BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR UNITY'S BRAND PURPOSE

Key Insights from Phase 1
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PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Develop a powerful vision and brand for Unity College to:

- **ELEVATE** the college to the national stage and establish its role as a leading authority in Sustainability
- **ATTRACT** the high potential students, faculty, staff and partners who can help Unity achieve its strategic goals
- **PROVIDE** a strong return on investment and command a premium in a competitive market
- **ENABLE** the school to make a significant impact in driving the sustainability movement forward
How can Unity redefine higher education to create the future leaders of the sustainability century?
WHERE WE ARE TODAY: A RECAP OF OUR PROJECT PLAN

PHASE 1: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

OBJECTIVE:
Gather the strategic inputs that will lay the foundation for our Brand Purpose: root strengths, human truths, category shifts and market needs.

KEY ACTIVITIES:
- Back-to-School Immersion
- Iterative Industry Interviews
- Campus Collaboration Session (Unity)
- Think Shop with Diane №1

OUTPUT:
- Insights Deck

PHASE 2: REDEFINING HIGHER EDUCATION

OBJECTIVE:
Leverage strategic inputs from Phase 1 to define Unity’s Brand Purpose, and articulate the strategic narrative surrounding it.

KEY ACTIVITIES:
- Reimagination Retreat
- Think Shop with Diane №2

OUTPUT:
- Unity Brand Purpose Manifesto

PHASE 3: CREATING FUTURE LEADERS

OBJECTIVE:
Activate Unity’s Brand Purpose through a unified collection of strategic opportunities and initiatives that span Unity’s brand experience.

KEY ACTIVITIES:
- Activating the Future Co-Thinking

OUTPUTS:
- Unity Brand Brief
- Activation Kit
WE GATHERED A ROBUST SET OF INTERNAL + EXTERNAL STRATEGIC INPUTS

3 days on campus

immersing ourselves in the Unity experience through:

+ 4 roundtable discussions with Students, Faculty, Staff + Chiefs
+ Auditing classes
+ Informal student chats
+ Participating in activities + clubs
+ Touring the campus + facilities

25 expert interviews

with thought leaders in:

+ Sustainability science
+ Higher education
+ Corporate sustainability
+ Non-profit/NGO space
+ Government + policy

Sample of experts:

LETITIA WEBSTER
Global Vice President, Corporate Sustainability, VF Corp

ROBERT ENGELMAN
Senior Fellow + Former President of the Worldwatch Institute

DR. MICHAEL E MANN
Distinguished Professor of Meteorology; Director, Earth System Science Center, Penn State University
...AND WORKED COLLABORATIVELY TO SYNTHESIZE KEY INSIGHTS

COMPETITIVE + INSPIRATIONAL AUDIT

7 close-in competitors

6 out-of-category brands

CAMPUS COLLABORATION SESSION

3 day synthesis
of 500+ insights with Unity students, faculty + staff

THINKSHOP WITH DIANE №1

4 hour work session
to collaboratively align on key findings
ROOT STRENGTH(S)

The core equities, attributes and beliefs that make up our organization's DNA.

A fundamental tension that defines our consumer and captures the barriers for achieving their goal.

HUMAN TRUTH

A living and flexing expression of our role in the world. It's the most aspirational statement of what we believe and stand for, grounded in the authenticity of our brand.

CATEGORY SHIFT

The driving forces impacting the categorical world in which we reside.

MARKET NEED

A point of view on the future needs of the cultural world we aim to impact.

BRAND PURPOSE

NOW WHAT / UNITY STRATEGIC BRANDING INITIATIVE / 9
EXPLORING THE FOUR QUADRANTS OF OUR BRAND
ROOT STRENGTHS

Root Strengths are the core equities, attributes and beliefs that make up the Unity brand’s DNA.
ROOT STRENGTHS
SUMMARY

Unity is a sailboat in a sea of ships: while larger institutions are weighed down by bureaucracy, Unity remains nimble. One of the school’s most defining features is its strong sense of community, charged by the deep relationships between students, faculty and staff. This commitment to people has created a culture of openness and inclusivity, demonstrated by the school’s non-conformist ethos and diverse environmental perspectives.

Unity provides an alternative to the traditional model of higher education, prioritizing experiential learning and empowering students to activate their hyper-focused passions through specific majors. A compelling differentiator for Unity is in its ability to walk the walk. The school’s authentic commitment to sustainability and fiscal integrity demonstrates how a small institution can create a significant impact as a role model.
ROOT STRENGTHS

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Nimble Size
2. Student-first mentality
3. Culture of openness
4. Alternative value set
5. Diverse environmental perspectives
6. Experiential learning
7. Specific passions, specialized majors
8. Commitment to sustainability
9. Fiscal integrity
INSIGHT 1: NIMBLE SIZE
UNITY IS A SAILBOAT, NOT A SHIP

Unity’s small size is core to the college’s identity and its role in the broader community. The school is a ‘sailboat,’ and its major advantage is its ability to adapt and pivot in an evolving market. An added benefit of being small and nimble is that it allows Unity to “pass under the radar” and avoid scrutiny while it builds a strong strategic plan for the future.

To consider: The challenge with being a ‘sailboat’ in a sea full of ‘ships’ is that it’s easy to go unnoticed. Unity must invest in awareness to gain recognition and to effectively fulfill its role model status.

“I have a high opinion of Unity. They began a movement. When you talk about influencing the world and making the world a better place, what more could you ask of a small institution like Unity in playing a giant role in getting the fossil fuel divestment movement going.”
- Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center, Pennsylvania State University

“Those smaller schools tend to be a little more nimble and flexible and can adapt a bit more quickly. These are the places where I would think I would see these faculty members serving as mentors and being active members in the community — visible leaders to their students.”
- Craig Dalen, Senior B Corps Fellow
THE AVERAGE CLASSROOM SIZE IS 15-25 STUDENTS, AFFORDING FACULTY + STAFF THE ABILITY TO TAILOR THE CURRICULUM TO STUDENT NEEDS
INSIGHT 2: STUDENT-FIRST MENTALITY
STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH
FACULTY DRIVE STUDENT SUCCESS

The supportive environment at Unity ensures that students who might fall through the cracks at a larger, ‘mainstream’ school are able to thrive and succeed. This is, in part, due to the uniquely supportive relationships between faculty and students, made possible by a low student-to-faculty ratio and extending far beyond the classroom.

To consider: Instead of making the material less challenging to bridge the gap between the academic elite and mainstream, Unity should reinvent how it approaches teaching to raise standards across the board.

“Being small allows us to develop promising students that could get lost elsewhere.”
- Unity Professor

“The faculty member’s role of a mentor becomes paramount for the student’s experience, to the degree that a faculty member can see themselves, one, as a mentor and be available and accessible to things beyond just the in the class boundary is very rich. I’ve seen students’ lives be deeply shaped by faculty members who have taken a personal interest in a student’s life.”
- Craig Dalen, Senior B Corps Fellow
INSIGHT 3: CULTURE OF OPENNESS

UNITY IS HOME TO A SPECIAL KIND OF COMMUNITY

Unity’s close-knit community and strong culture of openness and acceptance is one of the driving reasons that students and faculty choose the school. The warm atmosphere creates a ‘safe space’ where people can take risks and be true to themselves.

To consider: The insularity of the community may shield students from real world realities. It will be important to find ways to replicate this sense of community, while giving students an opportunity to experience an expanded perspective (e.g., through Unity Outposts).

“I never felt like I could get lost here. I didn’t think I could get that guidance anywhere else. My career counselor sends me personalized emails. My advisor cooks us dinner and lets us walk his dogs.”

- Unity Student

“We’re a tight-knit family.”

- Unity Student

“We’re a special kind of strange. You find your niche here.”

- Unity Staff Member
THE UNITY TALENT SHOW HIGHLIGHTED THE SUPPORTIVE NATURE OF THE SCHOOL’S COMMUNITY
INSIGHT 4: ALTERNATIVE VALUE SET

UNITY’S CULTURE IS ROOTED IN ALTERNATIVE VALUES

Unity creates a safe haven for likeminded individuals who see the world differently than the mainstream. Unity students and employees are not driven by financial success or status, sharing an alternative set of beliefs and values. For example, they prioritize personal fulfillment over financial success and the wellbeing of the community over individual achievement.

To consider: While the green economy is often pigeonholed as a grassroots movement with low-paying jobs, Unity must disillusion these stereotypes, showing the power that corporations can have for good and the valuable careers the green economy can provide.

“By our very nature and mission, we attract a student who has a sincere passion and desire to contribute. They’re more caring and less self-centered than students elsewhere. Other students are looking for high paying jobs and that’s their motivation.”

- Unity Professor

“Unity is eclectic. You don’t have to fit the mold. You can build your own mold.”

- Unity Student

“Unity students are progressives who are against mainstream, competitive society. This is a very important characteristic in our students.”

- Unity Professor
A Unity Professor Depicts the Way the School Protects Its Alternative Values from the Mainstream
INSIGHT 5: DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES
INCLUSIVE PERSPECTIVES ARE CELEBRATED

The bipartisan spread of Unity’s majors has created a culture that fosters a range of environmental perspectives and dialogue absent at most sustainability programs. In this way, Unity can play a powerful role as a convener of the conversation.

To consider: Unity is rich in diverse environmental perspectives, but to truly deliver on inclusivity it needs to enhance diversity in the traditional sense as well.

“Unity 360 degrees— students are hunters or huggers. We represent all political parties.”
- Unity Staff Member

“The sheer range of people from totally different backgrounds is amazing. But everyone gets along. You find common ground. It prepares you for the real world.”
- Unity Professor
INSIGHT 6: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
UNITY PRIORITIZES HANDS-ON, REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

Experiential learning is core to Unity’s pedagogical philosophy. ‘Hands on’ experiences are a compelling draw for outdoor-loving prospects looking for a non-traditional college experience, where they can bridge ideas learned in the classroom with experiences in the field.

To consider: As many schools tout their focus on experiential learning, Unity should lead the next evolution — ‘Experiential Learning 2.0’ — going beyond the outdoors to infuse the social and economic elements of sustainability into the experience.

“Professor Kevin Spiegel demonstrates the real meaning of experiential. I’ve seen expo markers used on the side of a van. We had water coming up to our knees.”
- Unity Student

“Experiential learning is really good. You’re giving students the proper intellectual framework and scaffolding, and then creating an environment in which they can mobilize that and test that out in a low risk sort of environment.”
- Craig Dalen, Senior B Corps Fellow
INSIGHT 7: SPECIALIZED MAJORS
THE DEPTH OF UNITY’S MAJORS HEIGHTENS THE DEGREE OF PASSION

As a result of its 16 environmentally-focused majors, Unity attracts a certain kind of student: students who have a desire to make a positive impact on the world through specific passions they’ve discovered early in life. Unity majors tend to be pre-professional and are appealing to students who are looking for a college experience with a tangible career path. This depth-over-breadth helps to foster a culture of purpose-driven students.

To consider: As is, the specificity of majors present a recruitment challenge because most high school students don’t know what they want to do with their lives yet. However, the level of specificity can also be an opportunity if Unity is smart about tapping into the right niche for each major (e.g., environmental high schools).

“I enjoy that the majors are more specific, because it means people are more passionate. Eighty-percent of students know where they want to work and what they want to do. This is what makes Unity, Unity.”

- Unity Student

“We only have 16 majors—that means everyone is really passionate about what they do.”

