



# SUSTAINABILITY

University of Maryland

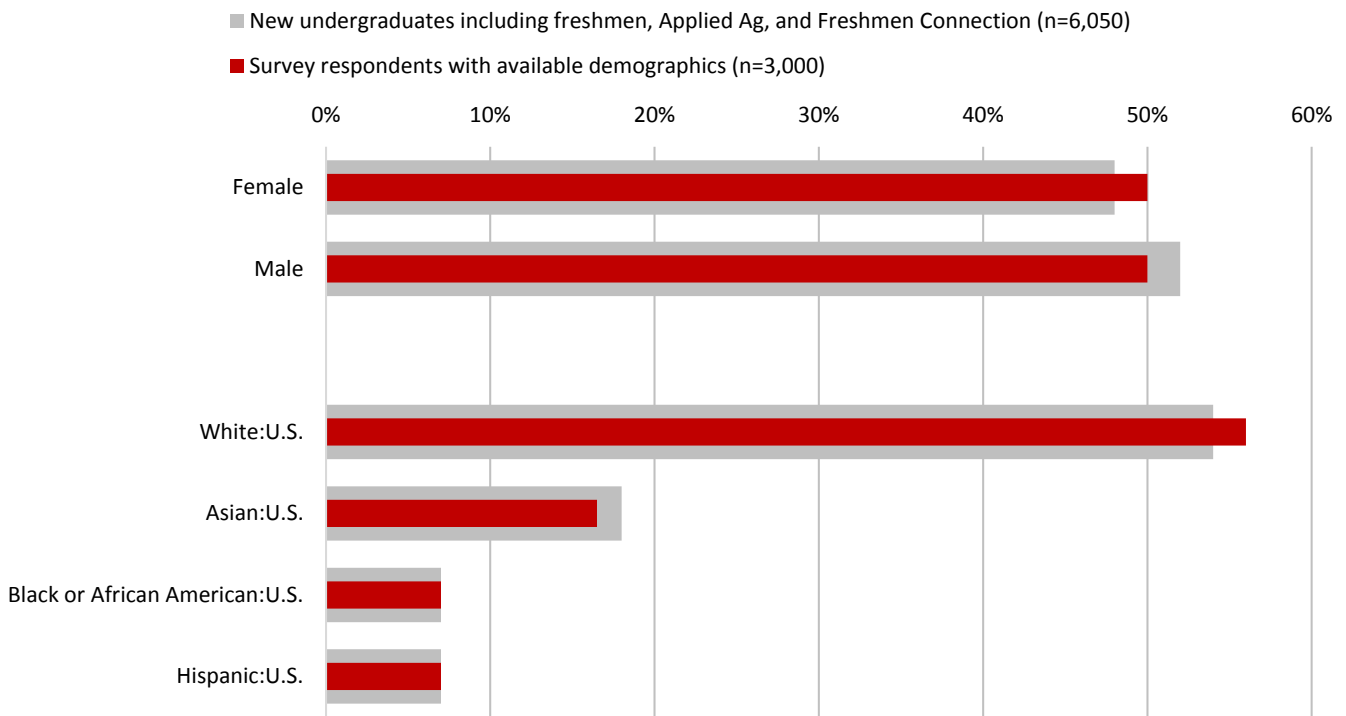
2019 – Issue 3, JUNE

This Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) Snapshot by the Beginnings subgroup reports findings on new first-year students' responses to questions about sustainability. The data included represent results from the Beginning Student Survey (BSS), an annual paper survey that was administered approximately 8-10 weeks into the Fall 2018 semester during courses such as English 101, University 100 (including Freshmen Connection sections), and Honors 100.



Created by Vectors Market from Noun Project

## Respondent Demographics



During the Fall 2018 semester, 3,191 of the 6,050 undergraduates new to campus completed the survey. However, demographics were only available for approximately 94% (n=3,000) of survey respondents. The chart above shows how sample and population demographics compare. Female and White respondents are slightly overrepresented and Male and Asian students are underrepresented in the sample compared to the population.

Demographic data were pulled from UMD applications. Fewer than 5% of respondents are of the following race/ethnicity categories, and therefore are not included in the chart above but are included in other report analyses: Two or More, Foreign, Unknown, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Survey data in this report represent only the self-reported responses of survey respondents, not all UMD students; therefore, use caution when generalizing. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

# Background



Created by H Alberto Gongora from Noun Project

In an attempt to better understand first-year students’ perceptions of sustainability, the Beginnings subgroup aims to answer the following questions:

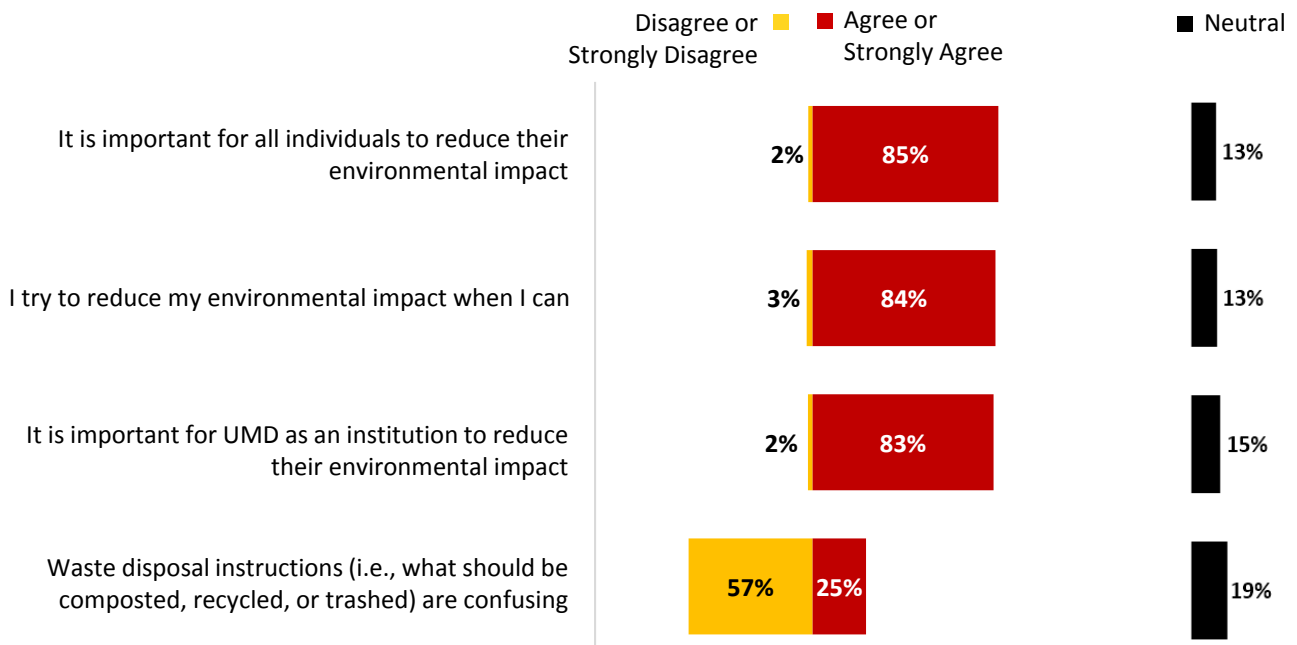
- [Do students think it’s important to engage in sustainable practices?](#)
- [How aware are students of environmental initiatives or groups on campus and how interested are they in participating?](#)
- [What environmental issues are students concerned about?](#)
- [How do students engage in sustainable practices?](#)

A non-exhaustive list of campus sustainability resources is available on the final page of this snapshot.

## Do students think it’s important to engage in sustainable practices?

**Students believe it is important to reduce environmental impact at all levels of the community (self, university, all individuals)**

*Original survey question: Please indicate how much you agree / disagree with the following*



N = 3,182 – 3,187

Most respondents (83% or more) agree or strongly agree that it is important to reduce environmental impacts and that they try to reduce their own. Only one-quarter of respondents (25%) agree or strongly agree that waste disposal instructions are confusing, indicating that confusion about waste disposal is not a major barrier to reducing environmental impact for respondents.

