

# Report

## Sustainability student survey



Oikos – Change on Campus

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# **1 Introduction**

The transition into a sustainable economy and society will be the defining challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a leading Business School, the University of St. Gallen (HSG) is expected to lead this change both from a standpoint of competition as well as societal responsibility.

As a student-driven sustainability organisation, Oikos sees itself as a linkage between the student's interests and university management. To carry out this function properly, regular data and student feedback are required. However, this information about student's opinions and attitudes towards the issue of sustainability is lacking, as shown by the fact that the last survey of this kind was conducted by Thomas Dyllick in 2013. With this survey, we hope to be able to close this gap. On the one hand, the results should serve the further development of Oikos' activities, such as workshops or infrastructure improvements. On the other hand, it should serve the development of the university as a whole, particularly regarding curricula development.

## **2 Method**

The survey, as included in the Appendix, consists of 29 questions, out of which 7 ask for demographic information. The 22 main questions were divided into the following four categories:

- Personal attitude to sustainability
- Opinions about teaching, course offering
- University and campus
- Materiality assessment of sustainability topics

### **2.1 Personal attitude to sustainability**

For the analysis of student's environmental attitudes, the integrative model proposed by Amérgo, Aragonés and Garcia (2012) was used. So far, the majority of theoretical constructs in the field of environmental concern used a bipolar scale, distinguishing for example between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism (Amérgo et al., 2012, p. 354). In contrast, the conceptual model of environmental concern used in this work additionally introduced the distinction between cognitive and affective dimensions of concern. This assumption is supported by past research, which has shown that "believing that one is part of nature is not the same as identifying with it" (Amérgo et al., 2012, p. 354). As shown in Figure 1, the model encompasses the four dimensions apathy, anthropocentrism, emotional affinity, and connectedness. The first two are associated with a lack of environmental concern and a utilitarian understanding of the human-nature relationship. The latter two are assumed to go along with a profound interconnection with all forms of life. Accordingly, the inclusion of nature in the self

(INS), represented by the x-axis, is expected to correlate with environmental concern and pro-environmental behaviour. This hypothesis has also been empirically validated (Amérigo et al., 2012, pp. 361–362).

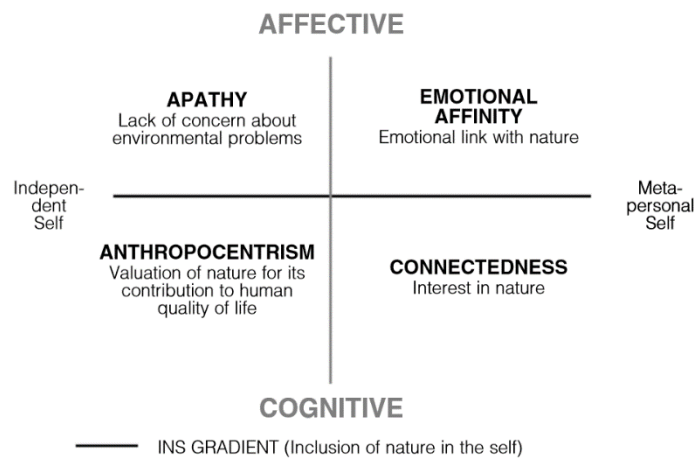


Figure 1: Conceptual model of environmental concern  
(Source: Amérigo et al, 2012, p. 355)

To keep the student survey brief, 9 out of the 27 original questions by Amérigo et al. (2012) were selected. 7 of those questions relate to the four core dimensions of the model and another 2 questions asked for environmentally harmful behaviour.

## 2.2 Opinions about teaching, course offering

The second part of the survey includes the same questions which were asked by Thomas Dyllick in his student survey in 2013. This allows for a direct comparison of the results and therefore helps to analyse how the opinions around sustainability in teaching have evolved. All items were formulated following a 5-point Likert-type scale. The six questions are listed below.

- How would you assess your personal interest and engagement in the areas of sustainability?
- How important is in your opinion the issue of sustainability for a business school today?
- Do you think sustainability is a core competence of the University of St. Gallen?
- Do you think HSG should have a stronger engagement in the field of sustainability?
- Do you think the importance attached to issues of sustainability in your program of studies should be... (lower, higher)
- How important is it for you to integrate issues of sustainability into the mandatory core courses of your program of study?

### 2.3 University and campus

This section collects opinions on Oikos' activities as well as on the university's formal commitment to climate neutrality. Furthermore, the open answer section is supposed to bring forth the most important topics from the perspective of the students. All items were formulated following a 5-point Likert-type scale.

### 2.4 Materiality assessment of sustainability topics

The fourth part of the survey comprises a materiality assessment of 28 sustainability-related activities in 6 areas. Students were asked to select the two most important areas and the five most important activities respectively. With this assessment, we hope to be able to give the university management insights into the priorities of students.

### 2.5 Demographic questions

Besides the attributes age and gender, data was collected about the current study level, the study program as well as one's activity in the field of sustainability. This information allows distinction and filtering of respondents with a particular interest and potentially prior knowledge in the field of sustainability.

