

# The Environmental Leader

A commitment to sustainability offers a competitive edge.

BY DR. SCOTT D. MILLER AND DR. MARYLOUISE FENNEL



**“I**N A CRISIS, THE BEST THING to do is the right thing. The worst thing to do is to do nothing,” President Theodore Roosevelt famously once said. His advice could have been written expressly about today’s environmental challenges; doing nothing is not an option for our campuses. We cannot wait until the economy rebounds to model ways to minimize global warming emissions and foster environmental protection. Today’s presidents must, therefore, add yet another hat, that of “environmental leader,” to their plethora of roles.



Green initiatives can offer a competitive edge among prospective students, families,

and donors; curbing emissions and using clean, renewable energy sources will not only stabilize and reduce long-term energy costs, but also attract funding while fostering new opportunities and synergistic partnerships.

“More than ever, universities must take leadership roles to address the grand challenges of the 21st century, and climate change is paramount amongst these,” emphasizes Michael M. Crow, president of Arizona State University.

While the financial impact of some environmental initiatives is a significant concern, many cost little or nothing. Even small, incremental steps, such as recycling cooking oil and scrap metal, reducing food and paper waste, and purchasing sustainable products can achieve measurable results over time.

The American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC, [www.acupcc.org](http://www.acupcc.org)) constitutes an important nationwide commitment to address global warming and to stabilize the climate. In addition to signing on to this effort, we recommend:


**Leading by example.** Presidents and senior leadership must demonstrate through deeds, not just words, their commitment to good stewardship of the environment. Personal consumption habits, for example, can include household recycling, driving hybrid vehicles, and reducing printing waste. Presidents can ensure that new campus construction meets LEED Silver standard or the equivalent, and that all new appliance purchases are ENERGY STAR-certified. Campus dining services and other vendors often have a financial stake in reducing waste and lowering energy consumption.

**Gaining strength in numbers.** Nearly 700 colleges and universities have signed the ACUPCC, and more than 400 have filed action plans committing themselves to developing institutional action plans for becoming climate-neutral within two years. Although the actions of individual campuses may seem insignificant in comparison to the challenges we face, by working together we can create measurable and tangible progress toward energy sustainability and independence.

**Engaging students and the campus community.** Green campus initiatives offer an ideal vehicle for involving students and their organizations in achieving progress while fostering town-gown partnerships. We believe, in the words of the Climate Commitment initiative, that “colleges and universities that exert leadership in addressing climate change will increase the support of alumni and local communities.” Many campuses also have internal task forces focusing on a cleaner, more sustainable environment.

**Setting measurable goals.** Presidents signing the Climate Commitment have dedicated their institutions to establishing concrete plans to reduce greenhouse emissions within two years. These include, but are not limited to, completing an energy inventory within one year of signing.

In the words of the ACUPCC pledge, “Campuses that address the climate challenge by reducing global warming emissions and by integrating sustainability into their curriculum will better serve their students and meet their social mandate to help create a thriving, ethical, and civil society. (In so doing) they will be providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to address the critical, systemic challenges faced by the world in this new century and enable them to benefit from the economic opportunities that will arise as a result of solutions they develop.”

We could not have said it better. 

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