

CSU_Carol_Dollard

Interviewer1: Carol would you mind telling us a little bit about your role at your institution?

CD: Okay first of all my title Carol Dollard, my title is Energy Engineer. I am a master's degree mechanical engineer and I work in facilities. Okay. So I help run the university. That's the easiest way to think about it. Now I was hired to run the utilities at the university. And CSU, you're at MSU, right?

I1: Yes.

CD: It's like MSU, a big state university. We get our utilities from the local utility at what we call master meters at the edge of campus. And then all the electrical, water and sewer, all that stuff inside the campus is our responsibility. So I help with that. All except the electrical stuff. I don't get electrical engineering and that's a whole other story. I always joke about that, but electrical engineers just live in a little different world.

So I help with the water and the sewer and all that. **But I also help with all the sustainability stuff. I am co-chair of the president's sustainability commission at CSU and that's a campus-**

wide commission that includes all the academic colleges. All the groups across campus like housing and the student center and student groups. It's a huge committee, it's 40-45 people and me and another woman from student affairs co-chair that committee. And we help... we won't say we coordinate things on campus because that's not really fair.

Everybody does their sustainability projects on campus pretty much without us, but we help connect the dots because sometimes really sustainability kind of bubbled up at CSU from the ground up. So there's people doing social justice work, there's people doing academic work, there's people doing research work all around sustainability. I do what we call operations right. Install solar systems, do energy and water efficiency and that kind of stuff. But on the

Commented [1]: Could be implementation as she implements the plan or stakeholder engagement as this is the committee that engages stakeholders

PSC which is what we call our commission, we connect people... like an academic that may be working on something with somebody in operations so that they can test their research right on campus. Does that sort of make sense? Does that answer your question?

I1: Yeah, definitely, that's super cool. So it sounds like you're more in charge kind of, of the implementation of your guy's climate action plan more than the development?

CD: No I wrote it. I've been at the university 22 years and I wrote our original one along with a team of people. I work with a lot of other people. There's very few things at the university to get to claim sole credit for. We wrote the first one in 2010, and that's when we set our goals. And then we committed at the time as ACUPCC signatories, you know the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment.

I1: Yup.

CD: So we were signatories to that. So we committed to doing a climate action plan and updating it every two years. I will be quite honest we haven't quite made every 2 years. It's 2 or 3 years, like we were supposed to update last year and frankly we got Covid, and we're hoping to get our climate action plan, we were supposed to do a 2020 10 year anniversary update of our climate action plan and frankly Covid just took us out at the knees. So we're hoping to get that out in '21, but we really want to do some campus engagement and frankly that's really hard to do right now.

I1: For sure, I definitely have a few friends at CSU. I am originally from Denver so I know Covid's been difficult there for sure.

CD: Yeah it's just so hard with everybody remote to try to do anything. And honestly in reality, Covid has put about 10 more things on everybody's plate in facilities. It turns out buildings are a lot more problematic when they're empty. It's counter-intuitive but there's a

lot more issues in our buildings when they're empty and so we've been really busy with water issues and other things that just haven't made time for the CAP. So again I hope to get back to it this year.

So yes, we developed the original one. We've updated it 4 times. We're actually making a pretty dramatic change to our next one which I can't tell you about until we actually get it approved. I'll just say we're probably going to increase our... increase that's not even the right word! Improve our goals, let's just put it that way.

5:25

I1: Oh that's awesome. We'll definitely have to keep an eye out for that. But I guess Covid set aside, do you feel like your institutions campus climate action plan has been successful so far?

CD: Well we have met our goals in some areas and not in others. That's the simplest way to say it. We have 16 strategies to get to climate neutrality by, our goal we posed in 2010 was 2050. And honestly it felt really hard at the time, it no longer does because frankly technology and... the technology has improved and the... it's becoming increasingly more aware that we don't have that long. Let's just put it that way. So I think everybody is motivated all the way up to the president to... to move faster further. But we just have to agree with what we can realistically do with what we know about today.