### Questions to consider:

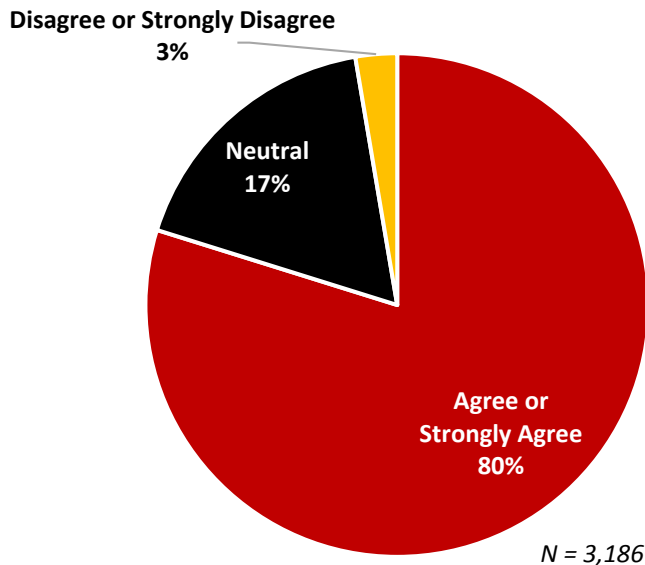
- Does UMD have a positive impact on students’ beliefs about the importance of environmental issues? How might we further assess the answer to that question?
- Twenty-five percent (25%) of respondents report that waste disposal instructions are confusing. What other factors might prevent students from recycling (not enough receptacles, too time consuming to separate items, etc.) and what could UMD do to eliminate those barriers?



# How aware are students of environmental initiatives or groups on campus and how interested are they in participating?

**Four-fifths (80%) of respondents believe that UMD engages in sustainable environmental practices**

*Original survey question: Please indicate how much you agree / disagree with the following – UMD is a university that engages in sustainable environmental practices.*

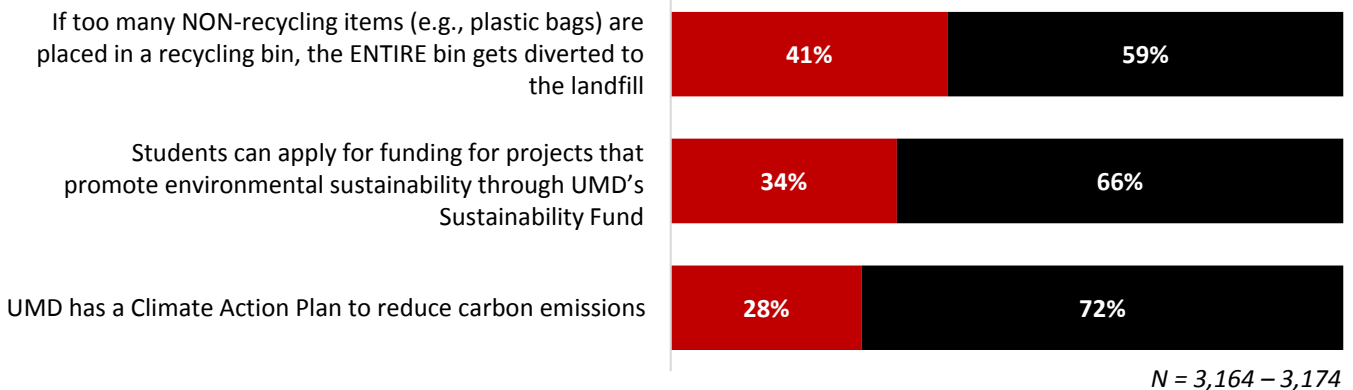


**Quick fact:** According to the [Sustainability Progress Report](#), “UMD is committed to working toward a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 – compared to a 2005 baseline – and carbon neutrality by 2050.”

