

ACURM Report on the Sunrise Brown Petition

Executive Summary

The Advisory Committee on University Resource Management (ACURM) conducted research and developed this report in response to a student petition requesting Brown to dissociate from the fossil fuel industry. ACURM investigated issues of social harm and disinformation by the fossil fuel industry. The committee established that issues of academic freedom required balancing protection of research from influence by the industry, while maintaining freedom of inquiry, and that shared governance is critical in decision making about academic freedom. To support the recommendations, ACURM researched precedents at Brown and peer institutions to identify relevant policies and committee procedures.

The recommendations resulting from the committee's research are as follows: 1: Bring a faculty vote on the question of a University-wide policy restricting research funding derived from the fossil fuel industry and, if approved, establish a faculty committee to develop principles, metrics, decision criteria, and standards for instituting the new policy. 2: Establish a faculty mentoring committee convened by the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) that provides educational programming and mentoring to new and current faculty, graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, and pre-award staff regarding fossil fuel research funding at Brown. 3: Institute a new charge to the Gifts and Grants Review Committee (GGRC) requiring the GGRC to identify and review all research grants and gifts for research sponsored by organizations representing the fossil fuel industry.

Sunrise Brown Petition: “Dissociate Now: A Fossil Free Brown”

Background and Timeline

In Academic Year 2022-2023 (“AY 22-23”), ACURM received a petition from Sunrise Brown (“Sunrise” or “Sunrise Brown”) in February 2023, and subsequent memorandum in April 2023. The petition is based on a report the students prepared, *Disassociate Now*, and is accompanied by a memo from Sunrise Brown to ACURM advocating for the University to “take action against the fossil fuel industry and its affiliated organizations” through a “comprehensive disassociation policy.” These documents are included in the Appendix. The petition includes three specific requests (“Requests”): that Brown University 1) disallows accepting industry gifts and grants for research, 2) adopts a fossil-fuel-free student careers policy, and 3) offers fossil-fuel-free retirement plan options for faculty and staff.

In May 2023, Committee members, via asynchronous discussion on the petition, unanimously decided to invite Sunrise Brown to present to the Committee the following academic year. The Committee shared several suggestions for Sunrise Brown to consider ahead of their presentation in the Academic Year 2023-2024 (“AY 23-24”).

In AY 23-24, ACURM held the following meetings:

- January 30, 2024: Sunrise presented their "Dissociate Now" proposal in an open meeting of ACURM
- February 8, 2024: ACURM held a closed meeting where Committee members discussed key areas to research, prior precedents for dissociation and stressed the importance of protecting Academic Freedom of faculty.
- March 7, 2024: ACURM held an open meeting where Professor Kristina Mendicino (German Studies), president of the Brown Chapter of the American Association of University Professors (“AAUP”), presented on academic freedom and addressed questions from Committee members.
- April 18, 2024: ACURM members were joined by Professors Timmons Roberts (Sociology/IBES) and Baylor Fox-Kemper (DEEPS) in a closed meeting to discuss how to proceed with interviews of faculty currently receiving funding from oil and gas companies.

- May 7, 2024: ACURM met to discuss the strategy to deliver a report on the Sunrise Brown petition and debrief on the announcement that ACURM would deliver a recommendation by September 30, 2024 related to the agreement with the Brown Divest Coalition.
- June 13, 2024: ACURM held a closed meeting to finalize the report on the Brown Sunrise petition.

Outside of the full committee meetings, committee members held several meetings and/or corresponded with faculty members and administrators to conduct interviews and collect information. These meetings are summarized in the Appendix.

Scope of Work

Of the three Requests included in the Sunrise petition, the scope of ACURM's recommendations in this Report focuses solely on the first Request: *Research: Prohibit fossil fuel companies, their affiliated foundations, and industry groups from funding research and donating to the university.*

Requests 2 and 3 of Brown Sunrise's petition are discussed below for completeness but are not subject to further recommendation by ACURM as set forth.

Request 2, *Recruitment: Adopt a fossil fuel-free careers policy that bans fossil fuel companies from hosting recruiting events and attending career fairs, posting job vacancies, sponsoring events, and otherwise advertising to students through Brown*, was discussed briefly in early meetings of ACURM during AY 23-24. However, the Committee decided that this request would not be included in the deliberations in AY 23-24 and it is not included in the recommendations in this report. Discussions by Committee members in AY 22-23 and AY 23-24 expressed concern about developing policies that attempted to limit certain recruitment on campus. In the process of its queries into Request 2, ACURM was advised that the Center for Career Exploration ("CCE") had decided to not actively invite oil & gas companies to campus, as reported by the Brown Daily Herald claiming that there was a change in CCE policy ([Brown Daily Herald, January 31, 2024](#)). Matthew Donato, Executive Director of the Brown Center for Career Exploration, wrote a letter in response to the article saying that was not the case ([Brown Daily Herald, February 7, 2024](#)). In the letter, he quotes from the Brown University Faculty Rules &

Regulations, “Brown students have the freedom both to consult with recruiting organizations to seek employment interviews and also to express their views (about) those organizations, providing they do so in legal ways that do not infringe upon the rights of others.”

There were no members of the AY 23-24 committee who felt that this was an area requiring further attention from ACURM. Brown’s Business Ethics Policy ([Paxson, April 22, 2022](#)), discussed further below, can serve as the foundation of any actions or non-actions taken by CCE to limit future engagement with fossil fuel companies.

Request 3, *Retirement: Require all retirement plan vendors to offer fossil-free retirement plan options*, is also not addressed in this report. In September 2023, ACURM received an update from the Brown Investment Office regarding Sunrise Brown’s Request 3, indicating that a “Fossil Free” fund option for participants in Brown’s 403b retirement plan has been approved for addition to the Fidelity 403b retirement plan. In consultation with representatives from Sunrise, it was determined that there was additional work to be done to make members of the Brown community aware of the availability of this option, but that work fell outside of the purview of ACURM. The following section summarizes the committee’s research and findings on academic freedom in consideration of the first Request.

Academic Freedom

ACURM determined early in our deliberations that the question of academic freedom is central to the considerations of a petition to ban research funding from certain sources. The petition arises in response to growing concerns about the influence of funding on the integrity and independence of academic research and broader social harm.

The petition provides some evidence to support the view that research funded by companies and organizations known to be associated with science disinformation may be unduly influenced by the funders. Such influence poses a significant threat to academic freedom, as it can shape research agendas, methodologies, and outcomes in ways that align with the interests of the funders rather than the pursuit of unbiased knowledge. While Brown’s Conflict of Interest (COI) policy is designed to identify overt instances of undue influence or bias, it is also clear from our interviews with two Brown researchers that fossil fuel funding can be difficult to identify and is at

times missed. Thus, the Committee's concern here is twofold: not only does the potential influence compromise the quality and integrity of research, but it also impinges on researchers' ability to explore and report findings freely.

These concerns must be carefully balanced with academic researchers' freedom to study the topics of their choosing and to seek funding for those topics where available. The ability to secure funding is a critical aspect of academic freedom. Without it, many important and innovative research projects could not be undertaken. As one example, which we learned from a faculty researcher, fossil fuel companies are often the primary source of funding for large-scale remediation projects; to prohibit this funding source may, in some cases, prevent Brown University from making positive contributions to environmental cleanup and the science and engineering behind it. Researchers must be free to seek and accept funding from a variety of sources to support their work, provided that this does not compromise the integrity of their research.

In order to seek guidance on navigating this delicate balance, committee members participated in several events that focused on the work of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and that organization's interpretations of academic freedom.

- A Conversation About Academic Freedom and Free Speech February 22, 2024 hosted by the FEC and Provost's Office and featuring talks by Professor Kristina Mendicino, Professor of German Studies, FEC Vice Chair, Brown AAUP Chapter President, and Claire Wardle, Professor of the Practice of Health Services, Policy and Practice
 - A webinar on March 6, 2024 with Mark Criley, Senior Program Manager with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, National Headquarters)
 - A discussion with Kristina Mendicino during our March 7th ACURM open meeting

In these sessions, examples were provided where funding sources had very likely encroached on academic freedom. Prof. Mendicino and Mark Criley both stressed the importance of shared governance within the institution and engaging the faculty to review potential cases of infringement on academic freedom. Mendicino pointed out that when it comes to donors and contracts, confidentiality agreements restrict access to the details of the contracts. At the meeting, the Committee discussed the recently formed Gifts and Grants Committee, as Prof. Mendicino had been involved in her capacity on the Faculty Executive Committee. These

discussions, in addition to a close reading of several AAUP statements on academic freedom, inform core components of ACURM's recommendations.

The 1940 AAUP Statement on Academic Freedom ([AAUP, nd](#)) states,

“Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good and not to further the interest of either the individual teacher or the institution as a whole. The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.... Freedom in research is fundamental to the advancement of truth.”

Since 1966, Brown University has also affirmed that “faculty members and students alike shall enjoy full freedom in their teaching, learning, and research (Brown Faculty Rules p.146).” As developed in these and other AAUP statements and reports, there are two core principles of academic freedom, both of which bear special significance in this case. The first principle is independent faculty self-governance. As noted in the 1994 Statement on the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom, “a sound system of institutional governance is a necessary condition for the protection of faculty rights and thereby for the most productive exercise of essential faculty freedoms.” Relative to the decision-making authority invested in university administrations and governing boards, “since the faculty has primary responsibility for the teaching and research done in the institution, the faculty's voice on matters having to do with teaching and research should be given the greatest weight.” We take this principle to mean that any decision that may result in restrictions on academic freedom of individual faculty must derive from the faculty, not from Brown University administration or the Corporation.

