Proposed Motion on UM’s Climate Action Plan

Background. On September 17th, Senate Chair Borrie issued a memo to Faculty Senators concerning a “solar panel covered parking project” that had been endorsed by ASUM. This memo informed us that (a) ASUM passed a resolution in support of this project, including a provision to bring this to the Board of Regents, and (b) President Engstrom had issued a response expressing serious concerns about the viability of the project.

In response to this divergence of opinion, a number of ASUM Senators have asked that Faculty Senate join them in encouraging the University of Montana administration to advance a major renewable energy project on campus. Given our prerogative to engage the administration in consultation towards the development of policy and administrative action to promote the welfare of The University of Montana-Missoula in cooperation with the President, it would appear to be within the scope of our charge to bring this forward for due consideration.

Accordingly, reasons for supporting a major renewable energy project on campus include the following:

- In 2007, UM President George Dennison signed the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment, committing the University of Montana to develop an institutional climate action plan to become climate neutral.
- The University of Montana’s 2010 Climate Action Plan set forth the ambitious goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2020.
- The University of Montana’s Strategic Plan, UM 2020: Building a University for the Global Century, identifies sustainability as a core value of the University of Montana.
- The most recent Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory Update (2013-14) for the University of Montana reports that we achieved an 8.5% reduction in overall emissions from 2007 to 2014.
- Leading by example speaks to our integrity as a flagship institution of higher learning and demonstrates responsible citizenship. A major renewable energy installation on campus would visibly demonstrate UM’s commitment to sustainability and could attract new students to our campus.
- As faculty members, our roles include the development of student leadership skills through projects that promote and model responsible citizenship and problem-solving.

It is clear that the University of Montana is already committed to reducing its carbon footprint and advancing sustainability on our campuses, but it also appears that significant action is needed soon to achieve the public goals stated in our Climate Action Plan. A major renewable energy project would move us closer to carbon neutrality.

To date, Faculty Senate has not been asked to weigh in on this issue. However, the growing need for climate action recommends that we do so. A general statement of support for renewable energy will allow us to (1) encourage responsible action on the critical issue of climate change (2) demonstrate support for student leadership, (3) recognize the University administration’s critical role in fully evaluating any specific proposal for which it must take ultimate responsibility, and (4) provide the administration with a clear index of faculty support for such a project.

Accordingly, the following MOTION is hereby offered for our consideration:

We the Faculty Senate of the University of Montana encourage the University of Montana Administration to take concrete steps towards meeting the commitments of the University’s Climate Action Plan and to report annually on actions taken and progress made.