



# University of Colorado Colorado Springs

## STARS Comparative Analysis

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# Introduction

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**The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS)** is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. STARS is a program of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

The University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) has submitted 10 years worth of data from 2011-2021.

This comparative analysis will review the 2018 and 2021 submissions providing a quantitative and qualitative understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The report will be used to guide the update to the 2030 UCCS Sustainability Strategic Plan to set realistic and innovative goals.



2011  
53.78



2015  
65.82



2018  
74.27



2021  
65.05



# Overview of STARS Credits

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Since 2006, STARS has continued to elevate sustainability goals by releasing updated versions of the STARS rating system. All institutions used version 2.1 in 2018. Version 2.2 was released in 2019 and used for UCCS' 2021 submission. Due to changes, some credits are more difficult to complete a point-by-point comparison. All credits are available in Appendix A.

|  | 2021           | 2018           |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| Academics  |                |                |
| • Curriculum   | 30.67 / 40     | 32.03 / 40     |
| • Research   | 11.06 / 18     | 15.93 / 18     |
| Engagement   |                |                |
| • Campus Engagement  | 15.83 / 21     | 13.95 / 21     |
| • Public Engagement  | 14.95 / 20     | 16.88 / 20     |
| Operations   |                |                |
| • Air & Climate  | 5.67 / 11      | 7.8 / 11       |
| • Buildings  | 3.17 / 8       | 4.5 / 9        |
| • Energy   | 4.79 / 10      | 6.64 / 10      |
| • Food & Dining  | 2.59 / 8       | 2.33 / 8       |
| • Grounds  | 2.01 / 4       | 2.02 / 4       |
| • Purchasing   | 4.28 / 6       | 4.98 / 6       |
| • Transportation   | 1.80 / 7       | 3.18 / 7       |
| • Waste  | 6.03 / 10      | 5.92 / 10      |
| • Water  | 4.35 / 6       | 5.55 / 6       |
| Planning & Administration  |                |                |
| • Coordination & Planning  | 7.25 / 9       | 7.25 / 8       |
| • Diversity & Affordability  | 5.55 / 10      | 7.30 / 10      |
| • Investment & Finance   | 0.91 / 8       | 1.97 / 8       |
| • Wellbeing & Work   | 3.03 / 7       | 3.72 / 7       |
| Innovation & Leadership  |                |                |
|  | 4 / 4          | 3 / 4          |
| <b>Gold highlights</b><br>represent credits with<br>increased points | TOTAL<br>65.05 | TOTAL<br>74.27 |

"STARS is the product of an extensive stakeholder engagement process that began in 2006 and continues to this day."

- [stars.aashe.org/about-stars/history](https://stars.aashe.org/about-stars/history)



# Improved Credits

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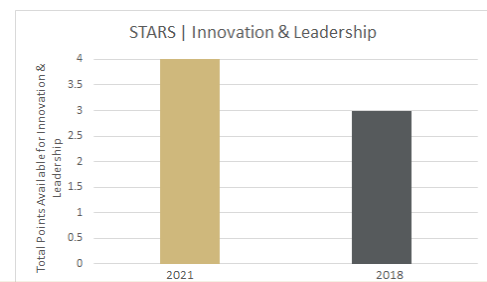
Innovation & Leadership, Campus Engagement, and Food & Dining were the three credits that UCCS saw the most significant increase in points over a three year period. The only other increase was in the Waste credit with +1.9% in total points. All other credits saw a decline in points. These credits will be addressed in the next section.

## ↑ 33.3% — Innovation & Leadership

Instead of only allowing four 'Innovation' credits, this section was broken down into 24 credits and weighted equally at 0.5 bonus points each with a maximum of four points.

We were awarded points for:

- Campus Pride Index (0.25 / 0.50)
- External Reporting Assurance (0.50 / 0.50)
- Food Bank (0.50 / 0.50)
- Student Living Wage (0.50 / 0.50)
- Sustainability Course Designation (0.50 / 0.50)
- Sustainability Projects Fund (0.50 / 0.50)
- Textbook Affordability (0.25 / 0.50)
- Innovation A | Food Next Door Farm Subscription Program
- Innovation B | Positive Impact Points

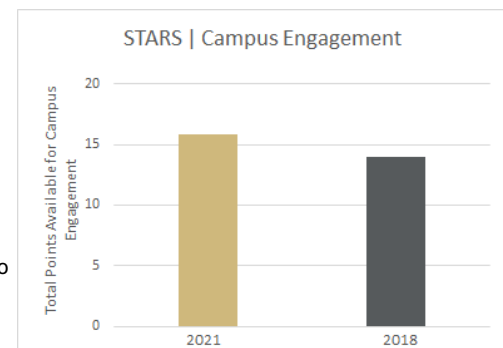


Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **0.0**

## ↑ 13.5% — Campus Engagement

We stayed consistent **scoring the maximum number of points** for Student Orientation, Student Life, Outreach Materials and Publications, Outreach Campaign, and Staff Professional Development & Training. We **improved** in the **Employee Educators Program, Student Educators Program, and Assessing Sustainability Culture** credits.

