



Research Group

Working Paper #9
2022

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U of T Fossil Fuel Divestment
Timeline

What is a university? In Canada, as elsewhere, it is a centre for research and teaching, supported in part by public funds. It is also an employer, a producer of images, a subject of rankings, a real estate owner, a generator of revenues, and a hub in global networks of value and aspiration. But how does a university work? What exactly does it do? What are the powers and pressures, the practices and networks that constitute contemporary university worlds?

An interdisciplinary team of faculty at the University of Toronto, we seek to discover the many worlds of our own institution, in collaboration with graduate and undergraduate students. We foreground the everyday experience of people who work or study in different corners of the institution, who live in its shadow, or respond to its public face.

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Abstract:

This timeline offers an account of the key dates in the fossil fuel divestment movement at the University of Toronto, from 2012 until 2021. The campaign began in June 2012 when a group of University of Toronto students and community members founded the grassroots group Toronto350.org, and later UofT350, the campus branch of the group. On December 15, 2015, the University President's *ad hoc* committee on fossil fuel divestment recommended "targeted divestment" - a major win for the campaign. On March 30, 2016, the President rejected his *ad hoc* committee's recommendation for divestment. Following the rejection, UofT350 fizzled out as a group and new campus groups emerged and picked up the divestment campaign: in particular, the student group LeapUofT and the student-faculty-staff coalition Divestment & Beyond. On October 27, 2021, the University President announced that the University of Toronto was committing to divest from investments in fossil fuel companies in its endowment fund beginning immediately. Efforts to divest the federated colleges and the University Pension Plan continue.

Acknowledgments:

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 2010-2012: A burgeoning idea and the birth of a movement | 7 |
| June 2012: Toronto350.org and UofT350.org are founded, launch of UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign | 7 |
| Institutional Context: UofT's Policy on Divestment | 8 |
| April 16th 2013: First contact with U of T administration..... | 9 |
| May 22nd 2013: Toronto350 letter to then-President Naylor..... | 9 |
| Summer-Fall 2013: Toronto350 volunteers write "the Brief" | 9 |
| October 15th 2013: Toronto "Do the Math" Screening | 9 |
| Winter-Spring 2014: Organizations, campus groups, public figures support divestment..... | 10 |
| March 3rd 2014: The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment (a.k.a. "The brief") is published | 10 |
| March 6th 2014: Toronto350 formally presents the brief to the Office of the President | 10 |
| April-May 2014: UofT Faculty Association supports divestment | 11 |
| October 22nd 2014: Formation of President's <i>ad hoc</i> committee on fossil fuel divestment..... | 11 |
| November 10th-14th 2014: Divestment Action Week and First March & Rally for Fossil Fuel Divestment..... | 11 |
| January 2015: Governing Council Elections Report Cards | 11 |
| February 2015: Divestment Valentines | 11 |
| April 10th 2015: The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment: Update (a.k.a. final brief) is published and presented to the <i>ad hoc</i> committee | 12 |
| April 17th 2015: Toronto350 presentation to the <i>ad hoc</i> committee..... | 12 |
| May-June 2015: UofT350 launches alumni petition | 12 |
| July 3rd-5th 2015: UofT350 participates in 350.org We>Tar Sands, and March for Jobs, Justice, and the Climate | 12 |
| September 4th-5th 2015: UofT350/Toronto350 travel to Aamjiwnaang First Nation for Chemical Valley Toxic Tour..... | 13 |
| October 29th 2015: Second March & Rally for Fossil Fuel Divestment..... | 13 |
| November 5th to 8th 2015: UofT350 members attend "Climate Welcome" in Ottawa | 14 |

