

COMMITTEE ON CAMPUS CLIMATE CHANGE (CCCC)

Disclosure of Fossil Fuel Industry Funding

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This committee confers with and advises the Senate and administration on matters pertaining to campus decarbonization, climate change impacts and mitigation, climate change in educational programs, and climate change research. It studies and collects data on the climate change impacts of campus activities and develops recommendations for short-term, medium-term, and long-term changes to campus policy and behavior.

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Proposed Academic Senate Resolution

UC Policy Requiring Special Disclosure of Fossil Fuel Industry Funding

The University exhorts researchers to:

1. Consider carefully whether to accept research funding from the fossil fuel industry (and whether their research might be better served by seeking funding from alternate sources).
2. Exercise the utmost care in assuring that their research (including research carried out with fossil fuel industry funding) adheres to the highest scientific and ethical standards. This includes being particularly vigilant about not allowing any funder to direct or control the outcome of the research or the dissemination of its results.
3. Explicitly disclose, in the event of accepting fossil fuel industry funding, the financial and non-financial relationships that obtain between the funder and researcher in all public communications regarding climate change and its impacts. This applies to both verbal and written communications, to both scientific audiences and the general public. Disclosure in scientific articles will follow the format established by the journal. Disclosure in communications to the general public must be part of the article with equal prominence to the main text. Disclosures must explicitly state the type of compensation (not amount) and the name of the organization providing the funding or other type of compensation.

Fossil fuel financial relationships includes grants, contracts, royalties, consulting fees, honoraria, payment for expert testimony, travel support, or any other gift with financial value. Non-financial relationships include serving on a board of directors, family interests, and any other relevant relationship. For the purposes of this policy, the fossil fuel industry is defined as coal, gas, oil, trade and other organizations that draw a substantial amount of their revenue from the discovery, financing, extraction, transport, refining, or combustion of fossil fuels, as well as agencies that are substantially controlled by or acting on behalf of such entities.

Failure to disclose Fossil Fuel funding shall be considered a possible breach of the Faculty Code of Conduct and is subject to APM-15 and APM-16.

Regents Policy Regarding Research Funding from the Fossil Fuel Industry

Preamble

In 2007 UCSF Professor Stanton Glantz gave [testimony](#) to the Regents concerning the funding of research by the tobacco industry. He laid out the university's core mission "to discover knowledge and to disseminate it to its students and to society at large." Glantz then touched on some of the many ways that the tobacco industry distorts the knowledge discovery process, primarily through creating a false image of scientific uncertainty and controversy. As one tobacco executive infamously wrote in a 1969 memo: "Doubt is our product, since it is the best means of competing with the 'body of fact' that exists in the minds of the general public."

In May 2007, as a result of the campaign by Glantz and others, the University of California adopted [Regent Policy 2309](#), creating special procedures for the submission of proposals to tobacco companies and affiliates.

As (then) UCSD historian of science Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway showed in their influential book *Merchants of Doubt*, the 'Tobacco Strategy' became the playbook for the fossil fuel industry. From claiming that scientists' responses to peer review are fraudulent cover-ups, to exploiting the media's commitment to 'balance', the coal and oil industry misinformation campaign has been staggeringly successful in stopping meaningful response to the climate emergency. Much of this effort is documented at the UCSF [industry documents archive](#).

In the past decade, the "growing colonization of university space and other public institutions by energy corporations" has been well established ([Ladd 2020](#)). Millions of dollars have been funneled into supporting industry-friendly research, work whose conclusions sometimes have been pre-determined by funders. Scandals about misleading 'research-for-hire' have arisen at many peer institutions.

The effects of climate change are some orders of magnitude more catastrophic than smoking, prompting the UC to declare a [climate emergency](#). The misinformation campaign is also much larger with fossil fuels than tobacco. Given these two facts, plus the context where UC researchers work hard to combat climate change and its negative impacts and helped uncover and document the misinformation campaign, we submit that UC again needs to take action as it did with tobacco funding.

Due to the scale of fossil fuel industry funding, a fossil fuel counterpart of Regent Policy 2309 is impractical. Shining light on this type of funding, however, is an effective strategy and can be implemented with a simple disclosure policy. Given UC's agenda-setting role, we expect this policy may become an example to others and spread widely while at the same time decreasing within UC the chances of 'research-for-hire' scandals that have occurred elsewhere. Best of all, it will give Californians more reason to trust our good research in an age when misinformation thrives.

FAQs

The proposed policy requires that researchers funded by fossil fuel interests must declare their funding in public communications. For details, please see the accompanying document.

1. Will the proposed policy infringe on academic freedom?

Disclosure does not impact your choice of research topic nor your choice of funding. For all this policy is concerned, you can work on what you want and fund it how you like. The change here is that researchers should now publicly disclose fossil fuel interests in their public research-oriented communications.

