Climate Commitment Advisory Council – Monthly Update

March 2025

Leadership Team

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

- **DRAFT Three-Year Plan Presentations**: The primary focus of the leadership team meeting was for each subcommittee to present on their draft three-year plans and provide space for members of the committee to share feedback and opportunities for collaboration. These three-year plans will be incorporated into the Climate Commitment 2030 Strategy and shared out publicly during fall 2025 in order to gather feedback.

Education Subcommittee

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

- **Reports from initial dialogues with Pratt and Nursing leadership:** Sara Oliver (Pratt) and Valerie Sabol (Nursing) provided updates from the initial discussions with leadership at Pratt and Nursing. Leaders from both schools expressed interest in continuing the conversation on climate and sustainability (C&S). Accreditation requirements (ABET for Pratt, AACN for Nursing) offer both opportunities and challenges for broad integration. Nursing is currently undergoing a curricular revision to align with new competency-based AACN standards. At Pratt, recommended targets for C&S integration include First-Year Design, capstone, and ethics courses, which reach all Pratt undergrads. In Nursing, efforts are underway to identify climate-inclusive content in courses and determine trainings for both faculty and practicing providers.
- **Evolution of three-year plan:** A working group of subcommittee members has spent the past month refining the three-year plan, focusing on updating the goal structure to be more universally applicable across institutional, school/unit, and individual levels. The updates were presented to the subcommittee for informational and feedback-gathering purposes. While the core aims remain the same—enhancing learner fluency, increasing access, and pursuing institutional engagement—the reframed goals are designed to be more inspirational and aligned with competencies, supported by cross-cutting efforts like communication and community-building.
- **Feedback and revisions to three-year plan:** Subcommittee members split into two breakout groups to discuss and provide feedback on the draft document. Questions among both groups centered around the purpose and audience for the document, as well as about feasibility of proposed strategies and milestones. Guidance is being sought from CCAC leadership about how to best balance goal-setting and ambitions with flexibility, adaptability, and feasibility. Additional feedback from committee members included recommendations for condensing content, harmonizing language, and ensuring pilot school work is highlighted. Feedback will be incorporated, and a next version of the draft will be presented to the subcommittee by April 7, for discussion and final edits at April 14 subcommittee meeting.

External Engagement Subcommittee

Chair: Lydia Olander (Nicholas Institute)

- **Three-Year Plan Discussions:** Subcommittee members gave feedback on the latest iteration of the three-year plan for external engagement. Major topics included creating a new goal to form new partnerships that could lead to new types of funding and the need for explicit links between the public-facing three-year plan and internal action plans priorities.
- **Designing an External Engagement Outreach Strategy:** The subcommittee has identified a need to engage in outreach specific to the external engagement subcommittee's work. This includes scoping out general attitudes towards external engagement across campus, sharing out priority actions and goals for feedback, and getting a feel for what external engagement activities are already under way. The subcommittee also discussed the benefits of further discussions with the Education Subcommittee and Research Subcommittee whose work may overlap with External Engagement priorities. We have designed an outreach strategy to be carried out through the summer to target key stakeholders across our network. This includes a student town hall idea created and spearheaded by our student representative, Fisher Mallon.
- **Climate Leaders in Residence (CLIR) Review:** Several subcommittee members formed a review committee to discuss a final recommendation for the next Climate Leader in Residence. Members ranked each applicant and participated in active discussion before ultimately recommending three finalists for consideration. A memo detailing the selection and discussion process was sent to university leadership to inform their final selection. We expect to publicly announce the chosen CLIR by the end of April.

Operations Subcommittee

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

- **Three-Year Plan Discussions:** Subcommittee members were walked through the latest iteration of the three-year plan draft and provided feedback. There were questions about stakeholder engagement and who we define as stakeholders. Also, there were questions about the Carbon Reduction and Resource Allocation Ad-hoc Advisory Committee and what their timeline for rendering recommendations is. Duke University Health System has a placeholder in the three-year plan as the Health System work through their own planning process over the summer, at which point their information will be incorporated.
- **NC Legislative and Renewable Energy updates:** Duke is exploring virtual power purchase agreements (vPPAs) options for offsite solar. The committee also discussed the legislation in the NC General Assembly that would remove the requirement for Duke Energy to reduce its carbon emissions statewide by 70% by 2030. This bill is likely to pass with bipartisan support and would allow Duke Energy to push its emissions reductions further into the future, which means Duke University's purchased electricity emissions won't fall as fast as projected.

Research Subcommittee

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

- **Communications & Marketing Strategy**: Kirsten Khire, Director of Marketing and Communications for Climate and Sustainability, presented on the importance of storytelling in promoting Duke's research. She emphasized the need to highlight impactful climate research stories to inform funders and the community at-large, manage the university's reputation, and aid Duke's government relations office. Kirsten introduced the "Research Saves Lives" microsite and discussed the unique moment we are in, requiring novel approaches to communication and engagement, including the "Climate Road Trip" initiative to engage alumni.
- **Shifting Research Funding Landscape**: The committee discussed the challenges posed by changes in federal administration, highlighting the confusion and lack of clarity in the current funding environment. They noted the devastation in international development programs and the importance of internal support for climate research. The conversation included exploring alternative funding streams, such as private sector and foundation relations, and the critical role of seed grants and postdoc programs in supporting young faculty and ongoing projects.
- **Reframing a Three-Year Plan**: The final discussion focused on shaping the three-year plan for the Climate Commitment's research pillar. Building infrastructure and collaborative environments for climate research, the strategic use of potential significant gifts, and the relative importance of supporting projects that align with campaign goals in the current funding environment. They also discussed the limitations now of the strategy of awarding seed grants for teams to secure larger grants and support for resourcing a postdoc program to bring in young researchers with creative ideas.

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.

- **Climate Commitment Student Town Hall**: On March 24th, the Office of Climate and Sustainability, in collaboration with Duke Community Affairs and the Undergraduate Environmental Union, hosted the student town hall. Both OCS and DCA presented on community partnerships and climate justice connections to Duke's Climate Commitment (see slide deck here). Following the presentation, there was a robust discussion about Duke's role in community partnerships, actions Duke could prioritize to uplift climate/environmental justice work, and ways to more strongly and strategically connect with students on these topics and Duke's Climate Commitment broadly.

***Current CCAC Membership List**