

CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE ON CAMPUS





Overview

The burning of fossil fuels is triggering changes to the global climate that will have catastrophic environmental, economic and social consequences. The magnitude of the problem, and the deep challenges associated with confronting it, can seem overwhelming. There are, however, practical actions that academic staff and their associations can engage in to reduce the threat. There are concrete steps we can take, as individuals, as faculty and as a member of an association, against climate change.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching out from the top right corner towards the center of the frame. The hand is positioned over a field of tall, green grass. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a bright, hazy sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall color palette is warm and natural, with greens, yellows, and oranges.

Our Role

Academic staff have a special responsibility and a unique opportunity to combat climate change. First, our institutions are significant sources of carbon emissions. Second, we have

the expertise to develop and disseminate climate change solutions. Third, as a safe haven for innovators and activists, and the prime proponents of critical inquiry and evidence-

based decision-making, our campuses are uniquely placed to lead the political transformation to a sustainable future.

The First Step

Concern over climate change is not new. Many colleges and universities have shown leadership and are taking actions to confront climate change. Because approaches and progress vary enormously from institution to institution, the first step is to identify the sustainability efforts in place on your campus. These include:

- academic staff association and institution-wide, climate change policies and plans;
- the mechanisms to implement them; and
- campus leaders - individual, institutional, and organizational working to address climate change.

Climate change policies encompass mission statements, guidelines, directives, official policy documents and collective agreement language. Implementation mechanisms include specific



personnel positions, appointed and elected representative positions, sustainability offices, and governance committees and sub-committees (including collective bargaining committees). Where these positions and structures do not exist, it is necessary to establish them. Where they are in place, the task is to support and empower them.

More specifically, associations can:

- inform and empower the work of their bargaining teams to move forward with changes to the collective agreement that will build more sustainable campuses;

- liaise with other campus unions and associations to work as a broad coalition to press for climate change action on campus; and
- ensure association representatives initiate or serve on campus environmental / sustainability committees, where they can encourage the enactment, enforcement and expansion of climate change initiatives.



Practical Action

The task of addressing climate change can sometimes seem insurmountable. With a problem so large, what can one do and where should the struggle begin? Fortunately, academic staff associations and academic researchers across the country are building expertise on the issue. We know that campus action against climate change will happen on three main fronts:

I

Reducing the
carbon footprint

II

Teaching, Research
and Service

III

Advocacy

Each of these pathways to change offers the opportunity for quick introductory action, and presents deeper challenges that will require long-term effort to address.

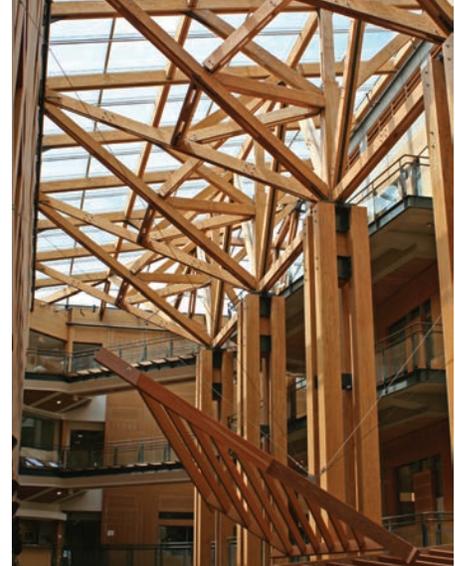
I

Reducing the Carbon Footprint

Our institutions are significant sources of carbon emissions, contributing to climate change on an industrial level. We need to change the way we build, use, supply, maintain, and travel to and within our campuses.

Buildings - The manner in which campus buildings are lit, heated, and cooled present simple, immediate, carbon-reduction opportunities. These include:

- training staff and students on energy conservation;
- switching off unused lights and equipment;
- converting to energy efficient lighting; and





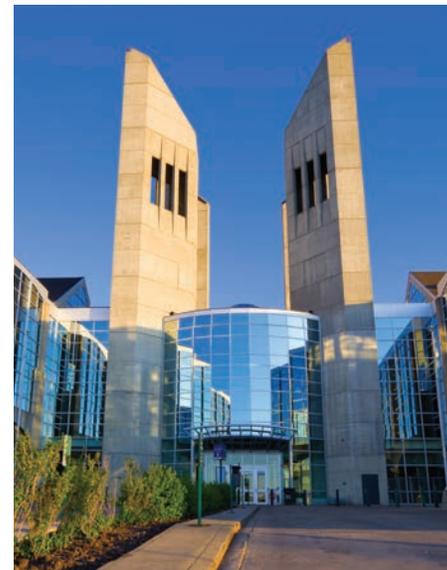
- modifying thermal comfort policy (widening the range of room temperature settings).

These minor steps will not reverse climate change, but they are projects that can educate and empower the campus community, and start the process towards systemic transition. More substantial measures include:

- retrofitting existing buildings to increase energy efficiency;



- ensuring all new buildings are built to the highest environmental standards;
- installing onsite sources of power generation including solar cells, wind turbines, heat exchange pumps, and biomass generators;
- purchasing electricity from renewable sources, rather than fossil fuel; and
- altering class and semester scheduling to increase room



use efficiency (ensuring heated/cooled rooms do not remain empty for long periods) and take advantage of longer daylight and warmer temperatures.

