Is SU Green? Assessing Sustainability at Salisbury University via STARS

Megan Fisher & Kayla Craighead
Executive Summary

Salisbury University has set a goal to improve campus sustainability. Using the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) we assessed sustainability within the co-curricular and curriculum subcategories of STARS at Salisbury University for our ENVR 499 Senior Seminar project. As students we have developed much of our environmental knowledge and awareness as SU students, and as seniors we desire to complete a project that will help SU in further developing its sustainability efforts.

Although Salisbury is working towards becoming a more sustainable university, it has yet to establish a clear definition of sustainability as it applies to the university setting. An official definition would serve as a set standard for Salisbury University and something for which to strive. As a result our first initiative in the project is to develop a campus wide definition of sustainability. In our definition, sustainability creates an environment in which humans and nature can productively co-exist yet still have the societal, economic, and political needs of the current population met without jeopardizing the needs and well-being of future generations. Our definition was developed through a culmination of all prior classes in the environmental program and prior experience within the environmental community. Ideally we recommend that Salisbury University formulate a committee comprised of at least three faculty members who teach courses in different departments to compose an official definition of sustainability for University use.

In this project, using criteria from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), we score Salisbury University on its current standings in its co-curricular and curricular programs dealing with sustainability. AASHE is a professional, membership-based association of colleges and universities. Its mission is to empower higher education to lead the sustainability transformation. AASHE does this by providing resources, professional development opportunities, and a network of support to enable institutions of higher education to model and advance sustainability in everything they do, from governance and operations to education and research. AASHE’s Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) assists universities in rating and monitoring their progress towards a sustainability benchmark.

For our report we use the criteria for STARS as a basis, gathering information from Salisbury University and its faculty, focusing on the education section within STARS analyzing the co-curricular and curricular subcategories. Overall Salisbury University scores poorly, out of 73 possible points the University only achieved 17.25. Despite the University’s low score, a majority of the points were not earned due to the fact that the University is still in the beginning stages of making the campus more sustainable. There is a lot of room for improvement at Salisbury University, but our research illustrates that the University is moving in a positive direction. In 2009 the University adopted a Climate Action Plan developed by a team of faculty, staff, and students. This is a living document that is revised every two years. Also, the University has undergone multiple renovation projects on its buildings to decrease its ecological footprint. Additionally this semester, spring 2013, the Student Government Association passed a campus-wide sustainability fee, and the faculties have recently become involved in an inter-disciplinary initiative to increase sustainability throughout the curriculum.
**STARS: Education-Co-Curricular**

This subcategory recognizes universities that provide sustainable learning experiences outside the normal curriculum. Engaging in sustainability issues through co-curricular activities allows students to deepen and apply their understandings of sustainability principles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Number</th>
<th>Credit Title</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 1</td>
<td>Student Sustainability Educators Program</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 2</td>
<td>Student Sustainability Outreach Campaign</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 3</td>
<td>Sustainability in New Student Orientation*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 4</td>
<td>Sustainability Outreach and Publications</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-Curricular Education</strong></td>
<td><strong>Credit Title</strong>: Co-Curricular Education Tier Two Credits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Student Group</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organic Garden*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Model Room in Residence Hall*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Themed Housing*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sustainable Enterprise</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sustainability Events</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Outdoors Program</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Themed Semester or Year*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*credit does not apply to all institutions

---

1 The format of the report will first give a summary of the STARS credit criteria, next report Salisbury University’s score, and finally we offer a proposed response for Salisbury University to either achieve this credit or improve upon existing programs.
Credit 1: Student Sustainability Educators Program 0/5 points

Credit Summary:
This credit recognizes institutions with programs that engage students to serve as educators in peer-to-peer sustainability outreach and education program for degree-seeking students. To achieve credit the institution must select or appoint students to serve as educators and formally designates the as educators. The institution provides formal training to the educators in how to conduct outreach and offers faculty or staff and/or other financial support to the program. To achieve the full possible 5 points the educator program must reach all for-credit, degree seeking students; incremental points are available based on the percentage of students served by the peer-to-peer program. ²

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury University achieved no points for credit one due to its lack of a formally trained peer-to-peer educators program.

