



2015 Insights Report

**Sustainability Study: Student Expectations
For Future Employers**

Joint Survey Conducted By Grand & Toy
And McMaster University

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About This Report

This report is a result of a collaborative effort between Grand & Toy and McMaster University. It is based on a survey conducted by two McMaster students, Warren Viegas and Chitmandeep Josan, as part of the interdisciplinary course Sustain 3S03* – Implementing Sustainable Change. This survey was part of a study that has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB). The MREB protocol number associated with this survey is MREB 2014 50.

McMaster University, located in Hamilton, Ontario, has a full-time undergraduate student population of 21,441 and a total student population of 30,117. McMaster’s undergraduate teaching is conducted through six faculties: DeGroote School of Business, the Faculties of Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, Science, and Social Sciences, and the distinctive Arts & Science Program**.

The survey was conducted in November of 2014. A total of 220 students participated in the study, of which 125 respondents majored in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, and 95 majored in the liberal arts. Students from all levels of education were represented, with the majority comprising of fourth year (74) and third year students (55). The sample size of the survey is not large enough to draw broad generalizations, but this study may contribute to other research on the subject.

*Sustain 3S03 is part of McMaster’s Sustainable Future Program. All courses within the program are focused on providing students with the opportunity for interdisciplinary, student-led, community-based, and experiential learning about sustainability. More information on the program and related courses can be found at asp.mcmaster.ca

**Source: http://www.mcmaster.ca/opr/html/opr/fast_facts/main/facultiesPrograms.html

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Overview

For the 2013 Insights Report, we commissioned Leger to conduct a survey of more than 500 decision makers in medium and large organizations across all industries. The respondents were polled on their views of sustainability and the programs being implemented in their companies. The survey showed that Canadian companies were great at capturing profitability derived from sustainability initiatives, but enhanced external collaboration was required for continued progression.

This year, we decided to turn the tables and ask prospective employees about their expectations for their future workplace. A survey of over 200 students was conducted at McMaster University in Hamilton to solicit their opinions on corporate sustainability. Many similar surveys were conducted for business students in the past, but we wanted to open the questionnaire to all students in order to determine whether attitudes differed depending on the area of study.



Executive Summary

Student attitudes towards corporate sustainability were ascertained through a series of questions aimed at understanding what sustainability means to them and what their expectations are from future employers. The survey results showed that the students were aware of many aspects of corporate responsibility and had high expectations from organizations. A significant number of students indicated that they would be willing to refuse a job offer or resign from their position if the employer’s sustainability efforts were unsatisfactory.

Key Findings

- Sustainability is an important consideration for students
- There is virtually no difference as to how sustainability is perceived amongst students based on their area of study
- Corporate sustainability practices are essential and affect how students view the organization as a potential employer
- Students’ purchasing habits are informed to a large degree by sustainability considerations
- Traditional employee values such as salary and opportunity for growth are still very important, but they are being supplemented with appeals for corporate sustainability

Sustainability Awareness

To gauge the respondents’ perception of sustainability, students were asked to rate their level of concern about the major social and environmental challenges. On average, all issues were given a fairly high rating, with over 50% of students indicating their level of concern was either high or extremely high in each case. Depletion of natural resources was identified as the top issue, with **76%** of students ranking their level of concern as high or very high.