You know the technology that we new about in 2010 when we wrote about this, solar seemed a long way off. And now it's like we're putting in 21 new systems in a project over the next year. So it's, there's all kinds of things that seemed really hard 10 years ago that frankly really aren't. Not any more.

I1: For sure. I think you kind of touched on this a little bit but what, and maybe I missed it,

what part of your plan has been more successful than the others would you say?

CD: There's some of them like okay let's just pick one that hasn't been more successful and we'll back up. Airline travel is one that comes to mind and it's a struggle for a big research university because people fly at a big research university. Although ironically that's the one thing that Covid was our friend, people got out of airplanes. But I tell people that there's a woman at CSU named Diana Wall. And she is a nationally recognized researcher in Antarctica. So much so that there's a valley in Antarctica named after her, okay. So that's a pretty cool thing but you don't get to do research in Antarctic over Skype, right, she has to go there. So that's a big carbon foot print. And we've always had it as a goal to come up with a local offset program that we're investing in energy efficiency and things that reduce that our carbon footprint at the university to offset airline travel and we just haven't gotten that going. It just hasn't happened. So I will put that down as one that we haven't gotten done.

Some of the ones we have done is despite, well we've grown from 9.5 million square feet to 12.5 million square feet in the last 10 years. And over the same time we actually reduced our energy use, our carbon footprint related to energy over that same period. Not by as much as we wanted to. We were hoping with the 2050 goal that you set in 2010 you got 40 years to do it. So theoretically you have to reduce your carbon footprint by 2.5% a year. Well after 10 years we're not 25% down. We're down about 15% but if you look at it per student or per square foot, we're down about 35%. It's been really difficult because the university has been growing a bunch to try to simultaneously reduce our footprint.

So we feel like we've made progress. We haven't made enough progress. But everybody gets that and we're focused on what we really need. And especially when we're having talk about accelerating that goal to earlier than 2050 and I am not going to say when that is. You

know I put it out to the President and I said if we're going to do that this is what we need to do. And it's not undoable, but it's also quite ambitious. It's a lot of work. Energy is a big part of our carbon footprint. As a matter of fact at CSU 80% of our footprint is either electricity or natural gas so we have to go after energy efficiency in a big way.

9:56

I1: For sure, that's definitely interesting, I didn't know that. It's really interesting how Montana, how we receive ours, I guess our energy is a lot from natural resources kind of like you, so it's so interesting to hear how each university gets all their energy and where from.

CD: Do you know what your greenhouse gas footprint is and what makes it up?

I1: So we're in the process of trying to kind of figure out that stuff. Um, from our last climate action plan which was in 2009 or 2010, is that right?

I2: I think it was 2011. Like it started in 2009, yeah it was released in 2011.

CD: So when you guys were in grade school! Isn't that crazy 10 years ago! Yeah exactly, that's not quite true, but close, junior high maybe, right!

I1: Around there. From there I forget the specific scope numbers but we're kind of trying to help our institution gather some information about how other schools go through this process so that they can hopefully for the summer to help gain those numbers and figure that stuff out.

I2: I know the...

CD: I will give you this tidbit of advice. **We do our greenhouse gas footprint every single year. It's an important metric for your university and I would work very hard at convincing somebody at your university. It's a pain, okay I am going say a bad word and you have to bleep it out, a pain in the ASS to do greenhouse gas footprints. I run that team every year.**

Um, but honestly we've been doing it since 2006. And without that we have no idea what our progress is right? I mean that's your scorecard on your climate action plan. If you're not watching your greenhouse gas footprint regularly, then your climate action plan has nothing, you have nothing to measure whether you are being successful.

So I would push very hard, especially in today's day and age, there's some tools. There's a tool called SIMAP. That we work with students, we do the university greenhouse gas footprint in house, just to make sure we get consistency year over year. But there's often times class projects that use SIMAP to do... oh they're doing the greenhouse gas footprint of their individual college or something like that. And you can use SIMAP at that level. But I would encourage you to look at that and it's pretty inexpensive to do a couple hundred bucks a year. It's not a really expensive piece of software. And just start tracking because without tracking making goals is not as meaningful if you're not tracking how well you're doing.