Proposed Response:
In the initiative to increase sustainability throughout the University, it would be beneficial to develop an “EcoReps” program where students educate and advise their peers on sustainability issues. This would allow for students to discover a sustainability principle as it applies to a university student by discussing the subject matter with fellow peers. Columbia University’s student group Earth Co. constructed a recycling education video to reach their fellow peers. https://stars.aashe.org/institutions/columbia-university-ny/report/2012-11-30/ER/co-curricular-education/ER-1/

² All credit criteria is taken directly from Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) https://stars.aashe.org/pages/about/technical-manual.html
Credit 2: Sustainability Outreach Campaign

Credit Summary:
To achieve this credit the institution must hold at least one sustainability-related outreach campaign directed at students. The campaign must yield measurable, positive results in advancing sustainability. The outreach campaign may be conducted by the institution, a student organization, or students in a course.

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury University achieves all 5 points through its participation in Recycle Madness, a campus-wide challenge to promote recycling on campus. Coordinated by the Student Government Association, the University’s students and organizations are given incentive to participate. The RSO (registered student organization) that brings in the most recyclable goods receives $100 while second receives $50. Any student who brings in at least 3 pounds of recyclables receives a prize.
http://www.salisbury.edu/sustain/programs/earthday.html

Proposed Response:
The positive results yielded by this campaign demonstrate that creating a competition and giving incentives result in higher participation within the campus community. We propose that this initiative can be taken even further by creating multiple outreach campaigns throughout the year. For example a semester long recycling competition between dormitories on campus could yield long term positive results. If a good enough incentive was given participation would increase advancing sustainability issues into the daily lives of dormitory residents, and create a green atmosphere. The University of South Florida’s student group Emerging Green Builders, for example, has a 9 week competition between residence halls to see who could reduce their energy consumption the most, energy savings ranged from 6%-48% with an average saving of 25%.
http://www ctr.usf.edu/egb/conservabull/
Credit 3: Sustainability in New Student Orientation 0/2 points

Credit Summary:
This credit recognizes institutions that include sustainability in orientation activities and programming. By including sustainability in student orientation it reflects the importance of sustainability to the campus and encourages student participation. The institution must include sustainability in orientation and make participation available to all new students.

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury University does not meet the criteria for this credit due to not including sustainability in new student orientation. Adding sustainability into the orientation would not only allow new students to recognize the importance of sustainability to the campus but would also offer them a chance to further their understanding of sustainability and participate in a sustainable community.

Proposed Response:
The University could achieve this credit by coordinating sustainability subject matter and activities within the new student orientation. For example, orientation leaders could provide a demonstration of how to live sustainably as a student at Salisbury University, explaining the importance of sustainability both as a University student and a citizen of the earth. This would demonstrate the University’s commitment to sustainability, and encourage a sustainable atmosphere within its population. University of South Carolina has a First-Year Student Reading Experience; during summer 2011 student orientation students were issued a copy of No Impact Man by Colin Beavan. The theme of the book was carried out through the year with various opportunities and events for students to participate in. https://stars.aashe.org/institutions/university-of-south-carolina-sc/report/2012-02-13/ER/co-curricular-education/ER-2/
Credit 4: Sustainability Outreach Campaign

Credit Summary:
This credit recognizes institutions that produce outreach materials and publications that enhance student learning about sustainability outside of the formal classroom. The institution produces outreach materials and/or publications that foster sustainability learning and knowledge. For each publication or outreach material the institution earns 0.5 points. The publications and outreach materials may include the following:
- A central sustainability website that consolidates information about the institution’s sustainability efforts
- A sustainability newsletter
- A vehicle to publish and disseminate student research on sustainability
- Building signage that highlights green building features
- Food service area signage and/or brochures that include information about sustainable food systems
- Signage on the grounds about sustainable grounds keeping strategies employed
- A sustainability walking map or tour
- A guide for commuters about how to use alternative methods of transportation
- A guide for green living and incorporating sustainability into the residential experience
- Regular coverage of sustainability in the main student newspaper, either through a regular column or a reporter assigned to the sustainability beat
- Other

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury earns partial points for this section. Salisbury meets the criteria for having a website that pertains to sustainability and the efforts of the University towards sustainability [http://www.salisbury.edu/sustain/](http://www.salisbury.edu/sustain/). Salisbury also meets the criteria of having a public report available on the university's carbon footprint [http://www.salisbury.edu/sustain/resources/carbonfootprint.html](http://www.salisbury.edu/sustain/resources/carbonfootprint.html). Although Salisbury has some publications or press releases on sustainability topics there is no set newsletter or print just on the university's sustainability efforts.