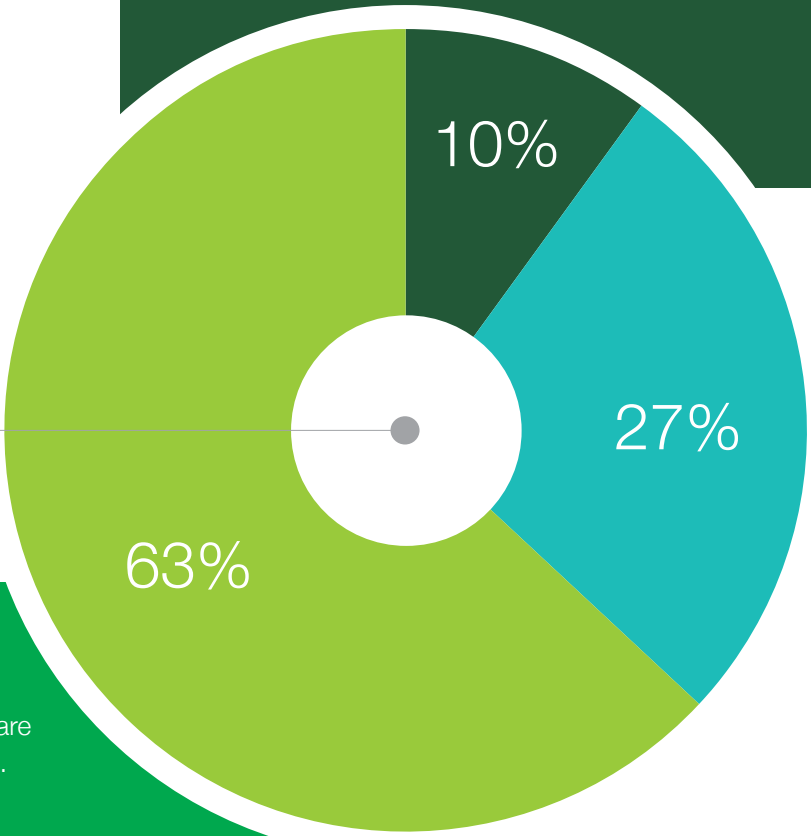
When asked whether sustainability would be relevant to their future career, **63%** of students answered positively. The number was even higher at **67%**, for students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields.



How relevant do you think sustainability issues will be to your future career?

- Not relevant
- Reasonably relevant
- Relevant / very relevant

Furthermore, **64%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Careers involving sustainability and environmental issues (“green jobs”) are a strong source of economic growth and opportunity”.



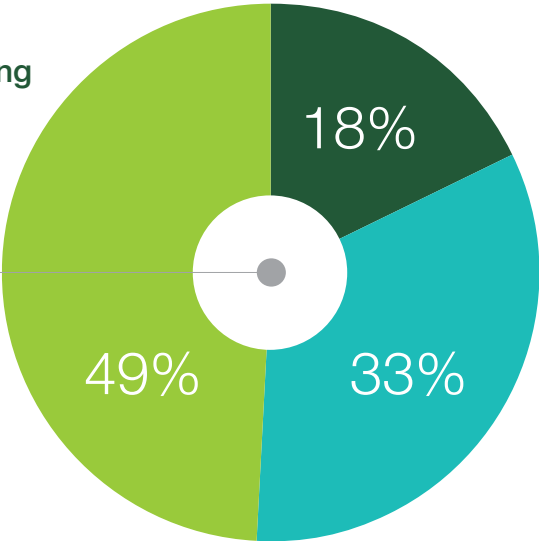
Sustainability Topic	Level Of Concern <small>Arithmetic mean on a scale of 1 to 5</small>
Depletion of resources	4.07
Pollution and waste	4.03
Human rights / Fair labour practices	4.03
Climate change	3.83
Corporate accountability	3.66

Responsible Consumers

With the launch of our Greener Office initiative and the online green catalogue this year, we wanted to know whether environmental impact of products that students buy were essential to them. Over **49%** of all respondents said that they consider sustainability to be important or very important when making purchases. Another **33%** stated that they consider sustainability equally alongside other factors such as price, brand, and quality of product.

How important are sustainability matters to you when making purchasing decisions? (Would you think about buying a greener or fair trade product over the alternative?)

