

Women, the environment, and physician activism: Encouraging activism through education

2017-18 Carbon Neutrality Initiative (CNI) Application

Applicants

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Background and Relevance:

The Carbon Neutrality Initiative (CNI) strives to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from UC's buildings and vehicles by 2025. A goal of this size requires substantial culture change and coordinated efforts by not only UCSF's administration and employees, but also its students. In fact, a 2017 JAMA article addressing physicians' role in climate change advises, "Start with medical students,"¹ and the CNI cites student engagement as a critical component in the success of the initiative.² UCSF has recently incorporated environmental sustainability into the Health and Society and Inquiry components of the Bridges curriculum, yet student engagement with this topic is still limited. Many students have voiced a desire for a deeper dive into the material and a concrete understanding of how to be agents of environmental change. Chiefly, we believe increased attention should be paid towards (1) understanding how climate change unequally affects different populations, and (2) what we as students can do to work towards a more sustainable campus, community and future.

To provide the opportunity for increased engagement with these topics, we propose to host an elective for UCSF 1st and 2nd year students in Fall 2017. The course will center around the intersection between climate change and inequality, particular in relation to women. It has long been acknowledged that environmental hazards disproportionately affect women; the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action prioritized "Women and the environment" as a critical area of concern,³ and the United Nations WomenWatch Fact Sheet states that "women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men."⁴ This topic is one not currently emphasized in the Bridges curriculum, thus would supplement students' current understanding.

Elective Description:

The elective will consist of 10 one-hour lunchtime sessions and a 2-hour documentary viewing focusing on environmental hazards and climate change as it relates to women's health. Lecture topics will include inequality & climate change, prenatal health & ground/air toxins, sustainable food practices, strategies for providers counseling patients on environmental hazards, and the climate impact of the health care system. We have started contacting physicians and experts with a wide range of perspectives to come speak. We aim to enroll 30 students in the course.

Our elective will differ from previous offerings in two key ways. Firstly, each speaker will suggest at least one concrete strategy to reduce carbon use at both an individual and institutional level. Secondly, pre- and post- course surveys will be conducted to gauge the effect of the course on student interest in environmental activism, and the level of engagement in carbon-reducing strategies. Example questions include, "Please describe one technique you individually can use to reduce your carbon footprint," and "Please describe an action you feel UCSF as an institution should take to reduce its carbon footprint."

Project Aims:

Our course is intended to integrate considerations of women's health and the environment into a science-based curriculum, inspiring culture change and leadership through education. Our primary objective is to encourage students to become agents of change, and to engage in carbon-reducing solutions both on- and off- campus. Additionally, our course will provide students with exposure to leaders in the field of environmental advocacy, offering opportunities for future mentorship and action.

¹ Friedrich M. Medical Community Gathers Steam to Tackle Climate's Health Effects. JAMA. 2017;317(15):1511-1513. doi:10.1001/jama.2017.0969

² University of California, Office of the President. <http://www.ucop.edu/initiatives/carbon-neutrality-initiative.html>

³ UN Women. <http://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/in-focus/environment>

⁴ UN WomenWatch, Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change Fact Sheet.

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf