Climate Action

Expiry: April 30, 2027

1. Preamble

The planet is at a tipping point. For decades scientists, world leaders, and the general public have known about the risks presented by climate change and yet little substantive action has been taken to address the crisis. As a result, we now find ourselves in a precarious situation where we must take radical action to not only prevent the climate crisis but respond to the impacts that are inescapable and threaten our collective future.

The scientific community agrees almost unanimously that climate change is real and poses the risk of extinction. Multiple reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) including their latest report “Climate Change 2021:The Physical Science Basis”, paint a bleak picture of the future. Their work confirms that unless radical change is taken to alter our political, economic, and social systems, climate change will continue to run rampant threatening not only the ‘natural world’ but human survival.
In 2019, protests in Edmonton to counter climate change grew exponentially, with an event in October reaching up to 10,000 protestors, most of whom were young people and thousands of which were UofA students. This coupled with increasing climate anxiety on campus demonstrates a clear interest in climate justice at UofA.

While climate change impacts us all, the Students’ Union recognizes that climate change disproportionately impacts Indigenous students and their communities. Colonial institutions including the University of Alberta and the Students’ Union have developed infrastructure, social systems, and systems of consumption that damage the environment and desecrate the land. This negatively impacts minority and Indigenous communities as the climate crisis is an intersectional problem tied in with race, class, ability, and gender among other things.

Because of the nature of this crisis, students, particularly those from adversely impacted communities, often find themselves at the frontlines of fighting against the climate crisis. This means that the Students’ Union and the University have a moral responsibility to help tackle the climate crisis.

This policy has been created by the Students’ Union to ensure that climate justice is a priority for all our elected representatives in the years to come.

2. Definitions

1. **Sustainability:** Sustainability is the process of living in a reciprocal relationship with the environment, including all living and nonliving entities and the systems they inhabit. In light of the climate crisis, sustainability efforts must recognize the environment's foundational role in human systems, and work toward countering these systems when oppressive to people --particularly when they result in unjust and unequal damage to frontline communities-- or the environment. Sustainability values treaties as a framework for reciprocal relationships and recognizes the degradative actions of the settler state. Indigenous peoples’ place-based knowledge is valued in guiding accountability to future generations, and ensuring that our actions will not harm future generations. Finally, when working toward sustainability the Students’ Union must understand that its actions reach beyond campus, as sustainability affects not only students but the communities from which they come.[1]
2. **Climate Justice:** Goes beyond sustainability. “As a form of environmental justice, climate justice is the fair
treatment of all people and the freedom from discrimination in the creation of policies and projects that address climate change as well as the systems that create climate change and perpetuate discrimination.”[2]

3. **Climate Action:** Often refers to the UN's 13th Sustainable Development goal “Climate action means stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to
climate-induced impacts, including: climate-related hazards in all countries; integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.”[3]
4. **IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.** This group works under the United Nations and is a
leading authority on the climate catastrophe.

3. Facts

1. Climate change is an existential crisis to all students, as it threatens not only future generations but our ability to live comfortable lives:
   - Climate change is happening, this is an undeniable fact;
   - Numerous scientists and academics now recognize that we are living in the Anthropocene. “the Anthropocene Epoch is an unofficial unit of geologic time, used to describe the most recent period in Earth’s history when human activity started to have a significant impact on the planet’s climate and ecosystems”;[4]
   - The Anthropocene is marked by the mass extinction of hundreds of species. This has led many to claim that we are living through the 6th mass extinction;[5]
   - Students come to University to build a future. The existential threat caused by climate change makes the climate crisis a student issue.
2. “Climate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe with human influence contributing to many observed changes in weather and climate extremes”:[6]
   - Nations within the Global South face much higher vulnerabilities to the threats of climate change due to geographical location, geopolitical situation and infrastructure limitations;
   - The worst global emitters per capita are from the Global North. With Canada ranking among the top nations in the world for GHG emissions despite our small population;[7]
   - For nations in the global South to best prepare for these impacts, they have had to build infrastructure for which they currently have no funding;
   - In light of the disparities between the North and South, many Global South nations have begun to ask for climate reparations to account for economic barriers to mitigation and adaptation. [8]
3. Climate migration is an increasing reality for many people in heavily affected nations, where they may migrate internally or externally to seek areas less affected by climate change:
   - For example “many of the Philippine coastal regions, including the Manila Bay area, could find themselves underwater if countries fail to mitigate the effects of climate change." [9] This could result in millions of Filipinos seeking refuge in Canada. The situation is similar in many coastal or island nations;
   - While migration is positive, refugee crises are a strain on host nations and traumatic for those who are refugees.
4. In 2019, a study titled Canada’s Changing Climate Report (CCCR) found that Canada was warming at twice
the global average, with Canada’s North warming at three times the global average.[10] These events will and have negatively impacted students and their families. This warming will and has already resulted in the following:
   - Increases in precipitation, particularly in the winter;
   - Wildfires;
   - Water supply shortages, particularly in the summer;
   - A heightened risk of coastal flooding.
5. In 2015 the Paris Agreement was signed by the Canadian government. This agreement represents a commitment to limit the global temperature increase to below 2 degrees celsius, if not 1.5 degrees celsius.
   Part of Canada’s agreement included reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent below 2005

