



January 30, 2012

STARS Steering Committee
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability
213 ½ North Limestone
Lexington, KY 40507

To Whom It May Concern:

In the AASHE STARS Assessment, credits are awarded for innovative practices, policies, or outcomes that are not covered by or exceed the highest criterion of an existing STARS credit, in addition to those that are innovative for the institution's region. I offer this letter to you as affirmation that with respect to arboreta and public gardens, Agnes Scott College's arboretum meets any definition or understanding of the word "innovative."

I am a faculty advisor to the arboretum project at Agnes Scott College. I serve on the Board of Trees Atlanta, a nationally recognized organization for urban tree planting and conservation. For that organization, I am a member of the Program Committee and served on the Steering Committee for the Atlanta BeltLine Arboretum. In addition, I was a co-founder of the Inman Park Neighborhood Arboretum.

Simply put, an arboretum is a collection of trees and woody plants cultivated for scientific and/or educational purposes. In the typical case, those who design and establish an arboretum have expertise in horticulture or a related field. One predictable result is that the conventional arboretum tends to focus on topics that one encounters in any good field guide to trees and forests.

In our case, however, a diverse committee of faculty, staff, and students is behind this effort. Consequently, we are designing and implementing an arboretum modeled on the broadly multi- and interdisciplinary curriculum at Agnes Scott. This content, moreover, will be delivered not by a conventional paper brochure but with the latest technology and by student docents.

Visitors with smart phones or tablets will be able to access a mobile tour, including audio files, via QR (Quick Response) codes. Students, faculty, and staff who do not have such devices will be able to check one out for use. From beyond the campus, anyone with a computer will be able to take a virtual tour.

In addition, plans call for the establishment of a student group like the ubiquitous tour guides one encounters on any university or college campus. Instead of hearing about the number of majors on campus, however, visitors will learn about trees in the arts, the use of tree structure to map hierarchies of knowledge and ideas, psychological benefits of trees, the dynamics of forest succession, the phenomenon of sacred trees, trees as carbon sinks, and much more.

In these ways – its multi-disciplinary, high-tech features as well as its focus on student input and participation – the Agnes Scott College arboretum will be innovative and, we hope, influential in creating a model for campus-based arboreta and public gardens.

Yours truly,

James C. Abbot Jr.
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