

Call for a System for Assessing & Comparing Progress in Campus Sustainability

Given the exciting and explosive growth of sustainability initiatives in every sector of campus life, measuring and assessing progress toward sustainability goals has become increasingly important.

Many institutions have undertaken detailed, campus-wide assessments of their progress toward sustainability. Others have measured progress in specific sectors (e.g., operations) or for specific parameters (e.g., recycling, energy, and water consumption). There is as yet, however, no system that assesses *and compares* a large number of campuses in terms of overall level of sustainability achievement. Such a system would of necessity address all the dimensions of sustainability (health, social, economic and ecological) and all the sectors and functions of campus, including curriculum, facilities, operations, and collaboration with communities.

While a variety of campus sustainability assessment “tools” and frameworks are available, there is no system in place that would allow campuses to compare their efforts with other institutions and see how they rate. It’s impossible to answer the frequently asked question, “Who are the leading campuses in sustainability?” with any degree of accuracy or confidence.

HEASC believes that a widely accepted rating system is key to accomplishing a number of important objectives to rapidly advance sustainability in higher education. Accordingly, we call for the development of a voluntary assessment and rating system for campus sustainability that would become the ‘standard’ for the higher education community. Ideally, such a system would accomplish the following:

1. Provide campuses with a road map for moving in a more sustainable direction, with a common set of benchmarks and goals.
2. Provide consistency from year to year in assessing progress toward sustainability.
3. Enable meaningful comparisons across institutions.
4. Provide incentives for institutions to advance sustainability in all sectors

We encourage AASHE to convene all relevant stakeholders in a collaborative process to develop such a system over the next year.

HEASC: The Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium