

# Group wants OU, other schools to banish coal as power source

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**T**he Sierra Club, a national environmental group, on Wednesday launched a campaign to “kick coal off campus” with rallies at Ohio University and 10 other U.S. schools.

About a dozen students gathered at the Civil War monument on College Green to speak out and show their support for the campaign, which calls on leaders at OU and 60 other American colleges and universities to shut down the coal-burning power plants on their campuses.

“Moving Campuses Beyond Coal,” a Sierra Club report released on Wednesday, names OU as one of 11 institutions nationwide that has started to move toward using cleaner energy, and which “should finish the job.”

The campaign is targeting the Lausche Heating Plant at OU, which supplies steam heat to university buildings. The plant burned about 31,000 tons of coal during fiscal year 2007, according to the OU Office of Sustainability Web site.

“Mining and burning coal is the most destructive industrial practice in our country,” charged Christina Liakos, an activist who came to Athens from New Hampshire to organize the campaign.

John Bailey, an OU sophomore who spoke at the rally, said OU should be investing in “the future” and helping “create clean-energy jobs” by supporting alternative energy sources.

Bailey and Liakos did not promote any specific alternatives to coal, but Liakos told *The Athens NEWS* that alternative-energy industries could create more jobs than the coal industry currently supports.

OU buys most of its electricity from American Electric Power (AEP), a huge energy company that operates coal-burning power plants in southeast Ohio and across the county.

When asked why the campaign is targeting OU’s heating plant and not its consumption of AEP electricity, Liakos said that the Sierra Club wants to empower students and faculty to take on issues in their local community.

Two years ago OU President Roderick McDavis signed the American College and University President’s Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). The commitment, which now has 650 members, requires institutions to take an inventory of carbon emissions, promote energy efficiency and submit a “climate action plan” to move the institutions toward “climate neutrality.” Liakos called the commitment a “great first step.”

“But the President’s Climate Commitment is just that, a first step,” Liakos said. “By acting



Sierra Club member Christina Liakos speaks Wednesday about what she sees as the need for OU to stop burning coal. Photo by Ed Venrick.

now to stop using coal, (OU) could become a leader of institutions of higher education.”

OU and other campuses participating in the ACUPCC recently received a four-month extension on the deadline to submit a climate action plan, according to an OU release. The original deadline was Sept. 15.

Sonia Marcus, OU’s sustainability coordinator, said OU has otherwise met the requirements of the commitment.

Marcus co-chairs the Presidential Advisory Council for Sustainability Planning (PACSP). The council is charged with developing recommendations for a comprehensive sustainability plan for OU.

Marcus said the PACSP wants extra time to create a plan that considers ecological, educational and food-supply issues, not just carbon emissions.

“We lacked specifics,” Marcus said. “Specifics are hard. They’re hard to generate, so it’s going to take some time.”

Marcus said she hopes to see more student participation in OU’s energy and sustainability initiatives.

The PACSP recently launched a new website at <http://www.ohio.edu/pascp>.

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