

# Assessment of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Efforts in the UCLA Sustainability Community Through Student Experiences

## **SUSTAINABILITY ACTION RESEARCH**

Team Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion  
2021

### **STAKEHOLDER:**


Carlo Morante

### **TEAM LEADERS:**

Alyssa S. Moreno  
Pratika Nagpal

### **TEAM MEMBERS:**

Janelle Vidal  
Priscilla Velez  
Madi Lehman  
Julia Wu



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# MEET THE TEAM



## **Alyssa S. Moreno**

Alyssa is a 4th year Human Biology and Society major with a minor in Environmental Systems and Society. She is excited to play a part in uplifting and empowering marginalized voices and transforming the sustainability community, a space she found a beautiful home in at UCLA and beyond!

## **Janelle Vidal**

Janelle is a 4th year Environmental Science major and believes uplifting the voices of folks from diverse backgrounds and giving them a sense of community and acceptance in green spaces is necessary for making sustainability more inviting and inclusive.



## **Pratika Nagpal**

Pratika is a 2nd year Environmental Science major. She is proud to co-lead this team which aligns with her personal mission and passion in making sustainability more accessible and inclusive.



# MEET THE TEAM



## **Priscilla Velez**

Priscilla is a 3rd year Geography/Environmental Studies major. She is excited to help increase the inclusivity and accessibility of sustainability at UCLA and foster a sustainability community that is a safe, welcoming space for people of all backgrounds.

## **Madi Lehman**

Madi is a 1st year Environmental Science major. She joined the EDI team to get involved with groundbreaking student work to help make UCLA more inclusive while studying remotely from the Bay Area.



## **Julia Wu**

Julia is a 1st year Environmental Science major who believes decisions should be influenced by those they affect. She joined this team to learn about sustainability at UCLA and how it can be made more inclusive.

# Introduction

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## DEFINITIONS

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- **UCLA sustainability community:** all UCLA undergraduate students, graduate students, staff, and faculty invested and involved with sustainability initiatives, education, and policies at UCLA.
- **UCLA sustainability:** initiatives, programs, events, and projects led by UCLA students, staff, and faculty.
- **EDI in Sustainability:**
  1. Fostering an inclusive, safe, and welcoming sustainability community for people of all backgrounds, including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, status, religion, and education.
  2. Including and elevating the voices and needs of historically underrepresented groups, like communities of color and low-income communities, in sustainability efforts.
  3. Recognizing the existence of structural racism and discrimination and actively challenging these norms and preconceptions that pervade environmental science and sustainability fields.



# Research Question

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WHAT ARE STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN SUSTAINABILITY SPACES AT UCLA, AND HOW MIGHT EDI PRACTICES ADDRESS ANY SHORTCOMINGS?

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## Objectives >

- Investigate the **current status of EDI in sustainability** at UCLA, specifically **student access** to and **representation** within sustainability spaces and efforts, through **student feedback**
- Produce a **comprehensive report with our findings and recommendations**

# Methodology

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## Outreach

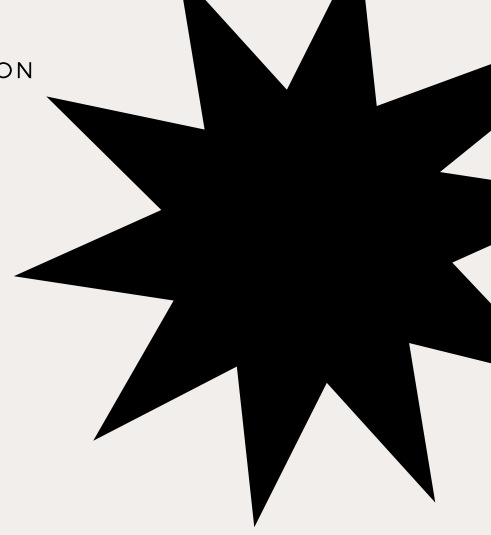
- We interviewed and created connections with various stakeholders and sustainability leaders at IoES, CNI fellows, UCLA Students Affairs, the LGBTQ+ Center, etc. this helped us understand the UCLA sustainability community and its EDI endeavors as well as how to create a safe, respectful, and comprehensive demographic survey.

## Survey

- We developed the "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Sustainability Survey" to hear directly from students regarding their experiences with sustainability at UCLA and to provide a space for students to speak on their experiences and identities. This allowed us to delve deeper into how students' positionalities influence their experiences.
- To distribute our survey, we outreached to a total of 170 academic departments and orgs

## Community Conversations

- We then determined 3 main identity groups based on students' most salient identities and adapted EDI-specific Community Conversations from the model created by the Zero Waste Team. We had 3 separate sessions and outreached to the wider UCLA community and survey participants for folks to attend these conversations. We then connected common themes in the survey to themes in in-depth responses in our conversations.