| | |
|---|----|
| November 16th 2015: Corporate Knight analysis shows UofT lost over \$550 million by not divesting three years prior | 14 |
| December 15th 2015: <i>Ad hoc</i> committee recommends targeted divestment (1.5 degree threshold: aggressive extraction, misinformation, coal)..... | 14 |
| January 21st 2016: Student groups call for divestment and for President to meet with UofT350..... | 15 |
| February 1st 2016: President Gertler meets with UofT350..... | 15 |
| February 8th 2016: Article in the <i>Harvard Crimson</i> on UofT Divestment and the "Toronto Principle"..... | 16 |
| February 25th 2016: UofT Community Response to the Report of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Committee published and delivered | 16 |
| March 23rd 2016: Banner drops in advance of divestment decision | 17 |
| March 30th 2016: Gertler rejects divestment and releases "Beyond Divestment" report..... | 17 |
| March 30th 2016: Leaked internal email instructing UofT administration to keep the doors to the President's Office locked to avoid a possible sit-in | 18 |
| April 1st 2016: "Fossil Fools Day" action outside Office of the President..... | 18 |
| April 1st 2016: "It's not easy being green" satire piece published in "The Farsity" (a.k.a. <i>The Varsity's</i> April fools edition)..... | 18 |
| April 4th 2016: UofT350 hosts open meeting in the wake of divestment rejection | 19 |
| April 4th 2016: Select former members of the <i>ad hoc</i> committee publish an open letter in <i>The Varsity</i> in defense of the "Toronto principle" | 19 |
| April 7th 2016: Emergency Rally for Divestment..... | 19 |
| April 20th 2016: UofT350 disrupts Gordon Cressy Student Leadership Awards..... | 20 |
| June 1st, 2016: USW1998 hosts panel discussion on "The Role of the University in the Fight for Climate Justice"..... | 20 |
| Fall 2016: LeapUofT is founded, re-launches the UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign | 21 |
| November 26th, 2016: USW1998 Passes Motion Endorsing Divestment..... | 21 |
| February 6th 2017: LeapUofT screening of "This Changes Everything" | 22 |
| February 9th 2017: Joint union open letter calling for divestment..... | 22 |
| Winter-Spring 2017: LeapUofT outreach, petitions, solidarity work | 22 |
| July 8th 2017: Op-ed in <i>The Varsity</i> calling for President to revisit divestment | 22 |
| September-October 2018: LeapUofT in conversation with Victoria College on divestment, sidewalk chalk action outside Victoria College | 23 |

| | |
|--|----|
| November 19th 2018: LeapUofT and Fight for \$15 and Fairness UofT co-host panel on climate and labour precarity | 23 |
| December 2nd 2018: Commentary in <i>The Varsity</i> on UofT’s “Carbon footprint” report and fossil fuel divestment | 23 |
| December 2018: LeapUofT hosts “carbon birthmark” event outside Victoria College, meets with Victoria College Investment Committee..... | 24 |
| April 2nd-4th 2019: LeapUofT Hosts “Divest Fest” | 24 |
| Fall 2019: LeapUofT participates in Global Climate Strikes, submits Freedom of Information Request to UofT | 25 |
| Fall 2019: Divestment & Beyond Coalition is founded | 25 |
| Winter 2020: Divestment & Beyond organizes town hall meetings, hosts Winona LaDuke for public lecture | 25 |
| Summer 2020: LeapUofT joins the Divest Canada coalition | 26 |
| September 8th 2020: Divest Canada coalition open letter released..... | 26 |
| September 21st 2020: LeapUofT hosts online progressive clubs fair | 26 |
| November 2020: LeapUofT runs divestment training sessions for students groups and unions | 27 |
| December 17th 2020: LeapUofT and Divestment & Beyond deliver new divestment petition to Governing Council | 27 |
| May 12th 2021: Divestment & Beyond attends consultation for new University Pension Plan (UPP) | 27 |
| July 1 2021: UTAM transfers management of the University of Toronto’s pension fund to the newly formed University Pension Plan (UPP) | 28 |
| October 27th 2021: UofT announces divestment | 28 |
| Post-Divestment announcement actions..... | 28 |

2010-2012: A burgeoning idea and the birth of a movement

The fossil fuel divestment movement first emerged as an idea at Swarthmore College in the United States. A small group of students formed [Swarthmore Mountain Justice \(SMJ\)](#) in October 2010 after travelling to West Virginia during their spring and fall break to learn about mountaintop removal coal mining in the Appalachian mountains. The students wanted to act in solidarity with frontline communities they had met during their trip, but were initially unsure what they could do as university students far removed from mining sites and mountaintop removal. After learning that their university's endowment was invested in mountaintop removal, as well as other extractive industries, SMJ launched the first fossil fuel divestment campaign.

