

2012

UC Student Sustainability Survey

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Introduction and Methods

The purpose of this survey was partly to validate the results of the inaugural 2011 UC Sustainability Survey, and partly to test an alternative method of conducting this survey. The 2011 survey was run as a pilot and was conducted 'on-the-ground' by seven students in seven locations around campus. 300 surveys were conducted over a concentrated 2 hour period and included both staff and students (although the vast majority of the respondents were students). The survey asked questions relating to attitudes to and awareness of sustainability, as well as knowledge of sustainability initiatives on campus and particularly of Sustainability Office initiatives.

The 2012 survey was distributed as an on-line survey to all current UC students on Tuesday 25th September. The link was contained in an email sent from the Director of Learning Resources, Alex Hanlon. The link was active for one week. 1,057 responses were received. The survey asked only eight questions and did not include questions about specific initiatives on campus.

In reassessing the survey, some changes were made to the Likert scales to improve their robustness which, in turn means strict comparison is not always straight-forward. However, the results broadly confirm the findings from the 2011 survey and indicate a strong level of student interest in sustainability and a desire to see a stronger sustainability focus at UC.

Who took the survey?

We asked student respondents to identify the college in which they spend most of their time. 24% were from Science, 22% from Arts, 21% from Engineering, 12% from Business and Economics, 9% from Education, 8% from Law and 4% reported 'other'.

UC students try to live sustainably

We asked students to self report on the extent to which they have taken steps to live more sustainably, and 56% of students said that they had taken some steps in this direction. A further 23% said they take many practical actions to be more sustainable. These results are similar to the findings in 2011, although those reporting they took many steps to live more sustainably increased more than three-fold (Figure1).

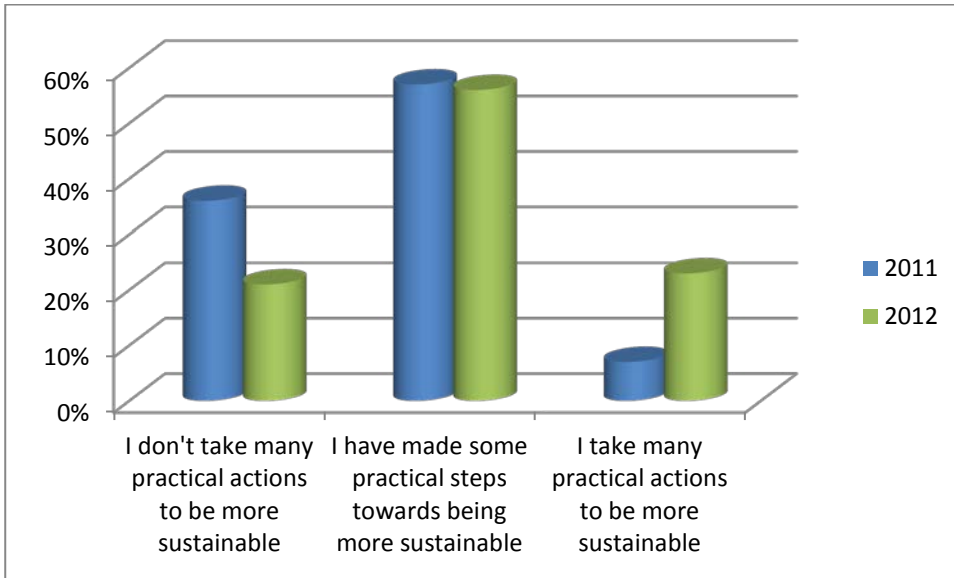


Figure 1: Level of sustainable practice amongst students in their personal lives, 2011-2012

Knowledge of sustainable practice is important for future employment

61% of students reported that they believe that knowledge of sustainable practice will be important or very important for their employment prospects in the near future, although almost one quarter believe that this will not be important for them.