The second core principle is the principle of free inquiry. As the 1940 Statement declares, “[t]eachers are entitled to full freedom in research and in the publication of the results, subject to the adequate performance of their other academic duties.” We take this to mean that individual faculty are protected in their right to pursue their research interests freely and without constraint or restriction, and that this right extends to securing access to funding to conduct research. The two core principles are indelibly intertwined; each reinforcing the other.

The Fossil Fuel Industry and The Case for Social Harm

Climate change impacts the futures of Brown University's students and threatens the enduring longevity of the Institution's teaching and research mission. The University therefore has a responsibility to protect the Brown community and its institutions from the social harms of climate change. In a February 11 2019 letter to the Brown community, President Christina Paxson acknowledged the danger that climate change presented to social wellbeing, and reconfirmed Brown's commitment to combating climate change by becoming a carbon-neutral institution. "Climate change is perhaps the defining challenge of this century. Given Brown's aspiration to educate leaders and generate knowledge for years to come, we have an obligation to contribute to global efforts to reduce emissions... The best available science tells us that the world needs to cut its emissions dramatically by mid-century or sooner to avert the most catastrophic effects of climate change ([Paxson, 2019](#))." Brown has been taking meaningful action to help reduce climate change since 2008, when a commitment was made to a 42% reduction in emissions levels by 2020. President Paxson continued by announcing even higher goals going forward: "I'm pleased to report today that Brown has set an aggressive goal to cut its campus greenhouse gas emissions by 75 percent by 2025, and to achieve net-zero no later than 2040."

The University unequivocally recognizes the link between fossil fuel carbon emissions and social harm. The scientific consensus has been developed over decades and is routinely assessed globally by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ([IPCC, 2023](#)) and for the US by the Global Change Research Project ([National Climate Assessment, 2023](#)). Since the first congressional hearings, 36 years of impediments to climate change action and policy avoidance have been the result of active, strategic, well-funded, and coordinated efforts by entrenched interests protecting their business model, often using tactics of deceit and disinformation. Fossil fuel industries lie at the core of that resistance to action in line with what the science says is needed.

A key part of the strategy to deflect pressure and avoid regulation by the fossil fuel industry has been its strategic investments in university centers and research. While some departments, particularly geological sciences, chemistry, and engineering, have technical and workforce development linkages to the fossil fuel industry, the fossil fuel industry has also supported projects spanning the wider academy seeking favor especially from political science, ethics,

environmental policy, and other social sciences ([Franta, 2021](#)). As we now know through leaked industry documents, the industry's academic funding strategy has aimed at diffusing criticism, generating favorable research, and perpetuating uncertainty about the role of their product in creating climate disruption. The strategy has also intended to undermine confidence in non-fossil fuel solutions to meeting society's energy needs ([Supran, 2024](#)).

A report by the Democratic House Oversight Committee and the Democratic staff of the Senate Budget Committee on "Big Oil's evolving efforts to avoid accountability for climate change" was released in 2024. One of the key findings related to this petition is that "The fossil fuel industry strategically partners with universities to lend an aura of credibility to its deception campaigns while also silencing opposition voices. Fossil fuel companies establish funded partnerships with academic institutions to enhance their credibility, shape academic research programs to provide studies supportive of a prolonged life for oil and gas, leverage the resulting research to their advantage, and bolster access to policymakers. New documents reveal previously unknown funding levels and show how companies condition their funding on academics' cooperation and alignment with companies' business needs. Additional documents demonstrate that companies actively tracked individuals and organizations critical of the industry and monitored their social media ([US House Committee on Oversight and Accountability and US Senate Budget Committee, 2024](#))."

Precedents at Brown and Other Institutions

This section sets forth precedents from Brown and other academic institutions. Certain actions by Brown form precedent for this petition, namely the Scholars at Brown for Climate Action petition to ACURM, and the Brown School of Public Health Policy on Tobacco funding. Princeton and Stanford are the key peer precedents for Brown. Princeton has made a public declaration to dissociate from fossil fuel companies ([Princeton University, 2024](#)), and Stanford University has established a committee process to further investigate fossil fuel funding on campus ([Stanford University, 2023](#)).

Scholars at Brown for Climate Action

Brown established a policy on doing business with organizations known to be associated with science disinformation based on the Scholars at Brown for Climate Action report and recommendations from ACURM in 2022 ([ACURM, 2022](#)). The report recommended that Brown:

- Amend the Business Ethics Policy to indicate Brown’s refusal to do business with organizations that knowingly undermine science or science-based policy, or support organizations that advance climate science disinformation.
- Maintain the existing Gift Acceptance Policy, which implicitly requires the same ethical standard of engagement as the newly amended Business Ethics Policy.
- Move forward with the creation of a clearinghouse for actions against organizations and funders that seek to deny climate change, or delay climate change with the intention of
 - a) perpetuating climate science disinformation or
 - b) supporting organizations that advance climate science disinformation.

Following a period of consultation, President Paxson announced in April 2022 that the University would amend “relevant policies and processes to reflect that, to the best extent practicable, the University will not conduct business with individuals and organizations that directly support the creation and dissemination of science disinformation, defined as knowingly spreading false information with the intent to deceive or mislead,” and create a gifts and grants working group to provide due diligence and transparency of gifts and grants (including research grants) ([Brown University, 2022](#)). For the avoidance of doubt, the “clearinghouse” recommendation was not endorsed by President Paxson and thus was not acted upon by Brown.

The current Brown Gift Acceptance Policy (*Gift Acceptance Policy, 2022*), Section 3.1 states that:

- “A gift will not be accepted if it is clear to the University that the funds or property donated were acquired by other than legal means, or that clear title to the donated asset does not flow directly from the donor to the University.
- A gift will not be accepted if, in the judgment of the Corporation, the gift is too restrictive in purpose, requires expenditures beyond the University’s resources, or compromises the academic freedom of the university community
- A gift will not be accepted if, in the judgment of the Corporation, the gift is not aligned with Brown’s mission of education, research and scholarship.

- A gift will not be accepted if, in the judgment of the Corporation, the intended purpose of the gift and/or being associated with the donor of the gift could inflict lasting damage on the University's reputation, standing or integrity.
- At the request of a donor, the University may treat a gift as anonymous. However, a gift will not be treated as anonymous with the purpose of shielding the University from damage to its reputation or disguising a gift which it would otherwise not have accepted.
- The acceptance of a gift does not imply nor mean that the University endorses or approves of the donor's views, opinions, businesses, or activities."

Further to this, in March 2024, the Gifts and Grants Review Committee ("GGRC") was approved by the Brown Faculty. It was established based on the recommendations of a working group established in April 2022 to review Brown's existing policies and practices on gifts and grants to ensure they are consistent with Brown's values as an institution ([Brown University, 2023](#)).

Brown Faculty Vote on Tobacco Funding

The most relevant precedent for fossil dissociation is the Department of Community Health faculty vote to ban accepting funding from tobacco companies. The Department of Community Health became the School of Public Health in 2013. According to Jennifer Tidey, Associate Dean for Research and Professor of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the Brown University School of Public Health (SPH), the faculty voted to dissociate from tobacco funding in 2011. The discussion prior to the vote focused on whether such a ban infringed upon academic freedom. At the time, many peer institutions had instituted similar policies. Dean Tidey noted that the topic is "more nuanced these days, now that some tobacco companies sell non-combusted products (e-cigarettes) that have the potential to reduce use of combusted tobacco products, but people in [the] field are still highly skeptical of researchers who accept funding from tobacco companies (Tidey, 2024)." The committee found no evidence that the policy was adopted university-wide. It is the faculty vote on the proposed policy that is most relevant to our recommendations.

The policy directly influences the Committee's first recommendation insofar as a vote by the faculty created conditions for collective decision-making that may impede choices by individual members of the same faculty to accept funding from a particular corporate source, in effect balancing one pillar of academic freedom (free inquiry) against another (shared governance).

Brown Endowment and Oil & Gas Investments

Climate change is a globally destabilizing trend, with impacts on certain financial returns and investment strategies. Brown now has an opportunity to take the next steps beyond direct and indirect investment capital flows, and helping other universities, nonprofits and corporations chart their course. It is worth remembering that the stated mission of the Brown endowment is to both preserve and prudently grow the endowment and its income distribution capability in perpetuity to support the educational mission of the University.

As an ethically minded investor that does not seek to profit from social harm, the Brown Investment Office actively monitors and incorporates an environmental, social, and governance (ESG) scoring system ([Brown University, n.d.](#)) into due diligence processes for new and existing investments. Further, and as has been widely reported, Brown's endowment has no direct investment exposure to oil and gas. It is important to note however, that per Jane Dietze, VP and Chief Investment Officer, "Brown is not technically divested from oil and gas. However, by 2019 the endowment had sold out of effectively all of its interest in fossil fuel energy strategies. The decision to do so was an investment decision, not an ethically minded divestment decision... In conducting research on the energy transition away from fossil fuels, the Investment Office concluded that there was substantial risk of "stranded assets," which would have significant negative financial impact...(Brown University, 2024)".

It is important to understand that – in line with a majority of endowments today – Brown's endowment is overwhelmingly invested through third-party external managers; specifically 96%. These managers are selected as part of Brown's "all-weather" portfolio after deep due diligence, inclusive of ESG performance and intention. Managers are retained to invest pools of assets in managed account portfolios and have discretion over proprietary investment strategy decisions that generate confidential portfolios of holdings. Brown is not able to approve or reject individual investments in these managed accounts.

Despite having a prior dedicated strategy in the area, by 2019 the endowment effectively sold out of all of its interest in third-party fossil fuel energy strategies such as long-life vehicles seeking to invest in fossil fuel extraction, driven by stranded assets concerns. Further, the stock holdings of the ~4% of the endowment which is directly invested are publicly reported in Brown's

13F SEC filing. These holdings include predominantly healthcare and financial services companies – none relevant to the fossil fuel industry, nor current divestment debates.