**Fewer than half of respondents were aware of the following truths before taking the survey**

*Original survey question: Before taking this survey, did you know the following?*

■ Yes ■ No

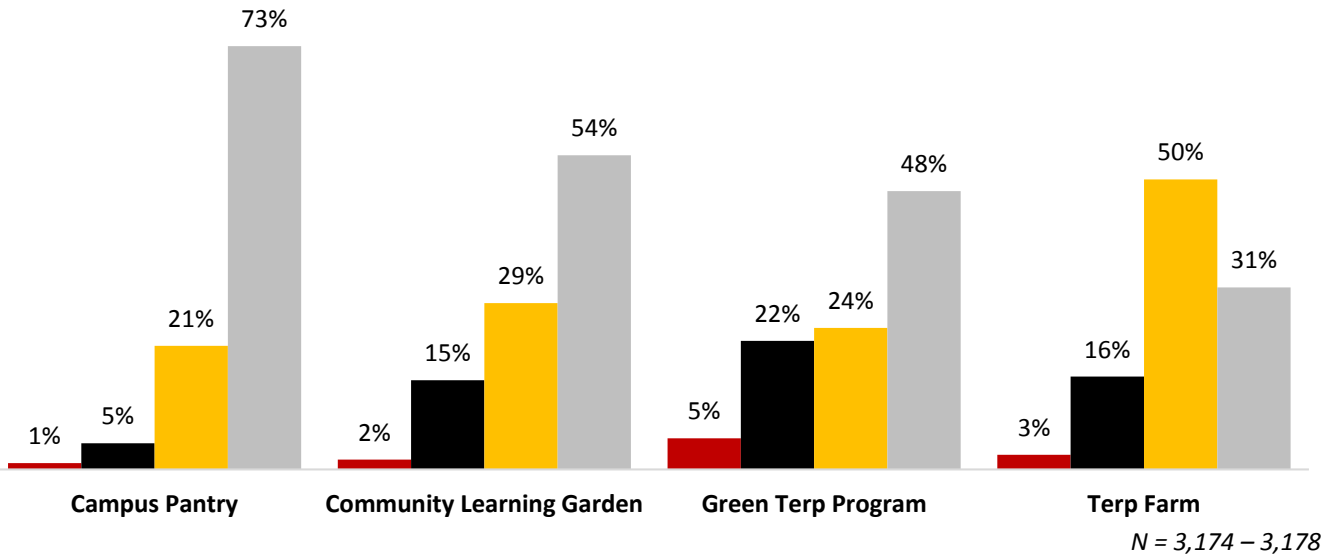


Despite reporting that UMD is a sustainable campus, students are not very aware of specific environmental initiatives on campus. Approximately one third of students are aware of UMD Sustainability initiatives like the money available through the [UMD Sustainability Fund](#) (34%) and [Climate Action Plan](#) (28%).

## Respondent knowledge of and plans to use campus resources vary

Original survey question: Please describe your awareness of the following resources on campus:

- I have already used this resource
- I plan to use this resource in the future
- I have heard about this resource but do not plan to use it
- I have not heard about this resource



- Because students take this survey 8-10 weeks into their first fall semester, they have not had much time to take advantage of these resources.
- Of this list, the [Green Terp Program](#) is the one with which respondents are most familiar as 27% reported using or planning to use it. Just under 20% of respondents report already using or planning to use the [Terp Farm](#) (19%) or [Community Learning Garden](#) (17%). Though it fulfills a vital need for campus, the lowest percentage of respondents plan to use or were aware of the [Campus Pantry](#).

**Quick fact:** According to a recent [study](#) by UMD's Counseling Center, 1 in 5 UMD students are food insecure.

### Question to consider:

- Students receive significant amounts of information about the university and its offerings before they even begin classes. During which point of the recruiting, admissions, and/or orientation processes should UMD make potential students aware of campus sustainability initiatives?
- Given that freshmen students have already been through orientation and the Office of Sustainability often presents in UNIV100, how can faculty and staff further reinforce resource availability for students?



# What environmental issues are students concerned about?

More than three-quarters of respondents are extremely or somewhat concerned with all environmental issues listed below

*Original survey question: How concerned are you about the following issues?*

*Original response options: Extremely concerned, Somewhat concerned, Neutral, Not very concerned, Not at all concerned*



Lack of renewable energy resources

**76%**



(1) Amount of materials that end up in landfills  
(2) Climate change

**78%**



Diminishing natural resources

**79%**



Poor air quality

**81%**



Lack of access to clean water sources

**82%**

N = 3,175 – 3,185

Though most respondents (76% - 82%) are extremely or somewhat concerned with the environmental issues listed here, just under 1 in 10 reported being not very or not at all concerned.