–Unity Student

“All the majors we have here are meaningful; they’re all related to the greater good.”

–Unity Student
MARINE JOB BOARDS, BROKEN DOWN BY SPECIFIC SPECIES
INSIGHT 8: COMMITMENT TO SUSTAINABILITY

UNITY STRIVES FOR OPERATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Unity is differentiated in its ability to ‘talk the talk’ and ‘walk the walk,’ striving to deliver on its sustainability mission through a dual curriculum/operations approach. This commitment positions Unity as a model of sustainability excellence within the world of higher education.

To consider: As Unity is on the path to total sustainability, it will be important to use the right tone and language to signal authenticity and avoid the “imposter syndrome.”

“The sustainability practices of the school are important. We’re committed here. We go camping instead of drinking. We’re here for the greater good.”

- Unity Student

“Unity practices and teaches sustainability. Other schools aren’t walking the walk.”

- Unity Professor

“Unity is a working experiment in sustainability economics. We can show the world that a campus can be sustainable. ‘Don’t tell me, show me.”

- Unity Professor
INSIGHT 9: FISCAL INTEGRITY

FISCAL INTEGRITY HIGHLIGHTS

UNITY’S RESILIENCE

As the entire higher education landscape, and especially smaller colleges, struggle to stay afloat in the current economy, Unity has weathered the storm through responsible management decisions and a spirit of frugality that further underlines the sustainable practices of the college. Now the college has an opportunity to shift from a cost-reduction to a growth mindset.

To consider: As Unity shifts to a positive ROI mindset and looks to new and non-traditional sources of revenue, there may be an opportunity to leverage the school’s financial model as a differentiator and to lead by example.

“We’re doing way better than our peers - kicking their butts in finance and enrollment.”
- Unity Chief Faculty Member

“I want to be the school that figures out how to do finances differently. I want Unity to be cheaper for students.”
- Unity Professor

“They are tuition dependent. So they have some very serious questions to ask. How many students do they need in order to be viable? How many students do they need in order to grow?”
- Mark Alter, Professor of Educational Psychology Programs in Special Education at NYU; Unity ‘69
Unity IS:
(Think about our people, culture, community, majors, etc.)
- A working experiment in sustainability economics
- Pedagogically excellent
- Immersive environmental community

Unity ISN'T:
(Think about the things that make us different from other colleges and universities in Maine and nationally)
- Prestigious
- Pretentious
- Part of the main competitive sphere
- We don't yet have enough smart students

UNITY'S ROLE AS A "WORKING EXPERIMENT IN SUSTAINABILITY ECONOMICS"
Human Truths are the fundamental tensions that define our audience and capture the barriers for achieving their goals.
HUMAN TRUTHS
SUMMARY

Today's college students operate based on an evolved set of ideals and ambitions. Their definition of success — both during college and in their broader life — is changing. They're driven by an innate desire to align themselves with a bigger purpose. Students expect their entire college experience to be filled with valuable learnings, growth opportunities, and moments of impact.

While the end goal — a degree — is important, the journey to get there is critical in its own right. For students looking to thrive, experiencing breakthrough moments during their college journey is imperative. These moments catalyze a lifelong passion and expand perspectives, shaping students into engaged citizens with the tools to rally others behind their ideas.
HUMAN TRUTHS
KEY INSIGHTS

1. Success is changing
2. Students seek purpose
3. Impact can’t wait
4. Breakthrough moments drive change
5. Real-world momentum
6. Colleges can shape morality
7. Leadership requires expanded perspectives
8. Hard sciences need to get soft
INSIGHT 1: SUCCESS IS CHANGING
TODAY’S GENERATION OPERATES ON A DIFFERENT METRIC OF SUCCESS

Definitions of success are changing as students put less emphasis on profit and more on purpose. A new version of success prioritizes the wellbeing of people and the planet; there’s now a triple bottom line to keep in mind. Students don’t want a job, they want a purpose-driven and impact-led career.

To consider: Colleges must respond to this reinterpretation of success by reevaluating their own metrics of success. Recognizing the team effort needed to combat the complexities of environmental issues, colleges must also learn to measure success using multidimensional, rather than linear, metrics.

“I want to love the job that I have. I might not make a lot of money, but this is my passion. Millennials are returning to the hippie generation.”

- Unity Student

“The regular bottom line is purely profit, financial metrics alone. The quadruple bottom line is this idea that social, environmental, cultural and financial are all equal.”

- Michael Kramer, Managing Partner, Natural Investments
In today’s world, students and faculty alike value environmental sustainability over making money.
INSIGHT 2: SEEKING A PURPOSE
TODAY'S STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING BIGGER

High school graduates are at an ambitious point in their life, drawn to purpose-driven people and organizations. Because students have their own set of lofty goals and ambitions, aligning themselves with a pre-existing change agent (person or organization) increases their confidence and ability to achieve their goals.

To consider: Colleges need to take a multi-scalar approach in imparting a sense of purpose in their experience; all courses, majors, clubs and administrative departments benefit from being tied to real-world issues and adopting a clear focus.

“I think kids want to make a difference. And the ones that don’t are very few and far between, and they want to be involved in practical things. One of the great things is it’s not liberal or conservative. It’s just forward.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment

“Younger folks are concerned with the world that they’re inheriting. They can envision a role for themselves in making it better and they want to work for or study at institutions that pursue societal good and value while pursuing its profits or an education. There is a deep sense that students want to be a part of the solution.”
- Craig Dalen, Senior B Corps Fellow
Because students choose their major based on their passion, their engagement with the subject matter extends beyond the classroom.
INSIGHT 3: IMPACT CAN’T WAIT
STUDENTS EXPECT COLLEGES TO SERVE AS VEHICLES FOR ACTION

Students view the college experience itself, not just the degree they receive upon graduating, as a vehicle to create change. They believe that making real world impacts during their time at school is as intrinsic to their education as the curriculum itself. It allows them to put into practice and refine their change-making skills.

To consider: Schools that provide opportunities for students to effect change and tangibly experience the impact they can have early on in their college careers will only promote more impact from them down the road.

“When students begin to understand the science of climate change, the lack of policy responses, and how the world is operating currently, they have two responses: one, they either get really angry, and then they really, really want to become activists; or they get really curious and they want to understand what they can do within their own discipline.”
- Robert Forbis, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University

“Higher ed is changing and students don't want to wait until they graduate to have an impact. They want to see these ideas in practice and learn from people that are doing it. And so I think you’re seeing the first iteration of taking the ideas out of the classroom.”
- Craig Dalen, Senior B Corps Fellow
FFA PRESIDENT REQUESTING FUNDS TO SUPPORT THE ORGANIZATION’S VOLUNTEERING EFFORT: “TO ASSIST WITH WINTER CLEAN UP AND GAIN EXPERIENCE CARING FOR ANIMALS”
INSIGHT 4: BREAKTHROUGHS MOMENTS
DRIVE CHANGE
CATALYTIC ENVIRONMENTS CAN
CREATE BREAKTHROUGH MOMENTS

Breakthrough moments shift perspective and trigger lifelong purpose and drive by prompting the confrontation or questioning of new or existing paradigms. A catalytic environment that encourages curiosity and creative problem-solving—both in and out of the classroom—provides the best opportunity to encounter these moments. Occasions and expectations of thought stimulation foster a chance for students to devise their own outlooks and motivations.

To consider: Creating a catalytic environment that induces breakthrough moments means not only creating tangibles—specifically purposed courses and exercises—but also instilling a set of values and intangible practices.

"[Wilderness trips are] a great way to foster introspection, and to develop leadership. Because when you’re out there, you’re disconnected from the world. You’re very reliant on the people around you, and there’s a lot of quiet. With skilled leadership, you can have people guide your thoughts to, ‘what is it like not to have your cell phone?’”
- Danny Richter, Legislative and Science Director, Citizens’ Climate Lobby

“The student has to have some idea of who they are as a person. That sense of self-discovery that higher education can help to foster.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment
INSIGHT 5: REAL WORLD MOMENTUM
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROVIDES MOTIVATION AND OPTIMISM

The large-scale implications and immense effort needed to fight climate change can be daunting; real progress is rare and the fight must continue indefinitely. However, through hands-on experiences, students are forced to confront the idea of change head on and put into practice methods of longterm, systemic change. Experiential learning—and the palpable experience garnered from it—begets a stronger sense of possibility and the optimism that progress can be made.

To consider: While ‘problem-solving’ traditionally implies a finite endpoint, unceasing, complex issues like the environmental crisis must be approached differently. The discourse around fighting climate change must shift to encapsulate the indefinite and ever-changing effort needed to ‘solve’ it.

“Students become engaged when they see their work is being used. For example, if their data is being used by the state. Someone is taking their work seriously.”
- Unity Professor

“Students need to understand the science behind climate change and species extinction, but as they learn the truth about the current state of the world, they raise the anxiety level. To dispel that in productive ways, we need to engage them in doing something that’s making the world different. It gives them something positive to do about situations that otherwise appear abstract and hopeless.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment
In a world [where of] change, crisis, wonder, Unity believes in creating fearless problem-solvers and adapts to.

Unity makes the world a better place because we embrace change with clear-eyed hope, optimism and teach others to do the same.

Students understand the importance of a positive attitude in making large-scale change

and to make it happen.
INSIGHT 6: COLLEGES CAN SHAPE MORALITY
COLLEGE IS WHEN LIFELONG MINDSETS AND BELIEFS ARE SHAPED

While a degree is the tangible product of a college experience, the most valuable output for students is a well rounded perspective. At a malleable point in their lives, college students look to pull inspiration from the people and places they encounter. Institutions of higher education have the opportunity to instill a set of morals and system perspectives with an ROI greater than any degree.

To consider: Colleges have an opportunity to incorporate intangible perspectives gained as a part of the value of an education beyond traditional academia.

“We get a degree after 4 years, but learning is a lifelong process. One of the outcomes of higher education ought to be a lifelong commitment to learning and curiosity.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment

“Younger people have a natural way of looking at the world, rather than the sort of artificial, consumptive way of looking at it. I think that this awareness and social judgment is having a subtle yet important effect on the younger generations and how they view themselves and their relationship to the world.”
- Tim Nixon, Managing Editor, Sustainability, Reuters
INSIGHT 7: LEADERSHIP REQUIRES EXPANDED PERSPECTIVES
SYSTEMS THINKING SHAPES FUTURE LEaders

In order to become an effective leader, a breakthrough moment of self-realization is needed. When one recognizes the bigger system in which they reside, their perspective expands and they are able to understand the systemic implications of their decisions and behaviors. Without an expanded view, one is only able to imagine as far as their (often limited) reality reaches, impairing their ability to lead.

To consider: Colleges must define the values of an engaged and responsible leader in order to foster their development. Such qualities to consider are: respect, heterodoxy, commitment, authenticity and purpose.

“At Unity, there’s an emphasis on discovery and personal growth. You know who you are and what you believe in.”
- Unity Student

“What is my relationship with the world? What does leadership look like within that frame? There is a similar model around maturity in sustainability and, from a personal perspective, your relationship philosophically and existentially with the world. There’s a whole body of thinking and work that helps prepare somebody to become a leader, that could be done in a university context.”
- Tim Nixon, Managing Editor, Sustainability, Reuters
INSIGHT 8: HARD SCIENCES GET SOFT COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE AN IMPERATIVE FOR AFFECTING CHANGE

While students aspire to make change, they must be equipped with the knowledge and skills of how to do so. Hard sciences provide definitive proof and substantiate calls to action, but without acknowledging social implications or using a more accessible delivery via the social sciences, this knowledge can fail to attract followers. Only a true blending of these schools of thought—and the comprehensive view it precipitates—can effect change.

