

Executive Summary

Climate planning empowers colleges and universities to take responsibility for their contributions to the climate crisis. It builds resilience in the face of increasing threats from extreme weather, wildfire, floods, and other climate-related disasters. As climate plans attempt to address their community's needs, they can either perpetuate existing inequities or help dismantle them.

Rising greenhouse gas emissions, and the resulting extreme weather events, affect us all but fall disproportionately on women, trans and nonbinary people, and Black, Indigenous and people of color. Climate plans must explicitly address these inequities — and their upstream drivers — in order to counteract them.

Not doing so means failing to take care of communities, leaving behind vulnerable populations, unnecessarily increasing pressure on health and social service infrastructure during disasters, and weakening the overall fabric of campus communities.

To learn if college and university climate plans include the disparate harms and underlying causes of the climate crisis, the Center for Biological Diversity reviewed 14 higher education climate plans from colleges and universities across the United States with wildlife mascots. In the wild, many of these species are facing the threat of extinction due to habitat loss and climate change. Climate plans were analyzed for their inclusion of several key issue areas along with often overlooked Scope 3 emissions that intersect with the impacts of the climate crisis.

Three main themes emerged: Equity in climate planning, health and education, and underlying drivers of climate change. The plans were analyzed for the frequency and strength of their inclusion of the following topics: gender, race, vulnerable populations, population growth, consumption, pollution, family planning and sustainability education.

Key Findings

- Considerations of gender and racial inequity are noticeably lacking in university climate plans with only three of the analyzed plans referencing these issues. Reproductive health isn't mentioned in any of the analyzed university climate plans, despite its importance to public health, gender equity and resilience in climate disasters.
- There is an uneven inclusion of upstream actions like lowering consumption, addressing indirect and embedded emissions related to procurement and other campus activities (Scope 3 emissions), or recognizing how population growth affects efforts to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis. Only nine plans note population or growth as a concern. Thirteen plans mentioned consumption.
- The majority of the university climate plans analyzed failed to fully account for health considerations in climate planning through cross-sector partnerships or planning efforts.

There's a growing body of research showing that gender and racial inequity are exacerbated as the climate crisis worsens. The absence of these issues from university climate plans mirrors their lack of representation in municipal climate plans, as seen in the Center's 2022 report, [Gender and the Climate Crisis: Equitable Solutions for Climate Plans](#).

Key Recommendations

By adopting the recommendations below, universities can create comprehensive and effective climate plans that address the multifaceted challenges of climate change and build stronger communities and healthier environments that meet the needs of all populations.

- **Support and invest in comprehensive climate planning.** Universities, along with public and private funders, should support the development, implementation, and more frequent updating of campus climate plans, including funding opportunities that prioritize environmental justice, climate resilience and community

engagement. Climate plans should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect new data, goals and best practices. Some of the plans analyzed in this report were updated within the past year, while other institutions have not updated their climate plans in five to 10 years or more. Climate planning should also include regular reporting about the institution’s progress toward their stated climate goals.

- **Expand education and training on climate, equity and health.** Universities should provide training for faculty, staff, and administrators on the links between climate change, social inequity, and public health, ensuring that climate planning efforts are informed by interdisciplinary knowledge and best practices and work to address the underlying issues.
- **Ensure inclusive and cross-sector climate governance.** Climate planning should include representatives from environmental sustainability, campus operations, and health services, as well as students, staff, and community members who are most affected by environmental harm. Recognizing the interconnected nature of climate, health and equity can help universities design more effective and just climate strategies.

Issue Area	Results
I. Equity in Climate Planning	
Gender	Three of the 14 plans mentioned gender. However, none of the plans included strategies to mitigate gender inequity.
Race	Three of the 14 plans mentioned race. However, none of the plans included strategies to mitigate racial inequity.
Vulnerable populations	Five of the 14 plans mentioned vulnerable populations. Only two included strategies to address disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations.
II. Health and Education	
Pollution	Ten of the 14 plans mentioned pollution. Seven plans included actions to alleviate the effects of pollution.
Family planning	None of the 14 plans mentioned family planning or included actions to improve access to reproductive health resources on campus.
Sustainability education	Thirteen of the 14 plans mentioned environmental or sustainability education. Eight plans included making environmental curriculum available on campus.
III. Underlying Drivers of Climate Change	

Issue Area	Results
Population/ Growth	Nine of the 14 plans mentioned population growth as a concern. Five plans included actions to address the impact of their growing campus population. None acknowledged global population growth.
Consumption	Thirteen of the 14 plans mentioned consumption and included actions to shift energy and food consumption.