# EDI Survey

Our survey's three main sections included:

## → **Perception of Sustainability at UCLA**

This section provided students an opportunity to rate the inclusiveness of the UCLA sustainability community based on Race and Ethnicity, Class and Socioeconomic Status, Gender and Sexuality, Ability, and representation in leadership positions.

## → **Reflect on Your Sustainability Experiences**

This section provided students an opportunity to write in-depth about their experiences in the UCLA sustainability community and sustainability in general in relation to their most salient identities, which they were subsequently asked to indicate. These salient identity groups were then used to inform what Community Conversation session topics were to be had.

## → **Experience with Courses that Discuss Environmental Issues**

This section provided students an opportunity to rate the diversity of course material, faculty, and overall inclusiveness of intersectional topics of discussion.



# Community Conversations

We held three community conversations on **Race and Ethnicity, Class and Socioeconomic Status, and Gender and Sexuality**, as these were the three most common salient identities in our survey responses.

## **In our Community Conversations, we asked participants:**

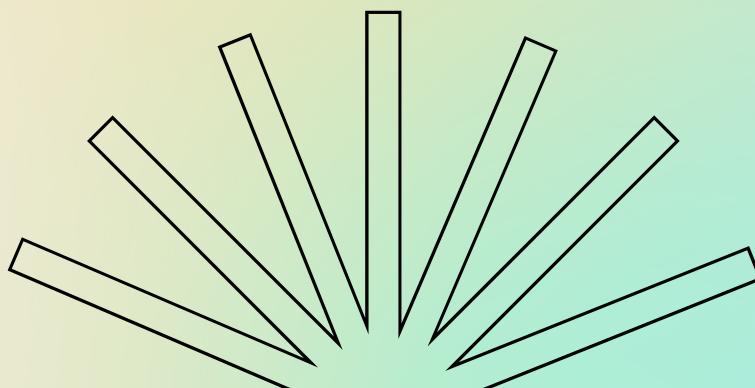
1. What are your experiences with sustainability?
2. What are your experiences with sustainability At UCLA?
3. Has your identity shaped your experience?
4. Do you think your identity is important to represent in the sustainability movement and spaces?
5. How would you describe the degree to which sustainability at UCLA is inclusive of or accessible to people from all (race/gender/etc) backgrounds?
6. Do you feel like sustainability is inclusive of people from all backgrounds at UCLA?
7. What do you most value in an inclusive environment?

# Results

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Our survey and community conversations revealed the many identities and positionalities of undergraduate students that interact with UCLA sustainability or sustainability in general. These students varied in the extent of their involvement with UCLA sustainability, their experience with interacting with UCLA sustainability, and their views on how sustainability at UCLA can be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive.

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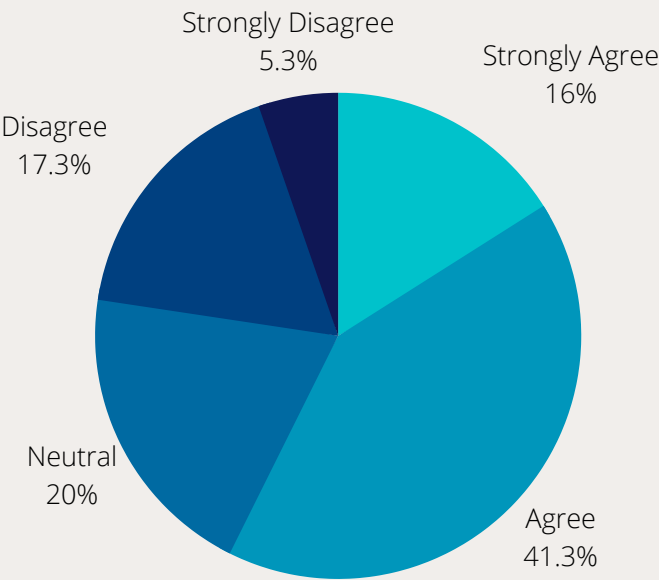
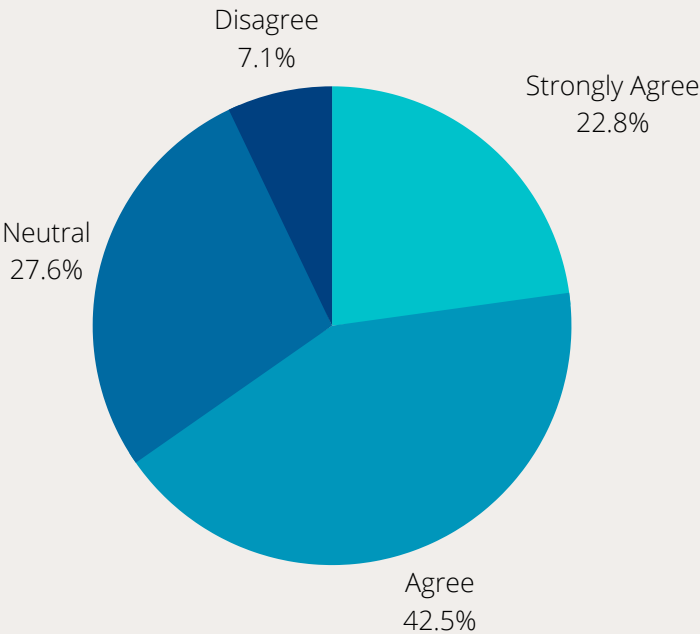
# Survey Results

