



July 28, 2011

Dear AASHE STARS Program Staff:

I am writing to affirm the innovative nature of the immersive experiences in sustainability sponsored by Penn State's Center for Sustainability, Office of Global Programs, and LEAP program.

As the Founding Director of the Leonhard Center for Enhancement of Engineering Education, I invested a great deal of thought and energy into innovative educational programs that were based on experiential learning. I was involved in the planning and initiating of two minors, Entrepreneurship and Leadership, with the most important foundational element being problem-based learning. These and other continuing efforts to integrate students into the process of change have convinced me that experiential learning and immersive experiences are essential for the development of deep understanding.

Immersive experiences in sustainability through service projects are the key part of the Center for Sustainability's approach to educating for sustainability. The four programs described in the attachment are an indication of its commitment to innovation in sustainability education. The oldest program, the American Indian Housing Initiative, incorporates flexibility and a willingness to change course that are essential to any meaningful community partnership. The newest program, Sustainability Research in Jamaica, expands on that flexibility by, bringing a class of first-year students into immersive experiences during the summer before they begin college.

I hope that this recognition from AASHE encourages Penn State and other universities to continue to develop new and innovative ways of educating for sustainability.

Sincerely,

Jack V. Matson PhD PE

Emeritus Professor of Environmental Engineering, Penn State University  
Founding Director of the Leonhard Center