

Benefits of Joining the Commitment

1) To the benefit of individual institutions, the ACUPCC:

Improves competitive position. Increasingly, leadership on climate and sustainability provides a key advantage in recruiting top students, faculty and staff, and fostering the support of donors, alumni and local communities. The Princeton Review recently reported that over 25% of applicants said that commitment to the environment would “very much” impact their decision on a college or university. The ACUPCC provides a venue for powerful leadership-by example, which is widely-recognized because of the national profile of the initiative.

Opens-up new funding opportunities. ACUPCC signatories have been successful in securing new funding sources, including foundations, government grants, and individuals to support their climate action planning and implementation processes, demonstrating that the ACUPCC can help address budget challenges.

Is flexible and well-designed, enabling presidents to make a bold institutional commitment with confidence. The ACUPCC is a pledge to *make a plan* to promote climate and sustainability education and pursue climate neutrality in a defined scope of campus operations. Plans can be revised and adapted as circumstances change through the transparent public reporting process, ensuring that they are beneficial to the institution over the long-term and do not lock-in specific scenarios for successors. Because it is a good-faith pledge to *pursue* climate neutrality, it is feasible regardless of what technologies or solutions do or do not come to fruition. As long as institutions continue to report on progress they remain in good standing with regard to their commitment.

Creates valuable and relevant opportunities for teaching, learning, and knowledge creation. Existing faculty, students, and staff can use the ACUPCC as an opportunity to learn-by-doing, developing valuable skills for the 21st century and avoiding implementation costs for the institution.

Generates strategic investment opportunities and cost savings. Investments in time and capital now will benefit institutions immediately and in the long-term by building student and staff capacity, improving reputation, lower operational costs, and generating innovative new solutions. While the level of investment needed to fulfill the Commitment will vary between schools and over time, many case-studies show immediate cost savings and attractive return on investment for emissions-reduction activities. As these techniques and technologies are brought to scale through the ACUPCC, these rates of return are likely to improve.

Provides a critical opportunity for leadership by presidents and chancellors. Presidents can best establish the moral leadership and strategic direction that is needed to address this challenge. Moreover, only they can convene all parts of a college or university to address the education, research and operational changes needed. Signatories have indicated that the ACUPCC is an effective vehicle for energizing their communities around an issue that is meaningful for everyone.

Provides a community-wide framework and strategic perspective that is both concrete and effective, and at the same time flexible and feasible. A comprehensive, strategic plan can enhance existing sustainability activities and inspire new ones, without which, *ad hoc* efforts in academics and operations may cost more and be less effective. New regulations, volatile energy costs, and increasing student demand for sustainability education make the potential costs of inaction far greater than opportunity costs associated with foresighted, proactive planning and investing today. Signatories have two years to create climate action plans, and complete autonomy in choosing their own targets and timetables, ensuring that actions are feasible and cost-effective. Target dates for achieving climate neutrality will be different for each institution – most signatories will likely develop plans with many incremental steps, including provisions for revising the plan and adjusting target dates as circumstances change, typically over a 10-40 year time period.

Promotes transparency and real, meaningful action. By developing a strategic plan and publicly report on their progress, as well as picking two tangible actions to get started as the plan is developed, ACUPCC institutions and their stakeholders hold themselves accountable and on-track.

Allows for, but does not necessitate, the use of offsets in each institution's plan to achieve climate neutrality. Offsets can provide a lower cost per unit of emissions reduction to help institutions meet targets more quickly, so this is an option that allows for flexibility in planning. However, because each institutions develops its own plans and targets, it can set a long term goal of climate neutrality without purchasing offsets, making adjustments as necessary as the circumstances and technologies change.

Helps to avoid “re-inventing the wheel.” The ACUPCC is a milieu for networking and information-sharing between schools and across sectors. This allows schools to benefit from lessons learned by their peers operating within the common framework of the ACUPCC, while retaining full autonomy over their planning and decision-making due to the flexibility of that framework.

