

**NOTES FROM THE FIELD ON USING VALUES BASED  
EDUCATION TO ENGAGE CHALLENGES AND  
OPPORTUNITIES OF THE AMERICAN COLLEGE AND  
UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS' CLIMATE COMMITMENT**

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## Introduction

Universities forge citizen leaders. As role models for peers, children, and observers on the global stage they move the world beyond their direct actions. Values based education provides strong reinforcement for practical design, application, and assessment of policy—skills fundamental to community leaders. Student implementation of campus environmental policies exemplifies values in practice, and coherently articulated environmental values at the campus level facilitate student praxis. Values in practice are evident at Stetson University through its engagement with the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC).

Stetson University defines itself as a values oriented institution with emphasis on seven universal facets of the human experience, unaffiliated with any particular faith though rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Stetson University 2010). Through the University Values Council, all university activities are informed through these core values. In no particular order these values are articulated as Spiritual Life, Gender Equity, Ethical Decision Making, Diversity, Community Service, Health and Wellness, and Environmental Responsibility, each administratively represented through a council formed of faculty staff and students and united under the umbrella of the Values Council. These values are taught and practiced on campus in myriad ways, providing living labs for the application of values thinking to real world issues.

This essay focuses on the Environmental Responsibility Council (ERC) with particular emphasis on the ACUPCC. The ERC plays a key role in the how students and administration engage, both critically and cooperatively, with the high profile commitment to climate

conservation and carbon neutrality outlined by the ACUPCC. Through the implementation of the ACUPCC, students, administrators, and faculty test the limits of the commitment for environmental relevance and force the university to assess its operation in novel ways. Overall the values framework promotes rational critique of both the ACUPCC and the University itself, but does not necessarily foster compliance with the mandates of the commitment.

## **Policies**

Both the ACUPCC and the Stetson University Values councils are policy instruments. They articulate modes of behavior across a given population to serve interests of all. In the case of these two entities they serve communities beyond their own corpus. Stetson Values permeate the University community whose members reflect these values in their lives beyond the campus. The ACUPCC fosters activities benefiting all things potentially harmed by climate change.

### **The Stetson University Values Council**

Stetson University's Values Council was first organized in 1998 with its current manifestation taking form in 2004. The original Values Council included five strategic councils: Spiritual Life, Ethical Decision-Making, Diversity, Community Service, and Environment. In 1999 Gender Equity was added and in 2004 came Health and Wellness. The mandate of the Values Council and its Strategic Councils are broad, encompassing many aspects of university life. Each is involved in organizing speakers and events, facilitating extracurricular programs (led by students or university employees). Starting in 2002 the Values Council has identified a theme each year to inspire the activities of all the strategic-council. These themes have included "Peace, Violence, and Religion," "Poverty and Wealth," "Freedom and Responsibility," and "How Shall We Live," among others. Additionally the strategic councils work to vet university

policy and practices though they do not have administrative authority, serving only in an advisory capacity for the purposes of University administration.

Specifically considering the work of the Environmental Responsibility Council (ERC) provides a window into the breadth of activity among the various councils. Each year the ERC meets several times without any particular schedule or required tasks. The activities of the council are essentially at the pleasure of the chair (who is a faculty member) and can be initiated by any of the ERC members. Membership and work for the council is voluntary, including individuals from Facilities, the faculty, the student body, and administrators. Over the last five years the ERC have included several active students (usually associated with student government or student environmental groups), the director of facilities, the director of dining services, and several faculty (all from the College of Arts and Sciences).

Among the projects completed by the ERC are sponsorship of invited speakers, organization and participation of Earth Day activities and programs, consultation with dining services to encourage environmentally friendly dining policy, support of Recycle mania, interaction with student government, and consultation for the campus native plant initiative and native tree planting program. Further, members of the ERC are involved with the ACUPCC activities on campus. Students on the ERC have participated in ACUPCC activities on campus, most notably performance of greenhouse gas audits.

The ERC committee proves an excellent forum to coordinate diverse projects around campus. Even though it is not an enforcement body the ERC perpetuates a way of thinking that permeates the entire university community. Attention to environmental issues, inculcated into every campus member, is de rigueur.

