



# Student Assembly

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## Resolution 20: Climate Renewal Vows

**Abstract:** Recognizing Cornell University's duty to address the global climate crisis, not only as a moral imperative but also due to the tangible and negative impacts of neglecting climate-related issues on its operations, community, and reputation.

**Sponsored by:** Marissa Brucker '26, Jenna Saevitzon '25, Sierra Burror '25, Adam Vinson '25, Lydia Blum '27, Eeshaan Chaudhuri '27, Christian Tarala '27, Eric Yao '27

**Type of Action:** Recommendation

**Originally Presented:** 12/05/2024

**Current Status:** Placed on the Second Readings Calendar, 12/05/2024

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**Whereas,** recent [IPCC reports](#)<sup>1</sup> indicate that human activities have caused approximately 1.1°C of warming since 2011-2020, temporarily exceeding 1.5°C since the pre-industrial period (1850-1900). The past few years have been the hottest on record, and intensifying climate-related catastrophes and increasing pressure on communities, economies, and ecosystems show signs of getting perilously close to the long-term warming limit of 1.5°C outlined in the Paris Agreement;

**Whereas,** these effects are evident in New York State, with [rising temperatures](#)<sup>2</sup> driving driving changes in weather patterns that threaten agriculture, food security, and local economies reliant on stable climatic conditions;

**Whereas,** as a self-proclaimed [leading institution in climate science and sustainability](#)<sup>3</sup>, Cornell University has a unique responsibility to act in alignment with the urgency of the climate crisis, safeguard the rights of students to a habitable future, and equip students with the tools and knowledge to navigate the challenges of the crisis ahead;

**Whereas,** Cornell's current [Climate Action Plan](#)<sup>4</sup> fails to adequately address the urgency of the crisis, as it lacks the bold, comprehensive measures needed to mitigate the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change on the university and broader community;

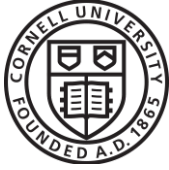
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<sup>1</sup> IPCC reports alarming warming throughout all regions across our planet emphasizing the impacts of humans on environmental degradation and what needs to be done to combat this warming on all levels

<sup>2</sup> The average temperature in the New York State region is expected to increase by about 5 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. Warmer winters and greater heat stress for animals and crops will increase production costs.

<sup>3</sup> Cornell's sustainability assessment score is disproportionately high compared to its initiated actions

<sup>4</sup> Cornell's current climate action plan states that they "aspire to create best practices by demonstrating scalable low-carbon solutions on campus, advancing climate literacy and research initiatives, and accelerating impact through



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25 **Whereas**, prioritizing decarbonization in all future construction projects, reducing the demand  
26 for energy and resources, actively revising campus policies to avoid high-carbon activities, and  
27 ensuring all new construction undergoes rigorous oversight and certification under [Leadership in](#)  
28 [Energy and Environmental Design \(LEED\)](#)<sup>5</sup> standards are critical measures Cornell must  
29 undertake;

30 **Whereas**, ensuring low-carbon, plant-based dining options, food waste donations, and  
31 composting program expansion should be prioritized in dining halls to combat the annual [800](#)  
32 [tons of food scraps](#)<sup>6</sup> and organic kitchen waste generated by Cornell dining halls and cafés,  
33 promote environmentally friendly consumption habits, and align operations with climate goals;

34 **Whereas**, establishing additional composting drop-off sites in high-density student areas, such as  
35 Colletown, Hasbrouck Apartments, and Pleasant Grove Apartments, in partnership with the  
36 Tompkins County Solid Waste Department, could further increase student participation in  
37 composting, reduce organic waste sent to landfills, and support broader waste diversion efforts;

38 **Whereas**, students call for leadership that prioritizes climate initiatives at the forefront, as was  
39 the case with [past university presidents](#)<sup>7</sup> highlighting the need to appoint a full-time president  
40 who prioritizes environmental issues on campus and in the greater Ithaca community, and to  
41 enact broader institutional changes at the highest levels of university governance, including  
42 expanding the Office of Sustainability, assigning a high-level administrator to promote climate  
43 actions on campus, and establishing regular meetings between senior administrators and a  
44 student climate advisory committee to ensure sustained and focused leadership on climate action;

45 **Be it therefore resolved**, Cornell University should adopt the following actions to enhance its  
46 Climate Action Plan and fulfill its obligation to its students, community, and global leadership  
47 role:

- 48 1. **Leadership Commitment:** Seek a full-time university president committed to addressing  
49 campus and community environmental issues, ensuring that sustainability remains a core  
50 institutional priority.

