

STARS ROUNDTABLE NOTES

Community College Sustainability Conference

April 16, 2008

On behalf of President Steve Mittelstet (present), my GREENRichland colleagues (including Facilities Director Eddie Hueston, also present), and the Richland College community, thank you to AASHE and Lane for the invitation to participate in this session. I am happy to be here to share Richland's experience as a participant in the STARS pilot.

First, a bit of context ...

Richland opened in 1972, is now the largest of the seven DCCCD colleges, with 15,000 credit and 6,000 non-credit students.

Our commitment, found in our vision statement, is to building sustainable local and world community and includes learning opportunities such as:

- Global and ethnic studies academic programs
- A peace institute and peace studies program
- A new sustainability-focused capstone option for degree completers
- A "sustainability across the curriculum" effort, recently begun
- An in-development energy management degree/certificate program
- A multi-part Intercultural Competence curriculum for all employees—and a second-phase anticipated to focus on sustainability thinking and triple bottom line skills/awareness development
- "Conversations," an annual staff development series, with participants from all employee groups, that this year focused on an emerging "American dream" centered on sustainability

As you can see, Richland works hard to fulfill Terry O'Banion's challenge to be a "learning college." We therefore committed to participating in the STARS pilot with confidence that it would be a valuable learning experience, and it is proving to be so. We have already learned that:

1. AASHE had done a great deal of good work leading up to the pilot and continues to work diligently to make STARS the strongest tool possible. Judy Walton, Julian Dautremont-Smith, Laura Matson, and their colleagues really want to know what works and what could work better for participating schools.
2. While we might not want to shout our initial STARS achievement level from the rooftops, there are areas of progress of which we can be proud—and others that appear to be within reach.
3. Most importantly, STARS will, as hoped, be a major driving and organizing force for our sustainability initiatives.

Many challenges/questions—or invitations, in Parker Palmer’s “Formation” language—have arisen, including:

1. How to involve as many Richlanders as possible in the effort to grow the college’s sustainability efforts and reduce our environmental footprint—including students, all of whom commute to campus and most of whom have jobs and/or families.

To begin this effort, we will hold an Appreciative Inquiry in May—including all student and employee stakeholder groups and focusing on creating a future in which sustainability is a way of life for everyone at Richland.

2. Realizing that we likely won’t be able to make major progress in all dimensions of sustainability, how to prioritize our efforts.

Conversations bringing together leaders from instruction, business services, facilities and grounds, and administration have already begun—on a small scale for now, but soon to be expanded.

3. How to apply what we have learned through the Malcolm Baldrige and Texas Award for Performance Excellence processes to measuring and tracking our progress in sustainability.

There are two sustainability-related Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in our latest strategic plan, with others to be included in the next update.

4. In less than optimal financial times, how to identify funding resources and options for sustainability initiatives.

An extremely skilled grant writer, already on campus, will become our “new” resource development dean—opening up thus far untapped funding opportunities.

5. How we might work with our parent organization, the Dallas County Community College District, to identify sustainability dimensions that could best (or only) be addressed at that level—and the rewards likely to be generated by doing so.

High-level administrative conversations are now happening in earnest, and our district office is also participating in the STARS pilot, which may further clarify shared opportunities and obstacles.