Five Years of Climate Leadership

Published on **24 Feb 2012** | Written by **Georges Dyer** | Posted in **Center for Green Schools**

This year, the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) is celebrating five years of climate leadership. Nearly 700 institutions, representing 6 million students, are implementing plans to promote education, research and community engagement to create a sustainable future.

These schools are also role-modeling solutions through their own campus operations and providing leadership-by-example for other institutions and other sectors, all while delivering important experiential education for their students and working to achieve climate neutrality as soon as possible.

Green building —in particular retrofitting existing buildings— is particularly important in fulfilling this commitment. ACUPCC institutions agree to take at least two short-term tangible actions, while developing a comprehensive, long-term climate action plan. To date, nearly 500 institutions (77 percent of the network) have chosen the option of establishing a policy that "all new campus construction will be built to at least the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Silver standard or equivalent."

Renovations to McDaniel Hall brings this 1967 originally built academic building up to Platinum qualification level that includes providing increased solar gain and cozy lounges to relax in.

Photo courtesy of Adams State College

In 2012, the early ACUPCC signatories are submitting the first round of progress reports on their climate action plans, providing a wealth of new data on higher education's leadership in creating a sustainable society. While results are still coming in, 92 institutions report completing 317 green buildings, and 104 institutions report having plans for 285 green buildings within the next two years.

Energy efficiency projects have also been popular, with 113 institutions reporting that they've completed a total of 2,691 projects since signing the ACUPCC. These efforts are helping institutional budgets, with 85 institutions reporting cost-savings (within a range) from climate action related projects that cumulatively add up to $46.8 million to $246.7 million. These activities have also helped institutions bring in new funding, with 71 schools securing $166.4 million in funding from outside sources (an average of $2.3 million per institution).

In January 2011, USF opened the doors to its first LEED Gold building—the Patel Center for Global Solutions, which houses the university's new School of Global Sustainability among other related departments. Photo courtesy of University of South Florida

As the ACUPCC network looks towards the next five years — a critical five years in avoiding run-away climate change — it will be leveraging the power of the collective initiative to jump-start a sustainable economy by focusing on three areas:

1. Preparedness: Understanding sustainability is required for career preparedness in the 21st century. The ACUPCC provides a framework and catalyst for delivering the curricular and co-curricular education needed to ensure students from all disciplines are sustainability literate.
2. Opportunity: Increasing access to and affordability of higher education is a major goal for the sector. The ACUPCC generates cost savings and new funding sources that better enable schools to reduce tuition costs and increase access.
3. Innovation: Campuses are cradles of innovation through research, experimentation, and role-modeling solutions in operations. ACUPCC schools are putting cutting-edge design practices and technologies to work in the areas of energy efficiency, green building, water conservation, food services, transportation, renewable energy, and more. They are creating community partnerships to implement sustainable solutions beyond their campus boundary and engage students in experiential service learning.

Higher education's leadership is necessary to reinvigorate our economy, and create a sustainable future. Retrofitting campus buildings and infrastructure to create a built environment that is healthy, efficient and sustainable will show what is possible, while preparing students to lead the rest of society in the same direction.

Georges Dyer

USGBC Articles can be accessed in the USGBC app for iOS or Android on your iPhone, iPad or Android device.

0 comments

Leave a comment

Leave a comment

Don't have an account? Create one

You must be signed in to leave a comment.

Email

Password

SIGN IN

Address
2101 L Street NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20037

Within the United States:
1-800-795-1747

Outside the United States:
1-202-742-3792

© 2012-2015 U.S. Green Building Council