- A faculty in Geography and Environmental Studies received a Green Action Fund Research Seed grant to conduct a sustainability culture survey; this was the first time we've been able to pursue this credit.
- Both educator program credits saw 'substantive changes' from version 2.1. The revisions included number of hours worked, which allowed us to better showcase more robust programs.

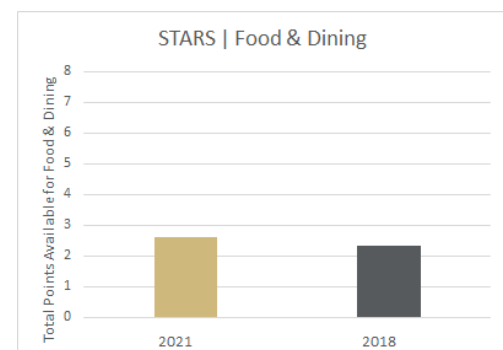


Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **5.17**

## ↑ 11.6% — Food & Dining

Both credits in this section had substantive changes that included clarification of definitions and reorganization, reducing duplication of content submitted.

- In 2018, UCCS had 6.3% of its overall **food and beverage purchases** that were considered from **sustainable or local sources**. In 2021, UCCS reported 8.8%, which was a **2.5% increase**.
- Both 2021 and 2018, we received full points for the Sustainable Dining credit, which includes operational and educational efforts supported by our Dining & Hospitality Services.



Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **5.41**

# Regressed Credits

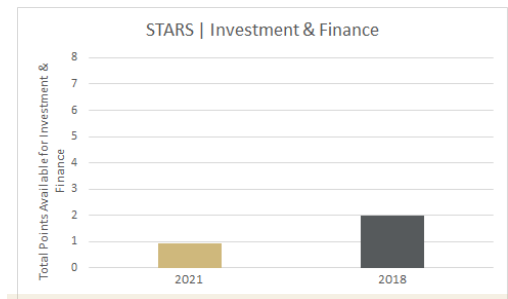
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Fourteen of the eighteen credits saw a reduction of points ranging from 0.01 to 4.87. Below we have addressed the five credits that saw the most drastic decrease of points from 2018 to 2021.

## ↓ 146.9% — Investment & Finance

In both 2021 and 2018, we did not pursue the two credits: Committee on Investor Responsibility and Investment Disclosure. The credit, Sustainable Investment, saw substantive changes, which applied contextual variability to weight the credit more heavily for institutions with very large endowments.

Even with a slight investment increase in 'sustainable industries', **we saw a significant reduction in investments made in 'businesses selected for exemplary sustainability practices' and 'sustainability investment funds.'** Since our overall investment pool value increased and the changes to this credit emphasized the impact of institutions with larger endowments, we saw the largest decrease in points for this credit.



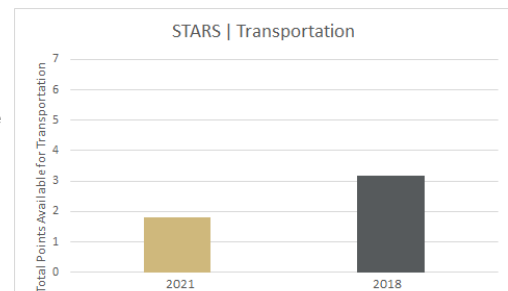
Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **7.09**

## ↓ 76.6% — Transportation

Our campus fleet saw a **decrease in cleaner fuel and fuel-efficient vehicles.** Vehicles fueled with B20 were not supported by our local economy in 2021. B20 vehicles represented 12% of our 2018 submission.

In 2018, 95% of our faculty/staff (f/s) population used single-occupancy vehicles (SOV) to commute to campus. In 2021, 91% used SOV. **Our student population saw a drastic increase in SOV use.** In 2018, 60% used SOV, while in 2021, 86% used SOV as their main form of commuting.

The UCCS Transportation Survey needs to be updated to reflect the changes that include 'distance education' and 'zero-emissions vehicles' as more sustainable options. These transportation options were not collected or reported for 2021.