## Race and Ethnicity

In response to the statements:

"Sustainability at UCLA encourages the participation of people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds."

n=127



"My professors present a diverse array of course material from different racial and ethnic backgrounds."

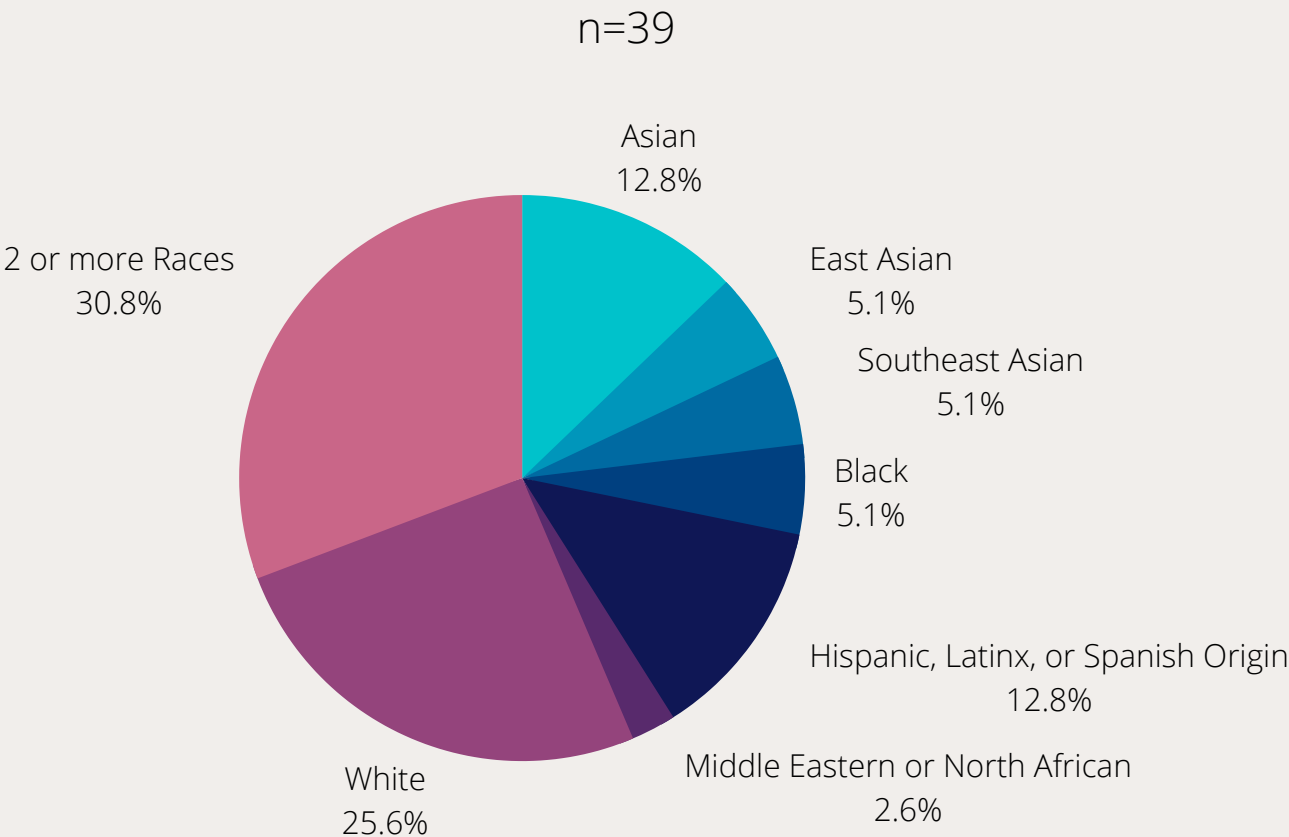
n=75



# Survey Results

## Race and Ethnicity

39 participants felt race/ethnicity was their most salient identity:



