

Sustainability Plan Progress Report

THE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR CATHOLIC
UNIVERSITY'S FIVE-YEAR SUSTAINABILITY PLAN



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Office of Campus Sustainability

At A Glance

Leadership and
Recognition



Campus
Facilities



Community
Engagement



Environmental
Impact



Introduction

"Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for the coming generations."

*Pope Francis
On Care for Our Common Home – Laudato Si'*



Inspired by the teachings of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on the environment, *Laudato Si'*, The Catholic University of America is committed to advancing sustainability across our campus and broader community. As "a comprehensive Catholic and American institution of higher learning," The Catholic University of America offers a distinctive contribution to the entire nation with an important opportunity to address the national conversation on environmental stewardship within the context of the University's Catholic mission and identity.

Our Five-Year Sustainability Plan released in FY 2021 outlined goals and strategies for reducing our environmental impact and promoting a more sustainable future. As the initial five-year period concludes, we reflect on the progress we have made towards increasing the sustainability of our community.

Over the past five years, we have established the Office of Campus Sustainability; earned top recognition for sustainability efforts from the U.S. Department of Education, the District of Columbia, and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education; constructed the region's largest solar array; achieved two LEED building certifications; planted over 500 trees; and engaged hundreds of community members in sustainability initiatives.

The following report highlights our major accomplishments over the past five years in leadership and recognition, campus facilities, and community engagement. The report concludes with an overview of the environmental impact of this work.

Leadership and Recognition

"Over the past five years, we have made considerable progress towards improving the environmental well-being of the campus and the greater community. The conclusion of our first Five-Year Sustainability Plan is not an ending; it is the launchpad for continued vigilance in the next decade and beyond."

Debra Nauta-Rodriguez
Associate Vice President for Facilities Planning and Management / University Architect



The Catholic University of America has a legacy of committed and active leadership in sustainability at the local, national, and international levels. At Catholic University we have turned our commitments into actions that are visible across campus, from academics to community engagement to our buildings and grounds, resulting in recognition from a wide variety of organizations focused on sustainability.

Key achievements include:

- Releasing the first [five-year sustainability plan](#), 2021.
- Creating the Office of Campus Sustainability, 2021.
- Launching a sustainability [website](#) and [newsletter](#) and [social media](#) accounts, 2021.
- Collaborating with Washington, D.C.-area universities as part of the District of Columbia Mayor's [College and University Sustainability Pledge](#) and the District of Columbia Sustainable Energy Utility's College and University Roundtable Series, 2021–2025.
- Participating in the D.C. region's CHEERS working group focused on advancing sustainability education across all campuses in the D.C. region, 2022–2025.

Leadership and Recognition

- Collaborating with nine other D.C.-area universities for a Climate Justice Teach-in, 2022.
- Organizing the Climate Change and the Future of Work Conference, 2022.
- Joining the [Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education](#), 2022.
- Enrolling in the [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#), 2022.
- Joining the U.S. Department of Education's Higher Education Steering Committee, 2023.
- Earning recognition as a [Tree Campus](#) from the Arbor Day Foundation and as a Bronze-Level [Bicycle Friendly University](#) from the League of American Bicyclists, 2023.

As a result of our efforts, Catholic University has earned the following recognition for sustainability best practices:

<u>21st Best Green College</u> College Consensus 2021–2024	<u>Green College</u> <i>Princeton Review</i> 2021–2025	<u>Green Ribbon School</u> U.S. Department of Education 2024
<u>STARS Silver Rating</u> Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education 2022	<u>Clean Energy D.C. Award</u> District of Columbia 2024	<u>Excellence in Energy Awards — Sustainability</u> NRG Energy, Inc. 2023

Campus Facilities

"This West Campus Solar Array project is not just a renewable energy venture; it's a testament to The Catholic University of America's dedication to creating a sustainable future for our nation and world."

*Dr. Peter Kilpatrick
University President*



Catholic University aims to provide a vibrant, challenging, and uplifting collegiate experience for students and the greater Catholic University community. Over the past five years, the Office of Campus Sustainability — in partnership with the Offices of Facilities Planning and Design Management, Facilities Maintenance and Operations, and Capital Project Management — and others across campus have accomplished a variety of sustainable infrastructure projects.

