

STARS Advisory Committees Focus Call
Wednesday, December 5, 2007

Topic: Research

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Agenda

1. Research - General

- *QUESTION 1: What criteria should be used to classify research as "sustainability-focused"?*

Agreed research is important enough to university's central purpose to include in STARS, despite challenges in devising credits. (Institutions where research is not important may be exempt from certain credits.) Perhaps distinguish "sustainability-focused" research from "sustainability-related" research in order to narrow field (otherwise virtually anything might be included). Proposal flow might be useful to look at (all sustainability proposals sent out). Getting faculty to write sustainability proposals can be seen as successful outcome in itself.

Perhaps have two tiered categories and measure both – 1. University-defined sustainability research (probably very broad), 2. STARS defined sustainability research - research must integrate all 3 spheres: social, economic, environmental (and doesn't necessarily use the term "sustainability"). Can put in key words in contracts & grants page.

Discussed question of what to measure: \$\$ granted, articles published, % research faculty involved; # of funded projects (# of grants awarded); # of proposals sent? Agreed it doesn't have to be either/or – can use multiple measures. Still question of how to reward institutions way out on the research edge – say huge numbers of faculty involved.

Agreed that # of articles published is tricky to include; questions of validity, bias, etc. Maybe use "scholarly output" to cover all bases including presentations. Allow university to list its best scholarly output.

Maybe add separate breadth question: "% departments involved in sustainability research."

Discussed ways to avoid "gaming" system. Public scrutiny important. Maybe ask institutions to put up their best examples of research in the two categories - university-defined (1 pt.), and STARS-defined (2 pts.). STARS should offer guidance even for university-defined sustainability definition, but allow university to apply it in own way. For documentation, list x of your best project titles – would make a great resource and transparency keeps people honest. Maybe avoid metrics completely – ask for best examples instead of measuring percents, \$\$ spent, etc. Opportunity for public to comment on each institution's submission may serve as one accountability mechanism.

2. ER Credits 8+9: Funded Research – Trend, and Internal Grant Research – Trend

QUESTION 1: Is there some percentage of research dollars going to sustainability past which it is unreasonable to expect a continued upward trend? If so, what is this percentage?

Hard to avoid penalizing advanced campuses when using trends. Don't know way around. Trends are important for encouraging schools to get on ladder. Maybe trend + threshold? Few if any institutions at present will have high threshold level of sustainability-focused research grants (as opposed to sustainability-related).

3. ER Credit 10: Research Center

QUESTION 1: How should we modify this credit to give recognition to those schools that have multiple sustainability-focused research centers, and to take into account different orientations to research? Should we ask about the percentage of research centers that are sustainability-focused?

Tough question. Number of centers may not be valid measure; one big coordinating center might be better than multiple distributed centers. Counting numbers of centers not important.

Rather than number of centers, maybe amount centers spend? What about credit for x% of institution's budget spent on centers? Or center's endowment? Want to find some way for institution to promote itself in terms of how money is earmarked for sustainability. Ex: "% of external research monies earmarked for sustainability research." 10% threshold. Money gets attention; starts snowball of involvement. Deserves credit as catalyst; but problem is that money can be gamed.

Center is valuable & important. Could get 1 pt. for having a center; 2nd pt for intensity (either multiple centers, or % of depts. involved or % faculty participating in center).

4. Research Plan

QUESTION 1: Do universities have plan outlining direction of research for university?

All pay lip service; may not be meaningful to incorporate as a credit.

5. ER Credit 11: Research Incentives

QUESTION 1: Are there specific sustainability research incentives (including any of those listed) that should be required to earn this credit? Are there other options that are roughly equivalent and should be listed?

Special recognition given for sustainability research (tenure, award program)

6. New Credits

QUESTION 1: Should we create a new credit about undergraduate sustainability research opportunities, or can undergraduate opportunities be incorporated into the other research credits? (ER8, 9, 10, 11)

Faculty are good indicator – if they're involved in research, students will be. If university uses undergrad researchers (not all do), they will probably be involved in sustainability research. Any campus with a strong campus sustainability program can be assumed to involve undergrads. Experiential learning component. Capstones, senior theses, group projects. But this credit would pertain to funded research only.

Discussed difficulty of practices that don't always lend themselves to metrics; may miss half the picture by quantifying intangibles. But if want to compare apples to apples, often need metrics. Challenge is how to combine soft and hard data. Leave room for institution to simply report progress.

Think about who will participate in STARS (beginner to advanced). Want to encourage tentative first steps, but also want to acknowledge schools that are farther along so they will consider participating. Delicate balance. If trying to serve both, be sensitive to what each will get from STARS in exchange for time invested.