## American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment

The ACUPCC was born in 2006 as a result of collaboration among twelve college and university presidents, Second Nature, ecoAmerica, and American Association for Sustainability in Higher Education at Arizona State University. By March 31, 2007, 152 presidents and chancellors were charter signatories, including Stetson University. The ACUPCC was officially formed in June 2007 and now has nearly 700 signatories. The agreement focuses on curtailing greenhouse gas emissions (specifically carbon dioxide, methane, fluorocarbons, and nitrous oxide) resulting from ongoing campus operations (ACUPCC 2006). Ultimately an institution should achieve carbon neutrality, or a net emission of greenhouse gasses equivalent to no new emissions of carbon dioxide—carbon dioxide being the franc among greenhouse gasses.

As a high profile agreement among academic institutions it encourages innovation for climate change amelioration. Participation is voluntary and a signatory's failure to comply may result in censure or removal of the institution from the signatory list. The commitment involves several aspects, but four of these are most interesting with regard to institutional organization: 1) the greenhouse gas emissions inventory, 2) the Climate Action Plan, 3) tangible actions, and 4) integration of the commitment into university curriculum.

A greenhouse gas audit quantifies the operational emissions of an institution for all greenhouse gases in terms of "carbon dioxide equivalents," which are measured as tons of carbon dioxide. Gases, such as methane, refrigerants, and nitrous oxide, have several times the effect of carbon dioxide and thus have a higher carbon dioxide equivalent value. The greenhouse gas audit initially provides a baseline analysis of emissions and later provides an assessment of progress towards carbon neutrality. There are many ways for an institution to complete an audit including hiring a consultant or in house accounting.

**Table 1:** Tangible actions to be implemented by signatories of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment as climate action plans are drafted.

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*Seven Tangible Actions of the ACUPCC*

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1. Establish 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.
  2. Adopt an energy-efficient appliance purchasing policy requiring purchase of ENERGY STAR certified products in all areas for which such ratings exist.
  3. Establish a policy of offsetting all greenhouse gas emissions generated by air travel paid for by our institution.
  4. Encourage use of and provide access to public transportation for all faculty, staff, students and visitors at our institution.
  5. Within one year of signing this document, begin purchasing or producing at least 15% of our institution's electricity consumption from renewable sources.
  6. Establish a policy or a committee that supports climate and sustainability shareholder proposals at companies where our institution's endowment is invested.
  7. Participate in the Waste Minimization component of the national RecycleMania competition, and adopt three or more associated measures to reduce waste.
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After the completion of the initial greenhouse gas audit, the university is required to formulate a climate action plan. The plan should lay out the methods and timeline for achieving emissions neutrality, though there is no formula for doing so. Plans typically set a final date for achieving neutrality in the years 2025-2050, often with tiered benchmarks leading up to complete

neutrality. The techniques for achieving neutrality may include construction of alternative energy facilities, energy conservation, reduced use of vehicles on campus, curtailed air travel, and the outright purchase of carbon credits from a third party.

The ACUPCC requires all signatories implement at least two of the following activities, called “tangible actions,” while they put together their comprehensive climate action plan (Table 1). These are intended to bridge current operational habits with those to be implanted as a result of the comprehensive plan and address aspects of university operations including business travel, procurement, investment, construction, and waste management..

Finally, The ACUPCC requires integrating the commitment into the curriculum “for all students.” Again, there are no specific guidelines on how to achieve this goal so compliance could be satisfied perfunctorily through signage, or extensively through long-term, active engagement with climate change studies. While this mandate will undoubtedly expand the exposure of students to the issue of climate change and how institutions address the issue, it is unlikely every student will engage with the ACUPCC meaningfully or in a way providing practical knowledge on climate change.

## **Performing the Climate Commitment at Stetson University**

In 2007 Stetson University became a charter member of the ACUPCC, ushering in a new University-wide policy mandate. The recommendations of the ERC preceding the commitment and the experiences of the University as it sought to achieve its commitment obligations demonstrate how Stetson’s values approach can be both informative and ineffectual.

