

UC San Diego First California University to Achieve 'Gold' STARS Sustainability Rating

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UC San Diego has been named the first college or university in California and one of only 10 campuses in the United States and Canada to earn a "gold" sustainability-performance rating in a prestigious annual survey.

The rating is the outcome of the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) survey, which has been developed with broad participation from the higher education community and administered by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). The rating is designed not only to be transparent, but also to enable meaningful comparisons over time and across colleges and universities using a common set of measures developed by participating institutions themselves.

"This gold rating attests to the collaborative efforts made by our students, staff, faculty, and community members to pioneer sustainable solutions," said UC San Diego Chancellor Marye Anne Fox. "In the six years since I declared sustainability a top educational priority and goal of all campus operations, UC San Diego has been transformed into a living laboratory of sustainability solutions. From economics to mechanical engineering, academic departments have incorporated sustainability concepts into majors, minors, internships, classes and a wide range of research experiences."

The gold STARS rating is one of many sustainability awards UC San Diego has won in recent years, including the 1st Annual Climate Leadership Award for Institutional Excellence in Climate Leadership, which was presented at the 4th Annual American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment Summit in 2010.

UC San Diego's gold STARS rating is based on the campus' performance in hundreds of measurements in three broad sustainability-focused categories: education and research, operations, and planning, administration and engagement.

The STARS survey stressed the submission of concrete metrics of performance by participating institutions. "STARS was developed by the campus sustainability community to provide high standards for recognizing campus sustainability efforts," said AASHE Executive Director Paul Rowland. "UC San Diego has demonstrated a substantial commitment to sustainability by achieving a STARS gold rating and is to be congratulated for its efforts."

The survey gauges the percent of UC San Diego's students who arrive on campus each day in something other than a private vehicle. The survey also includes such metrics as the square footage of building space that has been LEED certified by the U.S., Green Building Council. Expenditures on recycled-content paper versus expenditures on non-recycled-content paper also are compared.

Of the 269 institutions that have registered for the STARS survey, 12 have achieved a bronze rating, 26 got silver and 10 received gold. No college or university has yet achieved platinum.

"This is easily the most extensive sustainability survey of all of them, and it is easily the most objective," said Gary C. Matthews, vice chancellor of Resource Management and Planning at UC San Diego. "To be the first institution of higher education in California to get STARS gold is phenomenal and reflects the campus' deep commitment to sustainability. This starts with the chancellor and extends to all administrative and academic departments, right down to each student who decides each day whether to drive to campus or walk, ride a bike or takes a bus to campus. Our student interns helped with data collection for the STARS survey and it is they who will champion the cause for sustainability for many years to come as they clearly represent the future."

Each credit in the survey is scored according to a method described in a technical manual provided by AASHE.

One of many areas of scrutiny in the education and research category is the number and variety of student groups and organizations that are focused on sustainability. Students at UC San Diego operate the Student Sustainability Collective, which functions as an umbrella group for a wide variety of student groups and initiatives focused on sustainability. The collective's seven directors collaborate with the campus' Sustainability Program Office. The students and Program Office staff work side-by-side in an ultra-green suite of offices and meeting rooms at the heart of campus called the Sustainability Resource Center. Campus staff and students working at the center provide expertise, resources, support and space to faculty, staff, community groups and students of all backgrounds and majors who are leading sustainability efforts.

The STARS gold rating was also based on the campus' Housing Dining and Hospitality department's student Econauts program, which was started in 2009 to assist in the environmental education and outreach to the students who live on-campus.

UC San Diego's Dining Services contributed to the gold rating with its wide range of sustainable practices and items, such as trayless dining, vegan food entrees, recycled-content napkins, reusable mug discounts on beverages, pre- and post-consumer waste composting, and fair-trade coffee, tea and sugar.

Energy efficiency of campus buildings is an important part of the rating and is based on such parameters as the gross amount of energy consumed versus total square footage of the campus. Points are awarded in the survey for the campus' use of clean and renewable energy. Points were also given for energy-efficiency building and room controls such as motion sensors linked to controls that reduce lighting, heating and air conditioning in unoccupied areas.

The campus also scored well for controlling its use of water with ultra-low-flow urinals, water metering in each building, use of recycled water in landscaping, Xeriscaping and weather-informed irrigation.

Sustainability coordination and planning were strong areas in the rating as well, particularly relating to campus efforts to developing a strategic plan, a sustainability plan and a climate plan.

Innovative programs were also included in the gold rating for four projects:

- One of the strongest fair-trade policies of any university in the nation.
- Real-time energy monitoring campus-wide.
- Development of sophisticated solar-energy-forecasting tools.
- Cutting edge energy- and resource-efficient features in the campus' Sustainability Resource Center.

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