Proposed Response:
We propose to further the sustainability at Salisbury University by creating a regular monthly Seagull Sustainability newsletter. This would engage the student population and enhance student learning about sustainability topics, current initiatives, and anything sustainable about the University.
Co-Curricular Tier 2

Credit 1: Student Group  
.25/.25 points

Credit Summary:  
Institution has an active student organization focused on sustainability

SU Evaluation:  
Credit achieved through the Student Sustainability Club

Proposed Response: Credit achieved

Credit 2: Organic Garden  
.25/.25 points

Credit Summary:  
Institution has an on-campus garden where students are able to gain organic farming and/or gardening experience. The garden does not have to be Certified Organic in order to earn this credit, but it should use organic techniques.

SU Evaluation:  
Credit achieved through Dr. Hatley’s Environmental Studies garden and the Gardening Club; both gardens use organic techniques

Proposed Response: Credit achieved

Credit 3: Model Room in a Residence Hall  
0/.25 points

Credit Summary:  
Institution has an occupied, formally designated model room in a residence hall that is open to students during regular visitation hours and demonstrates sustainable living principles

SU Evaluation:  
Credit not achieved

Proposed Response:  
Designating a room in a residence hall as a model is economically unfeasible from lost rent income, and requiring a student’s room to be open to the public’s inspection is unreasonable. However, a 3-D webpage on the SU website could efficiently demonstrate sustainable living principles
Credit 4: Themed Housing  

Credit Summary:  
Institution has sustainability-themed housing (residential hall or floor or theme house) where residents learn about sustainability together and to which residents must apply. The focus of this credit is creating a residential sustainability learning community. Having a green building for a residential hall does not, in and of itself, count for this credit.

SU Evaluation:  
Salisbury has achieved this credit with the Green Floor students living in Pocomoke Hall who are required to take Introduction to Sustainability (ENVR 102) and participate in environmentally themed activities.

Proposed Response:  
Salisbury University can further pursue its commitment to sustainability by dedicating an ENVR dorm/house/building that can house Green Floor students, and expand its reach to the sophomore, junior, and senior students. This would allow students to practice sustainable living in an environment where its encouraged to make environmentally sound decisions.

Credit 5: Sustainable Enterprise  

Credit Summary:  
Institution has a student-run sustainable enterprise, such as a café, through which students gain sustainable business skills. The enterprise includes sustainability as part of its mission statement or stated purpose.

SU Evaluation:  
Salisbury does not meet the criteria for this credit. There is no student-run enterprise at Salisbury where students may gain sustainable business skills or has sustainability as part of its mission statement.

Proposed Response:  
By creating a student-run sustainable enterprise, students would gain sustainable business skills and therefore be gaining inter-disciplinary education and experience in the world’s work force. Students would gain experience in both sustainability and economics.
Credit 6: Sustainability Events

Credit Summary:
Institution holds major events related to sustainability, such as conferences, speaker series, or symposia, which have students as the intended audience.

SU Evaluation:
The University holds numerous events that meet the criteria for these points. Relevant events include: Earth Day, Sustainability Day, Recycle Madness, and much more. Information about all these can be found at http://www.salisbury.edu/sustain/programs/.

Proposed Response:
The University could offer incentives to increase participation within these events. This could be done either by offering prizes or through financial support to expand activities.

Credit 7: Outdoors Programs

Credit Summary:
Institution has a wilderness or outdoors program that organizes hiking, backpacking, kayaking, or other outings for students and follows Leave No Trace principles.

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury achieves criteria for this credit with its Outdoors Education Program.

