AASHE STARS INNOVATION CREDIT
PATAGONIA SUR REFORESTATION PROJECT

In 2011, as part of our aggressive push to achieve climate neutrality by 2019 and eliminate our contribution to global climate change, Colgate signed a 15-year commitment with Patagonia Sur to purchase forestry-based carbon offsets. Under the agreement, a total of 225,000 native-species trees will be planted on 430-acres of land in Chile's Aysén Region of Patagonia.

The "Colgate University Forest," as it is now called, is one of the first reforestation projects in the world to achieve Verified Carbon Standard (VCS) certification. VCS is the most renowned and one of the leading certifications within the global carbon offset industry. It is also the first project in Chile to reforest with native trees with a focus on ecological restoration.

Chilean Patagonia is often referred to as one of the world's last great wilderness areas and holds potential for study by faculty and students in Environmental Studies, Geography, Biology, Geology, Economics, Latin American Studies, Native American Studies, and other academic units. This agreement is new and its full potential in terms of research and teaching is currently unknown. However, with the signing of this agreement, there has been considerable academic interest in the Patagonia Sur property and programs. Already, several students, faculty, and staff have visited the property and produced written academic reports on for-profit conservation, environmental conservation, renewable energy, and indigenous cultural history. Future academic interest might result in the development of new 1) credit-bearing extended study programs, 2) long-term faculty research, 3) student internships, 4) new courses, and 5) the inclusion of new material in existing courses. These new academic opportunities might relate to climate change impacts, environmental hazards and mitigation, the rights and history of indigenous peoples, environmental economics, conservation biology, renewable energy, and other relevant aspects of land use and climate change issues in Chilean Patagonia.

We also believe that this site might provide an opportunity for our students to examine, first-hand, the quality of the carbon-offsetting process that we are funding. We might specifically explore the potential for monitoring of carbon sequestration by trees within the Colgate University Forest. We expect that our carbon-offsetting agreement would be much more meaningful to students if they were able to participate in measuring carbon accumulation in this forest. There actually exist very few studies of this sort, and the building of a long-term dataset on carbon accumulation at our carbon-offsetting forest could be a strong point of pride among students – and alumni as they revisit the site years later. In addition, this sort of analysis represents a crucial emerging area of scientific research, given the centrality of forest-based carbon sequestration worldwide as one key element in combating global warming.

Respectfully submitted,
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