Provides free access to valuable resources and materials. Dozens of organizations and associations have developed materials and resources to support ACUPCC institutions (as well as non-signatory institutions) free of charge. These include the Climate Action Planning Wiki (AASHE), the ACUPCC Reporting System (AASHE), and reports such as *Education for Climate Neutrality* (ACUPCC, 2008), *The Educational Facilities Professional's Practical Guide to Reducing the Campus Carbon Footprint* (APPA, 2009), *Guide to Climate Action Planning: Pathways to a Low-Carbon Future* (NWF, 2008), *ACUPCC Voluntary Offset Protocol* (ACUPCC, 2008); *ACUPCC Energy Performance Contracting Best Practices Toolkit* (ACUPCC, CCI, 2009); *Leading Profound Change* (ACUPCC 2009) and more - all of which are accessible via: www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org.

Leverages an institution's individual efforts for maximum impact. Each signatory acts as a draw for other schools, which may not yet be addressing the climate crisis, to make their own commitment to climate action. In some cases, when a leading institution has not yet demonstrated their commitment to climate action by signing the ACUPCC, their peer institutions use it as a rationalization not to act. The isolated activities on an individual campus can be leveraged many times over by engaging in the collective effort of the ACUPCC, and thus supporting national, international, and cross-sector cooperative efforts, *in addition* to the on-campus efforts.

2) To the benefit of the higher education sector, the ACUPCC:

Empowers the higher education sector to play a necessary role. The climate challenge is massive and will require transforming our economy, our institutions, our daily lives within a generation. Success requires the active leadership of higher education. No other institution in society has the influence, the critical mass and the diversity of skills needed to be successful.

Capitalizes on higher education's unique role in America. Higher education has been granted tax-free status, the ability to receive public and private funds, and academic freedom in exchange for educating students and producing the knowledge that will result in a thriving civil society. A thriving civil society depends on a relatively stable climate, and requires that we avoid the worst impacts of climate disruption. The ACUPCC network helps colleges and universities fulfill this critical role.

Fits squarely into the educational, research, and public service missions of higher education. Tomorrow's architects, engineers, attorneys, business leaders, scientists, urban planners, policy analysts, cultural and spiritual leaders, journalists, advocates, activists, and politicians—more than 17 million of them—are currently attending the more than 4,000 institutions of higher learning in the United States. The ACUPCC network is helping colleges and universities provide the new knowledge and skills these students will need.

Helps higher education avoid the great risk of failing to lead the effort to re-stabilize the climate. What will society say about those of us in higher education if we have runaway climate change and we, who have the expertise and the mandate of education and research for a thriving society, didn't do everything we could to help society recognize the risks and create the solutions to the challenge?

3) To the benefit of the rest of society, the ACUPCC:

Acknowledges the urgency of the climate challenge. The scientific consensus is that we need to reduce the global emission of greenhouse gases by at least 80% by mid-century at the latest in order to avert the worst impacts of climate disruption and to reestablish the relatively stable climatic conditions that have made human progress over the last 10,000 years possible.¹ ACUPCC institutions are taking a leadership stance by pursuing zero net greenhouse gas emissions.

Accelerates the pace of education and research for sustainability. ACUPCC institutions are making investments in new curricula, courses, programs, departments, research centers, and institutes to produce the knowledge and graduates needed to address this great challenge. Signatories have also established a generative dialogue between institutions around key issues of the climate challenge, including the appropriate use of carbon offsets, potential side-effects of low-carbon technologies, and defining the leading edge for determining what emission sources institutions are within an institution's boundaries.

Enables individual institutions to serve as powerful role models for other sectors. As the leaders of the primary intellectual sector of society, signatories are calling on all of society to address climate

¹ The latest results of this global scientific consensus are laid out in the Fourth Assessment Report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, released in 2007.

disruption and declaring that higher education is ready and able to take on the challenge of finding solutions for our well-being.

Creates opportunities for purposeful, collective action by higher education. The ACUPCC fosters new modes of collaboration, and the network's collective voice is prompting government, industry, and the public to take notice that the academic community sees climate disruption as a critical issue, opening up new opportunities that would not have otherwise occurred. ACUPCC institutions have developed new partnerships and programs with business, government, and civic organizations increasing their effectiveness and positive impact.

Helps bring solutions to scale with higher education's \$320 billion economic engine. Higher education employs millions of people and conducts research that can drive the development the new technologies, economic instruments and innovative strategies that society needs, and play critical roles in scaling them up to the community and state levels.