

UWO a charter participant in sustainability rating system

by News Bureau - Thursday, August 26, 2010

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/5455/uwo-a-charter-participant-in-sustainability-rating-system/>

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is participating in a new program to encourage sustainability in all aspects of higher education. The program, called the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS), is administered by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). To date, nearly 230 higher education institutions have registered as STARS Charter Participants.

AASHE's STARS program is the only one of its kind that involves publicly reporting comprehensive information related to a college or university's sustainability performance. Participants report achievements in three overall areas: 1) education & research, 2) operations, and 3) planning, administration & engagement.

"The advantage of STARS is that institutions can earn credits for all of their contributions to sustainability," said AASHE Executive Director, Paul Rowland. "From providing sustainability coursework, to using green cleaning products, to energy efficiency in campus buildings, there are lots of opportunities for a school to identify and track its sustainability progress."

Unlike other rating or ranking systems, this program is open to all institutions of higher education in the U.S. and Canada, and the criteria that determine a STARS rating are transparent and accessible to anyone. Because STARS is a program based on credits earned, it allows for both internal comparisons as well as comparisons with similar institutions.

Since making the commitment to be a green University, UW Oshkosh has hit several milestones in sustainability. In 2002, UW Oshkosh was one of a small number of universities to endorse the Earth Charter. In 2003, the university became the first Wisconsin university to join the EPA's Green Partnership by agreeing to purchase at least 3 percent of its energy from alternative sources. In 2008, UW Oshkosh declared itself a Fair Trade University, the first in the United States, by committing to the purchase and use of fair trade products whenever feasible. Following a comprehensive and sophisticated carbon-footprint study conducted by Johnson Controls, the University recently established one of the nation's most aggressive Climate Action Plans to achieve carbon neutrality by 2025.

Earlier this year, the UW Oshkosh Foundation partnered with the University to build the nation's first commercial scale dry fermentation anaerobic biodigester, which will convert yard and food waste into fuel. The project will break ground later this month; the facility is expected to be operational by summer 2011.