

10 Common Objections to Signing the ACUPCC

1) Meeting the terms of the ACUPCC will be too expensive

There are no fees associated with joining the initiative, and the amount of investment needed to measure emissions, create and implement a climate action plan, and carry out two tangible actions will vary between schools and over time, and are entirely determined by the signatories themselves. There is considerable evidence and many case-studies that demonstrate attractive return on investment for emissions-reduction activities, and as these techniques and technologies are brought to scale, these rates of return are likely to improve. The ACUPCC provides a community-wide framework and strategic perspective that connects existing climate action activities and inspires new ones, without which, ad hoc efforts in academics and operations may cost more and be less effective. As regulations are developed, energy costs grow more volatile, and prospective students increasingly demand education on climate issues and sustainability, the potential costs of delays and inaction are far greater than any opportunity costs associated with foresighted, proactive investments today.

2) Achieving climate neutrality is just too difficult, so signing the ACUPCC is setting us up for failure

Our civilization has developed during a period with a relatively stable climate. Any activity that threatens that stability threatens to our ability to survive and thrive. Transitioning to a low-carbon economy may be hard, but it is what the scientific consensus indicates is necessary. 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. We cannot avoid this decision – maintaining the status quo and not moving aggressively toward climate neutrality is a tacit admission that we are willing to risk the potential collapse of our civilization.

3) Climate neutrality is impossible without offsets, which are expensive and/or ineffective

The ACUPCC does not necessarily require the purchase of offsets. Signatories commit to making a plan to reduce and eventually eliminate or neutralize GHG emissions, and it is suggested that they focus first on their own reductions. If offsets are included as part of the plan, it is encouraged that they be a last resort after all on-campus reductions that are feasible at the time have been made. It may be very difficult to imagine how to do this without purchasing offsets, for example emissions associated with air travel. However, it is possible through teleconferencing, rail and road travel to greatly reduce, if not eliminate, air travel and there are already efforts underway to develop climate-friendly airplane fuels. These types of developments can be factored into flexible long-term plans, and moreover, many universities can actually drive the research and development of technologies as part of their plan. Where offsets are necessary, they should be tangible, real, verifiable and permanent. For example, colleges & universities could offset some of their emissions by financing energy efficiency retrofits in local K-12 schools creating a real cost benefit to the community and improving town-gown relations. Finally, as the offset market matures, the higher education sector can engage in the dialogue, providing a strong intellectual basis to shape it and ensure its protocols are robust and effective – the ACUPCC is an effective milieu for this sort of engagement.

4) We are already doing more than what the ACUPCC requires, and joining would dilute our efforts.

The magnitude of the transformation to a low carbon economy is so great that purposeful, collective action by higher education is necessary *in addition to* the excellent work that is already being done by individual campuses. The ACUPCC has been designed to integrate with and enhance existing institutional climate change initiatives, while also fostering unprecedented modes of collaboration. The collective voice of the ACUPCC demonstrates leadership by example, and is being heard by government, industry, and the public, prompting them to take notice that the academic community sees climate change as a critical issue. The ACUPCC fosters networking and information-sharing between schools and across sectors, helping schools scale up efforts and avoid ‘reinventing the wheel.’ Already, because of the size and profile of the ACUPCC signatory group, it has been able to formalize an agreement with the Clinton Climate Initiative, which will provide access to \$5 billion in low-cost financing for energy efficiency projects and to peer knowledge of performance contracting in the higher education context. This is just one early example of many exciting, innovative benefits that are emerging for the schools that join the ACUPCC.

5) The ACUPCC is largely symbolic, as higher education emits a small portion of GHG emissions; working to reduce our own GHG emissions to net zero will distract us from our real contribution of education and research on solutions to global warming

The ACUPCC is effective in promoting action *and* catalyzing all-important education and research. While higher education accounts for a small (though not insignificant) portion of the national carbon footprint, it has 100% of the educational footprint and has the capacity to experiment and role-model proven solutions for the rest of society. Higher education institutions are appropriate venues to prepare students to face the climate challenges in their professional lives, through both explicit learning in the curriculum and implicit learning through the entire campus experience. To promote early action, the

ACUPCC signatories commit to incorporating sustainability and climate neutrality into educational offerings, and completing at least **two** of seven options – which are reasonable for any institution type to carry out – while the broader climate action plan is being developed. They also commit to publicly reporting on their plan and annual progress, making them accountable to their own stakeholders in order to ensure real movement toward climate neutrality.

