



Carbon Neutral as of 2019—No Incentives Necessary



Enrollment:
Approx. 2,900 FTE

Institution Type:
Private University

Institution Size:
2,422,000 gross sq. ft.

Region:
Central New York



A Leader in Sustainability

For more than decade, Colgate University has been recognized as both a top liberal arts college and a climate leader among higher education institutions across New York State. In 2018, Colgate hosted the State of New York Sustainability Conference.

Despite a lack of access to many State incentives, Colgate continued to forge ahead with ambitious sustainability commitments, backed by broad action across the campus. As a result, Colgate reached a major milestone in April 2019 becoming the first college or university in New York State to achieve carbon neutrality.

Aiming for Zero

The road to achieving carbon neutrality began in 2005 when Colgate formed its first presidential-appointed environmental council. Three years later, the graduating senior class gift established a sustainability fund, and Colgate signed onto the American College & University Presidents' Climate Commitment (now Second Nature Carbon Commitment). In its 2011 Sustainability and Climate Action Plan, Colgate set an aggressive target date of 2019 for achieving carbon neutrality to coincide with the university's bicentennial celebration.

With this target in mind, Colgate successfully implemented an ambitious plan to reduce carbon emissions by 40% from 2009 levels, purchase 100% renewable electricity, and support verified offsets, including a Chilean reforestation project and a New York-based methane capture and wetlands restoration project. As a result, Colgate successfully met its target and became carbon neutral in April 2019.

Colgate continues to look for ways to reduce on-campus emissions and meet new targets—including aspiring to become a zero-waste campus by 2025.

“As long as we continue to have carbon-based energy and transportation systems, we’ll have to buy offsets. Ultimately we want to keep looking at both demand and supply to figure out how we can go all the way,”

John Pumilio, Director of the Office of Sustainability.



Summary of Clean Energy Activities and Accolades

Second Nature:

- Carbon Commitment Signatory
- Climate Leadership Award (2011)

AASHE STARS Gold

Sierra Club Cool Stars #21 (2018)

Climate Targets:

- Carbon neutrality by 2019 (achieved)
- Zero waste by 2025

Clean Energy Highlights:

- More than 75% of heating and hot water provided by biomass, solar thermal, and geothermal
- Green revolving loan fund established in 2017

Overcoming the Lack of State Incentives

Although Colgate cannot access many NYSERDA funding opportunities due to being served by a municipal electric utility, they've still made substantial progress toward their clean energy goals.

While being served by a municipal utility has given Colgate access to a reliable source of low-cost, low-emissions electricity, the lack of incentives and lower potential cost savings from electricity made it challenging to make many of the clean energy investments such as solar PV.

"At the end of the day, it hasn't really stopped a lot of cost-effective projects," said Pumilio. "We're all about getting the results—not so much the expensive but 'sexy' projects with long paybacks."

"It's safe to say that we've cut over half a million dollars a year from our operating costs just through cost-effective energy conservation and resource efficiency"

— John Pumilio Director of Sustainability

In addition to tackling some of the "low-hanging fruit" projects (such as lighting), Pumilio highlighted an ongoing retrocommissioning initiative, which already resulted in more than \$150,000 annually in operating cost savings from one building—the Ho Science Center built in 2008.

Colgate notably developed a full set of green building standards in 2015 to help advance energy improvements with longer paybacks. These standards include requirements for performing 20-year life-cycle cost analyses and achieving a minimum of LEED Silver certification for all new buildings and major renovations. The campus now has a LEED Platinum building and two LEED Gold buildings.

Additionally, in late 2017, Colgate seeded a green revolving loan fund to start financing, measuring, and evaluating energy projects across campus. The loan fund enables any individual on campus to propose a project for review—and Colgate hopes to continue expanding the fund's initial \$1.25 million allocation over time.

Ready to join? Get started today.

Learn how at nyserda.ny.gov/clean-green-campuses.