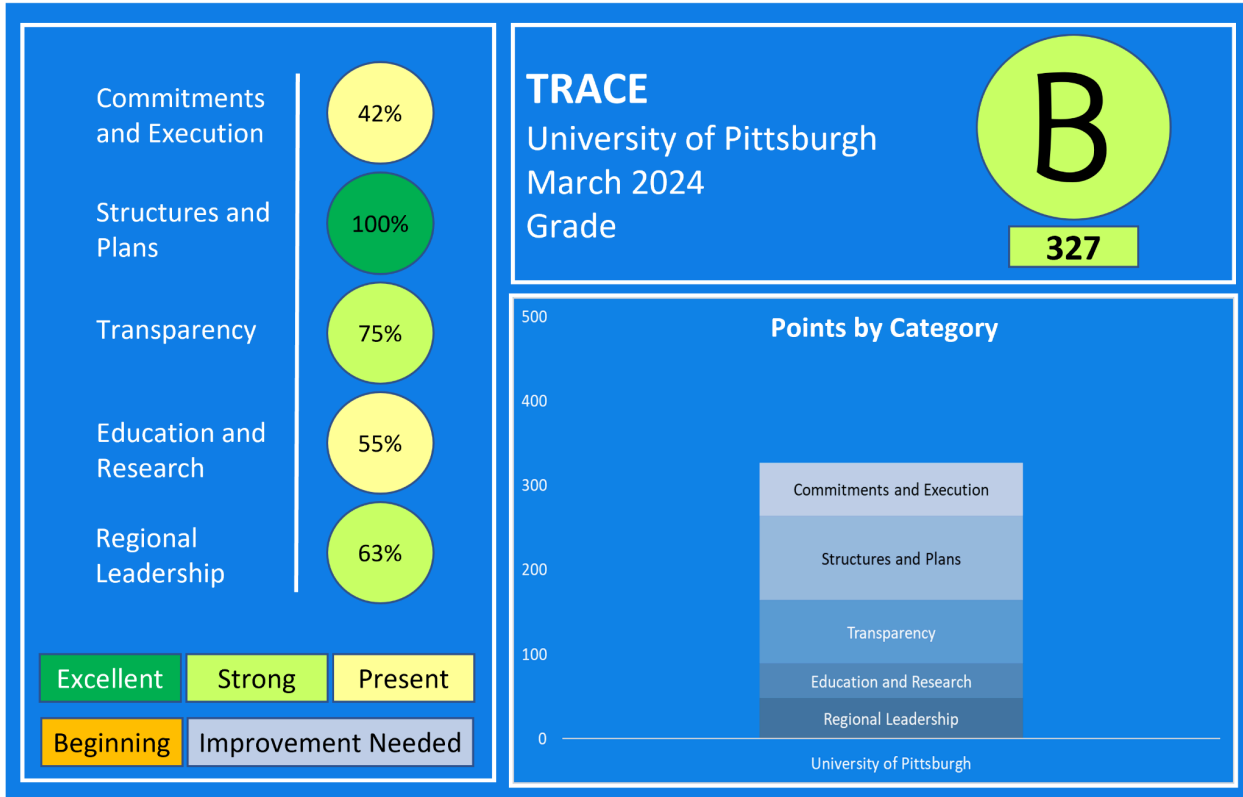




University of Pittsburgh
TRACE REPORT
 March 2024



Executive Summary

The University of Pittsburgh (“Pitt”) is a large public university and celebrated research institution, with about 33,000 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students enrolled across five campuses and a Consolidated Endowment Fund (CEF) valued at \$5.5 billion. In the past few years, the University has taken substantial strides in addressing climate change. This includes a commitment to carbon neutrality by 2037 detailed in the 2022 Pitt Climate Action Plan, which has already seen progress; and the publishing of their 2018-22 Progress Report on the Pitt Sustainability Plan, which demonstrates visible but slow progress towards its 68 Sustainability Goals from 2018.



Highs

Commitments, Goals, and Objectives

- According to its FY22 greenhouse gas inventory, Pitt has seen a **significant reduction in its campus greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** from FY19-22.