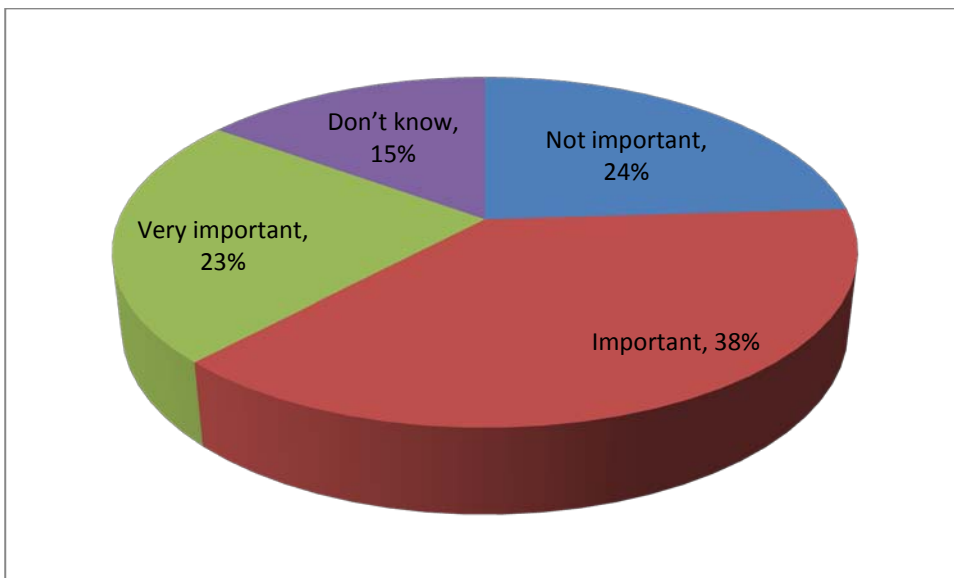


Figure 2: Relative importance of knowledge of sustainable practice for future employment, 2012

A change in the scale makes a strict comparison with the 2011 results awkward. In 2011 an additional category – ‘essential’ – had been included but was removed to provide a more balanced Likert scale for students to respond to. For comparative purposes, the ‘essential’ and ‘very important’ categories were combined for 2011. The 2012 result indicates far more students consider sustainability to be ‘not important’ for their employment in the near future than in 2011 (Figure 3), and the numbers in the other categories are correspondingly lower. However, a similar number consider knowledge of sustainable practice to be ‘important’ across both years.

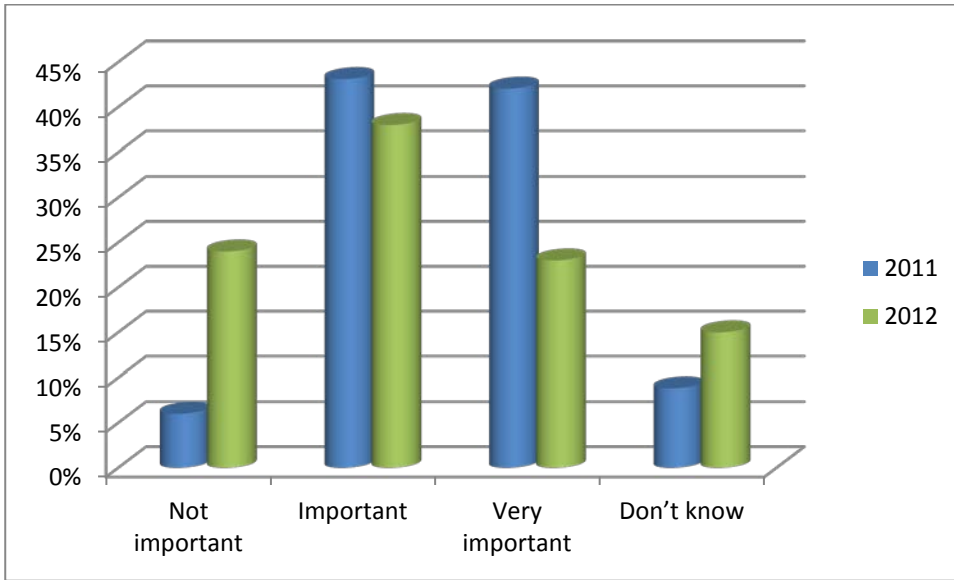


Figure 3: Relative importance of knowledge of sustainable practice for future employment, 2011-2012

Sustainability as a deal-maker for choosing UC as a place of study

UC does not market itself on its sustainability credentials currently, yet almost 20% of students reported that these credentials were either important or very important in choosing UC as a place to study. 71% said it was not important to their decision to study at UC, unsurprising given that these credentials are not widely known.