## 3 Results

This survey collected a total of 107 responses, with 59 male respondents, 46 female respondents and 2 preferring not to disclose their gender. The distribution over the current study levels was 24 assessment students, 49 bachelor students, 26 master students and 8 PhD students. 20 out of the 107 respondents are active in a student organisation related to sustainability and 13 are currently working in the field of sustainability.

In 2013, the survey collected a total of 386 responses. 63% of the participants were male and 37% female. The distribution over the study levels was 148 bachelor students, 183 master students and 54 PhD students.

### 3.1 Personal attitudes to sustainability

Dimension	Average value (1=disagree, 5=strongly agree)
Apathy (affective)	1.72
Anthropocentrism (cognitive)	2.64
Emotional affinity (affective)	4.20
Connectedness (cognitive)	4.57
Environmentally harmful behaviour	2.14

Figure 2: Results: Personal attitudes to sustainability

For the analysis of the results, the average value on the 5-point Likert-type scale was calculated, in other words, the agreement with the 9 statements across the 5 categories.

The feeling of apathy towards environmental problems had a low agreement score of 1.72. Importantly, this factor is assumed to be a major obstacle to pro-environmental behaviour (Amérigo et al., 2012, p. 362). The cognitive dimension of the independent self pole, anthropocentrism, reached an average agreement of 2.64. Within anthropocentrism, the statement ‘One of the most important reasons to protect the natural environment is to ensure a continued high standard of living’ had an agreement of 3.18. On the other side of the INS gradient, where nature is an important dimension in the self-concept, the agreement with the affective and cognitive dimensions were 4.2 and 4.57 respectively. Finally, the two questions on environmentally harmful behaviour yielded a low average agreement of 2.14.

Overall, respondents had a high level of agreement with the dimensions emotional affinity and connectedness. This result speaks for a strong inclusion of nature in the students’ self-concept, which equals a high INS gradient.

### 3.2 Opinions about teaching, course offering

Based on data from the 2013 survey, we can analyse how students' attitudes have evolved. To do this, a subchapter is dedicated to each of the 6 questions. In the various diagrams, the survey from 2013 is shown above and that from 2020 below.

#### 3.2.1 Personal interest and engagement in the field of sustainability

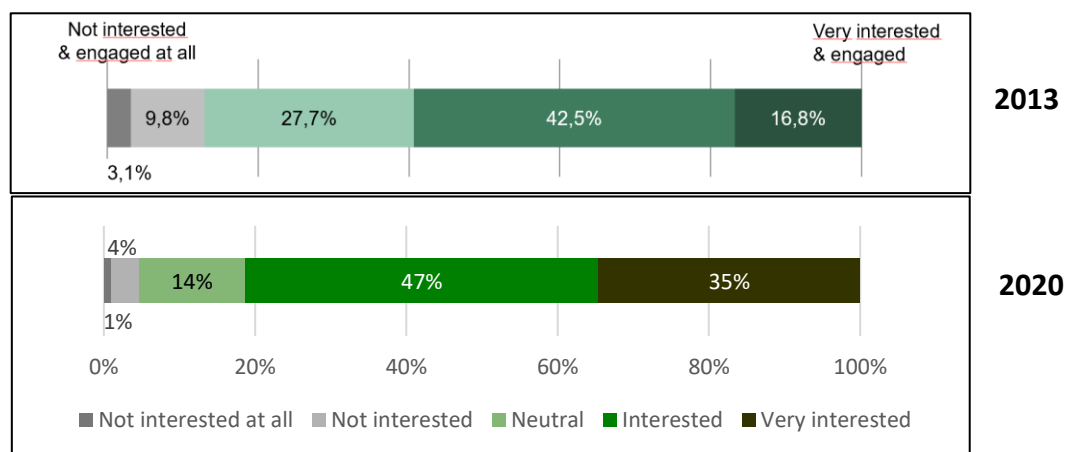


Figure 3: Results: How would you assess your personal interest and engagement in the areas of sustainability?

Regarding personal interest and engagement, we can observe a remarkable shift towards a stronger engagement. In 2013, 60% described themselves as ‘interested’ or ‘very interested’. In 2020, this



share has increased to 82%. Consequently, the fraction of respondents 'not interested' or 'neutral' has decreased from 40.6% to 18%.

### 3.2.2 Importance of sustainability for a Business School

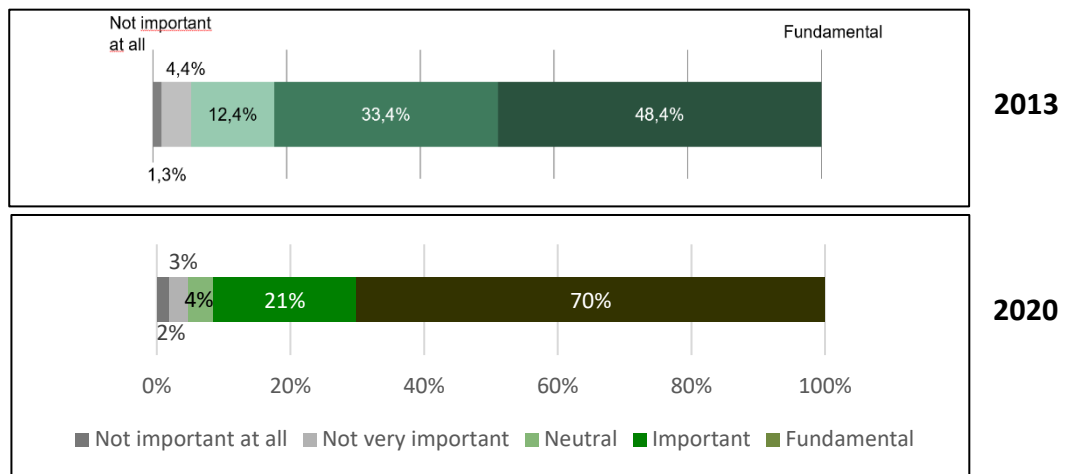


Figure 4: Results: How important is in your opinion the issue of sustainability for a business school today?

