

# **2021 Central Sustainability Campus Survey Report**

## **Central Michigan University**



In October 2021, Central Sustainability sent out a survey to all students living on-campus to measure their sustainability knowledge and the impact of ongoing sustainability initiatives. The survey was distributed via email by Residence Life, and it received 499 survey respondents with a 13.5% response rate.

These results will reflect on-campus sustainability perceptions and provide insight as to which initiatives Central Sustainability should pursue.

The survey consisted of 29 questions, which focused on demographics, sustainability background knowledge, community awareness/involvement, and interest in sustainability issues such as climate change, environmental justice, and environmental racism. The following document will detail the anonymous responses, summarize our findings, and highlight areas of improvement for future sustainability initiatives. Please see pages 1-4 for a survey summary, and pages 5-15 for individual question results.

## Survey Results Summary

### Demographics

In 2021, 499 students took the 2021 Sustainability Survey, 494 of which were students. Of these students, 73% were freshmen and sophomores, which reflects the demographics of the residence halls. Like 2020, over 70% of survey respondents were female. There was a near-even distribution of respondents per academic college.

### Sustainability Terminology & Behavior

Of the respondents, 90.4% indicated they were familiar with the term, “sustainability,” (*Question 8*) and 92.6% were familiar with the term “environmental sustainability” (*Question 20*). Despite this, less than half of survey respondents (around 42%) were familiar with social and cultural sustainability (*Question 20*). Similarly, 70-80% of respondents indicated they partake in environmental sustainability best practices, whereas less than 30% said they consistently participate in social and cultural sustainability practices such as attending community council, going downtown Mt. Pleasant, or visiting the Ziibiwing Center (*Question 9*).

### Describing Sustainability



Most of the questions were multiple choice to encourage a high response rate and clear data. However, a few were fill-in-the-blank to allow respondents to explain their reasoning or define a term in their own words. The word cloud above represents the 290 recorded answers to question 23 that asked respondents to describe sustainability in one sentence. Responses fell into one of two categories: answers that mentioned the environment and natural resources and answers that gave a more general definition without mentioning the environment or natural resources. Besides “sustainability,” the most commonly used words were “resources,” “environment,” and “future.”

Overall, 209 respondents (41.9%) chose not to respond to this question, indicating that they either did not know the answer or did not have the time, interest, or energy. However, question 8 indicates that the majority of respondents are familiar with the term sustainability.

### Sustainability Education

Question 22 reveals that a vast and overwhelming majority of students care about sustainability, yet only 32.5% feel that their academic education at CMU has informed them on environmental and sustainability issues (*Question 15*).

Outside of the classroom, respondents also indicated they would like to see more sustainability opportunities (*Question 16*). Over 50% of responses selected that CMU could improve its sustainability education through volunteer opportunities, events, sustainability policies, and more sustainable dining options. Overall, these responses demonstrated that CMU students do care about major environmental issues and hope to solve them (*Question 22*).

### Top Sustainability Issues

Of the ten environmental issues provided in our survey (*Question 11*), the top pick was clean water (78.8%), followed by pollution (71.7%), climate change (69.3%), and waste reduction (65.5%). Survey respondents were not limited in how many issues they could select.

Additionally, 82.4% of respondents indicated they believe climate change is a human caused issue that needs to be addressed.

### Community

There were only two questions directly focused on community (*Question 17-18*), but the results are telling and worth exploring more in future surveys. Of the students surveyed, 71.7% checked that they felt like they were part of a community. The remaining 28.3% was split between “no” (13%), “not sure” (14.6%), and “other” (0.6%). Although the majority indicated “yes,” we find it concerning that there was a sizable number of respondents who did not feel part of a community. That being said, community is a loosely defined word, and we would need to add more questions to future surveys for clearer data on the topic. This point is still important for us to note as community is a huge emphasis for sustainability-centered work at CMU.

### Full Survey

If interested in seeing the results of each individual question, this document includes all survey questions and results on pages 6-15.

## Conclusion

This was the second campus-wide sustainability survey conducted by Central Sustainability, and we were excited for the engagement and feedback we received.

Based on our 2020 survey report, we had made slight changes to the survey structure and added questions. This will likely be the case following this survey report as we see areas for improvement and room for follow-up questions. For future surveys, we would like to increase distribution to reach more facets of campus, with the hope of assessing the entire campus community to include more students, staff, and faculty. Future surveys will also be conducted through Qualtrics and may go through the IRB Approval process to encourage best practices.