# Survey Results

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## Race and Ethnicity

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### Common Themes from the Survey and Community Conversations



**White participants'** experiences were shaped by eco-anxiety and acknowledgement of their own privilege in identity and resources.

- Acknowledgement of the importance of sustainable action and advocating for BIPOC and otherwise marginalized communities.
- UCLA's courses have opened up the idea of sustainability, but only when interacting with fellow classmates and doing outside learning are they able to engage more fully with broader definitions of sustainability that include socioeconomic dimensions.



**Non-white participants'** responses expressed the following themes:

- Inaccessibility to sustainability because of affordability
- Education (including lack of concern for environmental issues)
- White-dominated spaces
- Cultural differences (including coming from immigrant or low-income households)
- Lack of inclusion of specific racially and ethnically minoritized perspectives (including of international students and undocumented folks)
- Concern over systemic issues (including environmental racism and settler colonialism)

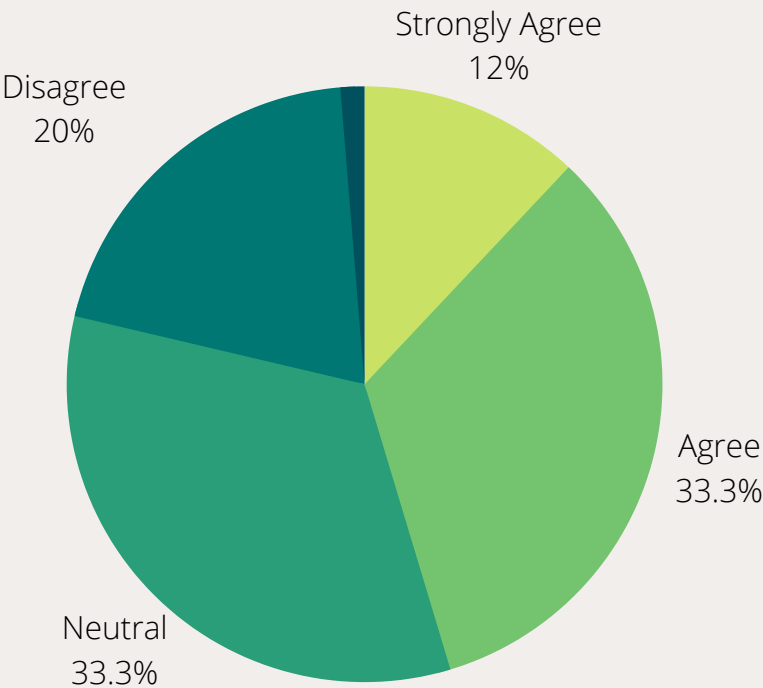
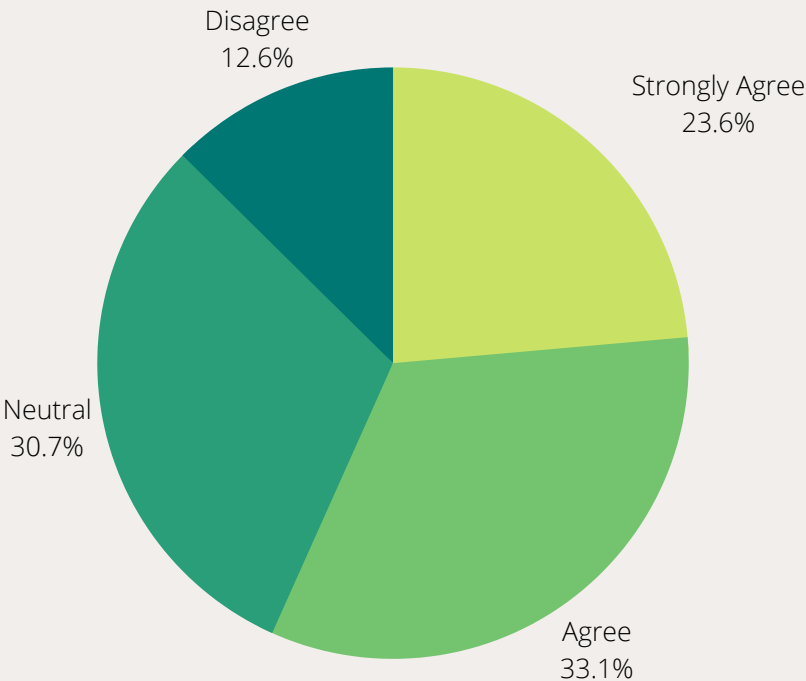
# Survey Results

