Climate Commitment Advisory Council – Fall 2024 Semester Update

Introduction

The Climate Commitment Advisory Council (Council) officially launched in January 2024 and was charged with developing the university-wide vision and strategy for Duke's Climate Commitment. The Council, chaired by Toddi Steelman, is comprised of 100 students, staff, and faculty from a diversity of schools and departments across Duke. Council members provide expertise across all pillars of Duke's Climate Commitment, which are education, research, campus operations, community partnerships, and external engagement. This document provides an update on the efforts of the Council during fall 2024.

The primary focus of the Council during the fall was to begin outlining the strategy for Duke's Climate Commitment out to 2030 with a focus on the near term. Each subcommittee on the Council harnessed its membership's input to draft an action plan for the next year and will work towards the development of a 3-year action plan in the spring. Below is a summary of efforts for each subcommittee (Education Integration, Research Innovation, Campus Operations, and External Engagement for Impact) and the Community Partnerships working group.

If you have any questions or feedback, please contact the Office of Climate and Sustainability (OCS) at climate-sustainability@duke.edu.

Education Integration Subcommittee

Goal: Duke will train and empower the next generation of climate leaders including students, staff, faculty, and alumni — in both their professional capacities and personal lives. We aim for every Duke student to graduate with climate and sustainability fluency and a sense of agency and hope to implement positive climate and sustainability action, regardless of their academic program of study. The vision for climate and sustainability fluency is that learners at all levels choose Duke at least in part because of the interdisciplinary, experiential, applied, and immersive opportunities available to actively engage in climate and sustainability. *Chairs: Valerie Sabol (School of Nursing) and Dan Vermeer (Fuqua)*

- **Defining our strategic goals to 2030:** As part of the CCAC's strategic planning, the subcommittee established its three primary goals to guide its work for the rest of this decade. These goals include *increasing access and participation* in climate and sustainability learning experiences for all Duke learner audiences across the university, including Duke's 18,000 students, 4,100 faculty, 43,000 staff, and 200,000 alumni; *pursuing cross-institutional involvement* in climate and sustainability education through stakeholder engagement and collective climate and sustainability education planning and action; and *enhancing learner fluency* through evaluation and tracking of climate and sustainability fluency across Duke's various learner populations.

- **Finding our North Stars:** After developing and publishing the Climate and Sustainability Fluency Framework in the Spring 2024 semester, the Education Integration Subcommittee wrote an aspirational companion "North Stars" document in the Summer and Fall 2024 terms. The North Stars articulate the subcommittee's educational aspirations and establish a vision to guide Duke educators to engage all learner audiences with the goal of building learners' climate and sustainability fluency.

- **Piloting a climate and sustainability educational evaluation:** In partnership with the Duke Office of Climate and Sustainability and the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at NC State University, the subcommittee piloted an evaluation process to gain insight into what Duke students know about climate and sustainability, how adept and empowered they feel at integrating climate and sustainability into their personal and professional lives, and where they gather information about climate change and sustainability. The evaluation was conducted through a survey and a series of student focus groups. The pilot iteration of this evaluation was conducted with students from the Pratt School of Engineering, Sanford School of Public Policy, and School of Nursing in October 2024. Results of this pilot will inform improvements and future deployments of this evaluation, as well as prospective expansion to other Duke learner audiences (i.e., faculty, staff, and alumni).

- **Looking ahead to spring 2025:** During the Spring 2025 semester, the subcommittee aims to ideate with instructors in Trinity who are teaching Constellation or Century courses as part of the new curriculum to consider ways their new courses may include climate and sustainability content. Leadership from the subcommittee will begin engaging with representatives from Pratt, Sanford, and Nursing on how climate and sustainability can be further woven into their schools' curricular and co-curricular educational opportunities. Additionally, a task force comprised of subcommittee members has been formed to identify competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors) related to climate and sustainability that can be broadly applicable to all Duke audiences. Lastly, subcommittee leadership will convene meetings with Trinity School of Arts and Sciences faculty that teach large undergraduate courses to explore the potential for shared curriculum and interdisciplinary engagement.

