

It's Alive!



Turning the University's Climate Action Plan into a living document



Envs 141 Policy Brief
Group 7

What's the Big Idea?

When it comes to climate action planning at the University of Vermont, not everyone is a part of the conversation, and sometimes it is the most important voices that are left out. There needs to be more inclusivity in the policy making process of not only students and faculty, but the concerned Burlington citizens. We must bridge the gap between the local community and the campus in order for all opinions to be heard.

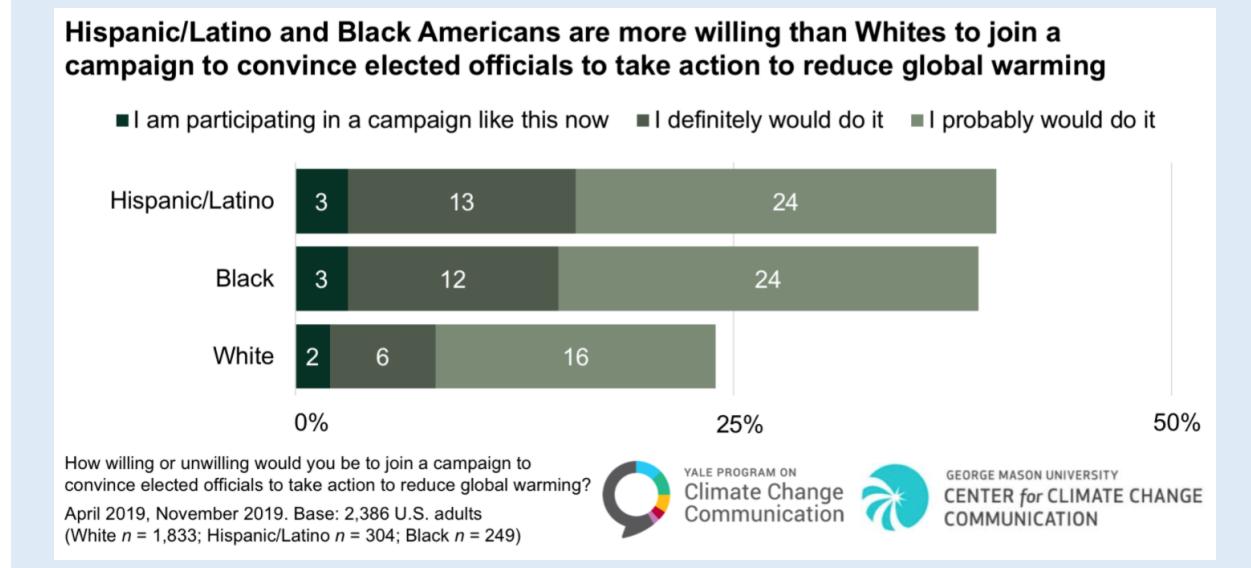
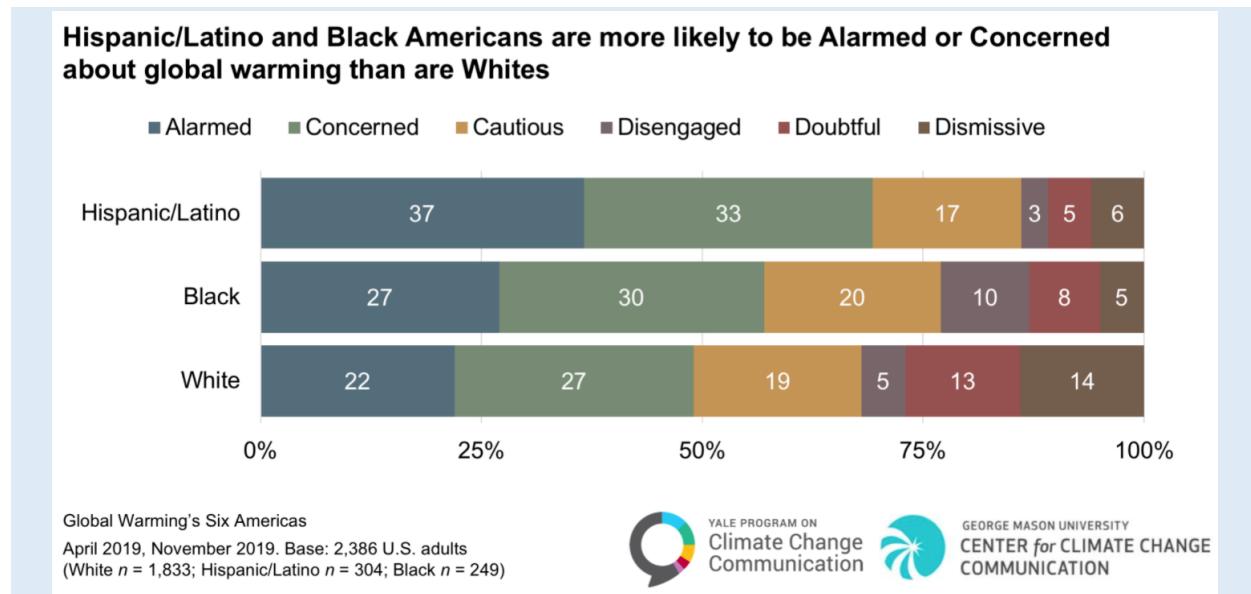
Accessibility is also a huge issue in regards to information on climate change in general. In order to find the climate action plan, let alone try to add onto the plan, one needs to have access to the internet. While we may be in an urban setting in Burlington, the greater Chittenden area becomes very rural and access becomes increasingly difficult.

