



Presidents meet to talk climate change

Universities must work to find solutions, Crow says

by Sarah Owen

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The evidence for global warming is undeniable and the only hope for maintaining a quality of life requires adaptation, according to officials from the state's three public universities Monday.

The cause of the observed temperature spike is "very likely" humans, said Jonathan Overpeck, director of the UA's Institute for the Study of Planet Earth.

"It's very real," Overpeck said. "And there's little doubt humans are causing it."

Overpeck, along with experts and the presidents from each of the Arizona universities met at ASU Monday for the Conference on Climate Change.

Speakers discussed the role universities should play in addressing global warming.

State universities have three responsibilities to fulfill, ASU President Michael Crow said.

University leaders must first work to build agile, flexible learning institutions, Crow said, which evolve to find solutions to climate issues.

Those institutions must then act as translators that speak across the chasm between science and everyone else, he added.

"Physical predictions (about climate changes) are possible with some certainty," Crow said. "But we don't have anybody that can understand them. You can put up charts until you're blue in the face — all of which might be highly probable — but we lack the ability to translate. We lack the ability to connect."

But the ultimate goal of universities must be the formation of an organization whose primary focus is learning and teaching others to adapt to inevitable changes, Crow added.

"It's the central reason for our existence as a university," he said. "Humans will survive — this is about quality of life."

Bruce Hungate, a biological sciences professor from NAU, said universities train the public by example and begin to explore alternative solutions.

"It's probably true that there is no single solution," he said. "We need a multi-pronged approach. And universities are a natural place to seek answers and more questions."

But the Arizona Board of Regent's Ernest Calderón took Crow's message a step further and urged academics to take greater action.

The regents govern the three state universities.



Andrea Bloom / THE STATE PRESS

SOME LIKE IT HOT: Dean of the College of Engineering and Natural Sciences at NAU Dr. Laura Huenneke speaks during a panel discussion held on climate change at Tempe's campus Monday.

"You have been belittled into believing all you're good for is some little study," he said. "Please, for the sake of Arizona, don't sit back and rest. The time is now and you have the power. The question is, do you scientists have the courage to step forward and do something?"

Calderón added that he thought climate problems facing the world are portrayed worse than they really are by misinformation.

"The term 'climate change' is disingenuous," he said. "It's global warming. Anything else is political double speak and we have failed to educate our students as to what global warming is all about."

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