

2021 – 2022 UCSF Carbon Neutrality Initiative: Engaging Students during COVID-19

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Introduction

The UC system is a national leader in sustainability and climate change progress. We are the first major university to have pledged to become carbon neutral by 2025. In order to reach more students and spread awareness about this goal, the UC system also recruits Carbon Neutrality Initiative fellows (CNI fellows). CNI fellows seek to engage the university community by holding three events that engage students, staff, and faculty about achieving UC Carbon Neutrality goals.

As a UCSF medical student, my primary goal was to increase awareness about climate education for graduate students. I specifically focused on medical students because as future providers, we will be treating many patients who are directly feeling the health effects of climate change, and so I believed it was important for us to gain a better understanding of the Carbon Neutrality Initiative.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, and the required virtual nature of all engagement events, a lot of creativity had to go into continuing to engage students with these events despite the growing “Zoom Fatigue”.

Project Goals

My goals with the CNI fellowship were threefold:

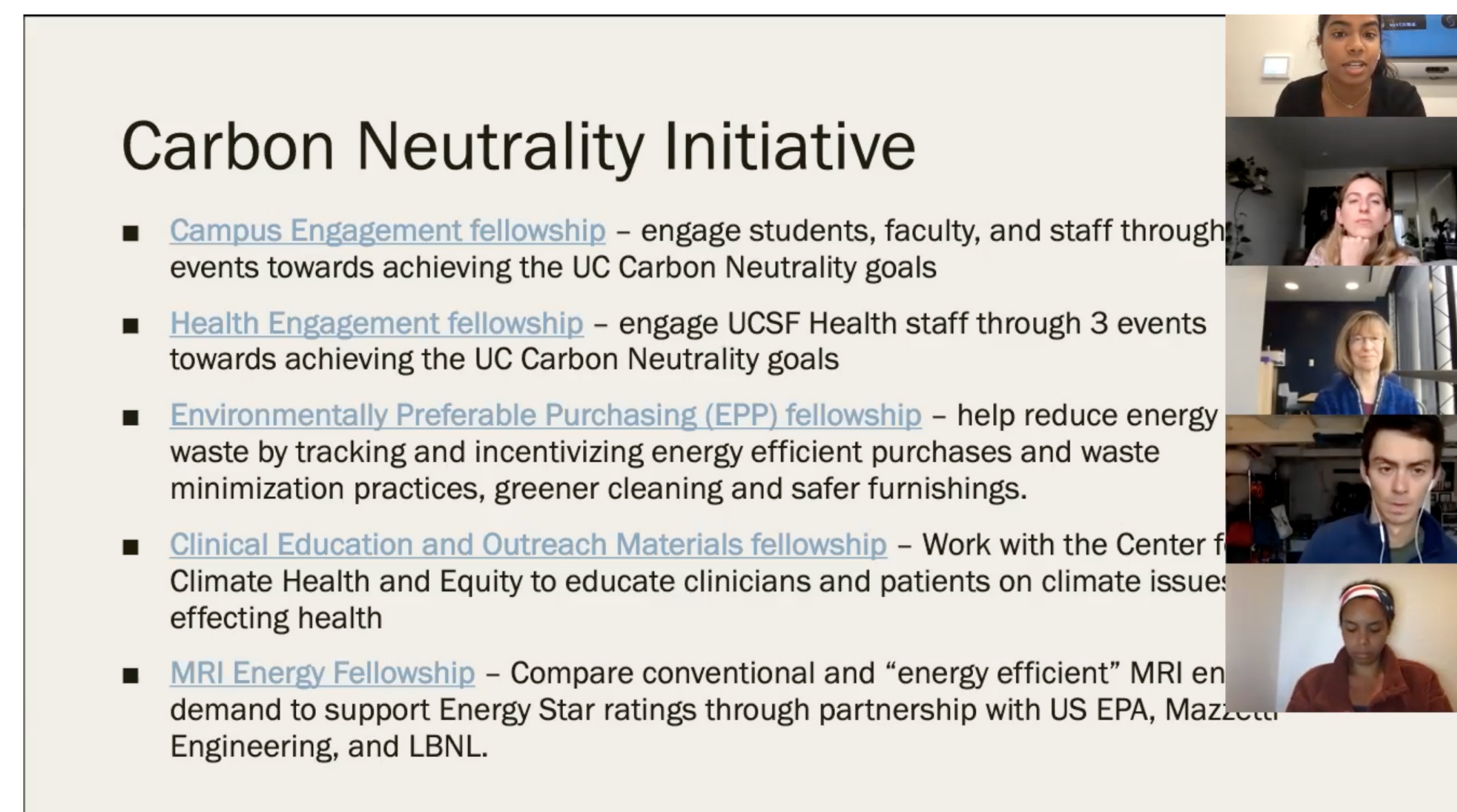
- Increase engagement in climate-centered opportunities at UCSF
- Increase overall student engagement with national climate-centered action items
- Increase awareness about the UC Carbon Neutrality Goal

Partnerships

Through the course of this fellowship, I had the opportunity to connect with a variety of staff/faculty/students, including:

- Dr. Gandhi and Gail Lee from the Office of Sustainability
- Dr. Arianne Teherani and Dr. Weiser from UC Center
- Dr. Gundling from Academic Senate
- Dr. Charlesworth from the EaRTH Center
- Drs. Whelan & Iverson from CHASE Curriculum
- Dr. Burke from Climate Change Mental Health Task Force
- UCSF medical students also interested in similar work!

