My experience at the National Climate Leadership Summit was incredibly eye opening and informative, but most importantly led to ideas that could help move sustainability forward on Xavier University’s campus.

“The work we do today will determine our future tomorrow”

In 2015, for the first time in history, the United States produced more renewable energy than energy based on fossil fuel. The fight on climate change is not over—not for Xavier, and not for thousands of other students and people who have dedicated their life to protecting the environment.

The way that we produce ‘conventional’ energy through dirty fossil fuels, coal, even nuclear energy will be decreasing and morphing into a new normal. This new grid of energy that is taking over schools, businesses, homes, cities, and almost everywhere around the world will be the way that our children and grandchildren consumer and create energy. With the recent COP 21 in Paris, France, nations around the globe have started to come together and sign agreements to sign the Paris Accord documents. If 55% of top energy consuming countries sign the Paris Accord, new restrictions on emissions will be enforced globally on every country.

According to Dan Utech, who was the mastermind behind America’s Clean Power Plan, the U.S. has designated 8% of the Department of Energy’s budget towards renewable energy. The amount of renewable energies invested in and used has increased by 30x over the last few years. In fact, in March 2016, 19% of the country’s electricity was based on renewable energy. Change is beginning to occur at all levels of politics, and the NCLS reminded me of the importance that was placed on mayors of cities by Benjamin Barber. Although change can happen from the bottom up or top down, sometimes starting in the middle can have profound effects that may have never occurred without the progressive ingenuity of those in middle management positions.

Similar to how Cincinnati has a Green Cincinnati Plan, Xavier should prepare its own, renewed green plan that includes sections on the resiliency of campus. While much of what people hear about climate change is its devastating effects, the idea of resiliency is still fairly new. We have established that climate change is real and happening—what now? How do we prepare for more intensive storms, more or less rainfall, and unpredictable weather? Cincinnati’s sustainability director, Larry Falkin, is well versed in resiliency plans. In his class, Climate Change Leadership, Larry Falkin addresses the importance of resiliency. The course description is as follows:

“Course will focus on Cincinnati as a Midwestern case study for climate impacts and responses. Students will gain insights into anticipated climate change in Cincinnati with an emphasis on preparations that are already in place and what other private and public sector responses could be developed, as well as the costs and benefits of possible strategies.”

Even if those who are invested in Xavier are not climate change believers, it is likely that they will want to protect the university from any damage in the future and prevent any loss of life. The ACUPCC has an alternative to the carbon neutrality commitment, and it is about the
resiliency of communities. By signing this resiliency commitment, Xavier would take a new step towards how the school deals with environmental crises.

Large cities are usually the most sustainable because of the large amounts of federal funding that they receive. Small towns of under 10,000 people rarely receive government grants to make the cities more sustainable. These are the communities that often need the most help in building resiliency plans.

Many of the student groups that were represented in Washington, D.C. brought up the idea of a fee that is added on to tuition. These fees are small, all under $10, and are required every semester by every student. With these fees, small sustainability projects on campus can be funded, or other larger projects by the school could access the fund. Some ideas for projects that could be funded by this fee:

- Bikeshare revitalization
- Bike Shelters for outside/bad weather
- Invest in a buy/share second-hand shopping program.
  - Buy items off students, store them, and then have a sale for students at the beginning of the year for second hand items. Double profits?
- Student Government Lobbying
- Student travel to conferences
- 20% real food challenge

If the green fee was $6 a semester, and there are 6,325 total students that attend Xavier with graduate and undergraduate, then the total amount of money collected every year would be $75,900. Alternatively, at $4 a semester that total would come to $50,600. That is more than enough money for a wide variety of projects and the award of sustainability project funding for different student projects. This money could help support a green fund on campus.

Gina McCarthy, the EPA administrator, recognizes that the Clean Power Plan derives its power from the fact that climate change has public health hazards and that if public safety is at risk, the government has the power to oversee changes and operations. Not only is this an opportunity to embrace environmentalism, but there are also heavy investment opportunities in hydrogen fuel cells, renewable energies, and companies that are working to find a viable solution to fusion energy creation, among other fossil fuel alternatives.

Here is a link to the climate resiliency webpage: