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Carbon-reduction programs receive funds

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The funding of four student-initiated projects under the Community Carbon Use Reduction at Brown program was announced yesterday, though administrators refrained from outlining the selected projects in detail or naming the recipients, saying that partnerships and sponsorships with community members had yet to be hashed out in full.

The CCURB program was born out of substantial donations by the Sidney Frank Foundation and the Office of President Ruth Simmons to fund student-led projects that reduce carbon emissions in the Providence community.

The four projects that will receive the program's funding plan to install high-efficiency lighting, programmable thermostats and "weatherizing" technology in Providence homes. They also plan to partner with a local low-income girls' school to develop and implement emissions-reducing ideas.

CCURB committee co-chair and Executive Vice President for Finance and Administration Elizabeth Huidekoper said that more official details about those projects will unfold "in the next couple of weeks." In the meantime, the University has not released the names of leaders of projects whose proposals were successful.

Among the successful applicants for CCURB funding was Herald Higher Ed Editor Debbie Lehmann '10, who, along with Dan MacCombie '08, will lead a project to install programmable thermostats in low-income households in Providence.

Lehmann said the project is designed to help those who leave their thermostats on while they are out of the house or asleep, compounding skyrocketing utility bills and leading to unnecessary carbon emissions. Studies say that fewer than half of people adjust their thermostats when they go out, she said.

"It's a huge financial problem, and it's also a waste of energy" Lehmann said. She added that she is pleased the University has chosen to tackle climate issues directly by taking action locally, and that she feels her project is a great opportunity to do just that.

Lehmann said she plans to use the CCURB funds to purchase the thermostats and partner with Providence community organizations that already do work in improving home energy efficiency to install the devices. The details of those partnerships, as well as how much money her project will receive, will be worked out as the project progresses, Lehmann said.

An e-mail to Lehmann from CCURB co-chair and Environmental Stewardship Initiatives Manager Kurt Teichert asked what types of support she thought she would need as the project moves forward. The e-mail also said the CCURB committee was thinking about hiring a part-time employee or a consultant to advise and offer support to funded projects.

Members of the committee, which notified program applicants of their funding decisions in recent weeks, said they garnered a variety of exciting and creative ideas. The final picks, they said, were made

on the basis of the projects' clearly articulated plans to achieve substantial cuts in carbon emissions.

CCURB committee member Michael Glassman '09 said the committee hopes to engage those projects that did not receive funding but still display strong potential.

"The CCURB project isn't just meant to be a source of funding. It's meant to really accomplish a goal, which is reducing carbon emissions in local communities and doing it in a bunch of different (ingenious) ways," said Glassman, who is also president of the Undergraduate Council of Students. Proposals that did not receive funding can still be part of realizing that goal, he said.

"These projects - to get them at a really high quality level - do take a lot of research and planning," Glassman added.

Glassman himself is part of a project selected for CCURB funding that was touted as the program's pilot. That project involves the distribution of energy-saving compact fluorescent lamps, or CFLs, to low-income Providence households and, unlike the other projects, is already underway.

The CFLs and other funding for the pilot project have been thus far provided by the Wal-Mart Foundation, Glassman said.

"It's cool. Wal-Mart is really excited about our project," he said. The company will continue to be a partner in the project, he said, but he would not specify the financial nature of the relationship.

Andrea Gaines '10 submitted a proposal to build greenhouses to reduce Brown Dining Services' dependence on purchasing energy-intensive non-local foods. The notice from Teichert that her project would not receive funding included an invitation to further discuss the project's potential, pending research on the efficacy of local food production and distribution on carbon emissions.

Gaines said she was frustrated that the program's stringent guidelines on quantifying carbon emissions reduction meant her project didn't get funding. But she added that she expects her project to move forward nevertheless, with or without any CCURB funds.

Like Gaines' project, the financial future of the CCURB program itself is not altogether clear, committee members said.

The committee does not expect that the four projects approved for funding will exhaust the original \$350,000 in donations that jump-started the program, and it hopes to use the rest of that money to sustain approved projects or take more on, Huidekoper said.

But Huidekoper added that the CCURB program funds were a one-time donation and neither the University nor the Sidney Frank Foundation have yet expressed any intention to put up more funds to make the program a permanent program.

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