As stated, this survey helps us understand student sustainability knowledge and priorities to guide our approach to projects, policy, and programming. This survey also allows us to stay in tune with the student body and offer data to back our actions. Below, we've highlighted some specific points of interest for sustainability development at CMU.

- 47.7% of respondents said they don't feel like their education at CMU has informed them on sustainability. 23.5% of respondents support university-required learning objectives.

We did not find these results surprising as sustainability is not directly integrated into the university's learning outcomes. In addition to these student responses, this institutional shortcoming can be seen in CMU's AASHE STARS score under the Academic Credits.

Our suggestions to improve CMU's sustainability education include: 1) expand the Descriptive Sciences University Program to add sustainability-focused learning objectives; 2) develop generalized sustainability learning outcomes; 3) ensure outcomes are integrated into overall academics.

- 56% of survey respondents were not familiar with social and cultural sustainability. Additionally, the majority of respondents said they were only partly knowledgeable of on-campus sustainability efforts. Only 13.8% of respondents had heard of Central Sustainability. 77% said they had not heard of Central Sustainability and 9.2% were unsure.

The first result is not surprising as social and cultural sustainability are still not widely-used terms, but it shows the value in continuing our education and outreach. Because social and cultural sustainability are important components of Central Sustainability's work, any suggestions to improve student knowledge on the terms overlap with our efforts to drive more engagement with our programming.

These results encourage further Central Sustainability presentations, guest columns, events, blog posts, walking tour recruitment, educational resources, and collaboration with various organizations.

We want to give all the students the opportunity to engage with sustainability, so our long-term goal is to be more involved in the orientation process and residence halls. In doing so, our hope is that we can integrate sustainability into many facets of campus life and promote an intersectional perspective of sustainability.

- 91.3% of respondents were in support of more volunteer opportunities, stronger university policy, events, and sustainable dining options. Overall, respondents indicated that they care about sustainability and expect it in their higher education experience.

When asked for project or policy ideas in a fill-in-the-blank question, popular responses included compost stations in residential halls, community gardens, education on waste reduction, and events focused on student engagement. These results are promising as they show that students are in support of many initiatives we are pursuing and find this work to be necessary.

With consistent annual surveying, we will be able to track the progress of these goals and address student priorities.

Overall, we are thankful for the immense contributions from all of our campus partners and look forward to building a more sustainable community.

## **Full Survey Results**

### **1. What campus group describes you best?**

Of the 499 documented responses, 494 of those were CMU students. The other 5 included faculty and staff members.

### **2. What gender do you identify with?**

- 359 Females (71.9%)
- 111 Males (22.2%)
- 24 Nonbinary (4.8%)
- 5 Other (1.0%)

### **3. What is your race/ethnicity**

When creating this survey, this question was left as a fill-in-the-blank. This was done with the intentions of empowering individuals to input whatever race or ethnicity they identified with, without the constrictions of a label. Unfortunately, this enabled high variability in responses, so we could not correctly interpret data. In the future, this question will need to be reconfigured.

That said, a majority of the respondents (419 or 84%) identified as “white” or “caucasian.” This data could be used to identify statistically significant and nonsignificant differences in responses among groups.

### **4. If you chose student, what year are you?**

- 219 Freshman (43.9%)
- 145 Sophomore (29.1%)
- 67 Junior (13.4%)
- 45 Senior (9.0%)
- 21 Graduate (4.2%)
- 2 Not Applicable (0.4%)

**5. If you chose student, what academic college do you primarily belong to?**

- College of Business Administration: 58 (11.6%)
- College of Education and Human Services: 93 (18.6%)
- College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences: 87 (17.4%)
- College of Arts and Media: 44 (8.8%)
- College of Science and Engineering: 102 (20.4%)
- College of Health Professions: 84 (16.8%)
- College of Medicine: 4 (0.8%)
- Undecided: 22 (4.4%)
- Not Applicable: 5 (1.0%)

**6. What category best describes your hometown?**

- Rural: 176 (35.3%)
- Urban: 80 (16.0%)
- Suburban: 239 (47.9%)
- Other: 4 (0.8%)

**7. If you chose student, where do you live?**

- Not a student: 1 (0.2%)
- North residential halls: 110 (22.1%)
- East residential halls: 122 (24.5%)
- South residential halls: 114 (22.9%)
- Towers residential halls: 82 (16.5%)
- Northwest Apartments: 40 (8.0%)
- Kewadin Village: 11 (2.2%)
- Graduate Housing: 13 (2.6%)
- Off Campus: 4 (0.8%)

