

AASHE STARS Pilot Project Implementation at The Evergreen State College

Introduction

In working with Evergreen's Office of Sustainability and the Master's of Environmental Studies Program, I coordinated the completion of the STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System) pilot project for my thesis work. STARS, developed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) is a voluntary, self-reporting framework for gauging relative progress toward sustainability for colleges and universities. Evergreen was one of 70 institutions nationwide to test the systems and provide feedback to AASHE during the STARS pilot project.

The goal of my thesis is to answer three questions in relation to Evergreen's participation in the Pilot Project: 1) what is Evergreen's commitment to sustainability as determined by STARS, 2) does the STARS framework accurately capture Evergreen's work in sustainability, and 3) will STARS serve as a catalyst for organizational change at Evergreen and possibly other institutions in higher education.

Methods

My approach was based on a single case study research design, with data collection methods drawn from ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, interviews and document review.

Data collection for the STARS credits required participation by numerous Evergreen community members, including staff, faculty and work-study students and interns. In order to track the data collection process for each credit I created an Excel "Indicators Tracking Spreadsheet". In addition to tracking the process for each credit, I also tracked the numerous contacts made during data collection, as well as the time commitment required by myself and all other participants.

I worked with the Director of Sustainability and my faculty thesis advisor to determine the primary contacts for each credit. Outreach to contacts began with meetings in late August and early September 2008 and continued with numerous email communications, phone conversations, and follow-up meetings. I emailed the reporting forms to the appropriate contacts for completion. Other reporting forms required a combination of information gathering from the Evergreen website on policies and programs, and outreach to Evergreen community members for additional information.

Results

Institutional Participation

In total, I conducted outreach to 50 different Evergreen community members in my data collection process, of these 50 community members 10% were students (either interns or work-study students), 14% were faculty, and 74% were staff members. Outreach to community members included 164 emails (total sent and received by me), 20 meetings,

and 9 phone conversations. Data collection began on August 25th, 2008 and was concluded on January 10th, 2009. The total time contributed by all community members that participated, including the time required for my coordination, was 255.25 hours. Students (including myself) contributed 67% of the total time, faculty 4% of the total time, and staff 29% of the time. My time accounted for 31% of the total time commitment.

STARS Credit Distribution

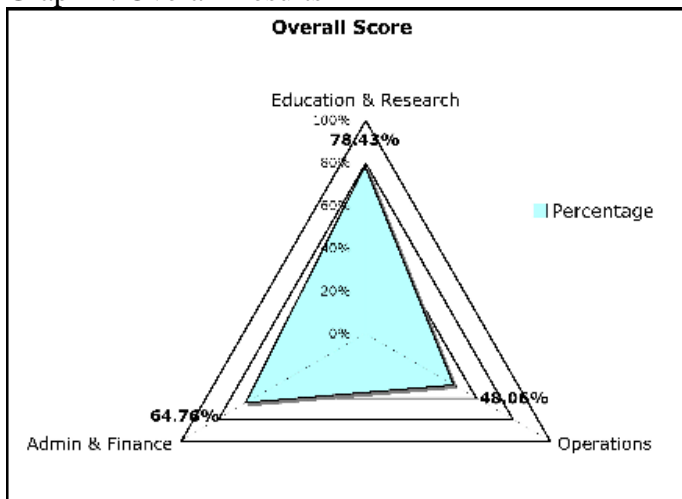
The STARS framework was made up of a total of 176 credits, 62 of these were Tier 1 credits worth one to six points. Tier 2 totaled 114 credits, worth 0.25 points each. A total of 11 Education & Research credits were considered not applicable to TESC. These were all 7 of the credits in the Research subcategory, and 4 credits in the Curriculum subcategory. Only 1 credit was determined to not be applicable in the Administration & Finance category (Diversity, Access & Affordability subcategory), and all credits in the Operations category were applicable.

Of the total credits determined to be applicable, 35.8% of the credits and 26.3% of the total points were possible in the Administration & Finance category. 42.6% of the total credits and 35.4% of the total points possible in the Operations category. And 21.6% of the total credits and 38.3% of the total points possible in the Education & Research category.