I1: For sure I can definitely see... I am not sure if that's something that's built into our plan but we'll for sure have to talk to our mentors about that, because I am sure like you said that plays a large component. One thing that I found interesting that you mentioned was like student involvement. And something I found interesting when looking at your guy's university was you guys have kind of a sustainability college. And I found that interesting. Are they kind of involved with the climate action plan as well? Or is it just like a major that you guys have available?

CD: The climate action plan is led by a small team of the PSC, back to President Sustainability Commission. Because one of the roles of the PSC is all of our sustainability metrics. Do you guys know what STARS is?

I2: Yes.

CD: So there's a team from the PSC that helps do the STARS metric and all that. So the greenhouse gas accounting I lead that team but there's people from... but we also for the climate action plan we put out a call, as a matter of fact we were in the midst of it about this time last year where we had gone out and done a bunch of publicity and got people to come to some public meetings and give us feedback about climate action plan and what was important to them. So that was students and employees of the university. But that team we made a Microsoft Teams thing and we were communicating and we had actually in person meetings before March of last year right. And so we were doing all kinds of things. They were coming forward with scenarios and we would say okay let's test that and see how much that impacts our climate action plan and that kind of thing.

Well again that all kind of fell apart a year ago. So we need to restart, that's what I want to do, is involve employees and students in the final climate action plan because I want to feel like people have ownership of it. Because honestly Carol and a handful of other employees are not going to solve the climate problem at the university. It has to be an all in thing.

15:36

I1: Yeah that's something interesting. We did a literature review as our first kind of step in this process and one thing that we found in the literature is kind of how you mentioned like how are these climate action plans approached? Is it more of like the top people like the President implementing these things? Or is it the students really running this project? Or is it in the middle? So it's cool to hear that you're involving almost everyone in that aspect.

CD: We're trying to, you know engaging students frankly – don't take it personally – is really hard. You guys are busy, you like... and then you do things like you go and graduate. You know we have a great team working on something and the next thing you know 3 or 4 people

oh they left the university and got real jobs. Oh okay I guess that happens, you know that's part of our world right?! So we do want to make sure that we have as many people involved as we can.

There is one thing I will caution you about and this happens all the time with public input, is that a climate action plan is a pretty narrowly focused document. It's how is your organization going to deal with their carbon footprint right? I mean that's what a climate action plan is intended to do. It is not an overall sustainability report card for the university. That's more like a STARS thing, right, we do STARS as well. But that's a different thing and the climate action plan, well not even the climate action plan really. The greenhouse gas footprint is one answer in STARS out of 1000 answers, right. So there's all these other social justice and you know investments and research and academics and engagement and all that other stuff is really important to your sustainability program. But when you're writing your climate action plan and everybody wants to put all those things in there, you say no this is a strategy. This document is a focused strategy on how the university is going to solve their carbon problem, right.

So we see this all the time when we do engagement, where we'll have people say well you know we need to work on food insecurity. And it's like that's great, we do, that's important. But you know what, it has zero to do with our carbon footprint. Not quite zero but close to zero. And things that ironically things that students are really jazzed about recycling compost. You can touch it, you can feel it. It's really tactile, right. And so you feel like I can reduce my waste, I can make a difference. And you can and that's really important. But at CSU solid waste is less than 1% of our carbon footprint. So it's really important, we have a big composting program. We have a big recycle program and they're really important. But you know what,

we can recycle and compost everything and it will take 1% off our footprint. So we really need to focus on much harder things like how inefficient our buildings are. Or how much lab equipment we put in our buildings or how we use that lab equipment or how many computers and how long we leave them on. And all those things. It's a million things and they're all hard. So yeah that's the thing that's important for people that want to engage sometimes want to engage on the issues that they're really jazzed about. And that's not always the things that will solve your carbon problem.

I1: Right definitely. So the next portion of our interview kind of has some questions regarding funding. That was one thing when we looked at literature that a lot of universities didn't touch on. Do you feel your climate action plan is well funded? And do you think it takes priority when money is being distributed within the university?