### Question to consider:

- At what point might a student’s concern translate to action and how might UMD prompt them to take more sustainable actions?
- What role might social desirability have played in the high self-reported concern of respondents?

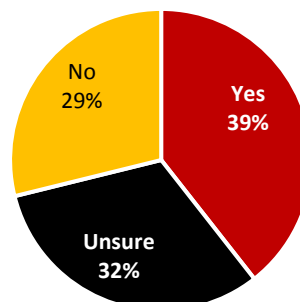


# How do students engage in sustainable practices?

**Quick fact:** CAWG administered sustainability surveys in 2008 and 2009. Though the questions were different than those asked in 2018, see the results from ten years ago [here](#).

More students reported engaging in more sustainable practices since coming to UMD than reported not engaging in more sustainable practices

*Original survey question: In general, do you engage in more sustainable practices now than before you came to UMD?*



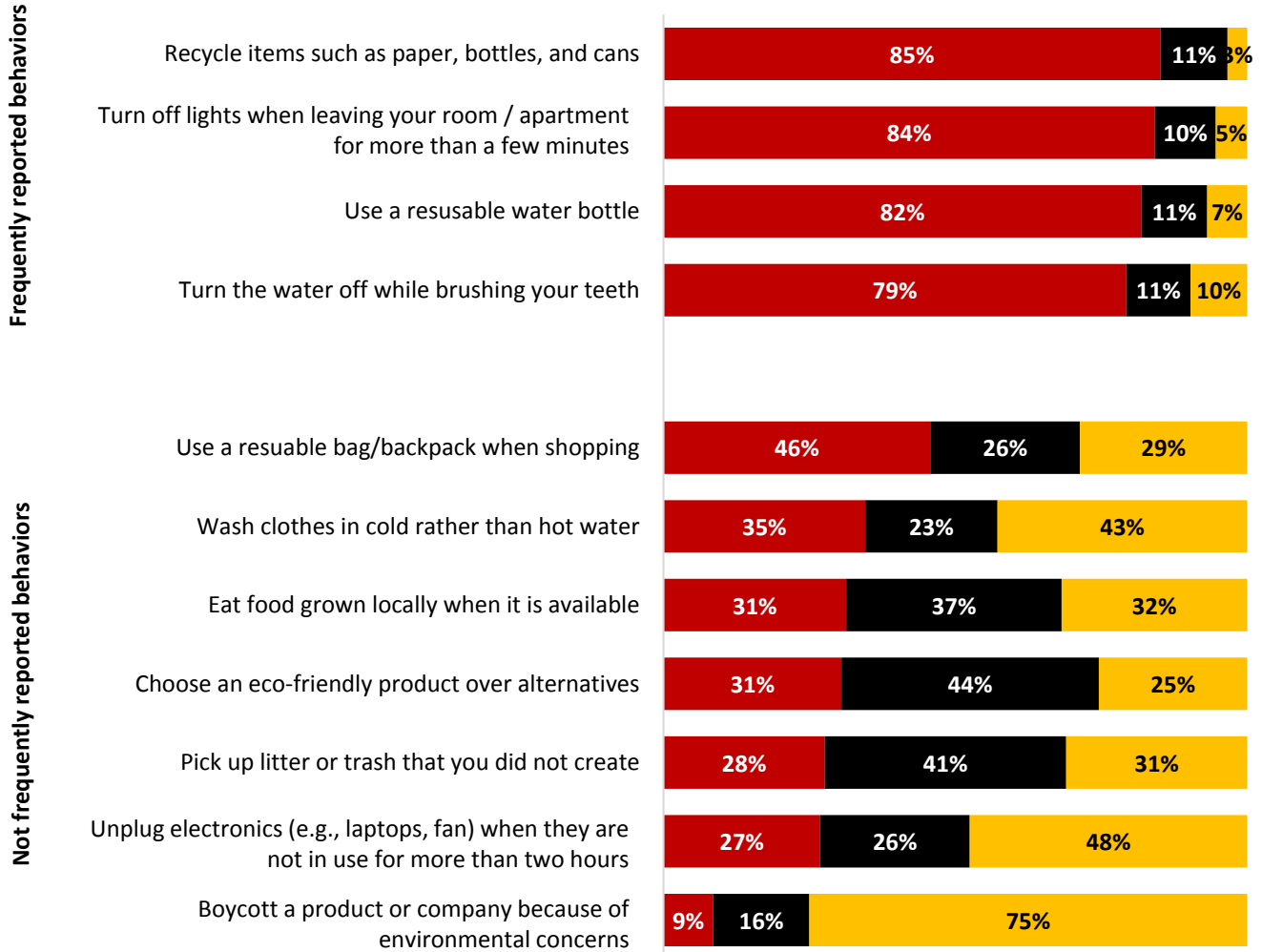
**Quick fact:** The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the School of Public Policy sponsor a [Sustainability Studies](#) minor, which was the [largest on campus as of 2018](#).