Key achievements include:

- Completing construction of the [West Campus Solar Array](#), 2024.
- [Achieving LEED](#) Gold certification for the Conway School of Nursing, 2024.
- [Pursuing WELL](#) certification for the Conway School of Nursing Building, ongoing.
- [Achieving LEED](#) Silver certification for Garvey Hall, 2023.
- Installing new [stormwater management devices](#) at Garvey Hall, the West Campus Solar Array, the Welcome Plaza, and the Conway School of Nursing Building, 2023–2024.
- Instituting a [back-of-house compost program](#) for all food waste generated in the campus kitchens, 2023.
- Introducing [battery recycling](#) to campus, 2024.
- Adding over a dozen filtered-water bottle filling stations, 2021–2025.
- Planting over 500 trees across campus, 2021–2025.
- Completing a comprehensive tree survey of campus, 2022.

Campus Facilities

West Campus Solar Array



Catholic University's [West Campus Solar Array](#) is a unique public and private partnership to build the largest community solar facility in the District of Columbia and greater DMV region. The 6 MW array provides locally generated, renewable energy in support of the District's renewable energy goals. It also supports learning and research opportunities for students and creates a healthy, local ecosystem.

The Conway School of Nursing Building



The [Conway School of Nursing Building](#) was designed to achieve both LEED Gold (LEED Building Design & Construction v4, Certified Gold, 2024) and WELL certification in alignment with the university's commitment to sustainability, human health, and well-being. Key features of the building include ongoing monitoring of air quality and thermal conditions to maximize occupant health and wellbeing, a focus on lighting and acoustics to support the unique needs and preferences of users, and the selection of biophilic design elements and high-quality furnishings that support indoor air quality and minimize toxins in the built environment.

Community Engagement

"Whether I'm providing a tour to local elementary students interested in learning about our solar arrays, working with faculty to design class projects focused on sustainability, or collecting hundreds of items for donation during our Move-Out Donation Drive, I am inspired daily by the care that our community has for our environment."

Gabrielle Choate
Director, Office of Campus Sustainability



Catholic University offers students, staff, and faculty a variety of ways to get involved in sustainability efforts on campus — from academics to student organizations to finding new ways to live a more sustainable life. Over the past five years, the Office of Campus Sustainability has partnered with offices and departments across campus on the following initiatives.

General Sustainability Education

- Conducting 30 [sustainability tours](#) of campus for students, faculty, staff, and the broader community, 2021–2025.
- Adding Office of Campus Sustainability information to all staff and faculty orientation sessions, 2022–2025.
- Launching a [Student Government Association](#) Environmental Executive Initiative, 2021–2025.
- Certifying 10 campus offices during the first-ever [Green Office Certification Program](#) for staff and faculty offices on campus, 2023.
- Creating a new staff and faculty engagement opportunity at the building level called [Sustainability Captains](#), 2022–2025.

Community Engagement

Academics

- Instructing three dozen students over four semesters as part of four independent study courses in partnership with the School of Architecture and Planning and the School of Engineering, 2022–2023.
- Facilitating eight [classroom collaborations](#) in partnership with the School of Architecture and Planning and the Busch School of Business, 2021–2025.
- Facilitating a monthly [Center for Teaching Excellence Connect & Collaborate series](#) to foster conversations with faculty on improving sustainability education, 2022–2025.



Environment

- Hosting three community tree planting events on campus in partnership with [Casey Trees](#) and three invasive vine removal events on campus with the [Chesapeake Climate Action Network](#), 2023–2025.
- Growing over 1,600 pounds of produce in the community garden and donating it to [Cardinal Cupboard](#), the on-campus food pantry, 2021–2025.
- Enhancing the community garden to include a permanent fence, paved walkways, a greenhouse, and raised beds, 2021–2025.
- Establishing a new service site with the [Franciscan Monastery Garden Guild](#), 2021–2025.
- Introducing three beehives to West Campus in collaboration with the [D.C. Beekeepers Alliance](#), 2024–2025.



Community Engagement

Zero Waste

- Recovering over 6,000 pounds of donations, including clothing, bedding, and residence hall room essentials during the first-ever spring and fall Move-Out [Donation Drives](#), 2023–2024.
- Hosting the first-ever [Move-In Free Sale](#) to offer clothing, bedding, and residence hall room essentials to students for free at the start of the fall semester, 2023.
- Opening [Cardinal Closet](#), the free on-campus thrift store, welcoming 700 patrons, and facilitating over 3,500 thrifts, 2022–2025.
- Hosting two community [electronic waste recycling](#) events that collected 5,195 pounds of waste, 2023–2024.
- [Rescuing](#) over 1,000 pounds of leftover food from campus events through a partnership with Food Rescue US - DC Chapter, 2023–2024.
- Piloting a [Free Food Alert](#) for students, staff, and faculty to donate food left over after events to campus subscribers, 2025.
- Hosting the first-ever campus wide [office supply swap](#) for staff and faculty to reduce waste in campus offices, 2023.
- Hosting two on-campus trash clean-ups in the North Woods, 2022–2025.
- Starting a Recycled Materials Closet in the School of Architecture and Planning to reduce waste at the end of the semester and promote resource sharing and recycling among students, 2023.
- Creating a new listserv for staff to use to swap durable office goods, 2023.
- Donating surplus furniture and supplies to local non-profit organizations, 2022–2025.



Community Engagement

Cardinal Closet



Cardinal Closet is Catholic University's on-campus free thrift store. The Closet began as a student project when Juliana Walsh, B.A. 2024, wanted to address the issues of waste, fast fashion, and resource insecurity on campus. The Closet opened in Fall 2022 and carries women's and men's clothing in all sizes. It includes business, casual, athletic, formal, and maternity clothes, and more, and was an instant success on campus, welcoming over 100 students during its first semester and over 700 students, staff, and faculty members in the years since.

Community Garden



In Spring 2021, students decided to resurrect the campus community garden. They started with a couple raised garden beds and have since expanded from harvesting a few dozen pounds of produce to hundreds of pounds of produce each year. In 2024, the garden was awarded a grant by the D.C. Department of Energy and Environment and the Chesapeake Bay Trust, which enabled the installation of new raised garden beds that include an ADA accessible raised garden bed and a small greenhouse. The new beds will dramatically increase the garden's production capacity in future years and provide opportunities for all community members to volunteer and benefit from time in the garden.

Community Engagement

Move-Out Donation Drive and Move-In Free Sale



For the first time in recent years, Catholic University hosted a Move-Out Donation Drive in 2023. All on-campus students were invited to donate any items that they did not want to take home with them over the summer. Students donated approximately 75 bags worth of clothing and bedding to Habitat for Humanity, plus some rugs and small appliances; three boxes of food and personal care items to Cardinal Cupboard; and approximately 30 bags worth of clothing to Cardinal Closet. In addition, students donated a full, 20-foot shipping container's worth of room supplies, including rugs, chairs, tables, organizational cubes, storage drawers, kitchen supplies, and more.

Following the success of the Move-Out Donation Drive, the Office of Campus Sustainability hosted the first ever Move-In Free Sale in August 2023. The goal of the free sale was to offer all the room supply items donated during the donation drive back to students at the start of the fall semester to encourage reuse and foster a zero waste mindset among our students. Students were enthusiastic about the event, and nearly every item donated was claimed. The few remaining items were donated to Goodwill.

Environmental Impact

The Office of Campus Sustainability, along with the Facilities Planning and Management team, continually monitor metrics related to Catholic University's use of energy and water utilities and to our generation of waste and greenhouse gas emissions. These metrics help us understand the environmental impact of Catholic University and Office of Campus Sustainability initiatives as well as provide insight into campus operations to support decision making.

We reduced our carbon footprint by **30%** compared to FY 2016, exceeding our goal of 20%.

We offset **100%** of electricity with renewable energy credits.

We diverted **51%** of our waste generated in FY 2025 from landfill, exceeding our goal of 50%.

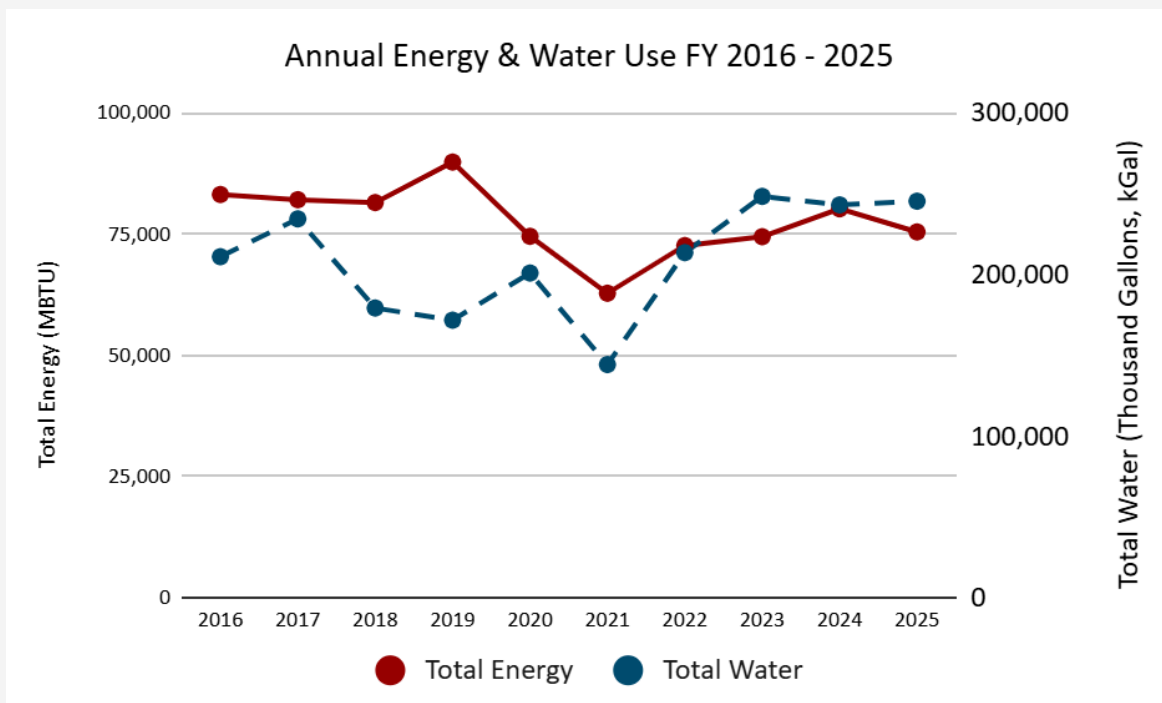
Energy, in the form of electricity or natural gas, accounts for the majority of campus utilities. Electricity is primarily used for cooling, lighting, and powering general appliances and computers. Natural gas is primarily used for powering boilers and other steam system components that warm buildings on campus. Energy use over the past decade has remained mostly consistent, with a peak in FY 2019 and a dip in FY 2021 due to a decrease in campus occupancy during the pandemic. In FY 2022, we started seeing a slight year-over-year increase in energy use with the return of faculty, staff, and students to campus on a more regular schedule and the addition of two new buildings to campus: Garvey Hall in FY 2024 and the Conway School of Nursing Building in FY 2025.

Environmental Impact

Water is used for faucets, toilets, and showers as well as to heat and cool buildings on campus. Water use has followed a similar trajectory as energy, remaining mostly consistent but with a significant decrease in water use during the pandemic and increases in subsequent years due to the return of campus activity and the construction of two new buildings. Water use has remained stable over the past three years.

Progress toward goals:

- Energy: As of the end of FY 2025, the University has achieved a 9% reduction in energy use compared to FY 2016, missing the target to achieve a 20% reduction by FY 2025.
- Water: As of the end of FY 2025, the University has seen a 16% increase in water use compared to FY 2016, missing the target to achieve a 20% reduction by FY 2025.