Before Doug Lee signed the ACUPCC he conferred with the ERC for guidance on the matter. The ERC, being mainly composed of critically minded faculty and practically oriented staff looked at the ACUPCC with attention to available resources, and institutional capacity. The

ERC unequivocally recommended that Dr. Lee refrain from signing the commitment, with several observations. The academic argument was based on the abstract nature of carbon neutrality. The absurd calculus that accounts an essentially boundary-less emissions process does little to change the underlying values that create the pollution. The practical argument hinges on accepting falsity of the first. Assuming we can accurately quantify greenhouse gas emissions as carbon equivalents (scientifically uncertain proposition), the University is financially incapable of sustaining carbon neutrality under existing economic systems (notwithstanding current economic conditions). Further with no provisions for personnel to administer ACUPCC, the ERC thought the endeavor doomed to failure in practical terms.

Nevertheless President Lee signed the charter and received a memento of the occasion, a cross-sectional piece of tree trunk with an inscription of the event. From Dr. Lee's perspective striving to attain the goal was at least as important as actually achieving it, and with the knowledge that the path was far from certain and indeed very likely to end without full compliance was convinced that the journey was still worthwhile. In the days following a Presidential Climate Commitment Task Force was put together and one faculty member agreed to organize a group of students to initiate a greenhouse gas audit with the help of an administrator from facilities.

## Auditing Greenhouse Gases

Completion of an initial greenhouse gas emissions inventory is one of the first conditions to be met by signatories of the ACUPCC, and semiannual inventories are required into perpetuity. Stetson has completed two GHG Audits—fiscal years 2007 and 2009—each presenting its own challenges. The initial audit involved becoming familiar with the vocabulary and methodology for quantifying GHG emissions in a way consistent among ACUPCC signatories. We use the

*Campus Carbon Calculator* to tally GHG emissions because it was designed specifically for university settings; it has been widely adopted among the signatories. Even though the calculator is the predominant method used by signatories, comparing data among universities is not recommended because the treatment of variables and parameters is inconsistent from one institution to another. Nevertheless the calculator can be a valuable tool to assess an institution's progress to carbon neutrality through time.

The first GHG audit, fiscal year 2007, proved the *Campus Carbon Calculator* an adequate tool to gauge the status of Stetson University baseline emissions. The process also proved that students can play a major role in data analyses and reporting. A key outcome of this first audit was a strategy to implement streamlined data collection with a concise list of key variables including units of measure and designated offices for data collection, with a request for institutionalized procedures for archiving the data in a central database. University administration did not act on this suggestion, so data collection surprisingly turned out to be more difficult for 2009 GHG audit, which was expanded to include the College of Law in Gulfport and Tampa, Florida.. Administrative exuberance for the ACUPCC was high in 2007; institutional support for gathering data was buoyed by President Lee's clear executive support for the project. In 2009, in the absence of the suggested data management infrastructure and an environment of new priorities for top administrators, data was difficult to obtain. Offices cooperative two years before were simply not forthcoming, and the untimely passing of Dr Lee meant the loss of the ACUPCC greatest champion on campus. Administrators at the College of Law worked with students trained on the Deland Campus in 2007 to complete their audit independently, which was then integrated with the Deland Campus Audit for a University-wide report.

Data management for greenhouse gas monitoring requires fundamental shifts in information management at the university. Much of the required information is of a type not historically important to the operation of a university, for example proportion of trips faculty, staff, and students make by bus, car, carpool, or bicycle, or the amount of fugitive refrigerant emissions from air conditioners and other appliances on campus. Existing data is often managed by diverse campus offices, meaning that campus divisions must be bridged in some way. Business travel data is spread across all university units, data related to energy usage, waste stream, and other operational issues is localized in facilities, and data regarding enrollment is housed in institutional research records. The units of analyses for similar data sometimes vary within the university. Finally, the multiple campuses at Stetson often operate independently, making it difficult to coordinate the ACUPCC holistically.

