

University of Utah Academic Senate Resolution to Reaffirm a Commitment to Achieving Net-Zero Carbon Emissions

WHEREAS, on Earth Day in 2008 and after receiving strong support from faculty, staff, and students, University of Utah President Michael Young committed to a goal of achieving carbon neutrality, or net-zero carbon emissions, by 2050 by signing the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment;

WHEREAS, the University of Utah has made significant strides toward achieving this goal, such as creating a comprehensive Climate Action Plan, negotiating the largest green-power contract of any United States university as of 2018, maintaining a Facilities Sustainability and Energy team and a Sustainability Office, investing in renewable energy sourcing, promoting sustainable and energy-efficient infrastructure development, and facilitating public transportation on and to campus, among other initiatives and actions;

WHEREAS, these actions must not only continue, but should be further expanded, expedited, and funded in order to combat climate change in a way that recognizes its dire urgency and that is more competitive with other universities regionally, nationally, and globally;

WHEREAS, because the University of Utah campus encompasses 17 million square feet of building area and because the campus population is equivalent in size to the 10th largest city in Utah, the University of Utah's existing carbon footprint contributes substantially to the total carbon footprints of Salt Lake City, Salt Lake Valley, and of the state of Utah;

WHEREAS, a predominance of peer-reviewed scientific evidence shows that carbon emissions are greenhouse gases that significantly contribute to climate change and other global environmental issues;

WHEREAS, climate change has intergenerational impacts wherein the consequences of each generation's actions affect successive generations' environmental and physical health and their access to resources;

WHEREAS, climate change disproportionately affects minority and impoverished populations and therefore has significant environmental justice implications;

WHEREAS, climate change disproportionately threatens indigenous communities and ways of life, which the University of Utah (as the Utah Utes) recognizes and has considerable concern about;

WHEREAS, the October 2018 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) urges institutions and countries globally to reduce their carbon emissions by 45% of 2010 levels by 2030 and to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by no later than 2050 in o;

WHEREAS, the University of Utah, as an institution of higher education, can explore bold and innovative solutions to lead our community and society in addressing climate change;

WHEREAS, the University of Utah can serve as a living lab for our community to engage with societal and global environmental issues while both learning from and contributing to positive change;

WHEREAS, the University of Utah has the opportunity to rise to the front lines of environmental leadership as the flagship university of the state of Utah and as a member of the PAC-12;

WHEREAS, our peer institutions have recently made calls to action to reduce their carbon emissions on their campuses, including Utah State University's Faculty Senate Resolution 2019-01 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Arizona State University's commitment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2025 through its ASU Carbon Project, and the University of California system's pledge to become carbon neutral by 2025, among others;

WHEREAS, in 2016, Salt Lake City Council passed a resolution to source 100% of the city's net-annual electricity needs from renewable sources by 2032, proving the urgency of the city's desire to address climate change in the Salt Lake Valley;

WHEREAS, due to the long-term systemic and infrastructural improvements necessary to achieve this goal, tangible and time-sensitive action is required to maintain the University's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by no later than 2050;

WHEREAS, because achieving net-zero carbon emissions will affect all parts of the University community, a Presidential Task Force on Carbon Neutrality consisting of campus experts and stakeholders including University administrators, faculty, staff, and students needs to evaluate and authoritatively recommend options to achieve net-zero carbon emissions at the University of Utah;

WHEREAS, a Presidential Task Force can find the most effective solutions and explore how projects reducing carbon emissions will affect campus units, employees, students, and the community;

WHEREAS, a Presidential Task Force could publicize and communicate the University's efforts regarding sustainability to the campus community in order to effectively find and bring about solutions that align with the community's values and needs and to allow for public input and feedback;

WHEREAS, a Presidential Task Force could reevaluate the appropriateness of the University's 2050 deadline for net-zero carbon emissions based on modern technical innovations in renewable energy sourcing, on the continually increasing urgency of addressing climate change as concluded in the 2018 IPCC report, and considering that many of the University's peer institutions have set deadlines that as soon as 2025;

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Academic Senate of the University of Utah requests the creation of a Presidential Task Force consisting of University administrators, faculty, staff, and students to research, evaluate, communicate, and quickly recommend implementable, sustainable, and tangible actions in pursuit of the University's goal of net-zero carbon emissions.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Presidential Task Force should investigate the following topics, among other unenumerated topics that the Presidential Task Force or that the University community deems appropriate:

1. Progress toward achieving net-zero carbon emissions by the 2050 deadline and, specifically, whether the University is on target to meet the 2050 deadline;
2. The appropriateness of maintaining 2050 as the target deadline by which the University should achieve net-zero carbon emissions, or whether the target deadline should be brought forward in time;
3. Factoring the social cost of carbon into long-term infrastructure cost analyses through a proxy carbon-pricing structure;
4. Further investment in renewable energy projects on campus and in electricity generated from renewable sources both on and off campus;
5. Further investment in and encouragement of research that could help the University, the state of Utah, and society at large reduce carbon emissions;
6. Mechanisms to reduce the effects of University air and land travel on the University's carbon emissions;
7. The reduction of energy waste through more efficient and cost-saving campus lighting, heating, and cooling systems;
8. The development of more robust public and active transportation systems on and to campus;
9. The efficacy of including sustainability-related education in the University's general education curriculum;

10. Ensuring sustainable decision-making at the highest levels of the University, such as by promoting the Chief Sustainability Officer to a Cabinet-level position.
11. Estimating the financial investments required to implement the Task Force's recommendations in order to aid in the prioritization of those recommendations;
12. Evaluating best practices for communicating the work of the Presidential Task Force and other on-campus sustainability-related activities to the University community and to the general public.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Academic Senate requests that the University of Utah provide sufficient funding to implement the Presidential Task Force's proposed actions, recognizing that the costs of inaction will, in the coming years and decades, far exceed the costs of action to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Academic Senate requests that the Presidential Task Force report on its work annually to the Academic Senate, in addition to providing regular updates to the University community.

THEREFORE, be it resolved that Academic Senate requests that the University of Utah recommit to achieving net-zero carbon emissions quickly and by no later than 2050, and, in doing so, should abide by the all the requirements set forth in the American College and University President's Climate Leadership Commitment.