levels
by 2030.

- In July 2021, Canada submitted a stronger Nationally Determined Contributions target. It will now cut emissions by at least 40-45% below 2005 levels by 2030, up from the previous target of 30% (incl. LULUCF).[11] While stronger (the quality of NDCs has increased and implementation is addressed more comprehensively), the target still falls short of the at least 54% domestic reduction (excl. LULUCF) needed to be Paris compatible. [12]
- In a NDC Synthesis Report from February 2021, the UN notes that "the level of ambition communicated through these NDCs indicates that changes in total emissions would be small, less than -1%, in 2030 compared to 2010. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), by contrast, has indicated that emission reduction ranges to meet the 1.5°C temperature goal should be around -45% in 2030 compared to 2010." [13]
- It is standard practice and important for politicians to be held accountable for their commitments. This includes their commitments to address the climate crisis. [14]

6. According to Environment and Climate Change Canada:
   - In 2017, Canada emitted 716 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent;
     - The oil and gas sector was the largest source of emissions, accounting for 27% of national emissions,
     - The transportation sector was the second-largest source of emissions, accounting for 24% of national emissions [15]
     - Buildings, electricity, heavy industry, agriculture and waste are also large emitters, with each one emitting between 6% and 12%,
     - Initiatives to lower emissions must target every carbon-intensive sector,
   - Alberta leads Canadian provinces in greenhouse gas emissions, representing 38% of national emissions.
7. Alberta can attribute much of its economic prosperity to the energy industry, particularly oil and natural gas:
   - The mining and oil and gas extractive industries accounted for 6.1% of total employment in Alberta in 2017. [16]
   - Employment in this industry is expected to grow at an average rate of 1% from 2019 to 2023. [17]
   - Members of the oil and gas industry have invested in green technology aimed at reducing emissions such as cogeneration and carbon capture. [18]
8. "Green Jobs" are becoming increasingly popular among those working in unsustainable industries and provide a practical solution to the job loss that might be caused by a movement away from fossil fuels in an effort to prevent the runaway impacts of climate change:
   - The climate crisis will threaten student job prospects;
   - No one should have to choose between making a living and working in a job that is causing environmental destruction.
9. In August of 2019, the City of Edmonton declared a climate emergency and committed to actionable steps
   to reduce the city's greenhouse gas emissions. [19]
10. Throughout 2019, protests in Edmonton to counter climate change grew exponentially, with an event in October reaching up to 10,000 protestors. [20]
11. As of December 2024, 558 Post Secondary Institutions, not including the University of Alberta, have committed to joining the UN Environment Programme's, the EAUC's & Second Nature's Race to Zero for Colleges and Universities. The Race to Zero is a global campaign that seeks to rally climate leadership and action in post-secondary institutions. Institutions that commit to the Race to Zero must: [21]
    - Pledge to reach net-zero as soon as possible;
    - Create both short and long-term plans to achieve net-zero;
    - Take action to achieve their net-zero plan; and
    - Commit to annually report publicly both progress towards short and long-term goals, and actions being taken to reduce carbon emissions.