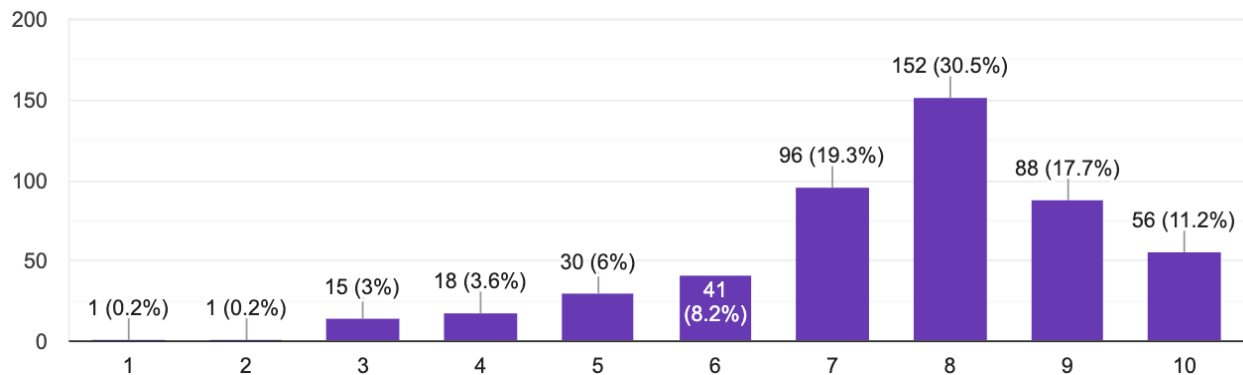
## 8. Are you familiar with the term “sustainability?”

- Yes: 451 (90.4%)
- No: 17 (3.4%)
- Not Sure: 31 (6.2%)

## 9. Check all that apply: (General Sustainability Practices, Check all that apply)

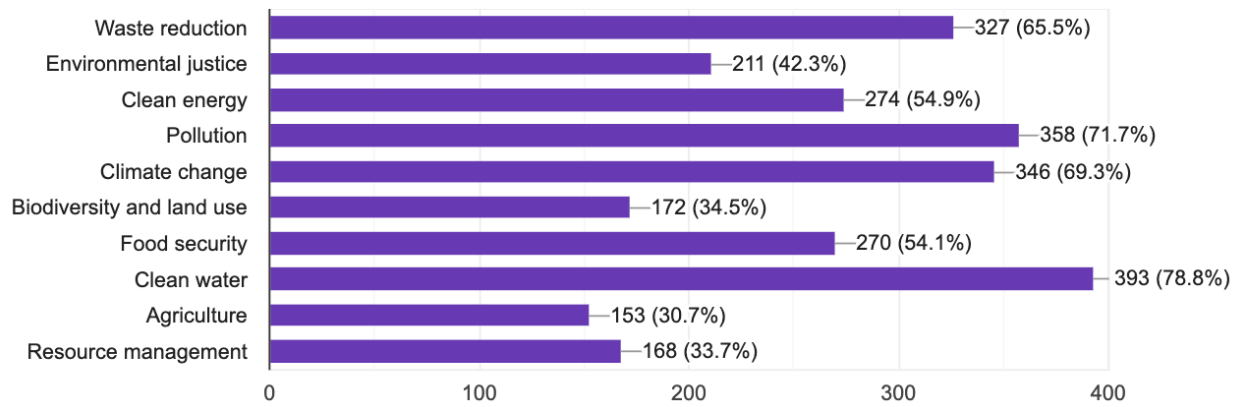
- I recycle regularly: 397 (79.6%)
- I use a reusable water bottle: 440 (88.2%)
- I conserve energy whenever possible: 345 (69.1%)
- I attend multicultural events: 122 (24.4%)
- I attend community council: 61 (12.2%)
- I have been to the Ziibiwing Center: 32 (6.4%)
- I have been to downtown Mt. Pleasant: 375 (75.2%)
- I have been to the Mt. Pleasant farmers market: 71 (14.2%)
- I am involved in a student group or RSO: 273 (54.7%)