Even with detailed reporting rights, practically Brown and other Limited Partners will not have visibility into third-party manager investments until *after* they have been traded and therefore cannot guarantee that indirect investments exclude fossil fuel related companies. In fact, it is almost certain that Brown has some low-level, incidental exposure to every industry and sector – inclusive of fossil fuel energy strategies. This is the practical reality of all divestment and modern endowment portfolio construction. Complete divestment of Brown's endowment from these managed accounts is structurally unfeasible and could only be accomplished through divestment from a manager entirely. This clarification is important to distinguish Brown from Princeton University as a precedent. Princeton's dissociation from fossil fuels was created in the context of a public announcement of divestment from fossil fuel investments in the Princeton endowment. Brown and Princeton do have comprehensive campus carbon emissions reduction policies. The Princeton precedent is discussed in the next section, primarily as a model for procedures and committee structures.

Princeton University

Members of the Princeton community proposed the issue of dissociation to the Resources Committee of the Council of the Princeton University Community (CPUC) in February 2020. A year later, in May 2021, the CPUC published a report recommending dissociation. The key recommendations of the report were that:

- Princeton University should dissociate from fossil fuel companies that deny climate change and/or spread climate disinformation;
- Princeton University should dissociate from the highest greenhouse gas-emitting sectors of the fossil fuel industry (e.g., thermal coal) as quickly as possible;
- For sectors of the fossil fuel industry not fitting into recommendation #2, Princeton University should establish criteria for conditional dissociation from fossil fuel companies that have not undertaken an acceptable path to achieve carbon neutrality, as guided by scientific recommendations;

- Princeton University should create an administrative process and determine what expert input is needed to establish, implement, and sustain actionable criteria for dissociation that is consistent with the three recommendations above. These criteria should not be based on past behavior of companies, but instead on their current and prospective actions.

During the year following the publishing of the report, the Board of Trustees set in motion a process to guide Princeton University’s dissociation from fossil fuel companies that participate in climate disinformation campaigns or otherwise spread climate disinformation, and from companies in the thermal coal and tar sands segments of the fossil fuel industry, unless they prove able to meet a rigorous standard for their greenhouse gas emissions. An administrative committee was established to propose final dissociation criteria to the Board of Trustees and a process for implementing them. That work was informed by scholarly advice from a faculty panel with expertise in fields including environmental studies, ethics, economics, public policy, and engineering. The faculty panel was also encouraged to update the broader community periodically while its work was in progress. The faculty panel published its findings in a public written report ([Princeton University's Faculty Panel on Fossil Fuel Dissociation, 2022](#)).

In September 2022, the Princeton Board of Trustees voted to dissociate from 90 companies under a fossil fuel dissociation process that focused on the most-polluting segments of the industry and on concerns about corporate disinformation campaigns. While there was an initial list of 90 companies, there was agreement that there should be annual evaluation of companies that are involved in the thermal coal or tar sands segments of the fossil fuel industry. In February 2024, the Board of Trustees voted to update the set of companies subject to dissociation, increasing the number of companies subject to dissociation from 90 to 2,371, reflecting findings from newly available information from commercial industry data providers ([Princeton University, 2024](#)).

Stanford University

In 2022, Stanford University President Marc Tessier-Lavigne created a committee “charged with assessing current funding from fossil fuel companies, reviewing the approach of other universities, and providing pros and cons of the current approach of accepting these funds and of alternative approaches” ([Stanford University, n.d.](#)). The group is also expected to consider a

variety of approaches to better understand diverse viewpoints and concerns across the campus, and to engage the Stanford community in thoughtful discourse.” The presence of fossil funding at Stanford has been highly publicized since the Doerr School of Sustainability receives significant funding from major oil and gas companies. Doerr School Dean Arun Majumdar had conducted a listening tour focused on the role of energy company engagement in research funding, and that input resulted in the formation of the Committee on Funding for Energy Research and Education (“CFERE”).

The Committee established a website for collecting input from the Stanford Community. There is also an Industrial Affiliates and Related Membership-Supported Programs. According to the introduction, “To safeguard the University’s academic and research objectives, it is important that Industrial Affiliate Programs be organized and maintained in ways that preserve the University’s academic integrity and independence” ([Stanford University, n.d.](#)).

ACURM’s Charge

ACURM operates under a charge and specific guidelines that establish responsibilities in making recommendations to the President. The charge and guidelines, posted on the ACURM website ([Brown University, n.d.](#)) are referenced here to clarify how the research above relates to those responsibilities. The summary discussion is the committee’s interpretations of the charge and guideline for operations related to this petition.

“ACURM is charged to have responsibility for reviewing whether the investment and expenditure of the University’s financial resources is conducted with ethical and moral standards consistent with the University’s mission and values. As part of this responsibility, ACURM will offer advice to the President on how the university should manage these financial resources.

ACURM is responsible for considering issues related to social responsibility with respect to:

- 1. The Brown endowment.*
- 2. Business practices and policies.*

3. *Labor issues, including fair labor standards, in the manufacture of products licensed by the University and bearing the University's name and/or logo.*
4. *Gift acceptance and naming policies.*
5. *Other matters related to the investment and expenditure of University financial resources."*

Accordingly, ACURM has determined that this petition falls clearly within its charge as Request 1 is related to "Business practices and policies" and "Gift acceptance and naming policies".

Further, according to the General Guidelines for Operations of ACURM, the Committee "may consider requests by any member of the University community to examine allegations of "social harm" with respect to the investment or expenditure of University financial resources. Social harm is defined for the purposes of ACURM as the harmful impact that the investment or expenditure of University financial resources may have on the University community, consumers, employees, or other persons, or on the human or natural environment."

ACURM endorses the idea that the fossil fuel industry has played a part in climate change, which is a social harm.

"In considering such a request, ACURM will carefully balance the gravity of the social harm, the potential effectiveness of various means of influencing relevant policy or conduct, the University's need to maintain a sound financial policy, and the consistency of various proposed recommendations with the maintenance of an environment at Brown conducive to teaching and scholarly inquiry, including the Corporation Statement on Academic Freedom for Faculty and Students. ACURM shall not recommend any action that advances a position on social or political questions unrelated to the investment or expenditure of University financial resources under consideration. ACURM should be mindful that partisan political advocacy is not consistent with either Brown's commitment to academic freedom or its status as a 501c(3) corporation."

"ACURM may recommend one or more of the following actions if it deems an investment or expenditure of University financial resources raises a significant question of "social harm" (as defined above):

1. *that letters of inquiry and/or protest be directed to the party(ies) involved, expressing the University's concerns and requesting further information, and that (in appropriate cases) such letters establish specific terms and deadlines for the correction of the social harm involved and suggest that the University might refrain and/or divest from the investment or expenditure if these terms are not met;*
2. *that the University make its views on these issues known to the public;*
3. *that, in the circumstance of a proxy resolution, a representative of the University appear at the shareholders' meeting where a proxy is to be voted and present on behalf of the University its views on the issue;*
4. *that the University cooperate with other interested groups and institutions to exert additional pressure upon the party(ies) involved to correct the social harm;*
5. *that the University pursue any other measures the Committee deems likely to be constructive; and*
6. *in the circumstance of investments held by the University in public companies, recommend divestiture or appropriate guidance to investment managers when such actions will likely have a positive impact toward correcting the specified social harm, or when the company or industry in question contributes to social harm so grave that it would be inconsistent with the goals and principles of the University to accept funds from that source."*

ACURM's recommendations consider the above requirement to "balance the gravity of the social harm, the potential effectiveness of various means of influencing relevant policy or conduct, the University's need to maintain a sound financial policy, and the consistency of various proposed recommendations with the maintenance of an environment at Brown conducive to teaching and scholarly inquiry, including the Corporation Statement on Academic Freedom for Faculty and Students." The recommendations fall within the available actions enumerated above.

Findings and Recommended Actions

With the notable precedents set by our colleagues at Princeton and Stanford, as well as Brown's own prior proven commitments to fossil fuel divestment and combatting scientific disinformation, the Sunrise Brown petition presents University Administration with a unique opportunity to further enhance the University's reputation as a leader on climate change by undertaking a set

of policy reforms that target fossil fuel-funded research. The central question is how might the University further limit the clear and ongoing social and environmental harms perpetuated by the fossil fuel industry and its agents without simultaneously jeopardizing fundamental principles of academic freedom. The recommendations aim to strike this balance and are outlined below.

From these recommendations and Brown's prior actions, it is clear that ACURM and Brown takes the issue of climate change seriously and has been steadily moving in the direction of fossil fuel dissociation. However, as stated in its Code of Conduct, "Brown University maintains, on behalf of its community, that academic freedom is essential to the function of education and to the pursuit of scholarship in universities and, mindful of its historic commitment to scholarship and to the free exchange of ideas, affirms that members of the community shall enjoy full freedom in their teaching, learning, and research." Additionally, "Allocation of authority to the faculty in the areas of its responsibility is a necessary condition for the protection of academic freedom within the institution" is set forth in the 1994 Statement on the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom ([AAUP, 1994](#)). In maintaining the University's principled positions on academic freedom, ACURM cannot recommend that the Corporation and thus the Administration implement a dissociation from fossil fuel industry sponsored research without a vote of the Brown faculty.

Overview of Recommendations

These recommendations can be taken holistically, but also separately. Recommendation 1 is ACURM's most direct recommendation toward fossil fuel dissociation. Recommendations 2 and 3 are designed to build organizational capacity and educational programming that will help individual researchers and departments make more informed decisions about fossil fuel funding. These recommendations are complementary to, but also independent from, Recommendation 1 and can be implemented regardless whether (i) Recommendation 1 is accepted and (ii) the outcome of such a vote.

Recommendation 1

Bring a faculty vote on the question of a University-wide policy restricting research funding derived from the fossil fuel industry and, if approved, establish a faculty committee to develop principles, metrics, decision criteria, and standards for instituting the new policy.