Fossil fuel divestment as an idea and a movement was proliferated in large part by American author and environmentalist Bill McKibbin, the founder of the international environmental non-profit [350.org](#), and Canadian writer and activist Naomi Klein. In July 2012, McKibbin published an article in *Rolling Stone*, "[Global Warming's terrifying new math](#)", making the case for universities to divest from fossil fuel companies and drawing connections to earlier divestment campaigns against South African Apartheid. The *Rolling Stone* article positioned the fossil fuel industry as "public enemy number one" in the fight against climate change, it framed divestment as a moral and financial issue with the potential to become a broad-reaching movement, and it highlighted the role that students can play within educational institutions that are ostensibly preparing them for a prosperous future.

The same year, McKibbin and 350.org launched the "[Do the Math tour](#)", a 21-city lecture series across the US with rotating guest speakers (including Klein) intended to proliferate and expand upon arguments proposed in the *Rolling Stone* article and seed and launch divestment campaigns on college campuses across the US. 350.org released the "[Do the Math](#)" movie the following year and launched [Fossilfree.org](#) as an online hub with information and [resources](#) for how to start a fossil fuel divestment campaign. The overarching message that emerged was this: "If it's wrong to wreck the climate, it's wrong to profit from that wreckage".

June 2012: Toronto350.org and UofT350.org are founded, launch of UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign

A group of University of Toronto (UofT) students and Toronto community members founded the grassroots and volunteer-run group [Toronto350.org](#) as the Toronto-branch of 350.org. Soon after its founding, Toronto350 launched a fossil fuel divestment campaign at the University of Toronto. The UofT campus branch of the

group was known as UofT350.org, though there was significant overlap in membership between Toronto350 and UofT350. In official reports and communications with the University, Toronto350 was listed as the organizing body behind the fossil fuel divestment campaign.

Institutional Context: UofT's Policy on Divestment

The University of Toronto has a [Policy on Social and Political Issues With Respect to University Divestment](#), created in March 2008 in the wake of the University divesting from tobacco companies. The policy states that in general, the University does not take positions on social and political issues, but that in instances where the university's social responsibility as an investor is in question, specific mechanisms for responding exist.

According to the UofT Policy on Divestment, members of the UofT community wishing to raise issues regarding the University's investments must 1) prepare a brief establishing the case for divestment, and 2) show evidence of general concern for the issue across the university by collecting at least 300 signatures endorsing the brief. The brief must account for the University's stated principles on investments, which include "prudent investment", "actions taken by the Canadian government or other national or international bodies with regard to the particular issue of concern", and Yale University's definition of "social injury" as outlined in the UofT Policy on Divestment.

The brief and signatures are to be presented to the Office of the President, at which time the President will establish an *ad hoc* committee to review the materials and make a recommendation to the President. The final decision on divestment lies with the President of the University, which for the majority of the UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign was [Professor Meric Gertler](#) (November 1st 2013 - present). The President reports to the [Governing Council](#), the highest governing body at the University. This means that in theory there is the possibility that the Governing Council could object to any decision made by the President, including decisions on divestment. The university's endowment is managed by an arms length body, the [University of Toronto Asset Management \(UTAM\)](#).

Members of Toronto350 and UofT350 spent much of 2012 familiarizing themselves with the UofT policy on divestment and the broader institutional context, and preparing to write a brief making the case for UofT to divest its endowment from fossil fuels.

