

# STARS Pilot Liaison Breakfast, AASHE Conference 2008

November 10, 2008

## **Introductions, Thanks, and Next Steps**

After a round of introductions, Laura thanked the group for all of their contributions throughout the pilot project. The feedback received so far has been really helpful and it's great to see that so many schools have made progress reporting. AASHE appreciates your patience as we've worked through some of the kinks we've encountered this year.

Reminder: the deadline for the pilot is December 31. We realize that is going to be tight for many of you, especially for some of the Phase Two credits. Due to the need to start analyzing the data and working on revisions, we aren't able to extend the deadline. Don't sweat it too much if you aren't able to fill in every field for every credit. We hope and expect that you make a good faith effort to complete as much as you are able. However, one of the reasons we're doing to the pilot project is to determine what types of data are readily available and what aren't.

After the reporting deadline passes on December 31, there are several next steps. First, we'll be putting out a survey to get feedback about your overall experience participating in the pilot project. The credit reporting forms get down to the credit-specific pieces of feedback, but we also want to get your feedback on some of the bigger picture issues, such as:

- Customer service -- Did you use the forum, email, phone call, buddy system? What was/wasn't helpful? What could we do better for version 1.0?
- Online reporting tool -- Did you like using the PDF forms or would you prefer to input the data into online forms? Suggestions to help streamline user experience?
- Overall experience -- (To provide context for understanding your submission and participation). Who gathered the data, how much time it took?
- New things for 1.0 -- What type of marketing materials would be useful in recognizing participants? What type of fee would you be willing to pay? Would you be interested in third-party verification?

You can look forward to seeing this survey sometime in January.

Second, we plan to publish a summary of data and credit feedback reported. We will honor our commitment to protecting the confidentiality of your submissions and the information that you've shared, so none of the feedback or data submitted will be identified as coming from your school; it will be summary and observations about the data, such as average responses on a credit.

Third, once we have assembled that feedback, we plan to incorporate that feedback into a final draft document (STARS 0.9) and releasing it for public review. We're doing this round for a couple of reasons. The first is that we want to be able to incorporate the feedback from all of you and from our last round of public comment into the draft. The other is that reviewers are very keen to provide feedback on the point allocation or weighing of the credits and we want to make sure people have a final opportunity to weigh in.

Finally, based on the feedback on that version, we will put together version 1.0. This will be the document that will be available for all schools that wish to participate and earn a rating. We

plan to release this document in fall 2009, but we need to build out the reporting tool in advance, so we're on a tight timeline.

In recognition of your efforts during the pilot project, we hope to offer pilot participants the opportunity to be first users of the system. If possible, we will help work to transfer pilot data into the 1.0 reporting system so that interested schools can be recognized as first users.

### **Alumni Survey**

Cindy Klein-Banai from University of Illinois at Chicago announced that her dissertation is heavily focused on STARS. She is examining the weighting of STARS points. In order to work through her methodology, Cindy will be using STARS pilot data. Schools will be able to opt out of sharing their submissions for this project.

In addition, Cindy is interested in studying one of the outcomes of sustainability programs in higher education: alumni behavior and attitudes. To do this, she is surveying alumni from her campus about their thoughts on and post-graduation involvement in sustainability. Cindy asked if anyone would like to participate in her study by surveying alumni from their own campus. All data will remain anonymous. If anyone would like to be involved in Cindy's study, please email her at [cindy@uic.edu](mailto:cindy@uic.edu).

### **Questions, Feedback, and Discussion**

One attendee noted that she has very recently begun the process of gathering and reporting data for STARS. She asked AASHE and the group if it is realistic for her university to have the goal of submitting by December 31. Another pilot participant suggested that her university would benefit from narrowing its scope and reporting on only one of the categories so the project is more manageable.

A participant said that he and his interns have been frustrated and confused by the changing of credit numbers. AASHE apologized for the confusion. There was a credit numbering error in the Guide to Pilot Phase One that was corrected in subsequent documents. There was some confusion due to releasing version 0.5 during the pilot period. All of the credits have been released now, so there will not be any more changes in credit numbers during the pilot phase.

One attendee asked what the process for giving feedback on STARS Version 0.9 would be. This attendee was interested in participating in conference calls for this process. In addition to written feedback, AASHE plans to host calls during the STARS V 0.9 feedback process, both on credit content issues and bigger picture issues, such as point allocation methodology. Someone requested that general calls include prompts/questions in order to facilitate discussion.