Institution Structures and Plan

- Pitt's **Office of Sustainability** is well staffed and has a strong presence on campus, in addition to the Chancellor's Advisory Council on Sustainability. The University's digitally published **Pitt Sustainability Plan (PSP) and Climate Action Plan (CAP)** are thorough, visually engaging, interactive, and actionable. Pitt demonstrates flexibility and adaptability in carrying out its plans and is encouraged to continue reporting with candid transparency.

About TRACE

Given the importance of higher educational institutions to the southwestern Pennsylvania region, we have created the *350 Pittsburgh Three Rivers Assessment of Carbon Emissions (TRACE)*. This scorecard is intended to be a simple and understandable assessment of each institution's progress toward carbon neutrality. The scorecard assesses the school's results in five categories. These five categories are weighted based on the degree of impact they have on operational, financial, and educational results. For more information on the scorecard, see <https://world.350.org/pittsburgh/TRACE/>

Transparency

- In the last five years, Pitt's **reporting system** has seen marked improvement in accessibility, design, frequency, and transparency. The University publishes annual GHG and nitrogen inventories.

Education and Research

- **Sustainability is a living element of Pitt's curriculum**, ranging from the undergraduate sustainability certificate all the way to the MCSI's M.S. in Sustainable Engineering. For students interested in taking sustainability-oriented courses in their area of study, there are such course lists in several locations including on the MSCI website and in the CAP. The Pitt campus is host to many climate-passionate students, as seen in the 17 member groups within the Student Office of Sustainability (SOOS), approximately six of those directly concerned with environmental education or action.

Regional Leadership

- Pitt has been at the forefront of regional university climate action for several years. It played a key role in the founding of the regional [Higher Education Climate Consortium \(HECC\)](#) in 2008 and its revitalization in 2022-2023. Its public outreach for its 2022 Climate Action Plan via its website, public webinars, and other methods role modeled public transparency. As [an AASHE Stars Gold](#) winner, it has demonstrated a commitment to communicating its approach in a way comparable to other schools.



Areas for Improvement

Commitments, Goals, and Objectives

- Despite nine years of active student and community campaigning for **fossil fuel divestment** from the Pitt CEF (endowment fund), the Board of Trustees continues to take a passive stance on the fossil fuel exposure of the fund. In 2021, the Board of Trustees chose not to actively screen fossil fuel investments but rather to monitor their strategy to phase out private-equity fossil fuel holdings by 2035. From 2021 to 2022, the endowment's exposure to private fossil fuel holdings increased from 4.5% to 6.3%, largely due to changes in market value and commodity prices. We recommend that the University take a more aggressive divestment approach to meet the urgency of the climate crisis, or else the already tentative 2035 target will be consistently liable to similar market fluctuations.

Institution Structures and Plan

- In 2014, the University of Pittsburgh signed on to the **2030 Challenge**, an international initiative to accelerate net-zero design in the building sector. Pitt reports its progress on these challenge goals as a piece of their carbon neutral puzzle. However, in 2021, the challenge sponsor called for a greatly accelerated effort, with all new buildings and major renovations to be carbon-neutral from the outset. We recommend that Pitt review and respond to the revised 2030 Challenge timeline.
- Pitt's CAP is heavily dependent on **carbon offsets**, with about a third of expected GHG emission reductions for the 2037 neutrality goal credited to carbon offsetting/insetting. Given the well-understood problematics of carbon offsets, we recommend that Pitt decrease the proportion of offsets in its emission reductions mix.

Education and Research

- The **Pitt Green Fund** is a student-run fund that grants money to student-led green initiatives on campus. While terrific in concept, the Green Fund ought to receive more than its current annual Student Activity Fee of \$5,000. The success stories of its beneficiaries should inspire a greater investment by the Student Government Board Allocations Committee so its positive impact can extend further. We recommend increasing the amount allocated to the Green Fund to \$20,000.

Regional Leadership

- Pitt's **ties to the fossil fuel industry** sometimes undercut the impact of its carbon emissions leadership. For example, for a *Decarbonize Middle America Kickoff* webinar hosted in 2021 by the Pitt Center for Sustainable Business (CSB), three of five panelists were from the fossil fuel industry: Federated Hermes Limited (FHL), People's Natural Gas, and CONSOL Energy. While this is just one example, we recommend that Pitt be more



transparent in its rationale for including these voices in public events and that its own objective is full carbon neutrality.

