

Developing a Campus Sustainability Rating System

Workshop at Rocky Mountain Sustainability Summit

U. Colorado at Boulder, February 22, 2007

Summary of Meeting

Project Overview

Key points:

- Differences between rating and ranking system.
- Draft rating system, original proposal, and other documents now posted on AASHE website.
- Goals of standardized rating system.
- Committee structure, timeline (one year to a beta version) and milestones.
- All volunteer effort to date; seeking funding

Committee Break-out Sessions

Technical Advisory Committee

Need to add indicators on:

- Worker safety
- Energy and water performance data (perhaps by giving points for being x % above or below a standard, based on collected information over a period of years)
- Stormwater management
- Maybe separate out landscaping indicators - fertilizers, pesticides, fuel
- Solid waste issues

Other Advice:

- Need to take into account different departments measure things differently.
- Need to specify what level a policy must cover (what if one dining sector on campus has a sustainable food policy, but not others) Same with campus-wide composting - what if in dining hall but not residence hall, or vice versa?
- KISS Principle - Keep it simple, stupid; or people won't fill it out.
- "% Renewable energy" should specify electricity vs. other energy use
- Would be easier to fill out if divided according to department (separate sections for housing, facilities, capital projects, etc)
- How to account for outsourcing? Fast food companies on campus may be unlikely to follow these measures. Maybe standard should be "is sustainability written into the contract?"
- Position-based questions (do you have sust coord? alt. trans coord? recyc coord? energy manager? etc) aren't good for small campuses who can't afford all these extra positions.
- Need to tailor questions to different institutional types.
- Not our place to dictate what good policy is; transparency will lead to improvement.
- Leave out country names in examples of socially responsible investing.
- Maybe allow innovation points to be used in a separate category, rather than two per category.
- Teaching hospitals are totally different, don't really fit. Maybe separate them out completely?

Strategic Advisory Committee

Discussion surrounded the following issues:

- Recertification – how often?
- Need to encourage continuous improvement; CSRS provide incentives
- Concern about rating becoming a "ranking" if independent party decides to use point scores to "rank" colleges. How to avoid?
- Conducting rating survey on campus should be educational and meaningful – key goal of CSRS is education

- Accreditation agencies as partners (tied into student learning outcomes)
- Need guidance document to explain each indicator and terminology
- Strategic issues vs. operational issues – committee should address separately
- Need for certification or peer review – can CSRS succeed without either, given limited budget? Need something standing behind self-rating? Random audits perhaps. Peer auditing suggested.
- Who will undertake CSRS on campus? Committees ideally, or coordinators. Students should be involved.
- Staged approach vs. piloting full survey. Maybe start with one category as pilot, bring in others over 3 years.
- Each section needs a feedback mechanism, especially during pilot stage.