Here as well, we can see an increase in the dimensions 'important' and 'fundamental' from 81% to 91%. This exemplifies that sustainability is considered to be key for a business school today.

### 3.2.3 Sustainability as a core competence of the HSG

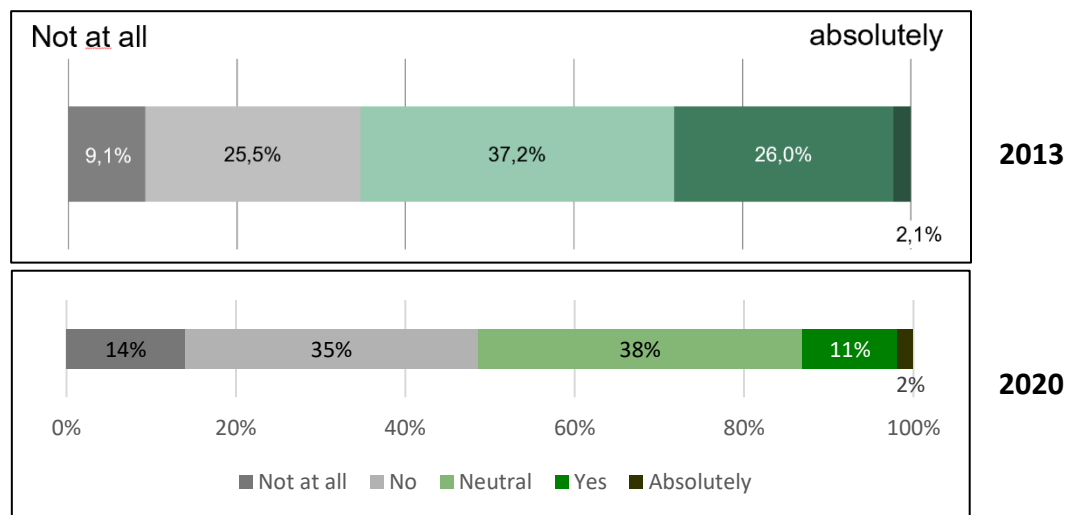


Figure 5: Results: Do you think sustainability is a core competence of the University of St. Gallen?

For the question of whether sustainability is a core competence of the HSG, a decrease in the agreement rate can be observed. While in 2003, 28.1% saw sustainability as a core competence, only 13% do so in 2020.

### 3.2.4 Stronger engagement of the HSG in the field of sustainability

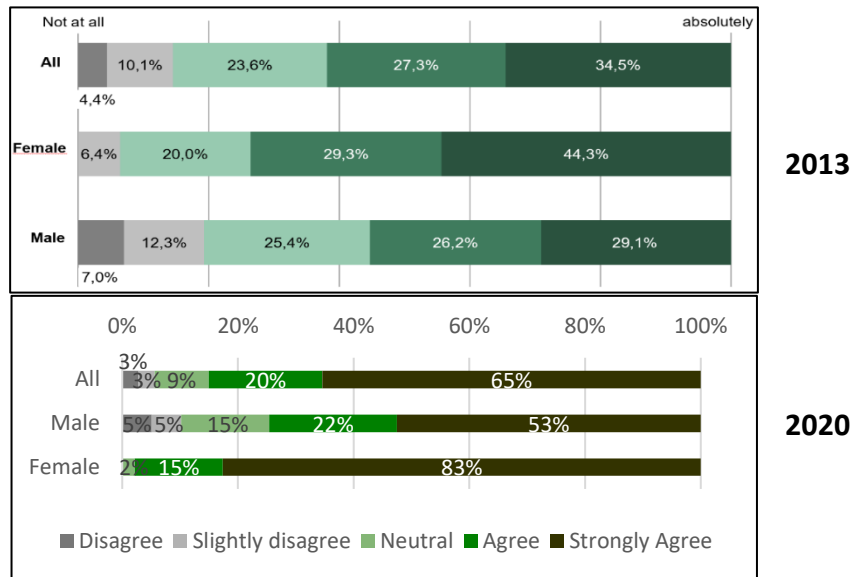


Figure 6: Results gender: Do you think HSG should have a stronger engagement in the field of sustainability?

