

**Sixth Annual**

Voluntary University Review  
*of the* Sustainable Development Goals

**2025–2026**



**Carnegie Mellon University**  
Sustainability Initiative

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# FOREWORD



## Dear Colleagues and Community Members,

I am pleased to introduce Carnegie Mellon University's 2025–2026 Voluntary University Review (VUR), marking the sixth year of our engagement with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This annual review offers an opportunity not only to reflect on our progress, but also to consider how sustainability continues to evolve as a shared responsibility across our university community.

This year represents an important milestone for sustainability at Carnegie Mellon. Most notably, sustainability is now included in the university's Strategic Framework, affirming its role as a core consideration in how we pursue excellence in research, education, and institutional practice. As we move closer to 2030, this integration signals that sustainability is not a standalone effort, but an essential lens through which we approach our mission as a university.

Over the past year, the Sustainability Initiative has focused on helping more members of the CMU community understand the SDGs and recognize how their work contributes to them, creating new pathways for engagement, education, and dialogue across disciplines. New programs such as the Student Sustainability Liaison program and the Sustainability Commons have created opportunities for students to lead, collaborate, and strengthen sustainability efforts within their departments and organizations.

We have also expanded our partnerships across the university. Through a new collaboration with Facilities, Infrastructure, and Risk Management (FIRM), departments are beginning to explore their work through the lens of the SDGs, identifying connections and shared impacts that may not have previously been visible. This engagement-centered approach reflects our belief that sustainability is most effective when it is embedded throughout the institution.

Our work continues to extend beyond campus as well. This year, the Sustainability Initiative returned to the United Nations Academic Impact workshop to share Carnegie Mellon's approach to sustainability engagement and learn from peers across higher education. These exchanges reinforce the value of collaboration as universities work together to address complex global challenges.

The stories throughout this review demonstrate the creativity, commitment, and leadership of the Carnegie Mellon community. Thank you to the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and partners whose efforts continue to advance sustainability at CMU and beyond.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Webster". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

**Keith Webster**

Helen and Henry Posner Jr. Dean of the University Libraries  
Director of Emerging and Integrative Media Initiatives



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**The 2025–2026 Voluntary University Review** documents an important evolution in Carnegie Mellon University's sustainability efforts. Six years after publishing the world's first Voluntary University Review, the university continues to employ the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, as a framework for understanding and advancing sustainability across education, research, and practices. Increasingly, the Goals are serving as a tool for engagement, helping members of the university community identify connections between their work and broader societal challenges.

Reflecting this shift, the Sustainability Initiative adopted a more qualitative and people-centered approach to this year's review. Through conversations, workshops, consultations, and collaborative projects, the Sustainability Initiative sought to understand how sustainability is experienced, practiced, and advanced across the university. The resulting report highlights not only outcomes, but also the relationships, networks, and communities that make those outcomes possible.

Several themes emerged. First, students are playing an increasingly important role in shaping sustainability efforts. New programs such as the Student Sustainability Liaison program, Sustainability Commons, and the Pittsburgh Intercollegiate Network for Sustainability (PINS) created opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning both within and beyond CMU.

Second, the SDGs continue to provide a valuable framework for connecting research, education, and practices. Faculty engagement through the Elements platforms helps make sustainability-related research more visible, while programs such as the SURF-Sustainability Fellowship encourage students to connect their scholarship to global challenges.

Third, sustainability engagement is expanding into new areas of university life. The FIRM consultation process demonstrated how administrative units can use the SDGs to identify shared impacts and strengthen cross-departmental collaboration. The creation of a health and well-being internship further reflected a growing recognition that sustainability encompasses the social, economic, and institutional conditions that enable people and communities to thrive.

Finally, CMU continues to strengthen both local and global partnerships. Collaborations across the Pittsburgh region, continued participation in the United Nations Academic Impact network, and partnerships with academic, cultural, and community organizations reinforce the university's commitment to advancing sustainability through collective action.

Together, the initiatives highlighted in this review demonstrate a university increasingly focused on building connections between people, disciplines, institutions, and ideas. As sustainability becomes more deeply integrated into CMU's Strategic Framework, the university is well positioned to continue serving as a convener, collaborator, and catalyst for positive change.





## THE 17 GOALS

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, came together following input from millions of people around the world, and were adopted by the international community at the United Nations in 2015. The Global Goals provide a universal framework to discuss and take action on issues of shared concern.