N = 3,047

## Students reported engaging most frequently (always or usually) in practices UMD has promoted: recycling, turning off lights when not in use, using a reusable water bottle

Original survey question: How often do you do the following?

■ Usually or Always ■ Sometimes ■ Seldom or Never



N = 3,175 – 3,182

**Quick fact:** Polychoric correlations between concern for different issues (see p. 5) and how often students engage in various sustainable behaviors (see p. 6) were moderately positive (between 0.2 and 0.4). This is evidence that as concern increases so does engagement in sustainable behaviors. However, the correlations are moderate at best, indicating that a lot of respondents' concerns are not transforming into behavior.

### Questions to consider:

- Are these habits based on convenience or conviction?
- What impact do social pressure or marketing campaigns have in shaping sustainability practices? What role should UMD play in shaping behaviors in the hopes of creating students who practice sustainability for a lifetime?
- Are students more sensitive to the higher cost of more eco-friendly products?



## UMD Sustainability Resources



The [Office of Sustainability](#) supports and advances environmental performance, economic prosperity, and social equality. It facilitates the development and implementation of sustainable policies, practices, [research](#), and curricula for the campus. The office coordinates efforts to ensure that UMD is meeting its [Climate Action Plan](#) goals; supports the [University Sustainability Council](#); oversees the University [Sustainability Fund](#); and reports sustainability progress to stakeholders.

The [Arboretum & Botanical Gardens](#) encompass the entire 1200 acre College Park campus and offer year-round [events](#). As an instrument of horticultural distinction, landscape design and interpretation, it reflects the university's education, research and service missions.



[Green Dining](#) is committed to sustainability through programs such as the [Sustainable Food Commitment](#), [Terp Farm](#), [Farmers Market](#), [Campus Pantry](#), and [waste management](#). Staff also work to educate the UMD community in the matters of food insecurity, the environment, and personal health while ensuring the resources of today will be preserved for future generations.

The [Recycling & Solid Waste Unit](#) within Facilities Management manages recycling, composting, and solid waste collection programs. They educate campus as to how to properly sort their waste with an emphasis on waste reduction and reuse.



[Smart Commute](#) is the sustainable transportation program that provides options and incentives to encourage the use of transit, ridesharing, biking, and walking to reduce the number of single occupancy vehicles coming to and parking on campus.

[Green Terp](#), a partnership between the [Department of Resident Life](#) and the [Office of Sustainability](#), engages students in a dynamic program to reduce their environmental footprint. Open to all students, it includes action checklists and a variety of events.



## Beginnings Subgroup Members

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*The Campus Assessment Working Group (CAWG) regularly gathers and exchanges information about UMD student and alumni experiences. The group is charged with developing a campus "Culture of Evidence" in which data and assessment can inform campus decision making. Its three subgroups focus on freshman experiences, junior/senior student experiences, and retention and completion efforts. For more information, to view past reports, or to join a CAWG subgroup, please visit <http://ter.ps/CAWG>.*