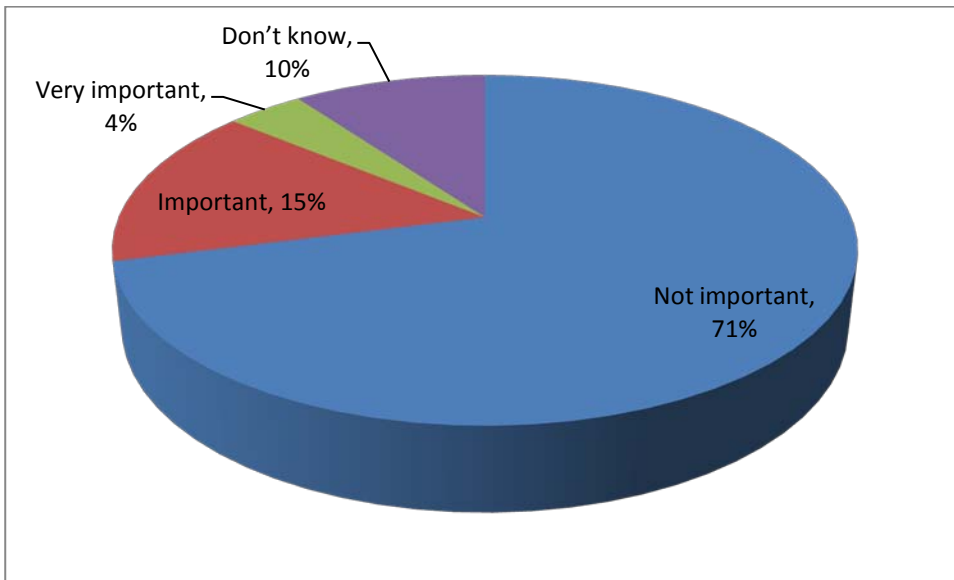


Figure 4: Relative importance of UC's sustainability credentials in choosing to study here, 2012

Again, a strict comparison with the 2011 results is difficult as the 'essential' category was removed and a 'don't know' category was added. The trend across both years is similar, however (Figure 5).

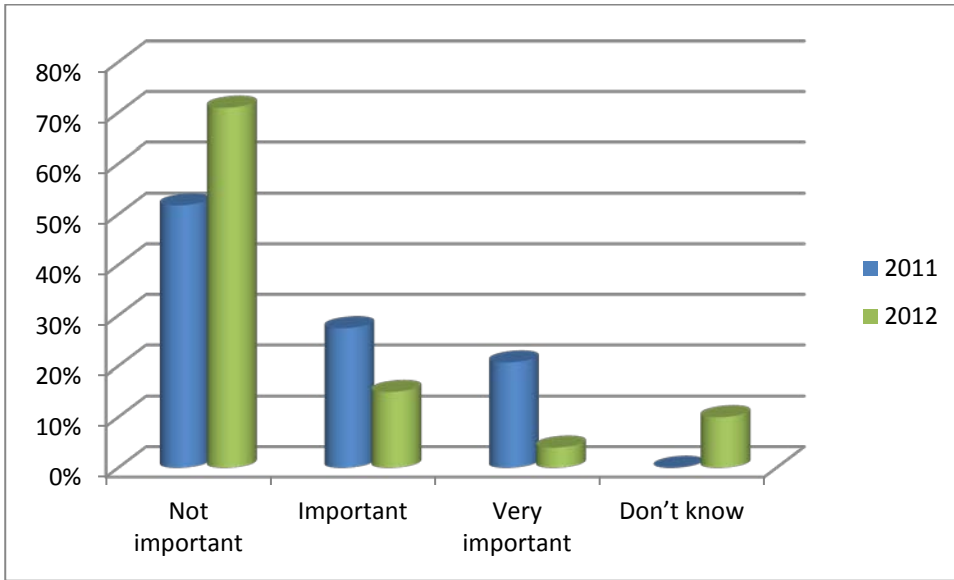


Figure 5: Relative importance of UC's sustainability credentials in choosing to study here, 2011-2012