To consider: Colleges need to not only support the scientific endeavors of its students and faculty, but also ensure that their discoveries are conveyed in an effective way to induce impactful change.

“Academics forget what they know. They use terms and they speak in ways that nobody understands, and there’s a disconnect. So, I would say that that is number one. What academia could do better is making sure they don’t forget how to speak to normal people.”
- Danny Richter, Legislative and Science Director, Citizens’ Climate Lobby

“It’s become even more important than it was in the past to effectively communicate. I think in today’s world it’s critical and we need to devote some resources to that. Every student has to take a course that is about science communication.”
- Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center, The Pennsylvania State University
Category shifts are the driving forces impacting the categorical worlds in which we reside—sustainability and higher education.
CATEGOR Y SHIFTS
SUMMARY

With a degree no longer ensuring a job upon graduation, the ROI of higher education is coming into question, forcing both large and small institutions to rethink their financial models. Innovative institutions are standing out and creating value by grounding all efforts in a carefully honed purpose. By focusing on a speciality, schools are able to direct their intentions to yield a greater impact within a set of defined parameters.

Rather than being all things to all people, these institutions are developing partnerships with complementary institutions - other schools, their local community, and external organizations. These partnerships are critical, as sustainability solutions necessitate an interdisciplinary approach. As a central member of society, institutions of higher education have a unique opportunity to convene the conversations that initiate change.
1. Questioning the ROI
2. Rethinking finances
3. The advantage of specialization
4. Indispensable rigor
5. The value of partners
6. External engagements
7. Interdisciplinary learning
8. The role of convening
INSIGHT 1: QUESTIONING THE ROI
THE MODEL OF HIGHER EDUCATION
IS BEING QUESTIONED

Conventional models of higher education equate credits earned and number grades to competency, perpetuating a factory model of education that ultimately leaves students unprepared for the reality of the real world. To truly set students up for success, schools must teach them how to fail—thinking outside a contained and safe ‘bubble.’ By failing, students learn how to pivot, adapt and change rather than how to memorize answers.

To consider: A college that encourages failure and subsequently prioritizes personal and professional growth not only provides valuable skills to their students, but also sets itself apart from its conventional counterparts.

“First of all, millennials need to fail, more so than anything. They need to fail when they’re in an academic environment and it’s safe, so that when they fail once they’ve graduated, it’s not as devastating.”
- Melissa Bilec, Assistant Director for Education and Outreach: Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation, University of Pittsburgh

“Credit hours prove that students can sit in a class long enough, then pass a test and then probably flush their knowledge away. We should advance students not by the time they spend in classes or by the credit that they amass, but by the skills they’re able to demonstrate.”
- Conor Williams, Senior Researcher in New America’s Education Policy Program
INSIGHT 2: RETHINKING FINANCES
COMBATTING THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF HIGHER EDUCATION

While the steep cost of a college education inhibits many capable students from ever attending college, many of those that do attend are faced with financial repercussions years after they graduate. The recent flux in online college degrees offers opportunity for less expensive—and thus more inclusive—education, though at the cost of in-person, interdisciplinary social benefits.

To consider: Higher education must recognize and respond to the full extent of its fiscal impact on students and potential students, providing opportunities for students of all backgrounds to grow into change makers.

“I think a lot of people are talking about the cost of college and student loan debt burdens. The cost and the number of universities and colleges have gone up remarkably in the last twenty or thirty years. Some people think that it’s been a big Ponzi scheme.”
- Andrew Russo, Creator of This Week in Education Blog

“I would want Unity to break the higher educational financial trap so that students could choose to come here for the right reasons and leave with the freedom and tools to do great things.”
- Unity Chief Staff Member
Think about and try to answer the following questions:

+ What would and wouldn’t you want Unity to stand for?
+ What would you want Unity to accomplish?
+ What would make you happiest?
+ What elements of Unity would you keep vs. shed vs. invent? Think about what’s working and what’s not working — it can

THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF HIGHER ED PUTS ADDED PRESSURE ON STUDENTS, HINDERING THEIR ABILITY TO FOCUS
INSIGHT 3: THE ADVANTAGE OF SPECIALIZATION

LEVERAGING A SPECIALITY TO STAND OUT AND ATTRACT CRAFTSMEN

In today’s world, there is increased competition, compelling a need to become more niche. Using a specific topic—like sustainability—as a lens for an entire institution attracts master craftsmen. By focusing on a singular cause or subject, specialized institutions can create efficiency; there’s no need to waste resources or time trying to ‘boil the ocean.’

To consider: The advantages of specialization should be balanced with the paradoxical need for interdisciplinary discourse, which can be achieved through smart partnerships.

“I wouldn’t take a shotgun approach, but I would take a laser approach and become the best at that, whatever that is. So, where environmental ed is one program in my department, at Unity, it’s a whole college. Unity is not competing with NYU. And shouldn’t have to. Two very different places.”
- Mark Alter, Professor of Educational Psychology Programs in Special Education at NYU; Unity ’69

“In the Midwest where the states at the university level are competing with one another, it would be more efficient to have universities specialize and then share the expertise in common, rather than having 6 or 8 or 10 or 12 different English departments that are all doing similar things and duplicating effort quite a bit.”
- Conor Williams, Senior Researcher in New America’s Education Policy Program
UNITY’S PELLET MACHINE IS ONE EXAMPLE OF THE COLLEGE’S AMBITION AND COMMITMENT TO FOSTER A LASER FOCUSED SUSTAINABILITY EFFORT
INSIGHT 4: INDISPENSABLE RIGOR
SOLVING POWERFUL PROBLEMS
REQUIRES INTENSIVE FOCUS

The severity of the climate change and its related challenges requires a serious and disciplined approach to higher education, if students are to be equipped with the knowledge, skill and attitude to “fight” these crises. This may require a more structured curriculum with more requirements, which in turn demands a dedicated student body.

To consider: Higher education must carefully balance the need to ask for a stronger commitment from students, while ensuring the school is presented in an appealing way to potential applicants.

“The purpose of higher education should be survival now. We need to figure out how this species can thrive, and survive in this uncertain, ambiguous and volatile era. If we’re not careful, it will be the last era of human civilization. I’d like to see education really be transformative and focus on solving these problems.”
- Michael Kramer, Managing Partner, Natural Investments

“I’m a little bit conservative that way, and I think you have the urgency of a sustainability crisis, we’re going to need more required courses.”
- Robert Engelman, Senior Fellow, Worldwatch Institute
WHILE NOT ROOTED IN ACADEMIA, THE WOODSMEN CLUB MOTTO PERFECTLY CAPTURES THIS SUBCULTURE’S COMMITMENT: “THE MORE YOU SWEAT IN TRAINING, THE LESS YOU BLEED IN BATTLE.”
INSIGHT 5: THE VALUE OF PARTNERS
TEAMING UP WITH OTHER HIGHER ED INSTITUTIONS CREATES EFFICIENCY

No school can be all things to all people. Rather than attempting a ‘jack of all trades’ curriculum, individual institutions can and should partner with each other. This type of partnership would create networks of mastery with each institution bringing their own differentiated specialties and supplementing each other’s shortcomings, complimenting rather than competing with one another.

To consider: Complementary relationships between institutions of higher education have the potential to cause peer-driven, rather than top-down, motivation for faculty.

“When you have multi-university collaborations, it’s when one university doesn’t have a skill and the other university has the skill, and you can complement that. We have an architectural study school but we don’t have a design school. If we want to do some architectural design, I would collaborate with Carnegie-Mellon University because they have a School of Architecture Design.”
- Melissa Bilec, Assistant Director for Education and Outreach: Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation, University of Pittsburg

“Prescott had set up some good exchange programs with inner cities, where students who were studying things like engineering could come and take a semester or an entire year at Prescott College to get experience doing field studies in biology. Those kinds of relationships between small schools and big universities might be very, very fruitful.”
- Alan Weisman, Author of The World Without Us and Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth?
INSIGHT 6: EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENTS
CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS APPLY EXPERIENCE

Experience working outside the university’s ‘bubble’ lets students create tangible outcomes that translate directly to the working world. Solving the problems of real companies and local communities allows students to graduate with a portfolio of work. Colleges must leverage and instill porous boundaries between themselves and their neighbors (geographic + metaphorical) to foster meaningful relationships and provide opportunities for tangible, experiential impact.

To consider: While all external partnerships can create valuable experiences for students, colleges must be strategic and mindful with the partnerships they foster. Local and small-scale partnerships are important to maintain, but can be limiting in their return value. A school that wants to grow and become more impactful must adopt partnerships that help make their vision a reality.

“Academia has given too little weight to public and community outreach. It’s not just about studying and teaching, but finding a way to take knowledge and apply it, helping society solve outstanding problems.”
- Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center, The Pennsylvania State University

“At Harvey Mudd they have computer science projects that they get companies to sponsor. The companies have a problem they want to solve and give the college some money for the students to be able to solve this problem. Students have no obligation of delivering anything, but the companies really like it. They usually make job offers to 40% of the students who participate in their cohort.”
- Daniel Mosse, Professor of Computer Science, University of Pittsburgh
THE MCKAY FARM IS A PROOF POINT OF THE EXPERIENTIAL, ‘REAL WORLD’ LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AT UNITY
INSIGHT 7: INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

SOLVING SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES REQUIRES THOUGHT FROM ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Higher education is undergoing a transformation—shifting from a linear to multidisciplinary curriculum. Relinquishing discipline-focused departments for ones oriented around solutions to real-world problems bestows students with a sense of purpose and empowerment and allows for collaborative, cross-functional work.

To consider: Across mediums and industries, conventional methods of organization are being revisited and challenged. Colleges must adapt to and learn from this changing design by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to how they organize themselves, encouraging the blending of people, ideas and backgrounds.

“Break down the barriers between the departments. Human society is part of ecology and having students understand that in order to preserve nature they need to understand economic and political science. They need to become good writers and good communicators.”
- Alan Weisman, Author of The World Without Us and Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth?

“The old way of higher education being siloed into academic specialties is inadequate. It doesn’t really match the circumstances of today. It really needs to be done in a holistic, interdisciplinary way. It should be organized around answering certain questions, as opposed to having departments of different subjects. That’s the only way you’re going to get an interdisciplinary response.”
- Michael Kramer, Managing Partner, Natural Investments
INSIGHT 8: THE ROLE OF CONVENING
HIGHER ED INSTITUTIONS HAVE A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO BRING MULTIPLE PARTIES TO THE TABLE

While drawing knowledge from multiple schools of thought is key in creating change, the process of knowing which to draw from and how to facilitate conversation between them is just as (if not more) important than the knowledge itself. To make progress against environmental threats, students must have a full understanding of not just sustainability, but of sustainability science: the expertise in bringing the social, environmental and economic landscapes together.

To consider: Colleges must arm students with the critical knowledge in all three sustainability territories—social, environmental and economic—and then provide opportunities for students to blend them together.

