Xavier’s commitment to sustainability is long-standing and has gained renewed relevance when the President signed the American College and University President’s Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). This Commitment states that the undersigned are deeply concerned about the unprecedented scale and speed of global warming and its potential for large-scale, adverse health, social, economic and ecological effects. Further, it notes that the signed academic leaders recognize the scientific consensus that global warming is real and is largely being caused by humans. We further recognize the need to reduce the global emission of greenhouse gases by 80% by mid-century at the latest, in order to avert the worst impacts of global warming and to reestablish the more stable climatic conditions that have made human progress over the last 10,000 years possible. They also believe that there will be great short-, medium-, and long-term economic, health, social and environmental benefits, including achieving energy independence for the U.S. as quickly as possible. Finally, the undersigned acknowledge that they must exercise leadership in their communities and throughout society by modeling ways to minimize global warming emissions, and by providing the knowledge and the educated graduates to achieve climate neutrality. Campuses that address the climate challenge by reducing global warming emissions and by integrating sustainability into their curriculum will better serve their students and meet their social mandate to help create a thriving, ethical and civil society.

At Xavier, we see this as an opportunity to grow and learn. Since the Committee’s inception, the Committee and the University as a whole have learned a tremendous amount about the complex nature of sustainability work. It involves systemic and holistic change; not just small, incremental changes. As a result, our University is entering a new phase of systemic and creative adaptation.

Some history:

Interest and commitment of many in sustainability existed prior to signing the ACUPCC Commitment

* Justice Across the Campus Committee
* Brueggeman Center lectures/scholars
* Environmental Studies minor

Fr. Graham signed ACUPCC Commitment January 2008

* Formed the Committee April 2008
* Very dynamic group with multiple changes in personnel always with the balance of faculty, staff, students.
* Conducted first GHG survey 2009
* Held first Sustainability Day 2009 with subsequent Sustainability Days every year since
* Finished the Campus Sustainability Plan (CSP) 2010
* Involved student sustainability interns from the outset, funded by Fr. Graham
* Hired Ann Dougherty as the first Sustainability Coordinator Fall 2011

Minimally, there are four ways in which Xavier will likely be transformed.

First, in terms of academics, sustainability calls upon us to learn across disciplines. We will also need to see that our campus and neighboring communities are laboratories for engaged learning around built environments, alternative transportation, gardening, energy use and alternative energy, among many other topics.

Second, within four to five years as this Plan is re-evaluated, a more holistic approach to sustainability planning and funding will be necessary. Third, and perhaps most importantly, we foresee planning and budgeting becoming a long-range undertaking that allows us to include resource conservation, educational benefits, building life cycles, and other measures alongside the more typical short-range financial measures. The combination of long-term planning and thinking and an ecological footprint assessment will mean that we take the future of our planet and our students’ grandchildren as seriously as we take our educational quality, our enrollment numbers, and our endowment.

Our broader Jesuit heritage also deeply informs our response to the climate crisis. The 2010 International Jesuit Higher Education Conference in Mexico City in April, 2010 is the most recent manifestation of the Jesuit educational response to our current circumstances. The conference called by Superior General Fr. Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., and the deceased Fr. Paul Locatelli, S.J., who was the Secretary for Jesuit Higher Education in Rome and the principal organizer of the meeting. Leading up to the meeting, Fr. Locatelli, S.J., noted that “Learning in a global context is the future. And as the only global network of higher education in the world, Jesuit higher education should seize this opportunity and at same time, accept its responsibility for helping to fashion a more humane, just and sustainable world for all, not only for those with access to education and resources but also those without.” One of the themes for this unprecedented meeting was sustainability. One of the four themes of discussion and presentation was “ecology and sustainability.”

Finally, integrating sustainability into Xavier’s operations at all levels is in keeping with the Jesuit tradition and promotes the welfare of our students, our institution and our community. Increasingly, U.S. students seek universities with robust attention to the environment and ecology; our physical infrastructure will be less costly to run and more resilient the lower our carbon footprint; our education will be more interdisciplinary and problem-focused; and we can become an even more vibrant partner in the community through our engagement in sustainability with others.