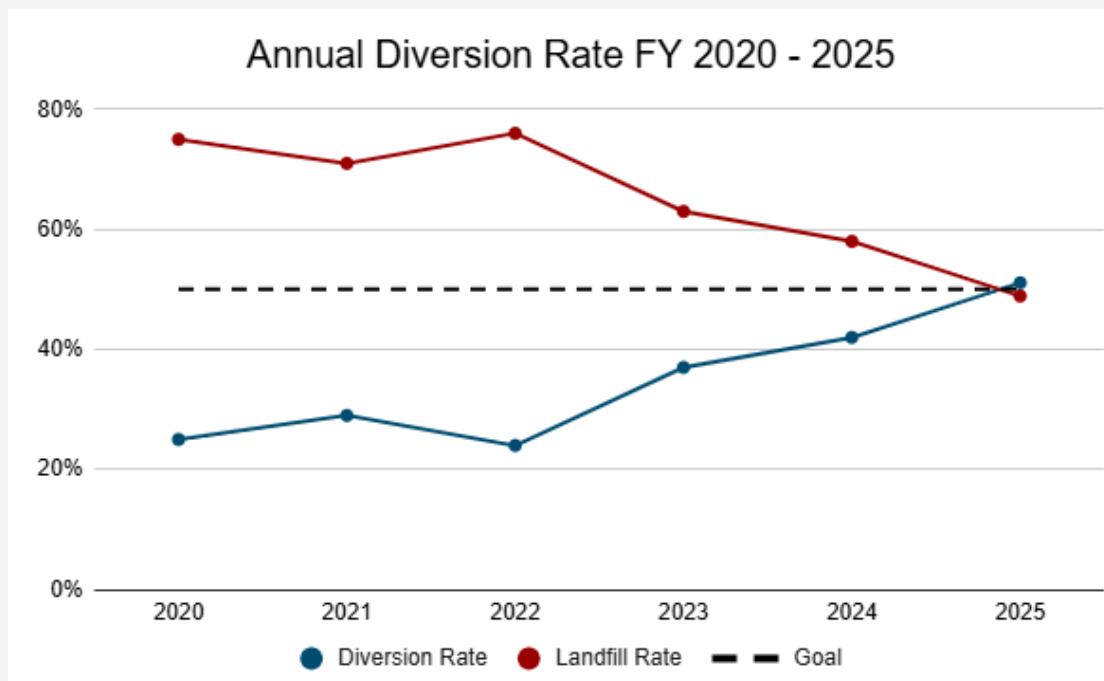


Environmental Impact

Waste refers to all items discarded and removed from the University, including recycling, compost, and trash. University waste data is available starting in FY 2020. From FY 2021 to 2022, we saw an increase in trash generation (waste sent to landfill), which can be attributed to the increased use of masks, cleaning supplies, and single use items during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in the years since the community returned to campus, the diversion rate has increased significantly, from a low of 24% in FY 2022 to a high of 51% in FY 2025.

Progress toward goals:

- Waste: As of FY 2025, the University has achieved its goal to divert over 50% of waste generated on campus from landfill.