Proposed Response:
Salisbury University should incorporate sustainability topics within the core courses in the Outdoors Program to greater encourage sustainable thinking.
Credit 8: Themed Semester or Year

Credit Summary:
Institution has chosen a sustainability-related theme for its themed semester, year, or first-year experience during the past three years. This could take the form of choosing a sustainability-related book for the common reading.

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury does not achieve the criteria for this credit.

Proposed Response:
Instituting a sustainability-related theme for the semester or year would lead to sustainability topics becoming an every-day conversation, generating a student body that is more concerned about sustainability issues and more adept and comprehending them. The University of New Hampshire has held multiple sustainability related years, 2006-2007’s theme was Power to the People: A University Dialogue on Energy.

http://www.unh.edu/academic-affairs/discovery/dialogue/
**STARS: Education-Curriculum**

This subcategory seeks to recognize institutions that have formal education programs and courses that address sustainability. A primary function of universities is the education of students. By training and educating future leaders, higher education institutions are uniquely positioned to prepare students to understand and address sustainability challenges. Institutions that offer courses covering sustainability issues help equip their students to lead society to a sustainable future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Number</th>
<th>Credit Title</th>
<th>Possible Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 5</td>
<td>Sustainability Course Identification</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 6</td>
<td>Sustainability-Focused Courses</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 7</td>
<td>Sustainability-Related Courses</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 8</td>
<td>Sustainability Courses by Department*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 9</td>
<td>Sustainability Learning Outcomes*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 10</td>
<td>Undergraduate Program in Sustainability*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 11</td>
<td>Graduate Program in Sustainability*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 12</td>
<td>Sustainability Immersive Experience*</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 13</td>
<td>Sustainability Literacy Assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER Credit 14</td>
<td>Incentives for Developing Sustainability Courses</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>55</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*credit does not apply to all institutions
Credit 5: Sustainability Course Identification

Credit Summary:
Institution has developed a definition of sustainability in the curriculum. The definition was developed by a committee comprised of at least 3 faculty members who teach courses in different departments. The committee may include students, staff, and other stakeholders as well. The definition does not have to be formally adopted, the definition of sustainability in the curriculum should distinguish between courses that focus or concentrate on the concept of sustainability throughout the course, and courses that relate to an aspect of sustainability or include sustainability as part of the course. Institution must identify its sustainability-focused and sustainability-related courses making them publicly available. **Sustainability-focused courses:** concentrate on the concept of sustainability including its social, economic, and environmental dimensions, or examine an issue or topic using sustainability as a lens. **Sustainability-related courses:** incorporate sustainability as a distinct course component or module or concentrate on a single sustainability principle or issue.

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury has not achieved this credit.

Proposed Response:
Salisbury University is in the first phase of incorporating this credit with some courses containing aspects of sustainability. To move into “phase two” a committee must be formed of three faculty members teaching in different departments to develop an officially recognized definition of sustainability for the university. To move into the final phase the university must develop courses that concentrate solely on the concept of sustainability, and then organize the courses into sustainability-focused and sustainability-related categories

- This credit criteria is included for credits 6-8
Credit 6: Sustainability Focused Courses
0/10 points

Credit Summary:
This credit recognizes institutions that offer academic courses focused on sustainability. Institutions earn the maximum of 10 points for this credit if sustainability-focused courses comprise 10% or more of all courses offered.

SU Evaluation:
Credit not achieved; no definition of sustainability focused courses

Proposed Response:
We propose Salisbury University not only construct an officially recognized definition of sustainability but to also create courses that have a focus on sustainability issues. We recommend the University require an Introduction to Sustainability as a general education requirement for all degree seeking majors to further create a green community within its student population.

Credit 7: Sustainability-Related Courses
0/10 points

Course Summary:
The institution offers sustainability-related academic courses. Institution earns the maximum of 10 points for this credit when sustainability-related courses comprise 30% or more of all courses offered

SU Evaluation:
Credit not achieved; while we have courses that incorporate sustainability concepts the university has no officially recognized definition of sustainability to create a campus standard.

Proposed Response:
We propose that academic courses with sustainability related themes are created and offered in the curriculum.
Credit 8: Sustainability Courses by Department 0/7 points

**Credit Summary:**
Institutions academic departments (or equivalent) offer sustainability-related and/or sustainability-focused courses. The institutions earn the maximum of 7 points for this credit when 90% or more of academic departments or their equivalent offer at least one sustainability-related or focused course.

