

Top reasons to sign the ACUPCC

Higher education has a moral and social responsibility to rise to the global warming challenge

- **With global warming causing unprecedented climate disruption, society faces a crisis that threatens its very viability.** 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 global warming and to reestablish the more stable climatic conditions that have made human progress over the last 10,000 years possible.¹ While this may be difficult, 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 also a decision, and a tacit admission that we are willing to risk the potential collapse of our civilization.
- **Higher Education is necessary to successfully eliminate this threat** – a challenge of massive proportion which will require transforming our economy, our institutions, our daily lives within a generation, and hence requires the active leadership of higher education to overcome. No other institution in society has the influence, the critical mass and the diversity of skills needed to be successful.
- **Higher Education has a unique role in America.** It 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.
- **Doing so 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. They will need new knowledge and skills that only Higher Education can provide on a broad scale.
- **Higher Education is a \$317 billion economic engine** that 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.
- **Higher Education faces a great risk if it fails 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 find solutions to the challenge?

The ACUPCC is the most effective and powerful action that colleges and universities can take

- **The ACUPCC is concrete and effective, and at the same time flexible and feasible.** It is a commitment to a climate action planning process in which institutions figure out how they will get to climate neutrality. Signatories have two years to create these plans, and complete autonomy in determining 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. Most signatories will likely develop a plan with many incremental steps, including provisions for revising the plan as circumstances change, over a 20-40 year time period.
- **It is the best way to leverage 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 an 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 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.
- **Leadership by presidents and chancellors is critical** because they 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.

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.

- **The ACUPCC better 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 deal with climate disruption and declaring that Higher Education is ready and able to take on the challenge of finding solutions for our well-being.
- **Signatories are committing to real, meaningful action** by developing a long term plan and agreeing to publicly report on their progress, as well as picking two tangible actions to get started as the plan is developed.
- **Signatories will benefit from information sharing, best practices, and case studies** from other institutions 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.
- **The ACUPCC 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.

The defining challenge of the 21st century – overcoming the global warming crisis – is also a great opportunity

- **Signing the ACUPCC improves each campus's competitive position.** Hundreds of colleges and universities are already reaping great health, economic, social and environmental benefits by implementing programs to address climate change and sustainability. Signatories are demonstrating the leadership on this critical issue that will be an advantage in recruiting top students, faculty and staff, attracting new sources of funding, and fostering the support of alumni and local communities.
- **Emissions-reduction initiatives are investments** in the future of the institution (in terms of capacity, reputation, lower operational costs, etc.) and society (in terms of producing the research and graduates to address this great challenge). The value in creating a Climate Action Plan, starting with the end goal of climate neutrality in mind, is to create a strategic framework within which to evaluate actions in order to optimize the likelihood of reaching the goal of climate neutrality.
- **Strategic climate action planning will generate cost savings.** There are no fees associated with joining the initiative, and while the amount of investment needed to fulfill the Commitment will vary between schools and over time, there are many case-studies that demonstrate 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.
- **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 planning and investing today.
- **Signatory institutions represent the largest and most effective network for developing the intellectual and technical solutions to the climate challenge.** From developing protocols and standards for the use of offsets, to evaluating side-effects of low-carbon technologies, to defining the leading edge for determining what emission sources institutions are within an institution's boundaries, the ACUPCC signatories have established a generative dialogue around the key issues of the climate challenge, and have an effective voice in establishing the best paths to climate neutrality.
- **The ACUPCC provides a venue for powerful leadership-by-example,** which is widely-recognized because of the national profile of the initiative.
- **The ACUPCC is an opportunity for purposeful, collective action by higher education,** which is necessary *in addition* to the excellent work that is already being done by individual campuses. The ACUPCC fosters unprecedented modes of collaboration, and the collective voice of the ACUPCC demonstrates powerful 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, and opening up new opportunities that would not have otherwise occurred. 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.