Research Innovation Subcommittee

Goal: Duke will engage in meaningful research that advances discovery, as well as mitigates, responds, and adapts to climate change. We have a three-pronged goal: 1) become a globally recognized thought and action leader in three areas—Climate Finance and Policy, Climate and Health, and Oceans—where Duke has distinctive advantages; 2) grow new areas where we have made investments in demonstrated strengths—Environmental and Climate Justice, Climate and Community Resilience, and Climate Science, Technology and Policy; and 3) continue to create opportunities for widespread participation and inclusion for our research community. We want to see more faculty, students, and staff recognize and choose Duke because they want to be part of our thriving interdisciplinary community of scholarship and action. *Chairs: Norman Wirzba (OCS/Divinity) and Prasad Kasibhatla (Nicholas School)*

- **Fostering Research Collaborations:** The Research Subcommittee is providing opportunities for students, staff, and faculty researchers to engage in climate and sustainability-related research at Duke while also addressing barriers to conducting research. During the fall semester, the leadership of the subcommittee convened the Catalyzing Climate Connections Researcher forum for 125 faculty and staff researchers to foster and deepen connections across diverse disciplines, inspire creative research approaches, and identify supportive institutional measures for advancing climate-research opportunities. Some of the key highlights from the forum include a desire to develop effective communication and community engagement strategies, bridging research across disciplines, providing seed funding for new research, and creating a research incubator for faculty, staff, and student researchers.

- **Funding Research Proposals**: The subcommittee reviewed and ranked Collaborative Research Planning Grant Proposals, which led to supporting four projects. The funded proposals included research on climate change-related kidney disease, environmental intelligence, sustainable energy transitions, and climate change's impact on cardiometabolic health.

- **Looking ahead to spring 2025**: During the spring 2025 semester, the subcommittee aims to engage more deeply with Duke's research community on the Climate Commitment's research priorities by hosting or participating in convenings across campus including the Duke Research Summit, a faculty conversation and networking event on climate justice, and a student research showcase in April. These convenings will provide ample opportunities for researchers on campus to network and build relationships, thus fostering future partnerships. The subcommittee is also developing a framework to evaluate the success of past climate-related, grant-funded research.

Campus Operations Subcommittee

Goal: Duke will be a bold and visible example of living, working, and practicing our values where our campus helps you directly experience sustainability. Sustainability and decarbonization will be demonstrated as primary concerns in all university decision making from leadership to students. Duke University aims to achieve net zero carbon emissions inclusive of the Duke University Health System. We also strive to demonstrate sustainable campus operations including enhanced alternative transportation, working towards a zero-waste and circular economy, sustainable procurement practices, sustainable food systems, water conservation and sustainable land management. *Chairs: Lindsay Batchelor (OCS) and Russell Thompson (Facilities)*

- **Future of Carbon Neutrality**: The Campus Operations Subcommittee focused on two key topics during the fall semester including Duke's greenhouse gas emissions goal and other sustainable operations areas including waste and transportation. In 2024, Duke University met its carbon neutrality goal, which was established in 2007 making Duke the first among its academic peers to achieve carbon neutrality. Meeting the 2024 neutrality commitment is just a milestone in a long journey to reducing Duke's greenhouse gas emissions. The subcommittee also is focusing on greenhouse gas emissions from the health system while it works to develop its baseline for emissions and its plan to reduce emissions going forward.

- **Sustainable Operations Strategic Planning**: In addition to Duke's greenhouse gas emissions, the subcommittee is evaluating and providing recommendations to infuse sustainability into other operational topics, including waste, transportation, food, procurement, water, buildings, and natural spaces. In 2025, the subcommittee is prioritizing the focus areas of waste and transportation. The subcommittee is being supported by topic-specific working groups, the first of which is the Alternative Transportation Advisory Group.

- **Looking ahead to spring 2025**: The subcommittee is developing a next generation carbon goal that will incorporate emissions from the Duke University Health System with the goal of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050 with interim reduction targets in milestone years. The subcommittee is supporting the development of a suite of emission-reducing strategies that can be implemented across Duke University and the health system, including a 101-megawatts of solar energy that is anticipated to come online in 2025. For waste and transportation sustainability, the focus of spring 2025 will be evaluating current processes at Duke and best

practices across higher education to best understand which initiatives are needed to meet Duke's goals. Duke is also assessing staff capacity and need to support future initiatives.

