Results Comparison from the Sustainability Literacy Assessment:
AY 18-19 to Fall 2023

Background

Cal Poly Humboldt's **Sustainability Literacy Assessment (SLA)** is a survey to measure how sustainability literacy and practice evolve over the course of students' time at Cal Poly Humboldt. Through a longitudinal study approach, we are able to compare results of surveys taken by new students with those taken by graduating students. The survey includes questions that fall within three categories: Institution (i.e., campus specific activities), Culture (i.e., behaviors, practices) and Comprehension (i.e., understanding of key concepts). First developed in 2016 through the Office of Sustainability (OS), then later refined in 2018 through a partnership between OS and the Department of Sociology, the SLA is also an effective tool for evaluating the impact of sustainability on enrollment, and for understanding the impact of sustainability education initiatives within the framework of a number of campus academic goals and programs, including:

- **HSU Institutional Learning Outcome #2**. Sustainability and Environmental Awareness: *HSU graduates will be able to explain how the functions of the natural world, society, and the economy depend on the resilience, sustainability, and conservation of ecological systems.*
- *HSU Institutional Learning Outcome #1. Equity and Social Justice: HSU graduates will be able to identify and evaluate systems of power and privilege and identify methods for creating diverse, inclusive, and racially just and equitable communities.*
- **2021-2026 Strategic Plan Vision**: *We will be the premier center for interdisciplinary study of the environment, climate crisis and resilience to climate change, and the conservation of ecological systems and natural resources. Our focus will continue to be on sustainability through environmental, economic, and socially responsible action.*
- **CSU Sustainability Policy**, which states that *the CSU will seek to further integrate sustainability into the academic curriculum, working within the normal campus consultative process*.
- **Climate Action Plan 2.0**, which includes strategies and actions to increase the percentage of courses with sustainability content.
- **Sustainability Tracking and Rating System** (STARS), which awards credit to campuses that have implemented sustainability literacy assessments.

Survey Distribution and Response

In the fall semester, the SLA survey is emailed out to new students (including freshmen, transfer and graduate students), across all colleges and programs, by the Office of Institutional Research, Analytics and Reporting (IRAR). In the spring semester, the same questions are emailed out to graduating students. Since 2018, the response rate has ranged from 3% to as high as 18%. In the fall of 2023, 1,727 students were invited to complete the survey, and 15.6% of respondents completed the survey.

Updates to the SLA

In 2023 we convened a working group through the Humboldt Advisory Committee on Sustainability (HACS) to update the SLA questions to better reflect current sustainability issues, challenges and opportunities[1]. We then tested the updated survey with a focus group and further refined the questions before integrating them into the SLA. The updated survey was first deployed in the fall of 2023. It will continue to be updated to reflect contemporary sustainability themes and concepts.

Summary of Results

Below are the results from a representative sample within each of the three categories of questions: Comprehension, Cultural Attitudes/Practices, and Institutional Initiatives/Course Offerings.

Comprehension of Sustainability Concepts:

What is an ecological service provided by wetlands?
Percentage of respondents with the correct answer:

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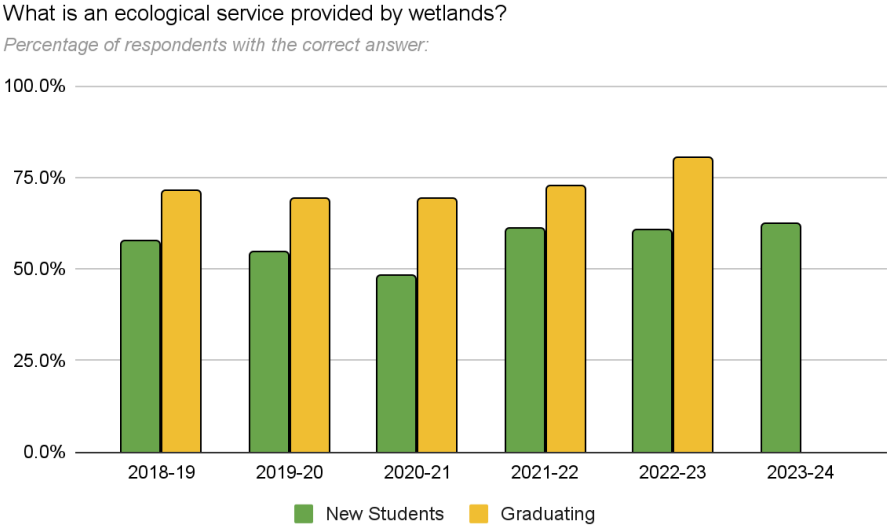
[1]Updates include rephrasing certain questions (e.g., asking about green building as a general concept instead of LEED certification for buildings), adding new questions (e.g., about reducing greenhouse gasses) and deleting certain questions that had proved to be too confusing or redundant.