Sustainability is an important feature of current study and research at UC

56% of students reported that sustainability was part of, or strongly connected to their research or studies, with a further 5% saying they intended to do some sustainability studies or research in the future. 40% of students said that their research or studies did not cover sustainability.

There were no changes in the Likert scale for this question, and the results are very similar across both years (Figure 6). The most significant difference was that the numbers of students engaged in studies or research with a strong focus on sustainability have increased from 8% to 15%.

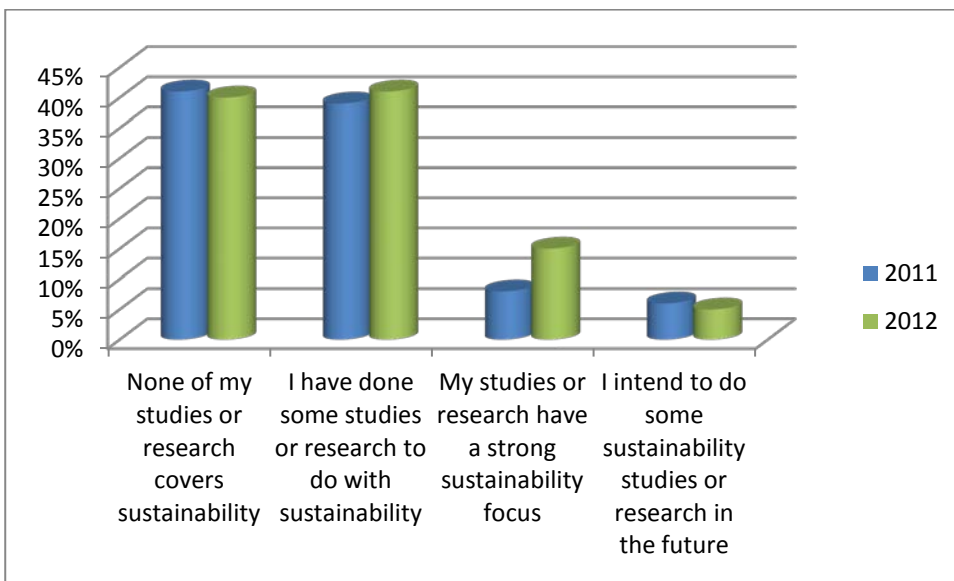


Figure 6: Amount of sustainability content currently in courses or research, 2011-2012

Students would prefer a stronger focus on sustainability in their research or studies

In 2012 we asked if students would like a stronger sustainability focus in their studies or research. This question was not asked in 2011. In 2012, 39% of students said they would prefer a stronger focus on sustainability in their research or studies. When this is broken down by college the results are interesting. 42% of Engineering students would like a stronger sustainability focus to their studies, 41% of Law students, 39% of Business and Economics students and 38% of Science students.

40% of Law students said 'no' to this question, as did 38% of Business and Economics students and 33% of Arts students. Education students were the most uncertain, with 32% of them saying 'don't know'.

