

29 UNIVERSITIES COMMIT TO LOWERING EMISSIONS, ENHANCING ACCESS TO CLIMATE EDUCATION

EVANSTON, Ill.— The U7+ Alliance of World Universities earlier this week issued a [statement](#) declaring their commitment to support the implementation of climate goals coming out of the COP26 conference in Glasgow.

The leaders of 29 universities from 12 countries said that the Alliance “recognizes that climate change is a global challenge that presents serious threats to natural environments, human health, security and economic stability.”

“We’re encouraged by the growing commitment on the part of major universities around the world to addressing climate change,” Northwestern University President Morton Schapiro said. “We have a shared duty to help confront this challenge head-on, through education, leadership and breakthrough innovation.”

The Alliance also emphasized the disproportionate impact climate change is having on vulnerable communities, leading to displacement, lost livelihoods, food insecurity and adverse health impacts — and the need to engage youth.

“Universities are extraordinarily well poised to surface solutions to the global challenges the youth they serve will inherit, as institutions sitting at the crossroads of disciplines, generations and cultures,” said Annelise Riles, Associate Provost for Global Affairs and Executive Director of the Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs at Northwestern University. “The U7+ Alliance can take coordinated action to bring scientific evidence to the fore of efforts to address the climate crisis and its [disproportionate impacts](#) on historically marginalized communities.”

The signatories reaffirmed their commitment to two actions introduced at the inaugural U7+ Summit Sciences Po hosted in Paris in 2019.

First, ensuring that students have access to courses related to sustainability, climate and biodiversity by taking the following actions :

- Take stock of existing courses with sustainability-related content and make the findings of these inventories a more accessible resource for student bodies
- Develop sustainability pathways — clusters of courses and co-curricular activities with a common theme of sustainability that allow students to explore the theme from various disciplinary, methodological and practical perspectives
- Engage students in discussions on sustainability that recognize a diversity of perspectives and needs



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Secondly, working to reduce university-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by taking the following actions :

- Measure emissions from owned sources as well as purchased electricity, heat and steam: benchmark energy consumption and GHG emissions to determine where opportunities for improvement exist
- Commit to energy and GHG emission reduction targets and publish plans to meet these targets
- Review and evaluate progress toward GHG emission reduction targets to determine and communicate results to stakeholders
- Begin developing approaches to estimating, benchmarking and ultimately addressing Scope 3 emissions, such as business travel, employee commuting, waste disposal, purchased goods and services

Since it was [elected as the first Secretariat of the U7+ Alliance](#), Northwestern has rallied member universities around the world on a range of issues, including climate change.

The [University of Toronto](#) has championed U7+ Principle 3 in collaboration with the [University of Edinburgh](#) and [Université PSL](#) since 2019. Working with colleagues across the alliance, they developed a set of recommendations on universities' role in addressing climate change and contributing to sustainability, which all U7+ Presidents signed on to. This commitment to collective action will ensure that more students have access to sustainability courses, and that all members pursue ambitious action plans and targets to reduce and offset GHG emissions.

"We are proud to work in collaboration with U7+ partners to take collective action on climate change and enhance sustainability across our institutions," said John Robinson, the University of Toronto's presidential adviser on the environment. "We believe we can make a more substantial impact through a unified approach and know universities have a crucial role to play in the fight against climate change. We have a responsibility to our students and communities to work towards a more sustainable future."

Student voices

[University College London](#) in recent months has hosted the [U7+ Worldwide Student Forum 2021](#) where students produced [reports](#) stressing that climate change should be tackled through an intergenerational lens. The forum included 94 student delegates representing 24 U7+ Alliance universities. Students provided innovative ideas under five key themes:

1. How can the voices and opinions of student sustainability leaders be turned into/influence global government/intergovernmental strategies?
2. How can universities encourage and educate students to embrace sustainability in their actions and take the pledge to be net zero over the next decade?
3. How can universities contribute to a transition towards degrowth and environmental justice?
4. How can we commit our societies to goals that could take many generations?
5. How can university research around climate change and sustainability be brought to the forefront in political and corporate decision making?

Students recommended that universities include a compulsory course on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. To translate their research into action, the students proposed universities need



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to find ways to connect the academic, corporate and political spheres on the topic of climate change. Students also suggested universities provide academics with courses on policymaking and urged that more focus should be placed on communicating complex scientific ideas in ways that explain their relevance and understand that overly technical language could be a barrier to collective understanding.

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