A technique to assess environmental impacts associated with all stages of a product's life from cradle to grave:

Percentage of respondents with the correct answer:
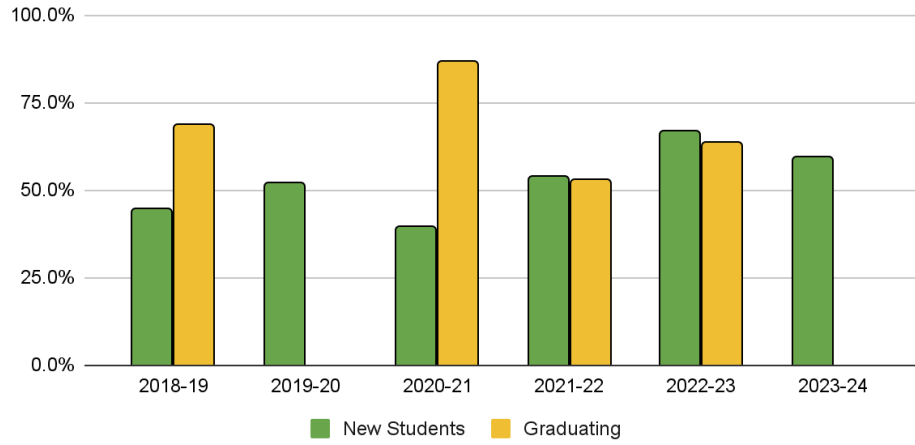
Workers around the world face a variety of social injustices, including low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of access to education. To help improve conditions for these workers we can:
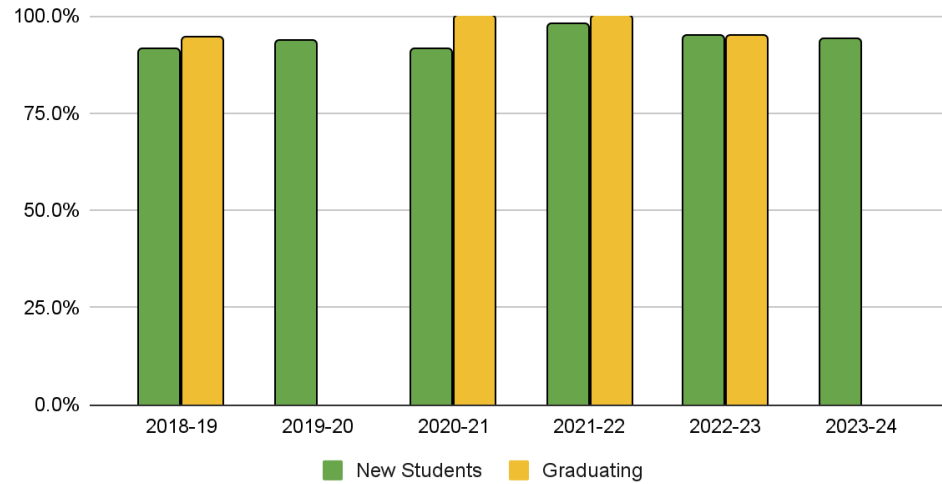
Percentage of respondents with the correct answer:
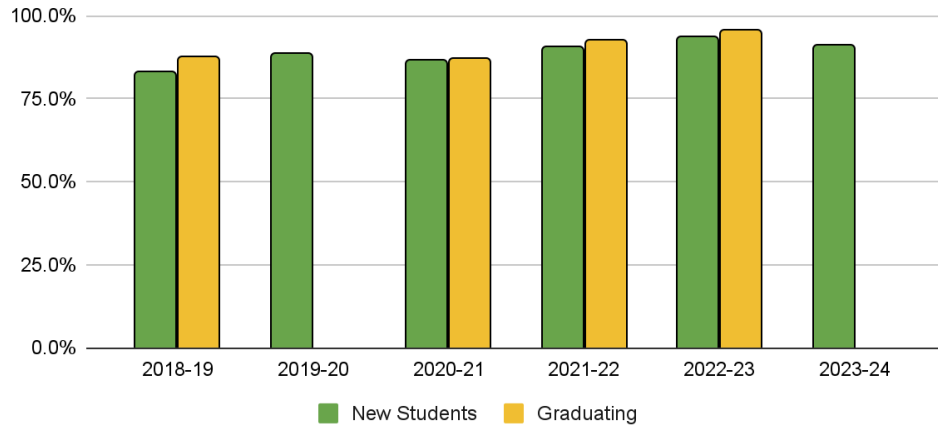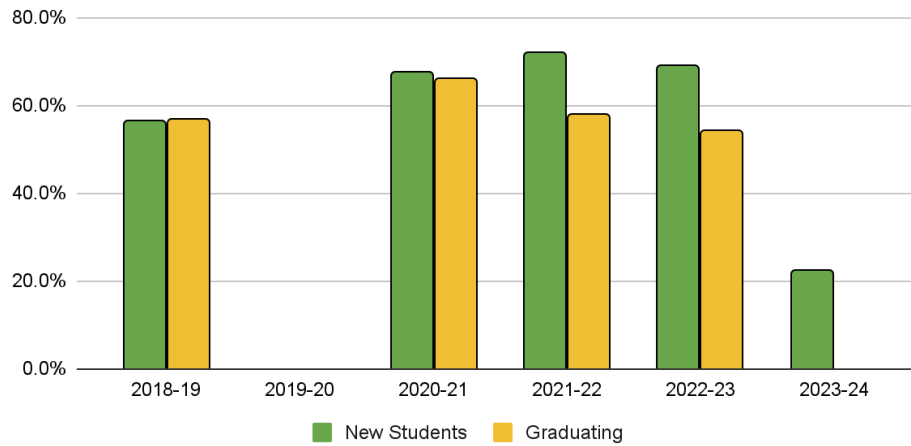
Cultural Attitudes and Practices:

