



## Office of the President | Dr. Ken Atwater

May 1, 2023

Meghan Fay Zahniser  
Executive Director  
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)  
P.O. Box 824583  
Philadelphia, PA 19182-4583

RE: Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS)

Dear Ms. Zahniser:

Via this communication, we are excited to share with you the sustainability efforts taking place at Hillsborough Community College (HCC). HCC has made a significant commitment to reducing the environmental impact of our institution and to promoting sustainable practices in our community through high impact teaching experiences. We are proud of these commitments and to have implemented creative initiatives aimed at achieving these goals, as well as inspiring others to do the same.

Prior to delving into HCC's recent sustainability work, we would like to share a brief background on Hillsborough Community College. HCC opened its doors as Hillsborough Junior College in 1968 to serve the residents of Hillsborough County, Florida and of its largest city, Tampa. HCC is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate degrees and as of 2022, its first bachelor's degree (the BSN or Bachelor of Science in Nursing). HCC consists of five campuses and various instructional sites offering Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees, as well as workforce certifications aimed at meeting local labor market needs. In academic year 2021-22, the College served over 42,000 credit and non-credit students. Of those students, 68% were 24 years or age or younger; 54% were female and 58% were students of color (32% Hispanic, 17% Black, 9% Asian and Other). HCC's impact is significant. We are proud to have more than one million alumni. Eighty-four percent of our graduates live and work in Hillsborough County and HCC contributes an estimated \$1.3 billion annually to the economic and social viability of our region. It is in part due this impact, that the College believed it important to set sustainability goals both college-wide and for each campus community.

Four years ago, the Office of Sustainability was restructured to increase faculty involvement and imbed sustainability into our college culture. Soon after, COVID shut down much of the physical engagement and pushed our content delivery online. The sustainability team swiftly pivoted to the new digital environment, offering beehive tours, composting workshops, planting seminars,

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meatless cooking demonstrations, a series on waste reduction, and many more. Now that we seem to be on the back end of the pandemic, we have ramped up our in-person events, attracting people from the college and our surrounding community to urban farm visits, community garden tours, wastewater treatment facilities, electronic waste depots, landfills, waste to energy facilities, kayaking events, native planting demonstrations, mass transit days, and other engagement opportunities.

Hillsborough Community College's monthly beehive tours are one of the College's best-attended sustainability-related activities. HCC's Ybor City campus, located in Tampa's urban core, is home to our rooftop apiary hosting 25-50 beehives. These hives are cared for by the sustainability team of students, staff and faculty and produce hundreds of pounds of honey each year. The hives serve as a platform to discuss everything from climate change, food security, invasive plants, and of course, honey. Much like the bees, communities of humans can accomplish amazing things when they work together.

In addition to beekeeping, we have also created several permaculture sites at three of our five campuses. The Office of Sustainability collaborated with the HCC Gallery to build living art systems that promote healthy food, healthy people, and a healthy planet. This area includes a variety of edible plants that are sustainably grown without the use of pesticides or other harmful chemicals. Our one half acre "food forest" is currently under construction at the Brandon campus. Once complete, it will provide a source of fresh fruit, eggs, and vegetables for our campus community and beyond. These living laboratories help promote sustainable agriculture practices, provide a space for aquaculture projects, math applications, and offer quiet spaces for contemplation.

As a college, we continue to decrease our environmental impact dramatically while serving a growing number of students. Tactical investments in HVAC, lighting, water use, and building infrastructure have paid for themselves, keeping tuition and carbon footprint low. Large investments in our buildings have decreased our energy consumption by 38% from our baseline seven years ago. This has saved the college millions of dollars and has kept nearly 36,000 tons of CO2 out of the atmosphere.

We are proud to say that the commitment to sustainable practices thrives at all levels of the college. There is a staffed Office of Sustainability that helps engage the community, students, and employees at HCC. There are campus level sustainability committees that contribute to local events and sustainability practices for their unique community. A college-wide sustainability council that comprises over 100 faculty, staff, and administrators who actively participate in engagement activities, reporting, and college-wide sustainability goals.

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Administration holds monthly meetings with the sustainability coordinator to increase communication and lower barriers of action. Faculty incorporate UNSDGs into their coursework, art shows, dances, and co-curricular activities. By promoting sustainability on campus and in the classroom, we inspire our students to become environmental leaders in their communities.

Hillsborough Community College is committed to the best stewardship of the social, environmental, and economic resources entrusted to us. We are committed to making a positive impact on our environment, community, and we hope that our efforts inspire others to work toward a more sustainable future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Atwater". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "A".

Dr. Ken Atwater  
President