

Public Perception of Binghamton University Sustainability

BINGHAMTON
UNIVERSITY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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The Source Project: People, Politics and the Environment

Background

- In 1987, the UN defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”
- College campuses often appear to be filled with a desire for social change, including climate action and sustainability initiatives.
- Yet, the Office of Sustainability, which is just a year old, has relatively low levels of engagement.
- How much do students know and care about on-campus sustainability? What would motivate students to care more? And are Binghamton University students’ perceptions of on-campus sustainability generally accurate?

Methodology

1. Survey Binghamton University students through an online Google Form questionnaire (includes polls, short answer questions, and demographics).
2. Research the Binghamton University Office of Sustainability by interviewing Sustainability Manager Martin Larocca and attending events.
3. Utilize BU Brain data regarding recycling contamination rate (percentage of unrecyclable materials in a recycling stream).
4. Compare students’ guesses of contamination rates of Binghamton University dorms with the actual rates.
5. Gather survey results to make conclusions about public perceptions of sustainability and how engagement with the Office of Sustainability can be improved.

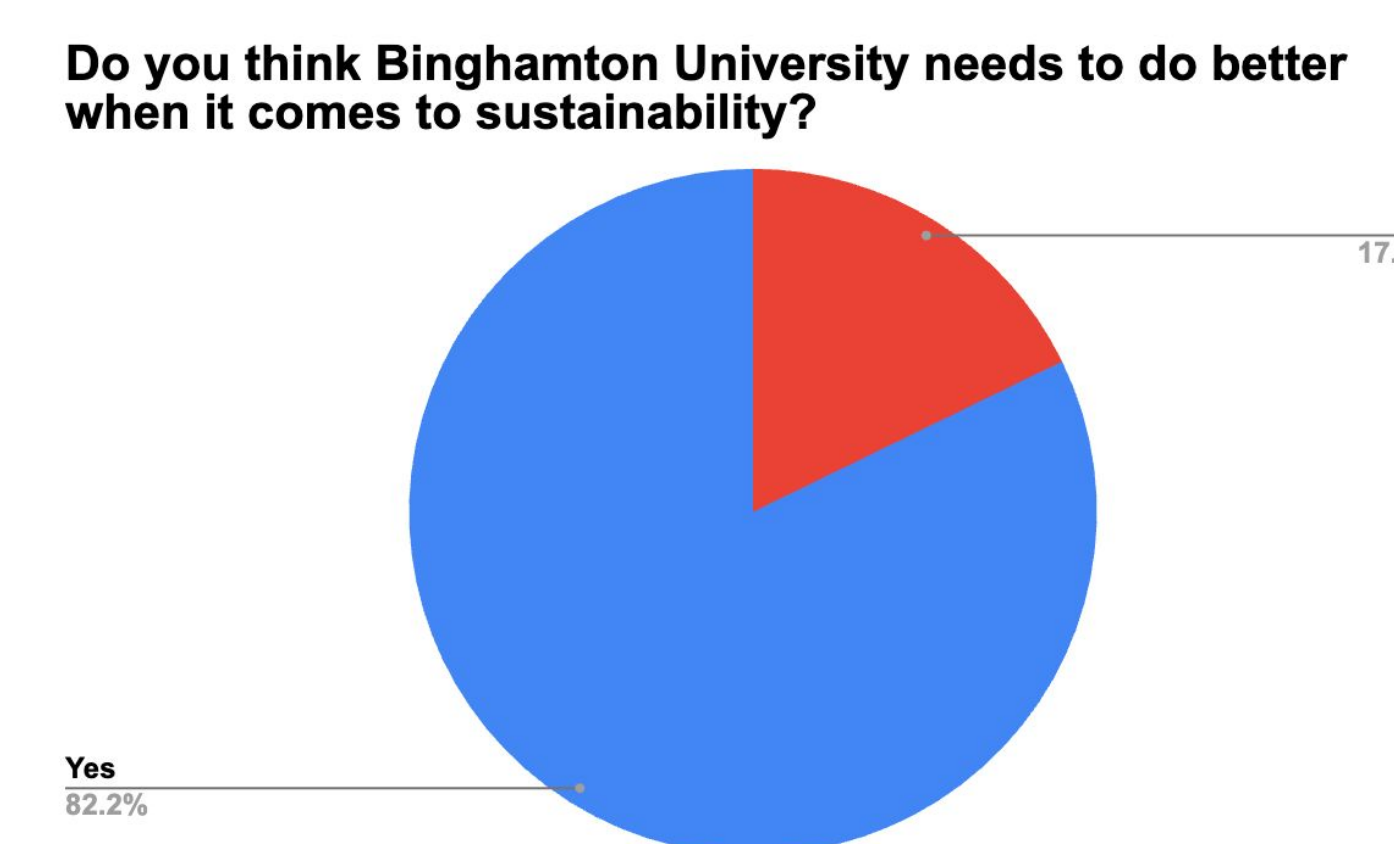
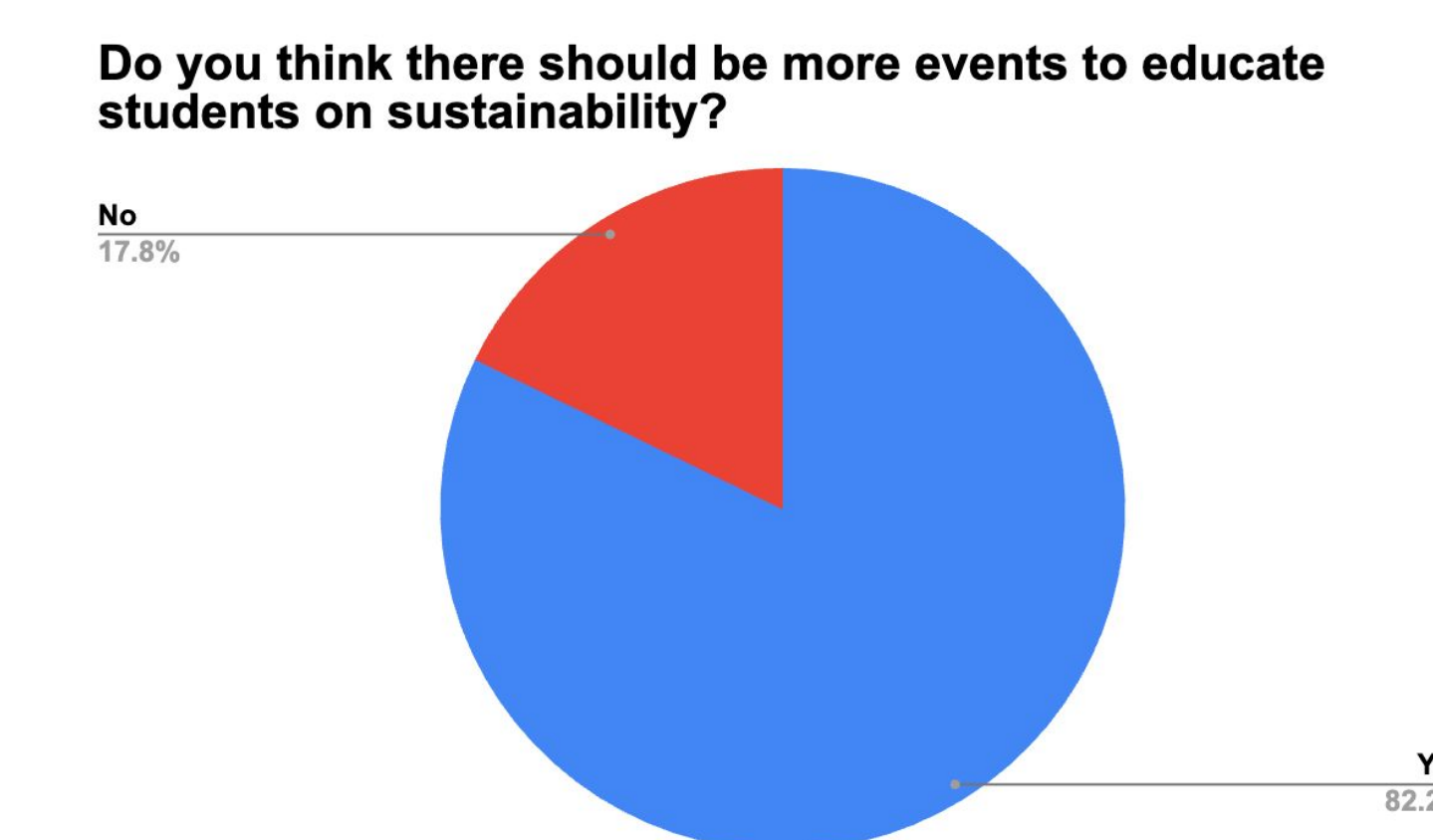
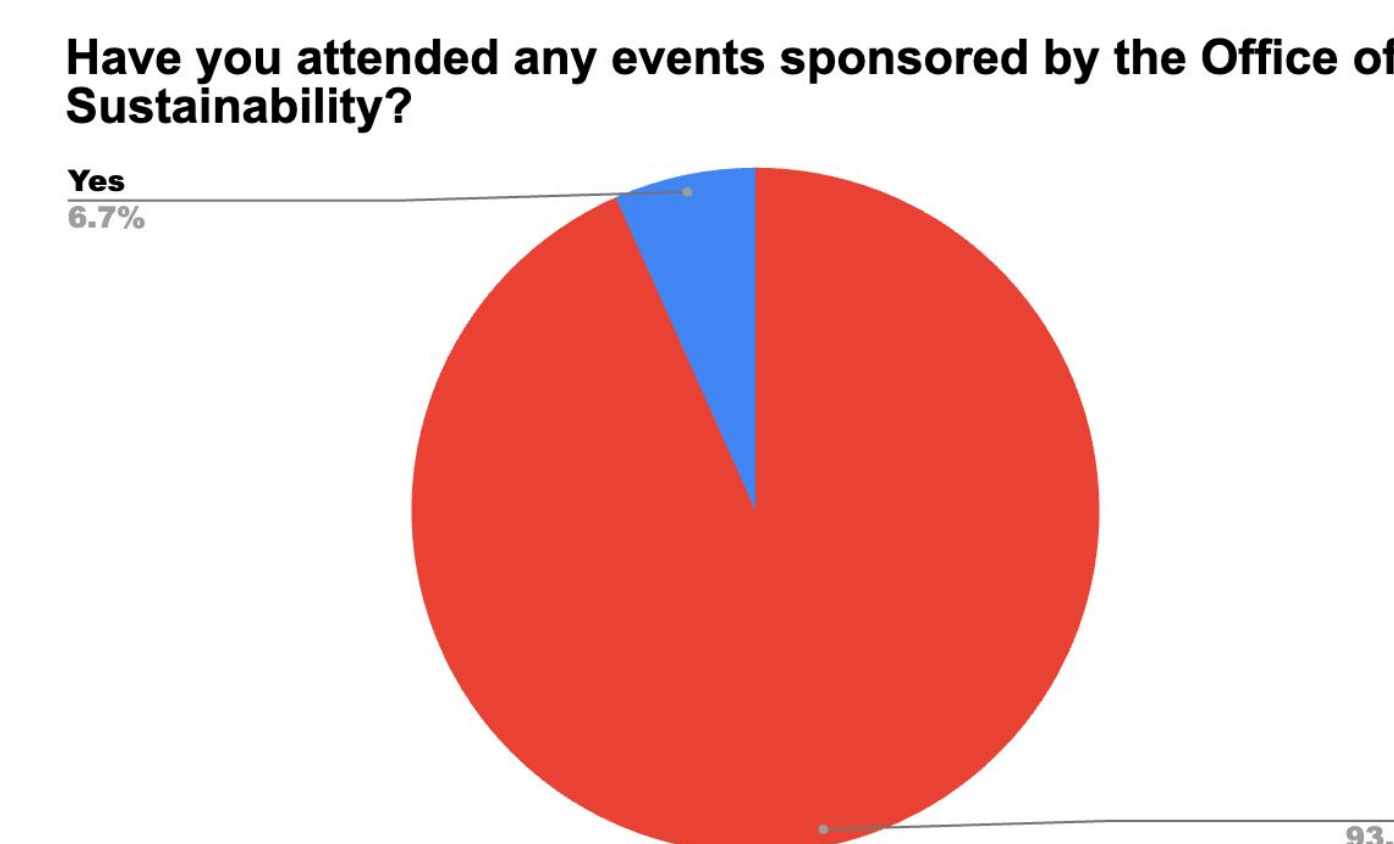
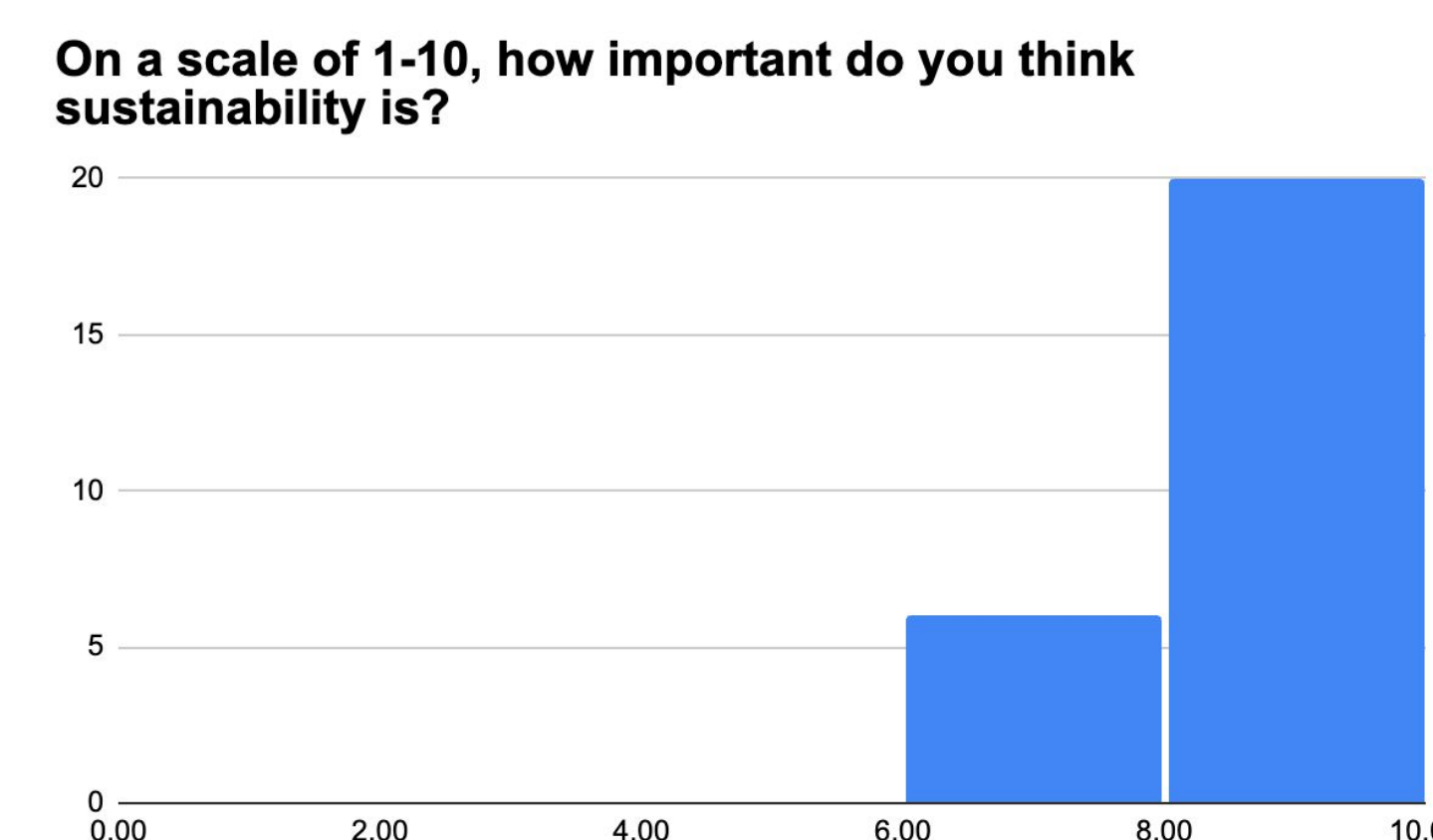
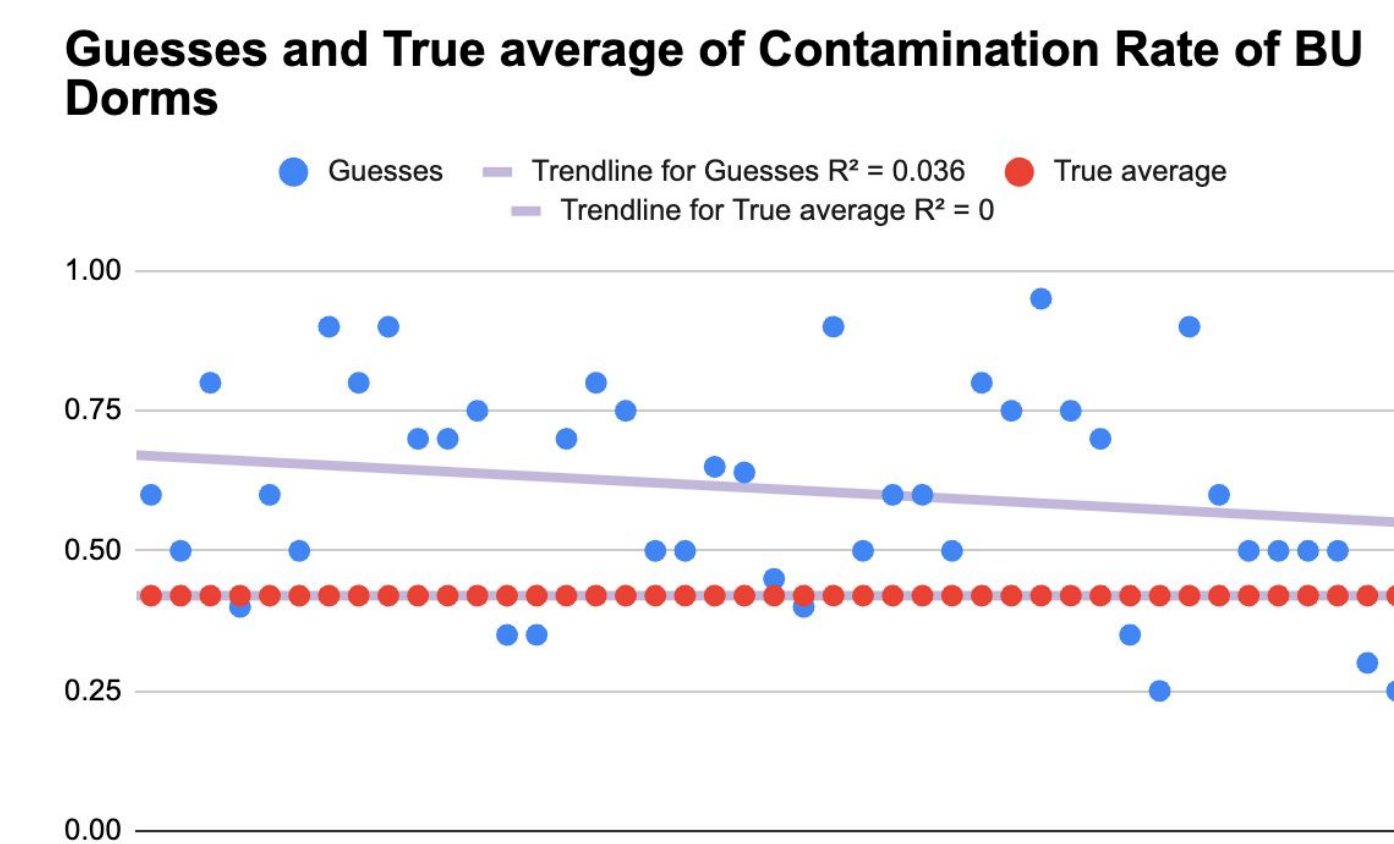
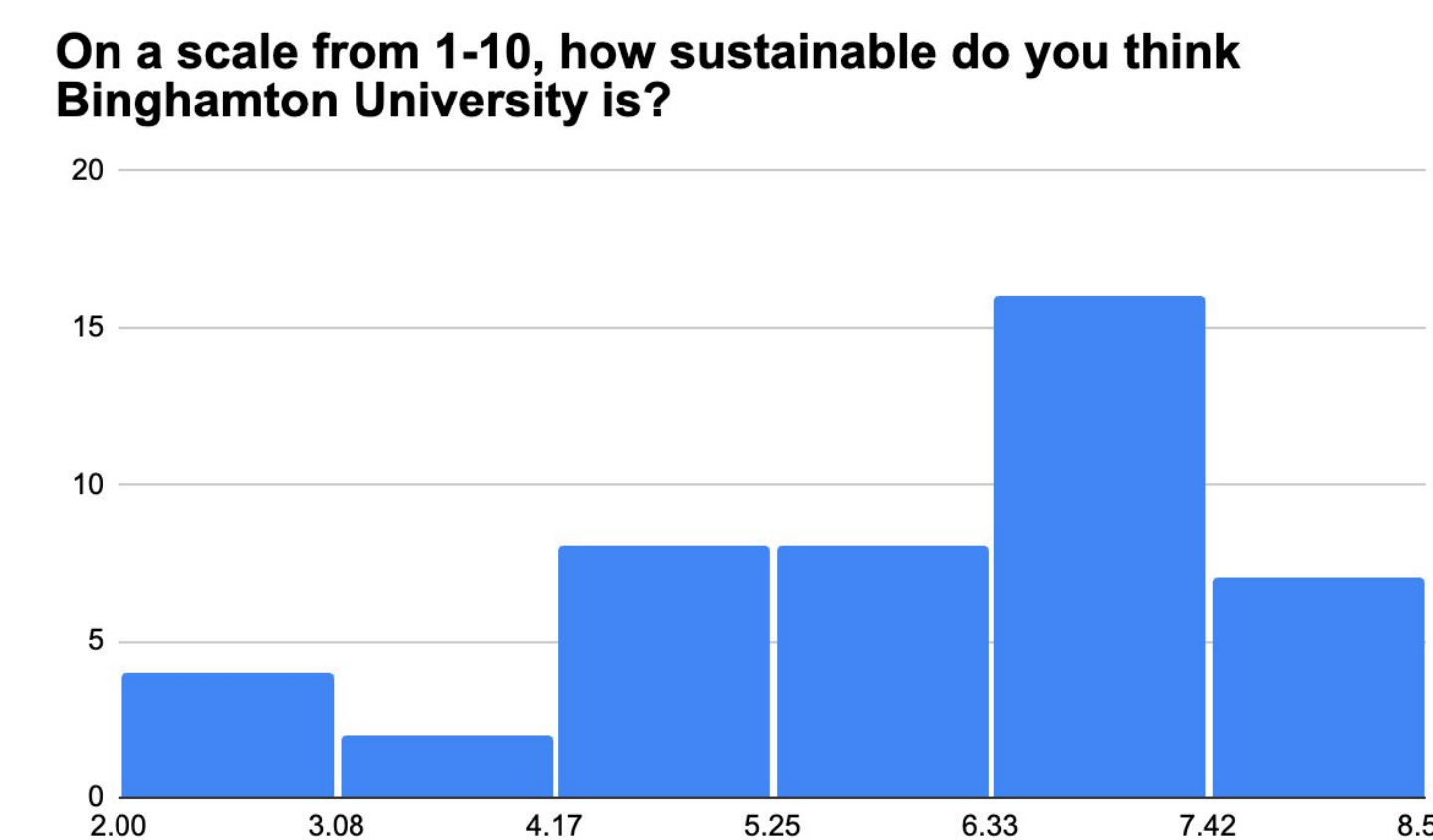
Participants