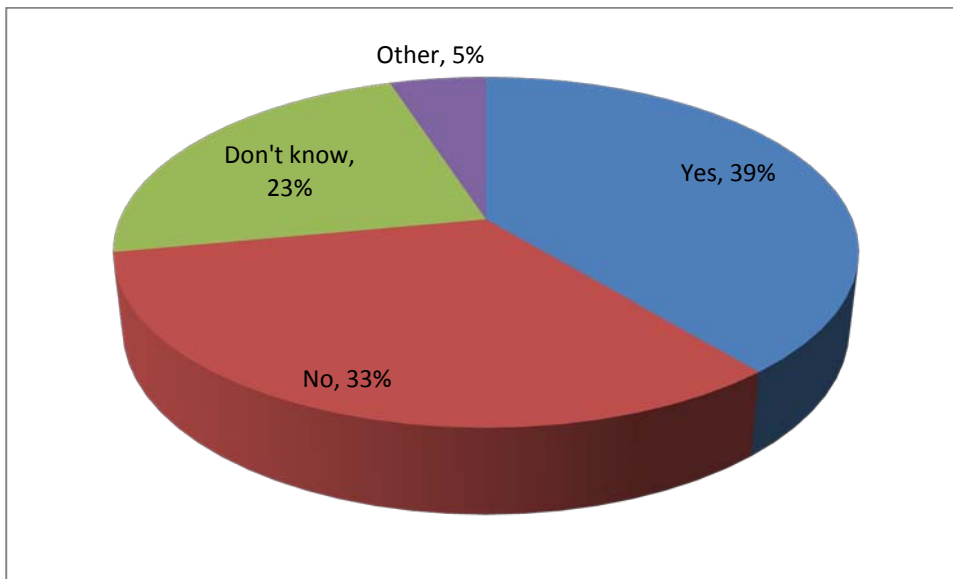


Figure 7: Interest amongst students in a stronger sustainability focus to their studies or research

Students see UC doing well in its sustainability performance

Despite seemingly not knowing much about UC's sustainability credentials when choosing to study here, 36% of students thought that the university's progress on sustainability was good, and a further 3% thought it was strong. However, 15% felt it was terrible or weak. 27% had no strong feelings either way and one fifth simply didn't know.

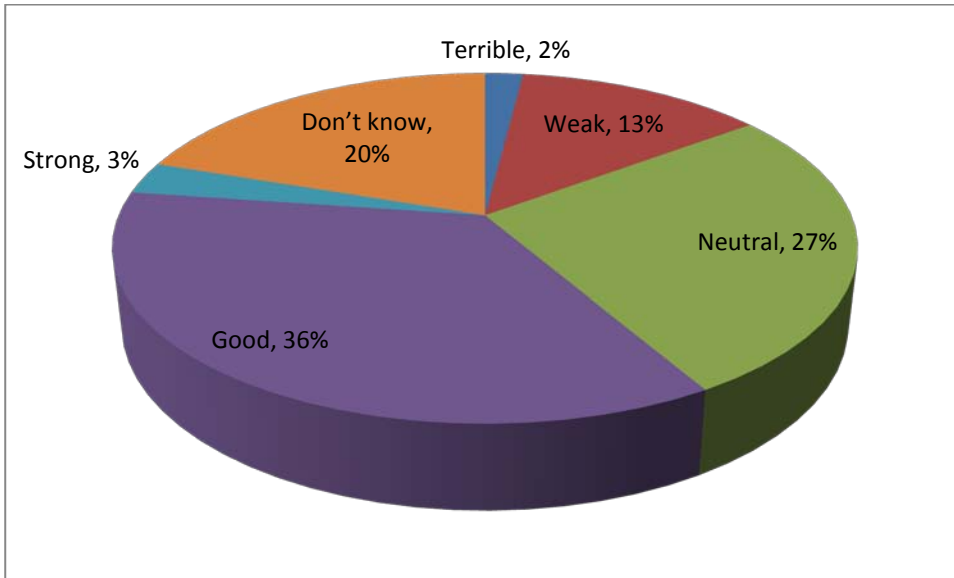


Figure 8: Beliefs about the University of Canterbury's progress on sustainability

Student ambivalence about the sustainability performance of their colleges

When asked about their own college's performance on sustainability, the result was somewhat ambiguous, with 60% reporting a neutral response and 32% reporting that they were satisfied or very satisfied. Only 8% reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their college's performance in this respect.

