On Campus

Columbia Releases New Campus Sustainability Plan

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Columbia University

Over the past five years, Columbia has significantly reduced its greenhouse-gas emissions by improving the energy efficiency of its buildings, shifting to cleaner power sources, purchasing electric vehicles, and increasing recycling and composting rates.

Now the University has announced an ambitious new plan to further reduce its carbon footprint, with the ultimate goal of achieving net-zero emissions by mid-century. Plan 2030, created in consultation with Columbia climate experts and other scholars and operations specialists, offers a comprehensive set of sustainability strategies that will put Columbia on course to reduce its emissions by another 42 percent by the end of this decade and eliminate or offset them altogether by 2050. Among the plan's specific recommendations are for Columbia to switch entirely to

emission-free electricity, to limit international business travel among faculty and staff, and to send zero waste to landfills.

“Plan 2030 will require transformational change across campuses, schools, and departments,” wrote President Lee C. Bollinger in an e-mail announcing the effort. “Its success is heavily dependent on participation from all of us, at all levels.”

He noted that Columbia’s new sustainability plan aligns with global accords like the Paris Agreement, whose goal is to limit the rise of global temperatures to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels. “It is also driven by a recognition that addressing this crisis is, at its core, about advancing social justice and alleviating the burden on underserved and marginalized communities that are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change,” Bollinger wrote. “The threats posed by the climate crisis demand collective action from our institutions in general and our universities in particular.”

In related news, Daniel Zarrilli, the former chief climate policy adviser to New York City mayor Bill de Blasio ’87SIPA, has joined Columbia as a special adviser on climate and sustainability issues. In this role, he will work closely with Columbia officials on efforts to achieve the University’s decarbonization goals.



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