University-Wide Effort Yields Silver Designation for Sustainability

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Contributions from dozens of departments helped Duquesne earn a STARS silver rating for its sustainability achievements from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

With more than 900 participants in 40 countries, AASHE's STARS program is the most widely recognized framework for publicly reporting information about a university's sustainability performance.

Duquesne participated in the program not only to see how it compared to other institutions but also to learn how it could improve sustainability efforts, according to Mary Kate Ranii, graduate program coordinator for the University's Center for Environmental Research and Education (CERE).

"Sustainability requires a holistic approach, which includes social, economic and environmental justice components," Ranii said. "When students look at Duquesne, we want them to think about more than the classes they will take. We want them to think about the type of world they want to live in."

The STARS report reviews a university's sustainability achievements in academics, engagement, operations, planning and administration, and innovation and leadership. Duquesne's curriculum and research, such as its top-ranked Sustainable MBA program and advanced environmental science programs, received high scores. The report also highlighted the University's efforts in engaging the entire campus, such as the community garden near Laval House, and the public through its annual Integrity of Creation Conference.

"Duquesne's social justice mission is so intertwined with the goals behind sustainability," said CERE Director and Environmental Microbiology Professor Dr. John Stolz. "Sustainability is about meeting our needs without impacting the needs of future generations. The University's efforts work to help achieve this balance."

The focus on sustainability reflects Duquesne commitment to equity and opportunity in the region, while broadening students' perspectives about environmental issues.

Ranii, along with CERE graduate assistants Carissa Lange and Gabriella Zuccolotto, led the effort to complete the STARS report, which included contributions from dozens of University departments.

"STARS requires a very comprehensive report to earn the silver designation," Lange said. "We knew Duquesne had a good story to tell about sustainability, and we received great support from our colleagues around campus."

Ranii said she looks forward to furthering Duquesne's efforts, which could include creating a sustainability literacy assessment that students would take when they first enter and then graduate from Duquesne. Other possibilities include changes in University transportation and the inclusion of sustainability as part of students' learning outcomes.

"STARS is a great road map, as we can also learn from other universities," Ranii said. "Now that we've made the list, I'm excited to see how far we can go."