Notwithstanding these hurdles, the inventory process leads to rapid identification of some easily resolved inefficiencies. For example, the audit unequivocally identifies the consumption of electricity as the University's largest source of greenhouse emissions. Close review of electrical consumption on a building by building basis can identify key areas to target efficiency oriented renovation.

## Climate Action Plan

The identification of such data management solutions and resource use inefficiencies on campus should inform a campus action plan. A greenhouse gas audit delineates operational emissions clearly enough to identify target areas of greatest impact for remediation. The formulation of strategies to ameliorate the easily addressed problems should be the minimal response to an audit. These would logically appear in a campus action plan.

Many ACUPCC signatories find the climate action plan difficult to complete; only half have done so (Abbott and Kasprzyk in progress). The plan must be conceptualized at high levels of University administration to be implemented meaningfully. A climate action plan designed as a class project may overlook many fundamental insights from university managers. The time of staff is expensive, and schools struggle to make resources for effective planning of this type.

Stetson University to date has made little progress on completing its climate action plan. Despite two greenhouse gas audits including explicit recommendations for data management, administrative management, and emissions reduction, no explicit policy has been adopted. The climate action plan has no real administrative home, which is to say that there is no single person clearly in charge in formulating the plan.

## Tangible Actions

Tangible actions (Table 1.) can be completed without genuine attention to the spirit of the policy. For example Stetson University is ostensibly in compliance with numbers two, four, and seven, but it is difficult to know the truth of this assertion. Campus assessment of these actions is not reported accurately, if at all. While instances of compliance may easily be cited, cases of non-compliance are equally easy to overlook. While we have an ENERGY STAR procurement policy, inefficient appliances such as old refrigerators are common on campus. The campus initiative for public transportation is achieved by having bus stops on municipal thoroughfares, which actually is not a University initiative. Participation in Recyclemania waste distribution is well assessed through the national organization, but what of the “three or more associated measures to reduce waste?” Compliance with tangible actions is often subjective, which permits loose assessment. More interesting is that the University was in compliance with these actions before joining the ACUPCC.

## Bringing the ACUPCC into the Curriculum

Integration of the ACUPCC into the curriculum has happened essentially by default due to two factors. First is the inclusion of an Environmental Responsibility component to General Education requirements in the College of Arts and Sciences. An environmental responsibility course category is included in a “choose two courses from two of the five areas” section of the general education requirements. While this does not force all students to take a course in environmental responsibility, which may or may not include climate change as a subject, it does ensure that a large fraction of the student body does so.

Second, the implementation of the ACUPCC has unfolded primarily through special topics coursework, independent study projects, and student internships. Overall, the implementation of the ACUPCC has involved the work of 19 students in the College of Arts and Sciences at the Deland campus and at the College of Law during the period of 2007 to 2010. These experiences have been quite rewarding to students, some finding employment using the strategies immediately after participation. Other students completed research projects inspired by their work with the ACUPCC.

## **Reflecting on Core Values Engaging the ACUPCC**

While the ERC has not been directly involved in the implementation of the ACUPCC on campus, it has followed the process closely and become an advocate for the agreement (notwithstanding the council’s early trepidation). Current reorganization at Stetson University has left administration of the ACUPCC in limbo. Chairmanship of the Presidential Climate Commitment Task Force was handed to a Vice President who has since stepped down. Conversations among senior administrators indicate that the ERC is the most logical home for

administering the ACUPCC. The ERC has become a forum for the achievements and challenges of the commitment in the absence of a clear administrative home, and it is here where the most important concerns of how the commitment works on campus have been debated.

### The ACUPCC's Limited Scope Regarding Sustainability.

The ERC experience with the ACUPCC revealed the commitments limitations as a unifying environmental paradigm for the University. The ACUPCC does not address important dimensions of sustainability as recognized by global institutions and scholars (UN 2005). Sustainability is paradigm commonly associated with environmentalism, but it is not solely an environmental concern. Sustainability recognizes that environmental concerns are linked to economic and social concerns, not one of which can be effectively managed without consideration of the other factors.

With regards to the economic and social dimensions of sustainability the ACUPCC is totally lacking. These two pillars of sustainability are often overlooked by those focused on environmental conservation; nevertheless they are fundamental to a harmonized holistic approach.

