

Towards a Sustainable University

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Introduction

The issue of sustainability in the context of higher education is a relatively recent theme. The 2030 Agenda established by the UN General Assembly in 2015 and the associated Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicate that higher education institutions (HEIs) should, more than ever, engage in the implementation of sustainable development in all thematic areas (Montenegro, 2020). The aim of this study is to present the definition of a Sustainable University and the practices that govern it.

Definitions

“Sustainable”, which is composed of three core elements of “environment,” “economy” and “society,” has been continuously improved in its connotation and its objectives have been continuously clarified and refined (AASHE, 2017). The definition of a Sustainable University present on literature refers always to environmental, economic and social concerns that universities should have on their activities, and the obligation of “leading by example”: an university should “minimize the negative environmental, economic, societal and health effects generated in the use of their resources” (Velazquez, 2006).

Sustainable Universities

The connotation of “green campus” is in the same line with the concept of “sustainability,” which also includes three dimensions of “environment,” “economy” and “society” (Zhu et al., 2020). As universities should apply the sustainability concept to build and use its infrastructures, it’s also their responsibility to encourage and promote the concept of sustainability on their curricula courses (Amaral et al., 2015).

Teaching and Learning

In terms of teaching and learning, universities can integrate SDGs with the principles of education for sustainable development (ESD) into undergraduate and graduate courses (Bhowmik et al., 2018). Bhowmik et al. (2018) emphasised that universities can play a pivotal role in SDGs implementation through teaching and learning, research, community involvement and curriculum orientation towards SDGs. Furthermore, universities can provide knowledge, innovation and solutions to underpin the implementation of SDGs through generation of new knowledge and new approaches (Bhowmik et al., 2018).



Examples of Sustainable Universities

This list from BestColleges.com names the 10 U.S. colleges and universities that have earned the highest STARS ratings, thereby distinguishing themselves as the nation's greenest schools.

1	Colorado State University - Fort Collins	Fort Collins, CO	STARS Score: 85.29
2	Stanford University	Stanford, CA	STARS Score: 81.02
3	Sterling College	Craftsbury Common, VT	STARS Score: 78.97
4	University of Connecticut	Storrs, CT	STARS Score: 78.48
5	University of Washington	Boone, NC	STARS Score: 77.43
6	Appalachian State University	Boone, NC	STARS Score: 77.24
7	Green Mountain College	Poultney, VT	STARS Score: 76.45
8	Chatham University	Pittsburgh, PA	STARS Score: 76.45
9	Colby College	Waterville, ME	STARS Score: 75.65
10	American University	Washington D.C.	STARS Score: 75.35

Conclusions

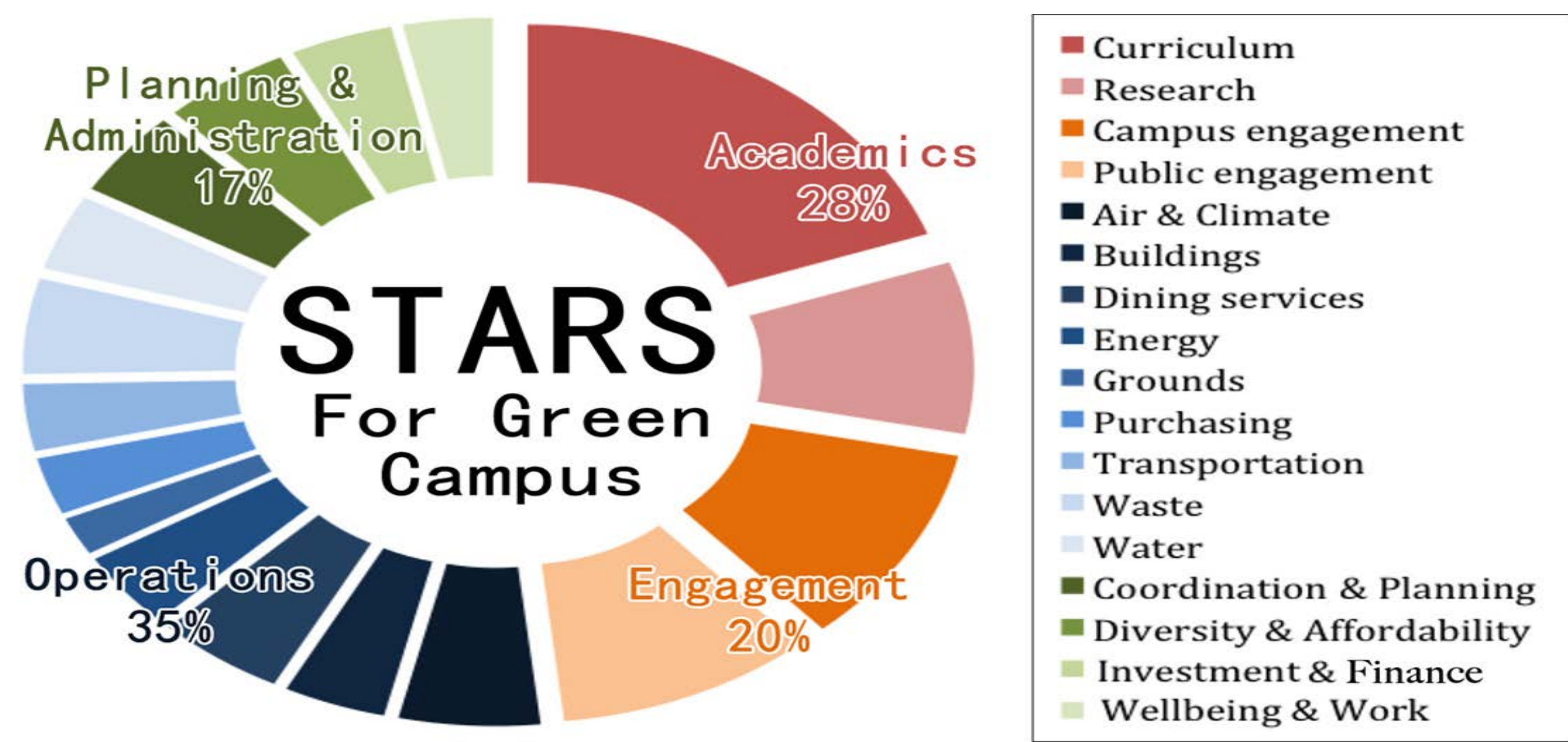
Universities have a critical role in providing the necessary knowledge, evidence based solutions and innovations through research. As elite institutions, they can map their policies and strategies to make campus operations instrumental in SDGs implementation (Mawonde et al., 2019)

University Campus

In terms of constructions, university infrastructures are usually embodied on a university campus, which are significantly large systems containing lecture classes, restaurants, sports hall, student residences, laundry, library, laboratories, etc. The activities taken place on the campus use large amounts of energy and resources and generate wastes (Amaral et al., 2015).

Based on the basic framework of sustainability and SDGs as the development vision, AASHE (2017) has developed the STARS for the campus level. STARS is the specific goal at the school level under the framework of SDGs, which not only provides a clear development direction for the sustainable construction of campus but also provides specific implementation suggestions (Zhu et al., 2020). STARS is not only an open self-evaluation framework tool for colleges and universities to measure their sustainable development but also a sustainable construction and development goal of campuses (AASHE, 2017).

As the physical carrier of the university, the campus has its own complete life system and students experience various social activities on campus, so the campuses’ construction experience has a good practical and reference significance for the larger scale cities or countries (Zhu et al., 2020).



Main contents and scores of STARS

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