**SU Evaluation:**
Credit not achieved; no official definition, no division of sustainability related/focused courses, and only the environmental department offers courses incorporating concepts of sustainability

**Proposed Response:**
We are currently moving into phase 2 of this with the recent “Sustainability in the Curriculum” initiative. Phase 3 would incorporate the development of sustainability focused/related concepts in each department.

---

Credit 9: Sustainability Learning Outcomes 0/10 points

**Credit Summary:**
Institution’s students graduate from programs that include sustainability as a required learning outcome or include multiple sustainability learning outcomes. Institutions earn the maximum of 10 points available for this credit when all students graduate from programs that have adopted at least one sustainability learning outcome.

**SU Evaluation:**
Credit not achieved; Salisbury has no programs that include sustainability as a required learning.
Credit 10: Undergraduate Program in Sustainability 4/4 points

**Credit Summary:**
This credit recognizes institutions that have formal, undergraduate-level degree programs focused on sustainability. Institution offers at least one sustainability-focused undergraduate major, degree program, or equivalent.

**SU Evaluation:**
Salisbury meets these criteria with its Environmental Studies program. Within this program sustainability is taught and experienced throughout many different courses offered in this degree program. [http://www.salisbury.edu/environmentalstudies/](http://www.salisbury.edu/environmentalstudies/).

**Proposed Response:** Credit Achieved

---

Credit 11: Graduate Program in Sustainability 0/4 points

**Credit Summary:**
This credit recognizes institutions that have formal, graduate academic degree programs focused on sustainability. Institution offers at least one sustainability-focused degree program or equivalent for graduate students.

**SU Evaluation:**
Salisbury University does not meet this credit

**Proposed Response:**
To further the sustainability initiative at Salisbury University, a graduate program would assist the University explore deeper the complexities of sustainability, and bring a richer understanding of sustainability to the community.
Credit 12: Sustainability Immersive Experience 2/2 points

**Credit Summary:**
This credit recognizes institutions that offer sustainability-focused immersive experience programs. Institution offers at least one immersive, sustainability-focused educational study program. The program(s) may take place off-campus, overseas, or on-campus.

**SU Evaluation:**
There are many different ways Salisbury can earn this credit. Salisbury offers a trip to India to experience the difference in living and how sustainability affects their lives so much different than ours especially not having waste disposal. Also even though Salisbury doesn't necessarily offer internships in sustainability, students get to pick what internships they want to do and by all means they could pick one that has experience learning about sustainability. An example of this would be the summer kayak trip which counts as an internship.

**Proposed Response:** Credit Achieved

Credit 13: Sustainability Literacy Assessment 0/2 points

**Credit Summary:**
This credit recognizes institutions that are assessing the sustainability literacy of their students. Part 1: Institution conducts an assessment of the sustainability literacy of its students. The sustainability literacy assessment focuses on knowledge of sustainability topics, not values or beliefs. Part 2: Institution conducts a follow-up assessment of the same cohort group using the same instrument.

**SU Evaluation**
Salisbury University does not meet this credit.

**Proposed Response:**
We propose that Salisbury University conducts a sustainability literacy assessment during new student orientation. Subsequently, they should conduct another one as seniors to see how the understanding of sustainability has changed during their education at the University.
Credit 14: Incentives for Developing Sustainability  0/3 points

Credit Summary:
This credit recognizes institutions that offer incentives to help faculty expand sustainability course offerings. Institution has an ongoing program or programs that offer incentives for faculty in multiple disciplines or departments to develop new sustainability courses and/or incorporate sustainability into existing courses or departments.

SU Evaluation:
Salisbury has not yet met the criteria for this credit. Although we did not earn the points for this section, the university is planning to put incentives in place in the near future.

Proposed Response:
An incentive based system is most often the most successful, and therefore we propose the creation of incentives for faculty who teach sustainability topics within the classroom. Certain incentives could be a one time or an annual bonus, or something developed individually between the university and faculty to cater to each individual desires therefore creating more incentive to participate.