



# Framing sustainability to align with higher education institutional missions: An effective approach to successful sustainability integration



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## Abstract

This work presents an illustrative case study on how Loyola University Chicago, highlighting how framing can be an effective approach to align sustainability with the institutional mission. Loyola University Chicago framed their sustainability efforts around social justice connecting sustainability work to their institutional mission to garner support and make sustainability a priority. This study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with key leaders in this transition including Dr. Nancy Tuchman, founding Dean of the School of Environmental Sustainability and Father Michael Garanzini, S.J., former President of Loyola University Chicago. Through an abductive coding process of interviews and event transcripts this work illustrates Loyola's sustainability journey through the perspectives of key leaders. This work highlights how reframing sustainability, a mission-based approach, along with other contextual elements can help to prioritize sustainability within higher education. This case serves as a model for practitioners at other Jesuit institutions, or institutions with value-driven missions, for how they too may reframe their efforts to connect more directly with their purpose.

## Overview

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play a unique and important role in the transition to a more sustainable future by preparing today's youth to address climate and societal challenges. HEIs must also become more sustainable entities themselves working to integrate sustainability within their own campuses. However, many institutions have failed to make sustainability and climate action a priority on campus. We present an illustrative case study on how Loyola University Chicago framed their sustainability efforts to align with their Jesuit mission to garner support.

## Framing Theory

Framing theory stems from communication studies, often used to understand how the media presents information to the public. It suggests that how something is presented to the audience influences the choices that people make about how to process that information. In this study, we highlight how framing theory can be applied to sustainability to garner support and make sustainability a priority on campus.

Sustainability is a broad concept with many dimensions allowing for flexibility in how it is presented. Framing sustainability efforts in a way that relates to the institutional mission, or stakeholder interests can be an effective approach in making sustainability a priority.

## Methodology

This study draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with key players in the sustainability movement on campus including administration, champions, and students. Through an abductive coding process of the interviews and event transcripts (such as the Grand Opening of the School of Environmental Sustainability) this work illustrates Loyola's sustainability journey through the perspectives of those involved.

## Findings

Along with sustainability champions, student pressure, and strong leadership, framing sustainability through a social justice lens played a key role in Loyola University Chicago's sustainability success. This framing allowed for the efforts at LUC to be connected to the Jesuit institutional mission and become central to living out their institutional values.

Throughout our interviews, the framing of sustainability through a social justice lens and connecting it to the institution's mission, was commonly identified as key in the campus's sustainability success. Sustainability was often described as part of LUC's mission and ingrained widely into the culture.

Considerations are important for how sustainability should be framed at institutions in order to connect to the mission and gain the support necessary to integrate sustainability throughout the institution.

## Acknowledgements

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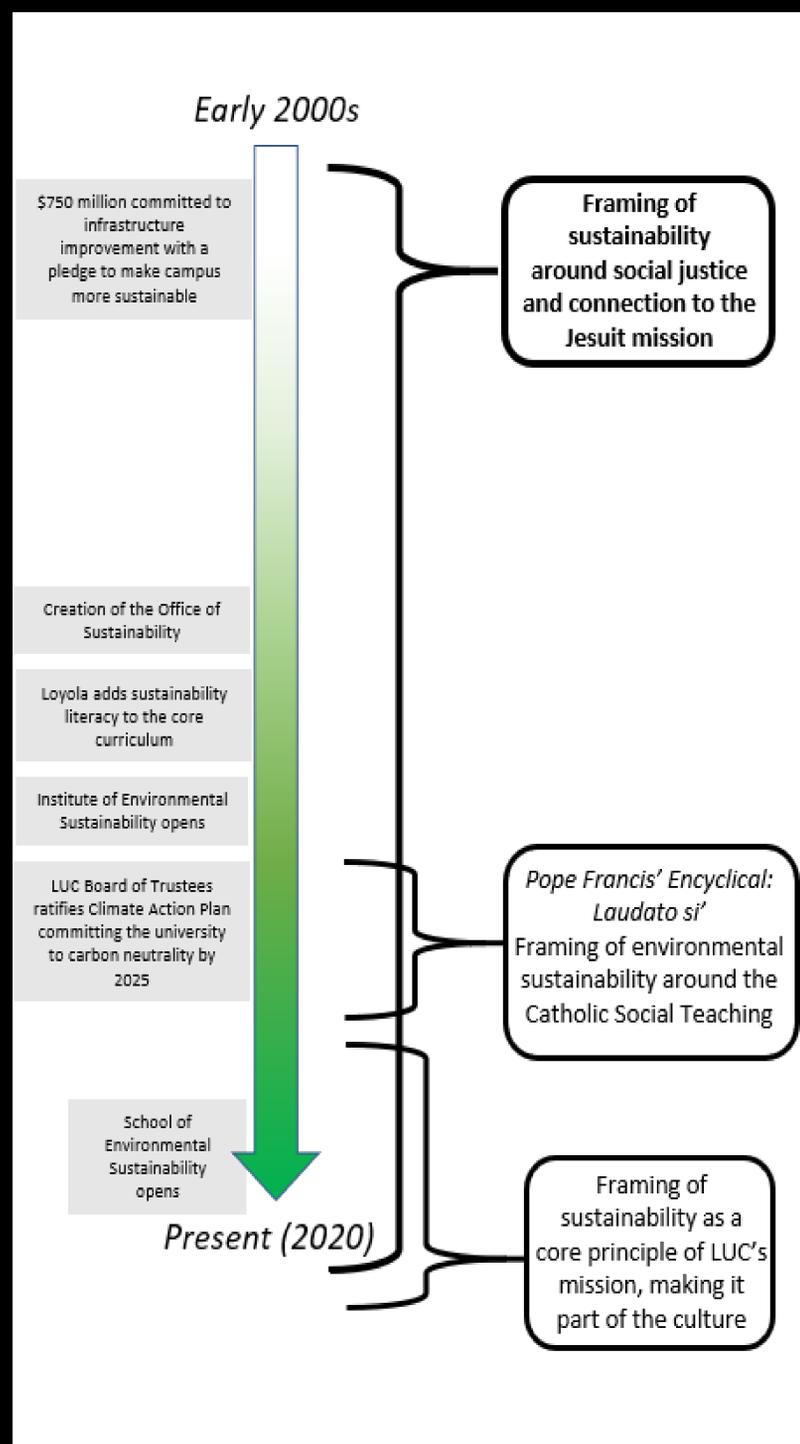


Figure 1

Significant sustainability events at LUC over a 20-year period leading to the current opening of the first ever Jesuit University School of Environmental Sustainability (on the left). Key framings of sustainability identified by the interviewees that played an important role in LUC's sustainability progress (on the right).