

# Developing a Campus Sustainability Rating System

## Workshop at Smart & Sustainable Campuses Conference

### University of Maryland, April 18, 2007

## Summary of Meeting

### Project Overview

#### *Key points:*

- Rating vs. ranking system; goals of standardized rating system.
- Call for rating system by HEASC (Higher Education Associations' Sustainability Consortium); general feeling that voluntary rating system is needed, not 3<sup>rd</sup> party ranking.
- Progress to date - workshops at AASHE 2006 in Tempe (October 2006) and CU Boulder's Rocky Mountain Summit (February 2007). Web page established with links to discussion list, committees, draft rating system, and original proposal - <http://www.aashe.org/rating/>
- Committee structure, timeline and milestones (final draft in September, beta version by January).
- All volunteer effort to date; seeking funding.
- Current status – initial draft of CSRS (presented at Rocky Mtn. Summit) undergoing major revisions. New draft will be posted when ready. Will draw heavily on AASHE's "Sustainability in Higher Education Assessment Framework" (SHEAF), developed by Puget Sound institutions.

### Summary of New Draft

#### *Key points:*

- 4 chapters – 1) Governance & Finance; 2) Operations, 3) Education & Research, 4) Social Responsibility & Community Engagement
- Subcategory example: Sustainable Building indicators
- LEED-like checklist; with no 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification initially (but public reporting requirement, transparency, president's letter of certification, and types of questions should help mitigate bad data.)
- Scope: Will consult with Canadian institutions about including Canada along with US.

### Workshop Participant Comments

- Suggestion to seek funding from each higher education association calling for the rating system – e.g., NACUBO, SCUP, APPA, etc.
- Important not to spend too long in development process. May not be a perfect system, but let's start somewhere and then improve it from there. Having a beta version by January sounds good.
- Certification is important, but should not be a deal breaker. Okay to test early versions without 3<sup>rd</sup> party certification, and then revisit the issue. Peer review is one possible means of certification.
- Separating curriculum from informal learning might be good.
- Design of indicators is critical – must be reliable, valid, etc. With points assigned to each, important to have credible indicators. Use latest measurement theories.
- Weighting can be tricky – how to decide on weighting among indicators, let alone categories?
- Look at "outcomes" to the extent possible rather than policies. What resource reductions, for example, were actually accomplished? De-emphasize policy, since there's no guarantee it will be followed (ex: IPM policies).
- Check into LEED for campuses to see similarities.

### Exercise - Financial Indicators

Participants were asked to come up with key indicators of sustainability in institutional finances and governance – only the most important, valid, realistic indicators (results listed below). Then they were asked to choose the

most important indicators among these (asterisked indicators). The point was to show that the CSRS will be an exercise in selecting the most significant, relevant, and technically accurate and rigorous indicators possible.

- Screen on endowment investments\*
- Measurement of resource use/ consumables\*
- Dedicated funding for sustainability, or ways of obtaining funding\*
- Sustainability filter for all budget decisions and capital spending\*
- Cost of tuition & board (on or off campus)
- Purchasing policies are socially responsible – local, environmental, diversity
- Living wage policy, including salaries
- Financial aid
- Cost availability of housing

\* *most important indicators*