CD: We are a priority, the university has a lot of priorities. And right one of them is a global pandemic. We're spending millions on testing and all kinds of other things. I just saw the number the other day, it was more than a million bucks have been spent on testing over the last 9 months.

I1: Wow.

CD: That's a big hit for the university. So anyway we have a green revolving fund, I don't know if you're run across that. Where we get \$1M a year and the savings from that goes back to replenish the fund. It turns out the fund was originally seeded at half a million dollars and then it grew. And then when it got to \$1M they said that's it, the extra savings is going to go back to the university. So we use that to implement energy and water conservation projects. And the savings from those projects go back into the funds until we hit a million bucks and that's the cap for each year.

I1: I see okay. No that's definitely cool. I think some of the other schools we've interviewed, I think some of them have things that are similar. But it's always interesting to see how that always trickles down. At our university that's one thing that definitely plays a large role and we're trying to figure out.

21:03

CD: Funding is a hard thing for anything on campus. So it's really difficult. Some people do it through programs called performance contracting. And that's where an outside entity, a private firm comes in and implements projects on your campus, but then basically they get to keep the savings until they get paid back for their original investment, okay. So essentially the university keeps paying the same utility bills, the equivalent of the same utility bills for like 10 years into the future, because the company that installed the equipment is taking the savings as payment right.

So that's one way to do it where you can do it with zero capital out of pocket. You know you don't have to put money on the table up front. But I always tell people, they're private companies, they have to make a profit. You figure 20 or 30% right off the top which just means you get to do 20 or 30% less projects for the same amount of money because you have to pay somebody to do their job, right. And that's reasonable but the reality is if you can figure out a way to fund them internally, and if you had the staffing to manage them. That's one thing people have always said why did they cap your fund at \$1M. And I am like for a variety of reasons but one was we said if you gave us more money than that we would need a staff to help manage it.

Because right now \$1M might be 20 or 30 projects a year. Actually this year we had one project that was \$300,000, so I think this year we only had about 15 projects. But managing

15 projects is a job, right, and while there's individual project managers from our construction group on those projects, just managing, making sure they get bid and that they happen and all that is a job. And so you know doing a lot of projects, that's one of the conversations we've had is that if we're really going to you know knuckle down and get our building energy use under control, we need somebody, probably two somebodies who that is their total job, right.

So it is not without financial burden. The thing is that's really cool is you look at it, those people pay for their job about 3 times over every year. So it's not a hard investment except for the first year. You know, after that you're realizing savings that are way more than the salaries of those people

I2: That's awesome.

CD: There are ways to go at it, but it's always hard. Money is always tight at university and right now with Covid we always talk about Covid budgets. It's going to be really hard because the state funding too is going to be less because the tax revenues are down so much because people aren't buying stuff. This is a hard year to do new initiatives.

I2: So you had mentioned that you know when you talk about changing your goal from 2050 to making it earlier and you know if you go to the President or whoever and say in order to make that happen we need to do this, is that well received? Like what kind of response do you get to that?

CD: Absolutely, but there is money attached to that request. I mean it's not without expense. So they're looking at it, I looked at it from a technical engineering cost standpoint, and did a little one page memo up there. I just sent it up a week ago maybe a week and a half. And we have gotten an email that said we're looking at it. So we have great support from the

president but any time you ask for money they got to figure out where it's coming from. And so we're asking for money over and above the \$1M they give us a year for our energy, we call it the ERF fund, that's our green revolving fund. Energy Reserve Fund, that's what it stands for.

25:23

I1: I think that was about all my questions. Do you have any other questions Jessie?

I2: Yeah I have one about, so like since, how is your day to day changed since the implementation of the university's climate action plan? Like has there been a big difference in your day from before and after?

CD: You know not really because we were doing... Energy efficiency has been part of my job since I joined the university in 1999 which seems like an eternity ago. Actually spring break this year, this month, this week actually is my 22nd anniversary at the University!

I1: Congrats.