A person with a backpack is standing on a transit platform, looking at a train. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter. The person is wearing a grey t-shirt and dark pants, and has a red and black backpack. The train is blurred, suggesting motion. In the background, there are modern buildings with many windows.

Transportation is another significant generator of carbon emissions. Responses range from basic education initiatives to deeper changes to campus infrastructure, customs and practices, including:

- anti-engine idling campaigns;
- pedestrian-friendly campuses;
- enhanced bicycle infrastructure (dedicated bike lanes and parking, showers);
- better campus access to public transportation;
- incentives to forego private vehicle use;
- centralized carpooling;
- inter- and intra-campus shuttle bus service;
- energy efficient institutional vehicle fleets;
- expanded video conferencing technology to curtail local and long distance travel;
- student housing on or near campus; and
- carbon offset programs (re-vegetation).

Consumption - The purchase, use, and disposal of products such as food and water, and office equipment, supplies and furnishings, is connected, directly or indirectly, to campus carbon emissions. You can act by:

- using default double-sided printing;
- increasing use of digital documents (transition to “paperless” office);
- eliminating use of disposable items such as plastic plates, cups, and utensils;
- procuring goods that meet higher environmental standards such as greener packaging and ease of recycling;



- increasing water conservation, including water recycling; and
- expanding general recycling, including actions to minimize waste generation and maximize resource recovery, especially in catering services.

Land Use – The manner in which land on campus is utilized and maintained also presents opportunities for action against climate change, including:

- altering techniques of grounds maintenance to reduce the use of synthetic fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides; and
- extending the area of vegetation through reforestation, installation of green roofs, and a general increase in the density of vegetation.

II

Teaching, Research and Service

Beyond modifying the physical environment, confronting climate change on campus also entails academic action, including the promotion of environmental concerns into teaching, research and community engagement.

Teaching - The next generation will begin to bear the full weight of climate change. Integrating environmental themes across the curriculum will empower these

students to confront and overcome the challenges ahead. Steps include:

- expanding the offering of dedicated courses addressing climate change;



- integrating climate change topics into existing courses; and
- creating community practicum and co-op opportunities that address climate change.

Research - From analyzing social responses to climate change, to formulating carbon reduction public policy initiatives, to developing specific technologies such as carbon capture, our institutions are uniquely placed to create and disseminate climate change solutions.

This means encouraging:

- graduate and undergraduate students to study in this area;
- the pursuit of dedicated research on climate change topics;
- granting agency and award programs support of climate change research; and
- climate change research partnerships with government, NGOs, and private industry.

Service - The service obligation of academic staff to the campus and wider community can be met through action against climate change, including:

- participating in the creation and functioning of association or institutional environment committees;



- working with established committees such as collective bargaining or workplace joint health and safety to push climate change concerns;
- participating in broader community groups; and
- engaging as a public intellectual with civil society on climate change issues.

III

Advocacy

The burning of fossil fuels is triggering changes in the global climate that will have catastrophic environmental, economic, and social consequences. The time scale to enact the transformative change required to address this crisis is generally cited as 40-50 years, just one or two generations. Academic staff, and their associations, are uniquely placed to play a critical role in this struggle.

Academic staff have extraordinary legitimacy in the eyes of Canadians. This credibility gives the power and responsibility to forcefully present the case for confronting climate change. On campus, this means advocating for the initiatives discussed above, and potentially taking on larger challenges, such as campaigns to divest institutional financial holdings from fossil fuel companies. Out in the broader community, this means fully accepting the role of public intellectual and speaking passionately about climate change – to community groups, to the media, and to politicians at all levels of government. It can also entail participation in the electoral process, directing time, energy and resources to political formations committed to confronting climate change.

Additional Resources

Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Climate Change

<http://www.adaptingcanadianwork.ca/>

Blue Green Alliance

<http://www.bluegreenalliance.org/>

Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)

<http://canadianlabour.ca/issues-research/issues/climate-change>

Green Economy Network

<http://greeneconomy.net.ca/>

Sustainability and Education Policy Network (SEPN)

<http://sepn.ca/>

Work in a Warming World

<http://warming.apps01.yorku.ca/>

Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

- Green workers guide book:
http://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/green_booklet_0.pdf
- CUPE climate change fact sheets:
http://archive.cupe.ca/updir/Climate_change_fact_sheet_%231.pdf
http://archive.cupe.ca/updir/Climate_change_fact_sheet_%233.pdf

- Workplace environment committees guide:
<http://archive.cupe.ca/ckfinder/userfiles/files/Workplace%20Environment%20Committee%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
- CUPE 3902 climate change policy:
<http://archive.cupe.ca/greening-workplace/CUPE-Local-3902-adop>
- CUPE Environmental Policy:
http://cupe.ca/sites/cupe/files/Working_in_harmony_with_the_earth.pdf
http://scfp.ca/sites/cupe/files/Travailler_en_harmonie_avec_la_terre.pdf



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