

July 29, 2011

STARS Steering Committee
Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
213 ½ North Limestone
Lexington, KY 40507

SUBJECT: Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program
STARS Letter of Affirmation - Innovation Credit #3

Dear AASHE STARS Steering Committee,

It is my pleasure to offer my endorsement and letter of affirmation for STARS Innovation Credit #3 titled *Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program*.

In my role as the Chief of Staff for the Vice President for Administrative Services, I have played an active role in ensuring this program's success. Working closely with the Office of Energy and Sustainability has been key to engaging critical stakeholders from across campus to support the work of each of the intern teams and our overall campus sustainability efforts.

It is my belief that the *Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program* meets all of the STARS Innovation Criteria, and especially reflects criterion #1: "Innovation credits are reserved for new, extraordinary, unique, ground-breaking, or uncommon outcomes, policies, and practices that greatly exceed the highest criterion of an existing STARS credit or are not covered by an existing STARS credit."

The *Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program* is a truly innovative program that fosters development of the personal, professional, and leadership skills necessary for our Virginia Tech students to become the sustainability leaders of the future. With foundations in collaborative research and interdisciplinary teamwork, this program trains interns of varying backgrounds to comprehensively understand society's most pressing sustainability-related needs. The program further challenges interns to develop creative solutions to enhance sustainability efforts on our campus. Additionally, the engagement of the campus community at all layers – students, faculty, staff, and administrators – is a unique approach that maximizes the innovative potential for creative solutions to our toughest challenges. The integration of student development and campus sustainability progress is a true institutionalization of sustainability at Virginia Tech.

Invent the Future

The *Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program* has produced tremendous results to date including 32 total graduates (with an additional 23 set to graduate in November), detailed building trash and recycling infrastructure assessments of 52 buildings on campus, and the establishment of a campus sustainability campaign image. The program is continually expanding with each graduating intern cohort, and several major projects have been carried on between cohorts due to the scope and time scale of the projects. These projects include a robust campus-wide electronic portal of sustainability initiatives, greening of football game day operations both on campus and in the development of a best practices toolkit for other universities, and a campus culture assessment tool.

I look forward to the future initiatives of the *Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program* and to seeing the growth and development of our Virginia Tech students as they become the stewards of a sustainable future.

For the reasons stated above, I highly recommend the *Emerging Sustainability Professionals Internship Program* for the STARS Innovation category based on its unique approach to foster and integrate student development and campus sustainability progress at Virginia Tech.

Sincerely,



Heidi M. McCoy
Chief of Staff