

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN SENATE
COMMITTEE ON CAMPUS OPERATIONS
(Final; Action)

CO.21.01 Resolution in Support of the Illinois Climate Action Plan

BACKGROUND

The pioneering efforts of University of Illinois alumnus Charles David Keeling in the late 1950s and early 1960s led to the realization that the concentration of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in Earth's atmosphere rises and falls each year as the terrestrial biosphere "breathes," but is steadily rising over time. Based on a variety of evidence, it is now clear that this overall rise is primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels. The amplification of the greenhouse effect by rising CO₂ concentrations has been equally clear, resulting in the 16 hottest years recorded since 1880 all occurring from 1998-2015 (NOAA). As CO₂ concentrations continue to rise, driven largely by the continuing growth of the world economy, scientists forecast continued warming and climate variability, with long-lasting and potentially irreversible impacts on sea levels, biodiversity, and agriculture.

In 2008, Illinois signed the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment, which committed our campus to carbon neutrality—eliminating or offsetting all carbon dioxide emissions—no later than 2050. In 2016, Illinois signed the Resilience Commitment, pledging to build resistance to climate change in our local community. These commitments together are now called the Climate Leadership Commitments. Furthermore, in 2019, President Killeen signed the Climate Emergency Letter, in recognition of "the need for a drastic societal shift to combat the growing threat of climate change" (<https://www.sdgaccord.org/climateletter>). The Illinois Climate Action Plan (iCAP) (<http://sustainability.illinois.edu/campus-sustainability/icap/>) lays out objectives and potential strategies in several key areas, such as energy, transportation, land and water, resilience, and education. The first iCAP was developed in 2010, and approved by Interim Chancellor Easter. The 2015 iCAP was signed by Interim Chancellor Wilson, and endorsed by the Senate in April of 2016 through a Senate resolution. In 2019, the process began for updating the Illinois Climate Action Plan to create iCAP 2020. This was a significant effort that was supported by hundreds of stakeholders across campus, with broad input from the campus community. On October 20, 2020, Chancellor Jones signed and approved the updated plan. We note that the campus has made progress in reducing its emissions and exceeded many of its initial goals set in 2010. It is clear, however, that greater efforts will be needed in order to fulfill the iCAP goals.

As the Senate supported iCAP 2015, we believe that the Senate should strongly endorse campus sustainability through passing a resolution in favor of iCAP 2020.

Resolution in Support of the Illinois Climate Action Plan

WHEREAS the broad consensus of the climate science community (including experts at the University of Illinois) is that the increase of carbon dioxide concentration and that of other greenhouse gases is altering Earth's climate, increasing average temperatures, and increasing climate variability, and

WHEREAS this campus signed the Climate Leadership Commitments, which committed our campus to carbon neutrality no later than 2050 and pledged to build resistance to climate change in our local community, and

WHEREAS the University of Illinois System President signed the Climate Emergency Letter, which recognized the need to accelerate efforts to address climate change, and

WHEREAS the Illinois Climate Action Plan established realistic goals for energy conservation that assisted us in reducing our energy use per square foot by over 40% from FY08 to FY20, saving the campus over \$80 million, and

WHEREAS the iCAP 2020 was developed with broad input from students, faculty, staff, administrators, and community members, and

WHEREAS further steps toward carbon neutrality will require campus-wide support of significant new or additional efforts coordinated across the campus community,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the University of Illinois should reduce its carbon footprint as quickly as possible in order to help prevent devastating climate disruption, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the University of Illinois should take a leadership role by demonstrating how large organizations can effectively eliminate their carbon footprint, and how universities can educate their students on sustainable practices and enable them as future leaders, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Senate recommends that the administration make it a top priority to allocate funding and human resources to the full and rapid implementation of the goals of the Illinois Climate Action Plan 2020 while maintaining the tradition of excellence in scholarly activities that define the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign as a world-leading research and teaching institution.

CAMPUS OPERATIONS

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