“Understanding how things connect to each other is the best way to go. You’ve got a wallet. Where does the leather in this wallet come from? Where does the plastic come from? Tracing and connecting how those things got to their pockets. For example, plastic comes from oil, and I don’t think that that is something that most people understand.”
- Danny Richter, Legislative and Science Director, Citizens Climate Lobby

“Universities have a huge responsibility in addressing the interdisciplinary nature of the problem. The science of climate change isn’t simply the science of climate change, it’s the technologies and policy interventions that we need to address these things. Arming students with the ability to communicate across disciplines is a huge role for universities to play.”
- Robert Forbis, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University.
UNITY LIES AT THE INTERSECTION OF THE THREE COMPONENTS OF SUSTAINABILITY
Market Needs represent a point of view on the future needs of the cultural world we aim to impact.
MARKET NEEDS

SUMMARY

Sustainability challenges can't be solved in isolation — they require collaboration. Higher education needs to arm graduates with the social intelligence driving this new era of leadership, where connection trumps competition and people are valued over power. The market needs leaders with an automatic reflex for seeking the truth, and armed with the tools to make things happen.

To create the paradigm shift where sustainability becomes the “new normal,” graduates will need to influence critical decisions at the source. Soon, a strong understanding of sustainability will be the cost of entry for applicants, as sustainability becomes a business imperative. The next generation of sustainability leaders can tip the scales through incremental progress, but will require the moral fiber and sense of purpose to overcome the barriers that will stand in their way.
MARKET NEEDS

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Collaborators
2. Connectors
3. Truth seekers
4. Doers
5. Influencers
6. Ninjas
7. Sustainability experts
8. Compassionate intellectuals
INSIGHT 1: COLLABORATORS
SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES AREN’T SOLVED IN ISOLATION

Solo individuals will not solve sustainability challenges. These challenges will require team-based collaboration. Students should be in touch with their own strengths and weaknesses as a team member and adept at navigating group dynamics and a range of perspectives and cultures.

To consider: Colleges have the opportunity to engage both the art and science communities in an effort to blend different disciplines and perspectives, positioning their graduates as collaborators.

“I think we’re giving up on the idea that producing individuals who can solve a problem on their own, in favor of creating individuals who bring a lot of skills to the table and can work together.”
- Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center, The Pennsylvania State University

“You want someone who can work on a team. You want somebody that’s creative and flexible and you want somebody who understands some of the core content and how to find out what they don’t know.”
- Judy Braus, Executive Director North American Association for Environmental Education
INSIGHT 2: CONNECTORS
GRADUATES MUST BE CONNECTORS OF DISPARATE IDEAS AND DISCIPLINES

Higher education’s traditional model of shaping experts within a specific area does not align with the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability challenges. We need to cultivate students who are systems-thinkers, able to pull from and make connections across different disciplines to approach problems from a holistic perspective.

To consider: As Unity thinks about its role as a ‘convener,’ it should consider the types of events and programs (e.g., ‘Meeting of the Minds’ conference) to shape these ‘connector’ skills.

“We’re going to train students in the future to communicate across disciplines. Scientists don’t speak policy language, and the policy people don’t really speak science. It’s trying to figure out how you can cross or bridge that divide.”
- Robert Forbis, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University

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- Robert Forbis, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University

“Being able to navigate across different leadership styles, leadership levels, that’s really important. So individuals who understand and can work within and across organizational structure is really crucial because you have to be able to navigate that to really succeed.”
- Letitia Webster, Global Vice President, Corporate Sustainability, VF Corp
The Woodsmen Club at Unity helps students develop leadership skills and learn to work in a team.
INSIGHT 3: TRUTH SEEKERS
COLLEGES SHOULD DEVELOP AUTONOMOUS TRUTH-SEEKERS

The volume and velocity of information today make it increasingly difficult to make informed decisions. The need for strong critical thinking and analytical skills is more relevant than ever before. Higher education needs to develop students into truth-seekers who can ‘navigate the grey’ and think independently of the traditional models and sources of knowledge.

To consider: Terms like ‘critical thinking’ and ‘analytical skills’ are so overused that they’ve lost their meaning. To stand out from higher education’s trite jargon, Unity can develop a new set of impactful terminology.

“Nobody wakes up and wants to destroy something in the world, to ruin something. You wake up wanting to do good, the question is whether you have the discernment to know what the good is.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment

“Any organization today requires people who are critical thinkers ... who don’t think everything sounds like a great idea. Jobs today require people to understand all the different perspectives that could weigh in. And to do that, you have to train students not just in simplistic formulas, but in breaking apart and unpacking really complex problems. They’re understanding context.”
- Ana Baptista, Associate Director of TEDC and Interim Chair of EPSM, The New School
INSIGHT 4: DOERS
TRAINED DOERS CAN ACHIEVE REAL-WORLD IMPACT

Millennials are criticized for lacking the hard skills that are most effective in the real world and many feel the current model of higher education is to blame. The urgency of the world’s sustainability crisis demands students who are trained to be both thinkers and doers with an understanding of how to balance public and private interests.

To consider: As many schools aim to give students real world experiences, Unity should develop a unique perspective on how these opportunities are curated and delivered (e.g., how the school partners with public and private organizations and embeds these experiences within the curriculum).

“Civic engagement needs to be part of everybody’s education: how do you get involved in the civic process? Or the political process?”
- Judy Braus, Executive Director
North American Association for Environmental Education

“Today, the younger generation is less impressed by a prestigious institution and much more interested in what you can do, what you know, how good you are at doing your perspective job. I think that that’s changed. I think things are different from the way they were.”
- Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center, The Pennsylvania State University
In a world [where/of] change is the only constant,
Unity believes we need leaders who are constructive in the face of change.
Unity makes the world a better place because we 
tackle challenges from the lens of sustainability.

Our mission is to create capacities for constructiveness.

UNITY CHIEFS EASILY ARTICULATE THE BELIEF THAT THE WORLD “NEEDS LEADERS WHO ARE CONSTRUCTIVE IN THE FACE OF CHANGE”
INSIGHT 5: INFLUENCERS
AFFECTING WIDE-SPREAD CHANGE
WILL REQUIRE EXPERT INFLUENCERS

Sustainability science is great at identifying issues and giving rational support, but it lacks the social momentum to drive large-scale change. The sustainability movement needs leaders with the interpersonal and communication skills required to both influence and persuade. True impact is achieved by shifting mindsets, behaviors and policies.

To consider: Leadership and communications training and an emphasis on the social sciences will be important in developing these skills.

“Communication is sort of a big one. I think many students come out of college not being able to communicate as eloquently and intelligently as maybe they could or should be able to.”
- Mark Orlowski, Founder & Executive Director, Sustainable Endowments Institute, a Special Project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors

“Communication training has to be embedded throughout the curriculum in a thoughtful manner because you need to be able to communicate your ideas and you need to be able to sell those ideas in order to be leaders in the field.”
- Melissa Bilec, Assistant Director for Education and Outreach: Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation, University of Pittsburg
INSIGHT 6: NINJAS
SUSTAINABILITY ‘NINJAS’ CAN INFILTRATE SYSTEMS OF POWER

In order to achieve systemic impact, we need to embed graduates who have a strong sustainability perspective into influential organizations across various industries. To set these sustainability “ninjas” up for success, graduates should be trained on how to affect change from the inside out. Students should be encouraged to join the ‘corporate world’ where their impact can scale and create a chain reaction.

To consider: Unity should be thoughtful in how it messages around the opportunity to create an impact vis-a-vis the corporate world to attract the right partners without isolating NGOs and non-profits.

“I also want these people to get into major corporations, and to fight the fight and get into the belly of the beast. That’s what I do for a living. I try to change these big, huge, powerful, wealthy companies. That’s the game changer.”
- Michael Kramer, Managing Partner, Natural Investments

“So, we need a whole new generation of educators to get into positions of authority in companies. To become professors. To become policy makers, and run for office, I see all these people graduating from these green programs starting B Corps. They are making it a part of the DNA from the moment they begin.”
- Craig Dalen, Senior B Corps Fellow
THERE'S AN AMBITION FOR UNITY TO “INTENTIONALLY TRAIN STUDENTS TO BE CONSTRUCTIVE LEADERS—TO CHANGE THEIR ORGANIZATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT”
INSIGHT 7: SUSTAINABILITY EXPERTS CORPS ARE STARTING TO DEMAND SUSTAINABILITY-SAVVY CANDIDATES

The corporate world is starting to realize that sustainability is not just about compliance, but rather a driver of growth and innovation. The need to arm students of all majors at all institutions with the proper understanding of sustainability challenges is becoming a universal truth, reshaping the standards for graduates. In this way, sustainability should become a core requirement, alongside the sciences and humanities, that all students must demonstrate competency in.

To consider: Unity needs to emphasize that money and passion aren’t mutually exclusive to encourage graduates to consider corporate sustainability as a potential career path—and fighting the misconception that there aren’t high paying ‘green’ jobs.

“That broad-based untapped market is ripe for students with college degrees infused with sustainability. These students are, quite frankly, far more competitive than a student that comes out with a traditional degree in their discipline.”
- Robert Forbis, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University.

“That broad-based untapped market is ripe for students with college degrees infused with sustainability. These students are, quite frankly, far more competitive than a student that comes out with a traditional degree in their discipline.”
- Robert Forbis, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University.

“Within undergraduate education, I don’t think there’s enough focus on those hard sustainability-related skills. Students have to be able to understand and see patterns. They have to be able to see the seams. They have to be able to go in and do some research and come back with some insights.”
- Letitia Webster, Global Vice President, Corporate Sustainability, VF Corp
In a world [where/of] every enterprise needs to be sustainable, Unity believes students need to graduate having mastered comprehensive/holistic and specialized skills that will enable them to be successful leaders.

Unity makes the world a better place because we offer personal attention to students, partnerships focused on change agents, and creative thinking to make it happen.
INSIGHT 8: COMPASSIONATE INTELLECTUALS

INTELLECTUALS WILL NEED COMPASSION TO PERSEVERE

The sustainability movement doesn’t need more intelligent and highly educated graduates. What it needs is a wave of intelligent and highly educated graduates instilled with a sense of compassion and moral obligation. This is key to encouraging high potential graduates to pursue purpose-driven and sustainability-oriented career paths, while providing them with the strength to stay the course when things get difficult.

To consider: Most colleges strive to develop well-rounded citizens, but the activities + experiences that contribute to this are not concretely defined or integrated into the curriculum. Unity has an opportunity to develop a leading POV on shaping purpose-driven graduates.

“I can find a whole lot of kids where there’s a lot of synaptic activity of the brain but hardly a twitch of compassion in the heart. And the educational process needs to balance that sense of compassion in the world.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment

“One of the biggest responsibilities of a university and the role that they could play is being a real force for social justice and for ethical action in whatever field we’re working in. I see a very dystopian future if all we’re doing is pushing out robots that know how to do great technical things but without any moral compass for why they’re doing it.”
- Ana Baptista, Associate Director of TEDC and Interim Chair of EPSM, The New School
COMPETITIVE AUDIT
WHO WE LOOKED AT - CLOSE-IN COMPETITORS

College of the Atlantic - Bar Harbor, ME

Evergreen State College - Olympia, WA

Green Mountain College - Poultney, VT

Hampshire College - Amherst, MA

Paul Smith's College – Paul Smiths, NY

Prescott College - Prescott, AZ

Warren Wilson - Swannanao, NC
MANY OF UNITY’S UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES ARE ALSO CLAIMED BY COMPETITORS

MESSAGING THEMES ACROSS THE COMPETITIVE SET

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MOST ARE MESSAGING AROUND EXPERIENTIAL, EXPERIMENTAL + INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

+ These terms have become buzzwords in the industry and risk losing their meaning; Unity has an opportunity to find a new way of articulating the value of these benefits and the way they’re delivered.

