



## **Climate Justice Action Committee**

### **Report to the Faculty Senate: March 2022**

This 2021-2022 academic year marked the first time that the Climate Justice Action Committee was a standing committee of the Faculty Senate. The committee was created in response to a specific recommendation of the 2020-2021 ad-hoc Climate Justice Action Committee.

The committee met regularly from October through March to review information, to discuss challenges and opportunities for climate justice action and to gain insights from meetings with a diverse array of key constituents. The committee met with representatives from Campus Facilities, Real Estate and Campus Planning, the Sustainability Office, the Vice- Provost for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, student leadership of environmental and sustainability student organizations, the newly appointed Executive Director of the Sustainability and Climate Justice Hub, the Director of the Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy at the School of Law, and the Chief of Environment, Energy, and Open Space for the City of Boston. The committee also conducted other forms of research to support its findings and recommendations.

#### **Committee Members:**

**Sonia E. Rolland**, Co-Chair, Professor of Law (School of Law)

**Jennie C. Stephens**, Co-Chair, Director, School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs; Dean's Professor of Sustainability Science and Policy (College of Social Science and Humanities)

**Sarah Kanouse**, Associate Professor (College of Arts, Media and Design)

**Elizabeth M. Glowacki**, Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Health Sciences (Bouvé College of Health Sciences) and the Department of Communication Studies (College of Arts, Media and Design)

**Auroop R. Ganguly**, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering (College of Engineering)

#### **Committee Charge:**

1. Develop a definition of climate justice action within the global university such as Northeastern,
2. Develop a communication strategy for climate justice
3. Provide recommendations to update and expand on the University's 2010 Climate Action Plan by including modifications that emphasize a university-wide commitment to climate justice action.
4. Implement specific steps to enable Northeastern to operationalize climate justice action, including suggestions on specific mechanisms for climate justice action to align with the university's new strategic plan

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### Key Findings and Recommendations:

The climate crisis is the existential threat of this generation of students. Leveraging Northeastern University's capacity to confront the injustices of climate disruptions and facilitate transformation for climate justice and sustainability is both a strategic opportunity and an ethical responsibility. This report includes the committee's response to each of the four specific charges. In addition, the committee recommends the following priorities to strengthen Northeastern's climate justice efforts: articulating leadership, transparent assessment, an inclusive community-engaged approach, and leveraging synergies.

**Leadership:** Elevate climate and environmental justice to a Presidential-level initiative. Other flagship universities in the Boston area and nation-wide have already taken such steps to recognize that responding to the climate crisis with a social justice lens must be part of their core mission going forward. Climate justice action impacts every aspect of the university as well as relationships with the communities in which we are geographically embedded. Demonstrating strength in this area requires the highest level of leadership and commitment for consistency throughout the global university network.

**Assessment:** Assess university policies and activities for their climate justice impact through transparent qualitative and quantitative metrics, including STARS rating and reporting, and curriculum mapping leveraging the framing of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); develop accountability mechanisms to ensure progress towards the realization of climate justice goals.

**Inclusive Engagement:** Develop best practices regarding inclusivity within and beyond campus engaging university constituents (faculty, staff, students, alumni) with external partners to take innovative action toward climate and environmental justice. In particular, the university should leverage the value of different modes of communication and contributions, including arts, design, humanities, media, and social sciences. A demonstrated commitment to valuing a transdisciplinary ethically-engaged approach is critical to creating trust for an inclusive and diverse community around climate justice. The university can demonstrate leadership by engaging in inclusive dialogue with surrounding communities, including community organizers, local and state/provincial governments, and Indigenous populations, with special emphasis on historically marginalized populations; under-resourced communities that typically both bear a disproportionate negative impact of university expansion and have the least capacity to avoid or alleviate the resulting hardships.

**Synergies:** Leverage synergies among research, teaching, learning, experiential and administrative activities throughout the university's global network of campuses and communities to increase Northeastern's impact on climate and environmental justice. Improving integration of faculty and student research with curricular and administrative/managerial initiatives and external partnerships will enable Northeastern to demonstrate leadership in the climate justice space.

