



## **Mount Holyoke College Sustainability Task Force Summary of 2017 Report**

In January 2018, the Board of Trustees of Mount Holyoke College endorsed the overarching goals of the College's Sustainability Task Force, including the goal of becoming a carbon neutral campus by 2037, its bicentennial. Progress toward this goal will be assessed every five years.

Carbon neutrality is achieved by reducing the amount of carbon released to the atmosphere, primarily by increasing energy efficiency and converting to renewable energy sources. It is also achieved by balancing the remaining carbon released with an equivalent amount sequestered — that is, removed from the atmosphere and held in solid or liquid form — or offset by reducing emissions elsewhere.

Mount Holyoke College is pursuing the goal of reaching carbon neutrality by its bicentennial through a strategy of investing in energy efficiency and conservation, retrofitting historic buildings and transitioning to carbon-neutral heating and electricity sources.

Climate change is a defining issue of our day. The global threat of warming temperatures, rising sea levels and extreme weather demands both serious study and decisive action to protect our Earth and its inhabitants. We share a collective responsibility to work toward a greener and more equitable world.

As one of the pre-eminent women's colleges in the country, Mount Holyoke is committed to training the next generation of environmental leaders while also taking significant measures to reduce its own carbon footprint, improve the sustainability of its campus operations and foster a campus culture of sustainability.

This new commitment builds on actions taken in 2017 by Acting President Sonya Stephens and thousands of others — college and university presidents, mayors, governors, CEOs and more — to sign the "We Are Still In" declaration. This statement supports the Paris Agreement's global commitment to climate action despite the U.S. government's decision to withdraw and urges elected officials to put a price on carbon in order to spur reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The College's strategic plan, the Plan for Mount Holyoke 2021, identifies environmental sustainability as a top priority. To that end, Acting President Stephens created the Mount Holyoke Sustainability Task Force in January 2017 with the mandate to recommend progressive action to advance sustainability in campus operations, programming and the curriculum. At the same time, responsibility for campus sustainability policies and efforts was aligned with the Miller Worley Center for the Environment, a move that improved coordination between educational programming and campus operations.

The Sustainability Task Force recommendations summarized here aim to realize the vision of Mount Holyoke College as a leader in environmental research and education and committed to investing in faculty, staff, students, programs and infrastructure that advance sustainability. Our graduates are the next generation of leaders who will create a more sustainable, just and equitable future across the world. Importantly for Mount Holyoke, sustainability means more than ensuring the long-term health of the environment by respecting the vital role of the ecosystem and mitigating the impact of human activity. It also means promoting equitable resource distribution and economic opportunity, and advancing human rights and social justice.

The recommendations were developed in 2017 through broad stakeholder participation by students, faculty, staff and administrators from across campus. In addition to carbon neutrality, the task force recommends that the College:

- become a model for sustainable use and management of the physical landscape, serving as a living laboratory for cross-disciplinary teaching, research and learning
- increase campus participation in and support for sustainable food systems and practices, such that all members of the Mount Holyoke community reduce waste through conservation, recycling and composting
- become a leader in sustainable retrofitting of historic campus buildings.

Finally, the task force recommends that the College strive to be an exceptional destination:

- for students to pursue environmental sustainability and social justice
- where faculty, staff and students have increased awareness of and engagement in campus sustainability practices
- where the curriculum offers a strong, interdisciplinary and foundational knowledge of environmental issues
- where co-curricular initiatives prepare students to apply this knowledge to advance environmental sustainability.

Drawing on its remarkable international and domestic diversity, outstanding liberal arts education and exceptional physical setting, the College is well-positioned to help students integrate a strong liberal arts foundation with the transformative power of experiential learning from global to local so that students not only understand the multidimensional facets of environmental issues, but also can address them in responsible, just and equitable ways.

The College has already begun moving forward in a number of areas. In 2015, it established a Green Revolving Fund to reinvest funds from energy conservation, renewable energy and other projects that reduce resource use and generate cost savings. The goal for this fund over the first five years is \$500,000. In fiscal year 2018, \$100,000 in capital expenditures were allocated and an additional \$510,000 were put toward the \$2 million in energy efficiency projects that were identified by a 2016 audit.

Collectively, these investments will reduce the College's annual greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of more than 900 metric tons of carbon dioxide. Energy efficiency strategies are included in all new capital projects. These include renovating Prospect Hall for the new Makerspace, retrofitting residence halls, collaborating with the South Hadley Electric Light Department, and reviewing equipment and vehicle purchases in order to "green the fleet."

The new Dining Commons represents a leap forward by consolidating six dining halls into one facility designed and constructed to LEED Silver standards. Key features include solar-thermal hot water, Energy Star appliances, efficient heating and cooling systems, and a food-waste dehydrator system. Building on an initial grant from the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, the College plans to increase purchase of more local and third-party-certified food. New menus emphasize sustainably grown food and local sourcing, which reduces our carbon footprint while promoting the local economy.

As we embark on this journey, students have exciting opportunities to study topics such as campus energy use, regional food economies and sustainable landscape management right on campus. The Campus Living Laboratory Initiative, including the Restoration Ecology Program's Project Stream,

offers the campus's natural and built landscape as a laboratory for field research, landscape history, artistic creation and environmental entrepreneurship.

Thanks to the generosity of alumnae donors, the restoration ecology boardwalk will be expanded, as part of an initiative to invest in infrastructure and to make this living laboratory more accessible. Likewise, there is an exciting opportunity to expand our curriculum with a newly endowed faculty position in the environment and to engage our alumnae in College sustainability initiatives through a new alumnae fellow program in the Miller Worley Center for the Environment.