## Class and Socioeconomic Status

In response to the statements:

"Sustainability at UCLA encourages the participation of people of all socioeconomic backgrounds."

n=127



"Courses consider the viewpoints of people from all socioeconomic backgrounds."

n=75

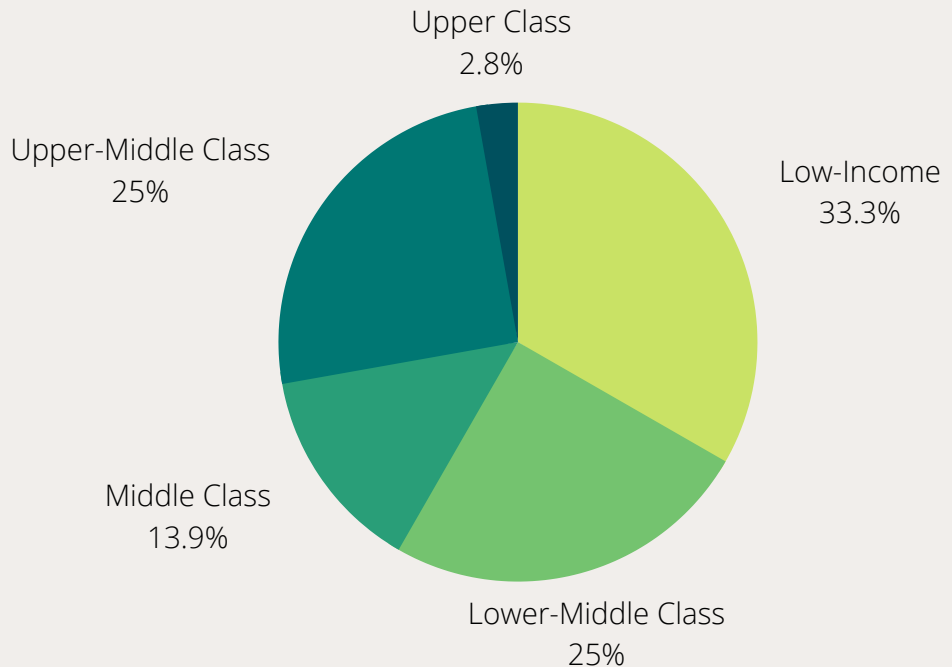


# Survey Results

## Class and Socioeconomic Status

Of the 36 participants who felt class/socioeconomic status was their most salient identity:

n=36



### Common Themes Among Low-Income Identifying Individuals

- Sustainable products are **financially inaccessible**, so many must choose cheaper, unsustainable products.
- Sustainability movement is **exclusive or less accessible** to lower-income communities.



### Common Themes Among Middle/Upper-Class Identifying Individuals

- **Easier to be sustainable** or interact with sustainability because of socioeconomic background.
- Having **generally positive experiences** in sustainability because of socioeconomic background.

## Community Conversation Results

# Class and Socioeconomic Status

## Common Themes Among Participants



**Sustainability being an integral part of their life for survival and to save money, rather than as an aesthetic or for morals**

- “So for us, sustainability has always been an integral part of our lives, but not so much as for moral reasons, rather than for survival reasons, as if this is what we need to do to survive.”
- Examples of practices to save money rather than to be sustainable:
  - Reducing food waste, such as by eating small portions or using the entirety of the food.
  - Passing down old clothes to younger family members or reusing old clothes for cleaning.



**There is a sense of moral gatekeeping and villainization to sustainability at UCLA and beyond**

“At UCLA there is some sort of gatekeeping to sustainability...Like this villainization of all plastic bags...but a lot of people do repurpose them. Or like [when] we buy fast fashion stuff, it gets handed down past generations, gets a lot of wear, and then also becomes repurposed as like a rag or something else towards the end of its lifespan.”