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### **Context for Climate Justice and Sustainability**

Over a decade ago, Northeastern established itself as a global sustainability leader when it designated sustainability as one of the university's three main research thrusts. As a founding member of the 2007 American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment, the university helped lead a national movement toward carbon neutrality by substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions and implementing green building, energy efficiency, conservation, food waste, and recycling initiatives, among many other notable sustainability operations achievements. Although the university's leadership in this domain was recognized among the Princeton Review's "Green Rating Honor Roll" from 2009 to 2012, during the intervening years sustainability and resilience priorities at Northeastern have lagged compared to others. A review of climate action initiatives in other Boston-area universities demonstrates that while some are continuing to demonstrate leadership, Northeastern is no longer a leader with respect to climate action. Given Northeastern's public commitments to both racial justice and sustainability, and given the growing societal need to link social injustice with climate change, Northeastern has a unique opportunity to be an innovative global leader in climate justice and sustainability.

### **1. Climate Justice Definition**

Climate justice is an approach to climate action that redresses the legacies of exploitation and injustice that have resulted in sharply unequal vulnerabilities to climate risks, both locally and globally. Climate justice action requires transformative systems-level changes that integrate multiple kinds of knowledge linking technological and social innovation in ways that prioritize social, racial, and economic equity.

Within higher education, climate justice action includes committing to a more equitable, inclusive, diverse, and accessible university community and ending fossil fuel reliance within our communities and our global network of campuses. Climate justice also involves expanding our commitment to partnering with and centering the needs of under-invested-in communities and communities of color who continue to be more vulnerable to increasingly frequent and intense climate disruptions and whose health and well-being are disproportionately harmed by fossil fuel use. Partnerships that facilitate the co-design and co-development of innovations building on the many resources and skills within Northeastern are an essential part of climate justice. To be a leader, Northeastern needs to ensure that our strategies and actions are aligned with and responding to the needs and priorities of broader networks of non-academic communities. Prioritizing climate justice is both an opportunity and a responsibility for any university committed to advancing racial justice, sustaining collaborative community relations, and restoring ecosystems.

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### 2. Develop communication strategies for the university community to engage in discussions surrounding climate justice and options for activism

In spring 2022, Northeastern hired a new Executive Director of Northeastern's Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub. This new Hub, to be officially launched with a university-wide event in April 2022, will take on the responsibility for coordinating communication, engagement and action on climate justice and sustainability throughout the university global network. To inform this effort, the table below offers an overview of possible future communications strategies on climate justice focusing on (1) **who** should be included in such communications, (2) **how** to engage in a meaningful and inclusive communication strategy and (3) **what** to include in such communications.

<b>1. Include relevant constituencies and those whose voices have historically been ignored or suppressed to facilitate informed conversations and decision-making regarding climate justice</b>
<b>Administrative centers:</b> Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub, Campus Facilities, Campus Planning & Real Estate, Faculty Senate Committee on Climate Justice Action, Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, Office of the Provost, relevant stakeholders at Northeastern campuses outside of Boston.
<b>Research centers:</b> Any research center working on climate justice, sustainability, equity and social justice or resiliency, including the Burnes Family for Social Change and Innovation, Global Resilience Institute, Institute for Artificial Intelligence, Environmental Justice Research Collaborative, Institute for Experiential Artificial Intelligence, Initiative for Energy Justice, Business Sustainability Initiative, Puerto Rico Testsite for Exploring Contamination Threats, Social Enterprise Institute, Kitty and Michael Dukakis Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy (School of Law), Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) Research centers in non-Boston based NEU campuses should be added as they emerge.
<b>Faculty, staff and student-serving organizations:</b> affinity groups sponsored by OIDI including Social Justice Resource Center, Native and Indigenous affinity groups, Faculty and Staff of Color, NU DREAM, NUBFSA, NU Parents.
<b>Student-led organizations:</b> Canopy, SGA Sustainability, HEAT, Net Impact, NUImpact, UNA Northeastern, Sunrise Northeastern, Wildlife Club, NUSBO, NU ASLA Adapt, Progressive Student Alliance, Engineers without Borders, Cruelty Free, SlowFood NU, Health Scholars for Social Justice, other student organizations at Northeastern campuses outside of Boston.
<b>External outreach:</b> Stakeholders at <u>Boston area higher education institutions</u> (e.g., Roxbury Community College), Boston Green Ribbon Commission, <u>political leadership</u> within NEU cities (City of Boston Department of Environment, Energy, and Open Space, Alternatives for Community and Environment, Boston Climate Action Network, Green Justice Coalition and counterparts in Nahant, Seattle, Charlotte, San Jose, Oakland, Portland, Toronto and Vancouver in Canada, and London, UK), and <u>indigenous populations</u> in campus locations (including the

