



Resolution 19: Climate Renewal Vows

Abstract: Recognizing Cornell University's duty to address the global climate crisis, not only as a moral imperative but also due to the tangible and negative impacts of neglecting climate-related issues on its operations, community, and reputation.

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Reviewed by: The Student Assembly Environmental Committee 6-0-0

Type of Action: Recommendation

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Whereas, recent [IPCC reports](#)¹ indicate that human activities have caused approximately 1.1°C of warming since 2011-2020, temporarily exceeding 1.5°C since the pre-industrial period (1850-1900). The past few years have been the hottest on record, and intensifying climate-related catastrophes and increasing pressure on communities, economies, and ecosystems show signs of getting perilously close to the long-term warming limit of 1.5°C outlined in the Paris Agreement;

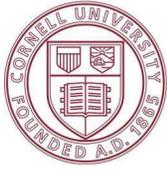
Whereas, these effects are evident in New York State, with [rising temperatures](#)² driving changes in weather patterns that threaten agriculture, food security, and local economies reliant on stable climatic conditions;

Whereas, as a [self-proclaimed leading institution in climate science and sustainability](#)³, Cornell University has a unique responsibility to act in alignment with the urgency of the climate crisis, safeguard the rights of students to a habitable future, and equip students with the tools and knowledge to navigate the challenges of the crisis ahead;

¹ IPCC reports alarming warming throughout all regions across our planet emphasizing the impacts of humans on environmental degradation and what needs to be done to combat this warming on all levels

² The average temperature in the New York State region is expected to increase by about 5 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. Warmer winters and greater heat stress for animals and crops will increase production costs.

³ Cornell's sustainability assessment score is disproportionately high compared to its initiated actions



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Whereas, Cornell's current [Climate Action Plan](#)⁴ fails to adequately address the urgency of the crisis, as it lacks the bold, comprehensive measures needed to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change on the university and broader community;

Whereas, requiring all new construction and major renovation projects at Cornell to achieve the highest [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design \(LEED\)](#)⁵ certification would ensure rigorous oversight, align with Cornell's Climate Action Plan, and solidify its leadership in sustainable development by prioritizing decarbonization, energy efficiency, and resource conservation;

Whereas, ensuring low-carbon, plant-based dining options, food waste donations, and composting program expansion should be prioritized in dining halls to combat the annual [800 tons of food scraps](#)⁶ and organic kitchen waste generated by Cornell dining halls and cafés, promote environmentally friendly consumption habits, and align operations with climate goals;

Whereas, establishing additional composting drop-off sites in high-density student areas, such as Collegetown, Hasbrouck Apartments, and Pleasant Grove Apartments, in partnership with the Tompkins County Solid Waste Department, could further increase student participation in composting, reduce organic waste sent to landfills, and support broader waste diversion efforts;

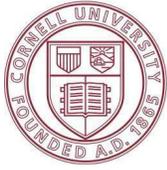
Whereas, students' call for leadership that prioritizes climate initiatives at the forefront, as was the case with [past university presidents](#),⁷ highlights the need to appoint a full-time president who prioritizes environmental issues on campus and in the greater Ithaca community, and to enact broader institutional changes at the highest levels of university governance, including expanding the Office of Sustainability, assigning a high-level administrator to promote climate actions on campus, and establishing regular meetings between senior administrators and a student climate advisory committee to ensure sustained and focused leadership on climate action;

⁴ Cornell's current climate action plan states that they "aspire to create best practices by demonstrating scalable low-carbon solutions on campus, advancing climate literacy and research initiatives, and accelerating impact through collaborative partnerships locally and globally." Locally, they are committed to reducing Ithaca campus' carbon emissions to net zero by 2035, creating a living laboratory for low-impact behaviors, climate education, and research."

⁵ LEED, a globally recognized rating system for measuring the sustainability of a building, is emphasized as an important piece of consideration among Cornell's construction initiatives, Cornell must maintain cooperation of these requirements

⁶ Cornell currently generates tons of food waste that should get sent to compost sites or food donation programs.

⁷ In 2007, Cornell's president sent out a statement emphasizing his goals as president to focus on Cornell's climate initiatives and other environmental initiatives



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Be it therefore resolved, Cornell University should [Declare a Climate Emergency](#)⁸ and adopt the following actions to enhance its Climate Action Plan and fulfill its obligation to its students, community, and global leadership role:

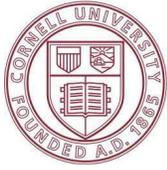
1. **Leadership Commitment:** Seek a full-time university president committed to addressing campus and community environmental issues, ensuring that sustainability remains a core institutional priority.
2. **Accelerate Decarbonization:** Commit to halving carbon emissions by 2030, and rapid decreases towards zero emissions (rather than net zero) after that, integrating robust decarbonization and resource consumption reduction strategies across all new campus construction and existing infrastructure, without relying on offsetting.
3. **Restructure for Low-Carbon Living:** Actively shift campus policies and infrastructure away from high-carbon activities while encouraging low-carbon alternatives, particularly in dining, transportation, and housing.⁹
4. **Expand Dining Sustainability:** Expand low-carbon footprint meal options in dining halls, strengthen food waste donation programs, and expand composting initiatives for Cornell eateries and dense student living areas to minimize environmental impact.
5. **Accurate Emissions Reporting:** A comprehensive emissions baseline inventory should include all significant emission sources, including upstream methane emissions, to guide equitable and science-based climate goals.¹⁰
6. **Advocate for Climate Equity:** Mobilize academic and community resources to drive climate resilience, prioritizing the voices of frontline and Indigenous communities in adaptation efforts.

Be it further resolved, Cornell University and the Office of Student Government Relations should commit to advocating for systemic legislative action and inspiring other institutions to

⁸ The United Nations Environment Program launched an initiative in 2019 along with Second Nature, Cornell's reporting platform, to encourage institutions of higher education to declare a Climate Emergency and agree to undertake a three-point plan to address the crisis. That plan is a step in the right direction, although not wholly adequate.

⁹ Intensive air travel is incompatible with maximum emissions reduction plans, yet Cornell continues to lobby for expansion of the Ithaca airport, which climate scientists have advised against. Viable land public transportation is essential to reducing unnecessary emissions from car travel, yet Cornell fails to provide adequate support for the TCAT bus system. Cornell students compose 75% of ridership, yet the university only makes up 33% of TCAT's annual budget, which has forced the company to cut routes, which harms the larger Ithaca community—to which Cornell does not support in tax dollars.

¹⁰ Current Cornell Baseline Emissions reporting lists methane usage separately from total carbon emissions, which allows them to simultaneously condemn natural gas usage, and makes it appear they emit less than they do by using methane. Cornell has also used this split reporting to claim that they are making more progress towards their climate goals than they are.



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address the climate crisis with urgency (e.g. enhancing energy efficiency in various campus operations or funding and supporting research specifically searching for climate solutions).

Be it finally resolved, Cornell University should affirm its responsibility to lead transformative shifts toward climate justice, ensuring students' rights to a habitable future while protecting the community from the far-reaching impacts of inaction.

Respectfully Submitted,

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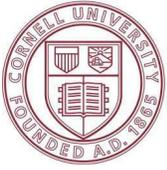
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