April 16th 2013: First contact with U of T administration

At this stage in the campaign, Toronto350 was only able to receive responses to their email inquiries when they showed up in-person. Milan Ilnyckyi, a Toronto350 member, met with Tony Gray, a representative of the Office of the President for the first time in-person April 16th 2013. The purpose of the meeting was to get official versions of relevant university policies.

May 22nd 2013: Toronto350 letter to then-President Naylor

Toronto350 sent [a letter to then-President Naylor](#) calling on the University to divest from fossil fuels. The letter explained that Toronto350 was in the process of writing a detailed brief making the case for fossil fuel divestment, in accordance with the University's Policy on Divestment. In the letter, Toronto350 also requested a meeting with President Naylor in order to explain their argument in more detail. The letter was co-signed by UofT alumni Dionne Brand (UofT professor), Tzeporah Berman (author and activist), Naomi Klein (author and activist) and Peter McLaren (UCLA professor).

Summer-Fall 2013: Toronto350 volunteers write "the Brief"

Volunteers spent the summer of 2013 writing a brief outlining the case for fossil fuel divestment in accordance with the University's Policy on Divestment. Toronto350 began collecting signatures in September 2013.

October 15th 2013: Toronto "Do the Math" Screening

Toronto350 hosted two back-to-back [Toronto screenings of 350.org's "Do the Math" movie](#) at Hot Docs cinema. Bill McKibben sent a video message to be played at the start of the event. Toronto350 organizers also introduced their two major campaigns at the time (fossil fuel divestment, and a campaign to stop the Line9 pipeline). Organizers pointed UofT alumni and UofT community members in attendance towards the Toronto350 website where they could [add their signature to endorse the brief](#). Following the screening, there was a panel discussion with Green Party Leader Elizabeth May and Canadian journalist and activist Adria Vasil, and a question and answer period. The events brought out over 1000 people.

Winter-Spring 2014: Organizations, campus groups, public figures support divestment

Toronto350 spent much of the beginning of 2014 meeting with campus groups and reaching out to prominent figures to garner public support for the UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign. At this point, divestment was still a new and politically contentious issue even amongst student groups, and so Toronto350 spent a lot of time preparing for one-on-one meetings with campus group leaders. [Various student groups](#) including the University of Toronto Students' Union and the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union voted to formally support the fossil fuel divestment campaign. January 7th 2014, [David Suzuki sent a letter](#) in support of the UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign to UofT President Gertler. February 6th 2014, [Judith Deutsh on behalf of Science for Peace](#) also sent a letter in support of UofT fossil fuel divestment.

March 3rd 2014: [The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment](#) (a.k.a. "The brief") is published

March 3rd 2014, Toronto350 published the 190 page "brief" in accordance with the University's Policy on Divestment. The authors and supporters of the brief called upon the university to do the following (from p.6 of the brief):

- Make an immediate statement of principle, expressing its intention to divest its direct holdings of stock in fossil fuel companies,
- Immediately stop making new investments in the industry,
- Instruct its investment managers to wind down the university's existing direct stock holdings in the 200 fossil fuel companies with the largest fossil fuel reserves within five years of the fully-endorsed brief being delivered to the president, and
- Divest from Royal Dutch Shell within one year of receiving the endorsed brief.

March 6th 2014: Toronto350 formally presents the brief to the Office of the President

Toronto350 formally delivered the brief to the Office of the President March 6th 2014. Toronto350 partnered with Canadian lawyer Dimitri Lakardais, who delivered [a 20-minute lecture](#) to the UofT administration, faculty, and wider community on the ethical and financial case for divestment.

April-May 2014: UofT Faculty Association supports divestment

[The UofT Faculty Association \(UTFA\)](#) formally voted to support fossil fuel divestment at a meeting April 23rd 2014, and penned a letter to President Gertler in support of divestment May 20th 2014.