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Massachusetts Tribe at Ponkapoag, North American Indian Center of Boston, United American Indians of New England)
<b>2. Engage in meaningful university-wide inclusive participation and consultation with stakeholders</b>
<b>Elevate communications regarding campus-wide or community events, organizational initiatives:</b> campus-wide community consultations organized by the Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub should be flagged and significant developments about climate justice work at NEU should be conveyed to the entire university network at the Provost or President level.
<b>Expand communication outreach through the newly formed Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub within and beyond Northeastern:</b> gather and maintain information about active student, staff and faculty groups, form liaisons with various institutional nodes relating to climate and social justice (including diversity and inclusion efforts), updates needed for Northeastern’s sustainability website, cultivate a greater-Boston climate alliance, develop social media outreach and proactive analyses and quantitative data-driven metrics for purposes of tracking and leveraging stakeholder engagement where appropriate, reach out to <i>Boston Globe</i> (seeking input for its “Into the Red” campaign) and find other opportunities for op-eds .
<b>Develop meaningful partnerships with community organizations:</b> Strengthening and growing long-term relationships with communities must be prioritized to build trust and collaboration. These efforts should be centered around the Principles of Ethical Community-Engaged Teaching and Research (co-developed by the Social Impact Lab in the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs in CSSH) should be at the core of these efforts <a href="https://cssh.northeastern.edu/impactlab/sil-principles-for-ethical-community-engaged-teaching-research/">https://cssh.northeastern.edu/impactlab/sil-principles-for-ethical-community-engaged-teaching-research/</a>
<b>Break down the silos of student life, academics, operations/administration</b> <b>Leverage Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub’s sub-groups:</b> Climate justice and equity, Community engagement, Academia, research and campus policy, Greenhouse gas emissions, Buildings and energy, Food, water and waste, Land use and transportation
<b>Focus on transparency, accountability, iterative feedback:</b> construct pathways for feedback internal and external communities and constituencies in surrounding communities.
<b>3. Communicate synergies among operational, research, curricular and community initiatives on climate justice</b>
<b>Link climate justice communications to DEI communications:</b> climate justice is intricately linked to equity issues and historical impacts of racial injustice; climate injustice continues to marginalize communities of color, Indigenous populations and other historically underserved groups.
<b>Showcase faculty and student research on climate justice within Northeastern University and beyond,</b> including coordinating with Communications professionals in schools, colleges, non-Boston campuses and within Northeastern’s central Marketing and Communications office.
<b>Spotlight curricular innovations:</b> student-based/citizen science initiatives (e.g., students measuring gas leak on Forsyth street), Intro to College (e.g., Explore Boston project)

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**Communicate about accessibility to resources and emergency management to underserved communities, vulnerable groups outside of Northeastern** when such resources exist or are being developed within the university.

### **3. Provide recommendations to update and expand on the University's 2010 Climate Action Plan by including modifications that emphasize a university-wide commitment to climate justice action**

Northeastern's current climate action goals were established in 2010 and have not been updated to reflect social or technological innovations or the rapidly changing external context of the worsening climate crisis. The [2010 climate action plan](#) included a short-term goal of a 20% reduction per gross square foot (gsf) in CO<sub>2</sub> output by 2015 using 2005 as our baseline, and a long-term goal of 80% reduction in GHG/SqFT by 2050, an interim goal of 50% by 2025 and striving toward a future of climate neutrality. Although the university has essentially met these goals so far, these 2010 goals were established for a much smaller campus than today's growing campus network. By prioritizing a climate justice lens on future climate action planning, goals must expand beyond the narrow technocratic approach of GHG emission reductions. To demonstrate a commitment to climate justice action planning, the university must link a commitment to reducing fossil fuel reliance with advancing social justice and disrupting systems that are perpetuating economic inequities and racial disparities.