n=45 responses

Students’ majors:

Political Science (11), PPL (6), Undeclared (6), Psychology (5), English (4), Environmental Science (3), Economics (3), Environmental Studies (2), History (2), MPA (1), Linguistics (1), Geography (1), Accounting (1), Classical Civilizations (1), Musical Theatre (1), Sociology (1), Human Development (1)

Results



- “There seems to be a huge disconnect between sustainability promotion and action. Most people believe in the importance of sustainability yet little is done to show real results (both individually and on a university scale).”
- “I think there needs to be more advocacy and education among students, teaching them how to be sustainable.”
- “I think that we engage in a decent amount of sustainable practices but still, more can be done.”

Conclusions

- The average Binghamton University sustainability rating amongst respondents was 6.11 out of 10.
- On average, respondents highly value sustainability; the average rating for the importance of sustainability was 9 out of 10.
- Despite this high value for sustainability, only 6.7% of respondents have attended an event sponsored by the Office of Sustainability.
- 82.2% of respondents believe there should be more events to educate students about sustainability.
- 82.2% of students believe Binghamton University needs to do better when it comes to sustainability.
- On average, survey respondents overestimated contamination rate of BU dorms by 19%.
- It can be concluded that while there is a prevalent belief in the importance of sustainability, there is a gap between this and an accurate understanding of certain sustainability factors including contamination rate on campus. There is also a gap between caring about sustainability and actually attending events hosted by the university.
- Students suggested incentivizing sustainability events with free food and prizes in addition to improving advertising.

Future Research

- College campuses often harbor a prosperous environment for sustainability action to take place, as they typically have the necessary resources and expertise.
- Further research is certainly necessary to gain a better understanding of how on-campus sustainability (including initiatives and events) can be improved not only on Binghamton University’s campus but on other college campuses globally.
- Future research would appeal to a larger audience by including students across more diverse majors (many respondents of the survey were Political Science majors) and other universities, including those that are known for renowned sustainability programs and initiatives.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Professor Holahan and survey participants for making this research possible!