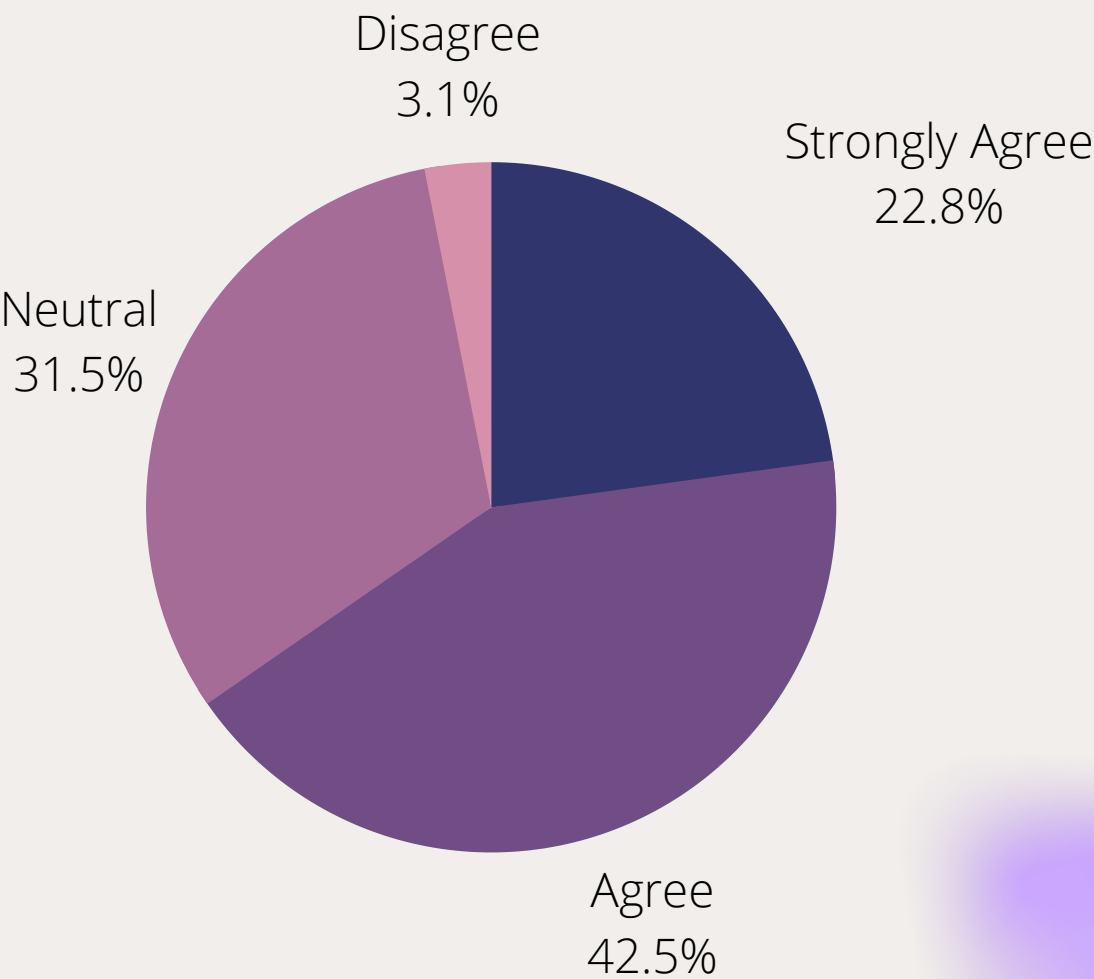
# Survey Results

## Gender and Sexuality

In response to the statement:

"Sustainability at UCLA is inclusive of LGBTQ+ people."

