

# Sustainability and Community Colleges It's More Than Just Recycling

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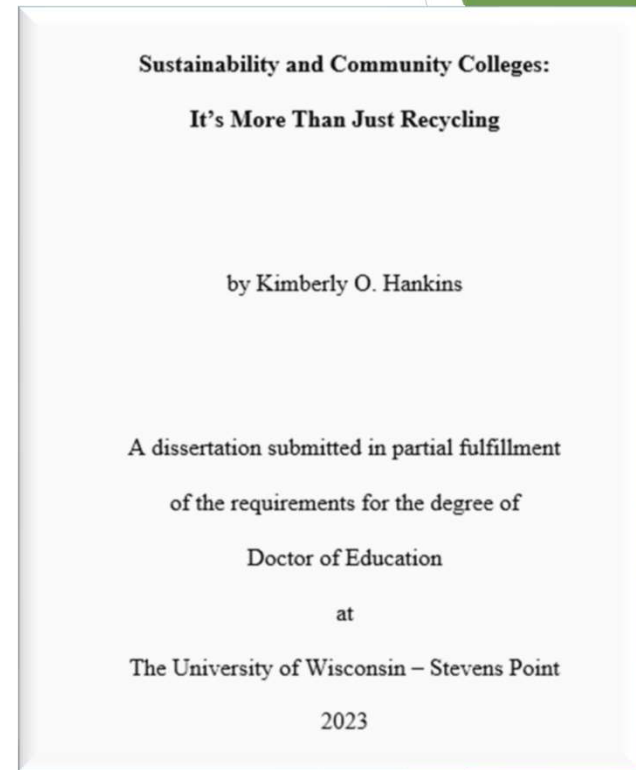


# EdD in Educational Sustainability from UW-Stevens Point



- ▶ Qualitative Study, late 2023
- ▶ Purpose was to examine sustainability programs at medium and large community colleges in the Midwest
- ▶ The research question guiding this study was:

What are the similarities and differences in how community colleges implement and integrate sustainability initiatives?

