

STARS Advisory Committees Focus Call
Monday, October 29, 2007
Topic: Curriculum

Present: Tom Balf, Sarah Banas, Carol Brodie, Ed Becker, Winston Huff, Susan Ledlow, Terry Link, Jean MacGregor, Margot MacDonald, Penny Menton, Gordon Nelson, Jacob Park, Jim Pittman, Maureen Roskoski. *Steering Committee:* Dave Newport, Julian Dautremont-Smith, Judy Walton

Agenda

1. Introduction

Introduced goals of meeting. Discussed concern by reviewers that ER section was too “short” compared to others, and deserves to be worth more points. Deferred issue of weighting until later. Current goal is to come up with meaningful indicators that measure achievement in education and research for sustainability.

2. ER Prerequisite – Definition of Sustainability

Steering Committee (SC) will make the following changes: 1) provide a definition of sustainability at beginning of document and explain that it informs all of STARS, 2) consider making ER Prerequisite 1 an overall prerequisite for STARS, 3) change existing ER Prerequisite from “operational definition” to “methodology for classifying courses and research as sustainability focused.” The majority of credits in the ER section depend on having such a methodology.

Question: Should “classification methodology” be a category *prerequisite*? If a regular credit (say ER Credit 1), all other credits that depend on having a methodology could specify “ER Credit 1” as prerequisite for earning that credit.

General consensus: don’t make it a prerequisite. Allows individuals to earn some points in ER even if they don’t have a classification methodology.

Question: Should methodology be defined by each institution, or by STARS?

General consensus: strong definition of what counts as “sustainability focused” is necessary; might otherwise end up with hundreds of courses based on loose definition. AASHE could provide strong guidance (for example, definition of “sustainability focused research & courses”) and urge institutions to incorporate similar definitions and methodologies for classifying courses. AASHE could alternatively require a specific classification system. (Too rigid? Avoid prescribing a single definition for all to use?)

Discussion: time-consuming to classify courses properly; involves wading into syllabi. Maybe offer different points for different levels of “incorporation” of sustainability. Geoff Chase & Peggy Barlett offer three or four “levels.” Allows for a scale. (But how would these levels translate into point values for each credit?) “Sustainability as course theme or goal” could be highest level. How to measure different degrees of incorporation? How to welcome and reward the least bit of incorporation of sustainability? Avoid being too prescriptive in what counts as “sustainability.” Like tax forms, offer guidelines on parameters of what sustainability content might look like, but allow flexibility for different approaches, at least on first draft. Improve on successive drafts. Realize this is a growing document; we don’t necessarily have to have everything fully defined at beginning. Create database of how campuses are earning the credits (offer opportunity to comment), and improve over time. Academic side needs to have some freedom; but STARS ought to offer “baseline” definition that can be built upon. When giving examples, don’t name specific institution – leads to jealousy or negative reactions. Turns people off to see other schools, especially if they appear frequently as examples.

Question: Are indicators based on classification methodology among the most effective indicators possible? General consensus: Yes, include them.

3. **Education Indicators**

Graduation requirement – many reviewers felt it should be worth more. How to accomplish? All credits in STARS worth 1 pt. unless “intensity” credits. May try to find a way to make this an intensity question. 100% student exposure is worth most points. Data collection may be major problem; and how to combine with ER Credit 3 to make a meaningful intensity indicator. How easy is it to collect data on “percent of students enrolled in a sustainability-focused course before graduation”? Time-consuming & difficult to collect data. Potential duplication – same students taking multiple sustainability courses.

Course offering trend – how to combine with graduation requirement (above) to make an intensity credit?

Student exposure to sustainability–trend – might be able to get at % of courses students perceived to be sustainability related in the sustainability literacy survey (separate credit). Could identify # of students in these courses, but couldn't distinguish between duplicates. Need to use FTE, and total the number of student credit hours. Consider challenges caused by quarters v. semesters (translate into one type of credit hour).

Course designation – Tier 1 or 2? Relates to other credits; helps students find sustainability-focused courses. Allow other means besides “identification in course catalog.” Allow comprehensive list of sustainability courses on a website, for example. Equally effective. Can list be informal, rather than “formal designation”? Would be interesting to know what percent of courses the *students* think are sustainability focused.

Tenure, promotion & hiring – could be problematic in terms of academic freedom. Can it be done in manner that is effective and fair? How about “if school has one program in this field then T&P is based on this.” Seems redundant with academic department or program (Credit 6) – if you have the program you'll promote and hire with sustainability in mind. Carrots work better than sticks. This credit might upset people. Hiring is exception – focus on hiring and drop T&P. One of biggest hang ups for sustainability scientists is that their work isn't recognized in T&P. Tenure issues in sustainability are in any interdisciplinary work. Real issue is interdisciplinary. Maybe say “interdisciplinary work is recognized in tenure, promotion, and reappointment decisions.”

Course development incentives – need more ideas for what counts to achieve this credit.

Academic program or department – AASHE may change credit to include points for different sustainability-related programs and certificates, such as green chemistry, sustainable design, etc. An intensity indicator. Clarify what “offer” means. Include list of programs that might qualify. Would “environmental studies” count?

4. **Potential new indicators**

Suggested New Indicators:

- 1) Institution specifies in comprehensive plan goals for sustainability-focused courses and research (potential new indicator).
- 2) Measurable outcomes to see if curriculum is effective (covered by literacy indicators).
- 3) Credit for student involvement in campus operations, applying knowledge from classroom (Ed Becker will help craft).
- 4) Service learning or internship credit.
- 5) Sustainability-focused living/learning communities (co-curricular credit).
- 6) Advisement indicator- having advisors who can help students choose right courses is critical.
- 7) Difference between credit for making options “available” v. making them a requirement. Instead of grad requirement, for example, focus on availability of courses to students. But “availability” doesn't guarantee many students will take courses. Would help if courses are electronically flagged.
- 8) Percent of academic departments with a sustainability plan.

- 9) Breadth credit - telling statistic would be “percent of departments with sustainability course offerings.” If all courses in the same dept, you don't have breadth.
- 10) Indicator for “greening of existing programs.”

5. *Other issues participants wish to discuss*

May need more wiggle room on 3-yr. trend in sustainability-focused courses. Some schools already have high enrollment, hard to continue making progress. Some schools make a big leap all at once – do they get credit for that, even if progress slows for next 3 yrs? Many indicators go back to institution's definition of sustainability, which is key.