



The American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment

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History and Purpose

In December of 2006, 12 college and university presidents working with the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), ecoAmerica and Second Nature, launched *The American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC)*. The ACUPCC is a high-visibility, *joint and individual commitment* to address global climate disruption through actions to reduce and eventually neutralize greenhouse gas emissions, and to develop the capability of students to help all of society to do the same.

The participating presidents are committing their institutions to create a comprehensive institutional action plan to move towards climate neutrality through the following actions:

- Complete a greenhouse gas emissions inventory within one year. The emissions covered are from heating and cooling in buildings, electricity usage, commuting transportation and official airline travel by administrators, faculty and staff.
- Within two years set a target date and interim milestones for becoming climate neutral. *Each school has the flexibility to do it on their own schedule and in their own way.*
- Take immediate steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by choosing *two* from a list of *seven* short-term actions.
- Make sustainability an integral part of the curriculum and educational experience of all students.
- Make the action plan, inventory and progress reports publicly available.

As of today, just 2 years later, 602 colleges and universities in all 50 states have made this unprecedented commitment. They represent 5.0 million students – about 30% of the student population and include every type of institution from community colleges to the biggest research universities (Ohio State U and Arizona State University).

Governance

The ACUPCC is governed by a 22-member Steering Committee chaired by Michael Crow, President of Arizona State University (see below). The Steering Committee makes all policy decisions for the ACUPCC. The coordinating organizations – AASHE, ecoAmerica and Second Nature - provide the organization and support.

Courageous leadership

The ACUPCC is an example of courageous leadership by college and university leaders. It is the first effort by any major sector of society to set a long-term goal of *climate neutrality*. The presidents believe that leading society to a low carbon, less auto-dependent and circular production economy fits squarely into the educational, research, and public service missions of higher education. Today's and tomorrow's businesses and professionals - architects, engineers, attorneys, business leaders, scientists, urban



planners, policy analysts, cultural and spiritual leaders, teachers, journalists, advocates, activists, and politicians will need new knowledge and skills that only Higher Education can provide on a broad scale.

Impact

The positive impact of *collective leadership* by a large number of colleges and universities will be huge. Global climate disruption is a global problem requiring global solutions of immense proportions. The scope, scale and speed of the challenge demand an unprecedented level of collaboration by all of higher education.

The American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment has fundamentally shifted higher education's attention on sustainability from a series of excellent, distinct programs to a strategic imperative – the lens for measuring success. We have numerous anecdotes on how effective the Commitment has been in raising the importance of sustainability initiatives on campus and in the classroom. According to presidents at dozens of colleges and universities, the ACUPCC has done as much to build a vibrant community and a sense of shared purpose across the institutions than any other initiative in recent memory.

Moving Forward

The 397 charter signatories (those that signed before September 15, 2007) began reporting on the first milestone of the Commitment in November of 1997: their institutional structure for developing and implementing the climate action plans and the short term tangible actions they are taking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the next two years. Some results:

- 290 have adopted policies for LEED Silver or the equivalent performance for new buildings
- 320 have adopted procurement policies for Energy Star products
- 35 have programs to purchase carbon offsets for air travel
- 240 have programs to facilitate the use of public transportation
- 140 have committed to purchase at least 15% of electricity from renewable energy
- 38 have efforts for climate friendly investments
- 220 have waste reduction programs under the Recyclemania program
- Over 200 GHG emission inventories were submitted in September.

The organizers of the ACUPCC – AASHE, EcoAmerica and Second Nature – are actively working on strategies to support the signatories and all of higher education to make the rapid transition to making sustainability the lens through which higher education measures success.

Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium (HEASC)

A group of fifteen higher education associations that represent presidents, trustees, business officers, facilities managers, planners, purchasing agents, student affairs officers and others have formed the Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium (HEASC). They are working together to make sustainability a foundation of higher education through their organizations' operations, publications, conferences and professional development. Since the inception of HEASC in May 2006, the member organizations have engaged in dozens of programs and activities to help their constituents understand and implement the principles of sustainability. For example, NACUBO (business officers) is launching an important study on financing all sustainability related activities on campuses, complementing their 2006 book on the business case for renewable energy in higher education. APPA (facilities managers) just released a comprehensive book entitled "The Green Campus: Meeting the Challenge of Environmental Sustainability". APPA is also working on a comprehensive guide for facilities managers on how to deal with climate change including supporting implementation of the ACUPCC due to be completed in December.



