

Presidential Working Group on Sustainability Education, Research, and Operations – Recommendations on Sustainability Research

May 2020

The Challenge

USC is a research university of international renown located within the City of Los Angeles and the State of California, both world leaders in sustainability. How best can USC galvanize its research to reflect its equally ambitious commitment to sustainability? How can this be accomplished in ways that address the important sustainability issues facing our city and state, of equal concern across our nation and the world, through leveraging our existing strengths and strategically building new ones? That should include transportation, urban design, equity and justice, environmental health, coastal ecosystems management, renewable energy, resiliency and sustainability behavior.

Recommendation

After considerable discussion the PWG has identified a set of guiding principles and institutional design changes to foster an array of innovative and new university, school, unit, and faculty and student sustainability research initiatives to address this challenge.

I. Principles in Fostering Sustainability Research

Foster opportunities for developing ideas and new approaches to collaborative sustainability research among faculty and students from across the university.

Foster opportunities for sharing ideas on collaborative sustainability research among established research centers and units from across the university.

Foster incorporation of sustainability challenges in graduate and undergraduate research.

Foster research grant development and advancement support around a small set of university-wide strategic sustainability research themes.

II. Institutional Design Components for Fostering Sustainability Research

Designate the VP of Research with responsibility for convening forums on university-wide sustainability research ideas and opportunities, funding sustainability grant-writing proposals, and assisting in pursuit of governmental and other sustainability research grant opportunities.

Designate the Provost with responsibility for establishing a university Committee on Strategic Sustainability Research (CSSR) chaired by the Provost, with VP of Research, CSO, four (4) representative sustainability research units, a representative of the Academic Senate, and ex-officio representation from university advancement to identify and support a small number of USC university-wide sustainability research themes where USC can excel with the potential for local, regional, state, nation, and international significance.

Designate University Advancement with responsibility for bringing together the VPR, Sustainable Education designated School Deans and appropriate research unit representatives in pursuit of external funding (government, foundation, and philanthropic) to support USC strategic sustainability themes.

Designate the Provost with bringing together Sustainable Education Deans to collaborate in cluster faculty hires deemed necessary to excel in pursuit of strategic sustainability themes.

III. 2020-2021 Campus-Wide Sustainability Research Forums, Seed-Grants, and External Funding

Fall:

- VPR/PWG distribute to university faculty the PWG recommendations on sustainability research;
- VPR initiate faculty and research units workshops and forums on current sustainability research and ideas for expansion;
- VPR host a visiting lecture series of leaders in collaborative sustainability research.

Winter:

- Drawing on the above, task the CSSR with making recommendations to the Provost and VPR on initiating request for proposals to the faculty for administrative and financial support for a small number of university-wide thematic sustainability research initiatives.

Spring:

- Based on the above request for proposals, task the CSSR with recommending 3-4 proposals that address the USC sustainability challenge of achieving regional, state, nation, and international importance to University Advancement.

Summer:

- Based on CSSR recommendations for university support and funding, task University Advancement with bringing together the external funding group identified under II above, tasked with identifying funding strategic university sustainability research priorities and opportunities.

Appendices

1. Lakoff and Bradforth preliminary Inventory of Dornsife and additional USC research units and academic departments where sustainability research is or has potential for becoming a major component of activity -- Inventory attached.
2. Research units that exemplify collaborative and cross-school and discipline sustainability research, based on the following criteria:
 - The center/institute primarily supports and seeks sustainability research grants, with principle investigators drawn from multiple schools and disciplines, and a web presence indicating its focus, grants and grants making, and resulting investigator publications.
 - The mission statement of the center/institute identifies sustainability *per se* or as a significant theme that is close to it as a primary focus (e.g., resilience, biodiversity).
 - Examples:
 - *Southern California Environmental Health Sciences Center*
 - *USC Equity Research Institute*
 - *USC Center for Sustainable Solutions*
 - *Wrigley Institute for Environmental Studies*