

## ESF Sustainability Committee

### **Charge, Structure, and Background**

April 27, 2016

#### Overall Committee Purpose

The Sustainability Committee will be comprised of ESF faculty, staff, and students, and replaces the College's previous Campus Climate Change Committee. The Sustainability Committee will plan, guide, develop, monitor, and evaluate ESF's efforts related to sustainability as defined and measured by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) and their industry standard STARS framework (*Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System*). For the purposes of this Committee's work, sustainability includes climate action and resiliency.

#### Specific Charge

- Collaborate with the College's Sustainability Office regarding preparation and review of ESF's sustainability reports, including AASHE's STARS, NYS REV Campus Challenge, Princeton Review's "Green Colleges Ranking," Second Nature's Climate Commitment, Sierra Club's "Cool Schools Ranking," and others;
- Recommend and monitor practices intended to improve sustainability\* in College operations—this includes achieving the highest level of accreditation according to the AASHE STARS (*Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment and Rating System*) framework, working toward carbon neutrality in an accelerated fashion, and an increased focus on resiliency;
- Interact with the College's Committee on Curriculum and other academic units within ESF with the purpose of further developing and integrating sustainability into curriculum, service- and experiential-learning, extra-curricular, research, and other scholarly activities;
- Uphold ESF's specific climate commitments as a signatory with *Second Nature*<sup>1</sup> and the White House;
- Develop, update, and oversee the implementation of policies relating to sustainability at the College (new or modified policies would need final approval from College leadership);
- Advise, assist, and promote the development of sustainability reports and updates, and help implement the College's Sustainability Plan, Climate Action Plan, and other related plans;
- Formally liaise with, and advise the College's Physical Plant and Facilities Department, and Capital Planning Committee on matters related to sustainability;
- Work with the College's outreach and communication functional areas to continue to develop communication, marketing, engagement, and outreach strategies focused on sustainability to internal and external stakeholders and organizations, as well as other communities and organizations;

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<sup>1</sup> See background section in this document, and <http://secondnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Climate-Commitment-Second-Nature.pdf>

- Review and approve Green Campus Initiative (GCI) Student Sustainability Fund projects, and other related funding efforts as appropriate; and
- Oversee other matters related to campus sustainability as appropriate.

Notes: (\*) For the purposes of this document, ESF upholds the definition of sustainability as agreed upon internally at ESF in 2011, and as described below. ESF also adheres to the definitions of sustainability provided by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. As noted, for the purposes of this Committee, sustainability also includes progress toward carbon neutrality, resiliency, and a focus on climate action.

### Committee Structure and Composition

#### Structure:

The College Sustainability Committee will be led by a Steering Committee, and organized around seven working groups / subcommittees (other working or task-oriented groups might be formed in the future). Most of these working groups align with the categories embedded within the STARS reporting framework. Currently planned working groups include Energy, Food, Land, Materials (solid waste, “green” purchasing, etc.), Mobility (transportation, accessibility, etc.), and Water. In addition, there will be an overarching Communication and Engagement Subcommittee. An additional subcommittee might be formed around the issues of climate and greenhouse gas emissions.

The Sustainability Committee reports directly to the President’s Office, but also has responsibility to report its activities to, and engage with the Executive and Full Cabinets. It interacts closely with Academic Governance (including the Committee on Curriculum), Academic Council, the Student Associations, and the newly-formed Capital Planning Committee. [See diagram—solid lines depict formal reporting roles, dotted lines represent collaboration obligations.]



**Steering Committee Membership:**

The Steering Committee of the Sustainability Committee will be comprised of the following voting members:

- 2 Co-chairs: One will be the ESF Executive Director of Sustainability, and the other a member of the faculty as elected by the committee.
- 6-8 Faculty Members: These will be appointed in consultation with Academic Governance leadership (one of these faculty members will become the Committee Co-chair).
- 5 Students – This includes three undergraduate and two graduate students.
- 6-8 Staff Members – This could include representatives from CSEA, management confidential, Police, Research Foundation, and UUP. At least two of these positions will be for Physical Plant and Facilities and one of those should be the College’s Energy Manager. Potential UUP members will be appointed in consultation with Academic Governance leadership.
- Additional members (staff and students) working in the College’s Sustainability Office (including its Executive Director).
- In the future, it may be necessary to add one or more “community members” external to ESF.

**Working Group / Subcommittee Membership:**

Members from the Steering Committee will be asked to be one of two Co-chairs of each working group / subcommittee. The membership of the working groups / subcommittees, including the second Co-chair, will come from the College community (volunteers).