- Do not consider it
- Equal consideration with other factors (price, brand, etc.)
- Important / very important

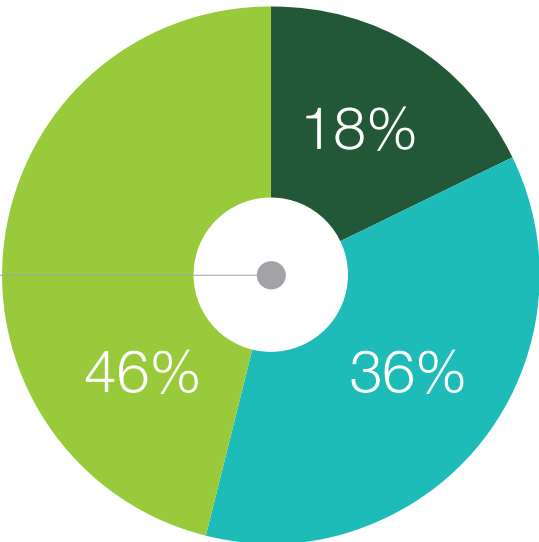


Expectations From Future Employers

When asked how imperative it was to them that their values align with those of their future employers, only **18%** of students said that it was not important. Similarly, merely **20%** indicated that it was not important for them to work for an employer that strongly values sustainability.

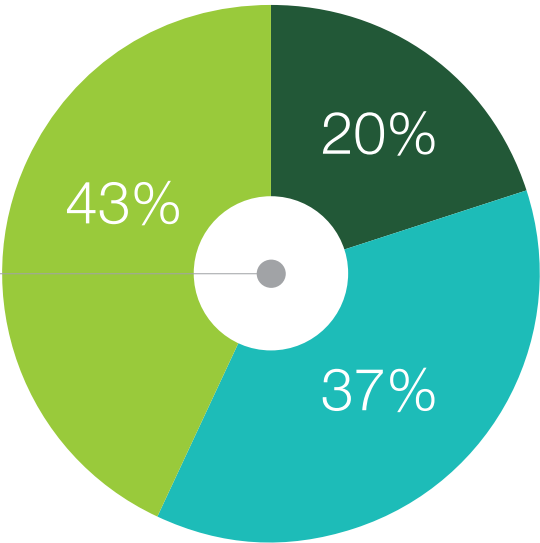
How important is it for you that your values regarding sustainability align with those of your employer?

- Not important
- Reasonably important
- Important / very important



How important is it for you to work with an employer who strongly values sustainability?

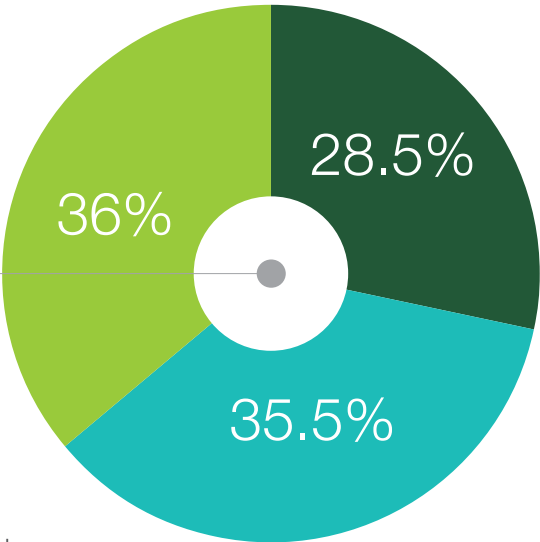
- Not important
- Reasonably important
- Important / very important



On the contrary, **36%** of all respondents stated that finding a job where they can actively participate in promoting sustainability was important or very important to them, with a further **35%** indicating that this was of reasonable importance.

How important is it for you to find a job in which you can actively participate in promoting sustainability?

- Not important
- Reasonably important
- Important / very important



Respondents were asked to rate the importance of both traditional employment values as well as sustainability considerations when choosing a potential employer. Virtually all respondents agreed that opportunity for growth was an important consideration for them, with zero people ranking it at 1 out of 5, and only one person giving it a 2 out of 5 rating. While the “good environmental record practices” option was mathematically last, only **16%** of students considered this subject unimportant while **52%** of all answers rated the significance of good environmental practices at either 4 or 5 out of 5.