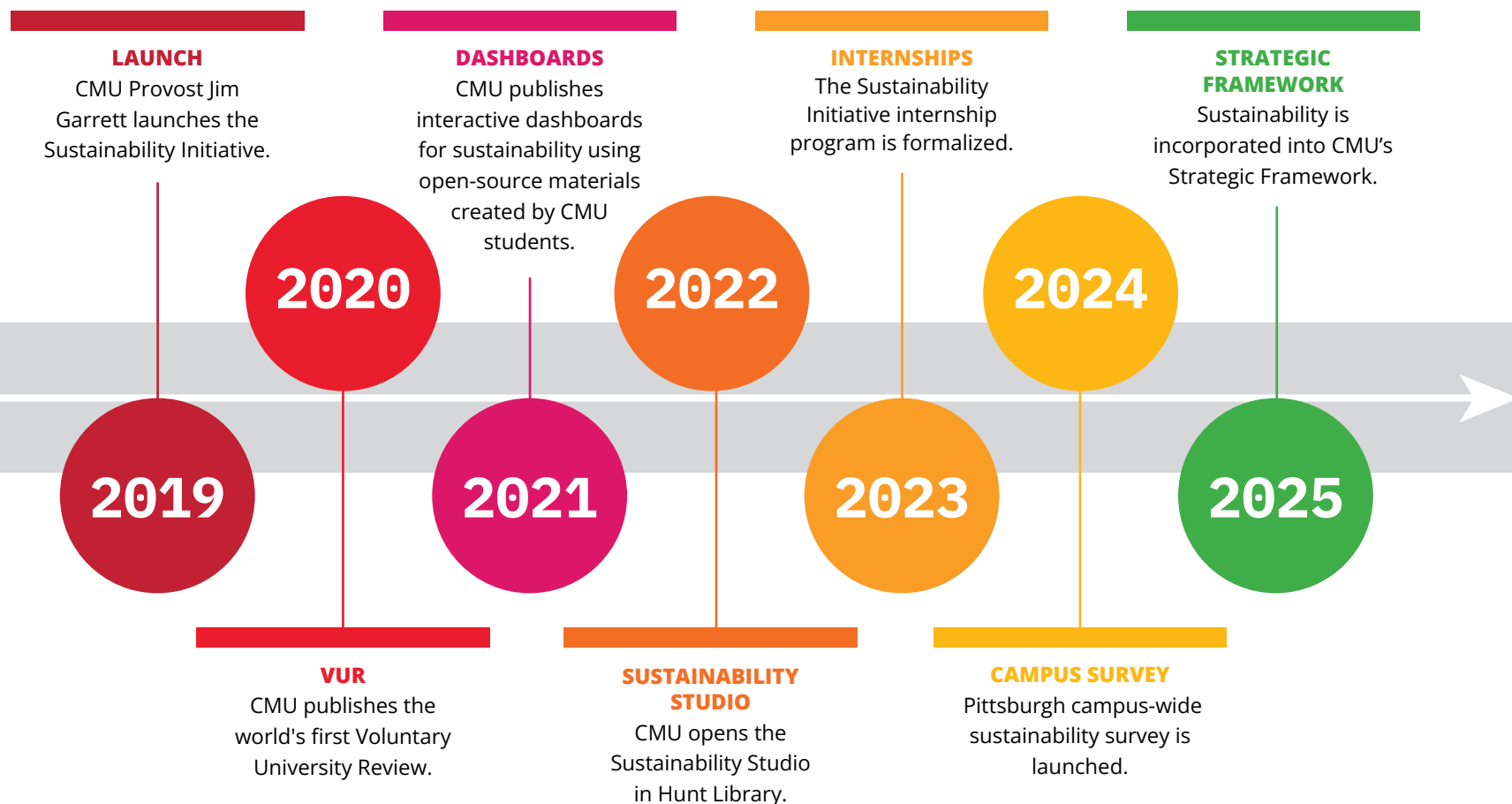


Carnegie Mellon University  
Sustainability Initiative



# SUSTAINABILITY AT CMU

With the Sustainability Initiative launched by Provost Garrett in 2019, CMU is building on more than two decades of an engaged effort in support of the broader definition of sustainability afforded by the Sustainable Development Goals. For a detailed overview of efforts before the Sustainability Initiative was established, please refer to Carnegie Mellon's 2020 Voluntary University Review, which can be found at [cmu.edu/sustainability](https://cmu.edu/sustainability).



## EDUCATION

# STUDENT SUSTAINABILITY LIAISONS

The Student Sustainability Liaison program allows for any student to get involved with sustainability at their department level. Piloted by Programming Intern Aleena Siddiqui, the first iteration of the initiative featured 20 students across 11 academic programs. Students spent the fall semester identifying key sustainability contacts within their department/school and gathering insights on current sustainability initiatives, strengths, and opportunities. They documented findings and observations, identifying gaps that they were interested in addressing. During the spring semester, students drafted recommendations for faculty leadership to advance departmental sustainability.



## Violet McCullough

Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE), College of Engineering

*“Working with other liaisons from across CMU has shown me how many people are genuinely invested not just in their own futures, but in the futures of people who come after them. My biggest goal is to create a wider understanding that sustainability is not a single, isolated concept. It lives across every discipline, field, and level within our community.”*



## Hannah Hudson

Biological Sciences, Mellon College of Science

*“I want to actually accomplish something concrete, whether that’s earning the Scotty Goes Green certification, embedding sustainability content into a required course, or starting to reform lab waste practices. I want to move beyond planning and make something tangible happen.”*