The University's 2010 Climate Action Plan should be updated with the following goals:

1. Set ambitious goals for being a fossil-fuel free university in the near term and accelerate decarbonization efforts by linking investments in renewable energy with investments in local communities.  
Committing the university to strive toward a fossil-fuel-free future is an essential part of climate justice. This includes ending fossil fuel reliance for university operations including electricity, transportation, and heating and cooling of buildings, and also limiting financial support for or from fossil fuel interests, including declining to seek or accept research funding or philanthropic donations from fossil fuel companies or associated individuals.
2. Align leadership on climate justice action planning with the university's 2021 Academic Plan, *Experience Unleashed*. In particular, the next Climate Justice Action Plan should consider (all quotations from Academic Plan):
  - a. Building "deeper and more interactive connections with those who live and work in our campus neighborhoods" to "propose jointly developed learning and research projects" around climate justice;
  - b. Developing pathways for "guided lifelong learning" in the area of green jobs for underrepresented students from our campus network host communities;

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- c. Forging connections with relevant Impact Engines, industry, government, and academic partners;
  - d. Promoting the integration of locally-relevant, experiential climate justice learning opportunities into coursework at all levels, in many disciplines, across the global network.
3. Align climate justice action with university practices around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
4. Collaborate with and hold ourselves accountable to the municipal and state/provincial governments on mutually-identified opportunities for climate justice action in our host communities.
5. Foster impactful interdisciplinary research on climate justice by:
  - a. Creating Impact Engines around climate justice and related matters;
  - b. Inventorying faculty and student research that aligns the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as they pertain to climate;
  - c. Hosting low barrier-to-entry, community-building research events, such as micro-conferences, braindating, hackathons, solution rooms, to help spark new research collaborations around climate justice;
  - d. Providing new funding for a dedicated climate justice research track for all major internal research awards (e.g. TIER, Interdisciplinary Sabbatical Program);
  - e. Creating a dedicated climate justice category for the annual RISE awards.
6. Incentivize the development of innovative, experiential coursework on climate justice by:
  - a. Creating a NUPath Core Category for climate justice;
  - b. Establishing a summer stipend program for interdisciplinary faculty groups to develop team-taught first-year courses that would satisfy the climate justice NUPath requirement;
  - c. Inviting faculty to develop funded experiential learning opportunities around climate justice using university facilities projects as their real-world partner.
    - i. For example, Dr. Sara Wylie, an Associate Professor of Sociology and Health Science, developed a class project with her Community and Public Health students centered on measuring a gas leak on Northeastern's campus. This project not only promotes citizen science and enables students to gain experience with data collection and analysis, but produced important findings on the presence of methane and its harmful effects on honeylocust trees on campus. Given Northeastern's arboreum status and that trees absorb carbon dioxide, it is critical that the campus recognizes and addresses the signs of gas leaks and works toward protecting trees/preventing urban heat islands. Northeastern should also address these climate justice issues within the scope of its surrounding community and think about how it is contributing to the spread of methane, damaged trees, and urban heat islands. Additionally, Dr. Wylie's project serves as a useful

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model for promoting citizen science in the classroom and implementing impactful opportunities for collaboration among faculty, university students and community students. This kind of work can also be used to inform visual communication and media studies initiatives. Visual depictions of data can be helpful for incentivizing audiences to take action and build further routes for collaboration among science and the humanities.

- ii. Other potential examples include a visual studies course working with the campus public art director to commission a climate justice themed mural or installation from a prominent contemporary artist. For example, Dr. Rebekah Moore, Aziza Robinson-Goodnight, and Jordan Rhymer recently presented their work, “Research at the Intersection of Art, Race, and Health Equity” which “highlights an ongoing longitudinal study investigating how and why inclusive participation in the arts constitutes a critical public health intervention on structural racism and its predictive negative health outcomes.” This is part of an ongoing initiative housed in the Institute for Health Equity and Social Justice Research.
7. Elevate the visibility of climate justice action in the university’s communication policy and chain of accountability, as outlined in Section 2 of our report. In particular:
    - a. Communicating campus-wide at the Provost level the new Northeastern Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub and the role of Executive Director Leah Bamberger;
    - b. Designating a contact point in the Provost office for coordinating and reporting of the university’s climate justice activities;
    - c. Improving coordination between the teaching, student life, research and institutional aspects of the university’s activities; and
    - d. Investing the Hub for Climate Justice and Sustainability with accountability for coordinating the diverse stakeholders around climate justice at Northeastern and in the community.
  8. Strive to demonstrate and engage with the principles of ethical community engaged teaching and learning that were co-developed by the Social Impact Lab in the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs in CSSH as described here:

<https://cssh.northeastern.edu/impactlab/sil-principles-for-ethical-community-engaged-teaching-research/>

### **5. Implement specific steps to enable Northeastern to operationalize climate justice action, including suggestions on specific mechanisms for climate justice action to align with the university's new strategic plan**

To operationalize climate justice across the global university network and to align with the university’s new Strategic Plan, **we recommend that the following actions be undertaken in the short and medium-term, at the institutional and at the programmatic levels.** Coordination of these efforts can now be led by Northeastern’s new Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub. This

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section contextualizes the recommendations with overviews of actions being undertaken by other Boston-area universities.

