

INTRODUCTION TO THE CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE

September 15, 2009

Background

Agnes Scott College signed the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC) in September 2007. We submitted our baseline greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory on September 15, 2008. Our initial Climate Action Plan (CAP) was completed during the summer of 2009 and was submitted on-line to the ACUPCC on the September 15, 2009 deadline. This document serves as an introduction to the on-line submittal of the CAP.

At the same time that we embarked on the research for our GHG emissions inventory and CAP, Agnes Scott began the process of drafting the goals for a comprehensive, campus-wide sustainability plan. We anticipate publishing that plan, including full reports of our 2008 and 2009 GHG emissions inventories as well as a complete report of the CAP, in December 2009.

Process for the Climate Action Plan

After completing the GHG emissions inventory, Agnes Scott's Sustainability Steering Committee (SSC) requested that the energy efficiency and alternative energy subcommittee that guided the GHG process also guide the CAP. This subcommittee has been led by three co-chairs: the college's director of facilities, a professor of chemistry and an alumna who served as an elected member of the state's Public Service Commission. The co-chairs and other volunteer subcommittee members met several times in the fall of 2008 to discuss what information needed to be gathered in order to decide on potential carbon emissions reduction goals for the college. The same student intern who conducted the GHG emissions inventory collected the necessary information as a work study student in 2008-2009. She and the college's sustainability staff also reviewed climate action plans and reports, along with case studies from other colleges and universities.

In the spring semester of 2009, the subcommittee began to look at potential reduction goals and agreed to report on several reduction scenarios to the full SSC and the Board of Trustees' buildings and ground committee. The reduction estimates in these scenarios were based on specific research, such as:

- Conservation: estimates based on limited information about past reductions at Agnes Scott due to conservation messaging. Also based on research about reductions achieved at other colleges and universities.
- Efficiency: estimates based on a three-phase mechanical retrofitting plan combined with energy saving projects from the deferred maintenance plan.
- Renewable energy: estimates based on a professional assessment of potential roof-top solar capacity.

The SSC and Trustees responded with support for the scenarios, asking the subcommittee to return with refined reduction options.

Uncertainties of the CAP

During discussions about the CAP reductions, the subcommittee and college decision-makers pointed out the future uncertainties we face in making these estimates. First, we only have comparative GHG data for two years, so future reduction estimates are uncertain. Second, while we have done some assessment of our efficiency potential, we need more detailed information. Specifically, we plan to conduct a campus energy audit and retrofitting master plan in 2010. Third, there is uncertainty about what technologies will be developed, when they will be available, and which ones will be most applicable to our campus. Fourth, we must package projects and apply for various financing and/or funding without knowing how much we can raise over what period of time. This uncertainty became even more of a concern as the national economic downturn caused the college to make budget cutbacks.

While all of these uncertainties are daunting, the SSC and Board of Trustees agreed to the need to set goals now and those goals can be adjusted accordingly as additional information becomes available. It was agreed that the CAP is a “work in progress” and should be revisited on an annual basis.

Conclusions

Between the initial presentation of the reduction scenarios in April 2009 and the refinement of CAP percentages in July 2009, we conducted our second GHG emissions inventory. The results showed a 6% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in our first year. With this information we were able to move our proposed deadline for climate neutrality to an earlier date than either original scenario had projected.

The detailed CAP goals are documented in the on-line submittal and the two additional documents available for downloading: a spreadsheet of estimated reduction by category (Scope 1, 2 or 3) and graph of the timeline for reduction.

The energy efficiency and alternative energy subcommittee presented these goals with the understanding that “the finish line will keep moving” and the college will need to be flexible as it adapts to the best approach for climate neutrality. We propose these goals as the beginning of a Climate Action Plan process that will be ongoing for years to come.