Climate Commitment Advisory Council – Monthly Update

January 2025

Leadership Team

Chair: Toddi Steelman (OCS), Vice-Chairs: Tavey Capps (OCS) and Brian Murray (Nicholas Institute)

- **Leadership Team Retreat**: The Leadership Team gathered in late January for a half-day retreat. The goals of the retreat were to foster connections between subcommittees, provide space for subcommittee chairs to present updates on their work, and outline the general work plan for the spring semester. Members of the Leadership Team also learned about Duke's upcoming public launch of Duke's fundraising campaign as it relates to the Climate Commitment. During the open discussion, some key themes that came up were 1) strategizing ways to infuse community partnerships and justice/equity in the work of each subcommittee, 2) identifying opportunities and barriers to measuring the impact of the Climate Commitment, particularly in the realm of research, 3) brainstorming opportunities for students to get purposefully involved in all aspects of the Climate Commitment, and 4) realizing the cultural changes that need to happen both on campus and in society to meet our ambitious goals.

Education Subcommittee

Chairs: Valerie Sabol (School of Nursing) and Dan Vermeer (Fuqua)

- **Previewing engagement with pilot schools' leadership teams:** In Spring 2025, subcommittee leadership will meet with Nursing, Pratt, and Sanford leaders to assess climate and sustainability (C&S) education and explore opportunities for deeper engagement. These schools serve as pilots for bespoke C&S educational opportunities, with expansion anticipated to other Duke schools in 2025-26. January's subcommittee meeting previewed these discussions with school representatives, who expressed enthusiasm for this work but emphasized the need for structured collaboration, resource repositories and inventories, and audience-specific engagement strategies. Initial meetings with leadership from these pilot schools are scheduled for the next month. In advance of these meetings, subcommittee members have provided feedback on an interview guide and an executive summary of subcommittee work to date.
- **Relating climate and sustainability fluency to the soon-to-launch campaign:** Emerson Beyer (Alumni Engagement and Development) presented to the subcommittee about the ongoing comprehensive campaign, which is slated for public launch in February, and the role of C&S fluency as a major focal area for fundraising effort. Subcommittee members learned about fundraising that will promote C&S education institution-wide as well as school-specific initiatives for programming at the nexus of climate and different disciplines.
- **Providing updates on ongoing work:** The subcommittee has approved a suite of foundational documents that provide guidance on the vision and direction for Duke's C&S educational efforts – the North Stars, Climate and Sustainability Fluency Framework, and contributions to the 2030 Strategy document. A 3-year plan document is in draft and will be reviewed at the February

subcommittee meeting.

External Engagement Subcommittee

Chair: Lydia Olander (Nicholas Institute)

- **Climate Leaders in Residence (CLIR):** Deans, University Institutes and Centers (UIC) administrators, and other administrators must submit outstanding Climate Leader in Residence nominations by February 17th for nominees who wish to begin their appointments in 2025. As a reminder, the CLIR program brings 1-2 top thought leaders to Duke each year to share their insights and expertise with Duke scholars and students, sparking discussion and action to advance climate solutions. We have received several compelling nominations making for a highly competitive applicant pool spanning a diverse range of professional backgrounds. The subcommittee conducted the review and selection of our newest (3rd) Climate Leader in Residence, Dr. Jessica Castner. Dr. Castner will be hosted by the School of Nursing and will begin her 1-year appointment in March 2025. **This has not yet been announced publicly.**
- **Climate Engagement Hub:** Work continues to develop the Climate Engagement Hub (formerly known as the Climate Impact Lab), a draft concept meant to lay out the External Engagement committee's vision for engaging critical stakeholders within and around Duke through targeted programming. Suggested programs include proposals that establish climate tech innovation hubs, empower post-docs/grad students through collaborative funding, and integrate external engagement directives into research programs across campus, among others. This concept will be finalized in the coming weeks and is the basis for the subcommittee's 3-Year Strategic Plan which will be unveiled in late March.