+ Many of these schools have adopted a non-conformist POV and position themselves as disruptors, but are not always connecting the dots; As Unity seeks to reinvent higher ed, it should be clear about how the school is strategically designed to create future sustainability leaders.

Offering experiential learning that helps to fulfill and enhance the educational mission of the College.

hands-on learning comes to life.

defined as a pioneering, even radical experiment in higher education

Experience is the best teacher. All Prescott College programs include lots of doing. Hampshire helped invent the notion of interdisciplinary education, based on the idea that questions and issues are best examined from multiple perspectives.

Welcome to College of the Atlantic. We’re unlike any college you’ve ever known.

HANDS-ON ACADEMICS FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

A place where every academic field is integrated with a focus on sustainability. Where students lead, teachers guide, and hands-on learning comes to life.

Beyond Disconnected Classes
Interdisciplinary programs reflect the real world.

Learn it, then do it.
First the brain, next the hands — it’s how we blend the best of classroom theory with practical, hands-on experience.

Evergreen emphasizes collaborative, interdisciplinary learning across significant differences.

Our philosophy stresses experiential learning and self-direction within an interdisciplinary curriculum.

Experiential learning is also central to a GMC education.

An innovative public liberal arts college.

Unplugged from such conventional practices as the departmentalization of knowledge, confining learning to the classroom and textbooks rather than real experience, and thinking of college as preparation for life, rather than life itself.
However, Unity competitors are successful at focusing around a singular, defining characteristic.

College of the Atlantic is uniquely centered around Human Ecology as the lens through which they approach sustainability.

One of Evergreen State College’s most differentiating factors is its affordability, as the only state school within this competitive set.

Warren Wilson College is set apart by centering student requirements around the Triad—academics, work and community service.

A point of differentiation for Prescott College is their emphasis on experiential learning, starting in student orientation and seen in an array of course and research opportunities.

Paul Smith’s College stands out for their natural setting—the only four year school in the Adirondacks.

One of Green Mountain College’s unique aspects is the specialized lens of sustainability through which all courses and majors across disciplines are viewed.

Hampshire College stands out for its customizable curriculum, which allows students to define and carry out their own academic curriculum and coursework.
There’s a tension between the depth vs. breadth of the focus on sustainability and flexibility vs. structure of the educational experience.

As schools like Prescott and COA give students freedom to design their academic experience, Unity must define its POV on the optimal level of structure within a sustainability-focused program.

Furthermore, as many colleges offer sustainability coursework within broader curriculum, Unity should articulate the advantage of choosing a college that is singularly focused on sustainability.

Note: This 2x2 is not comprehensive and may not reflect Unity’s ambitions to become a national brand; our thinking will continue to evolve and we may shift this view of the competitive landscape.
INSPIRATIONAL AUDIT
WHO WE LOOKED AT - INSPIRATIONAL MARKET LEADERS

**Best-in-Class Sustainability Brand:** Patagonia

**Growth Story:** Etsy

**Niche to Mainstream:** Method

**Challenger Brand:** Thinx

**Expanded Outposts:** TEDx

**Corporate + Non-Profit Partnership:** Pampers + Unicef
KEY LEARNINGS

+ **A sustainable B corp from the start through the vision of an enigmatic founder:** Climber Yvon Chouinard founded Patagonia in 1972 with a mission to develop high quality gear while doing minimal harm to the environment, tapping into values shared by many outdoor enthusiasts.

+ **Delivers on the mission by truly putting the environment before profit:** Patagonia is a leader in integrating sustainability into its business strategy and uses its marketing campaigns as proof points of its commitment, such as its famous full page “Don’t Buy This Jacket” ad in the *New York Times*.

+ **Develops powerful content that educates while creating brand lift:** Patagonia has produced documentaries about the environmental harm of the clothing industry and employs full transparency through “The Footprint Chronicles,” where it reports the full environmental impact of certain products, while telling a story about the way it sources materials.

*UNITY CAN DRAW INSPIRATION FROM PATAGONIA AS A BEST-IN-CLASS SUSTAINABILITY BRAND*
ETSY SHOWS HOW A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT CAN SUCCESSFULLY SCALE + GROW

KEY LEARNINGS

+ **Tapping into an unmet market need**: With humble beginnings in a Brooklyn apartment, Etsy was founded as an online platform for crafters to unite, network, and sell their work, incorporating all members of the crafting world—suppliers, makers and buyers—who were previously limited to offline platforms or fell through the cracks of other all-inclusive web stores.

+ **Fostering growth through the entrepreneurial spirit of users**: Essentially a collective of small businesses, Etsy’s users helped them grow organically by self-promoting their own Etsy accounts, and thus Etsy itself, through social media and real-world crafting networks, resulting in an audience of repeat customers with genuine interest.

+ **Growing big while staying small**: Despite an IPO, Etsy still strives to stay true to the anti-consumerist, anti-traditional ideals it was founded with, expanding their offerings and users while maintaining its identity as a champion of small businesses.
KEY LEARNINGS

+ **Redefining the meaning of cleaning products:** Disgruntled with the then-current offerings of cleaning supplies, Method’s founders wanted to create products that were beautifully designed and made cleaning fun—a driving principle that shines through in their products and marketing.

+ **Choosing an enemy to unite vs. alienate consumers:** Method’s brand idea of “people against dirty” playfully pits the company and its fans against both environmentally harmful products and messes at home, however, its “green” focus is only subtly expressed, allowing this niche brand to evolve from a local favorite to a mainstay at retailers, such as Target, Lowe’s + Whole Foods.

+ **A commitment to sustainable practices through and through:** Method has become a leader in sustainability not only on a product level, but company-wide as well: Method is a founding B Corporation, Cradle to Cradle certified and is opening the industry’s first LEED Platinum manufacturing facility.

“Green products at the time took themselves so seriously and catered to wear-it-on-your-sleeve greenies. We wanted to turn that niche on its head and show that green products can be fun.”

—Co-Founder Eric Ryan
THINX DESIGNED A CHALLENGER BRAND TO DISRUPT A BROKEN INDUSTRY

KEY LEARNINGS

+ Disrupting the industry and social stigmas through product and messaging: In addition to offering an innovative new product to the feminine hygiene market, THINX’s radical ads—which reject conventional and unrealistic imagery and coded language—aim to break the cultural taboo surrounding women’s periods.

+ Maintaining complete control of the story: By selling to customers directly online, THINX ensures that they retain complete control of their brand identity, not having to worry about the misrepresentation of their brand by secondary resellers.

+ Committing to a universal cause: For every pair sold, THINX makes a donation to AFRipads, a Ugandan company that teaches women how to make and sell cost-effective reusable sanitary pads, helping to prevent inconveniences and schedule stoppages that come from a lack of period products and further establishing THINX as a thought leader and cultural force.

“Tampons were invented in 1931 and aside from adhesive strips and wings on pads, there hasn’t been any major innovation in 85 years. It’s time to change that — and to change the taboo.”

— Miki Agrawal, CEO + Co-Founder
TEDx CREATED A REPLICABLE MODEL TO ESTABLISH ‘OUTPOSTS’ AROUND THE WORLD

KEY LEARNINGS

+ Making an exclusive event accessible to the masses: As the interest around the TED conference grew, TEDx was launched, giving access to TED’s culturally and intellectually illuminating talks without the high price tag and limited seating

+ Mobilizing a committed and invested fanbase to organize + promote: TEDx events are run by independent organizers—after being approved and agreeing to the stipulations of using the TEDx name and platform—which means ultimately fans of the brand are helping it evolve and expand

+ Supplying the resources to markets who need them: TEDx in a Box presents a way for developing communities to host their own TEDx event, equipping them with all the supplies needed for a successful event and allowing the TEDx brand to grow into territories it may otherwise not reach

“The power of TEDx is that people can spread the same message but it’s user-generated.”
— Marina Kim, Organizer of TEDxAshokaU
PAMPERS AND UNICEF SHOWCASE THE POWER OF SHARED VALUE PARTNERSHIP

KEY LEARNINGS

+ **Strategically aligning the mission, vision and brand purpose:** Pampers and UNICEF joined forces in a brilliant shared value partnership that enables Pampers to create a powerful point of differentiation, in an otherwise commoditized category, for mothers who have a strong emotional connection to UNICEF’s goal of ending maternal and neonatal tetanus

+ **Demonstrating the value of partnership:** UNICEF had stronger leverage in negotiating this partnership in later years, because the organization conducted consumer research during the campaign that demonstrated the value of their brand and the contribution their endorsement made to Pampers’ bottom line

+ **Piloting locally before expanding globally:** The partnership began as a pilot program in Western Europe, where the partnership proved the model’s success, and quickly expanded globally—successfully eliminating maternal and newborn tetanus in 14 countries to date
WE’VE UNCOVERED A ROBUST SET OF INSIGHTS WITHIN THE FOUR AREAS OF OUR BRAND PURPOSE MODEL

**ROOT STRENGTHS**

1. Nimble Size
2. Student-first mentality
3. Culture of openness
4. Alternative value set
5. Diverse environmental perspectives
6. Experiential learning
7. Specific passions, specialized majors
8. Commitment to sustainability
9. Fiscal integrity

**HUMAN TRUTHS**

1. Success is changing
2. Students seek purpose
3. Impact can’t wait
4. Breakthrough moments drive change
5. Real-world momentum
6. Colleges can shape morality
7. Leadership requires expanded perspectives
8. Hard sciences need to get soft

**CATEGORY SHIFTS**

1. Questioning the ROI
2. Rethinking finances
3. The advantage of specialization
4. Indispensable rigor
5. The value of partners
6. External engagements
7. Interdisciplinary learning
8. The role of convening

**MARKET NEEDS**

1. Collaborators
2. Connectors
3. Truth seekers
4. Doers
5. Influencers
6. Ninjas
7. Sustainability experts
8. Compassionate intellectuals
TAKEN TOGETHER, THE INSIGHTS CREATE OPPORTUNITY AREAS FOR UNITY’S BRAND PURPOSE

BRAND PURPOSE OPPORTUNITY AREAS:

1. Infusing science with compassion
2. Committing to a purpose
3. Catalyzing a chain reaction
4. Stewarding self-realization
5. Convening the conversation
6. Embracing change

A living and flexing expression of our role in the world. It’s the most aspirational statement of what we believe and stand for, grounded in the authenticity of our brand.
INFUSING SCIENCE WITH COMPASSION

How might Unity become an expert in the human condition to drive behavior change and demonstrate what it means to imbue the hard sciences with the human elements that give it power?

ROOT STRENGTHS
Unity can leverage the powerful relationship currency on campus to develop students with strong social capital

HUMAN TRUTHS
The right story is invaluable in its ability to communicate and create change

CATEGORY SHIFTS
Change making necessitates an interdisciplinary approach

MARKET NEEDS
Higher education should recognize the value of cultivating social intelligence alongside classic academic disciplines
COMMITTING TO A PURPOSE

What would it mean if an institution were fully committed to sustainability as an organizing principle?