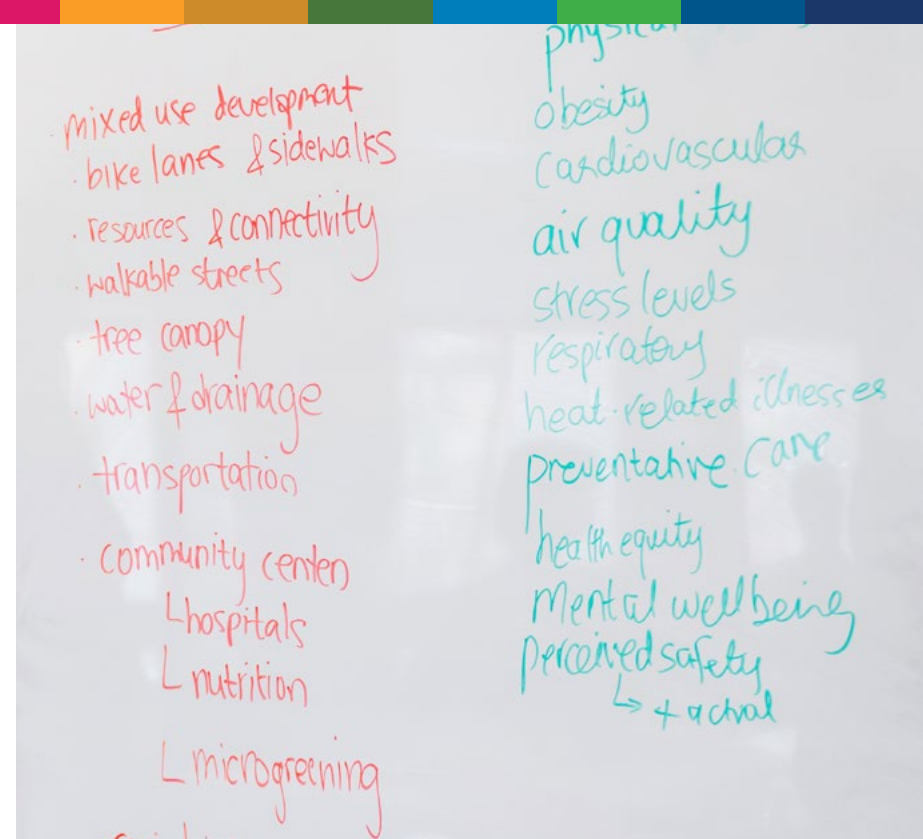
## EDUCATION

## HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

In 2025, the Sustainability Initiative created a new student intern position focused on health and well-being, recognizing this as an essential part of sustainability. Imama Zahoor, the first person to serve in this role, supports efforts to integrate health-related programming into sustainability work and strengthen partnerships across campus. This spring, the intern worked with Dr. Suzy Li, Adjunct Faculty in the School of Architecture, to develop the Design for Health workshop. The workshop explored how built environments shape health, comfort, and equity. Through a systems mapping exercise, participants examined connections between design features and health outcomes related to mobility, environmental exposure, and safety.



Design for Health workshop participants discuss how built environments shape health, comfort, and equity (Credit: Iris Hung)



Dr. Suzy Li presents her research at the Design for Health workshop (Credit: Iris Hung)





Dr. Michael McEachrane and Dr. Mame-Fatou Niang speaking at the February Sustainability, in Conversation event (Credit: Iris Hung)



Dr. Will Gogolak and Egshiglen Batjargal open the April Sustainability, in Conversation event (Credit: Iris Hung)

## EDUCATION

# SUSTAINABILITY, IN CONVERSATION

Sustainability, in Conversation is a discussion series designed to bridge the gap between everyday lived experiences and the broader framework of the SDGs. Data and Storytelling Intern Egshiglen Batjargal organizes monthly, theme-based conversations to cultivate a shared space where students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to reflect on their personal narratives and deepen their understanding of sustainability in a holistic and inclusive way.

In February, the series featured a panel discussion with speakers Dr. Michael McEachrane, Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Black European Studies and the Atlantic, and Dr. Mame-Fatou Niang, Professor of Global French Studies Director and Founder of the Center for Black European Studies & the Atlantic, examining the intersection of racial equity and global sustainability narratives.

In March, in collaboration with Heinz College, the Sustainability Initiative hosted a screening and discussion of a documentary on Pittsburgh native Rachel Carson, a pioneering figure in environmental protection whose work significantly shaped modern environmental policy, while also emphasizing the empowerment of women within sustainability movements.

In April, the series continued with an interactive workshop led by Dr. Will Gogolak, Assistant Teaching Professor, focused on equipping students with essential personal finance skills and highlighting the role of financial literacy in fostering sustainable and resilient communities.



Participants in the March Sustainability, in Conversation event (Credit: Iris Hung)

# FACULTY RESEARCHERS

Since 2020, the Sustainability Initiative has developed and refined methods for assessing how CMU's research contributes to the Global Goals. The effort aims to identify opportunities for collaboration while engaging faculty, students, staff, and partners in a shared sustainability framework.

The Sustainability Initiative initially employed Dimensions to conduct automated analyses of research publications connected to the Global Goals, but shifted to Elements to allow for greater human review and oversight since faculty are able to manually update their profiles. This information is displayed at [scholars.cmu.edu](https://scholars.cmu.edu), and the associated dashboard is available to the CMU community.

While all faculty are able to update their profiles, the Research Information Management Services (RIMS) team has undertaken targeted engagement with the College of Engineering, Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy, Mellon College of Science, and Tepper School of Business to enhance faculty profiles. Director Jason Glenn conducts program outreach while System Administrator Yingxue Li analyzes the data and updates the dashboards accordingly.

This engagement strategy encourages faculty to view their profiles as dynamic, long-term resources rather than one-time reporting tools, creating a more meaningful platform for communicating how research and teaching contribute to the Global Goals.

The dashboard aggregates Elements profiles and enables users to explore sustainability-related research by college, department, Goal, or researcher. By making these connections visible, it highlights the diverse ways faculty contribute to sustainable development and helps uncover opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration.