October 22nd 2014: Formation of President's *ad hoc* committee on fossil fuel divestment

October 22nd 2014, The Executive Committee of the Governing Council voted to approve [the membership of the President's *ad hoc* committee on fossil fuel divestment](#), selected by the President. The committee consisted of nine faculty members across various disciplines, one alumnus, and one student representative. The members were: Peter Burns, Susan Christoffersen, Graham Coulter, Andrew Green, Bryan Karney, Matt Hoffman, Arthur Hosios, Mohan Matthen, Carl Mitchell, Rita O'Brien, and Barbara Sherwood Lollar. UofT350 learned of this development in the following days and [shared the information publicly on their Facebook page](#).

November 10th-14th 2014: Divestment Action Week and First March & Rally for Fossil Fuel Divestment

Following the formation of the university's *ad hoc* committee on divestment, UofT350 organized [a week of on-campus events for fossil fuel divestment](#), including the [first march and rally for fossil fuel divestment](#) outside the Office of the President (Simcoe Hall) November 12th 2014. The march brought out [170 students, faculty, staff, and supporters](#). Students also delivered student letters in support of divestment to a representative of the Office of the President. Other events during the week included an art build in advance of the march, a panel discussion, and a [post-march party](#).

January 2015: Governing Council Elections Report Cards

UofT350 created a ["report card"](#) for assessing candidates for the student seats in the upcoming Governing Council election. They released endorsements as information on the candidates became available.

February 2015: Divestment Valentines

UofT350 set up a table in Sidney Smith Hall for students passing by between classes to write fossil fuel divestment [Valentines cards](#) addressed to President Gertler urging him to divest. February 13th 2015, UofT350 delivered [318 handwritten Valentines cards](#) to a representative from the Office of the President.

April 10th 2015: [The Fossil Fuel Industry and the Case for Divestment: Update](#) (a.k.a. final brief) is published and presented to the *ad hoc* committee

Toronto350 published a 230-page updated version of the brief with new information and recommendations taking into account developments since the release of the first brief. The updated brief also contained a new section with responses to questions from the *ad hoc* committee.

April 17th 2015: Toronto350 presentation to the *ad hoc* committee

Toronto350 was [invited to give a presentation](#) to the *ad hoc* committee following the release of the updated brief. Four Toronto350 members gave [a 30-minute presentation](#) making the case for fossil fuel divestment. Presenters also called on the *ad hoc* committee to expedite the process of making their recommendation, given the urgency of climate change. The presentation was followed by a 90-minute question and answer period.

May-June 2015: UofT350 launches alumni petition

UofT350 launched [an alumni petition](#) for UofT alumni to show their support for fossil fuel divestment. The group canvassed at "alumni weekend" May 27th-31st 2015 and continued to collect signatures online.

July 3rd-5th 2015: UofT350 participates in 350.org We>Tar Sands, and March for Jobs, Justice, and the Climate

July 3rd-5th 2015, 350 Canada (the Canada branch of 350.org) organized [three days of coordinated climate action](#) across Canada in advance of the [Pan American Climate Summit](#) to be hosted in Toronto later that month. July 3rd, UofT350 participated in a [sit-in](#) at then-finance Minister Joe Oliver's constituency office in Toronto, calling for [a freeze on tar sands expansion and a just transition to a clean economy](#). They were

joined by students in five other locations across Canada staging sit-ins at the offices of other Members of Parliament. The day of action was known as “We>Tar Sands”. July 5th, UofT350 joined the [youth and student contingent](#) at the [March for Jobs, Justice, and the Climate](#), which brought out over 10,000 people in Toronto. The weekend of action served as an opportunity for UofT350 and Toronto350 members to connect with activists across Canada and learn and develop new organizing skills.

July 4th, UofT350 organized their own “youth climate justice convergence”, a full-day of workshops, discussions, and training for youth and students attending the march the next day. The convergence covered topics such as anti-oppression and climate change, Indigenous solidarity, communications for divestment campaigns, and strategy.