**Other Issues to be Determined by the Steering Committee:**

- Frequency of Steering Committee meetings;
- The potential need for term limits of members; and
- How to best engage and interact with other ESF clubs and organizations such as GCI, Bicycle Safety Committee, and others.

**Background: ESF’s Commitments to Sustainability and Climate Change****ESF’s Commitment to Sustainability as Stated in 2016 Strategic Plan Update:**

“Sustainability is central to ESF’s mission. This, as well as an evolving understanding of its many dimensions, causes the College to continuously undertake a full-scale evaluation of its sustainability commitment.

In 2011, ESF framed its re-accreditation assessment around sustainability. The College proclaimed that “Sustainability begins with an obligation to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs through:

- the understanding of basic functions of natural and social systems;
- acknowledging and quantifying the limitations of nature's capacity; and
- developing solutions through the integration of social, economic, technological, and environmental systems.

This refers to the long-term viability of a system with regard to economic, social, and environmental goals and constraints.

One of ESF's important efforts remains quantifying its commitments and actions over time, and benchmarking against other colleges and universities to stay informed and to lead with best practices. ESF commits to an annual cycle of assessment, planning, and implementation, guided by the industry-standard for measuring campus sustainability: STARS—Sustainability Tracking and Rating System. By 2020, ESF will move from its present Gold STARS rating to Platinum status – the highest level – and as a component of this, realizing carbon neutrality.<sup>2</sup>

ESF also recognizes that sustainability uniquely involves linking academic and physical operations of the institution for the purpose of mutually beneficial interactions. The campus as a “living laboratory” is an example of this; as such, the College will improve teaching and research by opening up operations and processes. Ultimately, this will result in the intellectual might of the College community continuously improving physical and social operations of the College, including reducing costs.

In addition to these specific goals, however, ESF recognizes that the lands it resides on are the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee peoples. The internalization of this recognition gives us pause, and transforms us in ways still not yet fully explored or explained. Thus, we also commit to something different—something a list of quantifiable targets cannot always fully express.

- We commit to be responsible caretakers, and responsible neighbors; to be co-inhabitants of these lands, and those far beyond and across our planet Earth.
- We commit to remember and learn from those who came before us—to learn from other species with whom we share (and owe) our existence.
- We commit to take pause and listen, to think about what world we would like to leave for those who come after us—to seek consent, to act bravely, and to tread more lightly.

We hope our commitment inspires others and our own community to take a long-term view, and act as if we are all indigenous to this Planet, our home—as if we intend to stay, and co-exist here, together.<sup>3</sup>”

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<sup>2</sup> In the coming year (2016), a priority of ESF's Sustainability Office is to work closely with Physical Plant's new energy management team, to update ESF's Climate Action Plan and set a new timeline for achieving a carbon neutral goal.

<sup>3</sup> Slightly modified: from ESF's White House Climate Action Pledge, in preparation for the UN Paris Climate talks.

**ESF's Climate Leadership Commitment (as stated in *Second Nature*)<sup>4</sup>:**

"We, the undersigned presidents and chancellors of colleges and universities, believe firmly in the power, potential, and imperative of higher education's key role in shaping a sustainable society. Not only are we deeply concerned about the increasing pace and intensity of global climate change and the potential for unprecedented detrimental impacts, but we also understand that technology, infrastructure, global interconnectedness, and our greatest asset – engaged, committed, smart students – allow us to explore bold and innovative solutions and to lead in climate action and sustainable solutions.

We have begun to experience the effects of climate change in our communities and we understand that these effects are projected to become more severe and damaging. We recognize that mitigation and adaptation are complementary strategies for reducing the likelihood of unmanageable change, managing the risks, and taking advantage of new opportunities created by our changing climate.

We believe colleges and universities must exercise leadership in their communities and throughout society by providing the knowledge, research, practice, and informed graduates to create a positive and sustainable future. Along with other aspects of sustainability, campuses that address the climate challenge by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and by integrating resilience into their curriculum, research, and campus operations will better serve their students and meet their social mandate to help create a vital, ethical, and prosperous civil society.

We further believe that exerting leadership in addressing climate change will reduce our long-term energy costs and the costs of climate disturbance, increase our quality of life, attract excellent students and faculty, and build the support of alumni and local communities. We have resolved to take action with the following Climate Leadership Commitments. We believe carbon neutrality and resilience are extremely high priority areas of action for all institutions and we aim to lead the nation in these efforts. We urge others to join us in transforming society towards a sustainable, healthy, and more prosperous future."

**ESF's Specific Climate Commitment as a Signatory with *Second Nature*<sup>5</sup>:**

"This Climate Commitment integrates carbon neutrality with climate resilience and provides a systems approach to mitigating and adapting to a changing climate.

