

What is the “Committee on Research Funding from Fossil Fuel Companies?”

They were established over the summer to decide the future of Fossil Fuel-funded research at Columbia. They currently have a survey out to get feedback on six questions. This page is designed to help people understand the facts behind FFR and respond to the survey.

Who is Sunrise Columbia?

We are an environmental justice group on campus currently running a campaign to get fossil fuel funding out of our climate and environmental research! We have released a report that outlines some of the impacts of fossil fuel funding in our research. Scan the QR code to read the report!



The Problem:

Since 2005, Columbia University has accepted **\$43.7 million** from 44 corporations associated with the fossil fuel industry. This is likely an underestimate because Columbia is very bad at disclosing funding. At least \$36.1 million came from the top 10 fossil fuel companies.

At least **784** Columbia **studies** were funded by a company on the Global Oil & Gas Exit List or Global Coal Exit List.

Peterson (A past Barnard President) called her Exxon board position “a nice opportunity to make some money for Barnard.”

Overwhelmingly, Columbia’s Center on Global Energy Policy’s (CGEP) **top donors are fossil fuel companies**, including Occidental Petroleum Corporation, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, Shell plc, and Chevron, concerning considering the center should be neutral.

“BP’s 2018 “Communications Strategy And Tactical Plan” lists **CGEP** ‘opinion leaders’ to “**demonstrate that BP is a 'trusted voice'” and “illustrate BP’s energy transition narrative.**” According to the plan, a goal of BP’s engagement was to “develop and reinforce relationships with key stakeholder groups, positioning BP as a preferred partner.

The Impact:

A 2022 Nature study conducted by Columbia researchers describes CGEP as a “fossil-funded centre” and found that it has a “**more positive” stance towards natural gas** over renewables not seen in non-fossil-funded research centers.

Columbia’s biased research has also been directly **linked to significant policy decisions**, such as lifting the U.S. crude oil export ban in 2015.

As Columbia continues to violate academic integrity by accepting fossil fuel industry funding, it actively **undermines the university’s reputation.**

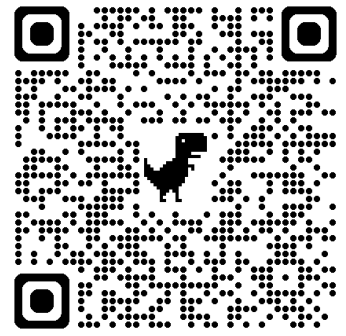
Polling from Data for Progress found that the net **favorability** towards Columbia University **dropped** by 17 percentage points **when survey respondents were informed about Columbia’s fossil fuel ties.**

*We defined fossil fuel companies with the Global Oil & Gas Exit List or Global Coal Exit List.



The Committee's charge is to consider the following questions:

1. Going forward, should Columbia receive support from fossil fuel companies for its research and research-related activities?
2. What are the potential risks and benefits of future acceptance of research funding from fossil fuel companies at Columbia?
3. Are there dimensions specific to the nature or discipline of the research in question (e.g., basic scientific or engineering research vs policy or legal research vs ethics) to be considered in answering these questions?
4. Do all fossil fuel companies warrant the same approach, or are there differences among them that should be considered?
5. What criteria should be used to assess opportunities for research funding from fossil fuel companies as they arise, and whether they should or should not be accepted by the University? Can broad guidance be developed to supplement or eliminate case-by-case evaluation?
6. Are there other questions concerning research funding from fossil fuel companies that the University should consider?



Scan here to be taken to the survey.

You will be asked to give your affiliation with Columbia, level of study, and major. On the left are the 6 questions the committee is answering. Below we have some prompts to help people respond.

No! Columbia should not receive support from fossil fuel companies for its research and research-related activities *Explain whatever reasonings are most salient to you.*

Examples:

Integrity: threatens academic freedom and the integrity of our research due to unavoidable bias towards these companies.

Hypocrisy: the school cannot call itself sustainable while funding climate research with fossil fuel money. The University does not invest its endowment in fossil fuel companies and should extend this logic to donations.

Justice: Fossil fuels are destroying communities, the environment, and killing people, Columbia should not be complicit in this.

What risks concern you the most? Which benefits?

Look at the fact sheet and find a risk/ benefit that stands out to you, and explain why

Examples: It can bias our research toward fossil fuels, impacts what research is funded, not knowing who funded the research you're reading

Example: Columbia could be a leader in research institutions cutting ties with oil and gas.

The university should set strict requirements! Pick one or multiple requirements that stand out to you. Explain why it is important...

- Full transparency
 - Public Disclosure of Donors
 - Donor Disclaimers on Research: Outline conflicts of interest. This disclaimer should accompany all research publications and public communications to ensure transparency for stakeholders and the public.
- Strict criteria for companies to fund research
 - Must not financially benefit from the extraction, production, or mass consumption of fossil fuels.
 - Must not have a history of or currently engage in the spread of climate disinformation.
- Set a Timeline for FFR
 - Give consistent updates and reports on progress
- Increase inclusion of researchers, students, and faculty, in administrative decisions around funding