

# AC 6: Sustainability Research

## Rationale

This credit recognizes institutions where academic employees are conducting research and producing scholarly work on sustainability topics. Sustainability requires collaboration that transcends traditional disciplines. The process of identifying an institution's sustainability research can help connect individuals, laboratories, and other entities that have a shared interest in sustainability. The percentage of departments that produce sustainability research is an indicator of the spread of such research and the extent to which an institution is contributing new knowledge to help address sustainability challenges. Incentive programs can encourage academic staff and students alike to broaden and deepen their sustainability research in ways that may not otherwise be captured.

## Applicability

Applicable to institutions where research is considered in **academic staff** promotion or tenure decisions as a matter of policy or standard practice.

## Points available

A maximum of 10 points are available for this credit.

## Criteria

### 6.1 Percentage of academic departments engaged in sustainability research

An institution earns 8 points when 90 percent or more of its **academic departments** that are engaged in **research** are engaged in **sustainability research**. Incremental points are available and earned as outlined in Table I.

Table I. Points earned for indicator 6.1

Number of academic departments engaged in sustainability research		Total number of academic departments engaged in research		Factor		Points earned
	÷		×	8.89	=	Up to 8

## Measurement

Report on academic departments that are currently engaged in research or have produced or supervised research during the previous three years and academic staff members who are affiliated

with those departments. Research conducted by individuals no longer affiliated with the institution does not qualify.

To qualify as sustainability-focused, the research or scholarly work must explicitly address the concept of sustainability, further our understanding of the interdependence of ecological and social/cultural/economic systems, or have a primary and explicit focus on a sustainability challenge.

A comprehensive listing of each department's sustainability research is welcome, but not required. Rather, an institution may identify one or more examples of sustainability research for each department for which it is claiming points.

## Documentation

Report the following information in the online Reporting Tool.

- Total number of academic departments engaged in research (required). Report on those subdivisions of the institution that are devoted to specific academic disciplines. If the institution's academic subdivisions typically incorporate multiple disciplines or fields of study, report instead on the academic disciplines or fields of study themselves.
- Number of academic departments engaged in sustainability research (required). Include departments that have at least one affiliated academic staff member who produces or supervises sustainability research.
- Annotated list or inventory of the institution's sustainability research by department (required). Upload. Include sufficient information to justify the inclusion of each department, e.g., at least one publication or project description that clearly indicates its sustainability content.
- Description of the process used to identify the institution's sustainability research (required). For example, a survey of academic staff or department heads, a review of individuals' published research interests, or an audit of academic publications and/or funded projects.

The Reporting Tool will automatically calculate the following figure:

- Percentage of academic departments engaged in sustainability research

## 6.2 Incentives for sustainability research

An institution earns 2 points when it provides incentives for A) **academic staff** and B) students to conduct sustainability research. Partial points are available and earned as outlined in Table II.

Table II. Points earned for indicator 6.2

Criterion	Points available	Points earned
A. Institution provides incentives for academic staff to conduct sustainability research.	1	

B. Institution provides incentives for students to conduct sustainability research.	1	
Total points earned →		

## Measurement

Report on the current status of the institution's programs.

To qualify, incentives must A) have a stated intent to support academic staff or students in conducting sustainability research, B) support participation in an ongoing sustainability research professional development or training program, or C) have resulted in the development of new instances of sustainability research during the previous three years.

## Documentation

Report the following information in the online Reporting Tool.

- Does the institution provide incentives for academic staff to conduct sustainability research? (required). For example, fellowships, funding, or release time.

*If Yes, the following field is also required:*

- Description of the sustainability research incentives for academic staff. Include, for example, the stated intent of the incentives program, the specific incentives that are provided, and examples of positive outcomes from within the previous three years.

- Does the institution provide incentives for students to conduct sustainability research? (required). For example, fellowships, funding, or mentorships.

*If Yes, the following field is also required:*

- Description of the sustainability research incentives for students. Include, for example, the stated intent of the incentives program, the specific incentives that are provided, and examples of positive outcomes from within the previous three years.

## Glossary

**Academic department** – An administrative subdivision of a college, university, or school faculty that is devoted to a particular academic discipline (e.g., Economics, Environmental Science, or Sociology) or a closely related set of disciplines (e.g., Asian Studies or Physics & Astronomy). Departments may exist under other nomenclature and with coarser or finer divisions, depending upon an institution's context. If, however, the institution's academic subdivisions typically incorporate multiple disciplines or fields of study, report instead on the academic disciplines or fields of study themselves.

**Academic staff** – Personnel whose primary assignment is instruction, research, or public service. Also known as “faculty members”, academic staff include personnel who hold an academic rank with titles such as professor, associate professor, assistant professor, instructor, lecturer, or the equivalent. The category includes personnel with other titles (e.g., dean, director, associate dean, assistant dean, chair, or head of department) if their principal activity is instruction or research. It does not include

graduate, instruction, or research assistants; student teachers; or teacher aides. [Adapted from the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) and the work of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).]

**Research** – The conception or creation of new knowledge. Research may include improving or developing concepts, theories, models, techniques, instrumentation, software, and/or operational methods. [Adapted from the definition used by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).]

**Sustainability challenge** – An issue or situation that threatens or undermines ecological integrity, racial equity and social justice, or the ability of future generations to meet their needs (e.g., biodiversity loss, poverty and inequality, and climate change), OR a goal or objective that contributes to the resolution of such an issue or situation (e.g., ecosystem health, universal human rights, and renewable energy generation). To identify sustainability challenges, it may be helpful to reference the [targets embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), the principles outlined in the [Earth Charter](#), and/or the [Doughnut of social and planetary boundaries](#).

**Sustainability research** – Research activities and scholarly work that explicitly address the concept of sustainability, further our understanding of the interdependence of ecological and social/cultural/economic systems, or have a primary and explicit focus on a sustainability challenge.