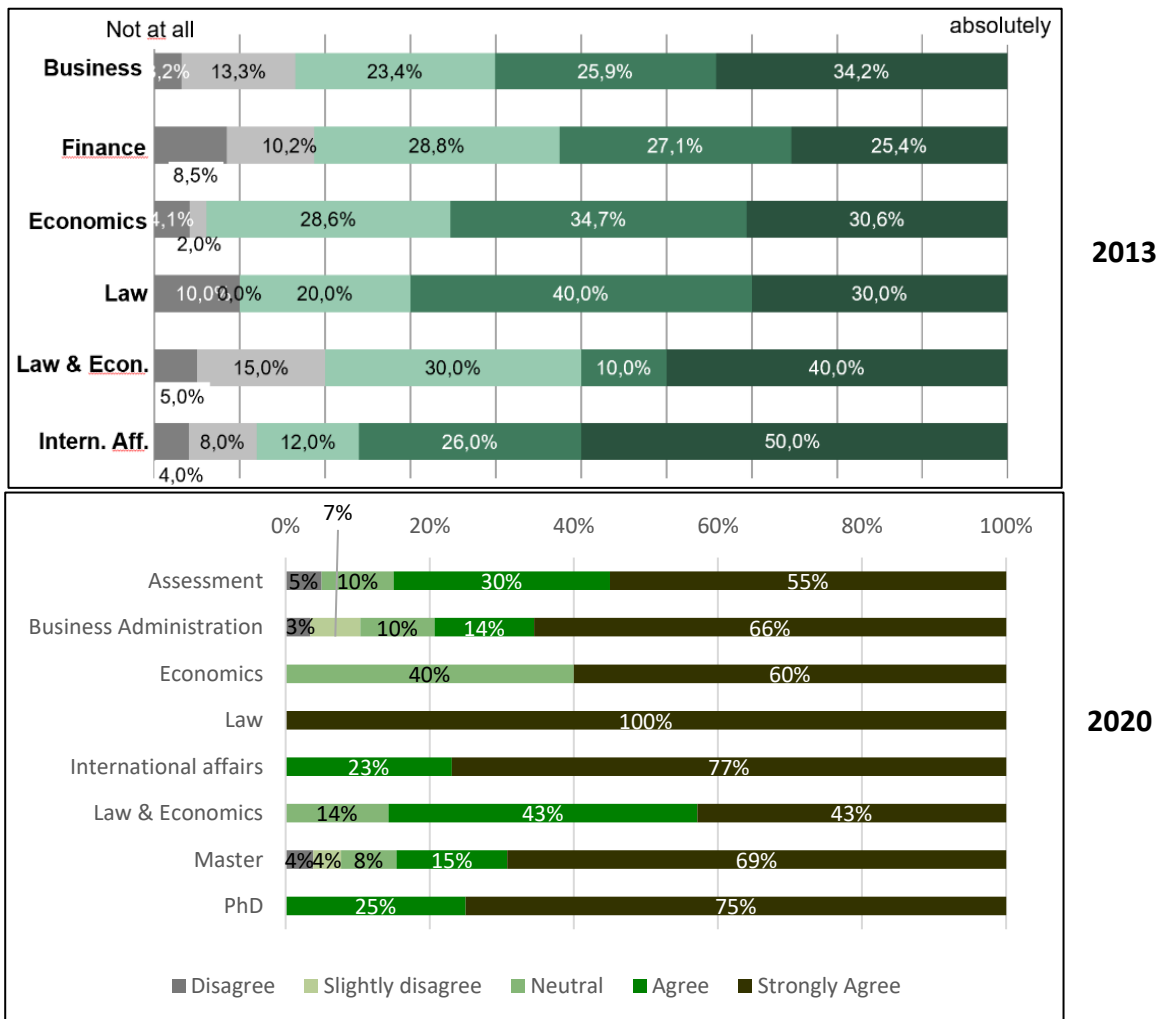


Figure 7: Results study programs: Do you think HSG should have a stronger engagement in the field of sustainability?

Overall, 25% more students demand a stronger engagement in sustainability on the part of the university compared to 2013. Beyond that, the gap between male and female respondents who agree ‘strongly’ has doubled from 15% to 30%.

Broken down according to the different study programs and study levels, we can see the same trend. Across all study programs, except Law & Economics, the demand for stronger engagement in sustainability has increased.

### 3.2.5 Importance of sustainability in the study program

Here again, the view that the importance of sustainability should be higher or much higher has increased by 26.7%. Interestingly, while the overall difference between male and female respondents has remained similar, it has decreased in the category ‘much higher’.

Across all study programs, as shown in Figure 9 on the next page, a majority of students answered that the importance of sustainability should be higher or much higher. This proportion has strongly increased compared with the 2013 results, except in Economics, where it remained roughly constant.

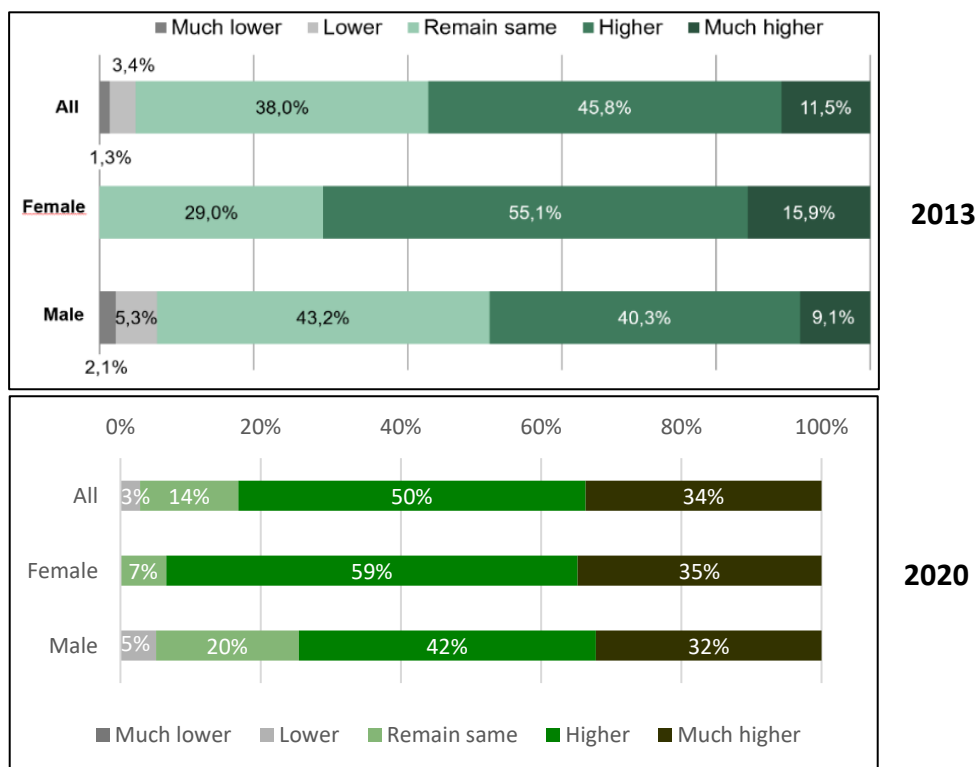
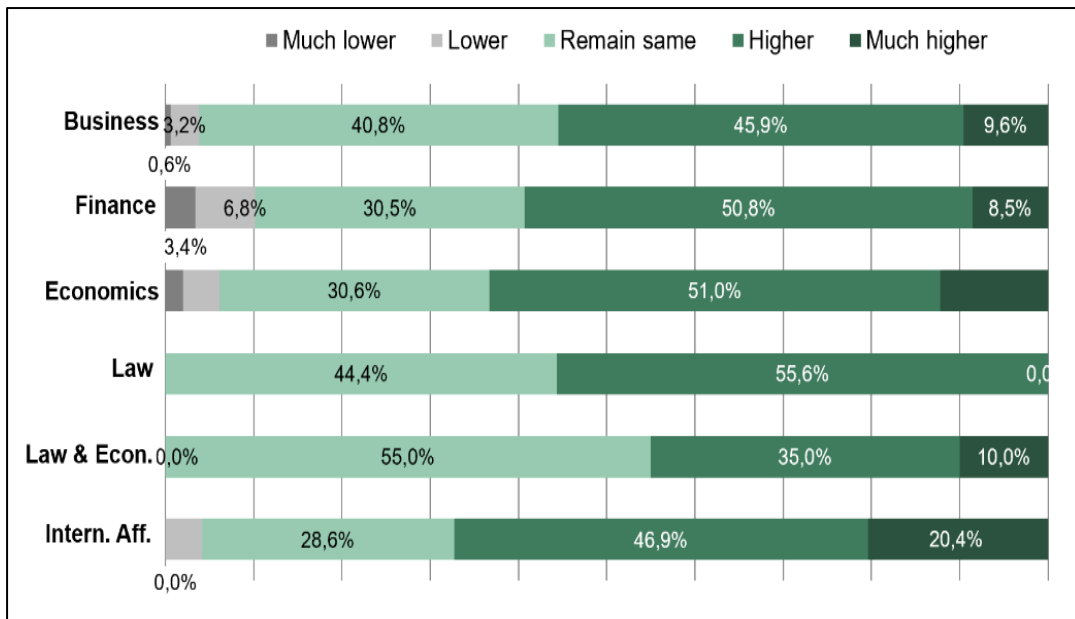
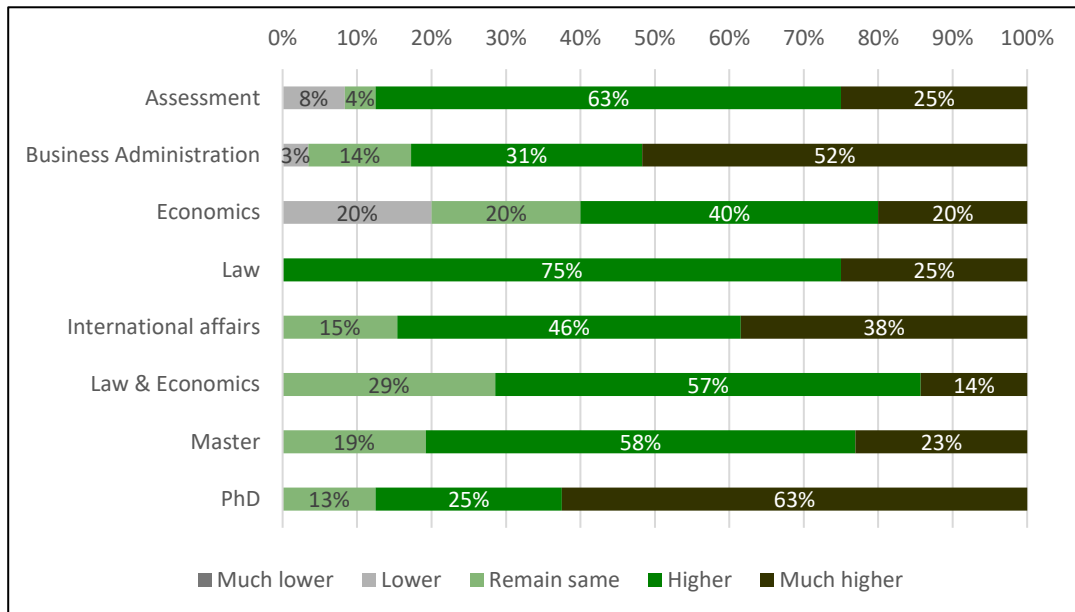