Virtual Engagement #1

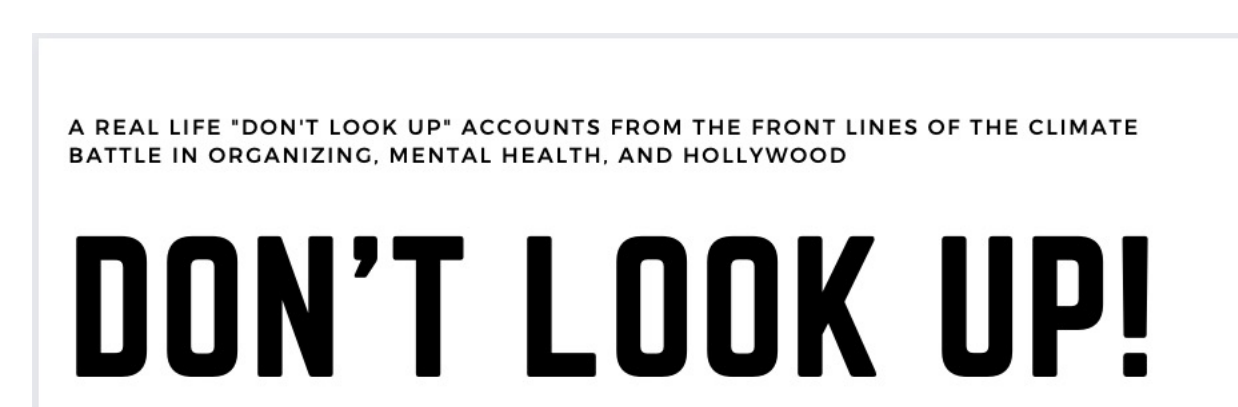


The first event was conducted in the fall of 2021. It was a virtual event that aimed to orient students to all of the work in planetary health that is being done at UCSF. Students, faculty, and staff all had the opportunity to speak about their current projects and research in climate change, environmental health, and/or healthcare sustainability. Additionally, there was an optional in-person happy hour after the event, to allow students/faculty/staff the opportunity for networking.

Many different students and faculty were involved on this panel, including Dr. Gandhi from the Office of Sustainability, Dr. Weiser from UC Center, Dr. Gundling from Academic Senate, Dr. Charlesworth from the EaRTH Center, Drs. Whelan & Iverson from CHASE Curriculum, and UCSF medical students Karly, Colin, Aude who spoke about their research and student organization involvement.

The event was recorded and also put on the website for future students to continue to watch and get orientated with climate opportunities available at UCSF. I had the chance to talk about the CNI fellowship as well.

Virtual Engagement #2



The second event conducted was a movie panel in the spring of 2022. Using the Academy Award nominated film *Don't Look Up* as a springboard, a diverse panel of experts discussed the many ramifications of climate change. We will address the mental health fall out, misinformation and science communication, industry influence and government failure, and more. BYO popcorn and beverages for this fun but serious evening (on zoom). The acclaimed panelists include Abhay Singh Sachal, Dr. Britt Wray, Daniel Hinerfeld, Grace Nosek, and Dr. Lisa Fortuna.

As part of my CNI engagement, I created a google survey with information about the Carbon Neutrality Initiative. I also listed a few action item links for students to explore (i.e., signing a letter to the senator, signing up for climate change newsletters, donating to a climate cause, etc). Once the students submitted an email verifying the action they took, they received a \$10 e-gift card to a sustainable organization.

Virtual Engagement #3

The third event conducted was a more longitudinal event, focusing on increasing the UC Center's Twitter social media presence. We wanted to use the Twitter to position the Center as a leader among the broad community of climate and health academic, implementing, and policy partners.

A part of this goal, I focused on climate oriented, timed tweets, including calls to action, climate change tips, as well as climate-health community agenda items. By monitoring link clicks as well as other Twitter analytics, I have been able to track our engagement over the course of this year. Thus far, since January, our engagement has increased by about 2.5%, with our daily impressions almost quadrupling from 40 in January to about 150 in March.

Takeaways

My takeaways from this opportunity were very valuable.

- It is difficult to get students to engage with virtual/Zoom sessions. Using incentives like gift cards are one way to incentivize students to participate.
- Even if attendance is low at zoom sessions, the opportunity to record the sessions and place them on a website where they can be utilized by others in the future is also valuable.
- Social media is increasingly becoming an important tool and resource to connect with other institutions and share important content/messages to a large audience.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people and groups for their support throughout this fellowship:

- Dr. Arianne Teherani & the UC Center
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- Dr. Burke & Dr. Charlesworth & the Mental Health Task Force
- Dr. Gundling & the Academic Senate
- Drs. Iverson & Whelan & the CHASE Curriculum team
- Human Health + Climate Change Student organization