CD: Since longer than you've been alive, but don't think about that too long! But in terms of my job day to day, energy and water efficiency were always a part of it. But when we got some mechanisms, it used to be we'd come up with projects and then we'd just ask for money right. So things like the ERF fund and some of those things got institutionalized. And so I won't say that anything changed dramatically but we did come up with some more systematic ways to address items in the climate action plan. And there has been some things like the story I told you about the airline offsets. We have not been successful in that, because basically the money stays within the university. The departments that travel it will raise their cost of travel. And that's just... right now, everybody's budgets are getting cut, so it's politically not a time when we can do that. So we're working on it but it just hasn't gotten

there. Does that sort of answer your question? I feel like I dodged the question!

I1: No, I think that definitely answered it. And I am sure that's super applicable... for our staff as well, because we're trying to convince some people who may have difference of opinion regarding climate, so that's definitely you know something that may help win them in our favor.

CD: Yeah. And that's fortunately at CSU I feel like the era where we're trying to worry about who "believes" in climate and doesn't. And it's like you don't have to believe in science for it to be real. It is not religion it's not a belief. So anyway. The science is real and there's a lot of people at CSU doing research in climate science. Everything from political scientists who are going to the... you know what the COPA meetings are related to the Global UN, like the Paris Accords and those kinds of things, she goes to those. So we have people involved from the political side, from the science side. We have a big atmospheric science department, so I feel like while I am sure there are climate deniers on campus, I feel like as an institution we are way past that. It's like I don't have to worry about... it used to be there was a time at the University where you had to worry about talking about climate because there would be people in the room whose eyes would roll.

We are way beyond that and I am so happy. Because it's like now it's not is climate a thing, it's like how bad is it? There's still difference of opinions there although I think there's a lot of people that recognize the world is on fire and we need to do something about it. And so I think when we talk about aggressive goals, um, we've had the President say things publicly like go big or go home. You know so that was when we felt motivated to present her with okay you want us to go big or go home, this is the resources that we need to do that. So um, yeah, that's where we're at. And again we have a President, we've very blessed. She came

to us, good Lord, let me think about it, has it been 2 years ago. Poor thing, all she knows is pandemic. She's just been here a few years. But she came to CSU. She sought out this job because of her interest and history in sustainability and she saw that we were doing some good stuff. And she wanted to be part of it. And she has said that publicly as well. So I am really excited that we have... support all the way up the chain.

But there's again, you know she's running a university and she has a million things to worry about. And we're just one of them. But we're an important one and she acknowledges that.

I1: For sure. I definitely like looking at your school. It's been so impressive to see your guy's success in your climate action plans and progressing those forward. As you know a lot of public universities at least have issues doing that. I think private universities you know they have that funding to spend. But it's so cool to see a public university be able to step up and take charge like that.

CD: Well I appreciate that. And yes we've worked our tail off at it and we're really proud of it. But we also recognize we have taken a few laps and we have a marathon to run. We got a lot of work left to do. As does everybody. And we all just need to say out loud that this is what the world in 10 or 15 or 20 years needs to look like and this is our path to get there. And what your climate action plan looks like can help you lay out that path.

But one more caution about your climate action plan, is that when you write it write it with the intent to update it at least every 2 or 3 years. I was a little cocky about how we're supposed to update it every 2 years and sometimes it's 3. But 10 years is way too long which is when you wrote your last one right?

I2: Yeah.

CD: The world has changed a lot in 10 years and by the time, there's universities that are

saying by 2030 we'll be carbon neutral. CSU will probably not be one of those. We have too many issues going on with like you say we live in the land of coal and gas right. So we will not completely dissociate from that world immediately. But I will say our local utility is on a path to be to zero coal by 2030.

I1: That's super cool, I definitely think that's something MSU wants to reach for as well. Are there any like specific projects you guys have upcoming to work towards those clean energy goals?

CD: We have 21 solar projects in design. The first construction starts in April and we will finish in the summer of '22. So over the next 15 months we'll put in 21 solar systems totaling about just under 5 MW. And that will bring our campus total to well over 10 MW. I think approaching 12. So we're excited about that. Not near enough to carry our whole campus load but it's enough to make us feel like we're starting to do our part.

