**AASHE STARS Report 2022 University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Improvements**

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**Introduction:**

The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS) is a program of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). This program is a framework used by colleges and universities to self-report their sustainability performance. The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign currently has a score of 72.89 and a Gold rating. This paper is meant to find aspects of the STARS report (point categories) where the university could improve its score. Since the 2020 improvements report already has suggestions for improvement on many STARS sections, this report will only focus on the sections that are particularly lacking and/or have easily implemented improvements.

**Buildings:**

The university has 1.00/5.00 points for Building Operations and Maintenance, and 2.69/3.00 for Building Design and Construction. Since UIUC becomes more sustainable over time, the latter category has more points, since more recently constructed buildings will be more environmentally friendly. As for the Building Operations and Maintenance category, the university already has several LEED certified buildings. According to the previous improvements report, the university didn’t report on any LEED certified floor areas. Reporting on LEED certified buildings would increase this score. UIUC currently has 21 LEED certified projects (18 LEED buildings) and approximately 10% of all building space is LEED certified (Silver certification at least). 8 projects are certified Silver, 9 projects are certified Gold, and 4 projects are certified Platinum. There are also several other buildings that are seeking certification right now which may be certified by the time the STARS report is written.

**Food & Dining:**

The university has full points for Sustainable Dining, but was marked non-pursing for Food and Beverage Purchasing with 0.00/6.00 points. Several products used in Dining are sustainably and locally sourced, so this category could significantly increase in points. Dining Services reports that 95% of produce grown at the Sustainable Student Farm is used at the university. Large percentages of pork products, bread, and eggs are sourced locally. 70% of pork products come from Rantoul, IL. 90% of bread and 90% of shell and hard boiled eggs are sourced from the state of Illinois. Additionally, a local fish program serves over 12,000 pounds of silverfin carp from the Illinois river. About 7,500 pounds of burgers will be produced on campus as part of the Blended Burgers program. These 2 programs started in 2017, so there is a decent amount of data available that could be used in the STARS report.

As for the sources of the university’s prime food vendor (Gordon Food Service) and the overall percentages of how much total food is locally or sustainably produced, I’m still communicating with Food Service Administrator Thurman Etchison.

**Grounds:**

The university already has full points in the Biodiversity category but is lacking in Landscape Management with only 0.28/2.00 points. As shown in the previous improvements report, UIUC has an integrated pest management program, a very small portion of land managed organically, and a majority of land managed conventionally. First, parts of campus that might not have been included in the “organic land management” portion are the 6 acres of the Sustainable Student Farm and the 10.5 acres of the President’s House. Overall the amount of certified organic land is 26 acres.

Another way to improve the score would be to mention several of the ongoing grounds management programs at UIUC. Although the university has a majority of its campus labeled under “conventional management”, there are sustainable practices within this management. First, the university has switched some of its maintenance equipment to electric motors (instead of gas). Several motors are also diesel, which is more efficient than gas.

The grass used on campus is gradually being switched to a deep root variety in order to replace the current shallow root grass which uses more water and wilts faster. This program has been in place for 3 years, but since grass is only replaced when needed it is hard to report the actual percentage of new deep root grass on campus. The deep root grass is hardier and uses less water. Most of campus is not irrigated though. LEED certified buildings for certain do not irrigate their grounds. This should probably be included in the Water section of the report, since according to last year’s improvements report, there was no entry on grounds water use in the previous STARS report.

Finally, within conventional land management, the university doesn’t use any pesticides except for very few specially maintained plants (such as important decorative bushes). Also, UIUC only uses the herbicides Roundup and Triple threat, which are applied as little as possible.

**Waste:**

In the last STARS report, the university has only 3.05/8.00 points for the Waste Minimization and Diversion category and full points for the Hazardous Waste Management category. UIUC was marked as not pursuing the Construction and Demolition Waste Diversion category, with 0.00/1.00 points. The university has multiple ongoing construction projects where points could be gained. The issue is that there are over 40 improvement construction projects and it is hard to find the sustainability practices of each project. However, several of these construction projects are seeking LEED certification.

For the Waste Minimization and Diversion section, as the last improvements report stated, the university’s recycling facility was not reported. The recycling facility sorts its materials (which is a part of the score) and diverts about 30% of waste from landfills. UIUC is also participating in the Campus Race to Zero Waste this year, 2021. This program will gather and report on waste data from campus and could be a very useful resource for waste statistics. UIUC also has a composting initiative which should be included in this section. Dining Services reports that about 7 tons of food are diverted from landfills and that there are 3 operating aerobic digesters. The university is currently switching over to using a local aerobic digester to create energy and fertilizer.

Finally, a concern that was in last year’s improvements report was that recycling bins in student dorms weren’t clearly marked. This problem was found in Carr Hall but also applies to Townsend Hall. As a result, Assistant Sustainability Researcher Shantanu Pai found over 200 locations that also needed better recycling signage. As of right now, I’m still waiting on a response from Shantanu Pai about when the signs will be put up.

**Conclusion:**

In several places the University is losing points because of under-reporting. Just by reporting in currently blank sections, the University will substantial points. The university only needs 12.11 more points to reach the score of 85 needed for a platinum ranking. The categories focused on in this paper have the potential to earn UIUC a platinum ranking. Overall, the university is doing quite a lot to help the environment, and sustainability improves every year.

**Resources:**

Dining and Digesters: <https://housing.illinois.edu/Dining/About-Dining/Sustainability>

LEED: <https://fs.illinois.edu/projects/leed-certifications>

Seeking LEED and Waste: <https://sustainability.illinois.edu/campus-sustainability/>

Recycling: <https://fs.illinois.edu/services/waste-management-and-recycling>