## RESEARCH

# FACULTY RESEARCHERS DASHBOARD

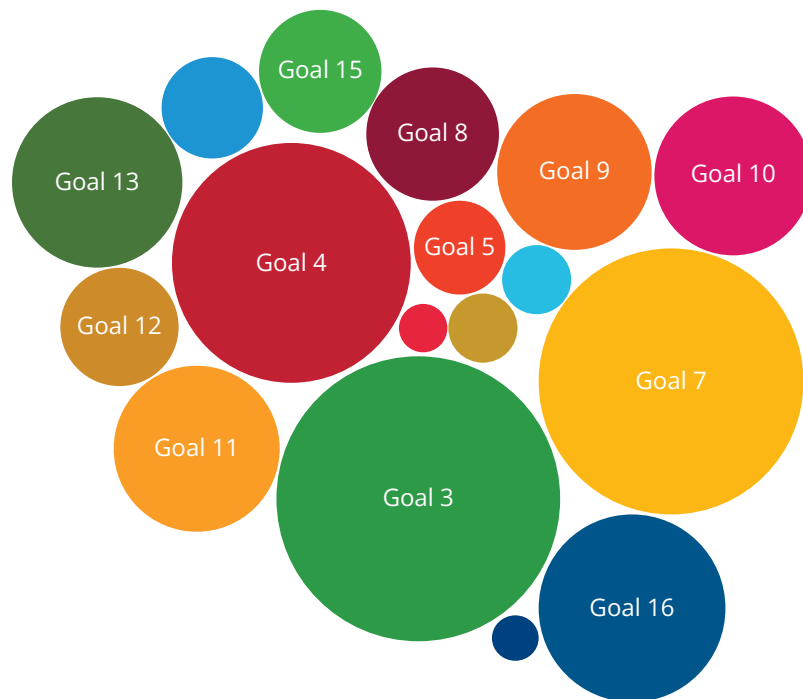
The illustration demonstrates the functionality of the Faculty Researcher Dashboard, an interactive visualization that enables users to explore CMU researchers' contributions to the Global Goals by filtering results by college, department, Goal, or researcher. To view the dashboard, visit [cmu.edu/sustainability](https://cmu.edu/sustainability).

Search for College/Division ▼

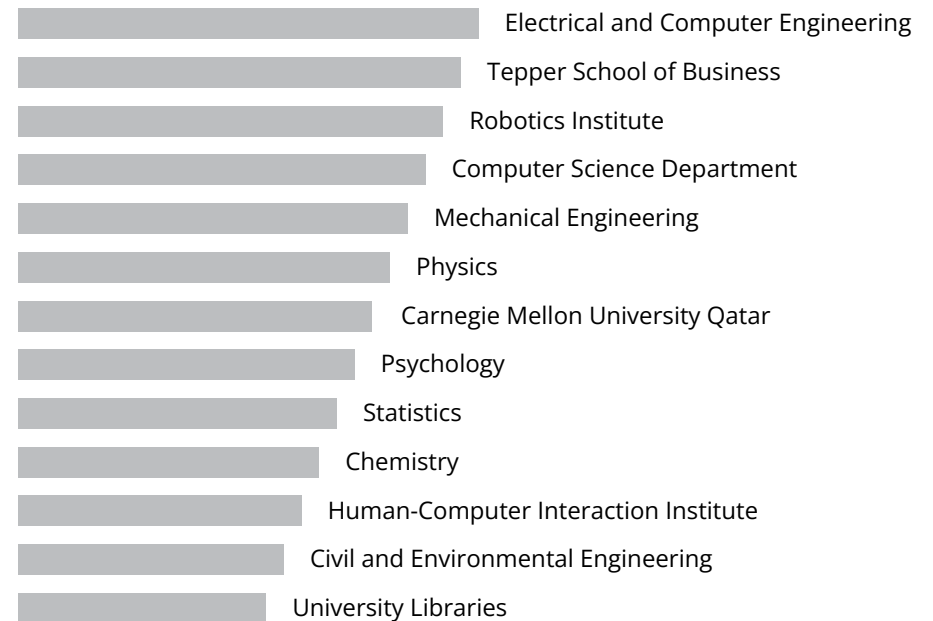
Search for Department ▼

Search for SDG ▼

Researcher Name ▼



Researchers contributing to Sustainable Development Goals by department



# SUMMER UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS (SURF)

Now in its third year as a permanent partnership with the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholar Development (OURSD), the SURF-Sustainability program allocates funding to undergraduate students for full-time summer research directly aligned with at least three Global Goals.

As part of the application process, prospective students are required to link their research interests to a minimum of three of the 17 Global Goals. Fellows also have the opportunity to participate in Speak Up!, an interdisciplinary communication seminar, and to disseminate their findings through a Three-Minute Research Talk. The summer 2025 cohort comprised three fellows.

**Keenan Norton**, Mellon College of Science senior  
*Research: breaking down the contaminant Diphenhydramine, the active ingredient in Benadryl, in wastewater*

**Wendy Wang**, Mellon College of Science sophomore  
*Research: assessing the strain rooftop solar adoptions place on aging power grid infrastructure*

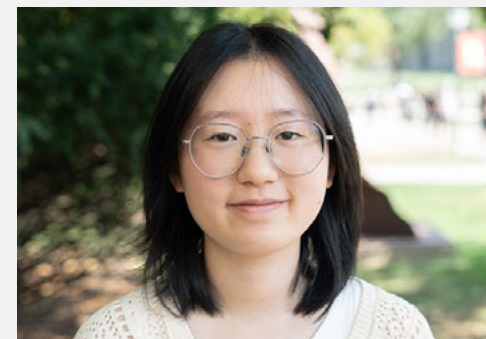
**Ruoyun Xu**, College of Engineering sophomore  
*Research: predicting how aerosol particles move around the atmosphere and the effects they have on weather and climate*



## Wendy Wang

Mellon College of Science sophomore

*"Moving forward, I would still keep the Global Goals in my mind and think about how my research contributes to different sides of sustainability. This experience has taught me to evaluate research not just by its scientific merit but also by its potential impact on environmental and social systems. In the future, I plan to actively seek collaborations and projects that align with multiple Global Goals, particularly those addressing responsible consumption and climate action."*