And then the utilities putting in a lot of utility scale wind. I don't know if you have wind energy up there in Montana but we have a lot of it in eastern Colorado and the utilities are really embracing it.

I1: That's awesome. That's perfect for that sunshine state. Whenever I fly into DIA I always look out at that huge field of solar panels.

CD: Yeah and what a perfect place to put them. You've got a giant field that you can't build in because airplanes fly over all the time. Let's put solar panels all over. And it turns out an airport uses a boatload of electricity. I have a woman friend who is the sustainability coordinator down at DIA and she told me once how much electricity. It's like a city. It's crazy! You don't really think about it but it's a big place and it's 24/7. And there's all these big machinery coming and going. So yeah it's an interesting story.

I1: That must be a huge job, I can't imagine how busy she's been. That must be very difficult!

CD: And think about trying to implement sustainability programs while staying within FAA, TSA, all the federal guidelines. You know you've got all these security and safety issues that you know that everything has to get reviewed in different ways by different groups. And I am like oh God I do not envy your job at all! (laughs)

I1: Right.

CD: Anything else?

35:05

I2: Do you think going public with your goal to be carbon neutral by 2050 and maybe sooner... do you think going public has helped you know push that goal, promote that, encourage the university?

CD: You know when we wrote the first one, we had a team. Actually it was from a committee that preceded the PSC but let's just say it was a subgroup of the campus wide sustainability committee. It's gotten renamed and sort of reorganized since then. **But back then that group pulled together everything from athletics to students to academics. Everybody kind of fed into the first one. And when we published it, we tried to do publicity. But I would still say for about the first 5 years of our climate action plan, if you just stopped people on the plaza and said did you know your university has a climate action plan, that most of them would say no. So we tried to go public but it didn't really stick or people weren't talking about it then. Or whatever. And now it feels like people get it. They ask what are your carbon goals. I get asked that when I present to different organizations and stuff. So it's become more of the lexicon that we talk about.** So when we make an announcement, which considering what time of year it is look for something around Earth Day, right. That's how PR works, they like to

time it to something cool, right. So if we are able to get that going, then we will do a big splash. But however many, again getting through to everybody who is busy and getting tidbits of information from a million places, how do you make sure that gets out there and people know about it, and frankly want to do their part.

And that's one of the things, okay I can ramble about this stuff forever. **We talked about doing a road show, going out to classes and staff meetings and that kind of stuff across campus to talk to different pieces of campus and say this is our climate action plan. And by the way this is your role in it! Because again 10 people from the President's sustainability commission or a couple people from facilities are not going to make this plan happen. It's everybody's job.**

II: For sure. I think that's awesome. I like that roadshow idea, because I guess I wasn't even aware that our like you said our university had a climate action plan until my adviser reached out to me. So I think getting the word out to different people definitely is something that's important.

CD: Right. It just takes time. And that's one of those things too, is that we talk to university relations and right now they're just doing all this messaging and information around Covid, because it's just overwhelming everything, right. **So it's hard to kind of break through the noise of everything that's happening to get people to pay attention to something else, so we'll see how that goes.**

II: Well we definitely look forward to seeing all that stuff and we'll keep our fingers crossed to see some great news for you guys around Earth Day. But I wanted to thank you again for taking the time out of your day to, or evening to let us interview you. This was incredibly helpful and yeah just thank you so much.

CD: Good luck. And make sure that somebody knuckles down and starts doing your

greenhouse gas footprint on a regular basis. It's got to happen. We couldn't.... Honestly we started doing greenhouse gas accounting years before we wrote our first climate action plan. And so understanding what your grade is is important before... you're writing a lesson plan and you don't have a way to grade it yet. So you need to work on that.

I1: For sure. I'll definitely make sure to bring that up. And thank you so much again. I truly appreciate it. You have a great rest of your day.

CD: Thank you, good luck, bye-bye!

39:35