As this practice is already common in most fields, this will represent a small change for most researchers. University researchers already must fill out annual disclosures of potential financial interests. Most academic journals require that authors declare financial interests. Many societies and fields expect such disclosures before or after a public talk. The disclosure policy is an “in house” solution to cover the loophole where journals or other publications do not demand transparency and extends it to other public outlets of our research.

Fossil fuel funding poses a vastly greater threat to academic freedom. Many universities have entered arrangements that allow companies memberships on academic governing boards, first rights to intellectual property, industry review of research, and more.

2. Aren't we on a slippery slope? Why single out the fossil fuel industry?

Like it or not, UC has and will take funding from sources that have not always acted according to one's personal moral preferences or in the service of the public good. Still, slippery slope arguments are often taught as fallacies in logic courses. They must be handled with care.

Why focus on fossil fuels? The answer is essentially that size matters. The size of the climate emergency dwarves most other problems facing society, the size of the orchestrated campaign by the fossil fuel industry to misuse our research dwarves that from other groups, and the size of fossil fuel's reach into academia dwarves that of most other industries. The problem is bigger and more costly than others. That demands special action.

On the societal cost, millions of current and future Californians will suffer from climate change. We face an existential threat, which is why the UC system declared a climate emergency in 2019. It has not done so for the other societal problems.

In terms of the campaign to misinform the public about climate change, note that cities all over California are filing torts, liability and consumer protection suits against fossil fuel companies for their role in misinformation. The problem is not merely that some businesses have interests that are not in alignment with the public good. That is natural in a market economy. The problem is that their misinformation campaign is borderline illegal if not outright illegal.

Finally, their employment of academics in this campaign is wide scale and documented (see Franta and Supran 2017, Oreskes and Conway 2011, Ladd 2020, and Michaels 2020).

There are other disanalogies, but scale is the big one.

3. Who is “the fossil fuel industry”?

This is a good question. Some companies such as Exxon-Mobil and British Petroleum are clear, but there are thousands of companies that draw revenue from fossil fuels in one way or the other. Is a company that makes 5% of its revenue from fossil fuels but the rest from elsewhere a “fossil fuel” company?

UCOP's office of Research Policy Analysis and Coordination interprets, guides and implements policy. In the case of tobacco and Regents Policy 2309, RPAC compiles a non-exhaustive list of entities identified as part of the tobacco industry. It also offers assistance when questions arise about a particular funder. The same can be done here.

There are large gray areas in the case of tobacco, as there are here. We don't see this as a principled problem with the proposal. Like with tobacco, it is a practical problem that can be and is being handled by RPAC. Due to third party groups already working on this issue, e.g., <http://nofossilfuelmoney.org/company-list/>, drawing up a useful non-exhaustive list may not be as onerous as it initially appears to be. UC will want its own list. Yet it does not have to reinvent the wheel.

In any case, we hope an effect of the policy is to change the culture of disclosure. Since disclosure is no burden, we would hope faculty err on the side of safety and disclose funding that is anywhere close to affiliated with the fossil fuel industry.

4. Will this be a burden to faculty who are already over-burdened?

Disclosure is not a significant burden. It consists of a sentence or two before or after a public talk at a conference or in the acknowledgements section of our publications. Since there is no "policing" of disclosure, there is also no burden in terms of monitoring compliance. Nondisclosure will represent a form of faculty misconduct; and just like any other kind of faculty misconduct, it creates no burden except where misconduct arises.

5. We've focused on clarifications and potential problems for the policy, but what benefits does it provide? Is it worth it?

This policy will decrease the chances of scandals hitting UC like the ones we've seen at many other institutions. MIT, Delaware, Harvard-Smithsonian and many others have witnessed cases and lawsuits involving research for hire. For instance, in a widely reported case, Dr Willie Soon of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics solicited funding for "deliverables" to fossil fuel, publishing eleven non-evidence-based studies pushing fossil fuel industry desired outcomes or policy. In none of these cases did he disclose fossil fuel funding, although he did in several other cases, including the infamous paper asserting that polar bear populations were doing fine. If the present policy were adopted by UC, it would help with cases like this one.

Stepping back, UC will not solve the climate crisis by itself. Yet it can be a beacon to others. We have amazing agenda setting power. These kinds of ethics-based initiative are very exportable. If adopted, this idea may steamroll throughout academia. Unlike divestment, where we are also a leader, this initiative is comparatively easy to implement. First and foremost, this will help us deal with climate change, but as an added benefit for doing the right thing, it will be great optics for UC.

UC is one of the great discoverers of climate change (e.g., Revelle, Keeling) and it continues to be a powerhouse in climate science and dealing with its impacts. It also houses or housed many of the researchers who discovered the "tobacco strategy" and its use by the fossil fuel industry. Our research uncovered the problem, found the obstacles to dealing with that problem, and is now trying to do something about it. If we do so responsibly, we will help regain the trust that Californians place in our research during a time when misinformation is spreading.