Broadly speaking, grouping together the 'very dissatisfied' and 'dissatisfied' categories, the most dissatisfied groups of students are Education students, of whom 16% fell into this category, Arts (10%) and Law (9%). Conversely, grouping together 'satisfied' and 'very satisfied' categories, the most satisfied groups of students are in Engineering (38%), Business and Economics (37%) and Science (34%).

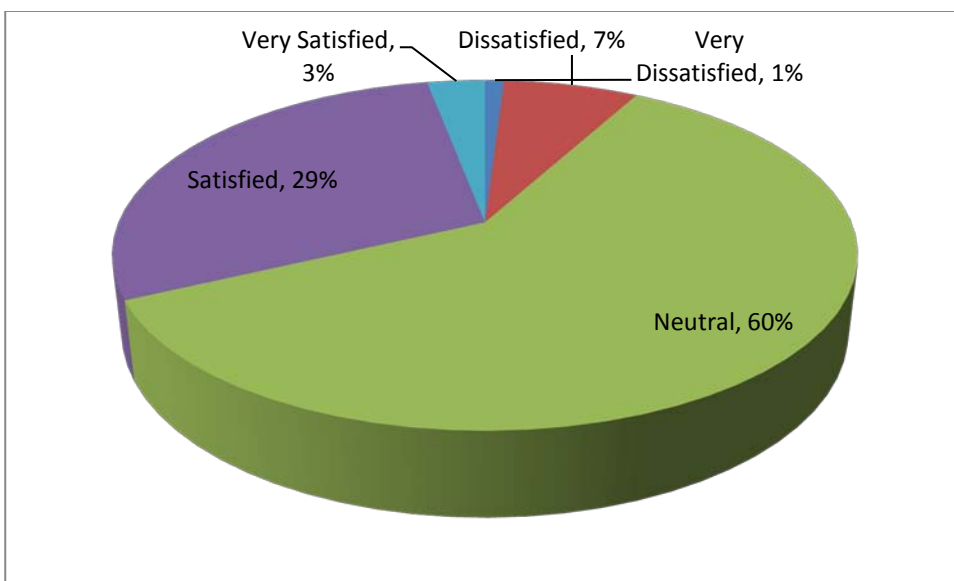


Figure 9: Beliefs about College's progress on Sustainability

UC Students have a resource-use, future-focussed understanding of sustainability

As in 2011, we invited respondents to tell us what they thought sustainability means. A simple analysis of the most commonly used words in such definitions reveals a striking similarity across both years. The words ‘resources’, ‘future’, ‘environment’ and ‘generations’ stand out prominently in both.



Figure 10: Key words from sustainability definitions, 2011



Figure 11: Key words from sustainability definitions, 2012

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from this exercise:

- The larger sample appears to have captured a wider range of views
- Where Likert scales were adjusted in 2012 to balance 'positive' views with 'negative' views, 'positive' responses were reduced. The scales were adjusted for questions about relative importance of sustainability for future employment and choosing UC as a place to study, as well as the sustainability performance of UC generally as well as their own colleges
- Where the scales were not altered, the results for both years were very similar, with a somewhat stronger support for sustainability voiced in 2012
- Nevertheless, both sets of data are generally comparable in all areas, and it is clear that the student body considers sustainability to be both important to them in their personal lives, their studies, and for their future employment
- It is unsurprising, therefore, that students appear to want more of a sustainability focus in their studies
- A draft definition for sustainability based around notions of resource use, environment and future generations has general support from the student body.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing, it is recommended that:

- References to sustainability and progress towards meeting sustainability targets outlined in the UC Sustainability Strategy (draft) be included in UC recruitment materials
- Existing behaviour change programmes aimed at developing sustainability habits amongst the UC community be maintained and enhanced
- Efforts to develop a stronger curriculum for sustainability at UC be encouraged
- Internal communications increase sustainability content so that students understand what the colleges and the university as a whole are doing about improving sustainability performance

The earthquake recovery process at UC is a perfect opportunity to make practical progress towards operational sustainability as well as to improve messaging.