Social dimensions of sustainability are difficult to assess, but cultural sensitivity, accommodation of multiple life ways, and valuing diverse ways of knowing beyond one's own comprehension are fundamental to the dignity of all people. For example the purchase of carbon credits to offset institutional greenhouse gas production may be morally objectionable to some in the university population. Carbon credits are viewed by some as the ethical equivalent of indulgences provided by the medieval Catholic Church (Monibot 2006). Indeed a growing literature on the international carbon credit economy describes neocolonial accumulation of carbon flow assets (Bumpus and Liverman 2009). Conceptions not only of economic resources,

but the fundamental social interactions of conservation are affected through this global trade by putting into practice the idea that environmental quality and our responsibility for its conservation are goods for trade, not sacred covenants.

Economic sustainability proves most challenging to meagerly capitalized institutions. Well endowed Universities such as Harvard, Middlebury, and Stanford, are well situated to invest with long term returns in mind. Many of the strategies associated with climate neutrality involve capital improvements, and adoption of technologies that are not well tested or have not benefitted from economies of scale associated with later development stages. Many alternative energy or energy conservation technologies, for example a deep-well geothermal heat pump, are expensive for large buildings. New equipment often requires retrofit of functioning infrastructure and campus personnel often are unfamiliar with the new technology. Personnel must be retrained or new specialists must be hired or contracted. Carbon offsets are simply draws on the budget from a fiduciary perspective.

With regard to environmental sustainability, the commitment's focus on greenhouse emissions brackets out a constellation of environmental harms. For example workplace toxins are not addressed by ACUPCC initiatives. Household cleaning compounds, potentially harmful pesticides for landscaping, and waste products from research laboratories are of no concern to the ACUPCC. Animal rights issues, considered by many to be within the purview of environmental issues are ignored completely. Given the large contribution of livestock production to greenhouse gas emission, one might argue a meatless dining policy is justified for the ACUPCC. Insofar as the ACUPCC is taken as the primary yardstick for measuring a university's sustainability, exclusion of factors such as these is problematic. The commitment prioritizes a certain type of sustainability and environmental attitude.

An anecdote illustrates how the commitment fosters University environmental policy in a seemingly natural way. Politically the ACUPCC has done heavy lifting to promote the Alliance for International Reforestation (AIR). The director of AIR (who happens to be the chair of the ERC) and other administrators assert that cash contributions and in-kind donations of time and space for tree plantings in Central America provided by the Stetson University should be tallied as carbon credits for the University. A law student in Gulfport now studies how to compute carbon credits from these plantings. However, those supporting this approach to the commitment seem relatively sanguine regarding the social implications of this calculus, despite concerns articulated in the audits for such carbon offsets. The science for making such calculations is uncertain and focusing on such an approach draws attention away from strategies that can be pursued on campus. This point is still in contention, and the ERC is the forum for debate.

### The ACUPCC and Limits to for Managing Sustainability on Campus

The ACUPCC is a pan campus project for Stetson University. The location of our campuses in four counties, with variable administrative structures among them has complicated compliance with the commitment. Since 2007 the boundaries of analysis have grown from the main campus, in Deland, Florida, to include the College of Law, situated in Gulfport and Tampa, Florida. The Campus at Celebration has yet to be folded into the commitment.

Since the University seems most inclined to devolve administration of the ACUPCC to the ERC it is worth noting some of the challenges this approach will entail. Most obviously, the ERC lacks the administrative authority to do anything. Though it can make policy recommendations it has no policy forming authority. It is less than a paper tiger. The likelihood of the ERC putting together an achievable climate action plan is remote. The will of the ERC to

author a climate action plan that is bound to be meaningless is understandably weak, given the councils commitment to values.

Overall the ACUPCC is an effective model to motivate universities toward sustainability, but many challenges inevitably lead to variable outcomes. Even more problematic is that performance assessment is nearly impossible; the program is heavily reliant on the honor system. Nevertheless the commitment, perhaps for the first time, stimulates institutions to think in new ways about resource management and environmental stewardship.

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