## Ruoyun Xu

College of Engineering sophomore

*"I applied for SURF-Sustainability because I wanted a dedicated framework to focus deeply on the research project I was passionate about: understanding how renewable energy shapes grid reliability. The fellowship provided valuable structure and mentorship during the summer, which helped me push the work further and refine it into a more rigorous and impactful study. It also encouraged me to situate my technical research within the broader context of sustainability and the Global Goals. Most importantly, the fellowship connected me to a community of students and faculty who care about building a more sustainable future, which made the work feel part of something larger than a single research project."*

## PRACTICES

# FACILITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND RISK MANAGEMENT (FIRM)

In late 2025, the Sustainability Initiative piloted a new type of internal partnership with Carnegie Mellon University's Facilities, Infrastructure and Risk Management (FIRM) division to map department activities to the SDGs. Building on research that began with the 2020 Voluntary University Review, the undertaking advances a broader university-wide effort to help members of the CMU community better see how their work directly supports sustainability outcomes. Through engaged conversations and collaborative reviews, departments are encouraged to consider their activities through the lens of the SDGs, helping staff identify new connections, recognize shared impacts, note areas for potential growth and better understand their role in advancing sustainability at CMU. The FIRM pilot also serves as a model for broader sustainability engagement and cross-departmental collaboration across the university.

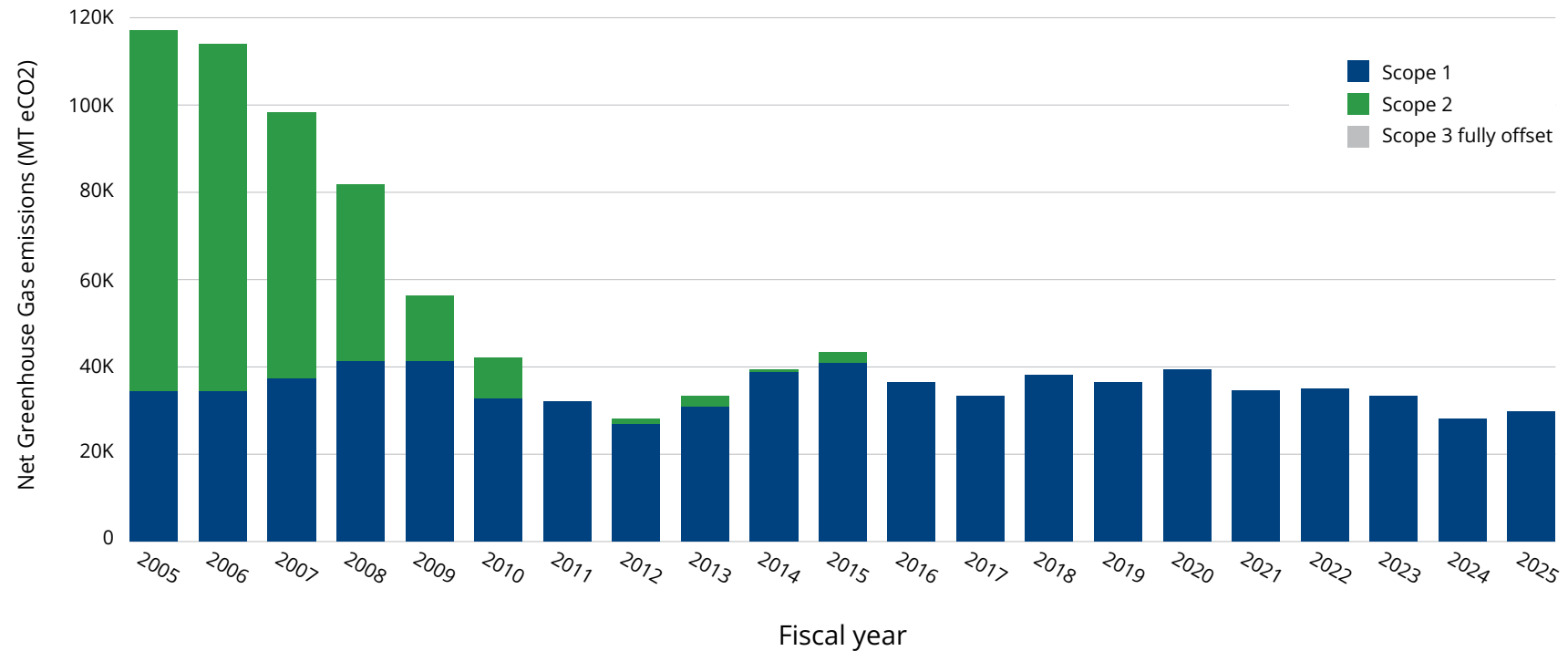


## PRACTICES

## CLIMATE ACTION

CMU continues to track its annual greenhouse gas emissions, including Scope 1 (direct emissions), Scope 2 (indirect emissions from purchased energy), and since 2024, applicable Scope 3 (indirect emissions). These are calculated and reported through SIMAP — the Sustainability Indicator Management & Analysis Platform. CMU has maintained its reduction of overall emissions since the 2005 baseline assessment of more than 78%. On a per student basis, the campus emissions are nearly 89% lower than the baseline.