Figure 8: Results gender: Do you think the importance attached to issues of sustainability in your program of studies should be



2013



2020

Figure 9: Results study programs: Do you think the importance attached to issues of sustainability in your program of studies should be

### 3.2.6 Integration of sustainability into the mandatory core courses

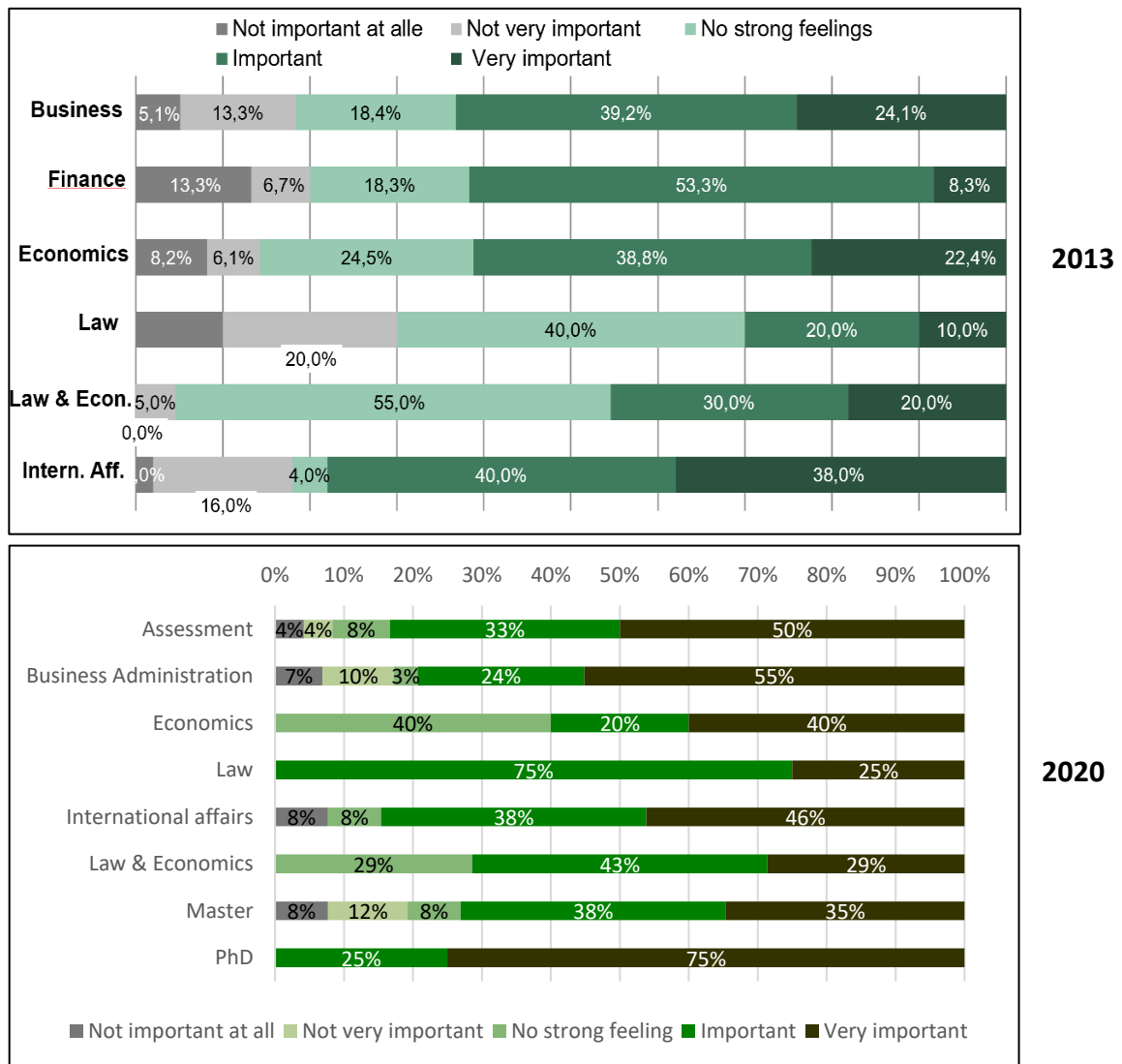


Figure 10: Results study programs: How important is it for you to integrate issues of sustainability into the mandatory core courses of your program of study?