I think that universities should be sustainability role models in their daily operations.

*Percentage of respondents that 'agree' or 'strongly agree':*

Please indicate how often you engage in the following activity: use a reusable water bottle, coffee container, etc.

Percentage of respondents answering 'always':

Please indicate which of the following statements best describes your level of interest in sustainability.

Percentage of respondents with a 'passion for' or 'considerable interest in' sustainability:

██ New Students ██ Graduating
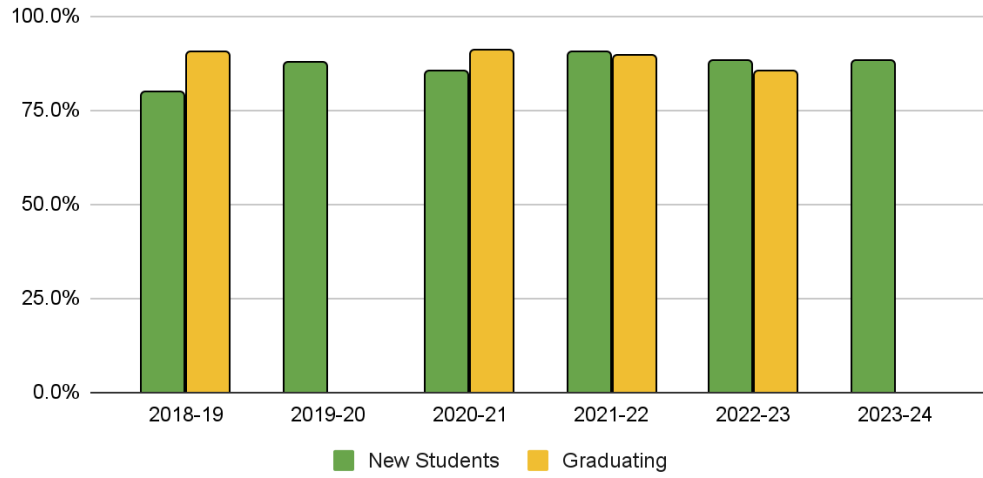
## Institutional Initiatives and Course Offerings:

Was Cal Poly Humboldt's commitment to sustainability a reason you chose to come here?

*Percentage of respondents answering 'yes'*
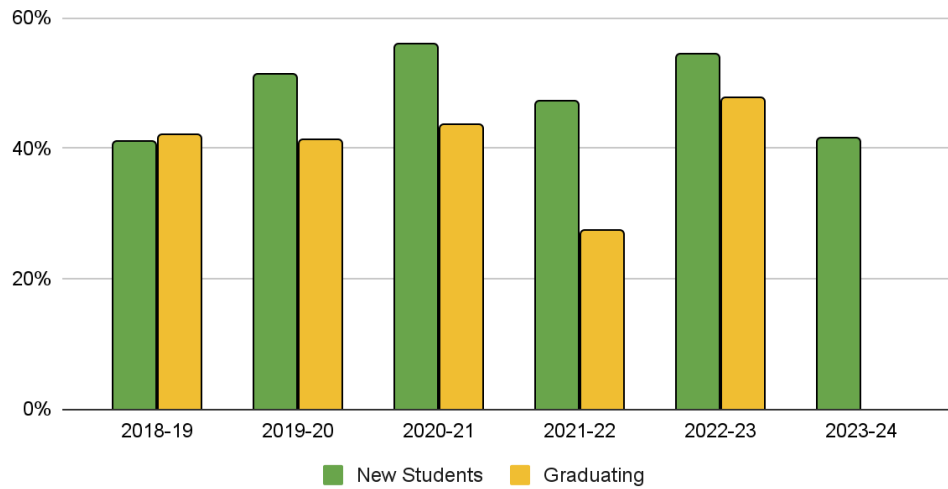
How many times have you taken classes at Cal Poly Humboldt that either explicitly focus on or touch on sustainability related topics?

