

Adopting a Transparent, Environmentally Just Carbon Offsets Policy

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Introduction

Carbon offsets appear more likely as a significant means of achieving carbon neutrality by 2025 for UCLA. This challenge should be met with creativity in how to best invest in offset projects, considering the institution's educational and social mission.

Project Goals

We sought to develop a policy reference document for how to invest in carbon offsets in a progressive and sustainable way. Our aims focused on criteria for determining “fair carbon” offsets. These would be actions both socially beneficial and educationally innovative.

Materials and Methods

Our research relied on existing literature and reports, along with considerations of climate inequities in the Los Angeles area. The work we conducted consisted of a review of literature and understanding of local issues. In the process of analyzing these data, we developed a synthesis incorporating academic findings and conditions on the ground.

Results and Outcomes

UCLA has launched a pilot Air Travel Mitigation Fund program that serves

as a small-scale example of how an internal carbon tax could operate. Funds from this program will go towards carbon reduction efforts, which could include carbon offsets. One advantage of investing such funds locally is the easier ability to monitor for “permanence” problems (i.e. deterioration of offset sequestration).

Conclusions

UCLA can utilize offsets to achieve carbon emissions reductions now that otherwise can not be achieved currently, due to infrastructural and funding challenges. Overcoming these obstacles necessarily involves innovation (scientific, policy, and so on), and so UCLA should incorporate its campus community into projects that can offset its emissions.

Future Goals

UCLA needs to further utilize existing campus initiatives and resources to implement carbon offsets in a local and socially impactful manner. This will require critical and active engagement of staff, faculty, students and even alumni. We strive to have future UCLA CNI Fellows identify areas and programs—such as Volunteer Day—where carbon neutrality and emissions offsets offer a clear value-add as components.

Literature Cited

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