### **4a. Elevate climate justice to senior leadership and appoint a Provost office level position to coordinate and hold accountable university stakeholders involved in climate justice and sustainability activities.**

Several prominent Boston-area universities have positioned their climate work as a presidential-level initiative.

- **MIT's Fast Forward:**
  - *MIT's Climate Action Plan for the Decade was launched in May 2021 after the 2015 Climate Plan's five-year program lapsed. In presenting the initiative, MIT President stated that "[h]umanity must find affordable, equitable ways to bring every sector of the global economy to net-zero carbon emissions no later than 2050."*
  - *The plan commits to net-zero emissions by 2026 and charts a course marshaling all of MIT's capabilities toward decarbonization.*
  - *Reference: <https://climate.mit.edu/climateaction/fastforward>*
- **Boston University:** *In 2017, Boston University's President and Board of Trustees endorsed a resolution proposed by the university's Climate Action Plan Task Force that "in order to increase the University's commitment to and focus on sustainability across teaching, research and operations, the University should develop and incorporate into its Strategic Plan a detailed Climate Action Plan"*
  - *Specifically, the President and Board of Trustees endorsed the following goals:*
    - "A. To adopt the overarching recommendations of the Climate Action Plan with its four-point focus on:*
      - i. 100% reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions directly controlled by the University (Scope 1) and those resulting from the purchase of electricity and steam (Scope 2) by 2040;*
      - ii. Preparing Boston University for climate change;*
      - iii. Focusing on climate change education and research; and*
      - iv. Developing a plan to reduce indirect (Scope 3) emissions.*
    - B. To endorse the University entering into a financially reasonable Power Purchase Agreement in the near term as a major component of the strategy to reduce Scope 2 emissions to zero by 2040, subject to the approval of the Executive Committee.*
    - C. To ask the president to create a plan for incorporating this commitment into the operating and capital budgets and to present this plan at the April 2018 meeting of the Board of Trustees.*
    - D. To ask that the Board of Trustees be updated every five years on the progress of the Climate Action Plan, with the goal of reassessing this commitment as the understanding of climate change, energy, and mitigation continues to evolve."*
  - *Reference: <https://www.bu.edu/president/climate-action-plan-resolution-by-board-of-trustees/>*
- **Harvard's President** *has moved on the recommendation of the Climate Change Task Force and Harvard's Executive Vice President, to "strive to become fossil fuel free by 2050" and in the*

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medium term, to move “towards being fossil fuel neutral by 2026.” The main features of the initiative are:

“- Strengthen and expand our living lab research initiative, bringing together multi-disciplinary teams of students and faculty on our campus and in neighboring communities to pilot innovative and creative solutions to the climate crisis.

- Appoint a new Sustainability Executive Committee composed of faculty, administrators, and students to administer the University’s fossil fuel emissions-reduction strategy and to provide periodic reviews of progress related to our short- and long-term sustainability goals. The Office for Sustainability will support the work of the Committee, continuing its strategic role as a University-wide resource to Harvard’s Schools and departments.

- Undertake a strategic planning process led by Executive Vice President Katie Lapp and Vice President for Campus Services Meredith Weenick with input from Harvard’s Schools to address the ways in which the University can further reduce its reliance on fossil fuels in centrally managed areas, such as electricity procurement, transportation, district energy supply, and capital planning.

- Convene University stakeholders in cross-disciplinary working groups tasked with research and recommendations on key areas including adoption of additional cost-effective energy-efficiency and emissions-reduction opportunities on our own campus, development of a carbon price or surcharge on on-campus fossil fuel energy use, evaluation criteria for high-quality off-site emissions-reduction projects, and guidance for addressing Harvard’s Scope 3 emissions.”

