



# Increased renewable energy penetration georgetown

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Before this agreement, university administrators worked to minimize the impacts of climate change as part of their responsibility to "care for our common home," according to Audrey Stewart, the director of the Office of Sustainability at Georgetown. "We are inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals," Stewart said.

Through a long-term green energy plan, the university has sought to reduce its carbon footprint under the leadership of President John DeGioia. In 2014, the university was able to half greenhouse gas emissions and has implemented energy efficiency policies ranging from district heating to building retrofits that have saved nearly 3.3 million kilowatt-hours of electricity, the carbon equivalent to planting 140,000 trees. However, Stewart said, this success did not stop the university's desire to shift further towards greener energy.

The latest plan follows a 2019 rejection by the Maryland Department of the Environment for a controversial solar installation that would have supplied more than half of the university's electricity. Stewart hopes the investment can further the university's sustainable goals by "continuing to power our campus using clean electricity, reducing long-term utility costs to the university and supporting the renewable energy industry in our region through our power purchase."

In the past, the university has partnered with student organizations like Georgetown Energy to create climate-focused initiatives like Solar Street, which expanded the university's regional solar power to nearly 18 kilowatts of installed capacity. The new PPA would supply the university annually with 100,000 megawatt-hours of electricity, a significant increase in the percentage of energy sourced from solar power.

This energy transition is part of a larger shift away from conventional fossil fuels and towards a "fully sustainable energy mix," said Stewart. The Georgetown University Student Association (GUSA) also praised the university for this move. Last year, the GUSA Sustainability Policy Team pushed the Blue Campus Referendum which encouraged several new programs to minimize carbon emissions and invest in renewable energy.

GUSA also noted that they are open to further cooperation with the university to mitigate climate change. "Our Sustainability Policy Team looks forward to continuing work with Vice President Geoff Chatas and other stakeholders in the referendum, including the formation of an official sustainability working group," Jacob Bernard (SFS '23), the press secretary for GUSA, wrote in an email to the Voice.

Georgetown currently sources two-thirds of its electricity from a renewable energy power purchase agreement, and aspires to become carbon neutral by 2030 and achieve 100% renewable power by 2035, in addition to its ongoing commitment to divest from fossil fuels, which began in 2020.



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The Earth Commons, the university's institute for environment and sustainability, will have innovative graduate degree programs and undergraduate offerings spanning the disciplines and schools. The institute will also elevate impact-focused research at Georgetown, and forge new partnerships with government and non-government institutions and corporations around sustainability and environmental education, research, and service.

The institute's launch capitalizes on increasing faculty expertise across the university, as well as strong student interest in the field, and coincides with a call from Pope Francis for Catholic institutions to make care for the environment an urgent moral priority.

Earth Commons takes its inspiration from *Laudato Si'*, the powerful 2015 encyclical by Pope Francis on the pressing need to reshape our relationship with the environment. The document outlines the problem of global environmental degradation and the impact on all creation, but particularly on the poor.

"With the launch of our new Earth Commons Institute, Georgetown is in an even stronger position to realize the impact that we can make to better understand and respond to urgent challenges facing our global environment," says Georgetown President John J. DeGioia.

"Providing a more sustainable planet for future generations is both a creative and inspiring ambition that requires the collaborative commitment of disciplines of every kind, focused on the larger goal of advancing the common good."

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