12. In light of the climate crisis and investing in a greener future, various post-secondary institutions across Canada have chosen to divest from fossil fuels over the last year. [22]
    - This includes other U15 schools such as UBC. In 2019 “The University of British Columbia (UBC) Board of Governors unanimously passed a resolution supporting full divestment of fossil fuels from UBC’s Trek Endowment Fund in a manner that is consistent with the fiduciary obligations of the Board. The Board also unanimously passed a motion approving in principle the full divestment of the remaining balance of the $1.71 billion Main Endowment Fund from the fossil fuel industry”;
    - Harvard also recently divested from fossil fuels. [23]
13. The University of Alberta is invested in non-renewable resources:
    - The University holds at least $65 million in stocks that include international fossil fuel prospecting, extraction, refining, transportation, and/or power generation. [24]
14. Climate change is a symptom of the colonial system and the desecration of the earth is a form of colonial violence:
    - Colonial institutions including the University of Alberta and the Students’ Union have developed infrastructure, social systems, and education systems in a way that damages the environment and negatively impacts minority and Indigenous communities, as a result, students from these communities may find themselves at the frontlines of fighting against the climate crisis;
    - Free, prior, and informed consent is a specific right that pertains to Indigenous people, this right has not always been afforded to communities and is still being fought for in Canada and around the world; [25]
    - Indigenous communities are not monolithic, and different opinions on projects exist within them;
    - Many nations within Treaty 6 and across other numbered treaties affirm that they did not cede sub-surface extraction rights within the signing of their Treaty;
    - Indigenous control of traditional territory is central both to community resilience and to environmental protection.
15. The Students’ Union and many of its representatives have in the past few years shifted the tone on its land
    acknowledgements to recognize that the land was ceded unfairly and unlawfully:
    - If land acknowledgements recognize the theft of land, it is also natural for them to call for the return of that land to the communities it was stolen from;
    - Land Back is an important part of climate justice.
16. In 2021 the IPCC released a new report called “Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis”. This report outlines a bleak future for the planet and calls on all of us to make radical changes to prevent extreme temperatures: [26]
    - The report confirmed once again that it is “unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land. [Causing] [w]idespread and rapid changes in the atmosphere, ocean, cryosphere and biosphere”;
    - The report confirms that some aspects of the climate crisis are irreversible and will have a detrimental impact;
    - The report also outlines potential mediation scenarios. These scenarios include;
        - Stabilizing greenhouse gases around 450 ppm CO2-eq or lower. But “[g]iven that we are currently around 430 CO2-eq, this is a tall order, requiring large-scale changes in energy systems and land use”,
        - The report states that “the costs of mitigation only offset a relatively small fraction of global projected economic growth for the 21st century”,
        - “Continuing on the pathways consistent with the Cancún pledges is more consistent with scenarios likely to keep temperature change below 3 degrees C relative to pre-industrial levels”,
        - “If we do not strengthen mitigation efforts between now and 2030, it will be more difficult and more expensive to achieve warming targets, such as avoiding 2 degrees of warming relative to pre-industrial levels”.

4. Resolutions

1. The Students' Union will advocate for the University to declare a climate emergency.
2. The Students' Union will advocate for the creation of an Indigenous-led climate action plan.
3. The Students' Union will advocate for and support Indigenous-led climate action projects and research that are led by students and/or involve students. These projects should be funded through:
    - The University of Alberta; and
    - All levels of government.
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    - The University of Alberta; and
    - All levels of government.
5. The Students' Union will advocate for the University of Alberta and the University of Alberta Properties Trust Inc. to return private land trusts to the Indigenous communities who traditionally lived on those territories:
    - The Students' Union will advocate for full Indigenous control of that land, and where communities seek to co-manage those lands, the Students' Union will support those wishes.
6. The Students' Union will support student efforts for the University of Alberta to divest from all fossil fuel corporations:
    - The Students' Union will call upon the University of Alberta Pension Plan to divest from all fossil fuel corporations.
7. The Students' Union will advocate for the provincial government to recognize the immediate and urgent need for action that will limit global warming to 1.5 C.
8. The Students Union will advocate for all levels of government to take action to address the climate crisis until a point at which it is not an existential threat to students.
9. The Student Union will advocate for the University to prioritize climate action. This includes:
    - Incorporating climate action into their strategic plans and other long term initiatives;
    - Advocating for the University to create a plan to be carbon neutral by 2030;
    - Advocating for the University to join the Race to Zero for Colleges and Universities; and
    - Consulting with students who are disproportionately impacted by climate change, particularly Indigenous Students.
10. The Students' Union will advocate for the University to reduce and ban all single-use plastics on all its campuses by 2027 at the latest:
    - The Students Union will advocate for this to be done in a way that accommodates complex accessibility issues.
11. The Students' Union will call on the City of Edmonton to reduce and ban all single-use plastics on all its campuses by 2027 at the latest:
    - The Students Union will advocate for this to be done in a way that accommodates complex accessibility issues.
12. The Students Union will advocate for the University of Alberta to go zero waste in their events, programming, and services by 2027 at the latest:
    - The Students Union will advocate for this to be done in a way that accommodates complex accessibility issues.
13. The Students' Union will reserve the right to support student-run climate action groups in their efforts:
    - Efforts supported must align with the definitions of climate justice and climate action defined above.

5 References

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domestic pathways.
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