ROOT STRENGTHS

Unity’s ability to deliver on sustainability can be a compelling differentiator

HUMAN TRUTHS

Conventional ideals and ambitions are changing
Students want their entire college journey filled with valuable learning and growth opportunities

CATEGORY SHIFTS

Having a specific purpose helps facilitate commitment and rigor

MARKET NEEDS

Institutions of higher learning can produce more effective change agents by impacting a sense of moral duty
What's the significance of being the “seed crystal” that ignites a disproportionate impact and how might Unity own what it means to be the catalyst vs. the solution?

ROOT STRENGTHS
Unity’s ability to deliver on sustainability can be a compelling differentiator

HUMAN TRUTHS
Breakthrough moments expand perspectives and catalyze lifelong passion

CATEGORY SHIFTS
Internal and external partnerships foster efficiency, connection and preparedness

MARKET NEEDS
Higher education’s role in sustainability should focus on real-world integration
4 STEWARDING SELF-REALIZATION

How might Unity design an educational experience and philosophy that delivers breakthrough moments that help students develop into leaders and shift the sustainability mindset of future generations?

ROOT STRENGTHS
Unity’s non-conformist ethos can find renewed relevance in the Sustainability Century

HUMAN TRUTHS
Breakthrough moments expand perspectives and catalyze lifelong passion

CATEGORY SHIFTS
Having a specific purpose helps facilitate commitment and rigor

MARKET NEEDS
Institutions of higher learning can produce more effective change agents by impacting a sense of moral duty
5 CONVENING THE CONVERSATION

What is the role of an interdisciplinary convener in driving the sustainability movement and systems thinking forward?

ROOT STRENGTHS

Unity can leverage the powerful relationship currency on campus to develop students with strong social capital.

HUMAN TRUTHS

The right story is invaluable in its ability to communicate and create change.

CATEGORY SHIFTS

Change making necessitates an interdisciplinary approach.

MARKET NEEDS

Higher education should recognize the value of cultivating social intelligence alongside classic academic disciplines.
EMBRACING CHANGE

How might Unity become an expert on the concept of change—what it means to create agents of change and how a person, institution, or population should adapt in a rapidly changing world?

ROOT STRENGTHS
Unity can own ‘small by design’ as an intentional decision that sets up Unity for success in today’s market

HUMAN TRUTHS
Students want their entire college journey filled with valuable learning and growth opportunities

CATEGORY SHIFTS
An education rooted in practicality and competency generates a higher return of investment

MARKET NEEDS
To create productive leaders, colleges should develop the automatic reflexes and tools students need to thrive in ambiguity
NEXT STEPS

PHASE 2: ARCHITECTURE Redefining Unity College

RENEIGATION RETREAT
OBJECTIVE: Re-imagine, realign and strengthen the brand purpose to align with The NorthStar
INPUTS: Brainstorming, collaborative session, prototyping, presentation, discussion, feedback, analysis
OUTPUTS: Revised brand purpose, brand strategy, brand narrative, brand story, brand identity

THINK TANK WITH PARTNERS (B2B)
OBJECTIVE: Engage and align key stakeholders in the development and execution of the brand strategy
INPUTS: Stakeholder meetings, workshops, focus groups, surveys, feedback, analysis
OUTPUTS: Shared understanding of the brand strategy, action plan, implementation roadmap

EXPERIMENTAL UNITY BRAND PURPOSE MODEL - BRIEF
OVERVIEW: Develop a framework for testing and validating the brand purpose
INPUTS: Existing brand research, customer insights, internal and external feedback, analysis
OUTPUTS: Brand purpose prototype, test plan, feedback loop

PHASE 3: ACTIVATION Identifying Mechanical Outputs

ACTIVATING THE FUTURE CO-CREATING
OBJECTIVE: Engage and activate the community in the creation of the brand
INPUTS: Community feedback, engagement sessions, workshops, focus groups, surveys
OUTPUTS: Action plan, implementation roadmap, strategy for ongoing engagement

DELIVERABLES: UNITY ACTIVATION PLAN
INPUTS: Brand strategy, brand purpose, target audience, market research, feedback loop
OUTPUTS: Activation plan, implementation roadmap, strategy for ongoing engagement

NOW WHAT / UNITY STRATEGIC BRANDING INITIATIVE / 97
PHASE 2: ARCHITECTURE
Redefining Unity College

REIMAGINATION RETREAT

OBJECTIVE:
Co-shape, dimensionalize, and prioritize 3-4 potential Brand Purpose territories, aligning on the most promising territory with which to move forward.

Attendees to include: NW, Unity Internal Transformation Team, 2-3 External Industry Experts.

INPUTS:
+ Recap foundational Phase 1 work and learnings to date
+ Share 3-4 Brand Purpose territories (shared with Diane in advance)
+ Collaboratively pull apart and rebuild the territories, mapping barriers and reasons to believe for each
+ Prioritize territories, identifying strongest territory (or mash-up of territories!) to move forward with
+ Pressure-test selected territory through activation brainstorm

OUTPUT:
+ Alignment on a clear path forward for the Unity Brand Purpose, to be developed in the Think Shop with Diane (№2)

THINK SHOP WITH DIANE (№2)

OBJECTIVE:
Begin to dimensionalize ‘winning’ territory, solidifying each element of the Strategic Brand Framework.

INPUTS:
+ Recap key learnings and takeaways from the Reimagination Retreat
+ Co-author and workshop the 4 quadrants of the Strategic Brand Framework (to be refined and finalized post-Think Shop)
+ Brainstorm proposed buckets for Activating The Future Co-Thinking

OUTPUT:
+ A draft of Unity’s Brand Purpose Model, to be refined and finalized

DELIVERABLE:
UNITY BRAND PURPOSE MODEL + BRIEF

OVERVIEW:
An inspiring articulation of Unity’s Brand Purpose (value proposition), key differentiating attributes/pillars and the root strengths, human truths, category shifts and market needs that ladder up to this brand purpose. This model will be accompanied by a strategic manifesto that tells the future brand story and will serve as the fundamental brand architecture that will define, differentiate, and propel Unity College forward over the next 3-5 years.

The Brand Brief will serve as encapsulation of all the elements that will help bring the brand to life externally, including but not limited to personality/voice, competitive frame, and the tools and guidelines to develop creative marketing initiatives.
PHASE 3: ACTIVATION
Identifying Mechanical Outputs

ACTIVATING THE FUTURE CO-THINKING

OBJECTIVE:
Ideate and prioritize tangible strategic concepts and recommendations to address Unity’s strategic goals, grounded in Unity’s Brand Purpose.

Attendees to include: NW, Unity Internal Transformation Team, 2-3 External Industry Experts.

INPUTS:
+ Share finalized Brand Purpose + Brand Story
+ Using pre-determined Activation buckets co-developed with Diane that correspond to the six goals within the ‘Building a Beacon’ Strategic Plan (i.e. new products + services, recruitment, partnerships) and leveraging ideation exercises, we will brainstorm concept sparks that can activate upon Unity’s Brand Purpose
+ As a group, we will evaluate and prioritize activation concepts to finalize and further develop in the Activation Kit

OUTPUT:
+ Prioritized list of strategic activation concepts and recommendations to be further refined and illustrated within the activation kit

DELIVERABLE:
UNITY ACTIVATION KIT

OVERVIEW:
A comprehensive and prioritized set of activation concepts and recommendations designed to deliver on Unity’s strategic goals through the lens of the evolved Unity Brand Purpose. These will include strategic recommendations specific to increasing enrollment, fundraising, and opportunities to penetrate new markets and touchpoints of outreach, as well as measurable benchmarks to assess progress and outcomes.
APPENDIX

+ ADDITIONAL QUOTES
+ COMPETITIVE AUDIT
## SUMMARY OF ITERATIVE INDUSTRY INTERVIEWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/Institution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert Engelman</td>
<td>Senior Fellow, Worldwatch Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Baptista</td>
<td>Associate Director of TEDC and Interim Chair of EPSM, The New School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Mann</td>
<td>Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center (ESSC), Penn. State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Bilec</td>
<td>Assistant Director for Education and Outreach: Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation, University of Pittsburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy Nixon</td>
<td>Managing Editor, Sustainability, Reuters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Brown</td>
<td>Scholar in Residence and Professor, Sustainability Ethics and Law, Widener University Commonwealth Law School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry Tinianow</td>
<td>Denver’s Chief Sustainability Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert Forbis</td>
<td>Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Tech University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny Richter</td>
<td>Legislative and Science Director, Citizens’ Climate Lobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig Dalen</td>
<td>Senior B Corps Fellow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morgan Wittmer</td>
<td>Vessel Staff Manager, Pacific Whale Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Hanchey</td>
<td>Executive Recruiter, Environmental Services The Newport Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon Leahy</td>
<td>Director, Sustainability and Social Innovation, Etsy.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letitia Webster</td>
<td>Global Vice President, Corporate Sustainability, VF Corp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Kramer</td>
<td>Managing Partner, Natural Investments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Campanale</td>
<td>Founder &amp; Executive Director, The Carbon Tracking Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Orlowski</td>
<td>Founder &amp; Executive Director, Sustainable Endowments Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Russo</td>
<td>Creator of This Week in Education Blog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conor Williams</td>
<td>Senior Researcher in New America’s Education Policy Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judy Braus</td>
<td>Executive Director, North American Association for Environmental Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniel Mosse</td>
<td>Professor of Computer Science, University of Pittsburgh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Alter</td>
<td>Professor of Educational Psychology, Programs in Special Education, NYU; Unity ’69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda Silke</td>
<td>Senior Fellow, Senator George J. Mitchell Center for Sustainability Solutions, University of Maine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan Weisman</td>
<td>Author of The World Without Us and Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ROOT STRENGTHS: QUOTES**

“Majors aren’t tied to money. This is double-edged sword.”
- Unity Professor

“A major reason that I came here was the undergraduate research. Unity is the only place where you have hands-on access to that.”
- Unity Student

“Unity is supportive of the whole person, whole student. We care about them academically, and also their mental and physical health.”
- Unity Professor

“And there’s probably a way to do that with Unity where you say, look, we’re going to ask you questions about sustainability because we really are that school...We’re asking you to prove to us that you belong in our sustainability-focused curriculum.”
- Conor Williams, Senior Researcher in New America’s Education Policy Program

“A lot of people who go here only apply to Unity. They’re not going to fit in anywhere else.”
- Unity Student
“Scientists are these mythical creatures. They’re like unicorns. Nobody ever sees them but they know, like, really they exist. And so just demystifying that...They think of old men with crazy hair in a lab coat. And it's just not the reality. So I think just showing up, you know, the public does a lot of the work for you. But then also making an effort to communicate what you're doing, why you think it's important, what you enjoy about it. What you get out of it. I think that's really important, too...And scientists are in the minority in trying to really isolate that. And stick to this dispassionate analysis and that's a disconnect.”

- Danny Richter, Legislative and Science Director, Citizens’ Climate Lobby

“We've gone a long time adopting a kind of factory model of higher education. And then the last thing I would say is this: we get a degree after 4 years, presuming a certain number of credit hours have been accounted for, but education can be compressed into 4 years, but learning is a lifelong process. And so, what can happen on a college campus can be very formative and for good or bad. But one of the outcomes of higher education ought to be a lifelong commitment to learning. Lifelong curiosity, and it ought to transcend disciplines... And so the student has to have some idea of who they are as a person. That sense of self-discovery that higher education can help to foster.”

- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment

“When you find people who think like you, it’s magic.”

- Unity Staff

“Unity students are united by a love of the outdoors.”