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collaborative partnerships locally and globally.” Locally, they are committed to reducing Ithaca campus’ carbon emissions to net zero by 2035, creating a living laboratory for low-impact behaviors, climate education, and research.”

<sup>5</sup> LEED, a globally recognized rating system for measuring the sustainability of a building, is emphasized as an important piece of consideration among Cornell’s construction initiatives, Cornell must maintain cooperation of these requirements

<sup>6</sup> Cornell currently generates tons of food waste that should get sent to compost sites or food donation programs.

<sup>7</sup> In 2007, Cornell’s president sent out a statement emphasizing his goals as president to focus on Cornell’s climate initiatives and other environmental initiatives



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- 51           2. **Accelerate Decarbonization:** Commit to halving carbon emissions (rather than net zero)  
52           by 2030, and rapid decreases towards zero after that, integrating robust decarbonization  
53           and resource consumption reduction strategies across all new campus construction and  
54           existing infrastructure, without relying on offsetting.
- 55           3. **Restructure for Low-Carbon Living:** Actively shift campus policies and infrastructure  
56           away from high-carbon activities while encouraging low-carbon alternatives, particularly  
57           in dining, transportation, and housing.<sup>8</sup>
- 58           4. **Expand Dining Sustainability:** Expand low-carbon footprint meal options in dining  
59           halls, strengthen food waste donation programs, and expand composting initiatives for  
60           Cornell eateries and dense student living areas to minimize environmental impact.
- 61           5. **Accurate Emissions Reporting:** A comprehensive emissions baseline inventory should  
62           include all significant emission sources, such as methane, to guide equitable and science-  
63           based climate goals.<sup>9</sup>
- 64           6. **Advocate for Climate Equity:** Mobilize academic and community resources to drive  
65           climate resilience, prioritizing the voices of frontline and Indigenous communities in  
66           adaptation efforts.

67   **Be it further resolved,** Cornell University and the Office of Student Government Relations  
68   should commit to advocating for systemic legislative action and inspiring other institutions to  
69   address the climate crisis with urgency (e.g. enhancing energy efficiency in various campus  
70   operations or funding and supporting research specifically searching for climate solutions).

71   **Be it finally resolved,** Cornell University should affirm its responsibility to lead transformative  
72   shifts toward climate justice, ensuring students' rights to a habitable future while protecting the  
73   community from the far-reaching impacts of inaction.

74   **Respectfully Submitted,**

75   Marissa Brucker '26

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<sup>8</sup> Intensive air travel is incompatible with maximum emissions reduction plans, yet Cornell continues to lobby for expansion of the Ithaca airport, which climate scientists have advised against. Viable land public transportation is essential to reducing unnecessary emissions from car travel, yet Cornell fails to provide adequate support for the TCAT bus system. Cornell students compose 75% of ridership, yet the university only makes up 33% of TCAT's annual budget, which has forced the company to cut routes, which harms the larger Ithaca community—to which Cornell does not support in tax dollars.

<sup>9</sup> Current Cornell Baseline Emissions reporting lists methane usage separately from total carbon emissions, which allows them to simultaneously condemn natural gas usage, and makes it appear they emit less than they do by using methane. Cornell has also used this split reporting to claim that they are making more progress towards their climate goals than they are.



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- 76 *Member, Environmental Committee, Student Assembly*
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- 81 Adam Vinson '25
- 82 *Executive Vice President of the Student Assembly*
- 83 Lydia Blum '27
- 84 *College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Representative, Student Assembly*
- 85 Eeshaan Chaudhuri '27
- 86 *Brooks School of Public Policy Representative, Student Assembly*
- 87 Christian Tarala '27
- 88 *Nolan School of Hotel Administration Representative, Student Assembly*
- 89 Eric Yao '27
- 90 *Undesignated Representative At-Large, Student Assembly*