Percentage of respondents answering 'a few times' or 'more than five':
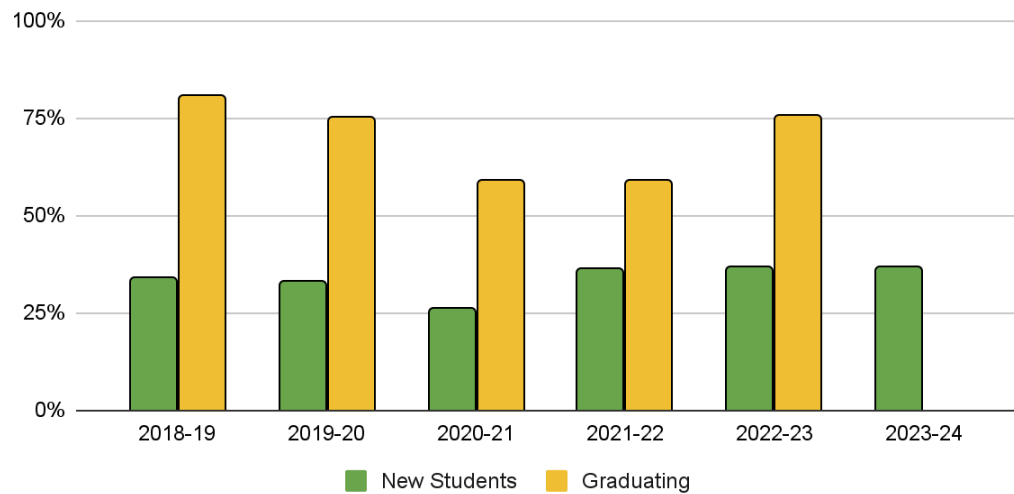
I would prefer more sustainability-related content in my courses.

Percentage of respondents that 'agree' or 'strongly agree':
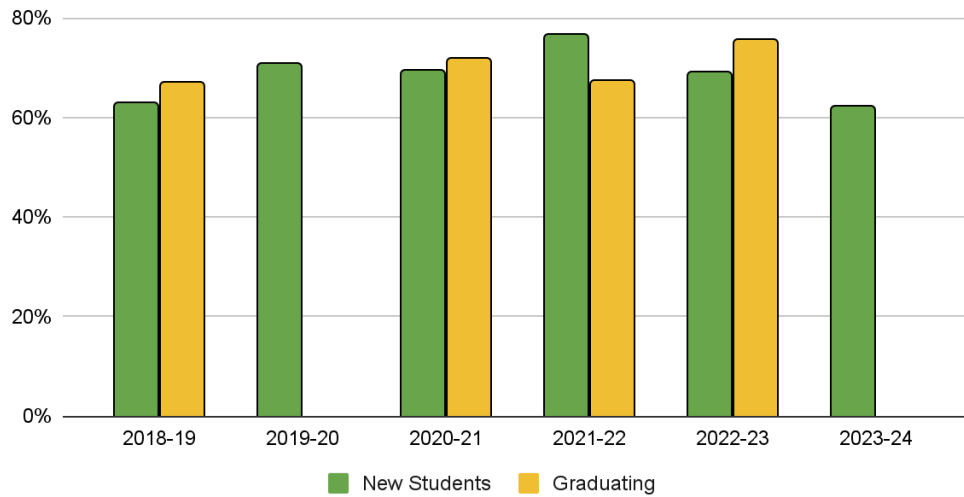
Some Conclusions to Consider

- O**ver 40%** of respondents indicate sustainability as a reason they chose to come to HSU;
- **Over 60%** of respondents consistently want more sustainability content in their courses;
- **Over 75%** of respondents consistently indicate they have a considerable interest or a passion in sustainability, and
- **Over 90%** of respondents consistently want universities to be sustainability role models in their operations.

For further information and results, see the Sustainability Dashboard's Impact on Recruitment and Retention page, and the Office of Sustainability's Sustainability Literacy Assessment page.