A vote on the question will benefit the University community in at least three specific ways. First, a faculty vote not only preserves but enhances shared governance, a pillar of academic freedom. Second, a vote follows the internal precedent set by faculty in the Department of Public Health in 2011 in approving a ban on tobacco industry funding – a policy that appears to have been uncontroversially absorbed into Public Health’s culture, and which the Committee finds impossible to ignore in the context of the current student petition. Third, regardless of the outcome, voting would open the faculty body to a sustained period of deliberation and debate on the question, including questions relating to potential constraints on individual faculty and other complex issues that lie at the heart of dissociation. At minimum, deliberation would help clarify lines of disagreement while potentially creating any number of now unforeseen opportunities for creative problem solving, collective action, and cultural change.

Recommendation 2

Establish a faculty mentoring committee convened by the Office of the Vice President for Research (“OVPR”) that provides educational programming and mentoring to new and current faculty, graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows, and pre-award staff regarding fossil fuel research funding at Brown.

Recommendation 2 offers informational interventions prior to and during the application process and extends to department staff involved with pre-award administration. Key components of the committee’s work likely would involve training for faculty and pre-award staff, as well as one-on-one mentoring opportunities for interested faculty. The committee should be available to provide confidential advice and counsel on specific grant situations. To ensure breadth of relevant expertise, we recommend that the committee composition represent each of Brown’s professional schools and one or more STEM departments in the College. To protect and encourage participation by pre-tenure faculty and to limit potential confidentiality concerns, the mentoring committee should be independent of OVPR. The recommendation protects academic freedom by providing educational and mentoring opportunities that will allow individuals to make informed decisions about the funding sources they target for research.

Recommendation 3

Institute a new charge to the Gifts and Grants Review Committee (“GGRC”) requiring the GGRC to identify and review all research grants and gifts for research sponsored by organizations representing the fossil fuel industry.

We recommend that the Gifts and Grants Review Committee (GGRC) review companies, foundations, charities, and advocacy groups associated with the fossil fuel industry. Specifically, the Committee recommends that all research grants (regardless of the value) are vetted against the Urgewald “Global Oil and Gas Exit List,” which is deemed as a legitimate third-party resource to identify oil and gas companies. We propose that there is no dollar value or time threshold to limit which of these grants are vetted.

The recommendation does not apply to grants and gifts from individual donors. Moreover, We anticipate that the actual number of grants and gifts subject to review in any given year will be small and will increase the likelihood that all such grants and gifts are properly identified, regardless of their value or whether or not the company has recently donated in the past.

The recommended change is not intended to be a prohibition on grants or gifts made by the fossil fuel industry, but rather an enhancement to transparency and knowledge and thus protective of academic freedom. Sharing this information with faculty, graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows and departments will help individuals as well as departments, institutes, centers and programs make informed choices by providing sourcing information about grants that researchers might not otherwise know (as we learned from faculty who shared such experiences with the Committee), but does not *a priori* prevent researchers from accepting those grants. The increased transparency may also create conditions for further dialogue within departments and is one way to develop new norms and ethical standards that recognize the political and ethical questions inherent to modern scientific research and academic scholarship. The rule will not impact, change or diminish COI review from the Office of Sponsored Projects.

ACURM completed an on-line asynchronous voting and commenting process on June 25, 2024. Twelve of the thirteen members of the committee voted positively to approve the recommendations and submission of the report. One member abstained. No members opposed. The members of the AY 23-24 are listed in the Appendix.

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Appendix

Committee Members

Kurt Teichert (Chair), Senior Lecturer in Environment and Society

Scott Frickel, Professor of Sociology and the Institute for the Study of Environment and Society

Erica Larschan, Associate Professor of Molecular Biology, Cell Biology and Biochemistry

Melvin Rogers, Associate Professor of Political Science

Benjamin Marcus, Undergraduate Student

Tessa Tomkinson, Undergraduate Student

Keenan Wilder, Graduate Student

Tiffany Amaral, Director of Finance and Administration, School of Public Health

Christine Geib-Ayala, Grants and Contracts Specialist, School of Public Health

Michael Santoemmo, Event and Meeting Coordinator, Office of the Vice President of Research

Sara Cunningham '06

Sophie Purdom '16

Daryl Twitchell '93

Additional Meetings and Correspondence

- Feb 9, and other dates through April: Tejal Desai
 - Email correspondence
 - Kurt Teichert
 - Discuss involvement of faculty currently funded by fossil fuel industry in the deliberations
- February 14, 2024: Brown University Endowment Overview
 - Brown University Endowment Overview for Faculty
 - In person
 - Kurt Teichert
 - Gain understanding of endowment policies and procedures
- March 6, 2024: Janet Blume, Marguerite Joutz, Steven Sloman, Robert Barrick, Kristina Mendicino
 - Email correspondence
 - Kurt Teichert

- Discuss the Gifts and Grants Committee
- May 1, 2024: Kurt Pennell
 - Remote meeting
 - Scott Frickel, Kurt Teichert, Sara Cunningham
 - Discuss funding sources and potential influence on academic freedom
- May 2, 2024: Jim Kellner
 - In person (Sara, remote) meeting
 - Scott Frickel, Kurt Teichert, Sara Cunningham
 - Discuss funding sources and potential influence on academic freedom
- May 6, 2024: Caitlyn Carpenter
 - In person
 - Kurt Teichert
 - Discuss the status of ACURM deliberations on the petition
- May 10, 2024: Daniel Newgarden, President of the Undergraduate Council of Students
 - Kurt Teichert
 - Discuss student membership and participation in ACURM
- May 14, 2024: Caitlyn Carpenter, Ava Ward, Ethan Drake, Garrett Brand
 - Scott Frickel, Kurt Teichert
 - Discuss the draft recommendations with the Sunrise Brown representatives who had presented the petition in the January meeting.
- May 17, 2024: Jill Pipher
 - Remote meeting and email correspondence
 - Scott Frickel, Erica Larschan
 - Discuss OVPR roles and responsibilities and mentorship of researchers
- June 3 & 10, 2024: Jennifer Tidey
 - Email correspondence
 - Scott Frickel, Erica Larschan, Kurt Teichert
 - Clarifications about the Policy on Acceptance of Tobacco-Related Research Funding
- June 21, 2024: Marguerite Joutz
 - Remote meeting
 - Scott Frickel, Sydney Menzin
 - Discuss finalization of report, protocol for submission, and confidentiality

Sunrise Brown Memorandum on Fossil Fuel Dissociation (attachment)

Sunrise Brown Report: “Dissociate Now: A Fossil Free Brown” (attachment)

Memorandum on Fossil Fuel Dissociation

To: Advisory Committee on University Resource Management (ACURM)

From: Sunrise Brown

Date: April 20th, 2023

Subject: Recommending a fossil fuel dissociation policy in line with Brown's existing commitments to sustainability, truth, and academic freedom

Sunrise Brown calls for a new policy dissociating the University from the fossil fuel industry in response to its attacks on science, its creation of science disinformation, and its business model that is wholly incompatible with a sustainable future for Brown students. Under this policy, the University would:

1. Prohibit fossil fuel companies, their affiliated foundations, and industry groups from funding research and donating to the university.
2. Adopt a fossil fuel-free careers policy that bans fossil fuel companies from hosting recruiting events and attending career fairs, posting job vacancies, sponsoring events, and otherwise advertising to students through Brown.
3. Require all retirement plan vendors to offer fossil-free retirement plan options.

Our request is that ACURM recommends dissociation and the creation of a faculty-led implementation committee with formal participation from students and administrators.

I. Context

On February 27th, Sunrise Brown released [*Dissociate Now: A Fossil Free Brown*](#), which details the role that fossil fuel companies play at Brown and makes the case for dissociation. Between 2010 and 2022, 63 journal articles have been published by Brown-affiliated authors with funding from the world's fifty largest oil and gas companies. The top funders are BP, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Shell. We also discovered that the quantity of such articles published annually is on an upward trajectory.

In addition to research funding, we found that between 2003 and 2019, Brown received at least 93 contributions amounting to \$20,511,567 from non-profit foundations affiliated with the fossil fuel industry or the top donors of the climate change countermovement. These figures are likely a severe underestimation as they only represent publicly available donation records. If a company contributes directly to Brown or by way of a donor-advised fund – rather than through

is non-profit – the sums are not publicly available.

Sunrise Brown is requesting this new policy with the support of the University community. Since the release of *Dissociate Now*, over 1,200 undergraduate students have signed a petition requesting dissociation, and the Undergraduate Council of Students unanimously passed a resolution endorsing such a policy on March 8th. Fossil fuel dissociation also enjoys the support of 16 Providence-based groups, including Scholars at Brown for Climate Action and Climate Action Rhode Island, as well as 32 climate organizations from San Diego to Harvard to Amsterdam.

Before asking ACURM for this recommendation, Sunrise Brown leadership met with a wide variety of stakeholders, such as the Dean of the College, leadership of CareerLAB, the Office of the Vice President for Research, the leadership of the Initiative for Sustainable Energy, leadership of the Institute at Brown for Environment and Society, the Brown Activist Coalition, and the Undergraduate Council of Students. Our conclusion is that fossil fuel dissociation is necessary, and that a policy establishing it must take place on the university level.

II. Academic freedom

The academic freedom of Brown students and faculty are at risk due to the University associating with fossil fuel companies. Fossil fuel companies do not engage with universities in good faith. They [influence](#) research outcomes, set research agendas, and incentivize researchers to avoid conclusions that may be unfavorable to the donor, thus threatening future partnerships. They also use universities to greenwash their image, hiding their perpetuation of the climate crisis with publicity derived from meager investments in ecological remediation and the humanities.