CMU Greenhouse Gas emissions since baseline year



## PRACTICES

# GREEN PRACTICES

This year held several firsts for CMU's Green Practices program. As a companion to the Scotty Goes Green (SGG) Workplace Certification, relaunched in 2023, a new rating system for individuals was released. The SGG Individual Certification program provides a guide for individuals to make sustainability-informed decisions during their CMU workday. There are currently 14 certified individuals representing eight departments. CMU also participated in the 2026 Freezer Challenge, sponsored by the non-profit organizations My Green Lab® and the International Institute for Sustainable Laboratories. The Freezer Challenge provides a means for campus lab staff and students to learn how to enhance energy efficiency, reduce risks, and save costs through sustainable lab cold storage practices. CMU has 10 labs participating in the challenge.

Green Practices also participates in Second Nature, led by Steven Guenther, Assistant Vice President, Facilities Management and Campus Services and University Engineer, and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), maintaining a Gold Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS) rating, led by Deborah Steinberg, Green Practices and Sustainability Manager.



## PRACTICES

# SUSTAINABILITY COMMONS

The Sustainability Commons is a pilot program designed by Strategy Intern Ameena George to strengthen collaboration among student organizations engaged in sustainability. Developed in response to student feedback, it adds visibility and helps students coordinate across campus sustainability efforts.

The program builds direct relationships with student organizations, provides tailored support, and facilitates collaboration through events and a shared communications network.

During its 2025–2026 pilot year, five organizations participated:

- **Freedom By Design**
- **Environmental and Water Resources Institute**
- **Sustainable Earth**
- **Tepper Energy and Clean Tech Club**
- **Engineers Without Borders**

Each organization completed a Sustainability Mapping Session using the SDGs to identify strengths, priorities, and opportunities for growth. The process also revealed areas of overlap and potential collaboration, helping inform future programming and strengthen connections across the campus sustainability community.



Students participating in the Careers for a Changing Climate event (Credit: Kitoko Chargois)



## PRACTICES

# PITTSBURGH INTERCOLLEGIATE NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY (PINS)

The Pittsburgh Intercollegiate Network for Sustainability (PINS) connects students at local universities who are passionate about sustainability. Established through the Sustainability Initiative, the goal of PINS is to build a community where students across institutions can share ideas, collaborate, and learn from each other.

The 2025-2026 academic year included participation from CMU, the University of Pittsburgh, Chatham University, Carlow University, and Duquesne University.

Throughout the year, a Slack workspace allows any college student in the Pittsburgh region to share events and connect with one another. The Sustainability Initiative also works with other partners and schools to host PINS-specific programming. In the 2025-2026 academic year this included:

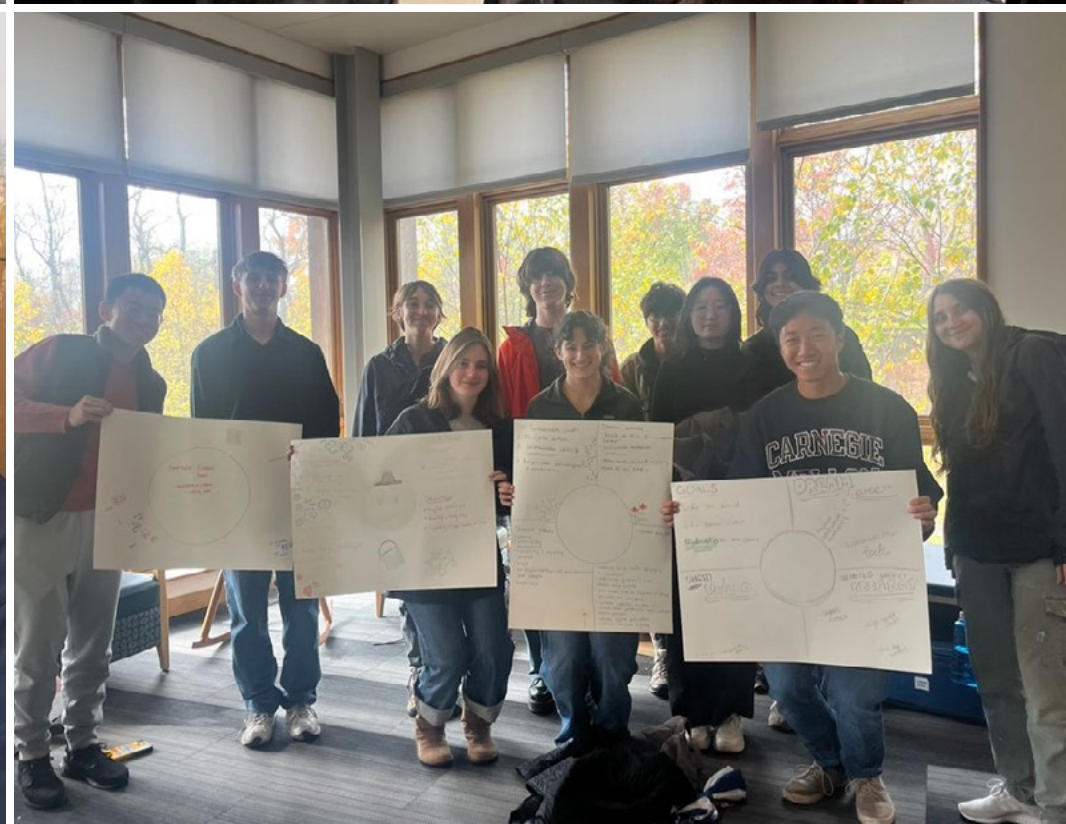
- **A tour of the Frick Environmental Center** in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh's Student Office of Sustainability and the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy
- **Careers for a Changing Climate**, a sustainability career symposium organized in partnership with the Phipps Youth Climate Advocacy Committee that brought together over 100 students and 17 employers
- A site visit and workday at the **Carrie Blast Furnaces National Historic Landmark**



**A TOUR OF THE FRICK ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF  
PITTSBURGH'S STUDENT OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY  
AND THE PITTSBURGH PARKS CONSERVANCY**



(Credit: Aleena Siddiqui)



**CAREERS FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE, A SUSTAINABILITY CAREER SYMPOSIUM ORGANIZED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PHIPPS YOUTH CLIMATE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE THAT BROUGHT TOGETHER OVER 100 STUDENTS AND 17 EMPLOYERS**



(Credit: Kitoko Chargois)



# A SITE VISIT AND WORKDAY AT THE CARRIE BLAST FURNACES NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



(Credit: Iris Hung)



## PRACTICES

# PARTNERSHIPS

The Sustainability Initiative continues to support events and initiatives across CMU whose work aligns with the Global Goals. If you are interested in partnering with the Sustainability Initiative, reach out to [sustainability@cmu.edu](mailto:sustainability@cmu.edu).

### **SONA Festival**

Hosted by the Kenner Room in the Department of Languages, Cultures and Applied Linguistics, SONA is an annual festival celebrating the work of filmmakers, artists, and creators working in XR, 360° video, and interactive media. In April 2026, the Sustainability Initiative sponsored the festival and presented the Sustainability Award to Elina Lex for VR virtual heritage project “Tantramar, 2100,” recognizing the piece that most meaningfully engaged with the Global Goals.

### **Center for the Arts and Society**

The Center for the Arts and Society (CAS) brings together artists and scholars from the College of Fine Arts and Dietrich College to explore how the arts intersect with social power and social change. The Sustainability Initiative continued its partnership with CAS this year to support the Dinner and a Reading series, in which visiting scholars presented their artistic and scholarly work and engaged in discussion with members of the CMU and Pittsburgh community. Culturally relevant food was served as part of these events.

### **Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Day**

CMU’s GIS Day is an annual symposium that brings together faculty, students, and community practitioners to explore how spatial data and analysis can address social and environmental challenges. The Sustainability Initiative sponsors the event in recognition of GIS’s important role in sustainability research and practice. On November 12, more than 170 members of CMU and the Pittsburgh community attended the Libraries’ largest GIS Day to date. Participants from universities, local government, and industry shared research, explored resources, networked, and celebrated the impact of GIS applications through a day-long series of presentations and discussions.

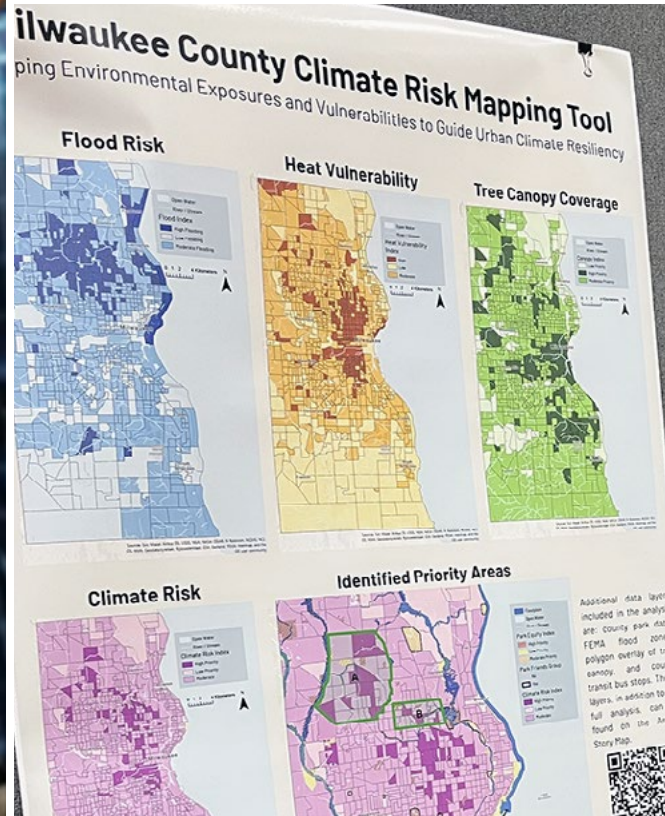
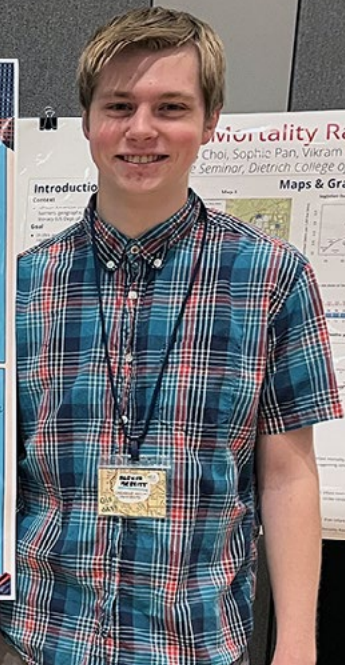
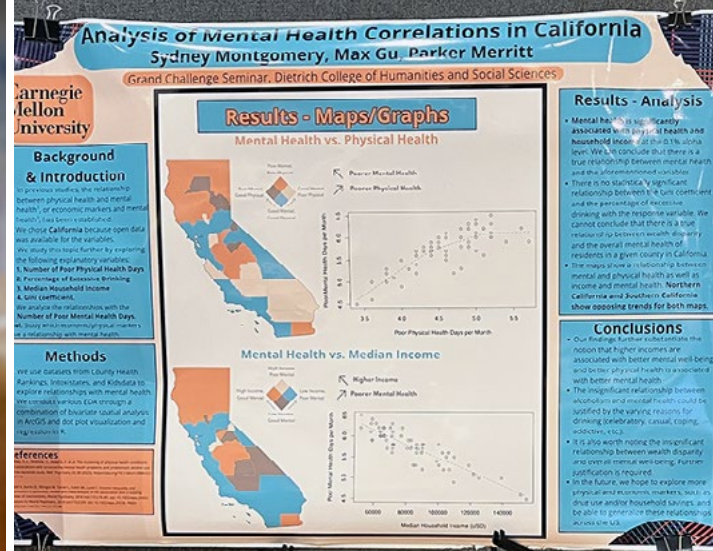