A sustainability coordinator for dining services noted that she is frustrated with the 150 mi radius definition of local food. She noted that they cannot source grain within 150 miles, but can source it right outside of this boundary. She also noted that her school has the ability to source ample local produce. However, Food Alliance certified produce is not available from her school's produce provider. She would like to see the food credits structured in a way that will not penalize her for the geographic limitations of her school. This is an important concern. Many schools have expressed similar thoughts. Some schools have developed rich and custom fit definitions of local food. AASHE is currently looking for a way to modify its definition of local

food in a way that allows for a fair comparison between schools and welcomes suggestions on how to approach this.

A participant noted that many schools have negative reactions to binary criteria such as the 150-mile radius definition of local food. This attendee said that the difference between 149 and 152 is irrelevant. This attendee suggested that there should be a larger gray area or point scale for credits like this and that a larger point scale will make trade off discussions easier.

There are many challenges in addressing regionalism across the STARS credits. AASHE is interested in discussion on this topic and welcomes feedback on how to approach this issue. It is unlikely that STARS will be able to develop regional systems by the time version 1.0 is released next fall, but AASHE can work on it for future versions. Right now, the plan is for STARS 1.0 to be active for two years before releasing the next version, STARS 2.0 (and allowing a one-year grace period with both systems operating). One attendee asked if the two-year revision timeline that AASHE plans to use for STARS would affect the current three-year reporting period used in STARS. It should not.

One attendee noted that her institution uses 96% non-potable water to irrigate 250 acres of land. She felt that such an accomplishment merits recognition, even though it doesn't meet the 100 percent threshold specified in the credit. She would like the credits to reward schools that make significant accomplishments that just barely miss the mark. One attendee offered the idea of using a scale of 0 to 1 in the credits, which would allow for proper showcasing of exact achievements made by institutions. Another attendee noted that this might be difficult because some of the credits do not describe an endpoint that can be represented by the number 1. Another participant supported the idea of creating a larger point scale (more shades of gray) for each credit and said that it is encouraging for institutions to get a "pat on the back" when they make progress, even if it is a small step.

One attendee said that her institution is using STARS as an internal compass that helps them to find the areas in which the most progress needs to occur and that they try to focus on understanding the impact their efforts are having on the school community rather than reaching the top score for each credit. Another attendee said that her institution has made the decision that it wishes to use the system as an internal compass rather than a tool for showcasing their accomplishments. However, they know that it may be difficult to keep this information private.

An attendee asked if there are guidelines for using STARS data to report to her campus. One attendee suggested that it would be useful if the system were set up so that schools could go in and retrieve their data so they can use it in public reports. AASHE is trying to make data available to schools in this way. A participant expressed concern that anonymity be maintained if data are made available. One attendee noted that it would be nice to be able to use the data (charts, etc.) for encouragement of good practice on campus (ex. water cooler stickers that show campus progress).

An attendee asked how far off we are from STARS being included in the accreditation process. Based on AASHE's conversations with folks active in accreditation, we are likely pretty far off in the short term, but some schools have already been recognized for their sustainability programs during their accreditation process. AASHE is working to align credits so that they are consistent with the standards used by accrediting bodies. An attendee said that accreditation is the best

leverage tool for inspiring STARS support in the top levels of the administration. Accreditation is much more important to top administration than student involvement or small achievements that the school has made while participating in STARS. An attendee encouraged participants to submit STARS data to accreditation agencies.

A participant asked if credits will be weighed to reward points that are hard to achieve. The system for allocating points has yet to be determined, but we may consider how difficult it is to achieve a credit. An attendee said that the system would create misleading incentives and would lose credibility if it gives extra points to things that are harder to achieve. The system should recognize what has the largest impact.

An attendee requested a “snapshot” showing his progress in reporting so far. One attendee noted that it is very useful to have a live person to answer questions.

Dave Newport surveyed attendees and asked if STARS is too big, too small, or the right size. By a raise of hands, everyone said just right. AASHE will survey pilot participants about the scope of the project after the pilot concludes.

At this point the meeting concluded, but some folks stuck around to ask questions.

Someone asked about regional conversations with other STARS pilot schools. A list of the pilot schools is available on AASHE website at [http://www.aashe.org/stars/pilot\\_institutions.php](http://www.aashe.org/stars/pilot_institutions.php)

A participant from a community college (CC) requested that CC data be separated out or showcased in a different manner. Their circumstances are very different than other schools. AASHE can do this as long as enough participating CCs report.

An attendee asked that AASHE communicate that data reported should adhere to certain standards. STARS is an important tool in getting all of the players on campus to the table and gathering data. At another conference an attendee suggested that AASHE ask campuses to report how they gathered data so viewers will know how to interpret the information.