Just like the tobacco industry before it, the fossil fuel industry has built its business model on lies and disinformation. [According to](#) Naomi Oreskes, a Harvard Professor of the History of Science and author of *Merchants of Doubt*, the fossil fuel industry has systematically misled the public by discrediting climate science, manufacturing controversy over the reality of climate change, and promoting false solutions. To this day, the fossil fuel industry makes false claims about their carbon reduction commitments and renewable energy investments on national television, in job descriptions presented to Brown students through CareerLAB, and in Congressional testimony.

Researchers must be free to determine their own agendas and declare their findings without fear of reprisal or the withdrawal of funding– and that freedom is compromised by relying on an industry whose business model does not permit science-led climate action. The same is true for career recruiting. Students’ freedom to select a career path from a variety of employers is compromised when an entire economic sector intentionally misrepresents itself– [exactly](#)

ExxonMobil's strategy when it came to campus in October 2022.

There cannot be academic freedom at Brown so long as fossil fuel companies threaten the integrity of research and deceive students into career opportunities. There is a freedom of Brown faculty and students to access research funds and job applications. But there also must be freedom from deception and manipulation. We understand that Brown has already taken stances on sustainability and disinformation through its Sustainability Strategic Plan and Business Ethics Policy. Now it must follow through with fossil fuel dissociation.

III. Reputational Risk

As the fossil fuel industry's strategy of manipulating and greenwashing university research has become more apparent, so does the incongruence between Brown's status as a leading research university and as a home to fossil fuel funding. The Harvard Faculty Divest steering committee [acknowledged](#) the reputational risk associated with fossil fuel companies just a few weeks ago, writing, "We ask not only about a potential conflict of interest, but also about the appearance of a conflict of interest, particularly one that might damage Harvard's reputation and impair its efforts to be a leader in climate and sustainability work." Associating with corrupt actors creates the appearance of corruption, even if no corruption is present.

Brown shares these values. As President Paxson [announced](#) to the Brown community in March 2023, the University will not accept a research grant "if the intended purpose of the Grant and/or being associated with the grant-making organization could inflict significant damage on the University's reputation, standing or integrity or be contrary to University values." Moreover, the working group tasked to review the University's grants policy determined that "in some cases, however rare, association with a grant-making organization could pose a threat to Brown's reputation or be inconsistent with Brown's values." Brown cannot afford to take on the appearance that its research is biased, and faculty labor should not risk invalidation because of associations with organizations that produce biased research.

IV. Sustainability

In March 2021, the University released its Sustainability Strategic Plan, stating that "If Brown is to fulfill its mission 'to serve the community, the nation and the world,' it must lead by example in addressing its impact on the environment and the impact of the services it provides."

Sustainability means more than just infrastructure upgrades and technical advancements. To uphold its commitment to sustainability, Brown must discontinue its relations with the destructive fossil fuel companies who have known that their business model rests on planetary destruction since the 1980s.

Fossil fuel industry leaders like [ExxonMobil](#) and [Shell](#) confirmed that fossil fuels cause global warming decades ago, yet they continue to maintain a business model that is wholly dependent on fossil fuels while [minimally investing](#) in green energy alternatives. These leaders' role in perpetuating the production and consumption of fossil fuels is antithetical to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions necessary for a climate transition. Fossil fuel infrastructure is directly funded by the income of faculty and staff, even when TIAA-CREF and Fidelity funds say investment funds are socially responsible.

Also, as the University's Sustainability Strategic Plan discusses, the impacts of the climate crisis are not distributed equally. Today, race is the [biggest determinant](#) of a person's exposure to pollution in the United States, above education and income. Through systems of systemic racism, such as housing discrimination, the fossil fuel industry has sited polluting facilities in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. [Fifty-seven percent](#) of residents living within three miles of oil refineries with high rates of benzene emissions – a well-known carcinogen that causes leukemia and other lung conditions – are people of color. Forty-three percent are below the poverty line.

Brown's relations with the fossil fuel industry not only tie it with the ecological consequences of a warmer world, but with the exploitation of marginalized groups caused both by the industry's actions and a changing climate. Brown cannot be a true leader in sustainability without ending its financial and social ties to the fossil fuel industry.

V. The dissociation process

The tides have turned against the fossil fuel industry. The fossil fuel divestment movement barely existed in the mid-2000s, but by 2023 over 100 US-based universities have divested their endowments of fossil fuel holdings– as did the Republic of Ireland's national investment fund and New York City pension funds. In this post-divestment landscape, Brown should set the standard for how universities interact with the fossil fuel industry, leading by example and in the interest of its students and faculty. The University is a promising first mover in the nascent dissociation movement.

After announcing its intent to dissociate from fossil fuels, Brown should take cues from other schools' actions. When Princeton announced its intention to end fossil fuel-funded research and donations, it established a committee led by faculty experts to hash out the logistics of the policy. This [resulted](#) in a methodology for defining climate disinformation and a list of the fossil fuel companies subject to the new procedures. Four schools in the United Kingdom established fossil-free career services policies in 2022, with the University of Birkbeck being the first [to act](#) against the companies “most responsible for destroying the planet.” And it did this while

[continuing](#) to offer “impartial one-to-one careers guidance on any industry of their choosing.”

VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, Brown’s financial and social ties to the fossil fuel industry clearly indicates its enablement of the climate crisis and disinformation. The University is giving the industry a license to perpetuate crippling climate change, skew research, and lie to both students and the public. Brown’s reputation and integrity are on the line. Dissociation from the fossil fuel industry would be an affirmation of the University’s pursuit of truth, and an alignment of the institution’s actions with its values, from academic freedom to sustainability. We are happy to discuss dissociation, its urgency, its implications, and its logistics with the Committee as desired.

Respectfully,
Sunrise Brown





DISSOCIATE NOW
A FOSSIL FREE BROWN

DISSOCIATE NOW

A FOSSIL FREE BROWN

This report was written by Sunrise Brown and published in February 2023

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Since 2010, Brown-affiliated authors have published at least **63 journal articles** with funding from the world's fifty largest oil and gas companies. The top research sponsors are **BP, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Shell**. Furthermore, between 2003-2019, Brown received more than **\$20 million** from foundations associated with the fossil fuel industry and foundations that have contributed more than \$35 million to climate denial groups. It is likely that much more fossil fuel money flows to Brown as this number only reflects contributions from non-profit foundations, which are publicly available through third-party sources. The university does not make information about contributions

publicly available.

Through these financial and social relationships, Brown University compromises the integrity of university research and fosters an environment in which the fossil fuel industry can operate unchallenged, all while pledging to be a national leader in sustainability.

This report calls on Brown University to demonstrate its commitment to the values and objectives it proclaims by dissociating from the fossil fuel industry. This requires terminating all financial and social connections with fossil fuel corporations, their affiliated foundations, and industry groups.

In accordance with the evidence presented in this report, and in alignment with Brown's stated values of environmental sustainability and academic freedom, we recommend that Brown University take the following measures to dissociate itself from the fossil fuel industry:

- ◆ **Prohibit fossil fuel companies, their affiliated foundations, and industry groups from funding research and donating to the university.**
- ◆ **Adopt a fossil fuel-free careers policy that bans fossil fuel companies from hosting recruiting events and attending career fairs, posting job vacancies, sponsoring events, and otherwise advertising to students through Brown.**
- ◆ **Require all retirement plan vendors to offer fossil-free retirement plan options.**

PART I: THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY




The Fossil Fuel Industry is Causing the Climate Crisis

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) unequivocally states that in order to effectively tackle the climate crisis, it is imperative that we cease all fossil fuel combustion.¹⁰ To put it in the simple words of Oxford Geosystem Science Professor Myles Allen, “We have to stop fossil fuels.”¹¹ He is far from alone in this plea — there is an overwhelming scientific consensus that Earth’s climate is changing at an unprecedented rate, and fossil fuels are to blame.¹² Coal, oil and gas account for over 75% of global greenhouse gas emissions and close to 90% of all carbon emissions.¹³ Rather than meaningfully contribute to climate solutions, fossil fuel executives talk out of both sides of their mouths: publicly promising renewable energy investments while privately

discrediting and undermining their own efforts.¹⁴

Four decades and five IPCC reports after Exxon scientists confirmed that fossil fuels cause global warming, fossil fuel industry leaders ExxonMobil, BP, Shell, and Chevron maintain a business model that is wholly dependent on fossil fuels.¹⁵ Their green energy investments are insignificant by comparison.¹⁶ The fossil fuel industry’s adamant commitment to releasing carbon into the atmosphere directly obstructs the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions that is necessary to avoid the most extreme repercussions of climate change.

The devastating impacts of the fossil fuel industry are not felt in statistics



and risk assessment reports. They are experienced by communities whose land is polluted by oil spills and whose children breathe toxins spewing from local refineries. They are experienced by people fleeing drought and the famine it causes, and those who cannot afford to rebuild after a flood.

These effects are not distributed equally. Fossil fuels are intertwined with the exploitation of marginalized groups. Today, race is the biggest determinant of a person's exposure to pollution in the United States, above education and income.¹⁷ Through systems of systemic racism, such as housing discrimination, the fossil fuel industry has sited polluting facilities in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. Fifty-seven

percent of residents living within three miles of oil refineries with high rates of benzene emissions – a well-known carcinogen that causes leukemia and other lung conditions – are people of color. Forty-three percent are below the poverty line.¹⁸

Accepting funding from an industry that disproportionately harms and targets people of color, displaces Indigenous peoples across the globe, and refuses to take accountability for doing so is not a choice that is compatible with an institution that claims to value diversity, equity, and inclusion. By dissociating from the fossil fuel industry, Brown will also dissociate from a system rooted in white supremacy that continues to harm marginalized communities.