- Reference: <https://green.harvard.edu/campaign/harvards-climate-action-plan>
- **Tufts’** 2013 Strategic plan mentions the challenge of climate change as one of the transformative drivers for the upcoming decade, it was informed by a Sustainability Report and drafted with the involvement of the President’s Sustainability Council. Today, the Campus Sustainability Council is chaired by Executive Vice President Mike Howard, a member of President Anthony P. Monaco’s senior leadership team. It also includes a number of college deans.
  - Reference: <https://sustainability.tufts.edu/sustainability-at-tufts/institutional-environmental-initiatives/sustainability-council/sustainability-council-members/>
- **UMass Boston** established a comprehensive sustainability program as early as 2002. The five-campus UMass have since formalized sustainability efforts and issue annual reports. The UMass Board of Trustees has since passed the UMass System Sustainability Policy, which is a President-level initiative.
  - Reference: <https://www.umassp.edu/reports-and-initiatives/sustainability>
- **Brandeis’** Office of Sustainability explicitly frames its mission as helping to “fulfill Brandeis’ commitment to social justice and its responsibility to the global community by elevating and promoting the sustainability of our campus and our community.” The President’s Task Force on Campus Sustainability developed a new Climate Action Plan in 2020, which is currently under review.
  - Reference: <https://www.brandeis.edu/sustainability/>

By contrast, Boston College deals with sustainability as part of its Facilities Management office. Suffolk University’s “Suffolk 2025” strategic plan Executive Summary and publicly available information do not

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*mention climate change, environmental justice or climate-related equity issues. Simmons University's campus sustainability page is minimal.*

### **4b. Expand an inclusive process for developing a University Climate Justice Action Plan**

The Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub should spearhead the expansion of an inclusive process for developing a Climate Justice Action Plan using inclusive consultative processes and a rigorous transparent tracking and assessment system. This new Climate Justice Action Plan should foreground issues of climate justice within the community in practice, at the institutional level and throughout the university's activities. For impact and effectiveness, this process must involve and engage directly with university senior leadership including university leaders throughout the global network. The university's climate justice action commitments must align with university-wide strategic priorities and investments.

Various organizations have developed comprehensive tracking and assessments systems to assist in measuring progress towards the achievements of climate plan goals. In particular, the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) provides a comprehensive "Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System" (STARS) self-reporting framework. Northeastern has been a member of AASHE since 2008, and submitted a report in May 2021. However, Northeastern is not a rated institution.

Reference: [https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/northeastern-university-ma/report/2021-05-28/#bmreporter\\_status](https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/northeastern-university-ma/report/2021-05-28/#bmreporter_status)

*By comparison, the following Boston-area institutions are reporting and receiving a rating:*

- MIT rating: Gold: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/massachusetts-institute-of-technology-ma/report/>
- Wellesley College rating: Gold: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/wellesley-college-ma/report/>
- Babson College rating: Gold: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/babson-college-ma/report/>
- Emerson College rating: Gold: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/emerson-college-ma/report/>
- Boston University rating: Silver: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/boston-university-ma/report/>
- Bentley University rating: Silver: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/bentley-university-ma/report/>
- Tufts rating: Silver: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/tufts-university-ma/report/>
- Boston College rating: Silver: <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/boston-college-ma/report/>

*Other unrated Boston-area universities include:*

- Wentworth Institute of Technology is reporting, but not rated. <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/wentworth-institute-of-technology-ma/report/>
- Mount Holyoke College is reporting but unrated <https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/mount-holyoke-college-ma/report/>

*Harvard has registered to use the reporting system but has not issued a report.*

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Surveying students and alumni about prioritizing climate justice at Northeastern will likely align with recent surveys:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/06/gen-z-climate-change-careers-jobs>
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/05/26/key-findings-how-americans-attitudes-about-climate-change-differ-by-generation-party-and-other-factors/>

### **4c. Articulate the role of the Office of DEI in coordinating with the Climate Justice and Sustainability Hub**

#### **4d. Facilitate ethical engagement with community stakeholders beyond the university to listen to concerns, liaise and coordinate on climate justice requirements in relation to communities' needs and priorities.**

This includes regional and local governments, civil society groups, local communities, tribal representatives and other interested stakeholders. These interactions should strive to follow the principles of ethical community engagement developed by Northeastern's Social Impact Lab.

#### **4e. Invest in climate justice research**

Budgets are a reflection of values, and research investments incentivize specific areas of research. Climate justice is an area where near-term impactful interventions are critical, so investing in climate justice research is aligned with the university's strategic plan. "Impact engines" in the area of climate justice should be prioritized.

Other funding streams that are pertinent to climate justice efforts include TIER grants and ODEI funding for Faculty innovation grant and others on climate change: <https://provost.northeastern.edu/odei/funding/>

#### **4f. Incentivize integration of teaching and research with university facility projects**

Numerous opportunities exist to advance climate justice work through integration of research, experiential learning, operations and university investments. Integrating the faculty senate climate justice and sustainability committee and climate/sustainability Hub work is essential to leveraging leadership, and continued innovative efforts to break down the traditional silos of student, staff and faculty are needed. For instance, the university leadership could incentivize the development of NUPath for climate justice projects and support team-led classes or modules on climate justice.

#### **4g. Map and Inventory Climate justice and Sustainability Activities throughout the University Network**

Demonstrating leadership in climate justice requires systemic university-wide curriculum mapping and an inventory of climate justice and sustainability activities. The Sustainable Development Goals provide a valuable framework for curricular and research mapping of climate justice and sustainability initiatives across the university network. A key element of such a mapping project

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is to cast a wide enough net to encompass arts and humanities as they play a crucial role in climate justice.

Alongside the SDGs, Voluntary National Reviews are a process through which countries, cities and organizations can measure their progress in achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals. The purpose of these voluntary reviews is to present metrics for where a nation currently stands in relation to the sustainable development goals and to accelerate progress in achieving these goals through sharing experiences, identifying policy gaps, and mobilizing partnerships (OHCHR, 2021).

Despite originating as a global partnership among countries, local municipalities and academic institutions have adopted the SDGs to assess their progression in achieving these goals. Carnegie Mellon University and UC Davis are two of the few universities that have conducted voluntary reviews. CMU's Voluntary University Review was spearheaded by the Sustainability Initiative Steering Committee in efforts to create a snapshot of education, research, and practices that relate to the UN SDGs. Similarly, UC Davis's Voluntary University Review demonstrated the emerging opportunities to connect existing practices to the global SDGs.

### **4f. Fossil fuel Divestment**

Ending fossil fuel reliance is an essential part of climate justice and racial justice. The April 2021 Resolution from the ad hoc Climate Justice Action Planning Committee called for divestment of the university's endowment fund from fossil fuel investments. No action has been taken to date on this aspect of the Resolution. Prominent Boston-area universities have divested their endowment funds from fossil fuel assets. Harvard University moved to divest its \$42 billion endowment from fossil fuels in September 2021, closely followed by Boston University. BU's President Robert A. Brown stated that "[t]his is putting us on the right side of history." Meanwhile, MIT and Boston College continue to face vigorous activism by students and faculty to secure a divestment commitment.

### **4.g Transparency in Fossil Fuel Research Funding and University Leadership**

In addition to divesting from extractive industries so that Northeastern is no longer profiting from continued fossil fuel extraction, a critical component of climate justice action involves refusing to accept fossil fuel research funding and grants from fossil-fuel interests. A first step toward this requires university-wide public transparency in the origins of research funding to enable accountability. In addition, the university should further reduce influence of fossil fuel interests by eliminating direct donations from fossil fuel interests and limiting direct engagement with the former fossil fuel executives on the Board of Trustees. A university committed to climate justice cannot be steered by the same corporate interests that have strategically invested for decades to intentionally exploit vulnerable communities, to confuse the public about the severity of the climate crisis, to slow down the development and deployment of renewable energy, and to accelerate climate change.

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Decades of scientific research reveals clearly that climate change is a direct result of emissions resulting from fossil fuel extraction and combustion for energy, as well as other by-products including plastics and agricultural inputs. A university committed to climate justice resists efforts to suppress information and deliberately misinform about the climate impact of fossil fuels, to prevent just and sustainable transitions at the expense of public health and environmental quality, particularly in communities of color and poor communities. Ethical and responsible university activities also include recognizing that one well-recorded fossil fuel industry strategy to maintain fossil fuel economic interests has been corporate greenwashing, where fossil fuel companies explicitly or implicitly claim to have changed their practices to address their climate and social impacts, including through funding academic research into climate solutions. These industry research investments have been found in practice to slow clean energy development and just transitions, instead institutionally entrenching fossil fuel input and interests and subtly shaping research agendas to suit the interests of the investor at the expense of the broader public.

The existence and success of the fossil fuel industry is predicated on furthering ongoing racially unjust extraction, pollution, and health harms both in the U.S. and internationally. There is substantial documentation that through donations to and investments in political leaders, academic leaders, and certain think tanks, fossil fuel companies have inhibited climate justice by preventing science-based leadership that accounts for the social costs of their operations at all levels of government and are attempting to achieve further ideological dominance in institutions of higher education.

### Key References

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