Process

Because of the high priority that TRACE places on transparency, the scoring process starts with a survey of publicly available information provided by the University and other public data sources. This approach helps assure that the general public and other institutions can see the individual school's approach and progress. The public data search is supplemented with an opportunity for the school to respond to the initial scoring by providing additional information not found in the public data search. The final score is adjusted with the additional information and the school is encouraged to make this information available to the public.

For the 2023 Pitt scoring, the process was conducted by a University of Pittsburgh student with guidance from 350 Pittsburgh. Input from the school was provided by the Pitt Office of Sustainability. Final scoring was jointly established by 350 Pittsburgh and the Pitt student.

Acknowledgements

The Office of Sustainability and the Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation (MCSI) are leaders of the sustainability effort at Pitt. 350 Pittsburgh thanks the Office of Sustainability, and particularly Dr. Aurora Sharrard (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Sustainability), for their continuous support in offering resources and input for the development of the Pitt Scorecard, although final scoring decisions were made by 350 Pittsburgh with input from its student scorers.

Disclaimer

This report has been conducted by 350 Pittsburgh, the local affiliate of 350.org. 350 Pittsburgh is solely responsible for the result. Pitt provided information, guidance, and feedback during the scoring process.



Score Breakdown

Pitt received a final score of 327 for a “B” Grade. **Because the 350 Pittsburgh Quality Standards have not yet been finalized, full points were awarded for that attribute.**

Commitments, Goals and Objectives	Score	Category Score
Has a target date commitment and interim milestones to carbon neutrality for all 3 GHG Protocol scopes	65%	63
Has published target dates for divestment from fossil fuel interests	10%	
Is making visible documented progress toward stated goals	50%	
Institution Structures and Plan	Score	
Has a formal sustainability office/initiative/director	100%	100
Has a formal/public climate action plan with implementation underway	100%	
The plan meets 350 Pittsburgh Quality Standards	100%	
Transparency	Score	
The institution is reporting at least annually via public documentation and presentation	75%	75
Education and Research	Score	
Curriculum	100%	41
Students	60%	
Research (where applicable)	5%	
Regional Leadership	Score	
Publicly visible engagement and advocacy with regional higher education and non-education institutions	90%	48
Peer Institutions Leadership	75%	
Local Community	25%	



Public Source Material

Commitments, Goals, and Objectives	Pitt Sustainability Plan (2018) 2018-2022 Progress Report on the Pitt Sustainability Plan Report of the Ad-hoc Committee on Fossil Fuels to the Board of Trustees (2021) Pitt Climate Action Plan (2022) Pitt ESG Report 2021-22 (published 2023)
Institution Structures and Plan	Pitt Office of Sustainability Aurora Sharrard (Assistant Vice Chancellor for Sustainability) Chancellor’s Advisory Council on Sustainability 2030 Challenge
Transparency	Pitt Sustainability home page
Education and Research	Pitt Sustainability Academic Programs Pitt Sustainability Research Centers Pitt Green Fund Pitt Student Office of Sustainability
Regional Leadership	AASHE HECC Decarbonize Middle America Kickoff (2021)

About 350 Pittsburgh

350 Pittsburgh was founded in Spring 2015 by local environmental activists to build on the momentum of the 2014 People’s Climate March and form a Pittsburgh group dedicated to climate issues. We envision a future where policies and actions at the local, state, federal and international levels will have ensured a stable climate that provides an opportunity for all people to achieve health, prosperity and fulfillment.

Through public education and collaborative civic activism, 350 Pittsburgh:



- Promotes understanding of the devastating impact of climate change on the urban and rural communities in our region and elsewhere.
- Demands that the region’s decision makers take all possible steps to help diminish climate disruption by ending our reliance on fossil fuels and investing in good jobs in a renewable energy economy.
- Encourages people in our region to become actively involved in the urgent struggle to reverse catastrophic climate change.

TRACE information, including a white paper, can be found on the [350 Pittsburgh website](#). To contact 350 Pittsburgh, email 350pittsburgh@gmail.com.