## 10. How proficient are you at identifying what can and cannot be recycled?

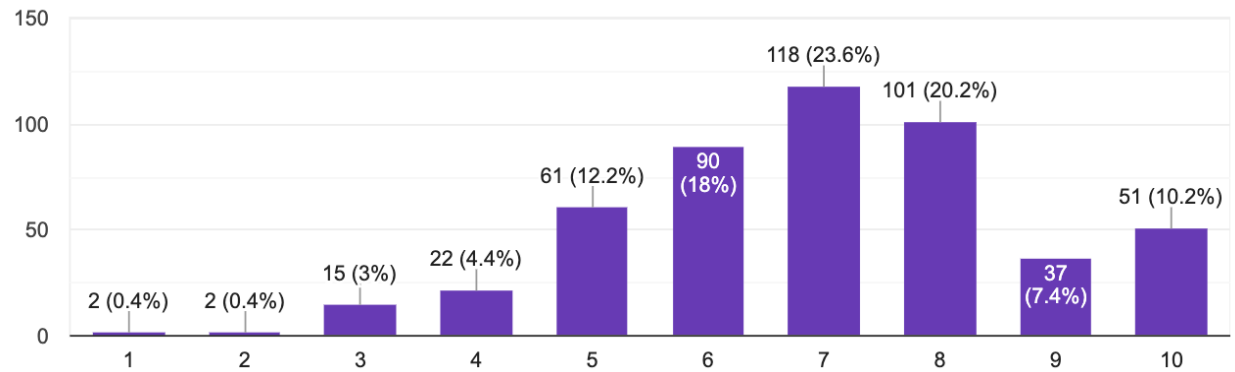




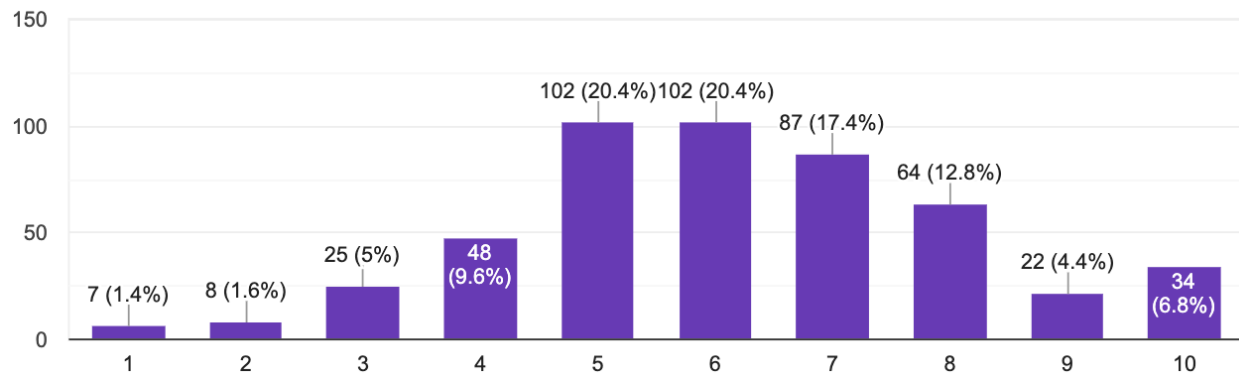
### 11. Which sustainability issues do you care most about? (Check all that apply)



### 12. How familiar would you say you are with environmental issues?



**13. How familiar would you say you are with solutions to environmental issues?**



**14. Do you feel like your high school education has informed you enough on sustainability and environmental issues?**

- Yes: 137 (27.5%)
- No: 290 (58.1%)
- Not Sure: 57 (11.4%)
- Other: 15 (3.0%)

**15. Do you feel like your academic education at CMU has informed you enough on sustainability and environmental issues?**

- Yes: 162 (32.5%)
- No: 238 (47.7%)
- Not Sure: 99 (19.8%)

