UMassAmherst | School of Earth and Sustainability

Appendix B: Session 1 | Student Success

May 19, 2026 | SES Strategic Planning Series

The following provides an overview of the Session 1 format, activities, and discussion content.

Session Agenda

1:00 – 1:20	Arrival, welcome, and contemplative opening
1:20 – 2:10	Station activity: groups rotate through 5 stations
2:10 – 2:30	Lunch
2:30 – 3:20	Small group discussion
3:20 – 3:30	Check-out

Opening & Ground Rules

Participants were welcomed with a contemplative opening. A go-around question invited each person to share: "What feeling are you arriving with to the discussions today?" The following community agreements were shared:

- Using I statements (being the expert of our own experience)
- Be conscious of time (help stick to it or negotiate for more)
- Assume good intent (attend to impact)
- Recognize how your social identity impacts how you might interact with the group and these agreements
- Take space / make space

Breakout Session 1 | Station Activity

Five stations, each with a prompt and flip chart, were set up in different parts of the space. Participants self-arranged into three groups, each with a facilitator. Groups spent approximately 10 minutes per station, capturing responses on shared flip chart sheets. The station activity created a layered record of the conversations.

Station 1: Needs and Vulnerabilities

PROMPT: Which specific student groups require targeted support? What barriers are hindering student success right now? What are the major obstacles for student programs? Are there specific student groups that require targeted support?

The following ideas and themes emerged from discussions about different student populations:

Collaboration with the Humanities

- Desire to create a sustainability major that is not exclusively science-focused (discussion about how students become BDIC if they don't want to do Sustainable Community Development)
  - Perhaps a sustainability certificate developed in collaboration with the humanities?
- PhD students need support beyond their home department

Navigating Resources

- How do we ensure students from underrepresented backgrounds know about the resources available to them?
- The need for an SES filter in SPIRE / Academic Analytics to better track student outcomes

Emotional Wellbeing of Students

- How can SES support students in exploring different majors and minors?
  - Help students deal with the pressure of major selection and see themselves as both employable and self-confident — connecting major exploration to emotional wellbeing
- Imposter syndrome is a real barrier for many students
  - Peer-to-peer mentoring (students or alumni sharing how they navigated higher education)
- Translating the value of a sustainability-related degree through concrete examples

Support & Learning Accommodation

- Supporting international students through the graduate school process
- Experiential, applied learning opportunities to support different learning styles
- More paid opportunities, potentially reserved for specific student populations
- Clear, consistent events and milestones across the year

Student Populations Discussed

- PhD students
- Students seeking a sustainability experience that is not exclusively science-based
- First-generation students
- International graduate students
- Online students
- Undergraduate students navigating employability
- Mount Ida students
- Transfer students
- Nontraditional undergraduates
- Students with financial concerns — what can our network do for them?
- Students who need different types of support (shy students, introverted learners, etc.)

Station 2: Living Labs

PROMPT: What does "living lab" mean to you and your unit? What major project or course activities happen each year? What are concrete ways SES can reduce friction and help foster the ecosystem?

- The campus itself is a living lab with many opportunities — how do we help students navigate it?
- Short courses over winter break, spring break, and in the week before fall semester
- Supporting undergraduates with paid opportunities in living lab positions for lecturer-run programs that do not receive start-up or research funds
- Creating more praxis opportunities: experiential and hands-on learning courses, fellowships, and field experiences integrated into classes
- Getting students more involved in campus operations — more staff and student collaboration
- Client-based work with external partners; organizations should know to come to SES when they need student support
- CESL and its untapped potential for building community partnerships
- Stockbridge programs with established community partnerships were highlighted as models
- Questions about what genuine co-production with community partners looks like — avoiding one-way benefit flows
- Create a community engagement mission or goal?
    - What are the key features of an effective living lab? (peer-to-peer learning and leadership practice noted as important)
- The shape of living lab engagement will differ at the undergraduate vs. graduate level

Station 3: Partnership Network

PROMPT: Describe how partners support your teaching, research, or role. When do you work with partners throughout the year? Who are your primary teaching and research partners? What makes a partnership work well?

Internal and external partners mentioned by participants:

- Mass Arborists Association (internships, workshops, scholarships)
- New England Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture
- Tree Fund
- MassGIS
- Tree Care Industry Association
- Waugh Arboretum
- On-campus teaching partnership: an EGCS–Engineering cross-listed course

- CISA — Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture
- Amherst elementary schools
- The partnership supporting the Amherst Farmers Market
- Industry partners

Ideas and opportunities raised:

- Stay in touch with industry partners to identify needs for mutually beneficial collaboration that grows sustainably and empowers students
- Invite short courses and workshops to grow and sustain partnerships
- Use department alumni networks to identify community partners — can we create a recurring, shared list?
- Need for more seed grants supporting on-campus research partnerships between faculty

Station 4: One New Thing

PROMPT: What is one major initiative SES should take next year to meaningfully address student success across our majors and programs?

