

Divesting Canada's Universities — Guide for Research Subjects

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“I'm glad that there's a serious academic study of divestment underway; we need as much data as possible to figure out how to keep on the offensive!”
—Bill McKibben

Fossil fuel divestment campaigns across Canada have tried different approaches and achieved different outcomes, but they have all been motivated in part by the objective of training and motivating student activists. The question this study seeks to answer is: In what ways have the different experiences of these campaigns affected the subsequent views and behaviours of those involved? **By taking part you can help build up as good a picture as possible of what the whole experience of fossil fuel divestment has been across Canada.**

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1 Why take part?

You are the living experts on these campaigns. Certainly there are media accounts and some other types of public documents describing what happened, but for the most part these campaigns seem to have been coordinated on the fly with collaborative tools like Google Docs. The only real way to get detailed information on what happened at each university is by hearing the perspectives of as many of the participants as possible, including student activists, faculty members, university administrators, and others. Also, the window for collecting this information is comparatively short because not many divestment campaigns seem to have been conducted by permanent organizations which maintain current contact information for past volunteers. By taking part and encouraging other divestment activists to do so you will be providing the best base of information for all subsequent analysis of the significance the divestment movement at universities have had, at least in terms of the effect it had on those who ran these campaigns. Strong confidentiality protection will be provided for all research sources. Research subjects will be able to control how publicly any information they provide is shared. In the context of interviews, subjects will choose from a range of protective confidentiality options. These range from an entirely anonymous and confidential background basis to full willingness to having your verified quotations attributed by name. The option you choose will be linked to your data and used to avoid unintended disclosure during the writing up of research findings. Attributed quotations will be confirmed by a mutually-agreed means of communication before publication.

2 What does being a research subject involve?

Participation will involve an interview which could take place in person, by telephone, via an encrypted messaging system like Skype or Signal, or by other means which we agree to. If you took part in a divestment campaign you should expect the interview to last about an hour. Interviews with faculty and administrators are generally shorter, while those for volunteers who have been involved in more than one campaign may be a bit longer. The interviews will be semi-structured and based on a list of questions available in advance (p. 32–4 of the ethics protocol).

All research subjects are volunteers who will receive no material compensation. Their cooperation is requested to help build up as good a picture as possible of what the whole experience of fossil fuel divestment has been across Canada. The more people participate, the more complete the story it will be possible to tell and the more can be learned for the benefit of further efforts at changing public climate change, energy, and investment policies through activism.

All divestment volunteers interviewed will be emailed a consent letter approved by the ethics office, outlining the risks associated with participation and mechanisms for getting more information about how projects of this type are designed and approved. This letter can be seen on pages 27 to 30 of the ethics protocol, at: <https://www.sindark.com/phd/thesis/ethics/CFFD-ethics-4-0.pdf> They may affirm their agreement by a variety of means, though in most circumstances a signed paper form or an email affirming consent will be preferred for documentation purposes.

3 Confidentiality and consent

This entire project has been carefully designed to protect participants. I will be deliberately not collecting information which could lead to demands for access to research materials from university administrations, government authorities, or other entities.

3.1 Consent documents

All research subjects will need to affirm their consent to participate, generally through a printed form or by email, though other options are available to those with confidentiality concerns. Confidential information about who has consented to which phase, what confidentiality options they have chosen, and what anonymous linking code will be used for them in other documents will be stored in a database, allowing for verification that all quotes in the final dissertation are from people who consented to be quoted, either anonymously or with attribution. Subjects will be assigned a linking node to label records pertaining to them, which shall be drawn at random from among suitable words in the Oxford English dictionary, by means of their random search function.

3.2 Data protection

For detailed information about data protection practices being employed in this project, you can either contact Milan or review the ethics protocol at <https://www.sindark.com/phd/thesis/ethics/CFFD-ethics-4-0.pdf>

4 I have a concern

You have a variety of people who you can contact with any questions or concerns.

The investigator of this project is Milan Ilnyckyj, a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Toronto. I can be reached by email at milan.ilnyckyj@mail.utoronto.ca or by cell at 416-732-6922.

The Faculty Supervisor of this project is Professor Robert Vipond, in the Department of Political Science. His University of Toronto website includes contact information: <http://www.vic.utoronto.ca/academics/Vipond.htm>

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a research study subject, please contact the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board (REB) to speak to an informed individual who is independent of the researcher. You can contact the REB at:

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