Sustainability

Shoreline Community College (Shoreline) values sustainability, taking major action in 2006 with the creation of the first Sustainability Committee. Sustainable practices are ecologically sound, socially equitable, and economically viable. These “Three E’s”1 are a major component of our Strategic Plan and an important focus of the Day of Learning. This document further defines what sustainability means and provides an introduction to concepts and organizations that the college is involved with and will help us reach our sustainability goals.

Advancing Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)

Sustainability is increasingly a priority in higher education due to its impacts on finance, student enrollment, and more. Shoreline joined AASHE in 2007 to utilize the resources and support it provides to track and improve school sustainability. AASHE also provides several opportunities for colleges and universities to stand out and receive recognition for sustainability accomplishments.

AASHE is the leading association for the advancement of sustainability in higher education. They serve a full range of higher education faculty, administrators, staff and students who are change agents and drivers of sustainability innovation.

Understanding Sustainability

AASHE defines sustainability in a pluralistic and inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice, secure livelihoods, and a better world for all generations. STARS attempts to translate this broad and inclusive view of sustainability to measurable objectives at the campus level. Thus, it includes credits related to a college or university’s environmental, social, and economic performance.

The concept of sustainability has shaped the development of STARS and is fundamental to the rating system. One of the most popular definitions of sustainability is actually a definition of sustainable development. It is from Our Common Future: The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, commonly known as the Brundtland Commission Report:

1. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:
   - the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
   - the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

2. Thus the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability in all countries […]

3. […] Physical sustainability cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to such considerations as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and benefits. Even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies a concern for social equity between generations, a concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation.

The interconnectedness and interdependence of the social, environmental, and economic components of sustainability are included throughout Our Common Future. The Brundtland Commission writes, “Our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative neglect of economic and social justice.” The report continues, “A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to

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1 Often the Three E’s are referred to as the Triple Bottom Line: Economy, Environmental, and Social or People, Planet, and Profit.
ecological and other crises. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.”

To further advance the principles of sustainability, the Brundtland Commission called for a “universal declaration” of norms to promote sustainable development. This goal was realized with the Earth Charter, a “global consensus statement on ethics and values for a sustainable future.” Developed over a period of ten years with extensive global consultation, the Earth Charter has been formally endorsed by many organizations. The Earth Charter continues the Brundtland Commission’s understanding of the connections between social justice, environmental welfare, and economic security.

Today most uses of and references to sustainability emphasize the concept’s simultaneous economic, environmental, and social dimensions. For example, businesses talk about the triple bottom line: people, planet, and profits (or, alternately, human capital, natural capital, and financial capital). Likewise, sustainability educators commonly refer to the Three E’s of sustainability: economy, ecology, and equity.

Popular representations of sustainability also underscore the concept’s three dimensions. Sustainability experts often use a three-legged stool as a symbol for sustainability. The social, economic, and environmental components each represent one of the stool’s legs. If one of the legs is missing, the sustainability stool can’t balance or function. A common illustration of sustainability is the diagram above depicting three overlapping circles representing environmental needs, economic needs, and social needs. The area where the circles overlap and all three needs are met is the area of sustainability.

Another popular representation is the diagram above in which sustainability is depicted as three concentric circles to further emphasize the interdependence of the three dimensions - the economic existing within the social/cultural, and both existing within the environment.

In 2015, the United Nations published "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", a "plan of action for people, planet and prosperity". The publication outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets, and seeks to build on previous efforts by outlining a 15-year agenda that balances "the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental”.

**STARS Overview (adopted in 2011)**

The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System™ (STARS®) is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. Shoreline started using the STARS framework in 2011 in order to inform strategic planning and make real progress toward sustainability. STARS creates a baseline for continual improvement, helps generate new ideas, and provides international recognition for sustainability efforts.

STARS is intended to engage and recognize the full spectrum of colleges and universities - from community colleges to research universities - and encompasses long-term sustainability goals for already high-achieving organizations as well as entry points of recognition for college and universities that are taking first steps toward sustainability.