# GIS DAY, AN ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM THAT EXPLORES HOW SPATIAL DATA AND ANALYSIS CAN ADDRESS SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES



GIS Day participants in a breakout session (Credit: Josh Mullenite)

GIS Day poster session presenters (Credit: Sarah Bender)



## PRACTICES

# NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

The Sustainability Initiative also continued to expand engagement with partners beyond Pittsburgh. The Sustainability Initiative is an active member of networks including the International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) and the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI), and presents at conferences such as NAFSA: Association of International Educators. For example, over two days in New York City, the team connected with partners working on the SDGs across local government, the United Nations, and education sectors. They met with staff from the NYC Mayor's Office of Operations, presented at the UNAI workshop, and spoke at the Pratt Institute's Research Open House at its Research Yard in Brooklyn.

Designed and led by Sustainability Initiative Director Alexandra Hiniker to foster student-led connections between institutions working on the Global Goals, the second annual UNAI workshop brought a wider circle to the table, with representatives from Columbia University, Hunter College, Lehigh University, The New School, New York University, Northeastern University, Pratt Institute, and UC Davis. Also joining for the first time was staff from the NYC Mayor's Offices of Operations and International Affairs, whose firsthand experience applying the Global Goals framework at a city scale offered a perspective that extended well beyond the university context.

The five Sustainability Initiative interns shared initiatives spanning sustainability programming, community building, and communications across the CMU campus. The workshop also featured presentations from participating institutions, followed by small group breakout discussions where attendees shared challenges, strategies, and ideas for collaboration.



Participants in the UNAI workshop



Sustainability Initiative interns presenting at the UNAI workshop

# CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Six years after publishing the world's first Voluntary University Review, CMU continues to refine both how it advances sustainability and how it understands its contributions to the SDGs. This review highlights a growing emphasis on engagement, relationship-building, and creating opportunities for members of the university community to see themselves and their work reflected in sustainability efforts.

Several themes emerged throughout the year. First, the SDGs continue to serve as an effective framework for connecting individuals and groups whose work might otherwise remain siloed. Whether through faculty research profiles, student organizations, departmental consultations, community partnerships, or campus programming, the Goals provide a common language that helps reveal shared priorities and opportunities for collaboration. Second, sustainability at CMU increasingly extends beyond environmental topics alone to include the broader topics addressed by the Global Goals. Finally, meaningful progress depends not only on institutional commitments but also on empowering students, faculty, and staff to lead and shape sustainability efforts within their own communities.

Looking ahead, the Sustainability Initiative will focus on transitioning the Student Sustainability Liaison program from a pilot to a permanent opportunity, expanding the Sustainability Commons to support greater collaboration among student organizations, and continuing to integrate health and well-being into sustainability programming and partnerships. The Initiative will also strengthen the Pittsburgh Intercollegiate Network for Sustainability (PINS), deepen engagement with faculty through the Scholars and Elements platforms, and build upon the successful FIRM consultation process by adapting the model for additional divisions and departments across the university.

As sustainability is now embedded within CMU's Strategic Framework, the university is well positioned to continue serving as a convener, connector, and catalyst for action. The Sustainability Initiative invites all members of the CMU community as well as partners beyond campus to contribute their ideas, expertise, and energy to this ongoing work. Advancing sustainability is a shared endeavor, and the progress documented in this review demonstrates what is possible when people come together around a common purpose.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The Sustainability Initiative team in front of New York City Hall

We extend our sincere thanks to the CMU community for your engagement with the Sustainability Initiative throughout the 2025–2026 academic year. Your ideas, collaboration, and commitment continue to strengthen our shared efforts to advance sustainability at CMU.

To the students, faculty, staff, and community partners who contributed to sustainability initiatives and this Voluntary University Review, thank you for sharing your time, expertise, and perspectives. Your contributions have strengthened this report and continue to shape the future of sustainability at Carnegie Mellon.

## The Sustainability Initiative team (2025 -2026)

### Alexandra Hiniker

*Director*

### Aleena Siddiqui

**Senior, Materials Science and Engineering and Environmental and Sustainability Studies, College of Engineering, MCS Interdisciplinary, Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences**

*Programming Intern*

### Ameena George

**Sophomore, Business Administration and Environmental and Sustainability Studies  
Tepper School of Business, MCS Interdisciplinary, Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences**

*Strategy Intern*

### Egshiglen Batjargal

**Masters Student, Public Policy and Management, Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy**

*Data and Storytelling Intern*

### Imama Zahoor

**Masters Student, Health Care Analytics, Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy**

*Community Health and Wellbeing Intern*

### Iris Hung

**Masters Student, Entertainment Industry Management, Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy and College of Fine Arts**

*Communications Intern*