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Institutional assessment tools for sustainability in higher education: strengths, weaknesses, and implications for practice and theory

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Abstract

This paper analyzes recent efforts to measure sustainability in higher education across institutions. The benefits of cross-institutional assessments include: identifying and benchmarking leaders and best practices; communicating common goals, experiences, and methods; and providing a directional tool to measure progress toward the concept of a "sustainable campus". Ideal assessment tools identify the most important attributes of a sustainable campus, are calculable and comparable, measure more than eco-efficiency, assess processes and motivations and are comprehensible to multiple stakeholders. The 11 cross-institutional assessment tools reviewed in this paper vary in terms of stage of development and closeness to the "ideal tool". These tools reveal (through their structure and content) the following critical parameters to achieving sustainability in higher education: decreasing throughput; pursuing incremental and systemic change simultaneously; including sustainability education as a central part of curricula; and engaging in cross-functional and cross-institutional efforts. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Shriberg, Michael, E-mail: mshriber@umich.edu