Fossil Fuel Money Creates Research Bias

The fossil fuel industry perennially targets climate science. The reason is clear: climate science is the backbone of policies designed to limit fossil fuel production and expand the development and use of renewable energy. In response to increased public awareness of the climate crisis, fossil fuel companies have orchestrated an extensive campaign to combat government climate action and sway public perception.

The American Petroleum Institute (API) began casting doubt on climate science as early as 1980, when it argued for the possibility of global cooling by misinterpreting research and

highlighting flimsy claims.¹⁹ A 1989 internal Exxon report proposed the manufacture of scientific uncertainty as a strategy to counteract public awareness of the climate crisis.²⁰ Similarly, a 1998 action plan by API proposed orienting media coverage towards viewpoints that challenge the scientific basis of climate change, including funding scientific research that aligns with fossil fuel interests.²¹

It is no secret that the oil industry and its allies seek to use academic institutions to their benefit. Oil magnate Charles Koch has explicitly manipulated the academic sphere to advance his business interests for half



a century. His brother, David, co-led this effort until his death in 2019. Between 1997 and 2018, the Koch family foundations spent at least \$145 million on more than 90 different groups that have attacked climate science and policy solutions.²² In 1974, Charles stated,

“I maintain that the educational [philanthropy] route is the most vital and the most neglected. We should support only those programs, departments, or schools that can contribute in some way to our individual companies or to the general welfare of our free enterprise.”²³

Since then, the Koch donor network has left a global paper trail demonstrating its intent to parlay “intellectual raw materials” produced by academic institutions into public opinion campaigns and policy.^{24,25} For example, the Koch donor network has plowed funding into the Regulatory Studies Center at George Washington University, which has long advocated for deregulation and produced research that “dramatically [reduced] the cost that the government attributes to carbon emissions.”²⁶ Manipulating government policy through the targeted application of academic research is a key tool that the fossil fuel industry and its allies use to delay climate action.

A study published in *Nature Climate Change* in November 2022 demonstrated that university-based energy research centers funded by the fossil fuel industry produce reports that are more favorable to natural gas than centers that do not receive such funding.²⁷ At the University of Manchester, the school’s relationship with BP “informs and directs” its scholarship.²⁸ The Advanced Energy

Consortium at the University of Texas, which has counted at least ten fossil fuel industry companies among its members, has invested at least \$50 million in research and development towards its stated mission to “optimize energy production.”^{29,30}

These research outcomes not only encourage fossil fuel exploration and exacerbate the climate crisis, but they also produce serious social consequences. By receiving fossil fuel funding, universities like Brown are complicit in a counterscientific quest to delay decarbonization. When research does not directly aid the expansion of fossil fuels, it often develops technologies that can be utilized to perpetuate fossil fuel dependency, such as carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) and oil spill remediation.³¹ In isolation, some of these research topics are not problematic. Still, by flooding climate research with funds, the fossil fuel industry dictates research agendas and fundamentally alters how we conceptualize the severity of climate change and its solutions.³²

Even when fossil fuel-funded research has nothing to do with industry expansion or the climate, universities grant them social and cultural legitimacy. A fossil fuel company that works with a university can broadcast to shareholders, policymakers, the media, and the public that it is working alongside — or inside — a highly respected institution to advance the public good. Universities that associate with fossil fuel companies help those companies corrupt research, distract policymaking, and appear as if they are contributing to climate solutions.

By receiving fossil fuel funding, universities like Brown are complicit in a counterscientific quest to delay decarbonization.



PART II: METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS



We conducted this research to inform our dissociation campaign in two central areas: the amount of money Brown has received from fossil fuel-affiliated and climate disinformation-affiliated organizations through general contributions, and the quantity of Brown-affiliated research articles sponsored by the fossil fuel industry. The data in this section is based on publicly-available information and therefore only reflects the minimum amount of money Brown has received from the fossil fuel industry and the minimum number of studies that Brown-affiliated authors have published. Fossil fuel companies may contribute directly to institutions or by way of donor-advised funds, which hide these sums from the public view, rather than through their affiliated charitable foundations which have publicly available donation records.

Methodology

For the data on general donations, we collaborated with Fossil Free Research, an international coalition of university student organizers advocating for an end to fossil fuel-funded research.³³ We exclusively relied on Foundation Directory to identify grants awarded to Brown from non-profit foundations affiliated with the fossil fuel industry and climate disinformation.³⁴ Foundation Directory is an online database that compiles grants found

in IRS 990 forms, which are filed annually by non-profits.

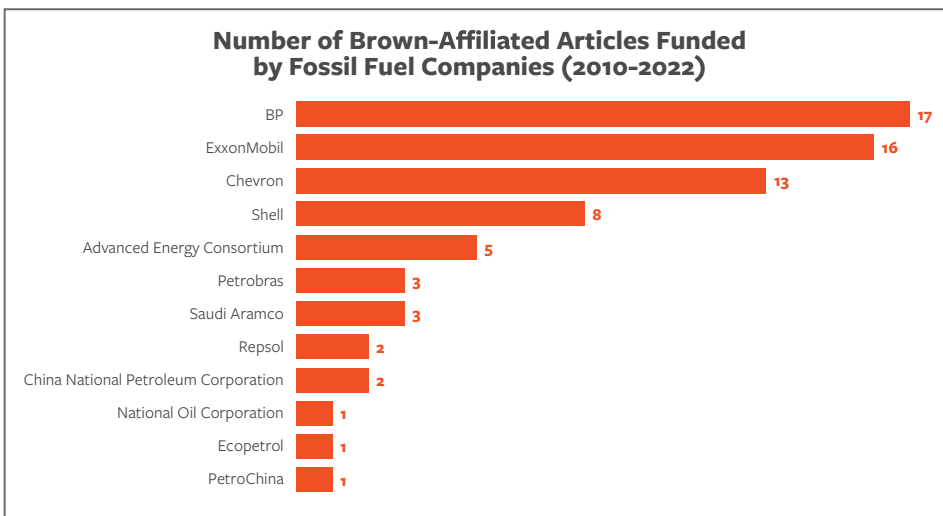
We searched for grants awarded to Brown University from a list of foundations tied to the top organizations from Urgewald's Global Oil and Gas and Exit List, Global Coal Exit List, Sierra Club's Report on fossil fuel utilities, and Fortune 500 oil and gas companies.^{35,36,37,38} We also included philanthropic



foundations that have given more than \$35 million to the climate change countermovement (referred to as the denial movement in this report) since 2003, as identified by climate disinformation scholar Robert Brulle, a Visiting Professor of Environment and Society at Brown University.³⁹ See the appendix for more information on the lists and the full list of funders that have given money to Brown.

To search for Brown-affiliated articles with fossil fuel funding, we utilized

Web of Science, an online database that houses articles published in over 34,000 different academic journals.⁴⁰ Web of Science lists funding disclosures and author affiliations for each of its articles, making it ideal for identifying fossil fuel-sponsored papers. We searched for articles that had both a Brown-affiliated author and sponsorship from at least one of the top fifty companies by total fossil fuel production on the Urgewald Global Oil and Gas and Exit List or the Global Coal Exit List.



Findings

Research Papers

Since 2010, **63 journal articles** have been published by Brown-affiliated authors with funding from the world’s fifty largest oil and gas companies. Seven of these articles received funding from multiple of these companies. The top funders are **BP, ExxonMobil, Chevron, and Shell**. It should be noted that all of these organizations are also members of the American Petroleum Institute. Other

companies include China National Petroleum, Ecopetrol, National Oil Corporation, Petrobras, PetroChina, Repsol, and Saudi Aramco. This list also includes the Advanced Energy Consortium, whose known member groups all belong to the top 50 fossil fuel companies.⁴¹

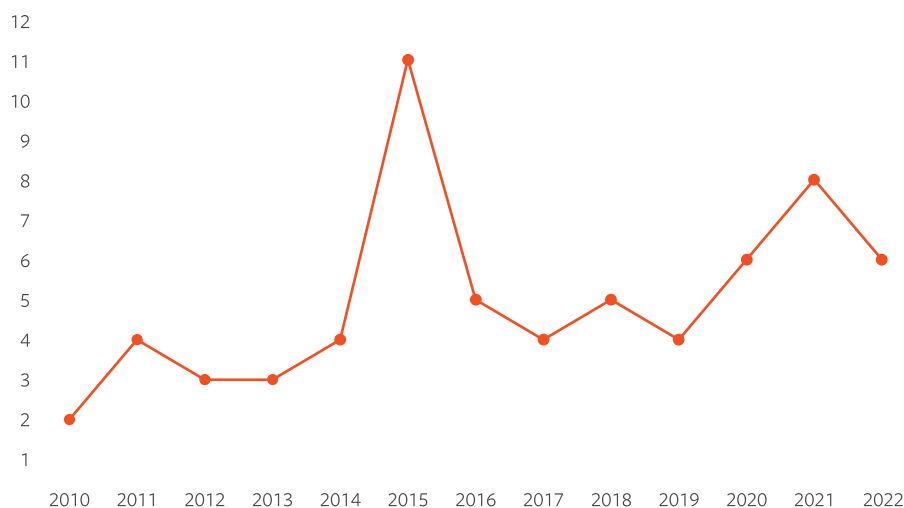
The quantity of articles published with fossil fuel funding peaked in 2015, but

yearly fossil fuel-funded article output increased between 2010 and 2022.

Five departments at Brown received fossil fuel funding for more than one article. These departments are

Chemistry, Engineering, Geological Sciences/Earth, Environmental and Planetary Sciences, Applied Mathematics, and Pathology & Laboratory Medicines.