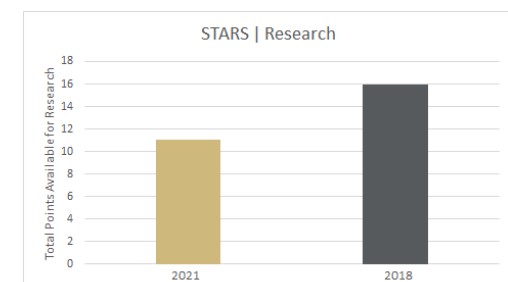


Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **5.2**

## ↓ 44.0% — Research

The reduction in research points is fairly straight-forward. In our 2018 submission, it was the first time we had compiled all sustainability research from faculty and staff at UCCS. A LibGuide was created for easy access and to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration. We reported all information and should have only reported the previous three years.

In 2021, our external reporting consultant caught this mistake, and we were able to correct our reporting for our most recent submission. **This correction allows us to move forward with a more accurate process to report sustainability research conducted by UCCS faculty and staff.**



Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **6.94**

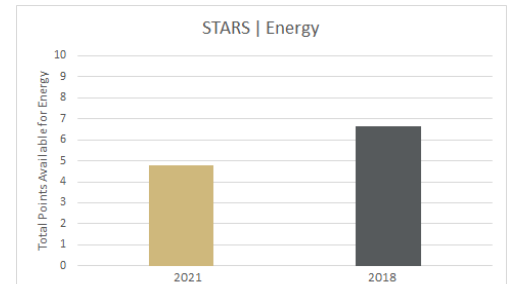
# Regressed Credits | cont'd

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↓ **38.6%** — **Energy**

Even though we produced 600+ MMBtu more of on-site, renewable energy in 2021 than 2018, our campus used **44k MMBtu more in total energy consumption**.

We had three new buildings come online between 2018 and 2021 resulting in an additional 100,000+ gross square feet of indoor space to condition. None of these new builds had infrastructure to produce renewable energy on-site.

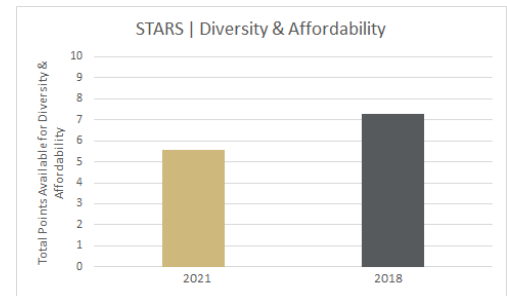


Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **5.21**

↓ **31.5%** — **Diversity & Affordability**

Overall, we saw a decrease in three of the four credits in this section.

- Diversity and Equity Coordination | We saw a slight reduction in points, but we feel confident that our data is realistic and represent the number of campus community members completing trainings and attending event.
- Assessing Diversity and Equity | At the system and campus level, we **did not have a survey** that was completed in past three years to submit.
- Affordability and Access | This credit saw substantive changes which weighted quantitative responses more heavily rather than qualitative. Due to this change, our **overall numbers saw a decrease** in 2021 compared to 2018.



Point Gap to Achieve 100%: **4.45**

## The additional credits we saw a reduction include:

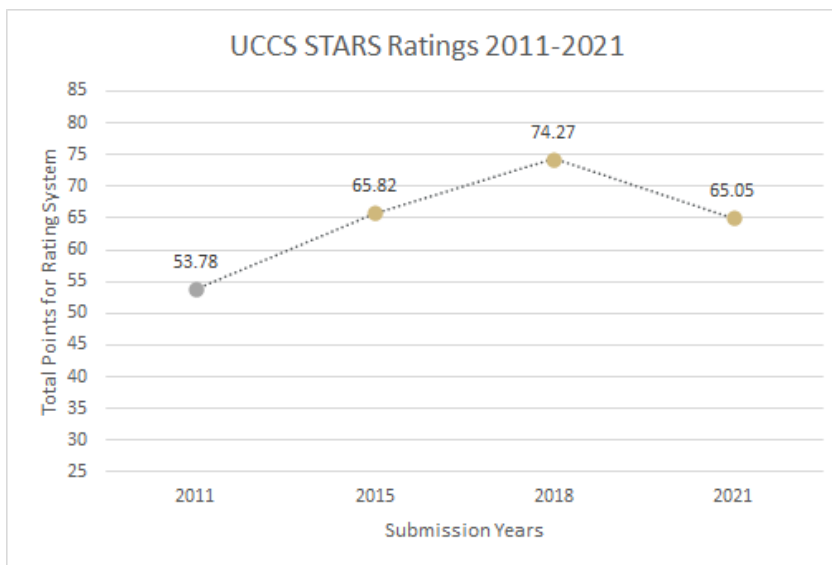
- Buildings | 26.2% decrease
- Air & Climate | 26.1% decrease
- Wellbeing & Work | 22.8% decrease
- Purchasing | 16.4% decrease
- Public Engagement | 12.9% decrease
- Coordination & Planning | 12.5% decrease
- Water | 9.4% decrease
- Curriculum | 4.4% decrease
- Grounds | 0.5% decrease

# Conclusion & Next Steps

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## UCCS STARS Submission 2011-2021

In 2011, UCCS submitted their first STARS report and received a Silver rating. Consistently since 2015, UCCS has received a Gold rating; however, our 2021 submission saw a dramatic decline in overall points that is lower than even in 2015.



