

February 24, 2021

Ms. Meghan Fay Zahniser, Executive Director
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
1536 Wynkoop St. Suite 100
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Ms. Zahniser:

Sterling College was among the very first colleges to declare a climate emergency last year, a natural action after the adoption of a ten-year strategic initiative in April 2019 to use education as a force to address critical ecological problems caused by unlimited growth and consumption that is destroying the planet as we have known it. Sterling has articulated these problems to be fossil fuel dependence and rapid climate change; the destruction of biodiversity and loss of wild places; promotion of harmful agricultural practices that threaten human and natural communities; persistence of structural oppression that impacts human and ecological wellbeing; and deterioration of civil society through estrangement from community, nature, and place.

Because there is much work to be done, Sterling is committed to making the critical learning, work, and community opportunities of which are an integral part of the Sterling experience accessible to all. While a work in progress, a tuition-free model is underway through our Wendell Berry Farming Program. This two year program is designed for juniors and seniors committed to contributing to the revitalization and renewal of rural agrarian communities.

Sterling offers majors in ecology, sustainable agriculture and food systems, environmental humanities, and outdoor education. That being said, ecology is the backbone of all of Sterling's degree programs and prepares students to make real change using nature as the measure in the communities of their choosing. 75% of all BA alumni responded to a recent survey—92% identify as environmental stewards and 88% feel their community contributions make the world a better place. Sterling alumni are dedicated to both protecting wild places and promoting a working landscape that contributes to a just food system.

Our work is important for the common good but must always be practiced at home. A Self Sufficiency Task Force was established by the College in Spring 2020 as a means to inventory our existing land-based resources as leverage points for increasing both institutional and community self-sufficiency and resilience. Such a task included establishing specific goals for increasing community food and energy security and identifying those existing assets and initiatives already underway. I anticipate the outcomes of this work will show up in future reports to AASHE.

We take this work extremely seriously and appreciate your review of our most recent data primarily from the 2019-2020 academic year.

Sincerely,



Matthew Derr
President