



CSAP
The Campus Sustainability Assessment Project

Introduction

- **CSAP Database & Resources**
 - CSA Database
 - Best Practice Evaluation
 - CSA guidelines
 - Literature Resources
 - CSAP publications

Related Resources
Contact the CSAP Home

Submit a
CSA/Literature
Record

CSA Guidelines

The "Snapshot" CSA: An Overview

The goal of the CSAP has been to review and evaluate the CSA corpus with the express purpose of offering advice and guidance for improving the CSA process (and, ultimately, campus planning). While we recognize that academic institutions are businesses, we also see them as having a wider range of multiple goals and responsibilities that make their planning obligations ultimately more like those of a community or small city. Our approach integrates the practice of performance measurement and reporting with the process of planning, management, and decision-making on campus. In our view, the purpose of a CSA is not simply to report on “what is happening,” but to present this blend of quantitative and qualitative information in a manner that facilitates improved decision-making, by highlighting opportunities for positive change and by giving early warning about costly, wasteful, ineffective, illegal, unethical, or dangerous practices.

We see CSAs as the core element of an anticipatory and participatory campus planning process that seamlessly links past, present and future. By combining analysis of trends with an open and transparent strategic goal assessment process, a flexible and adaptable campus planning framework can be created. One of the benefits of such a framework is that it can develop incrementally as interest and infrastructure grow and efficacy is proven. We believe that making the link between performance measurement and the policy, planning, and management systems on campus—*as early as possible in the CSA planning process*—will yield more informative and effective CSAs.

Over the course of our research, the CSAP team has come to favor a particular strategy for performing CSAs. We have created the term “Snapshot CSA” to refer to a generalizable, easily institutionalizable strategy for gathering concrete data on an institution’s social and environmental performance that can readily support policy evaluation and reform. A Snapshot CSA provides a general yet concrete and informative overview of an institution’s social and environmental performance. Its purpose is to give an accurate and representative “lay of the land” without becoming overburdened in details. It is intended as a first step in a succession of strategically organized assessment and implementation projects aimed at systematically greening a college campus. The Snapshot CSA is a particularly suitable beginning (or near-beginning) point for institutions just

embarking on their sustainability journeys because of its ability to simultaneously provide essential information and stimulate campus stakeholder interest in sustainability issues, while requiring a minimum of effort, cost and institutional commitment.

A case for the "Snapshot" CSA

The Snapshot CSA serves six basic functions in the context of formal efforts to reduce an institution's overall ecocultural wake and become more sustainable:

1. Help initiate or nurture a campus-wide conversation on sustainability.

The key goals here are to stimulate an open, inclusive and ongoing conversation on the sustainability of the campus (in its widest sense) and clarify the institution's sustainability objectives.

2. Create a clear picture of where the institution stands (at a particular time) with respect to established sustainability considerations.

A Snapshot CSA strives to answer questions such as: *How much energy do we consume and how much waste do we produce? What are our yearly GHG emissions? What processes are currently in place to address social and environmental issues on campus? What and how many courses do we offer that provide an introduction to ecological literacy and numeracy?*

3. Obtain high-quality information to support decision-making and policy development with minimum effort and cost.

A carefully designed Snapshot CSA results in information that is efficient to gather, meaningful, and clearly presented to campus decision-makers. The "lay-of-the-land" perspective that a Snapshot CSA offers enables an academic institution to identify and prioritize areas that at particular times require more detailed, focused analysis without requiring regular acquisition of data at this level of detail and specificity when it is not needed.

4. Identify problem areas and develop strategies for improvement.

The information generated by a Snapshot CSA helps to identify and understand specific strengths and weaknesses as well as identify opportunities for addressing these problem areas.

5. Develop an ongoing, easily supportable and institutionalizable framework for gathering sustainability data over time.

In addition to its role in providing a “jumpstart” to campus sustainability initiatives, a Snapshot CSA can serve as a tool for tracking institutional sustainability performance over time. By setting viable goals and benchmarks and using these to measure an institution’s progress, a Snapshot CSA can keep campus decision-makers and other stakeholders atop the most pressing sustainability issues at their institution. It can thus provide many of the benefits of a full-scale sustainability management system, but at a fraction of the institutional investment.

6. Help foster a campus culture committed to sustainability.

A Snapshot CSA brings attention to important social and environmental issues on campus. It can help bring together the campus and surrounding community to participate in visioning and decision-making processes that ultimately affect them—as well as society at-large. Potential impacts of such a process on the campus community include: heightened awareness of sustainability issues on and off campus; the creation of improved, more efficient and cost-effective campus infrastructure; stronger interest in and involvement with campus sustainability initiatives; positive working relationships between leaders of these initiatives and key campus decision-makers; enhanced staff and administration trust in the good intentions and competence of campus sustainability leaders; and generally improved communication about sustainability issues within and between stakeholder groups.

The guidelines (in progress)

The CSAP research team originally considered creating a comprehensive set of guidelines and tools for conducting CSAs. Our research, however, has convinced us that an incremental, adaptive, institution-specific and flexible approach is more appropriate and relevant. As a result we are putting forth a concise set of critical sustainability indicators to stimulate dialogue. Please send your thoughts and suggestions to campus.assessment@wmich.edu. We will use your comments to develop and refine these indicators (attribution will be provided).

In addition to this indicators list, the CSAP research team plans to publish a series of articles addressing various campus sustainability assessment issues. Please visit our publications page periodically to check the availability of these materials.