

Tulane sustainability director receives national research award

October 08, 2018 3:15 PM Roger Dunaway
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Liz Davey was honored for her article “Recapturing the learning opportunities of university sustainability indicators,” which was published in the Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences in 2017. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Liz Davey, the director of Tulane’s Office of Sustainability, has received the Campus Sustainability Research Award from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

Davey was presented with her award on Oct. 2 at the AASHE Conference & Expo in Pittsburgh. She received the honor for her article “Recapturing the learning opportunities of university sustainability indicators” which was published in the

Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences in 2017. The AASHE bestows its prestigious awards on the institutions and individuals that are helping to lead higher education to a sustainable future.

Davey focuses on how reconfiguring student involvement in university sustainability assessments and reporting can create essential learning opportunities. The article includes accounts of early student and faculty efforts to assess university sustainability, including a 1990s Tulane effort called, “Green Gradecard for the Green Wave.” The article is also the basis of a class that Davey teaches called Measuring Sustainability.

Today, university sustainability ratings and rankings are largely-developed by organizations outside universities, with data provided by university sustainability staff and administrators. These schools participate in the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Rating System (STARS), which is administered by the AASHE.

Davey explains how environmental studies and sciences faculty and students can participate in the process of assessing university sustainability by producing their own sustainability indicator reports from the STARS data. Students can use these theories and methods to critically evaluate sustainability data, to develop their own sense of the components of a sustainable institution or sustainability society and to advance understanding of sustainability within their university community.

“The paper suggests that discussions of how we measure sustainability can help students think about sustainability in more complex ways, and it offers suggestions of assignments and class projects,” Davey said. “I am pleased that this award will help me share these ideas with more faculty and students.”