By making the University of Vermont's Climate Action Plan a living document, it will not only increase community participation, but also create a sense of place for all those in Burlington by making them feel more connected with their surroundings. This will benefit their mental and physical health, as well as the environment. The living document will also have the ability to educate more students and community members on sustainability by enhancing their opportunities to have a say in policy planning and by reading others comments on sustainability by enhancing their opportunities to have a say in policy planning and by reading other's comments..



Why Should We Care?

- I. Did you know that many BIPOC citizens are more likely to be concerned about climate change and are more willing to take action about it than white citizens?
 - A. This data comes from Yale University's Program on Climate Change Communication.
 - 1. They collected data from our two Climate Change in the American Mind surveys conducted in 2019 to find these results:



These marginalized groups are on the front lines of climate change and are experiencing its consequences first hand. According to the *Climate Institute*, regions that are more vulnerable to natural disasters lack infrastructure that allows for adequate planning and response. It is imperative that these communities have a say in policy-making because they are the hardest hit by climate change.

However, it is not possible with our current system. In order to increase accessibility and allow all voices to be heard, we must make the University's CAP a living document which allows all students, faculty, and Burlington citizens to leave their comments.

One striking point of policy failure is the lack of recognition by UVM that it is a land grant university and how that program stole millions of acres of Indigenous land for universities such as UVM. In fact, there is still a hall named after the person responsible for creating this program. This injustice needs to be addressed, especially when it comes to climate action planning. This policy failure is disconnecting the UVM community from the indigenous Abenaki community, marginalizing them, and disregarding their trauma that UVM is partially to blame for.

Another striking fact according to *The World Resources Institute*, is that "In the first half of 2019 such events displaced a record 7 million people." (par. 3). Those who are displaced and forced to relocate often suffer from PTSD and other mental health illnesses.

According to the *American Public Health Association* and *ecoAmerica*, "Forty-nine percent of the survivors of Hurricane Katrina developed an anxiety or mood disorder, and 1 in 6 developed PTSD. Suicide and suicidal ideation more than doubled." (pg. 1). These irreversible consequences affect those who are the most systematically excluded from the conversation.



Our Option Pathways

Path 1 would be to have a climate action plan written solely by the university's administration. This is the current way the plan has been written and how most universities operate. Economically, this option is beneficial. There is no cost associated with this, seeing as it has always been done this way. Environmentally, this plan does have some risks associated. Those risks would be implementing structures the community may not want in place. Socially, a negative hierarchy is still in place. Voices are still being left out of the important decisions and the power is solely given to the administration. If we enact this option, not much change will occur because it is so similar to the way things are already being done.