Finally, the proportion of students who think that sustainability should be integrated into their core studies, has again increased across all programs except in Economics. Compared to 2013, the number of students in Business Administration who believe that integration is ‘important’ or ‘very important’ has increased by 15.7%.

### 3.3 University and the campus

Out of the 107 participants, only 30 were aware of the university’s signing of the UN climate emergency letter, which equates to 28%. However, 90%, or 97 students, believed that this is a good step for a university to take.

Regarding the student-driven sustainability initiatives on campus, recycling and sustainable food were preferred with 84% and 88% respectively. Additionally mentioned activities included knowledge sharing, clean-up days, solar panels on the buildings, a reduction of mobility for example through distance learning, sustainable investment of SHSG’s financial resources as well as more vegan and plant-based food options at the Mensa.

Initiatives	% of responses
Sharing (e-bikes, books etc.)	63%
<b>Recycling (reusable coffee cups)</b>	<b>84%</b>
Workshops/Presentations	61%
<b>Sustainable food and beverage</b>	<b>88%</b>

Figure 11: Results: Student-driven sustainability initiatives

In the last section, students could voice further ideas, concerns or comments related to sustainability at the HSG. The ideas raised can be grouped into four categories: teaching, food offer, infrastructure/recycling and implementation/communication of measures. In the following, each of these areas will be discussed in detail.

#### 3.3.1 Teaching

A major concern seems to be the lacking integration of sustainability topics into the different courses and the feeling that “our graduates casually laugh these topics off with nonchalance or leave university with the distant memory of ethics and sustainability”. Two other respondents mentioned that lecturers would outright avoid sustainability topics. Consequently, the desire for comprehensive integration of sustainability topics into all courses was a recurring theme. Especially in the case of sustainability-related finance courses, demand appears to be significantly higher than current course offering.

Criticism was also voiced regarding the mobility of students and lecturers, primarily in the case of air travel.

### 3.3.2 Food offer

The main issue addressed was the offering of vegan and vegetarian menus, which is deemed insufficient as well as too expensive. At the same time though, multiple participants criticised enforced measures such as the ‘Meatless Monday’. Instead, they propose measures which respect the freedom of choice such as the internalisation of the ecological footprint into the pricing schemes.

### 3.3.3 Infrastructure and recycling

By far the most discussed topic of the whole open answer section was that of disposable coffee cups. The participants agreed that this waste stream should be urgently addressed. Beyond that, an option to compost organic waste was requested. Regarding infrastructure, respondents favoured the use of solar panels as well as a mandatory sustainability concept for all events.

### 3.3.4 Implementation and communication of measures

Analogous to the criticism of enforced measures in chapter 3.3.2, participants dismissed a top-down approach with mandatory measures. Rather, they want the benefits of sustainable solutions, such as convenience, to be communicated more effectively. Students should be convinced to choose sustainably rather than be forced to do so. Overall, they should be more actively involved in the elaboration and implementation of sustainable solutions.

Regarding the HSG as a public institution and leading business school, it was requested that it would “walk the talk” and embed sustainability as a core activity.

## 3.4 Materiality assessment of sustainability topics

For the first part of the materiality assessment, participants were asked to select the two areas which they would like the university to emphasise in the future. The results clearly show that the areas Teaching/Education and Campus-Environment were considered most relevant. Governance on the other side was given less importance and only chosen in 7.8% of the cases.

Areas	% of responses
Research	22%
<b>Teaching / Education</b>	<b>63%</b>
Campus - People	21%
<b>Campus – Environment</b>	<b>66%</b>
Community outreach - Dialogue	19.4%
Governance	7.8%

Figure 12: Results: Materiality assessment; Areas

In the second step, students had to select the five most important activities related to sustainability. Analogous to the areas in Figure 12, the most chosen activities revolve around teaching, curricula development and ecological sustainability on campus.

Activities	% of responses
Integration of sustainability into the curriculum	52%
Skills for managing sustainable development/climate solutions	51%
Food (waste, sustainable food choices)	45.6%
Waste and recycling on campus	40.8%
Energy consumption on campus	30.1%
Research on sustainability-related topics	29.1%
Equal opportunities / non-discrimination / inclusion	27.2%
Executive education in sustainability-relevant areas	24.3%
Research collaborations on sustainability topics	21.4%
Accessibility of research/knowledge transfer	20.4%

Figure 13: Results: Materiality assessment; Activities



## 4 Conclusion

This student survey has shown that the interest and engagement in sustainability have sharply increased over the past seven years. This claim is backed up by an analysis of student's attitudes towards nature and environmental concern. It has demonstrated that nature is part of the respondent's self-concept, which in turn is a good predictor for pro-environmental behaviour.

From the viewpoint of Oikos, the results reveal strong support for student-driven sustainability initiatives. Multiple participants emphasised the importance of our efforts and encouraged Oikos to continue the pursuit of sustainable change. Concerning our activities, it seems that tangible changes such as the introduction of a reusable coffee cup or the extension of the sustainable food and beverage offering are most desired. This is also reflected in the materiality assessment, where environmental sustainability on campus was voted as the most important sustainability-related activity. The integration of sustainability into teaching was almost equally important though. This insight underlines the importance of a project such as Curriculum Change, where Oikos tries to enter into dialogue with the university leadership.