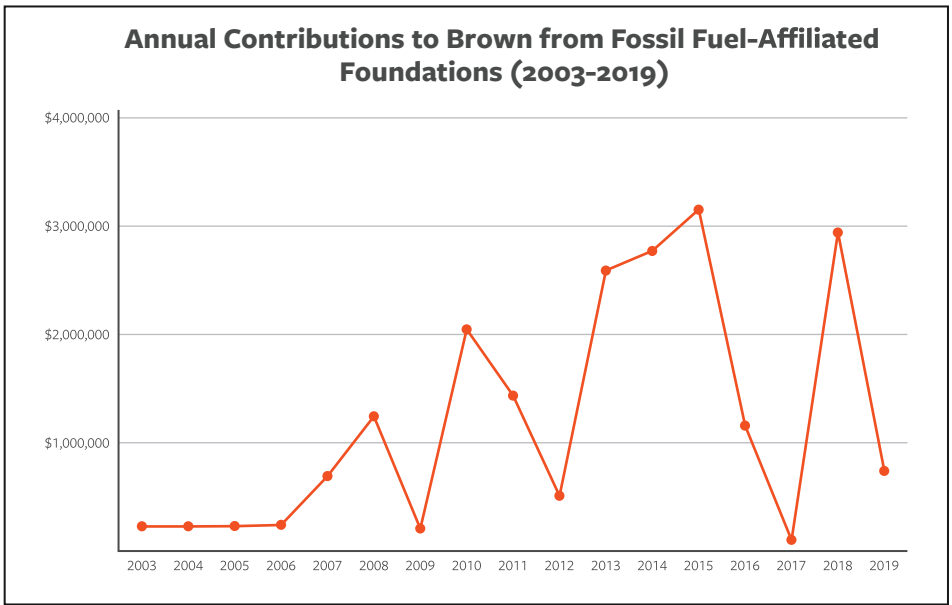
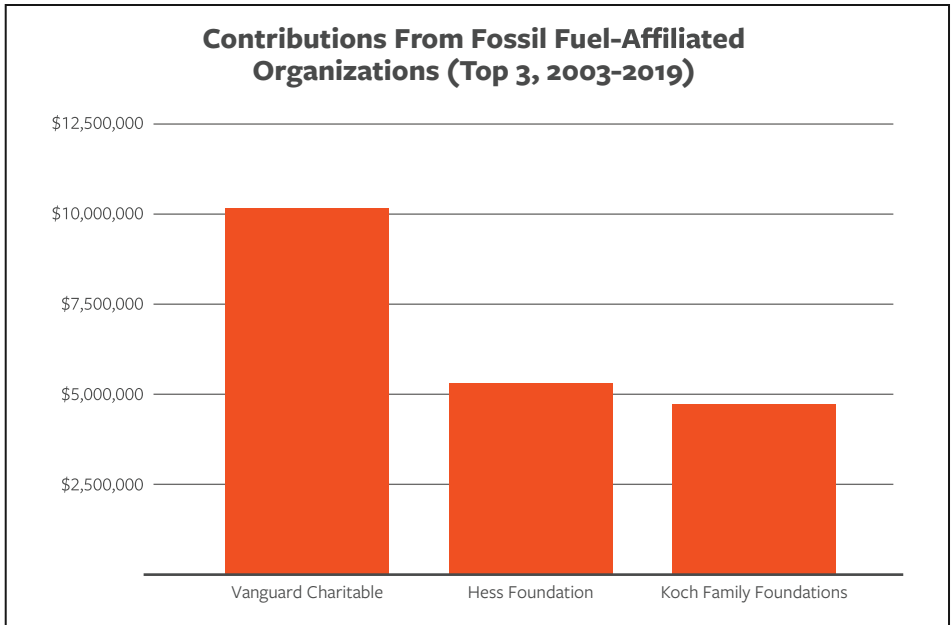
Annual Brown-Affiliated Articles Sponsored by Fossil Fuel Companies (2010-2022)



Contributions

Between 2003 and 2019, Brown University received at least **93 contributions** amounting to **\$20,511,567** from non-profit foundations affiliated with the fossil fuel industry or the top donors of the climate change countermovement. **16 such foundations** contributed to Brown during this span. These contributions indicate transfers from these organizations to Brown – they may be donations to the university’s operating budget, funds for research, or something else entirely. **Three** large, potentially problematic foundations stand out.

Over the specified period, the **Vanguard Charitable Endowment Program** donated more than **\$10,157,039**. It has also funded dozens of climate change-denying think tanks, such as the Heartland Institute, The Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute.⁴² Vanguard Charitable is an arm of the Vanguard Group, one of the largest fossil fuel asset managers.⁴³ **The Hess Foundation**, a family foundation closely tied to the Hess Corporation, a fossil fuel exploration company, donated **\$5,310,000**. **The Koch family foundations** donated **\$4,728,628**. They are notorious donors to climate



change denial groups and their wealth comes from Koch Industries, which extracts, transports, and refines oil and gas.

The vast majority of identified money has come from these three organizations that are intimately tied

to the fossil fuel industry or climate disinformation. But our analysis also revealed that Brown has accepted money from a variety of fossil fuel extraction, transport, and refining companies, such as **Valero Energy, Shell, Equitrans Midstream, and EQT.**

PART III: APPLICATIONS TO BROWN



Dissociate Now

Fossil fuel dissociation would not be Brown's first attempt to curtail its exposure to the fossil fuel industry. In March 2020, President Christina Paxson announced that Brown's Investment Office had divested nearly all of its assets that were entrenched in fossil fuel extraction companies, citing the high risk inherent to those companies during the global shift towards renewable energy sources.⁴⁴ We commend the Brown administration, faculty, staff, and students who advocated for such a

decision, enabling Brown to take an important step towards environmental sustainability.

Additionally, in April 2022, President Paxson announced updates to the university's business ethics policy, stating that the university would no longer do business with "individuals and organizations that promote science disinformation."⁴⁵ This policy was the first of its kind to be enacted by a university, and established Brown as a leader in global battles against



Fossil fuel dissociation pieces these policies together to make the unequivocal statement that fossil fuel companies' climate demolition and disinformation have no home at Brown.



science disinformation. However, we have yet to see any action suggesting that Brown will use the new standard to end its relationships with fossil fuel companies, which clearly spread climate disinformation through a host of intentionally deceptive claims.⁴⁶

This is a golden opportunity for the university to live up to its ethical ambitions. Fossil fuel dissociation fills in the gaps where divestment and the lackluster enforcement of the business ethics policy fall short. Our proposed policies take cues from other schools that have, to varying degrees, used their social standing to counter fossil fuel influence. In September 2022, Princeton announced that it would refrain from entering financial relationships with ninety companies active in the thermal coal and tar sands segments of the fossil fuel industry due to their climate impacts.⁴⁷ Faculty even established a method for identifying climate disinformation espoused by fossil fuel companies.⁴⁸

Princeton isn't the only school demonstrating that dissociation is possible. Birkbeck, University of London became the first school in the United Kingdom to end on-campus fossil fuel recruiting, including all career fairs, job postings, and advertising.⁴⁹ By the end of 2022, three more UK schools – The University of the Arts London, University of Bedfordshire, and Wrexham Glyndwr University – followed suit.⁵⁰

Fossil fuel-free retirement plans are already in place nationwide. When the University of California system divested its \$126 billion in assets from fossil fuel institutions in 2020,

its pension funds became fossil fuel-free too.⁵¹ The New York State Common Retirement Fund, which holds \$226 billion in assets for 1.1 million employees, divested the same year.⁵² Fossil fuel dissociation pieces these policies together to make the unequivocal statement that fossil fuel companies' climate demolition and disinformation have no home at Brown.

As a global leader in research, Brown holds significant standing in the public sphere. By accepting research money from fossil fuel companies and foundations, Brown actively provides the industry with a “social license to operate” – or the legitimacy, credibility, and communal trust it needs to continue its business practices.⁵³ This social license allows the fossil fuel industry to sustain a positive reputation in the public eye, despite destroying the climate and spreading disinformation.⁵⁴ Continuing to hold financial and social ties with fossil fuel companies thus makes Brown an enabler of the climate crisis.

By providing social legitimacy to fossil fuel companies, Brown helps obscure how fossil fuel affiliations fundamentally threaten its academic mission. This is true for all relationships with fossil fuel companies, but especially for academic research. Before a project even begins, funding shapes which questions are asked. It incentivizes researchers to avoid conclusions that may be unfavorable to the donor, thus threatening future partnerships.⁵⁵ Fossil fuel companies have proven masterful at weaponizing funding in this way. Academic projects must be

free from companies whose agenda relies on corrupted research and the denunciation of science. Protecting free inquiry at Brown means excluding funding that too often has a preordained result.

There may be concern that banning fossil fuel funding to research hampers academic freedom by dictating where funding must come from. But far greater risk is brought by allowing fossil fuel companies to shape research outcomes and agendas, and by inviting the reputational damage associated with their planetary destruction and subversive goals in academia. The same is true for career recruiting, a key platform for fossil fuel companies to market themselves to students as ethical and sustainable firms—exactly ExxonMobil’s strategy when it came to campus in October 2022.⁵⁶

This exposes students to an agenda of explicit deception that covers up a cataclysmic business model incompatible with the university’s basic ethical responsibilities.

Brown has already taken stances on sustainability and disinformation through its Sustainability Strategic Plan and Business Ethics Policy. Now it must follow through with fossil fuel dissociation. Brown has the opportunity to become the first university ever to completely dissociate from fossil fuels. As a world class research institution with a commitment to the pursuit of truth, Brown must end its ties with organizations actively destroying the climate and deploying science disinformation to prolong their profits—and the climate crisis.

History of Environmental Activism at Brown

In launching a fossil fuel dissociation report and campaign, we understand that we are one note in a symphony of climate activists at Brown over the last several decades. The activists who came before us – those named in records such as *The Burn Brown Book* and those omitted from the historical record – inspire us to fight for truth, transparency, and climate justice. Their struggles for change inform and inspire our advocacy.⁵⁷ We stand on their shoulders.