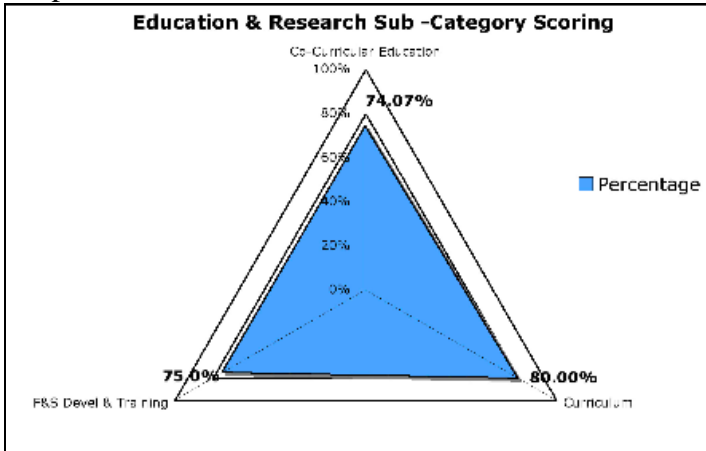
Evergreen STARS Scores

I calculated Evergreen’s overall STARS sustainability score as 67.75%. This is the average of the scores for all three categories described above. Broken out by each category, Evergreen scored the highest in the Education and Research Category with 78.43% overall. However, only 57% of the total Education & Research credits were determined to be applicable. The score I calculated for the Administration and Finance category was 62.86%, and the score for Operations was 48.06%. Graphs 1 through 4 detail the overall results and the results for each category.

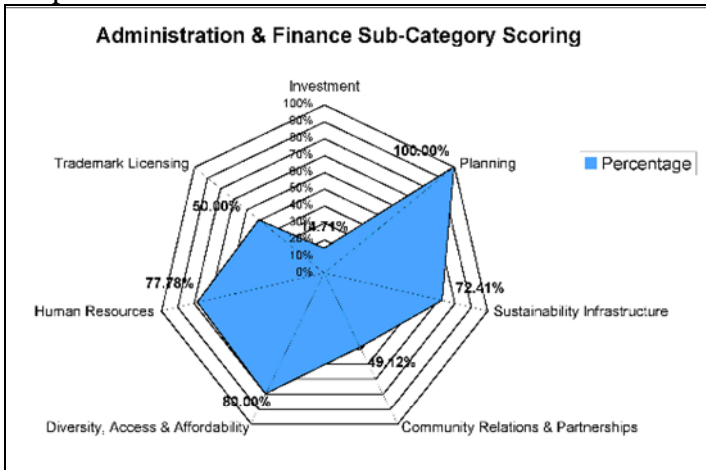
Graph 1. Overall Results



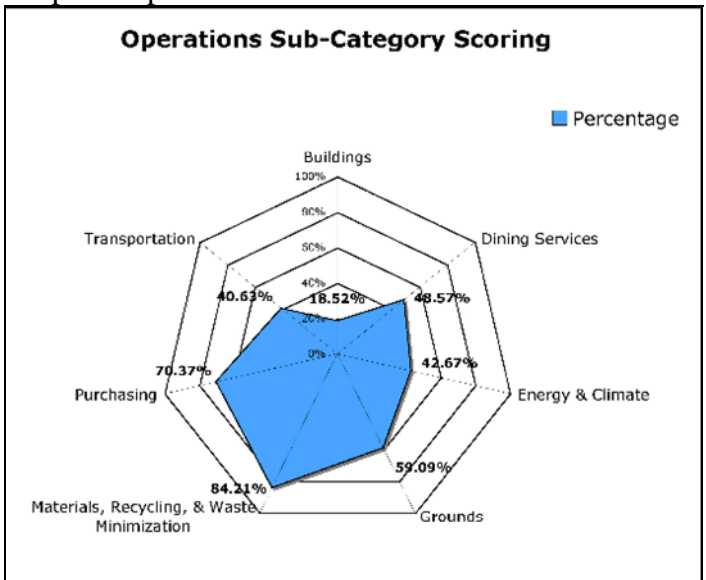
Graph 2. Education & Research Results



Graph 3. Administration & Finance Results



Graph 4. Operations Results



Next Steps

In the coming weeks I will be completing my analysis of the STARS framework, and Evergreens participation in the pilot project. In answering the three questions posed above I will be able to provide valuable recommendations to the Evergreen community and AASHE on the future implementation of the STARS framework.

For more information on the STARS pilot project at Evergreen, contact Kyle Murphy at murkyl20@evergreen.edu.