



***WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY***  
College of Arts and Sciences  
School of Environment,  
Geography, and Sustainability

# **Strategic Plan**

## **2024-2028**



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1903 West Michigan Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49008  
(269) 387-3415 | [www.wmich.edu/environment](http://www.wmich.edu/environment)

## ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The School of Environment, Geography, and Sustainability (SEGS) was formed on July 1, 2023 out of the sole initiative of the faculty of two former academic departments in the College of Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University– the Department of Geography, Environment, and Tourism and the Institute of the Environment and Sustainability Studies.

The merger was preceded by a three-year discussion and collaboration between the two academic units. The merger brought together a large number of undergraduate majors and minors and three graduate programs. The majors and graduate programs are listed below.

### Undergraduate Majors

- BA- Environmental and Sustainability Studies
- BS Freshwater Science and Sustainability
- BS Environmental Geography
- BS Geographic Information System
- BS Urban, Regional, and Environmental Planning
- BA Secondary Education
- BA Global and International Studies
- BS Sustainable Brewing
- BA Tourism and Travel

### Graduate Programs

- MS Geography
- Graduate Certificate in Geographic Information Science
- Graduate Certificate in Unmanned Aerial Systems (Drones)

## ABOUT THE STRATEGIC PLAN

As a new school, the strategic plan was one of the two items of priority for school. The other was the department policy statement. We started the strategic planning process in spring 2024 after we had completed work on the DPS. Our colleague, Dr. Kathleen Baker, Professor of Environment, Geography, and Sustainability, was given one course release to serve as the main facilitator of the process. She held listening sessions with all the faculty and staff, as well as representatives of undergraduate and graduate students of SEGS to identify what they saw as challenges, concerns, and aspirations of all the members of the SEGS community, and within the contexts the strategic plans of WMU and the College of Arts and Sciences. The information obtained from these sessions informed the formulation of goals, objectives, and strategies of the plan following a series of further meetings between Dr

Baker and other members of SEGS. A draft version of the plan was discussed at the School's retreat in on May 2, 2024, after which a working report was sent to the Director for final revision. We are grateful to Dr. Kathleen Baker for her excellent work as the facilitator of the entire process.

The plan has four main goals: - academic excellence, community building and belonging, research and creativity, and community engagement. Each of these goals has a set of objectives and strategies.

## OUR MISSION

The Western Michigan University School of Environment, Geography, and Sustainability seeks to:

1. foster the acquisition of core knowledge about environmental sustainability and the applications of such knowledge to real-world issues through quality teaching and research;
2. provide an environment for student professional growth through development of critical thinking, scientific problem-solving, communication ability (e.g., written, oral, graphic), and creative capacity;
3. raise awareness, appreciation and relevance of geographic and sustainability dimensions of environmental, social, cultural, political, economic, and technological issues in order to address them more effectively; and
4. create and maintain a challenging and intellectually vital learning community that engages students and faculty in continuing discourse, with focus on active, informed, productive, creative, open-minded, and ethically responsible professional preparation and citizenship in a complex, increasingly connected and globalized, multicultural world.

## OUR VISION

To fulfill this mission the department pursues the following vision and goals:

- Instill a passion for the study of environment, geography, and tourism, and other related subfields (e.g., GIScience, sustainability, eco-justice, climatology, public health, and urban planning).
- Achieve excellence in teaching, research, and service within these fields and, by doing so, make our School visible and recognized both nationally and internationally for its strengths.
- Emphasize the importance of communicating our science to, and collaborating with partners from, academic and non-academic communities.

- To address societal change by building a foundation for scholarly collaboration, cultivating active world citizens, and creating equitable and resilient human and ecological communities on a healthier planet.

## OUR CORE VALUES

**Transdisciplinarity:** Striving for excellence within, across, and beyond disciplinary boundaries and academia to address societal change

**Community:** Cultivating collegial relationships and connectedness to build a foundation for collaboration

**Global Engagement:** Actively pursuing responsible interactions and collaborations with all cultures and perspectives for a common good

**Justice:** Building capacity for inclusive, participatory planning to empower equitable and resilient communities

**Sustainability:** Championing environmental consciousness and data-driven, spatially-explicit decision making to create a healthier planet

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** We embrace Diversity in all its many forms and work to build a culture of belonging to effectively address and serve the interests of our global community. We recognize that diverse perspectives, experiences, and expertise are essential to strengthening our academic mission in environment, geography, and sustainability.

## GOAL 1: ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

### Objective 1.1 - Quality instruction

- Stay committed to improved classroom teaching through continuing professional development.
- Create a robust educational experience by making lessons inclusive of a variety of scales, backgrounds, and perspectives
- Balance online, hybrid, and in-person modes of instruction as permitted by courses
- Pursue teaching for life-long learning by building up learner's capacity to focus, create their own optimal learning environment, prepare more effectively, and engage with difficult material

- Pursue teaching for well-being by increasing instructor capacity to show care and concern through understanding of early warning signs for at-risk students, utilization of university concern programs, and learner management in eLearning

#### Objective 1.2 - Experiential learning in every course

- Train students to collect, analyze, and accurately interpret data in class work
- Provide nature-based and/or community-based field experiences in conjunction with hands-on laboratory exercises.
- Expose students to diverse cultures and perspectives in courses, by encouraging immersive cultural experiences locally and abroad.
- Use portfolios that include products to showcase student skills learned/gained, progression of thought, and sample works for future employers, in course evaluations.