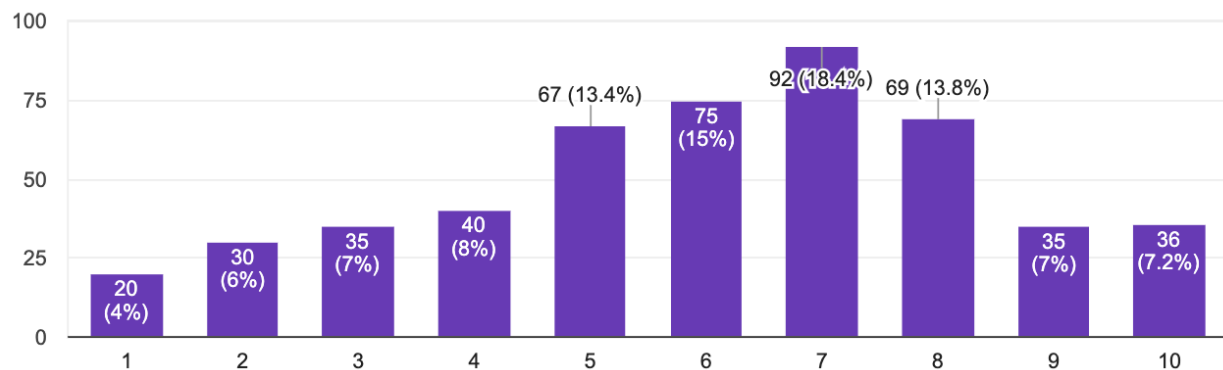
## 16. How could CMU improve its sustainability education?

- University required learning objectives: 116 (23.5%)
- Sustainability events: 288 (58.3%)
- Sustainability volunteer opportunities: 306 (61.9%)
- Stronger university sustainability policy: 261 (52.8%)
- More sustainable dining options: 283 (57.3%)
- No improvements necessary: 43 (8.7%)
- Other responses: 14 (2.8%)
  - More resources to deal with food insecurity issues
  - Reducing waste production in all ways possible
  - More passive learning opportunities
  - Informative flyers and emails
  - Add a chat or questions box online for recycling and waste questions
  - More vegetarian and vegan options in dining halls

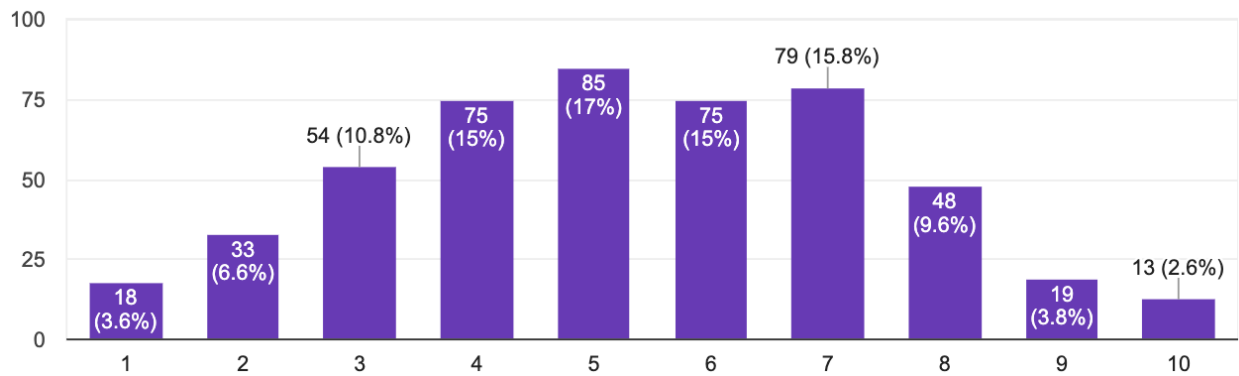
## 17. Do you feel like you are a part of a community?

- Yes: 358 (71.7%)
- No: 65 (13%)
- Not Sure: 73 (14.6%)
- Other: 3 (0.6%)

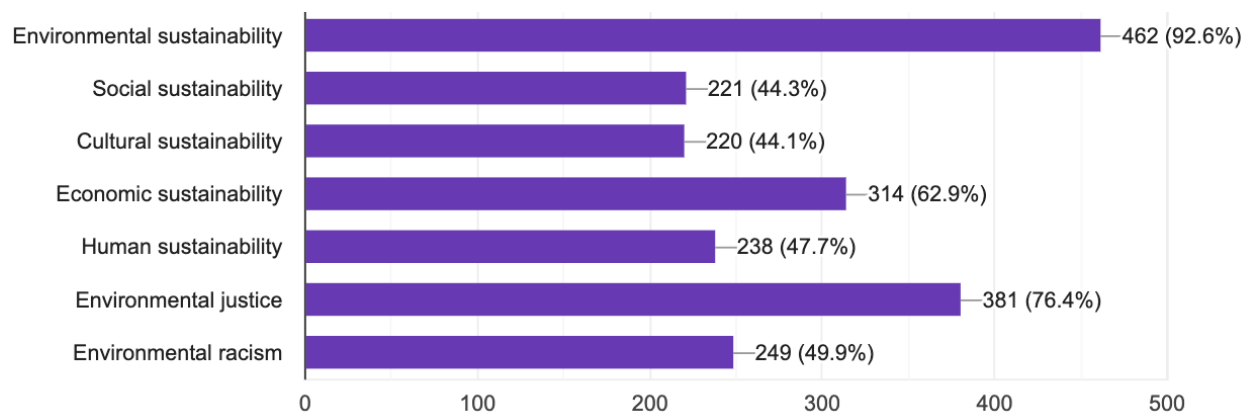
## 18. How involved would you say you are in your community?



