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Contact: Ulli Klein,
617-722-0036 ext. 206, uklein@secondnature.org

New Report Finds Higher Education Has Critical Role in Adapting to Changing Climate

BOSTON, MA — As record-breaking weather events, such as extreme heat, floods, intense storms, and drought become more common, we are confronted with the need to adapt to a 'new normal' when it comes to our climate.

A new report, released today — [Higher Education's Role in Adapting to a Changing Climate](#) (PDF) — evaluates how colleges and universities are preparing society for a changing climate through their education, research, operations, and community engagement activities.

"This report makes a valuable contribution through its analysis of the multi-faceted role for higher education at this critically-important moment," said Jack Sbrega, President of Bristol Community College. "By devoting our considerable intellectual resources to this crisis and by role-modeling best practices on our campuses, institutions of higher education can lead the national and international quest for sustainability in this uncertain world. In these pages, the [ACUPCC](#) not only provides answers but also points to future pathways.

The report was developed by the Higher Education Climate Adaptation Committee, a group of thirteen leaders in higher education and experts in climate adaptation, convened by the [American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment](#) (ACUPCC) in March 2011.

"Colleges and universities have a unique and critical role to play in climate preparedness," said John Anderson, President of Alfred State College, "while being good stewards of the planet, we remain mindful of our local environs. Studying adaptation enables our graduates to be successful in this new reality, and provides an opportunity to showcase solutions on campuses."

The report provides an overview and a series of examples on what colleges and universities are and should be doing to teach their students, generate new knowledge, manage risk in their own campus operations and work with their local communities to become more resilient in the face of climate impacts such as extreme weather events and rising seas.

"The past is no longer an analogue for the future," said Professor James Buizer, Director for Climate Adaptation and International Development at University of Arizona's Institute of the Environment and Chair of the Committee, "a rapidly changing climate poses threats to our national security and economic well-being. Many colleges and universities are doing great things around adaptation – including generating most of our best research. But higher education as a sector as a whole needs to step up its climate adaptation leadership, similar to the way it stepped up its climate mitigation efforts through initiatives like the ACUPCC. This report is a first step."

Building on the efforts of other national efforts, such as the [National Climate Assessment](#) being conducted by the US Global Change Research Program and [America's Climate Choices](#) from the National Academy of Sciences, the report highlights a range of adaptation activities on campuses. The Climate and Society program at Columbia University "covers dynamics of climate variability and change, regional climate and climate impacts, managing climate variability and adapting to climate change." The MassGREEN Weatherization Installer Course at Bristol Community College in Massachusetts prepares students to work as professional air sealing technicians and insulation installers; a strategy that contributes both to climate adaptation and mitigation "in that it better protects residents from extreme heat events (adaptation), and also reduces energy demand (and associated emissions) for heating and cooling (mitigation)."

"Human society is facing an unprecedented rate of change due to a very rapidly shifting climate. This is resulting in already-documented vulnerabilities to human communities," said Dr. David A. Caruso, President of Antioch University New England. "As this report makes clear, higher education institutions are well-positioned and ready

to leverage the best of our faculty and students to empower people to rapidly respond, in effective, just and transparent ways, to a changing world."

[Higher Education's Role in Adapting to a Changing Climate](#) (PDF) concludes that while colleges and universities have a responsibility to address climate adaptation, and doing so can create new opportunities for campuses, to date the sector as a whole has not applied sufficient focus to this topic.

Another finding of the report is that colleges and universities have the opportunity to serve as "hubs" in their communities for testing climate preparedness strategies and sharing knowledge with local leaders.

"Institutions such as Paul Smith's College may be small, but we play large roles in our communities," said Dr. John Mills, president of Paul Smith's College, a 1,060-student institution in the Adirondack Park of New York State. "As teachers and leaders, we have the obligation to explain why we need to address climate change now, and offer tangible solutions to plan for it."

[Second Nature](#), the lead supporting organization of the ACUPCC, and [Clean Air – Cool Planet](#), administered the Committee and supported the development of the report. Information about the Committee and the process of developing the white paper is available at <http://www.acupcc.org/adaptation>.

About the ACUPCC

The ACUPCC is a high-visibility effort to address global warming by garnering institutional commitments to eliminate net greenhouse gas emissions and accelerate the research and educational efforts of higher education to equip society to re-stabilize the earth's climate. Learn more at: www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org.

About Second Nature

Second Nature works to create a healthy, just, and sustainable society by transforming higher education. Second Nature is the lead supporting organization of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, a growing network of over 675 signatory higher education institutions in all fifty states that have made a public commitment to neutralize their greenhouse gas emissions and transform their curricula to educate all students to contribute to solving the climate crisis. Learn more at: www.secondnature.org.