Employee Considerations

Importance

Arithmetic mean on a scale of 1 to 5

Opportunity for career growth / development	4.60
Work / life balance	4.47
Salary	4.29
Social responsibility initiatives	3.77
Good environmental record / practices	3.50

Students were asked whether they would reject a job offer from a company with poor environmental and social practices. They were asked to consider two scenarios:

1

Where they were extended an offer immediately after graduation.

Not surprisingly, the number of students who would reject a job offer after graduation was relatively low; however **43%** indicated that they would reject the offer as a mid-career professional. In addition, **29%** percent of respondents indicated that they would consider resigning their position due to the employer’s poor environmental and social responsibility performance with further **52%** stating that it would be a factor in their decision to resign.

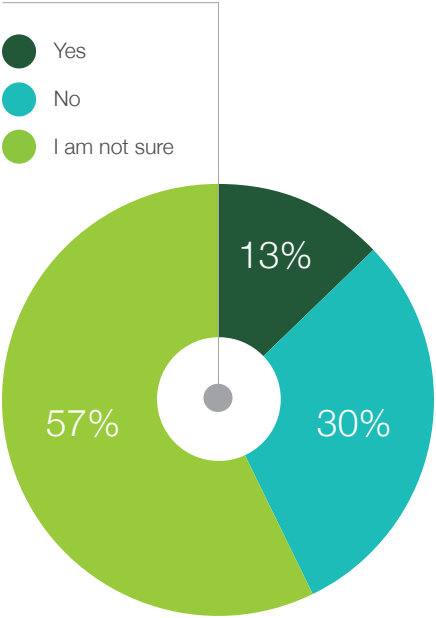
2

Where they were offered a job as mid-career professional.

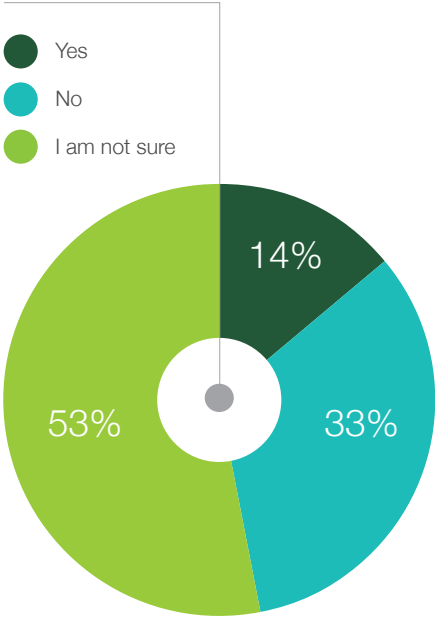
Part of the study's purpose was to find out whether students in different fields of study have different attitudes towards sustainability. In the responses to most of the questions in this survey, it was found that the answers from students in the STEM fields mirrored the overall results closely to the point where there was practically no discernible difference in replies.

Imagine yourself immediately after graduation. Would you reject a job offer from an organization with a poor environmental or social record?