### 19. How knowledgeable are you about sustainability efforts on campus?



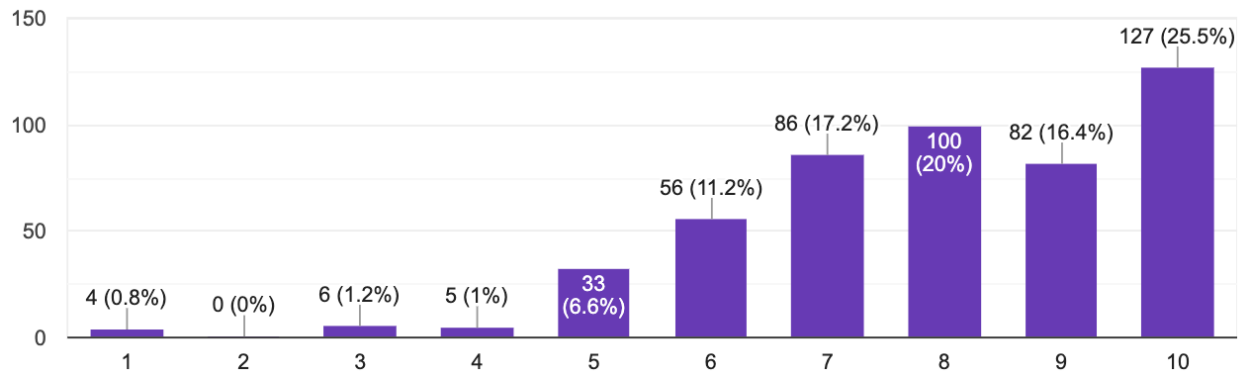
### 20. Check the terms you have heard before (sustainability vocabulary)



### 21. Do you think climate change is a human-created issue that needs to be addressed?

- I think that climate change is caused by people, and needs to be addressed: 411 (82.4%)
- I think that climate change is NOT caused by people, but still needs to be addressed: 31 (6.2%)
- I think that climate change is caused by people, but does NOT need to be addressed: 3 (0.6%)
- I think that climate change is NOT caused by people, and does NOT need to be addressed: 6 (1.2%)
- Not sure: 48 (9.6%)

## 22. How important is sustainability to you?



**23. In one sentence, how would you describe what sustainability means?**

Of the 290 recorded responses to this question, respondents appeared to fall into one of two categories, being those who answered with regard for the environment and natural resources, and those who answered without mentioning the environment and natural resources. Nearly all responses recorded were correct according to varying types of sustainability, whether that be environmental or social sustainability.

The only point of concern for this question is that 209 respondents (41.9%) chose not to respond to this question, indicating that they either did not know the answer, or did not have the time or energy. Luckily, question 8 indicates that a vast majority of respondents are familiar with the term sustainability, meaning that it is likely that this question lacked responses due to factors out of our control.





**27. As a student, would you be willing to pay a sustainability fee between \$1 and \$10 annually to support sustainability improvements at CMU?**

- Yes: 141 (28.3%)
- No: 152 (30.5%)
- Maybe: 172 (34.5%)
- Other (mostly negative): 34 (6.8%)

**28. Have you heard of Central Sustainability?**

- Yes: 69 (13.8%)
- No: 384 (77%)
- Not Sure: 46 (9.2%)

**29. Update Email Dropbox**

The final question asked respondents to leave their email address if they would like to receive sustainability updates in the future. This question received 119 responses, 104 of which included emails to add to the sustainability email list.

**For more information, contact Teresa Homsí ([homsit1m@cmich.edu](mailto:homsit1m@cmich.edu)) or Eric Urbaniak ([urban1ed@cmich.edu](mailto:urban1ed@cmich.edu)), and check out the Central Sustainability Website (<https://www.cmich.edu/diversity/Pages/Central-Sustainability.aspx>)**