

Sustainability Statement of the University of the South

(Version with Edits Approved by the BoR 12/09/2024)

I. Overview/Rationale

The University of the South is committed to addressing global environmental challenges such as climate change. It recognizes that mitigating and halting the consequences of environmental degradation fall on all parties. Located on 13,000 acres atop the Cumberland Plateau and with over 10,000 acres of natural forest, the University has a unique responsibility to steward its environment and to contribute to global efforts to address climate change.

The University's commitment to environmental stewardship is embodied in its Position Statement:

Located on a 13,000-acre Domain on the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee, the University of the South is a premier liberal arts college and seminary of the Episcopal Church that cultivates academic excellence, community values, and environmental stewardship and produces informed, self-aware, and participatory citizens for our democracy and servant-leaders for the world.

While the University strives to prepare its students to be active citizens and stewards of the environment, it extends its environmental commitments to its own operations.

In 2007, Vice-Chancellor Joel Cunningham signed the American Colleges and University Presidents' Climate Commitment on behalf of the University. The University has maintained its commitment to stewarding the environment and addressing environmental injustices through many aspects of its operations and programming. In 2013, the University was awarded and has maintained STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System) silver status by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). The University aspires to lead efforts by institutions of higher education through its sustainability efforts. In this statement, the University affirms its environmental commitments and identifies several areas of its work that contribute to a holistic approach to environmental stewardship.

II. Defining Sustainability

In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined "sustainability" as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The definition notes the intergenerational compact that exists between our current operations and the opportunity for future generations to thrive.

Sustainability, as a concept, has many dimensions, including environmental, social, and economic. The University recognizes that its sustainability commitments encompass all of these dimensions, which calls on it to attend to, and balance, its work in each of these areas. The University strives to foster a community and world that enjoys a stable environment, thriving and diverse population, and adequate financial resources.

III. Focal Areas

A. Educational Program: The University of the South is committed to training the next generation of engaged citizens to be prepared to address the world's environmental challenges. The College offers a robust set of six major and six minor courses of study that introduce students to sciences, policies, and arts and humanities related to the environment. The offerings prepare students to have the scientific skills and creativity to address climate change. The School of Theology has created the Center for Religion and the Environment to encourage reflection on, and stewardship of, the environment.

“Elevating Mind, Heart, and Place: The Strategic Plan of the University of the South, 2024-2030” calls for each department in the College to develop courses related to the physical landscape, history, and people of the 13,000 acre University Domain and surrounding communities as part of a “Domain Across the Curriculum” initiative. The initiative will deepen students’ awareness of the importance of sustainability and environmental justice.

B. Operations: The University recognizes the importance of providing a living example of sustainability practices on its campus and surrounding communities and does so in many ways, notably including the following:

- The University has established an Office of Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability and employed a sustainability director to provide leadership and organization on sustainable operations.
- The University is committed to reducing its material waste including plastics and compost materials from its dining services and to improve its recycling program across campus.
- The University seeks to source an increasing share of its food for dining services from the University Farm and local providers.
- The University implements improvements in its physical plant to decrease energy use.
- The University increases the number of vehicles in its fleet that use hybrid fuel or electricity to operate.
- The University uses its revolving green fund to use financial savings accruing from energy-saving infrastructure to invest in further improvements of its physical plan.

- The University strives to provide affordable rental housing and home ownership opportunities to accommodate the needs of the faculty and staff and minimize energy needed for commuting.

The University's work on sustainability will expand opportunities for students to engage in hands-on learning opportunities.

C. Stewardship: Owning more than 10,000 acres of natural forest on its property, the University of the South has an opportunity and a responsibility to steward its land and pursue sustainability practices. The University engages in a number of practices that protect the local environment and preserve its resources, including selective timber harvest and prescribed fires to improve the diversity and resilience of its forest while increasing its sequestration of carbon.

D. Carbon Reduction: Recognizing the scientific evidence supporting the existence of climate change, the University is called to reduce its carbon footprint. The University has written a Climate Accountability Plan that endeavors to achieve carbon neutrality for the institution by the year 2030. The University's forest management practices play a significant role in its carbon neutrality goals, yet being a forestland owner is not sufficient to achieve carbon neutrality. The Climate Accountability Plan details the many ways that the University will seek to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. "Elevating Mind, Heart, and Place: The Strategic Plan of the University of the South, 2024-2030" calls on the University to update and revise the Climate Accountability Plan. The core commitment to carbon neutrality remains, but the pathway to achieve the reductions and the timeline for achieving this goal require refinement.

E. Allocation of Financial Resources: On behalf of the University administration, the Investment Management Subcommittee of the Board of Regents will advise the OCIO (Outsourced Chief Investment Officer) to invest the University's endowment in sectors that operate in a manner consistent with its Responsible Investment Statement.

F. Campus Culture: To reduce its environmental impact, the University has taken steps to inculcate an active, low-carbon culture on campus. These measures include the following:

- Introduction of bicycle lanes and improved pedestrian travel in the central campus area.
- Creation of a library of bicycles for students to borrow during the academic year.
- Introduction of a shuttle service to reduce use of personal cars.
- Establishment of theme houses that focus on sustainability practices.
- Creation of a sustainability fellows program that contributes to the education of students on sustainability practices and provides opportunities for them to monitor and contribute to the University's work to reduce its environmental impact.

IV. Reporting

In order to foster greater transparency and responsibility for meeting its sustainability goals, the University will annually report on its ongoing work and achievements in the area of sustainability. The report will include summaries of work in the areas defined above: academic programming, operations, stewardship, carbon reduction, and allocation of resources, and campus culture.

In addition, the University will construct a dashboard that will display the University's performance against key performance indicators related to sustainability goals. The dashboard will include at least the following key performance indicators:

- The number of departments and programs in the College with courses related to sustainability
- The number of students completing a major or minor related to sustainability in the College on an annual basis
- The amount of electricity used on campus on an annual basis
- The carbon footprint of the University's campus operations
- The amount of carbon sequestered in the forests on the University Outer Domain
- The percentage of food served by Sewanee Dining that is locally sourced
- The number and percentage of faculty and staff members who live in University rental housing.
- The number and percentage of faculty and staff members who live on the Domain.
- Metrics to be determined in the forthcoming Responsible Investment Statement used to guide investment of the University endowment.