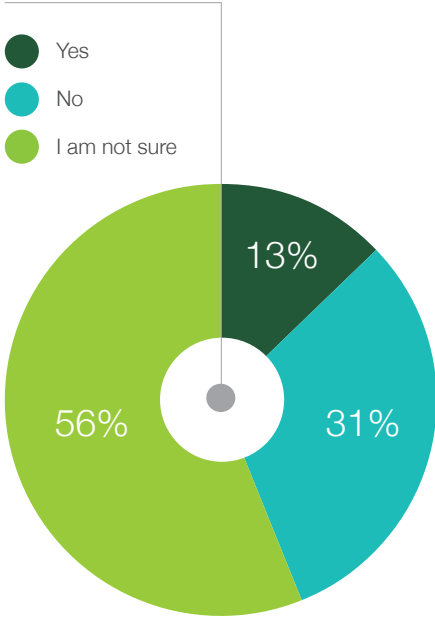
Non-STEM Responses



STEM Responses

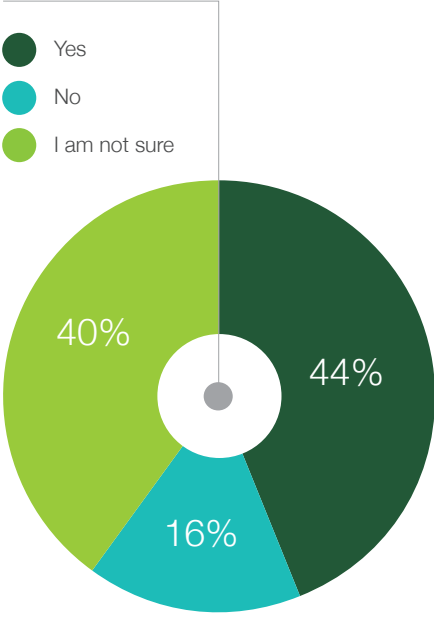


Overall Results

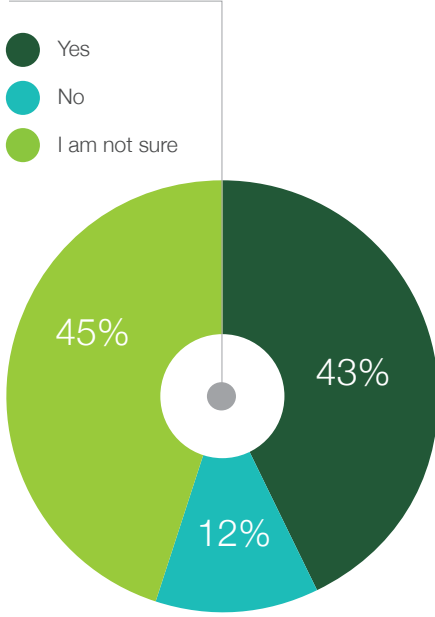


As an experienced mid-career professional, would you reject a job offer from an organization with a poor environmental or social record?

