



March 1, 2023

Ms. Meghan Fay Zahniser
Executive Director
AASHE
2401 Walnut Street
Suite 102
Philadelphia, PA 19103

Dear Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE),

We as a Toro Nation care deeply about the welfare of our members and the communities around us. This culture of care and stewardship extends to supporting the planet we all share, which is why I am proud to write this letter recognizing the role of sustainability as a core value of our institution. As quoted in our campus strategic plan, “We recognize and live up to our responsibility to our campus community, and the community at large, through the sustainable and equitable stewardship of our natural, social, and economic resources.”

We are a university that serves the communities and students most vulnerable to the impacts of global climate change, environmental racism, and environmental pollution. It is our moral imperative to steward our own campus resources and model personal behavior in a way that reflects our culture of care. This is a core value we continue to urge all Toros to embrace regardless of background, walk of life, or academic discipline as our ability to thrive on this planet as a community and species depends on our collective actions as a Toro Nation today. Though the challenge of global climate change is a daunting one, I want to highlight CSUDH’s commitment to the fight, and laud our institution’s progress in dramatically changing the face of what leadership in sustainability looks like in higher education: a face that is diverse, urban, resourceful, and ready to protect our disadvantaged communities and communities of color from the disproportionate burden they bear in navigating an imperiled Mother Earth.

I am proud to be a signatory of the Presidents’ Climate Leadership Network which, in concert with our CSUDH Climate Action Plan, commits our university to carbon neutrality by 2045. We are well on our way with nearly 1 megawatt of rooftop solar now gracing five of our campus buildings (including our LEED Platinum Science and Innovation building), an innovative 1MW/4hr battery storage array that was highlighted nationally in the Sustainable Campus Index in 2021, and highly efficient buildings utilizing cutting edge technology that has been the feature of many a statewide case study through the California Energy Commission.

Our campus has also been a pioneer in developing innovative initiatives designed to reduce our waste and water impacts and build more sustainable food systems. Everywhere you look on campus, you will find zero waste bins designed to reduce our impacts on landfills, hydration stations on every campus water fountain to

help all Toros go plastic-free, highly water efficient landscape, and an urban forest recognized nationally by the Arbor Day Foundation four years running. But just as impactful are the operations and programs that work silently to make a tangible difference in the ability of our Toros to thrive. Food recovery, donation programs, the weekly Farmers Market, and the CSUDH Campus Urban Farm collectively bring in thousands of pounds annually of fresh, locally grown produce to students battling food insecurity and the realities of living in a regional food desert. Outreach programs such as the pop-up thrift initiative (started as a Presidential Challenge Initiative under my office) now allow hundreds of Toros to receive free office supplies, clothing, and other essentials while alleviating our burden on landfills. This is just a small sample of the dozens of other projects and programs that make us stand out as a model urban university leader in this space.

There are also instructional, research, and co-curricular efforts that leverage our position as an urban university to understand, research, and develop solutions for our most pressing issues around climate change, environmental justice, and the impact of our rapidly changing environment on human health. Our regional partnerships, service learning projects, and even the alumni who graduate from our institution are all making efforts to transform our region in preparation of a more sustainable future.

This rapid transformation is probably best exemplified by our progression through the national AASHE STARS rating system for sustainability over the last five years. Starting as an unrated institution, we achieved a rating of Bronze in 2018, silver in 2020, and are now proud to be making this submittal for gold in 2023. For a university to jump from Bronze to Gold in five years is an unprecedented rise for any institution and is a testament to how sustainability has served as a powerful catalyst for all the things CSUDH already does well. I believe this latest STARS report highlights the levels to which our campus sustainability efforts have become a point of pride in our institution, as well as the strength of our campus commitment to ensure a better planet for all.

However, this submittal for AASHE STARS Gold is just the start of our sustainability journey, and we look forward to continuing to report our progress in future years as we follow the road to AASHE STARS Platinum.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Parham, Ph.D.
President