Collaboration with the US Conference of Mayors

The US Conference of Mayors (UCM) and the ACUPCC have just agreed to launch a collaborative effort with the more than 870 city mayors that have signed the Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. The mayors will work with the ACUPCC signatories on joint programs to accelerate education on “green collar jobs” and the clean energy economy and action on reducing the carbon footprint of cities and colleges and universities. We will launch the effort in early to mid 2009.

Carbon Offset Protocol

The Commitment fosters a strategic approach to carbon management on campuses by providing for signatories a common framework, through which they each create their own unique climate action plans with the same end-goal in mind: greenhouse gas (GHG) neutrality. Schools will employ one or more of four strategies

- *Avoiding* their own emissions through smart planning and conservation;
- *Reducing* their own emissions through efficiency and other measures; and
- *Replacing* their own emissions-intensive activities with cleaner alternatives.
- *Purchasing* off-campus carbon offsets

Carbon offsets are both vexing and controversial. For that reason, the ACUPCC is just to published a voluntary offset protocol to help answer the questions: *Should offsets be incorporated into climate action plans? If so, when and how should they be included? And what steps can be taken to ensure that investments in offsets are legitimate, credible, and effective.* The Protocol was developed under the leadership of three ACUPCC presidents – David Hales of College of the Atlantic, Judith Ramaley of Winona State University, and David Shi of Furman University – with the help and support of representatives from other ACUPCC institutions, experts from the carbon markets, and Second Nature. It was launched at the AASHE Conference in Raleigh, NC Nov. 9-11. <http://presidentsclimatecommitment.org/offsetprotocol.php>

Federal Legislation to Support Sustainability in Higher Education

ACUPCC presidents and the members of HEASC successfully supported the Higher Education Sustainability Act – a bill amending the Higher Education Reauthorization bill that authorizes up to \$50 million annually for sustainability education activities in higher education. Signed into law this summer, it is the first federal authorization specifically for environmental and sustainability education for higher education. The presidents have also been actively supporting appropriations for the Energy Independence and Security Act (EISA) that became law in December. EISA authorizes up to \$250 million in grants and \$500 million in loans annually for energy efficiency and renewable projects on college and university campuses.

Clinton Climate Initiative Partnership

The ACUPCC and the Clinton Climate Initiative (CCI) are partnering to exponentially increase the number of large scale energy saving retrofits for campus buildings. Through this program, colleges and universities will dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions while lowering their energy bills, without dipping into their capital budgets or increasing monthly operating expenses. ACUPCC signatories are able to take advantage of the relationships the CCI has established with private sector financial institutions, energy services companies, and product manufacturers to lower project costs while achieving greater greenhouse gas reductions. Thirty schools are acting as pilots for the program that will be rolled out to a larger set of schools in early 2009.

Commentary

The participating presidents believe it is impossible to be a leader in higher education without thinking a great deal about the future. Today’s students and their children will experience the worst effects of climate disruption if we continue business as usual. We are faced with the greatest intergenerational equity challenge in modern history. When we surveyed the presidents participating in the ACUPCC last summer, the majority said the most important reason for making the commitment was that it was the *right thing to do* for the sake of their students and their students’ children and grandchildren.



Some have argued that achieving climate neutrality and sustainability is too hard or impossible. The earth does not recognize how hard it is for us humans to change. It will respond to the physical changes we cause on its own schedule and in its own ways. It doesn't have the cognitive ability to decide to wait for us to figure out how we can change to preserve our way of life and ourselves.

We are now in the process of breaking away from an old paradigm which, like gravitational pull, will require a great deal of energy, commitment and perseverance. We can do it if we set our minds to it. When President John F. Kennedy set a goal for man to reach the moon in a decade, our country had no way of knowing if it could be done. But because it was a goal we shared and to which we put our minds, hearts and our backs, we achieved the goal in 9 years and unleashed the scientific and technical revolution that led to so much innovation from the Internet to materials science to breakthroughs in medicine that are the basis of life today. We need that kind of leadership today from the great leaders in society, especially in higher education. There are lots of other examples of this kind of bold leadership that pushes the limits of knowledge to go beyond what is possible now. This is one of the primary thrusts of higher education. The future of humanity is depending on us. For, if higher education doesn't lead, who will?

Some Organizational Resources

Second Nature

www.secondnature.org

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American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment -

www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education

www.aashe.org

ecoAmerica

www.ecoamerica.org

Higher Education Associations Sustainability Consortium

www.heasc.net



ACUPCC Steering Committee

2009 – 2010

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President	Horace Mitchell	California State University - Bakersfield
President	Michael Crow *	Arizona State University
President	Kathleen Schatzberg	Cape Cod Community College
President	Esther Barazzone	Chatham University
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* *Current Chair*