STARS attempts to translate this broad and inclusive view of sustainability to measurable objectives at the campus level. The various STARS categories include academic courses and programs, learning outcomes, sustainability literacy for students and employees, public engagement that creates community partnerships and uses the college as living/learning laboratory (identifying trees and plants, as well as sustainable practices in place on campus), and college operations – building maintenance, grounds, food service, procurement, transportation, recycling and construction.
STARS is designed to:

- Provide a framework for understanding sustainability in all sectors of higher education.
- Enable meaningful comparisons over time and across colleges and universities using a common set of measurements developed with broad participation from the international campus sustainability community.
- Create incentives for continual improvement toward sustainability.
- Facilitate information sharing about higher education sustainability practices and performance.
- Build a stronger, more diverse campus sustainability community.

College Climate Commitment (signed September 24, 2007)

In 2007, Shoreline signed the following commitment to combat climate change through our learning, research, service, and administrative operations. By making this commitment along with over 500 other colleges and universities across the country, we join an organized network of colleges and universities with a common goal to mitigate the devastating effects of global climate change. As part of this commitment, Shoreline created a Climate Action Plan to reduce the College’s 2008 figure of 14,280 reported metric tons of CO2 emissions by 80% by 2050. Below is the commitment the college signed in 2007:

We, the undersigned presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities, believe firmly in the power, potential, and imperative of higher education’s key role in shaping a sustainable society. Not only are we deeply concerned about the increasing pace and intensity of global climate change and the potential for unprecedented detrimental impacts, but we also understand that technology, infrastructure, global interconnectedness, and our greatest asset – engaged, committed, smart students – allow us to explore bold and innovative solutions and to lead in climate action and sustainable solutions.

We have begun to experience the effects of climate change in our communities and we understand that these effects are projected to become more severe and damaging. We recognize that mitigation and adaptation are complementary strategies for reducing the likelihood of unmanageable change, managing the risks, and taking advantage of new opportunities created by our changing climate.

We believe colleges and universities must exercise leadership in their communities and throughout society by providing the knowledge, research, practice, and informed graduates to create a positive and sustainable future. Along with other aspects of sustainability, campuses that address the climate challenge by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and by integrating resilience into their curriculum, research, and campus operations will better serve their students and meet their social mandate to help create a vital, ethical, and prosperous civil society.

We further believe that exerting leadership in addressing climate change will reduce our long-term energy costs and the costs of climate disturbance, increase our quality of life, attract excellent students and faculty, and build the support of alumni and local communities.

We have resolved to take action in one of the following Climate Leadership Commitments. We believe carbon neutrality and resilience are extremely high priority areas of action for all colleges and universities and we aim to lead the nation in these efforts. We urge others to join us in transforming society towards a sustainable, healthy, and more prosperous future.

1) Develop a comprehensive Climate Action Plan (adopted in 2010)
a. Within two months of signing this document, create internal organizational structures to guide the development and implementation of the Plan

b. Within one year of the implementation start date, actively support a joint campus-community task force (or equivalent) to ensure alignment of the Plan with community goals and to facilitate joint action, and complete a greenhouse gas emissions inventory, also identifying near term opportunities for greenhouse gas reduction. Report these in the first annual evaluation of progress

c. Within two years of the implementation start date, lead and complete an initial campus-community resilience assessment including initial indicators and current vulnerability

d. Within three years of the implementation start date complete the Plan, (also reflecting joint community-campus components), which will include:

- A target date for achieving carbon neutrality as soon as possible
- A target date by which defined thresholds of resilience will be met
- Interim target dates for meeting milestones that will lead to carbon neutrality and increasing resilience
- Mechanisms and indicators for tracking progress (including those that cut across campus-community boundaries)
- Actions to make carbon neutrality and resilience a part of the curriculum and other educational experiences for all students
- Actions to expand research in carbon neutrality and resilience

e. Review, revise if necessary, and resubmit the climate action plan not less frequently than every five years

2) Submit an annual evaluation of progress (Completed in 2010, 2014, and 2017)

a. Within one year of the implementation start date, and every year thereafter, complete an annual evaluation of progress

b. Make the action plan, annual evaluation of progress (including greenhouse gas inventory, resilience assessment etc.), publicly available by submitting them to Second Nature’s reporting system for posting and dissemination

Citations
"STARS Overview." STARS, AASHE, stars.aashe.org/.