- Unity Student
“We need to bring in more students who aren’t perfect, but want to deal with the real intellectual problem of sustainability problems. We need to move the dial on willingness to work, persistence—students who are looking for a challenge.”
- Unity Professor

“If you can isolate [competencies] for the purposes of instruction and of student development, then you can also isolate them for employers and say,... I can't tell you that my kids have sat through X-number of credit hours. What I can tell you is that anyone who comes from our college is going to be capable of these 15 core competencies.”
- Conor Williams, Senior Researcher in New America’s Education Policy Program

“We have to create the environment where the value of the product is worth the investment.”
- Unity Professor

“I'm a little bit conservative that way, and I think you have the urgency of a sustainability crisis, we're going to need more required courses.”
- Robert Engelman, Senior Fellow, Worldwatch Institute

“When students have a community partner that they’re accountable to, it gives them a purpose.”
- Unity Professor

“One of the problems is that these problems are inherently deeply interdisciplinary and colleges and universities usually look at these issues through the lens of either one scientific discipline or economic. And they do really poorly with the ethical dimensions of sustainability issues.”
- Donald Brown, Scholar in Residence and Professor, Widener University Commonwealth Law School

“We need to bring in more students who aren’t perfect, but want to deal with the real intellectual problem of sustainability problems. We need to move the dial on willingness to work, persistence—students who are looking for a challenge.”
- Unity Professor
“Interdisciplinary is important. I want my math work to appear in environmental journals.”
- Unity Professor

“The difference between I think a God awful future and something that is better however resides pretty much I think in higher education. I see the whole issue of education not as an item on a long list but the first item on the list; the thing that holds all the rest of it together.”
- Anonymous, Special Assistant to the President of Oberlin College on Sustainability and the Environment

“One of the problems is that these problems are inherently deeply interdisciplinary and colleges and universities usually look at these issues through the lens of either one scientific discipline or economic. And they do really poorly with the ethical dimensions of sustainability issues.”
- Donald Brown, Scholar in Residence and Professor, Widener University Commonwealth Law School

“It should be organized around answering certain questions, as opposed to having departments of different subjects. That's the only way you're going to get an interdisciplinary response. I feel like community colleges tend to be better at this. They tend to be more public interfacing, and much more interested in problem solving, and practical.”
- Michael Kramer, Managing Partner, Natural Investments

“A university that takes a holistic approach to education might be a more natural model for training today's students in an interdisciplinary way, in a way that qualifies them to tackle problems like climate change... I think it's not coincidental that we have arrived at a point where we are dealing with monumental, unprecedented challenges that require people who can think across multiple disciplines and work together as teams in solving these incredibly difficult problems.”
- Michael Mann, Distinguished Professor; Director, Earth System Science Center, The Pennsylvania State University
MARKET NEEDS: QUOTES

“We teach a course called, ‘Strategic Change.’ These are exactly the kind of skills they’re trying to teach students, such as how to be social change agents and what that actually means within different contexts, whether it’s the private sector, the public sector, whatever the sector is, and whatever the field is.”
- Ana Baptista, Associate Director of TEDC and Interim Chair of EPSM, The New School

“This is a huge moral and ethical issue. And it bridges into that whole sphere of moral and ethical discussions that you find so often at universities, so I think there’s probably a tie-in, not just universities but also in very religious traditions.”
- Tim Nixon, Managing Editor, Sustainability, Reuters

“Being able to articulate the challenge and the opportunities. Analytic skills. Really being able to analyze a problem, good questioning and strategic thinking. Being able to think holistically is really important.”
- Letitia Webster, Global Vice President, Corporate Sustainability, VF Corp

“There’s a way to get everybody to understand how the political process works, no matter what you’re doing, to be an active, engaged citizen. And a lot of people don’t really know how to kind of engage themselves in creating change. They’ll figure it out but it should be part of how we’re training people to be good citizens when they graduate.”
- Judy Braus, Executive Director North American Association for Environmental Education

“[You need a] really broad thinker. But with that, some hard skills. That's the thing you need. And you don’t want just someone who can kind of be a thinker, but someone who can really do, and be active in the business. And contribute.”
- Letitia Webster, Global Vice President, Corporate Sustainability, VF Corp
DETAILED COMPETITIVE AUDIT
College of the Atlantic - Bar Harbor, Maine

OVERVIEW:

Year Founded: 1969
Endowment: $46M
Size: 350 students; 35 faculty members
Tuition: $42,084
Acceptance Rate: 71.1%
Ranking(s):
#82 National Liberal Arts Colleges; #11 Best Value Schools National Liberal Arts Colleges, U.S. News + World Report

POSITIONING:

An ‘educational experiment’ designed to prepare students to improve the relationship between people and the environment through the interdisciplinary lens of Human Ecology

KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:

+ Self-directed: Students design their own courses of study within H.E. and are required to complete an internship and capstone project
+ Participatory community: Students, faculty, and staff are involved in the governance of the college through weekly “All College Meetings”
+ Ocean-centric: 38-acre main campus on the ocean in Bar Harbor, two organic farms, and two offshore island research stations

SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:

“A COA education isn’t just about learning—it’s also about transforming thought into action to make a difference in the world, starting now. We believe that tomorrow’s problem-solvers will need to work across multiple disciplines, collaborate, innovate, and think far outside the box.”

—COA Website

“The mission of the school is to create the people who can create the change. And then the school itself is a big social entrepreneurship experiment.”

—Jay Friedlander, Chairman of the sustainable business program at COA, NY Times
### RELEVANT MAJORS:

**Undergraduate:**
- B.A. in Human Ecology

**Note:** There are no departments at COA; each student majors in H.E., but is able to customize their experience.

**Graduate:**
- M.A. in Human Ecology

### PARTNERSHIPS:

**Academic partnerships:**
- Part of the EcoLeague consortium; COA students can spend up to a year at Alaska Pacific University, Dickinson College, Green Mountain College, Northland College, or Prescott College.
- Also has exchange agreements with The New School, University of Maine at Orono, National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) + Sea Education Association (SEA).

**Community partnerships:**
- Internships and senior projects with the Jackson Laboratory, MDI Biological Laboratory and MDI Hospital.

**Corporate partnerships:**
- Students are required to participate in an internship, but no formal partnerships specified.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:

+ By orienting the college around the broad topic of Human Ecology, the COA has strategically struck a balance between interdisciplinary depth + breadth, as all students graduate with the same degree but are able to customize their curriculum; **Unity can consider a ‘freedom within a framework’ approach through the lens of sustainability.**

+ At the same time, in many ways the COA and Unity brands occupy the same space in students’ minds; Unity can leverage the **specificity of its majors** vs. the generalized Human Ecology focus at COA to demonstrate how the school takes a more rigorous and disciplined approach to sustainability.

+ COA has an advantage in its location and partnerships, and the opportunities for hands-on learning these create; **Unity should consider how outposts can provide differentiated value for students.**
Evergreen State College - Olympia, Washington

OVERVIEW:

Year Founded: 1967
Endowment: $8.9M
Size: 4,300 students
Tuition: $8,682 in-state/$22,752 out-of-state
Acceptance Rate: 98.9%
Ranking(s): #35 Regional Universities (West), U.S. News + World Report

POSITIONING:

An alternative model of education that accommodates diverse learning styles and goals through a customizable and interdisciplinary approach

KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:

+ Flexible academics: Students can choose from 60+ fields of study with no requirements and a majority of students are able to work while they obtain their degree

+ Value: ESC provides generous financial aid, enables students to graduate quickly, and has a proven track record of graduating 50% of students debt-free

+ Leader in environmental education: ESC continues to grow its commitment to sustainability through the curriculum and campus

SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:

“At Evergreen, you’ll go beyond the ordinary and experience your education the way you imagine.”

—ESC Website

“Innovative Academics: Escape the sequences of disconnected classes and endless prerequisites. Experience a better way of learning with programs that explore the many sides of a theme or topic... Interdisciplinary programs reflect the real world.”

—ESC Website

Programs focus multiple subjects around a common theme, instead of teaching disconnected subjects.
RELEVANT MAJORS:

Undergraduate:

+ Sustainability Studies ("Field of Study" that includes sustainable development, environmental policies, ethics, ecology, landscape architecture, city and regional planning, economics, natural resources, sociology, and anthropology)

Note: Students graduate with a B.A. or B.S., but their self-designed “major” is not reflected on their diploma

Graduate:

+ M.A. in Environmental Studies

PARTNERSHIPS:

Academic partnerships:
+ Variety of study abroad partnerships

Community partnerships:
+ Sustainability in Prisons Project: ESC Graduate students coordinate programs and assist with research and the school partners to provide additional support
+ Tribal: Reservation Based Community Determined Program: ESC enables Native Americans living on the Tulalip Reservation to earn their degree without leaving the reservation

Corporate partnerships:
+ Not specified

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:

+ ESC demonstrates its commitment to interdisciplinary learning through the structure of its courses, called “Programs,” where multiple subjects are connected through a common theme: As Unity emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach, it must consider how to tangibly deliver on this through the design of its curriculum in a differentiated way.

+ Although ESC emphasizes sustainability, it is not the singular focus of the school—this is an area where Unity has an advantage in its all-encompassing commitment to sustainability.

+ Like Unity, ESC appeals to students who may benefit from a more flexible and experiential approach to learning; however, Unity’s more formalized curriculum with specified majors signal that it takes a more rigorous and serious academic approach that will recognized by potential employers vs. a “self-designed major.”
WARREN WILSON COLLEGE
OVERVIEW:

Year Founded: 1894
Endowment: $53.8 million
Size: 824 students
Tuition: $32,560
Acceptance Rate: 71.8%
Ranking(s):
#164 National Liberal Arts Colleges, U.S. News
+ World Report

POSITIONING:

An ‘innovative approach’ to a balanced education using a curriculum that combines academics, work and community service—The Triad—to build self-identity and a commitment to your surroundings

KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:

+ Work learning: Residential students must work weekly shifts ranging from farming to plumbing to maintenance, collectively sharing the responsibility of running a campus

+ Community engagement: A community service requirement aims for hands-on learning about the complexity of issues and their impact on community

SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:

“It’s called the Warren Wilson College Triad and our students will tell you that its three components – academics, work and service – equal more than the sum of their parts. And, no, you won’t find anything else quite like it in all of higher education.”

—WWC Website

“Sustainability is woven into the fabric of Warren Wilson. It is grounded in our rich history of place and purpose, embedded by generations of community members who have modeled our fundamental commitment to connect values to action.”

—WWC Website
**Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, NC (cont’d)**

### RELEVANT MAJORS:

**Undergraduate:**
- B.A. or B.S. in Environmental Studies (with a concentration in Conservation Biology, Environmental Chemistry, Environmental Education, Environmental Policy, Sustainable Forestry, or Sustainable Agriculture)
- B.A. in Global Studies with a concentration in Environment + Society

### PARTNERSHIPS:

**Academic Partnerships:**
- Variety of study abroad partnerships

**Community Partnerships:**
- While the community service requirement can be completed in a number of ways, students are encouraged to unite with some of WWC’s longstanding community partners, such as:
  - Asheville GreenWorks
  - Building Bridges
  - Burton Street Community Center
  - MANNA Foodbank
  - Mountain Housing Opportunities

**Corporate Partnerships:**
- Not specified

### IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:

- WWC’s self-imposed obligation to community service integrates them into their local surroundings. A similar requirement by Unity would ensure their standing as an organic and influential member of their own community.