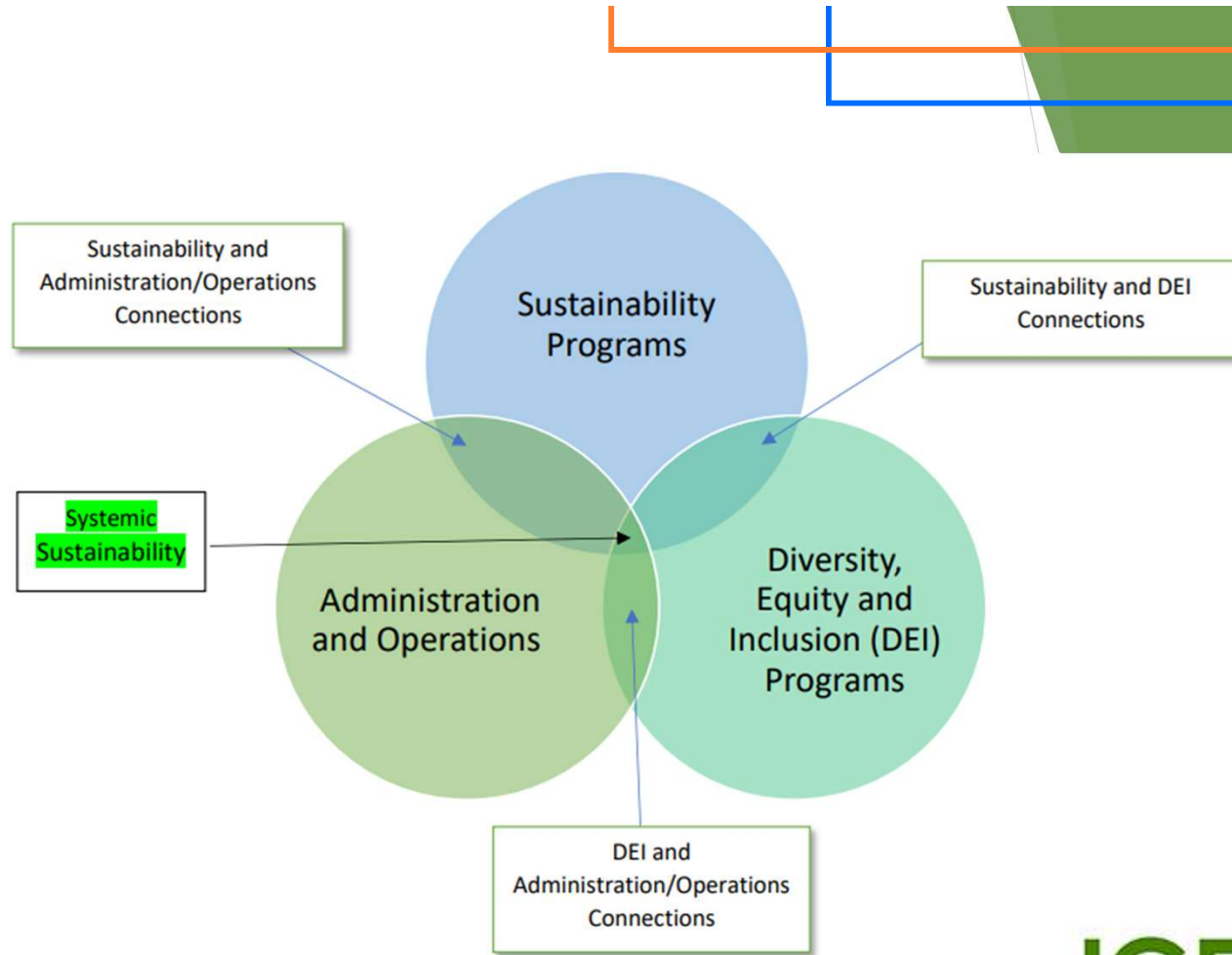


# Why do this? Who cares?

- ▶ Limited studies on sustainability programs at medium and large community colleges
- ▶ voices of sustainability professionals are infrequently heard in research literature
- ▶ Help to identify some of the methods that these community colleges are using to meet their sustainability goals as well as discuss some of the struggles.
- ▶ This work matters because community colleges are under stress with competing priorities for limited funds, and sustainability cannot be devalued.



Data collection & the importance of the overlap



Problem:

Community colleges have a large responsibility in educating students on sustainability and the impacts of their choices and developing of the green workforce

But.....



# Barriers

- ▶ lack of vision
- ▶ lack of funding
- ▶ impacts from the pandemic
- ▶ the brief time that students have at a community college
- ▶ an atmosphere of fear stemming from the political climate
- ▶ apathy



# OPPORTUNITY

- ▶ increased levels of student engagement through internship opportunities and classes connected to sustainability topics.
- ▶ support for sustainability initiatives from their direct or department management.
- ▶ sustainability programs were more accepted across campus
- ▶ other areas of opportunity are growth include creating trails, enhancing transportation options, renewable energy, workforce education programs, creating guidance for implementation, programs food waste and food insecurity initiatives
- ▶ all but one expressed pride in their accomplishments.





**Conclusions from  
data collected**



A lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the sustainability staff person by administration.

Committee structure is an effective method to infuse sustainability concepts

The political climate was an area of great concern for sustainability program managers

Impossible for one person to ensure that sustainability principles are part of every major decision on campus.

The research consistently noted that apathy is a barrier for sustainability programs.

Not a clear understanding of the overlapping mission of equity in both sustainability and DEI initiatives by either students or employees

Funding sources are primarily from capital and/or departmental funding and grants

The areas of overlap are where the most progress is achieved, as the collaborative connections help reach sustainability goals

## A few things to think about...

Connecting the common goal of equity in both sustainability and DEI programs

Sustainability is becoming a lesser priority

Isolation, Silos

## Now what? Where do we go from here?

### Future studies & Recommendations:

1. include additional participants such as instructors who are teaching sustainability concepts and DEI professionals at the community colleges;
2. examine overlapping DEI and sustainability programs at community colleges
3. Highly recommend networking opportunities for sustainability staff of community colleges of similar sizes - silos, isolation

4. Additional research on organizational structural changes to incorporate sustainability as part of decision making and planning.
5. Additional studies on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic specifically on sustainability programs

The background features a white central area with several overlapping, semi-transparent green geometric shapes on the right side. Scattered across the white area are several thin, colored rectangular outlines in blue, green, orange, and red. The text 'Final Thoughts' is centered within a prominent red rectangular outline.

# Final Thoughts

## At your tables.....

- ▶ Funding - how is your sustainability program funded?
- ▶ Structure - where in the administrative structure is the sustainability program?
  - ▶ Is this an effective spot?
  - ▶ Has the program been somewhere else?
- ▶ What is one barrier and one opportunity you see for your program?



“I think that's one of the challenges that I find about a sustainability director position is that they have to have their hands on like a million different things.”



Thank you

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Link to dissertation

<https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/84798>



# Resources

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