# May 31, 2015

Dear Ms. Urbanski,

We appreciate your efforts to review STARs submissions, including the 2.0 version submitted by The George Washington University on February 27, 2015. We want to assure you, and your colleagues, that we take the STARs reporting very seriously, and worked very hard to produce a high quality submission, which your kind note acknowledged.

We have reviewed those areas identified as potential mismatches with credit criteria or intent. This purpose of this letter is to provide a summary of our changes to the STARs submission and to provide additional information and rationale to explain our submission.

**AC1: Academic Courses**

You and your team correctly identified a discrepancy between the number of Departments listed under Institutional Boundary (73) and the number of Departments listed under AC1 (52). In the Credit Submission Note under AC1, this discrepancy is explained. As stated, for this portion of our submission, we excluded the Medical School from our course analysis as well as throughout the Academic portions of STARs. We followed this same practice when we submitted the 1.2 version of STARs.

I was advised by our Office of Institutional Research and Planning that GW has no clear definition of what constitutes a department. The count that was provided was of Department Chairs as declared by individual schools. In some cases, these Chairs have no faculty or classes under them, in others there are many courses and faculty. In four of our schools – i.e., Elliott School of International Affairs, School of Nursing, the College of Professional Studies, and the Law School – there are no Departments or Department Chairs. In considering other sorts of divisions, such as “programs” the definitional challenge only becomes greater.

We believe that our accompanying note provides the reader with the transparency necessary to assess our input throughout this section.

**AC6: Sustainability Literacy Assessment**

We administer a pre/post-test that challenges students to display their knowledge of critical sustainability concepts and processes. We administer this literacy pre/post-test in Sustainability 1001 “Introduction to Sustainability” for three important reasons.

First, this class is geared toward freshmen and the pre-test helps us understand how much they know about sustainability coming into the university so that we can well calibrate instruction. This course does not typically have declared Sustainability Minors, but freshman students who have not declared their majors or minors. Many of the students have no previous understanding of sustainability. For this reason we consider that this assessment is conducted on a broad student audience.

Second, this class has a diverse range of students that actually reflects the members of the undergraduate population. The class enrollment is 100 students, and the breakdown of students by schools matches the wider school-based distribution for all undergraduates (for example, 70% of students in the Sustainability 1001 class are in Columbian College, 12% are in Elliot School of International Affairs, 8% are in the School of Business and so on). For this reason we consider the assessment to be of a representative sample of the GW undergraduate population.

Third, by testing literacy within a course, we are able to assess what and how well students learn over the course of the semester, something we feel is valuable to enhancing the curriculum. In some of the examples highlighted under STARs for this credit, we wonder whether there is comparable benefit to educational programming.

In the first box under this credit, we provided the percentage of students assessed for sustainability literacy (directly or by [representative sample](https://stars.aashe.org/terms/104/)) and for whom a follow-up assessment is conducted. We entered 100% because all Sustainability 1001 students are given a pre and post- test.

**AC11: Access to Research**

We have updated this entry, as the Open Access policy is fully adopted. The Faculty Senate had just adopted the policy at the time of our submission, so we did not have a website up and running. At this point, all is there.

We have one remaining concern. When we altered our submission, we were not allowed to alter the note section. This will require an update as well, and we need to figure out with you and the AASHE staff how to mechanically accomplish this.

**EN9: Community Partnerships and EN13: Community Stakeholder Engagement**

We had made the changes, as you suggested directly into the document and have received email confirmation that the changes have been made.

I expect, given these outstanding issues described above, that you may want to have a phone meeting to discuss them. Professor Lisa Benton-Short and I are available and happy to do that.

Lastly, I do want to raise a general issue of how applicants should use the Credit Submission Note section in STARs. In some cases, the items on your list of concerns with the GW submission are addressed either in the Note or a methodology section, but your email does not seem to reflect the explanations we provided. My assumption is that part of the rationale for having a Note section is that not all colleges or universities are structured the same way. The Note section provides an important and essential opportunity for universities to explain their methodology and therefore encourages transparency.

Thank you for your efforts to review these submissions. I look forward to working with you on any remaining concerns.

Sincerely,

Kathleen A. Merrigan, Ph.D.

Executive Director of Sustainability

Professor of Public Policy