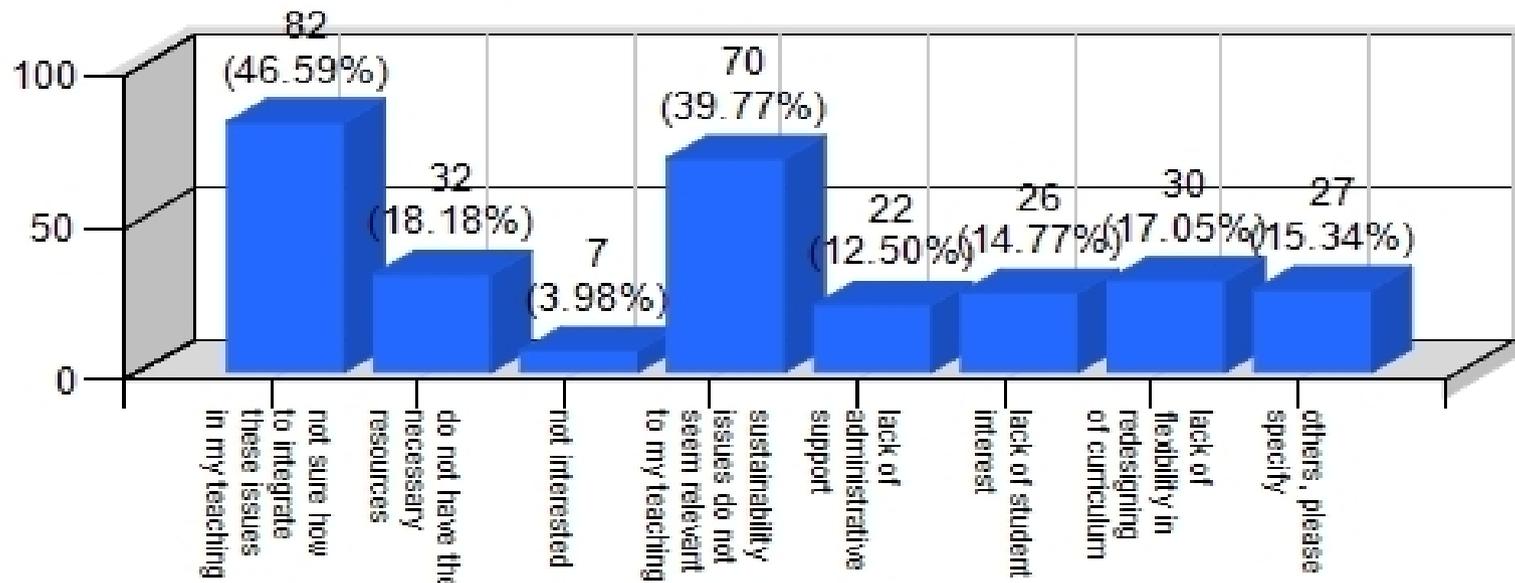
**What would you consider to be appropriate ways of integrating sustainability issues in your teaching?  
(181 Responses)**



Most consider modified lectures, additional reading and student papers as appropriate (more than one choice available).

# Main Results (9)

**Which of the following, if any, do you see as barriers to increasing coverage of sustainability in the curriculum?  
(176 Responses)**



Main concerns are:

- 1) not sure how to integrate sustainability; and
- 2) sustainability issues are not relevant.

# Key Points and Conclusions

- Was a baseline survey which leave many questions open and raises new ones.
- Faculty who responded thinks that sustainability is an important issue
- There seems to be a gap between faculty's concern about sustainability and focus on sustainability in teaching.
- But in the absence of a coordinated focus on sustainability in the curriculum, almost half of the respondents address sustainability issues in their teaching and expressed interest in doing more.
- Respondents indicate interest in developing assignments to teach sustainability issues.
- Faculty don't know how to integrate sustainability issues in their courses or think that they are not relevant to their teaching.
- Comments indicate many other reasons, including lack of time, money, not being tenured, institutional support, ...

# Points of Discussion

- Survey has value in sparking discussions
- Sustainability across the curriculum is our priority
- Deeply multidisciplinary, integrative
- Skills and perceptions for sustainability in teaching
- Enabling informed decision makers versus guiding students in the 'right' direction
- Hidden/shadow curriculum both for faculty and students

All is work in progress, but a lot of fun ...