Participants first reflected on what student success means, including social, academic, and professional considerations, as well as holistic wellbeing. Ideas surfaced across the following areas:

Connection Building & Career Support

- A suite of activities, academic and social, for connecting sustainability-interested students across campus (undergraduate and graduate), including films, lectures, and quarterly events
- SES-level peer mentors
- "Flavors of your major" that bring in alumni and professors to share what a career in sustainability actually looks like; possibly at the SES level
- Alumni panels

Community & Regional Engagement

- An annual sustainability symposium engaging community and students: co-define issues and co-produce approaches
- Broad outreach to regional high schools; shared recruitment efforts and possible invitation to the Majors Fair

Operational & Structural Ideas

- Support for lecturer positions
- An internship and practicum inventory
- Better preparation for interns entering the workforce (professional skills development)

- A coherent, shared SES calendar of events
- A workshop around creating a sustainability general education requirement — momentum already exists

Station 5: SES Calendar & Programming

PROMPT: Where are the major academic milestones next year? Where are gaps or opportunities to add career programming? Any needed updates to signature programming like the career fair?

- Career fair: build a shared calendar and consider whether student participation should be expected
- Programming should span fall, spring, and summer
- "Get Involved with SES!" w/a master list of academic and non-academic opportunities to share with advisors
- Plan events in alignment with the UMass academic calendar (e.g., around New Student Orientation)
- Student socials and faculty-student events; promote departmental social events through SES channels
- Community engagement event idea such as a "green drinks" social
- Idea: each department tables at a downtown community event to connect with the local community
- Pair the career fair with an alumni panel drawing from different departments
- Engagement idea: "Meet the Researchers"
- A listserv or digest of internship and research lab opportunities sent to students at the start of each semester
- A syllabus or menu outlining practicum opportunities across programs
- Faculty sponsor model for students

Additional questions and discussion:

- How do we encourage student engagement with opportunities like the career fair?
- Recruit incoming students through AP course networks in high schools
- Opportunities at the Charles River campus with sustainability-related courses and internships
- Forestry has an established annual internship model with a potential template
- Tangible linkages between courses, degrees, and careers need to be made more visible
- Stockbridge programs need help attracting more relevant vendors to the career fair
- Explore collaboration with CNS and other college career centers for events and programming
- SSIF: What if community partnerships were encouraged or expected for funded student projects?
- Public Service Engagement Grants (PSEG) as a funding mechanism to explore

Breakout Session 2 | Small Group Discussion

GUIDING QUESTION: SES will develop a partnership development strategy for next year. What would you like to see SES provide? What programming would you be most interested in participating in?

- Simple, clear communication — net benefit to partners, not additional burden
- Being in community means understanding the needs of your community
- Clarity on what SES is offering and what additional capacity partners need
- Interns need approximately 10 hours per week of substantive work; training and work plans are essential
- Help interns develop professional and interpersonal skills
- Summer internship program for undergraduates
- Partner opt-in / application process; match partners with students
- More paid internship opportunities
- Models for faculty-community partnerships with academic sponsors
- Guidance on credit, quality criteria, and flexibility across the academic year
- Examples of student-faculty-partner agreements and learning contracts
- The SES student experiences model with clear expectations, outlined structure
- MS3 learning contract as a model
- Independent Study forms used by BCT, NRC, and Environmental Science as additional models
- UNH internship model noted as a reference
- Non-profits and smaller organizations are preferred by many students; larger organizations tend to offer more pay
- A shared master list of SES partnerships circulated across the network
- Identifying gaps: what partnerships are we missing?

Participant Information

The following were the participants for the Student Success session:

- Britt Crow-Miller, Earth, Geographic, and Climate Sciences (EGCS) / Environmental Conservation (ECo)
- Camille Barchers, Landscape Architecture & Regional Planning (LARP)
- Daniel Bensonoff, Auxiliary Enterprises / Permaculture
- Eleni Christofa, Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) / UMass Transportation Center
- Forrest J. Bowlick, EGCS / ECo
- Kristina Bezanson, ECo

- Laurie Simmons, Facilities Management Sustainability
- Lena Fletcher, ECo
- Mark Leckie, EGCS
- Monica Guzik, Auxiliary Enterprises
- Peter Dunn, LARP
- Robert Ryan, LARP
- Sarah Berquist, Stockbridge School of Agriculture
- Steven Petsch, EGCS / Environmental Sciences

Meeting Materials

The following materials were distributed or used during the Student Success session:

- May Planning Series Briefing
- SES Sign-In Sheet
- SES slides during plenary