# 19.95

points away from achieving a  
Platinum rating

# 9.22

total points declined since 2018

Along with the decline of individual credits, from a macro perspective, the following changes from 2018-2021 have impacted the efficacy and scope of sustainability efforts at UCCS:

### 2018

- 3 full-time sustainability office employees + 1 operations engineer
- Current Campus Sustainability Strategic Plan

### 2021

- 1 full-time sustainability office employee
- Sunset 2020 plan; draft 2030 plan

**UCCS must commit resources** to achieve a Gold or higher rating in 2024 as the AASHE Board of Directors and the STARS Steering Committee continue to set **exponential, stretch goals for higher education** through the STARS tool.



# Conclusion & Next Steps

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Below we have identified at least one goal for each credit that saw the most dramatic point reduction. We will work with the Sustainability Committee and UCCS community members to integrate these goals into our 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan.

## Investment & Finance

- Implement Green Revolving Fund\* for campus operations; start at departmental levels

\*GRFs invest in energy efficiency projects to reduce energy consumption and reinvest the money saved in future projects. - [greenbillion.org/the-challenge/](https://greenbillion.org/the-challenge/)



## Transportation

- Align our goals with the Colorado Employer-Based Trip Reduction Program (ETRP) to reduce our percentage of Single Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) drivers to from 91% to 75%



## Research

- Work with the UCCS Office of Research to incentivize sustainability and interdisciplinary research through annual grant funding



## Energy

- Finalize energy master plans, audits, and assessments and identify opportunities for energy performance service contracts and maintain/upgrade existing buildings to LEED standards



## Diversity & Affordability

- Consistently conduct an Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) survey, provide an annual report on findings to the campus community, and implement into daily operations



# Conclusion & Next Steps

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Upon completion of this comparative analysis, our STARS assessment, the CU Strategic Plan, UCCS Strategic Plan, UCCS Equity Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals will be used to ensure alignment of the UCCS 2030 Sustainability Strategic Plan.



## Assessment Complete during a Pandemic

Although UCCS saw a decrease in overall score along with individual credits, campus partners supported the efforts of tracking and reporting longitudinal sustainability data during a very difficult time in our global history. Through this perseverance, we have updated information to improve our Campus Sustainability Strategic Plan 2030.



## 100% Points Achieved | Innovation & Leadership

UCCS continues to be creative with resources. These innovations are celebrated in our 2021 STARS report.

- Clyde's Cupboard - 100% donation based and non-need based food pantry on campus
- Green Action Fund - \$5/student/semester fee that has invested over \$1 million dollars in sustainable projects, programs, and research since 2012
- Books for Battle Buddies - donation based textbook loan program available to military affiliated students
- Food Next Door | Farm Subscription Program - the SWELL: Sustainability, Wellness, and Learning initiative realized the impact of COVID-19 on our student and local community and implemented a program to help fight hunger, promote healthy food access, boost food literacy, and support regional farmers and ranchers in our community



Are you faculty, staff, or student at UCCS?

Are you a Colorado Springs community member?

Are you invested in helping make UCCS more sustainable?

Then we need your feedback, suggestions and engagement!  
Visit our website to learn more: [sustain.uccs.edu/sustain-plan](https://sustain.uccs.edu/sustain-plan)

# Acknowledgements

UCCS Office of Sustainability  
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We could not have collected and submitted data for this assessment and rating system without the help of our UCCS community of students, faculty, and staff.

Thanks to our UCCS Office of Sustainability student employees for their tireless work to ensure we reported accurate information. | **Annabelle Nippe MPA '21, Jaymee Collins BA '21, Mauricio Soriano BS '20, and Ryan Maikell BA '22**

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We appreciate your support and continued efforts to make UCCS more sustainable.

## Contact



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# Appendix A

## UCCS STARS Credits

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The best way to access our current and previous STARS reports is through the STARS website:

- 2021 UCCS STARS Report | Gold | 65.05
- 2018 UCCS STARS Report | Gold | 74.27
- 2015 UCCS STARS Report | Gold | 65.82
- 2011 | UCCS STARS Report | Silver | 53.78

If you are reading a physical copy of this report, please visit [stars.aashe.org](https://stars.aashe.org) and search for University of Colorado Colorado Springs.