Colleges & Universities Report Significant Progress in Confronting Climate Disruption

BOSTON, MA - 2010 closed out the hottest decade on record. It was witness to the inability of the US Congress to pass meaningful legislation to address the climate crisis. Yet 2010 was also the year that a critical mass of colleges and universities in the US reported concrete reductions in their greenhouse gas emissions, while ramping up the education and research efforts needed to enable the rest of society to do the same.

The 2010 annual report released today by the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) provides an overview of participating schools that are creating and implementing comprehensive plans to eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions from their campus operations. Also integral to these plans are activities that promote education, research, and community engagement and contribute to creating a low-carbon economy and a healthy, just, and sustainable society.

According to the report, the ACUPCC network, launched in early 2007, had 676 active members as of December 31, 2010, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia - and nearly six million students, or about one-third of the US higher education student population. Of these, 549 had inventoried their greenhouse gas emissions and 361 had released plans for eliminating those emissions. For the first time a significant number of schools - more than 250 - have submitted updates to their original greenhouse gas inventories, revealing whether emissions have increased or declined since climate action efforts began in earnest. On balance, this group accounted for a net reduction of more than 250,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year.

Tim White, Chancellor of the University of California, Riverside, and Co-Chair of the ACUPCC Steering Committee, noted, “To have such a large and diverse network of institutions commit to a common goal, and hold themselves accountable through a public reporting process, is unprecedented. To see so much progress from this network - particularly as we navigate the toughest economic environment in decades - is nothing short of amazing.”

The public reports, which show each school’s emissions rates, as well as their current and planned efforts to reduce those rates, are available online through the ACUPCC Reporting System.

Growing Diversity

In April 2010, Spelman College held an unveiling ceremony for the LEED Silver plaque in the first certified green building on the campus of a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). Later that year, the College’s Board approved a policy that all new construction and renovations on campus meet at least LEED Silver standards. Beverly Tatum, Spelman’s President and Co-Chair of the ACUPCC Steering Committee, said, “For years HBCUs have been leaders in promoting social and environmental justice. And as more people realize that sustainability is about empowering people to meet their needs - now and in the future - it has become clear that the unique perspective and experience of minority-serving institutions strengthen the education for sustainability movement.”
At Delaware State University, the only HBCU in Delaware, the sustainability effort is a campus-wide endeavor with the "Go Green Campaign," run by seven sustainability subcommittees comprised of over 80 faculty, staff and students.

In total, eighty-seven HBCU's, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and Hispanic Serving Institutions have signed the ACUPCC.

**Walking the Talk**

Higher education remains the only sector with a critical mass committed to pursuing climate neutrality. According to the new ACUPCC report, nearly 40% of the schools that have submitted climate action plans to date are aiming to eliminate net carbon emissions prior to 2030.

In just one year, George Washington University reduced its net emissions 3%, eliminating 3,754 metric tons of climate disrupting pollution from entering the atmosphere each year. Their plan aims for a 40% reduction by 2025 and reaching net zero by 2040.

Working with the Texas Engineering Extension Service to identify and implement energy saving measures, the Alamo Colleges have reduced electricity use by 16.5% and natural gas consumption 41% since 2002. In the process they've accumulated savings of approximately $3.9 million and kept 33,803 tons of carbon out of the atmosphere.

**Empowering the Future**

Each year, approximately three million students graduate from colleges and universities in the US. A core element of the ACUPCC is ensuring that these graduates are empowered to lead society to a safe, secure, and resilient future. The new ACUPCC report highlights academic efforts at a range of institutions.

"Colleges and universities are taking an extraordinary leadership role in promoting the virtue, necessity, and urgency of a sustainable way of life," said Mitchel Thomashow, President, Unity College and ACUPCC Steering Committee Co-Chair. "These efforts integrate the best thinking about how we use food, energy, and materials, with new approaches to governance, investment, and wellness, finally linked to curricular initiatives."

The Pratt Institute in New York operates the Center for Sustainable Design Studies, a hub for students, faculty, and alumni to promote sustainable design education. Dickinson College in Pennsylvania has the Center for Environmental and Sustainability Education, which leverages the campus as a living laboratory for sustainability solutions. Cape Cod Community College, Allegheny College, and American University have created faculty development programs on how to integrate sustainability into their teaching and classroom activities.

"Across the country, colleges and universities of all types and sizes are rethinking what it means to prepare graduates for the 21st century economy," said Mary Spangler, Chancellor of Houston Community College and ACUPCC Steering Committee Co-Chair. "We are working with partners from the private and public sectors to ensure our students gain the necessary skills and experience to help create the green economy."

**Networks within Networks**

In Ithaca, NY, Cornell University, Ithaca College, and Tompkins Cortland Community College have all signed the ACUPCC. With coordination support from the Tompkins County Climate Protection Initiative, they've been building bridges with other sectors and working with local government, business and community groups to align climate action efforts. The Tompkins Energy Conservation Corps, rolled out
through Cornell Cooperative Extension, has trained students to engage with community members and improve energy efficiency in their homes.

The Illinois Green Economy Network (IGEN) is an effort to focus the 48 community colleges in Illinois on developing a clean, green economy. As Jerry Weber, President of the College of Lake County and one of the founders of IGEN, explained, the purpose of this inter-institutional collaboration is “to tackle challenges we cannot tackle alone, and to accelerate development of workforce training for green jobs.”

Campuses as Sustainability Laboratories

As colleges and universities implement their climate commitment plans, they gradually become campuses that teach in new ways through how the campuses operate, through their curriculum, and through the scholarly environments they create. According to Judith Ramaley, President of Winona State University and ACUPCC Steering Committee Co-Chair, “The act of embracing a sustainability agenda can transform our higher education institutions and confer advantages that will allow colleges and universities to make a successful transition into the 21st century while preserving and accentuating our distinctive qualities and character. If we take sustainability seriously, we can position the institutional environment itself as a working laboratory for developing and deploying sustainability strategies.”

Many more examples of new innovative climate- and sustainability-related activities by colleges and universities are featured in the new ACUPCC Annual Report available online: www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org/reporting/annual-report/2010.

---

About Second Nature:
Second Nature is a Boston-based nonprofit organization that works to accelerate movement towards a sustainable future by helping senior college and university leaders in making healthy, just, and sustainable living the foundation of all learning and practice in higher education. Second Nature is the lead supporting organization of the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), which has been signed by more than 675 college and university presidents who are committed to eliminating carbon emission on campus and training students to help society address the climate crisis.
For more information about Second Nature’s programs, visit www.secondnature.org.

About the ACUPCC:
Launched in 2007, the American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment is a network of more than 675 signatory schools, representing all fifty states and the District of Columbia. This high-visibility effort to address global warming garners institutional commitments to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate the research and educational efforts of higher education to equip society to re-stabilize the earth’s climate. The ACUPCC is led by a Steering Committee comprised of 29 university and college presidents, including five co-chairs: Judith Ramaley, President of Winona State University; Mary Spangler, Chancellor of Houston Community College; Beverly Tatum, President of Spelman College; Mitchell Thomashow, President of Unity College; and Timothy White, Chancellor of University of California, Riverside.
For more information about the ACUPCC, visit www.acupcc.org.

###