Operations Subcommittee

Chairs: Lindsay Batchelor (OCS) and Russell Thompson (Facilities)

- **Carbon Reduction and Resource Allocation Ad-hoc Committee**: Provided an update to the Operations Subcommittee on this new ad-hoc committee which started in January 2025 and is charged with making a recommendation to university leadership about whether Duke should continue to purchase carbon offsets to maintain carbon neutrality or re-appropriate the funds for campus decarbonization efforts (e.g. energy efficiency investments, utility upgrades, etc). This committee will provide a recommendation report to Duke leadership at the end of the semester.
- **Waste and Transportation Strategy**: Discussed how Duke's goals in these operational areas compare to other universities and how goal language from other universities could inform Duke's future goals. Some topics that came up in discussion include assessing Duke's current policies and practices to help inform what Duke could feasibly aim towards in the future, the need to educate the entire campus on these topics (especially waste) as behavior change is key to making lasting change, and the tradeoffs of making university-wide policies vs collaborating with departments to make their own policy for operational sustainability.

- **Scope 1 and 2 Climate Action Plan Development**: Russell Thompson presented on strategies to further reduce Duke's energy-related emissions, which include temperature scheduling policies for campus buildings, LED lighting upgrades, renovating and upgrading current campus buildings, and improving the efficiency of Duke's utility plants (e.g. chilled water plants). There is potential to reduce building energy use by 10-20% (depends on building functions and age) and if all energy efficiency measures were implemented. The steam to hot water conversions that already underway reduces energy use by 15-25% compared to using steam. Facilities will continue to evaluate other energy reduction technologies to determine feasibility.

Research Subcommittee

Chairs: Norman Wirzba (OCS/Divinity) and Prasad Kasibhatla (Nicholas School)

- **Climate Research Summit & Grant Awards:** The subcommittee successfully advanced a climate track at Duke's Research Summit on January 7, focusing on Climate and Health, Climate Policy & Finance, and Oceans. The panels were well-attended, and research planning grants were awarded. OCS provided the funding for four projects to have facilitation and project management support, which span climate-resilient healthcare, critical minerals sustainability, and AI-powered environmental intelligence.
- **Proposed Climate Justice Dinner for Faculty Collaboration:** The committee discussed hosting a Climate Justice Dinner as a way to build faculty connections and clarify Duke's approach to climate justice research. The event would feature a keynote and also engage new faculty hires. The goal is to spark interdisciplinary interest, identify key collaborators, and deepen engagement in climate justice topics that have yet to receive broad institutional focus.
- **3-Year Planning & Blue Sky Climate Conversations:** By the end of March, the subcommittee will finalize a 3-year strategic plan for CCAC. A key proposal is to launch "Blue Sky Climate Conversations," small faculty groups meeting over a semester to explore transformative climate ideas. Stipends and meal funding could support participation. Discussions emphasized flexibility in group selection, balancing structured research collaboration with open-ended, cross-disciplinary dialogue. More to come.
- **Future Researcher Fora:** The committee debated the merits of hosting another open-ended Researcher Forum and decided that refining gatherings to a more targeted event focusing on a strategic area would be more appropriate. An event focusing on Climate & Health is already being proposed by SOM and presents a good opportunity for partnership.

Community Partnerships Working Group

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 across the other Climate Commitment pillars.

- **Continuing Efforts to Strategize Collaborations**: While the Community Partnerships Working Group did not convene in January, they will continue to determine alignments between the Climate Commitment and Duke Community Affairs' priorities this spring.

- **Center for Community Engagement**: In support of Duke's mission of purposeful partnerships, Duke Community Affairs and Interdisciplinary Studies in the Office of the Provost recently launched the Center for Community Engagement, which is an interdisciplinary hub that facilitates collaborative scholarship with community partners. On February 5th, the Center hosted a daylong symposium for local community members and the Duke community.
- **Climate Commitment Student Town Hall**: On March 24th from 6-8pm, the Office of Climate and Sustainability is hosting its semesterly student town hall. Please encourage interested students to register in advance of the town hall.

***Current CCAC Membership List**