Path 2 would be to write a climate action plan with regards to the students, staff, and Burlington community's ideas and opinions. Like the first option, there is no economic cost. Environmentally, there would be more positive change because more people are considered in the plan and the needs of the students are placed in a higher regard. Socially, the people's voices will be heard, however not everyone has equal access to share their thoughts. This is a step in the right direction because it starts to become a collective process at this point. There is still more that can be done though because of the accessibility issue. If this option is implemented, more people will have a say in how the University proceeds in its climate dealings.

Path 3 would be to create a living document. This would allow for edits and changes to be made to the plan at any point in time. This option would also include full community involvement and meetings where everyone is welcome to attend and voice their opinions on how the University should move forward. Economically, there is a cost associated with this plan. Funds would be needed to rent a space for these meetings and to cover the cost of advertising. Environmentally, the benefit is huge. Collaboration will create new ideas that will propel us forward. Everyone in the University of Vermont and Burlington communities will have an input on how to better our campus, thus ensuring the longevity and sustainability of the University. Socially, the University of Vermont and Burlington communities will be brought closer together than ever. Marginalized people will have a voice and a real say in what is happening around them. Though there is a cost for this plan, the benefits far outweigh it.



Our Recommendations

There will be an online editable version of the Climate Action Plan accessible on the UVM website for anyone to add their ideas onto that will then be reviewed and added to accordingly.



- 1) At the beginning of someone studying or working at UVM, they should be immediately introduced to the Climate Action Plan through an email or lesson plan (e.g. Everfi) where they will also be provided with the link to edit it
 - a) This is important, so we can get the entire UVM community involved with climate action planning on campus
 - b) **Pros:** Students and staff are made more aware of climate action planning and given accessibility to it.
 - c) **Cons:** Doesn't involve the community at all, some people don't check their emails or take part in lessons such as Everfi.
- 2) Advertise the editable climate action plan across all UVM social media platforms and websites and expand beyond into other platforms that the Burlington community may use
 - a) This way even if a student or staff member at UVM doesn't check their emails a lot, but looks at their social media, they will still be aware of this document
 - b) **Pros:** It will keep students and staff constantly informed, having this information on websites they always have to use. It will help those in the community who have internet access stay informed, since online platforms can sometimes reach a large range of people.
 - c) **Cons:** Not everyone has access to social media, the internet, or a device to access such things. The costs associated with the production and distribution of advertisements.
- 3) Host the meetings on a monthly or bi-monthly basis, bringing the UVM and Burlington community closer
 - a) Have translators at the meetings

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- b) **Pros:** This way we can reach a large range of people. Students and community members will have the opportunity to bond. Having these directed conversations can help distinguish the public's opinion on issues. People who don't speak english can get involved in climate action planning at UVM without facing as many barriers.
 - c) **Cons:** Individuals who work long hours/ care for children may not have the time to attend these meetings. There's the economic cost behind renting the space out and paying for the translator's time.
- 4) Advertise the meeting across all platforms, such as radio, television, newspaper, posters and pamphlets around Burlington
- a) Translate advertisements to increase accessibility
 - b) **Pros:** Most people in the community will be informed of events even the ones who don't go on the internet will have a voice in climate action planning. Having a mix of audio and paper advertisements will allow people who may not see or hear to be able to become informed about the event.
 - c) **Cons:** Not everyone participates in these platforms, and therefore won't be aware. It's hard to reach such an audience that's been disconnected from this campus for ages.
- 5) Advocate for more people to get involved in the Indigenous Rights group at UVM.
- a) Make announcements about meetings and upcoming events in UVM lecture halls. Also, create posters to hang them up around campus and post on social media.
 - b) **Pros:** More students will be informed of the group, and become more involved. This will help advocate for the Abenaki people whose land was stolen by Justin Smith Morrill through the Land-Grant Acts of 1862 and 1890 and turned into the University of Vermont.
 - c) **Cons:** Doesn't involve other members of the community.



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Links to Original Research

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<https://sustainability.richmond.edu/goals/action-plans/index.html>

University of Maryland:

https://sustainingprogress.umd.edu/progress-commitments/climate-action-plan/#CAP_Strategies

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All of the photos were taken by Kelly Billharz