**1. *Develop a comprehensive Climate Action Plan***

- a. Within two months of signing this document, create internal institutional structures to guide the development and implementation of the Plan;

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<sup>4</sup> <http://secondnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Climate-Commitment-Second-Nature.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://secondnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Climate-Commitment-Second-Nature.pdf>

- b. Within one year of the implementation start date, actively support a joint campus-community task force (or equivalent) to ensure alignment of the Plan with community goals and to facilitate joint action, and complete a greenhouse gas emissions inventory, also identifying near term opportunities for greenhouse gas reduction. Report these in the first annual evaluation of progress;
  - c. Within two years of the implementation start date, lead and complete an initial campus-community resilience assessment including initial indicators and current vulnerability;
  - d. Within three years of the implementation start date complete the Plan (also reflecting joint community-campus components), which will include:
    - A target date for achieving carbon neutrality as soon as possible,
    - A target date by which defined thresholds of resilience will be met,
    - Interim target dates for meeting milestones that will lead to carbon neutrality and increasing resilience,
    - Mechanisms and indicators for tracking progress (including those that cut across campus-community boundaries),
    - Actions to make carbon neutrality and resilience a part of the curriculum and other educational experiences for all students, and
    - Actions to expand research in carbon neutrality and resilience.
2. *Review, revise if necessary, and resubmit the climate action plan not less frequently than every five years*
  3. *Submit an annual evaluation of progress*
  4. *Within one year of the implementation start date, and every year thereafter, complete an annual evaluation of progress*
  5. *Make the action plan, annual evaluation of progress (including greenhouse gas inventory, resilience assessment etc.), publicly available by submitting them to Second Nature's reporting system for posting and dissemination"*

#### **ESF's Previous Climate Action Plan Commitment (September 15, 2009)<sup>6</sup>:**

"SUNY ESF is committed to expanding sustainability efforts on campus, in the local community, and beyond. Two fundamental prerequisites of a sustainable and prosperous human society are a healthy environment and a stable climate. Greenhouse Gas (GHG) air pollution and the climatic disruption it contributes to are a threat to sustainable human prosperity and all life on earth. In 2007 ESF became a charter signatory of the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, 'a high-visibility effort to address global warming by garnering institutional commitments to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions' (ACU-PCC, 2009). ESF President Dr. Cornelius B. Murphy has set a target date of June 30th, 2015 for achieving

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.esf.edu/sustainability/ECN2015.pdf>

institution-wide carbon neutrality. ESF students, faculty, staff, and administration have united to craft a unique and creative plan for reducing campus GHG emissions & energy use. The findings of this analysis indicate that ESF is on-track to meet its carbon neutral commitment and is well positioned to emerge a leader in campus sustainability & climate action.”

“Building on the growing momentum for leadership and action on climate change, the President’s Climate Commitment provides a framework and support for America’s colleges and universities to go climate neutral. The Commitment recognizes the unique responsibility that institutions of higher education have as role models for their communities and in training the people who will develop the social, economic and technological solutions to reverse global warming.” – (ACU-PCC, 2009)

### **Acknowledgments**

The College sincerely appreciates the efforts of the previous Campus Climate Change Committee; whose recent members include:

- Neal Abrams – Faculty, Chemistry
- Emily Bielejec – Previous Undergraduate Student, GCI President
- Douglas Daley – Faculty, Environmental Resources Engineering (ERE)
- Robert Davis – Director of Forest Properties
- Theodore Endreny – Chair/Professor, ERE
- Susan Fassler – Previous Graduate Student, Environmental Studies (ES)
- Melissa Fierke – Faculty, Environmental and Forest Biology (EFB)
- Charlie Hall – Faculty, EFB
- Justin Heavey – Sustainability Office, Previous Graduate Student, Forest and Natural Resources Management (FNRM)
- David Johnson – Professor, Chemistry
- Michael Kelleher – Previous Director of Renewable Energy Systems, Faculty, FNRM
- Cornelius Murphy – Immediate Past President (ESF), Faculty, ERE
- Paul Otteson – Staff, Communications
- Alex Poisson – Sustainability Coordinator, Student, ES
- Steve Shaw – Faculty, ERE
- Richard Smardon – Faculty, ES
- Jennifer Smith – Faculty, Sustainable Construction Management and Engineering
- Tim Sweet – Director of Energy and Computing Management (SU)
- David VanTress – Staff, Physical Plant
- Timothy Volk – Faculty, FNRM
- Andrea Webster – Previous Graduate Student, ES