The main takeaway for university leadership is the strong call for more sustainability in all courses and study programs. The number of students who consider sustainability to be of utmost importance for a business school has increased to 70%. At the same time, only 13% consider sustainability to be a core competence of the University of St. Gallen. These results are in line with the Positive Impact Rating which has shown that the HSG is merely at the beginning of institutionalising sustainability and in this regard severely lagging behind other business schools. In summary and from the student's point of view, it becomes clear that curricula development and environmental sustainability on campus are in urgent need of further development.

## Appendix

### Sustainability student survey

Thank you for participating in this survey about sustainability at the HSG. This survey is conducted by the student organization Oikos St. Gallen.

The goal is to find out more about your preferences related to sustainability on campus and in your studies. The results will be used to further develop our campus-related activities as well as for curricula development. With your answers, you will contribute to this important endeavour and help make our university future-proof!

The survey will take approximately 5 minutes. Your answers will remain anonymous and will be treated with full confidentiality.

**Explanation:** 'Sustainability' refers to environmental topics (e.g. climate, resource use, biodiversity, waste etc.) as well as social topics (e.g. ethics, equality/fairness, gender, responsibility etc.).

#### **Personal attitude to sustainability (5-point scale, disagree-completely agree)**

1. I am really not willing to go out of my way to do much about ecology since that is the government's job
2. Pollution is not personally affecting my life
3. The thing that concerns me most about deforestations is that there will not be enough lumber for future generations
4. One of the most important reasons to protect the natural environment is to ensure a continued high standard of living
5. I think of the natural world as a community to which I belong
6. I can enjoy spending time in a natural setting just for the sake of being out
7. Being out in nature is a great stress reducer for me
8. I would take a job with a company I knew was harming the environment
9. I would not make a special effort to buy products in recyclable containers

#### **Opinions about teaching, course offering (5-point scale)**

10. How would you assess your personal interest and engagement in the areas of sustainability (Not interested & engaged at all – Very interested & engaged)
11. How important is in your opinion the issue of sustainability for a Business Scholl today? (Not important at all – Fundamental)
12. Do you think sustainability is a core competence of the University of St. Gallen? (Not at all – Absolutely)
13. Do you think HSG should have a stronger engagement in the field of sustainability ? (Not at all – Absolutely)
14. Do you think the importance attached to issues of sustainability in your program of studies should be (Much lower – Much higher)
15. How important is it for you to integrate issues of sustainability into the mandatory core courses of your program of study? (Not important at all – Very important)

#### **University and campus**

In October 2019, the rector of the HSG signed the Climate Emergency Letter in which the HSG commits to become climate neutral by 2030 as well as to increase the integration of sustainability in research and teaching

16. Have you heard about this commitment (Yes, No, Not sure)
17. Do you think this is the right thing for a university to do? (Yes, No, Not sure)
18. In which of the following student-driven sustainability (e.g. by Oikos, SHSG) would you be interested?

- a. Sharing (e-bikes, books, clothing etc.)
- b. Recycling (e.g. reusable coffee cups)
- c. Workshops and presentations
- d. Sustainable food and beverage
- e. Other, please specify

19. Are there any topics, ideas, concerns or comments related to sustainability at HSG that you would like to share?

### Materiality assessment of sustainability topics

Which topics are important to you? In the following sections, please indicate the relevance you assign to the different topics and activities

#### A. Research

- 1. Research on sustainability-related topics
- 2. Research collaborations on sustainability topics
- 3. Accessibility of research / knowledge transfer

#### B. Teaching / Education

- 4. Integration of sustainability into curriculum
- 5. Skills for managing sustainable development / climate solutions
- 6. Executive education in sustainability-relevant areas

#### C. Campus - People

- 7. Diversity among students and faculty
- 8. Equal opportunities / non-discrimination / inclusion
- 9. Health (health care, sport, security...)
- 10. Career support / development
- 11. Attractive employment conditions (part time, child care,)

#### D. Campus - Environment

- 12. Waste and recycling on campus
- 13. Energy consumption on campus
- 14. Sustainable mobility concepts
- 15. Greenhouse gas emissions
- 16. Biodiversity
- 17. Food (waste, sustainable food choices)
- 18. Paper consumption and printers

#### E. Community outreach / Dialogue

- 20. Support student organizations / engagement in sustainability
- 21. Start-up support
- 22. Public lectures on sustainability
- 23. Engagement with the local community
- 24. Alumni engagement
- 25. Partnerships for sustainability with educational, business and government entities

#### F. Governance

- 26. Good corporate governance / compliance
- 27. Transparency and information of stakeholders
- 28. Participation (student-driven, student-bodies etc.)

20. Please check the two topics listed above that are most important to you

21. Please check the five activities listed above that are most important to you

22. Please add any additional topics that seem relevant to you (open answer)

### Demographic questions:

23. Age (20 or younger, 21-25, 26-30, 31-40, 40 or older)

24. Gender (Male, Female, Other, Prefer not to say)

25. Current study level (Assessment, Bachelor, Master, PhD)

26. Program (all 29 programs listed)

27. I am engaged in a student organization dedicated to a sustainable

28. I am currently working in the field of sustainability

29. I would like to work in the field of sustainability in my future career