External Engagement for Impact Subcommittee

Goal: Duke will be a sought-out convener, known for purposeful partnerships for positive societal impact to address climate and sustainability challenges. We will demonstrate how universities fulfill and maintain the promise of higher education as a neutral host where conversations, collaboration, and partnerships of consequence across sectors of society and the political spectrum can take place. Duke will be known as a convener of record in national and international arenas for several key signature events that will continually draw experts and decisionmakers into the forum. Through this work, Duke will attract corporate, NGO, alumni, philanthropic, decision makers, and research partners to join in the work of the Duke Climate Commitment and meaningfully engage with the communities our work touches. *Chair: Lydia Olander (Nicholas Institute)*

- **Climate Engagement Hub Ideation:** The subcommittee drafted a proposal for a Duke Climate Engagement Hub that will provide university-wide support for faculty, staff, and students through a number of programs to enhance the impact of their work by engaging outside the University. The Climate Engagement Hub could also institutionalize and build on the success of programs like Climate Leaders in Residence Program, which brings top thought leaders to Duke University to share their insights and expertise in order to spark discussion and action to advance climate solutions, and the Climate Collaboration Symposia series, which is designed to accelerate climate solutions by developing new collaborations among Duke scholars and external partners.

- **Climate Leaders in Residence Progress:** The Nicholas Institute welcomed the second Climate Leader in Residence Alison Taylor. In her previous role as chief sustainability officer for ADM, Taylor supported the company's global sustainability strategy by spearheading the implementation of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. As a resident she will focus on work that builds more climate-resilient, climate-friendly, and just food systems. The institute also welcomed inaugural resident Francis Bouchard as a non-resident policy fellow at the Institute to continue collaboration. Bouchard, who is managing director for climate at Marsh McLennan, has three decades of experience leveraging the insurance industry to address climate change. He will continue his work to explore ways in which the insurance sector can incentivize and support advances in management of climate risks.

- **Climate Collaboration Symposia**: With support from the Climate Commitment the Nicholas Institute helped to host 3 climate collaboration symposia with topics including: Risk Science for Climate Resilience, Sustainable Infrastructure, and Climate Resiliency and Mobility. The external engagement subcommittee also selected 4 groups for the 2025 program series representing partnerships across the entire University. These include: The Nexus of Climate Change, Policy and Health; Enhancing Geothermal Systems Along the East Coast; Tackling Food Waste and Loss and Indigenous Seed-keeping; and Climate Technology and Our Planet Ocean.

- **Looking ahead to spring 2025**: The subcommittee will continue framing and refining the Climate Engagement Hub concept, while also developing a plan for implementation. The subcommittee

will continue to act as the initial review and selection committee for the climate collaboration symposia and Climate Leaders in Residence programs. In addition, a student representative from the Duke Climate Coalition will be joining the committee starting in January in order to share the student experience as it relates to external engagement. The Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment, and Sustainability will co-host the aforementioned climate collaboration symposia with teams across campus and work with the School of Nursing who will host the next Climate Leader in Residence, Dr. Jessica Castner.

Community Partnerships Working Group

Goal: Duke will draw on our strengths as a university and as a committed community partner to co-create a more sustainable and healthier place to work and live. We are committed to authentic, purposeful partnerships—particularly in Durham, our region, and across North Carolina—grounded in an understanding of community needs. By weaving community partnerships through all the pillars of the Climate Commitment and also integrating the work the Office of Climate and Sustainability (OCS) with that of the Office of Duke Community Affairs (DCA), we will create synergies between Duke's strategic objectives in sustainability and DCA's commitment to community empowerment and social equity.

Working Group Formation: While Community Partnerships is a pillar of the Climate Commitment, it is not a separate CCAC subcommittee. Instead, there are Duke Community Affairs staff members on each subcommittee with the goal of infusing community partnerships and justice across the other Climate Commitment pillars. The Community Partnerships Working Group is comprised of staff from Duke Community Affairs and the Office of Climate and Sustainability who are also members of the Climate Commitment Advisory Council. The working group meets quarterly to strategize avenues to center community partnerships and justice across the Duke Climate Commitment. This recently developed working group is identifying areas of alignment between Duke Community Affairs' strategic priorities with the Duke Climate Commitment's 2030 strategy.

Looking ahead to spring 2025: Looking forward, this working group will cocreate, with student partners, an inventory of climate- and sustainability related community engagement projects where Duke is an active partner, support the newly created Center for Community Engagement, and educate members of the Climate Commitment Advisory Council and eventually the broader campus about community partnership opportunities and avenues.

Next Steps

The focus of the spring semester will be on fleshing out more detailed three-year plans for each of these subcommittee topics and implementing many of the programs planned this spring. To stay engaged in the work of the Climate Commitment Advisory Council, please consider the following avenues:

- Review the current draft of the 2030 strategy document (LINK!!)
- Review the 2024 Duke Climate Commitment annual report
- Sign up for the Duke Climate Commitment monthly newsletter
- Save the Date: Climate Commitment Student Town Hall on Monday, March 24th at 6pm (additional details forthcoming)