

Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future Topical Lunch: Strategic Investing for a Sustainable Future: A New Approach to the Campaign for Divestment in the Fossil Fuel Industry

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A campaign to encourage university divestment in the fossil fuel industry is achieving national attention. Student groups at over 300 universities are calling for changes in university investment portfolios. To date, only a few, small liberal arts colleges have responded favorably to the call.

Divestment is being pursued as a tool to convince the fossil fuel industry that it must play a constructive role in the transition from fossil fuels to renewable, carbon-neutral energy sources. While few university administrators would argue against such a goal, divestment has not gained traction, in part because of the perceived conflict between divestment and the fiduciary responsibilities of the Board of Trustees. The purpose of this Topical Lunch was to explore ways that faculty members can work with students to develop an alternative investment strategy that achieves the same goal as the divestment movement but by rewarding good corporate behavior rather than focusing on the penalties for bad behavior.

Several strategies for achieving the aforementioned goal were discussed, including the following:

1. Faculty providing direct support for the student divestment movement, including an effort to pass a resolution of support through the University Faculty Senate. Considerable networking across departments and colleges will be essential to insure success for this strategy.
2. A parallel effort in which faculty participate in a multi-disciplinary research initiative to make a socio-economic case for altering the University's investment portfolio. This strategy must minimize both the risks of dangerous climate change and the costs to the University, and by extension society, of rapidly changing its energy portfolio. The case must be made on the basis of short- and long-term sustainability and economic considerations for the University. Climate change risk and shareholder risk were recognized as key factors that must be considered when evaluating Cornell's investment portfolio.
3. Developing natural alliances with partner institutions to amplify our impacts. The group discussed local partnerships with Ithaca College, the City of Ithaca, and the Park Foundation as well as a potential coalition of Ivy League Universities.

The group ended the discussion with plans for developing a network of interested faculty members this summer 1.) to lay the groundwork for the Faculty Senate resolution to be proposed next fall semester, and 2.) to conduct the multi-disciplinary research essential to crafting a message that will resonate with the University

administration and Board of Trustees.

Organizers:

Last Name	First Name	NetID or email	Dept (if known)	College (If known)
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Participants:

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