n=127

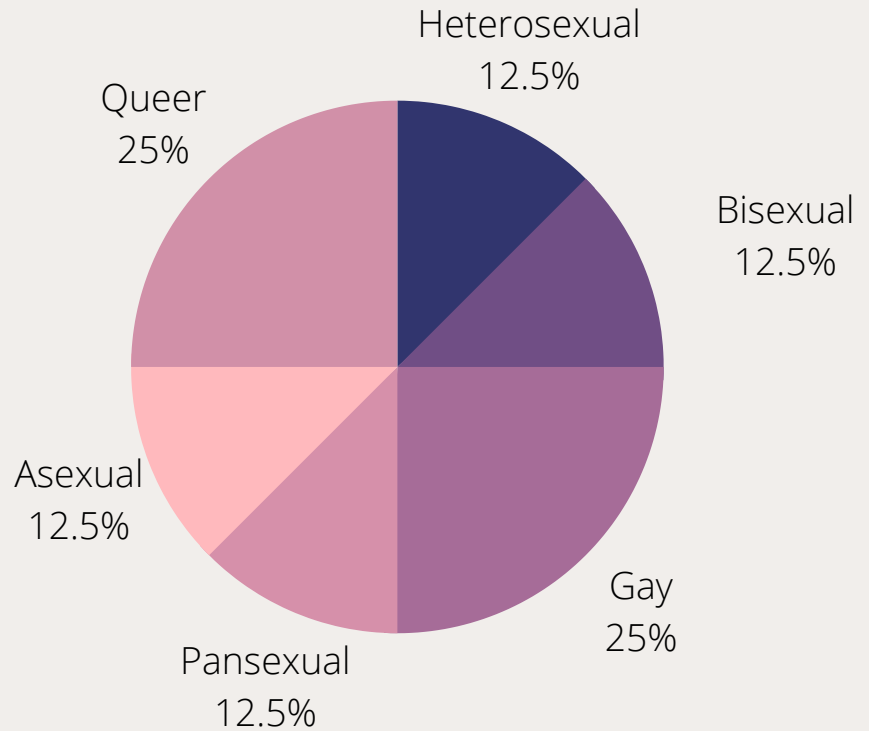


## Survey Results

### Gender and Sexuality

Of the 8 participants who felt gender was their most salient identity:

n=8



### Common Sexuality Themes

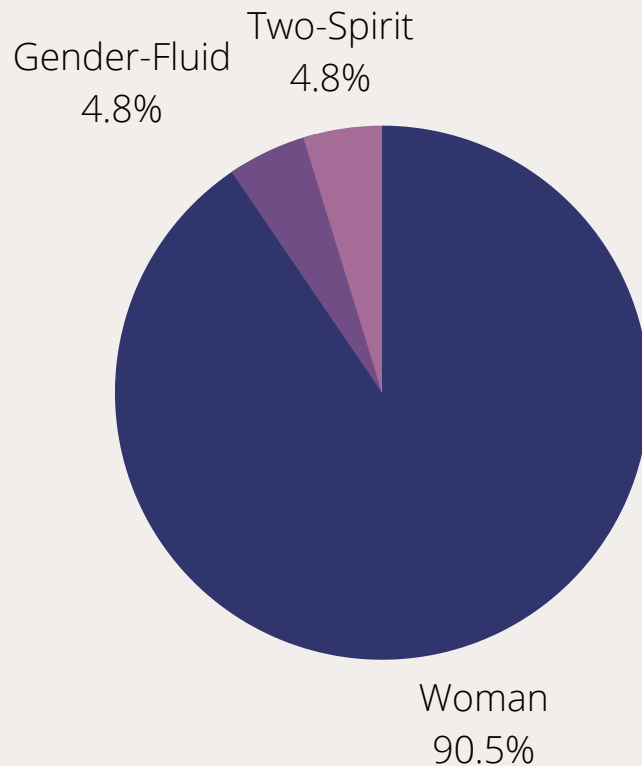
- UCLA sustainability is **generally inclusive** of LGBTQ+ students.
- Students with **multiple marginalized identities** feel **excluded** from sustainability.

## Survey Results

### Gender and Sexuality

Of the 21 respondents who felt gender was their most salient identity:

n=21



#### Common Gender Themes

- UCLA sustainability is mostly inclusive of women.
- Even with the environmental science major being overwhelmingly white women, there is more diversity in gender and sexuality in sustainability clubs and organizations.



# Community Conversation Results

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## Gender and Sexuality

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### Common Themes Among Participants



#### **Sustainability is generally inclusive of LGBTQ+ students**

- LGBTQ+ people feel representation in sustainability spaces is important, especially for women and queer students of color.
- Many LGBTQ+ students feel included in sustainability spaces (clubs, classes, organizations).
- “[the environmental science major] overwhelmingly has white women... but within the clubs, at least that I've been participating in, I do see a lot of diversity in sexuality and gender”



#### **Where LGBTQ+ Students do not feel represented**

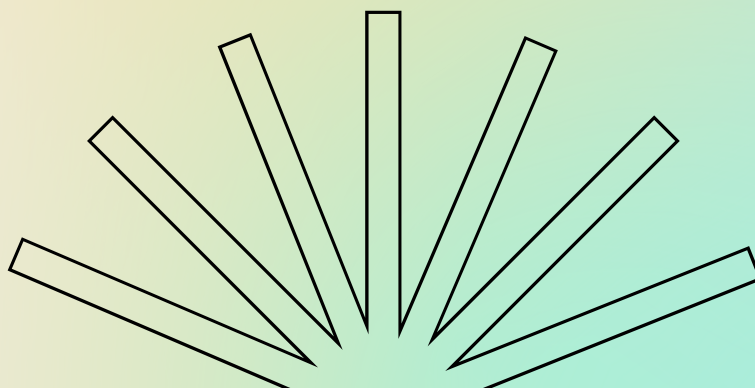
- Students still feel discrimination for sharing their queer identity: “You never know how [your sexuality is] going to be perceived. So you try to... moderate how you normally act... out of fear... is this persona going to start treating me differently from this point on?”
- Non-sustainability specific spaces feel exclusive to LGBTQ+ students.
- Sustainability generally does not include or value practices from other cultures.