#### Objective 1.3 – Make Curriculum relevant to employment opportunities

- Undertake program review and curricular revision based on alumni employment and career trends
- Expose students to interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary ideas and methods
- Prioritize student engagement in critical thinking, problem solving, evaluating knowledge, and taking responsibility and initiative for their own learning
- Consider course flow, and capstone purpose/effectiveness within and across programs
- Develop a new assessment plan to better quantify and examine our curricular efforts

### **GOAL 2: COMMUNITY BUILDING AND BELONGING**

#### Objective 2.1 - Recruit and retain diverse faculty, staff, and student population, including underrepresented groups

- Offer training each year to faculty and staff in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives
- Target scholarships and awards to bring in exceptional students who share our core values
- Participate in CAS and WMU recruitment activities: Bronco Bash, Major Excitement, Future Broncos, Middle School STEM days
- Identify and respond to the needs of at-risk students
- Communicate regularly with students to celebrate innovative ideas and events that encourage mutual respect and support

- Grow SEGS-affiliated RSOs and increase interaction among them
- Organize templates for degree completion by program to assist in advising and graduation
- Prioritize inclusive language in curricula, instructional, and promotion materials

Objective 2.2 – Create a welcoming and belonging environment for all

- Create a more learner-centered environment, by improving and utilizing SEGS community spaces for faculty, staff, and student interactions
- Encourage collaboration that will enhance cohesiveness of the SEGS unit, including team teaching, joint grant writing, development of new programs
- Increase capacity for event and information management including monthly newsletter, use of social media, schedule of regular expected events, brown bags, end of semester parties, and reunions
- Create an advisory board of alumni to build a lasting relationship between alumni and current students
- Be conscientious with expectations for dual appointed faculty

### GOAL 3: RESEARCH AND CREATIVE EXCELLENCE

Objective 3.1 – Strive for excellence in faculty research and creative scholarship

- Promote transdisciplinary research in issues of environment, geography, tourism, justice, and sustainability
- Maintain production of high-quality research articles and books with a focus on the highest-tier publishers in our respective fields and subfields
- Conduct research on significant global topics aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for people, the planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships
- Conduct research on significant local topics such as Great Lakes resources and issues, community health in the Midwest, small city regional planning, and regional climate change impacts
- Incorporate scholarship into instruction to actively engage students (e.g. share research results, demonstrate research outcomes, discuss scientific process)

Objective 3.2 - Engage students in research and creative scholarship to help them gain knowledge, experience, and practical skills

- Place undergraduate and graduate students in local-to-global research, internships, and other out of class experiences, catalog and promote these types of experiences
- Engage undergraduates in faculty-led and student-led interdisciplinary, collaborative research experience and research-focused class projects

- Enhance quality of graduate research by encouraging community involvement, public presentation, co-authorship, and publication of graduate student thesis and research projects
- Expand offerings of qualitative and mixed-methods skills, in conjunction with quantitative methods, to further increase data-driven support of decision makers and student job placement

Objective 3.3 Communicate our science to one another and to the broader public and non-expert audiences

- Build enthusiasm and celebrate our research and creative achievements by coordinating communication with faculty, staff, and students
- Monthly newsletter of faculty and student activities in research and creative activity
- Celebrate faculty and student achievements and successes by hosting different forums or events such as brown-bags, social gatherings, and presentations.
- Actively pursue community-based research for positive societal impacts by leveraging existing partnerships and developing new ones with government, industries, businesses and nonprofit organizations.

#### **GOAL 4: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Objective 4.1 – Promote student, faculty, and staff engagement with local communities and beyond through dynamic interactions, collaborative projects, and internship opportunities

- Increase collaboration with other WMU academic departments
- Strengthen the relationship between the School and the WMU Office of Sustainability
- Bring community to our students in the classroom – through invited lectures/talk from community agencies and people
- Engage and utilize the presence of international students and faculty at WMU
- Establish internship opportunities in the community for students

Objective 4.2 – Facilitate lasting relationships and shared initiatives between the School and our broader communities

- Increase collaborations with other academic units on WMUs campus, as well as community colleges, colleges and other universities
- Build just relationships with diverse communities, organizations, and institutions
- Value multiple ways of knowing through our scholarship, teaching, and community engagement
- Support co-creation of knowledge and ways of knowing

- Initiate collaborations for real world impact
- Continue to be present in professional associations and organizations that support our scholarship
- Enhance inter-relationships between School and Office of Sustainability
- Commit to cultural awareness, environmental stewardship and ethical behavior through safeguarding privacy, ownership, and ethnic practices

Objective 4.3 - Increase visibility by communicating scholarly expertise to the public

- Participate in public forums, expert testimony, and activism
- Publish in mainstream media and open source venues
- Engage in community service and service learning
- Support data driven decision making with technologies and services
- Sponsor programs on WMUK to mention the School

## **GOAL 5: DEVELOPMENT**

Objective 5.1. Seek opportunities to financially support the mission of the School

- Work with the College of Arts and Sciences and the WMU Foundation to cultivate donors
- Publicize giving opportunities on our social media
- Disseminate the School's annual newsletter to alumni – including giving opportunities
- Build meaningful and enduring relationships with our alumni
- Create and maintain a contact list of alumni