6) Presidential leadership through the ACUPCC is not meaningful for climate action on campuses – those that do sign the Commitment are just making empty statements for PR reasons.

Due to the complexity and magnitude of the issue, presidential leadership is a key climate action success factor, as he or she is in the best position to foster alignment among all the various departments – operational and academic – that must cooperate to develop cost-effective and timely solutions. Without this leadership, sustainability efforts are less likely to be strategic and comprehensive. Additionally, involvement of the president will keep the institution focused on reducing the carbon footprint and practicing sustainability on an ongoing basis. While many discreet and ad hoc programs can move the university toward carbon neutrality, presidential leadership demonstrated through the comprehensive, strategic, explicit and purposeful approach of the ACUPCC provides a greater chance of getting there quickly and in a cost-effective manner.

7) The ACUPCC does not have a clear definition of what “climate neutrality” means –we can’t sign-up for something without clear parameters

For purposes of the ACUPCC, climate neutrality is defined as having no net GHG emissions, to be achieved by eliminating GHG emissions, or by minimizing GHG emissions as much as possible and using offsets or other measures to mitigate any remaining emissions. At a minimum, signatories agree to include emissions produced from on-site combustion of fossil fuels (known as “Scope 1 emissions”); purchased electricity (“Scope 2”); and of their indirect (“Scope 3”) emissions, student, faculty, and staff commuting and institution-funded air travel. As inventory methodologies develop and to the extent practical, participating institutions are encouraged to evaluate other “Scope 3” emissions, such as those embodied in purchased goods and services, such as food.

8) It is irresponsible for the president to make an institutional commitment without knowing exactly how and at what cost it will be fulfilled

The ACUPCC is a commitment to a climate action planning process in which institutions figure out how and when they will get to climate neutrality. Signatories have two years to create these plans, and complete flexibility to determine their own targets and timetables, ensuring that actions are feasible, cost-effective, and achieve real reductions over the long-term. Target dates for achieving climate neutrality will be different for each institution – fast enough to role-model the solutions needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change and at a feasible pace that will maximize benefits while minimizing costs. We anticipate that most signatories will develop a plan with many incremental steps, including provisions for revising the plan as circumstances change, over a 20-40 year time period.

9) Our institution is a leader, and we do not join outside initiatives as a matter of policy

The crisis of un-sustainability, particularly the threat of catastrophic climate disruption, is not ‘just another’ issue. Because climate change is a **shared** crisis, the scale and magnitude of addressing it requires **shared** action to be effective in a timely manner. Each school’s participation in the ACUPCC is instrumental to the success of this collective effort. Each signatory acts as a draw for more schools, which may not yet be addressing the climate crisis, to make their own commitment to climate action. In some cases, when an institution has not yet demonstrated their commitment to climate action by signing the ACUPCC, their peer institutions use it as an excuse not to act. The individual contribution of any school can be dwarfed by the impact that school can have as a leader in the collective effort of the ACUPCC, leveraging individual actions to serve far broader national, international, and cross-sector cooperative efforts.

10) Global warming may be real, but we don’t need to act now

With global warming causing unprecedented climate disruption, society faces a crisis that threatens its very viability. The scientific consensus is that we must stabilize the global emission of greenhouse gases by 2015 and reduce them at least 80% by mid-century, at the latest, in order to avert the worst impacts of global warming and to reestablish the more stable climatic conditions that have made human progress over the last 10,000 years possible. Global climate disruption is real and is already affecting us; it is worse and happening faster than predicted by the most conservative scientists. Moreover, global climate disruption is different than every other environmental challenge because it is a function of all human endeavor, particularly the success of the western, industrialized economy. Today’s carbon dioxide emissions will continue to change the climate for the next century and a half creating an ecological debt for future generations. In addition the effects on the climate are both irreversible, (e.g., whole scale extinction of species) and prone to non-linear, abrupt change with very little warning – witness the rapid melting of *all* the earth’s glaciers. 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.