

Campus Social Sustainability: Not Just About the Green

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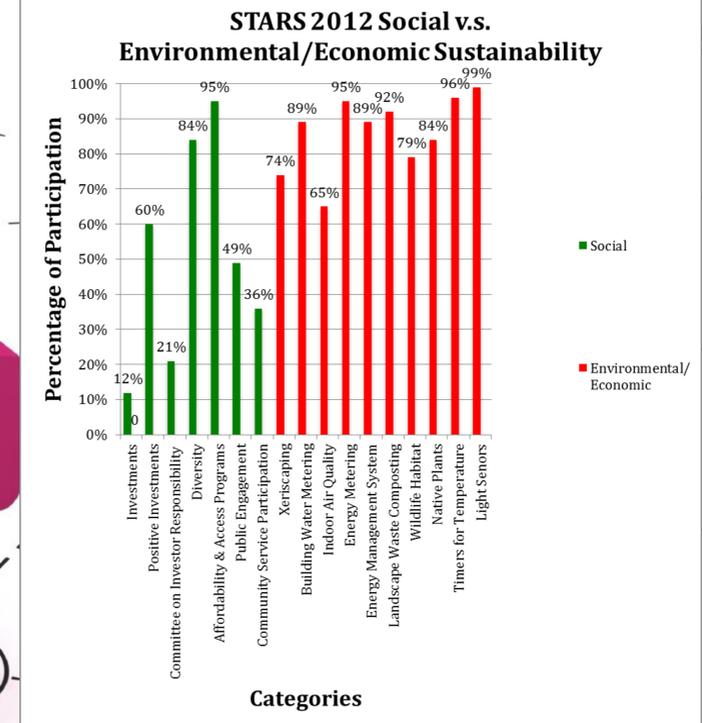
Acknowledgements: Thank you to all those who supported me these last four years through the all the ups and downs. "And no matter how hard you try sometimes life gets you down, but I will stay strong. With my family by my side, these friends never die. These are the best years of our lives. This is what I stand for!"

Abstract

With the demands for highly skilled and qualified workers by the world's most influential companies and organizations, institutions of higher education act as gateways for planting socially responsible individuals into the workforce for generations to come. However, the campus sustainability movement has been far too focused just on the environmental and economic aspects of sustainability without fully incorporating the social part of it. Although the campus sustainability movement has significantly progressed in the last few decades, with the emergence of different organizations and the commitments made by colleges and universities around the country, social sustainability has been unequally represented and left out. By examining the history of the movement, interviewing people about what socially sustainable initiatives schools are accomplishing today, and critiquing the Sustainable Tracking Assessment Rating System, I was able to observe that there is a lack of a focus on social issues that can be addressed in institutions of higher education across the nation. The STARS program does a good job in giving some structure for colleges and universities to become more socially sustainable, but the program needs to be further improved to help achieve this goal.

Sustainability Tracking Assessment & Rating Systems (STARS)

The STARS system is a self-reporting universal rating system that allows institutions of higher education to track and compare their progress in sustainability along side other participants. Participants of the program go through a checklist of sustainable initiatives that will earn them points which in the end will add up to a score that reveals their "STARS RATING" of either platinum, gold, silver, or bronze, with the option not to be rated and labeled reporter.



Festival of Cultures, showing commitment to student population diversity on campus.

Methods

For my research I decided that it was necessary to do some background research on the campus sustainability movement to determine what would be the best approach to making institutions of higher education more socially sustainable. From there I was able to pick out four different categories with examples and interviews of how schools around the nation are incorporating these socially sustainable initiatives on their campus to see if they could be implemented on others. Then I evaluated the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Sustainability Tracking Assessment & Rating System (STARS) to recommend whether or not it is a viable option to increasing social sustainability at colleges and universities.



CSB/SJU students participating in community service efforts through ABE Program.

Avenues to Increase Social Sustainability Broken Down By Categories

Investments	Divestment, Positive Investments, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs)
Diversity	Support Programs for Underrepresented Groups, Cross-Racial Interactions, Cognitive Openness
Access	Affordability, Upward Bound, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs
Public Engagement	Community Sustainability Partnerships, Local and National Community Service Participation

Conclusion

Institutions of higher education can put it upon themselves to become more socially sustainable, but they need guidance, which the campus sustainability movement failed to address early on when they started. Although it has improved in recent years, it will take an integrative approach of addressing investments, diversity, access, and public engagement among other initiatives to become more socially sustainable. In addition, the STARS program does a good job in providing a template of what colleges and universities can do to become more sustainable as a whole, as well as addressing the social aspect. What it does lack though is the enforcement needed for institutions of higher education to become involved and participate in the program. The rating system in the STARS program could also be changed to include prerequisites on what initiatives schools must accomplish to better encompass sustainability as a whole, instead of just focusing on the environmental and economic aspects as they have in the past.

Sources: Background: <http://www.arkadiansystems.com/?tag=social-diversity>
Top Image: <http://www.csbsju.edu/ISPO/Festival-Of-Cultures/Pictures-from-Festival-of-Cultures-2010.htm>
Bottom Image: Personal photograph