# How can UCLA sustainability be more equitable, diverse, and inclusive?

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Based off our research and direct feedback from survey and community conversation participants, our team compiled a list of recommendations, strategies, and potential projects to promote EDI in sustainability at UCLA.

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# Recommendations



## Centralize and Democratize Sustainability Efforts

**Ensure transparency and communication between sustainability leadership, students, and all relevant stakeholders** through centralized efforts to hold leadership accountable. Through our outreach, it was evident that EDI efforts in sustainability at UCLA were definitely present, but also decentralized and in some cases ineffective. Students did not know where to go to express concerns about the community or to have their voices heard, but the Office of Sustainability had a webpage dedicated to their EDI survey form. Additionally, **club leaders and sustainability staff expressed a need for centralized guides in implementing EDI in their respective spaces**, but no such guide had been created and distributed as of yet.



## Collaborate to Increase Access

It is necessary to **open up sustainability efforts beyond sustainability spheres** like clubs and organizations that are geared towards sustainability and environmentalism and into cultural organizations, socially-focused clubs, and identity-oriented groups in order to emphasize the **inherent intersectionality in sustainability-related topics**. This will also **elevate marginalized voices** that are often ignored or silenced in sustainability spheres. This directly correlates to the opinions and experiences of marginalized students we interviewed and surveyed that expressed exclusion from sustainability spaces.



## Provide Resources and Training

Sustainability leadership should provide resources like **EDI newsletters and guidebooks and mandatory action-oriented training for all UCLA sustainability organizations and clubs**. Action-oriented educational tools are necessary to **promote constant learning of EDI practices and unlearning of harmful internalized prejudices and systemic oppression**.

Sustainability admin should also **properly compensate the passionate student advocates** that will develop and host these training sessions. **These initiatives should be student-led and initiated in order to elevate student voices and opinions** and ensure accountability to the communities that are directly impacted by UCLA sustainability initiatives and spaces.



# Prospective EDI Initiatives: What Students Want!

The following suggestions were directly provided to our team by the students we outreached to, surveyed, and interviewed in our Community Conversations. It is important that these students were allowed the space to provide these suggestions and that sustainability leadership take action to work towards actualizing these goals.

## Dining

- Halal and Kosher for options that are already vegan
- Increasing cultural variety in plant based foods

## Housing

- Accessible composting education and collection program

## Student Clubs + Orgs

- EDI Guidebook + trainings

## From Staff, Faculty, and Student Leaders

- Workshops on EDI and anti-racism and discrimination topics and skills
- Subsidy programs for clothes/sustainable products

## Education

- More Environmental Justice Focused classes
- More diverse faculty leading courses with intersectional material



UCLA Student  
Participants



# Resources and Inspiration for Further Action

(sources linked for your  
reference!)

## **The Student Environmental Resource Center (SERC) at UC Berkeley**

The Student Environmental Resource Center at UC Berkeley cultivates a collaborative space to strengthen the collective effectiveness of the sustainability community, and provides resources for students to actualize their visions of a more equitable, socially just, and resilient future. The center has resources like workshops and toolkits on social justice-oriented topics including activism and restorative community healing. There is also an Environmental Justice component that is emphasized. UCLA should also have a student-initiated and run environmental center perhaps under the Office of Sustainability to address our needs.



## **Point of Interest: "How corporate diversity initiatives trap workers of colour"**

EDI initiatives should not be the burden of the marginalized and oppressed groups that these initiatives are meant to serve. Many BIPOC and otherwise marginalized students are passionate about advocating for their communities and will constantly work to create a welcoming and action-oriented space for themselves, but it should not be solely their duty. Those in power, those with privilege, should be willing to make the necessary institutional changes to actually address the needs of marginalized and disproportionately affected populations, and they should be ready to educate new generations of leaders with that focus in mind! Just food for thought.







# Thank you!

Special thanks to our SAR Directors, Advisors,  
and our Stakeholder Carlo Morante for endless  
support and inspiration!