- WWC’s work requirement creates a channel of hands-on, outside-the-classroom learning for students. Unity can consider their own outside-the-classroom, experiential learning opportunities and recognize the potential for learning moments in all facets of a student’s life, not just during designated moments.

- While this stipulation means all WWC students graduate with work experience, many campus jobs tend to be technical—plumbing, woodworking, blacksmithing—and confining. Unity should keep in mind that all work experience is not equal and Unity needs to know how to provide relevant experience for students to enter change making and purposeful career paths.
**Prescott College, Prescott, AZ**

**POSITIONING:**

An ‘evolving experiment’ in methods of collaboration and teamwork in order to understand, succeed in and better the larger community and environment

**KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:**

+ **Experiential education:** PC offers an array of experiential learning opportunities where students can get hands-on experience at Prescott ‘outposts’ like the Jenner Farm or Kino Bay Center (Mexico)

+ **Competence:** Graduation is centered around the idea of competency; students design their own ‘competence’ (like a major) and prove their competency in their selected field by completing a senior project

+ **Wilderness orientation:** The majority of incoming PC students partake in a 21 day backpacking expedition that builds connections with their group and the natural world

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**SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:**

“Doing allows you to put theory into practice, making abstract concepts concrete. **Doing builds a resume of experience not just a transcript of courses taken.** And doing is fun.”  
—PC Website

“The College puts students at the center in everything it does and is. Optional grades. Narrative evaluations. No barriers. Limited bureaucracy. No summa or magna or ‘best in show’ ribbons”  
—PC Website

“This is higher education without the competition, without striving for someone else’s definition of success, without dividing talent into that arbitrary alphabet of A through F. Unplugged from such conventional practices as the departmentalization of knowledge, confining learning to the classroom and textbooks rather than real experience, and thinking of college as preparation for life, rather than life itself.”  
—PC Website
PARTNERSHIPS:

Academic Partnerships:
+ Part of the EcoLeague consortium; PC students can spend up to a year at Alaska Pacific University, Dickinson College, Green Mountain College, Northland College, or College of the Atlantic
+ Part of the Consortium for Innovative Environments in Learning (CIEL); its members share resources and information.
+ Has exchange agreement with Telemark University College in Norway

Community Partnerships:
+ PC’s Kino Bay Center’s Indigenous Community Partnership; connects research and conservation with the tradition and knowledge of the local Comca’ac (Seri) people
+ In their effort to create a holistic education, PC encourages student interaction with local community stakeholders

Corporate Partnerships:
+ Not specified

RELEVANT MAJORS:

Undergraduate:
+ B.A. or B.S. in Environmental Studies + Sustainability (with a concentration in Conservation Biology, Earth Science, Environmental Education, Environmental Studies, Marine Studies, Natural History + Ecology or Sustainable Community Development)
+ B.A. in Psychology, Human Development and Counseling with a concentration in Ecopsychology
+ B.A. in Adventure Education (with a concentration in Adventure-Based Environmental Education, Outdoor Program Administration, or Wilderness Leadership)

Graduate:
+ M.A. in Adventure Education
+ M.A. in Environmental Studies
+ PhD in Sustainability Education

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:

+ PC owns their nonconformist take on higher education through the language they use to describe themselves. While this attracts a particular niche of potential students, it also isolates others who may be qualified. Unity should be mindful of the language they use in order to differentiate themselves without isolating talented candidates.

+ PC has branded their curriculum around the idea of competency, rather than conventional majors and credits. Unity should consider the structure of their own curriculum in order to ensure the genuine preparedness of their graduates.

+ Their emphasis on experiential learning has led PC to utilize certain remote research stations. As Unity looks to develop their own outposts, they can draw inspiration from PC’s integration of these outposts into their course offerings and curriculum.
Paul Smith’s College, Paul Smiths, NY

OVERVIEW:

Year Founded: 1946
Endowment: $27 million
Size: 1007 students
Tuition: $26,146
Acceptance Rate: 74.7%
Ranking(s): #44 Regional Colleges (North), U.S. News + World Report

POSITIONING:

A hands-on approach to education that provides career training for students while also fostering a discovery of self, society, and earth

KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:

+ **Inside the Adirondacks:** As the only four-year college within the Adirondacks, PSC offers beautiful scenery in a natural environment

+ **Hands-on Education:** PSC emphasizes experiential learning for all of their majors, preparing all of their graduates with career training

SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:

“When it comes to cookie-cutter colleges, Paul Smith’s is anything but. In fact, we’re the only 4-year college inside the boundaries of the world-famous Adirondacks. *Living and learning here requires a special kind of student — someone who values the abundance of our natural landscape and embraces our spirit of creative self-reliance.*”

—PSC Website

“At Paul Smith’s, we learn by doing... Our forestry students help manage thousands of acres of college-owned land, then transform fresh timber into finished boards in our sawmill. *Smitties are in demand because we graduate with more than a degree — we have real experience.*”

—PSC Website
PARTNERSHIPS:

Academic Partnerships: + Not specified

Community Partnerships: + Not specified

Corporate Partnerships: + Not specified

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:

+ PSC’s main point of differentiation—residing in the Adirondacks—creates a connection with environmental studies, rather than its curriculum itself, which also includes many culinary- and hospitality-based majors. Unity’s emphasis on sustainability and the environment throughout their curriculum and in the way they ‘walk the walk’ creates a more genuine reputation for themselves.

+ Many of PSC’s majors—e.g. Recreation, Adventure + Leisure Management, Parks + Conversation Management—are technical and lead to jobs, not necessarily careers. While Unity considers PSC to be a competitor, Unity is more interested in students looking for purpose-driven, change making careers.

+ While its majors are job-specific, PSC does emphasize hands-on experience in their courses. Unity should consider what relevant experience they can offer students while still fostering the foundation of a career in change making.
GREEN MOUNTAIN COLLEGE
OVERVIEW:

Year Founded: 1834
Endowment: $3.8 million
Size: 750 students
Tuition: $33,736
Acceptance Rate: 68.4%

Ranking(s):
Rank Not Published, National Liberal Arts Colleges, U.S. News + World Report

POSITIONING:
An interdisciplinary curriculum linked through a focus on sustainability that fosters a sense of personal, collective and environmental understanding and responsibility

KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:

+ Genuine Environmental Commitment: As proclaimed leaders in sustainability, GMC prides itself for not only integrating sustainability into its curriculum, but also ‘walking the walk’ with its green practices

+ Tight Community: Small class sizes and a 14:1 student-teacher ratio lets students create bonds with each other, as well as with their teachers

+ Vermont State of Mind: Besides providing beautiful scenery to explore and learn in, GMC represents Vermont’s ideals: humility, activism and originality

SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:

“Because you know who you are, and what you want in a college — and it’s more than a degree. Green Mountain College is the liberal arts education with a purpose.”
—PSC Website

“Discover the campus where small meets sustainable. Where Vermont’s mountains, lakes, and streams form a natural playground and living classroom — right outside your door.”
—PSC Website

“For two decades, Green Mountain College has placed social and environmental sustainability at the very core of our graduate and undergraduate academic programs. ‘Green’ isn’t a word we throw around casually. We practice what we teach.”
—PSC Website
Green Mountain College, Poultney, VT (cont’d)

**RELEVANT MAJORS:**

**Undergraduate:**
- B.S. in Adventure Education
- B.S. in Sustainable Business
- B.S. in Renewable Energy + Ecological Design
- B.A. in Sustainable Agriculture + Food Production
- B.A. in Environmental Studies
- B.S. in Natural Resources Management
- B.A. in Wilderness + Outdoor Therapy

**Graduate:**
- Sustainable MBA
- M.S. in Sustainable Food Systems
- M.S. in Environmental Studies
- M.S. in Resilient + Sustainable Communities

+ Note: all graduate programs are conducted online

**PARTNERSHIPS:**

**Academic Partnerships:**
- Part of the EcoLeague consortium; GMC students can spend up to a year at Alaska Pacific University, Dickinson College, Prescott College, Northland College, or College of the Atlantic
- The National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) offers college credit through GMC, teaching outdoor technical skills and leadership
- Variety of study-abroad partnerships

**Community Partnerships:**
- GMC has a number of community partnerships, including:
  - Stone Valley Community Market; a local food co-op founded and funded in part by GMC
  - Green Mountain Power: Cow Power Program; GMC’s carbon offset provider
  - Poultney Woodshed Project
  - Green Mountain College Watershed Alliance
  - Vermont Higher Education Food Systems Consortium

**Corporate Partnerships:**
- Not specified

**IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:**

+ GMC ties their identity with the longstanding values of the community they reside in, creating a national identity for themselves while also solidifying themselves as genuine members of their community. Unity can consider aligning themselves more closely with the ideals of Maine to both craft their own national reputation and integrate themselves into their local community.

+ While GMC offers an interdisciplinary discipline, they emphasize a sustainability lens in all courses. Looking at GMC, Unity can learn how to show the complexity of environmental issues by offering a multidisciplinary curriculum through a specialized lens.
Hampshire College, Amherst, MA

POSITIONING:

An experimental curriculum designed to not only foster proficiency in academics, but also an ability to become community leaders and independents moral citizens

KEY POINTS OF DIFFERENTIATION:

+ **Customized Curriculum:** With guidance from faculty, students build their own academic concentration based on their interests and passions

+ **Interdisciplinary Schools:** Rather than conventional single-discipline departments, HC’s offerings are organized by five interdisciplinary schools—Cognitive Science, Critical Social Inquiry, Humanities, Arts + Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinary Arts, and Natural Science

+ **Divisional System:** Rather than ‘grades,’ HC uses a three division system. Students start by taking distribution courses, then focus on their chosen concentrations and end their time completing a year-long project related to their area of study

SAMPLE MESSAGES + QUOTES:

“At Hampshire you’ll take responsibility for your education, customize your curriculum, and move beyond boundaries of disciplines and departments. We call this your academic concentration. It puts the emphasis on learning, not on teaching.”

—HC Website

“No approach to education is better geared to meet the challenges ahead than the model Hampshire provides. Experience-based. Learner-centered. Inquiry-driven. Hampshire is extreme sports for the mind.”

—HC Website

HAMPShIRE COLLEGE
OVERVIEW:

Year Founded: 1965

Endowment: $40 million

Size: 1410 students

Tuition: $48,065

Acceptance Rate: 70.4%

Ranking(s): Unranked, U.S. News + World Report
PARTNERSHIPS:

Academic Partnerships:
+ Part of the Five College Consortium; HC students can take courses at and use resources from Amherst College, Smith College, Mount Holyoke College and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
+ Variety of study-abroad partnerships

Community Partnerships:
+ All HC students have a community engagement requirement; the Community Partnerships for Social Change program is a rescue for students and faculty to connect with community partners

Corporate Partnerships:
+ Not specified

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNITY:

+ While students are able to customize their learning experience, they ultimately leave HC with a genre-less B.A. that may not represent the full extent of thought that went into their degree. Unity’s categorical degrees are of a more recognizable format and translate to real world expectations.

+ HC’s interdisciplinary colleges respond to the complexity of societal issues and promote the power of diverse thought. Unity should consider an interdisciplinary organizing of their own academic departments to achieve the same.

+ The division system used at HC guides students through different thresholds of learning to ensure their competency. As Unity attempts to foster a genuine learning experience, they can look to instill specific checkpoints of their own.

RELEVANT MAJORS:

Undergraduate:
+ Bachelor of Arts

+ Note: There are no departments at HC, each student decides their concentration

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