In line with many academic institutions across the country, Brown saw the mainstream environmental

movement first take root on campus in the 1970s, as students began to form environmentally-oriented independent concentrations. This led to the university formally establishing the Center for Environmental Studies in 1978, now the Institute at Brown for Environment and Society (IBES), which was quickly followed by the construction of Brown’s Urban Environmental Laboratory in 1979.^{58,59}

Since then, student activism at Brown has played a significant role in university and local politics. In 2007, the Brown Environmental Action Network (BEAN) successfully

pushed Brown to reduce its carbon emissions by 80% by 2050, compared with 1990 levels.^{60,61} Around the same time, student groups like EcoReps and emPower focused on university energy and plastic consumption.^{62,63} In 2008, the Rhode Island Student Climate Coalition (RISCC) was founded with a focus on mutual relationships between policymakers, students, and community organizations.^{64,65} Five years later, RISCC organized the attendance of over 100 Brown students at a Washington D.C. protest against the Keystone XL pipeline.⁶⁶

Under the RISCC banner, Brown students allied with NoLNGinPVD – now the People’s Port Authority – to fight against the construction of a new liquified natural gas facility in Providence. They also pushed for carbon pricing legislation alongside the Energize Rhode Island Coalition and lobbied for renewable energy policy at the state level.^{67,68}

Then, in September 2012, Brown Divest Coal demanded that Brown divest its endowment from the fifteen largest American coal companies. The group became the first in recent memory to present their case in front of the Brown Corporation. Despite their appeal and the concurrence of the Advisory Committee on Corporate Responsibility in Investment Policies (ACCRIP), President Christina Paxson declared that Brown would not be divesting from those fifteen companies.^{69,70} In the months after her announcement, student activists wrote letters, marshaled sit-ins, organized a student union, and advocated for an environmental justice-based track in the new Environmental Studies

concentration.^{71,72}

While the university refused to divest from coal, student climate activism continued. Three Brown students were arrested at a November 2016 protest for their peaceful demonstration against the Dakota Access Pipeline, an oil industry project constructed on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.⁷³ In 2018, Environmental Justice @ Brown allied with Brown Divest, the Immigrant Rights Coalition, and others to demand that Brown end its affiliation with then-IBES Presidential Advisory Council member Warren Kanders, whose company Safariland manufactured tear gas used against peaceful protesters at Standing Rock, in Palestine’s West Bank, in Ferguson, Missouri, and against migrants along the southern US border.^{74,75} After Kanders dug in, the Warren Kanders Must Go coalition launched a flier and banner-drop campaign, a teach-in, a series of Family Weekend disruptive demonstrations, and a public interrogation at an IBES panel.^{76,77,78} Safariland divested from its weapons divisions in 2020 and Kanders is no longer listed as a member of the IBES Advisory Council.^{79,80}

Today, we move towards dissociation with the knowledge that pioneering student activists are responsible for environmental scholarship, policy, and justice at Brown. Groups like RISCC and Brown Divest Coal – as well as non-climate groups such as the Third World Coalition – demonstrate righteousness and perseverance, and they lend us practical strategies. Equipped with the lessons of the past, we strive for a more sustainable and equitable tomorrow.

PART IV: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Brown's financial and social ties to fossil fuel-affiliated organizations clearly indicate its enablement of the climate crisis and climate deception. As such, Sunrise Brown urges that Brown takes action against the fossil fuel industry and its affiliated organizations to revoke the industry's social license and set a meaningful standard for how a university should associate with groups driving the climate crisis.

We advocate for a comprehensive dissociation policy.

This policy should include the following components:

1. Gifts and Grants Dissociation Policy

As our findings show, Brown-affiliated authors have published 63 journal articles funded by fossil fuel companies and foundations since 2010. In context, this figure is almost trivial. Between 2017 and 2021 alone, Brown-affiliated authors published nearly 7,500 articles.⁸¹ So Brown's mission and integrity are compromised by fossil fuel funding, yet the benefits it reaps from such funding are negligible. Brown gets nothing in return that can't be easily replaced by other donors. Meanwhile, the benefits to the fossil fuel industry are immense: social legitimacy, institutional trust, and research outputs that enable fossil fuel expansion. This same logic holds for gifts given to the university by fossil fuel companies, foundations, and industry groups – their donations are not vital to Brown's day-to-day operations and will not have a major effect on the university's revenue streams.

We are calling for an official policy prohibiting all fossil fuel-funded research grants and gifts to the university. By enacting a strict gifts and grants policy, Brown has the opportunity to take a significant step towards a fairer, more sustainable future with minimal impact to their research funding portfolio and operating budget.





2. Careers Policy

In fall 2022 alone, two fossil fuel companies hosted recruiting events on campus: ExxonMobil and SLB.^{82,83} By helping the fossil fuel industry in its recruiting efforts, Brown legitimizes the industry on campus and in the minds of students. The business models of these companies are built on deception and destruction. They are unfit to represent themselves to students as forward-thinking firms with integrity and a social conscience.

Therefore, we are calling for a fossil free careers policy that bans fossil fuel companies from hosting recruiting events and attending career fairs, posting job vacancies, sponsoring events, and otherwise advertising to students through Brown.

3. Retirement Fund Divestment

We are calling for the university to require all retirement plan vendors to offer fossil free retirement plan options, giving faculty and staff the opportunity to divest their retirement fund from the companies actively harming the future of their students. Including fossil fuel companies in retirement fund portfolios normalizes their unethical and harmful practices. Worse, investments in these companies directly fund oil exploration, pipeline construction, and political lobbying, which actively worsen the climate crisis and help the industry retain its social legitimacy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There were many minds that helped bring this project from a scattered idea born in a conference room to the campaign that is now launching alongside this report.

Thank you to the revived and vibrant student activism groups on campus – especially Students for Educational Equity, Students for Justice in Palestine, and the Student Labor Alliance – for fighting alongside us and for their persistent efforts to make this campus a better place.

Thank you to Fossil Fuel Divest Harvard, Divest Princeton, Earth Guardians, Fossil Free Research, People & Planet, Sunrise American University, Sunrise Dartmouth, and the University of California Green New Deal Coalition for providing invaluable precedent, inspiration, and advice.

Thank you to the activists that came before us, on Brown’s campus and beyond.

Thank you to Kim Cobb, Baylor Fox-Kemper, Tim Herbert, Dawn King, Brian Lander, Myles Lennon, Timmons Roberts, Kurt Teichert, and all other Brown faculty who guide us in our collective fight for climate action.

Thank you to Gregory Hitch, whose encouragement and leadership led to the revival of Sunrise Brown.

Thank you to the students who care and who continue to fight.

Thank you to the youth, each of you who are working to change the world.

Thank you to the Urban Environmental Lab for hosting late-night art builds and providing warm tea (and cold oat milk), and thank you to Jeanne Loewenstein for taking care of our peculiar home.

Thank you to Dove Street, which needs no further explanation.

And thank you to the salmon, stubbornly swimming home.

APPENDIX

A spreadsheet containing the data backing the findings of this report can be accessed [here](#). Please contact sunrise@brown.edu with any further questions.

Search process for Web of Science:

1. Searches were initialized using the “Affiliation” and “Funding Agency” search features whereby companies were searched for using keywords (i.e. “Shell”) in order to return all possible related results.
2. Information collected included the article title, publication year, funding agencies present on our search lists, all Brown-affiliated authors and, if specified, their department(s).
 - a. Departments were listed under the Author Information section. If the general Brown University address was given, departments were determined through internet searches using websites such as LinkedIn or Brown University website pages.
 - b. All specific company subset names (i.e. Shell International Exploration and Production, Inc.) stem from names provided by Web of Science. On occasion, Web of Science provided “appeared in source as” names. For the sake of data cleanliness, these were not used.
3. All search results were verified by multiple contributors.

A note on co-authorship

Both Brown-affiliated lead authors and co-authors were included in our searches. Of the 63 articles, 52 of them did not specify which author the fossil fuel funding source went to. Five specified that the fossil fuel contribution went directly to the Brown-affiliated author, and six specified that the funding went to a non Brown-affiliated author on the study.

Lists of potential donors

To determine general contributions from the fossil fuel industry, we worked with Fossil Free Research to build a list of fossil fuel corporations and identify the corporations that have contributed to Brown. We searched through the following companies and their affiliated foundations:

- ◆ Top US and Global corporations in the Urgewald Global Oil and Gas and Exit List by hydrocarbons production for upstream firms and by pipeline length and LNG capacity for midstream firms.
- ◆ Top US and Global corporations in the Urgewald Global Coal Exit List by annual production and installed capacity.
- ◆ All oil and gas equipment corporations and petroleum refining corporations in Fortune 500.
- ◆ Utilities with a score of lower than 40 in Sierra Club’s report “The Dirty Truth About Utility Climate Pledges,” based on Utilities plans to expand fossil fuel capacity.

Below is a list of the funders that have been identified as financial contributors to Brown. It includes fossil fuel affiliated foundations and foundations affiliated with the denial movement. Note that Vanguard and the Koch foundations have a star since they appear in the list of core foundations of the denial movement and also are closely affiliated with the fossil fuel industry, as mentioned earlier in the report.

| Funder | Affiliated with the Climate Change Countermovement (denial movement) |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Vanguard Group | TRUE* |
| Hess Foundation | FALSE |
| Koch Foundations | TRUE* |
| Searle Freedom Trust | TRUE |
| John Templeton Foundation | TRUE |
| Valero Energy | FALSE |
| Shell | FALSE |
| Equitrans Midstream Corporation | FALSE |
| EQT Corporation | FALSE |
| Baker Hughes | FALSE |
| NextEra Energy Inc. | FALSE |
| Alabama Power | FALSE |
| DTE Energy Co. | FALSE |
| Sempra Energy | FALSE |
| Southern Company | FALSE |

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