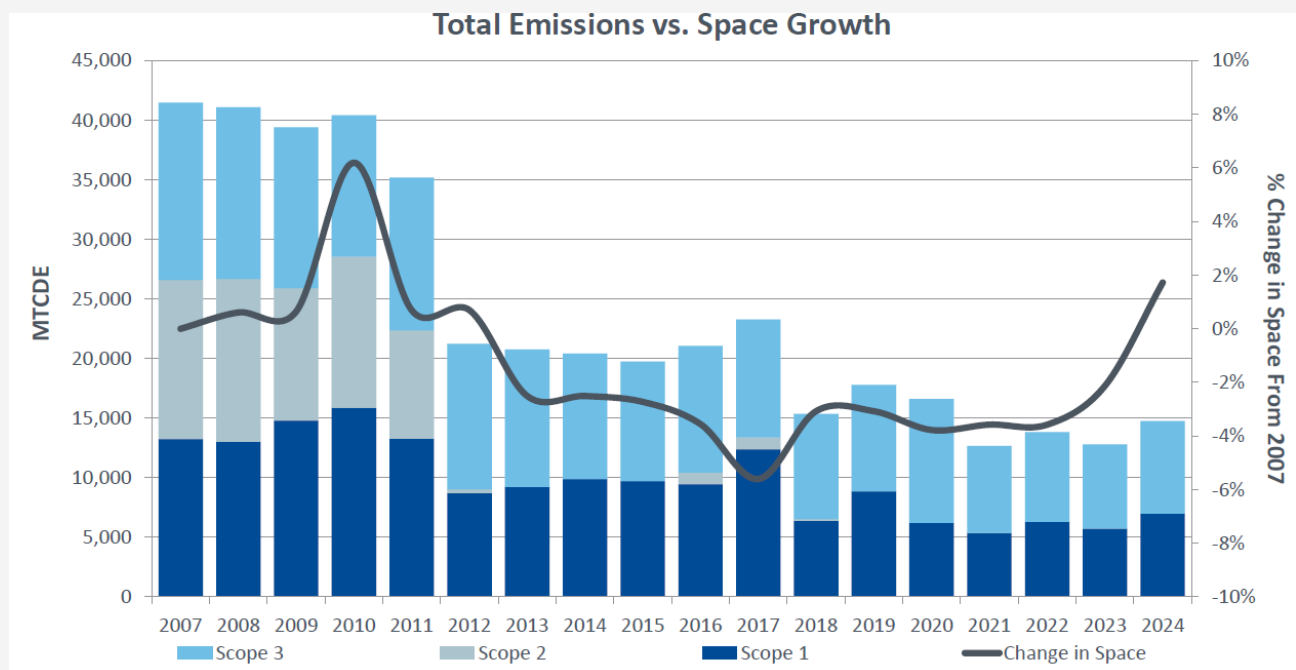


Environmental Impact

Greenhouse gas emissions are the result of everyday activities such as turning on lights and driving to campus. These emissions, which include gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide among others, contribute to global climate change.

In FY 2024, Catholic University emitted 14,757 metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent emissions. This is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions from driving 37.6 million miles in an average passenger vehicle or the carbon dioxide emissions from charging 1.2 billion smartphones.

Since the University first started tracking emissions in FY 2007, it has reduced total emissions by over 64%. Recent years show a gradual decline in overall emissions, despite an increase in inhabited building space on campus due to the opening of Garvey Hall and the Conway School of Nursing.



Environmental Impact

In greenhouse gas inventories, emissions are broken into three categories to better understand the source of emissions and how to control them.

- Scope 1 emissions are emissions that an organization directly controls. This category includes on-campus natural gas use, fleet fuels, and refrigerants. Scope 1 emissions increased by 22% in FY 2024 compared to FY 2023.
- Scope 2 emissions are emissions from purchased electricity sources, such as electricity, steam, heat, and cooling. Catholic University has zero scope 2 emissions due to the purchase of Renewable Energy Credits (RECs). RECs ensure that the electricity we purchase is offset with the generation of renewable energy.
- Scope 3 emissions, which are the most difficult to measure and control, include emissions from sources that are not owned or controlled, but that the organization indirectly impacts. Scope 3 includes emissions from commuting, travel (including study abroad and directly financed University travel), waste generation, wastewater, paper purchases, and transmission and distribution losses (associated with electricity use on campus). Scope 3 emissions decreased by 10% in FY 2024 compared to FY 2023.

Progress towards goals:

- As of the end of FY 2024, the University has achieved a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to FY 2016, exceeding the target to achieve a 20% reduction by FY 2025.

Conclusion

"Catholic identity is not a footnote to the general concept of sustainability but rather imbues every aspect of it."

Catholic Climate Covenant



Since the initiation of the Five-Year Sustainability Plan, Catholic University has made impressive strides towards advancing sustainability across our campus and broader community.

While the initial five-year period for the Sustainability Plan has concluded, the Office of Campus Sustainability will continue to make progress in FY 2026 and beyond to achieve and improve upon the goals outlined in the plan. The next Sustainability Plan will be released in conjunction with the next Campus Master Plan in FY 2027.

Sustainability is a sustained collaborative effort.

Feel free to reach out to us at sustainability@cua.edu and check us out at www.catholic.edu/green.



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA
Office of Campus Sustainability