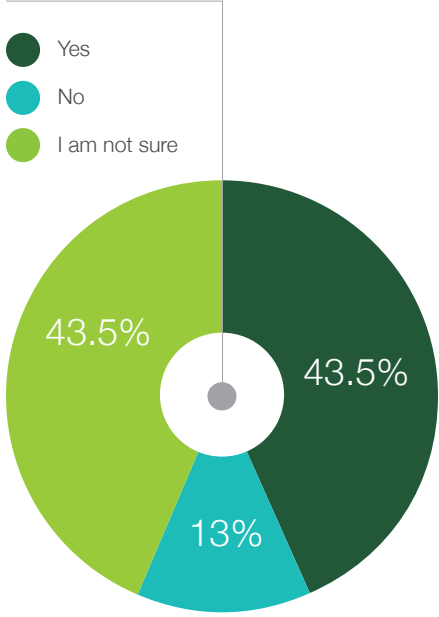
Non-STEM Responses



STEM Responses

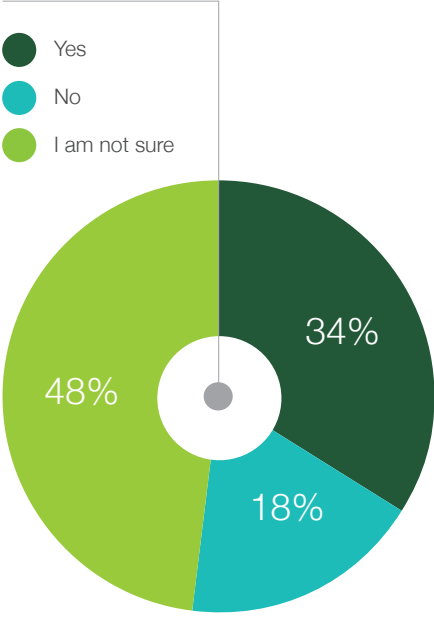


Overall Results

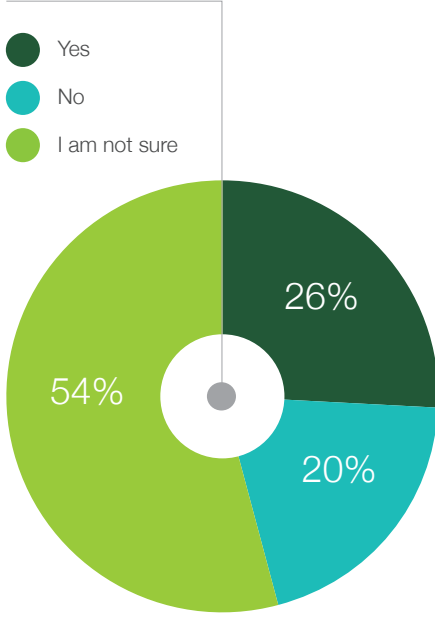


Would you ever consider resigning your position due to your employer’s poor environmental or social practices?

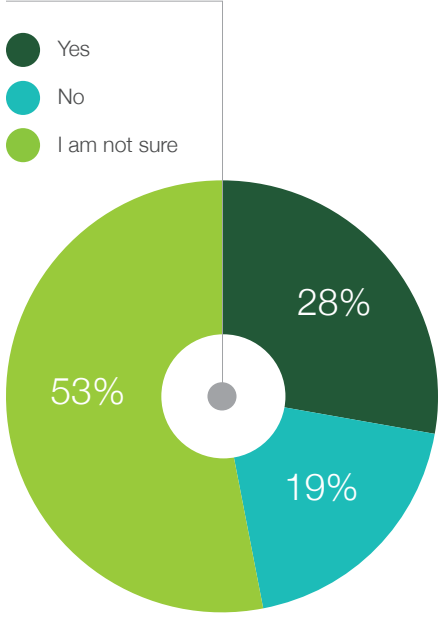
Non-STEM Responses



STEM Responses



Overall Results



One of the students indicated in the comments section that a job offer from a company with poor social and environmental practices would be accepted because this would give the respondent a chance to become a change agent in this organization.



Definition Of Sustainability And Comments

The comments section asked students to define sustainability and to add any other remarks concerning the subject of the survey. Out of the total 220 respondents, 120 students took advantage of this option, and the majority of comments focused either on the environmental side of sustainability or on the Triple Bottom Line (environmental, social and financial sustainability.) The following responses are representative of the majority of comments received:

- “(Sustainability is) living in harmony with the environment being aware of one’s consumption of resources and ecological footprint. Sustainable practices are those that ensure some resources are left for the next generations.”
- “Sustainability equals promoting practices that increases environmental, social and economic well-being equally, without degradation.”
- “I think sustainability is making sure we can protect and provide in the future the basic needs of our people. Whether it is the environment, education, social welfare or economics.”
- “Working towards a society that is less reliant and detrimental to the Earth’s limited natural resources, less harmful and damaging to the Earth’s health, and more considerate of the generations to come.”

We also received several responses that were more unique in nature:

- “(Sustainability is) stuff lefties keep pushing on others in hopes of expanding the government and taking away more of your rights.”
- “With respect to “poor environmental or social record” (of future employers), it is the social record that would particularly matter to me.”



Conclusion

There is a large segment of the university student population that is passionate about corporate sustainability. These students are well informed and care about environmental and social issues. They expect their future employers to hold values that align with theirs and to demonstrate their commitment to those values on an ongoing basis.

While the answers showed that the quality of the organization’s sustainability practices is not a factor for most students in accepting a job offer after graduation, they did indicate that this will be important later in the respondents’ careers. Furthermore, most respondents expect their future careers to have a sustainability component. Establishing a corporate sustainability program and engaging young professionals in environmental and social initiatives is therefore important to attract professionals and avoid high employee turnover rates.

The respondents also demonstrated that they are responsible consumers and consider environmental and social impact of the products they purchase. Most students indicated they take into account whether the product is green or fair trade and that it plays a part in their purchasing decision. Availability of the environmentally friendly products and services is essential for manufacturers, retailers and potential employers.

Crucially, these sentiments are not specific to students in any particular area of study, but are fairly uniform for students in both STEM and non-STEM fields. Organizations in every industry segment should pay attention to their sustainability practices.



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