September 4th-5th 2015: UofT350/Toronto350 travel to Aamjiwnaang First Nation for Chemical Valley Toxic Tour

UofT350 and Toronto350 members traveled to Aamjiwnaang First Nation (near Sarnia Ontario), for the [Chemical Valley Toxic Tour](#). Aamjiwnaang First Nation is surrounded by [40% of Canada’s petrochemical refineries](#). Participants spent two days in Aamjiwnaang and learned from community leaders about the health and environmental impacts of petrochemical refineries in the area, as well as [how the community is fighting back](#). The trip bolstered ongoing discussions that UofT350 and Toronto350 had been having on the intersections of settler colonialism, climate change, and environmental racism, as well as the importance of solidarity with Indigenous peoples within climate activism.

October 29th 2015: Second March & Rally for Fossil Fuel Divestment

UofT350 organized the [second march and rally for fossil fuel divestment](#) October 29th 2015, coinciding with a meeting of the Governing Council. [The rally included](#) speeches by student leaders, faculty, and staff, and a land acknowledgment from a representative of the Indigenous Studies Students’ Union. Students also delivered [400 postcards](#) from prospective UofT students urging the university to divest, and filmed a support video for Fossil Free MIT’s week-long sit in. The day before, the UofT350 faculty petition in support of fossil fuel divestment reached [200 signatures](#).

November 5th-8th 2015: UofT350 members attend “Climate Welcome” in Ottawa

UofT350 members travelled to Ottawa to participate in “[Climate Welcome](#)”, a four-day event organized by 350.org, the Council of Canadians, and the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition to welcome the newly sworn in Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, to his new residence in Ottawa. The purpose of the event was to call for a freeze on tar sands expansion and push Trudeau to make a commitment to build a clean energy economy ahead of the United Nations climate summit in Paris that December. UofT350 members joined other climate and environmental justice activists from across the country for sit-ins and gift presentations in front of Rideau Cottage. The group delivered “welcome gifts” to Trudeau each day, including petitions opposing pipelines, scientific reports, broken treaties with Indigenous Nations, and solar panels to be incorporated in renovations at 24 Sussex Drive. Participants blocked traffic on Sussex Drive and marched to Rideau Hall as part of the event.

November 16th 2015: Corporate Knight analysis shows UofT lost over \$550 million by not divesting three years prior

The Toronto-based media, information, and research company Corporate Knights published [an analysis](#), in partnership with 350.org, showing that the University of Toronto [lost over \\$550 million](#) by not divesting from the largest fossil fuel firms back in 2012.

December 15th 2015: *Ad hoc* committee recommends targeted divestment (1.5 degree threshold: aggressive extraction, misinformation, coal)

December 15th 2015, the President’s *ad hoc* committee on fossil fuel divestment published the [Report of the President’s Advisory Committee on Divestment from Fossil Fuels](#), recommending “targeted and principled divestment from companies in the fossil fuels industry that meet certain criteria”.

In particular, the committee advised that the University divest from fossil fuel companies whose actions “blatantly disregard” international efforts to limit the rise in average global temperatures to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial averages by 2050, what they termed the “1.5 degree threshold”. The committee noted that the University would need to determine a method for

evaluating if companies blatantly disregard the 1.5 degree threshold, but advised that the University focus on 1) firms that derive more than 10% of their revenue from “non-conventional or aggressive extraction” (leaving open how this is to be defined), 2) firms that knowingly disseminate disinformation on climate change, and 3) firms that derive more than 10% of their revenue from coal extraction or coal-fired plants. The committee stated that they would be willing to reconvene, at the President’s invitation, to develop a method for evaluating companies based on the above criteria.

The release of the report garnered media attention in [mainstream news outlets](#), with reporters noting that UofT would have become the first university in Canada to divest from fossil fuels if the President were to accept the committee recommendation.

January 21st 2016: Student groups call for divestment and for President to meet with UofT350

UofT350 and 18 campus student groups penned [a letter to UofT President Gertler](#) urging him to heed the recommendations of his *ad hoc* committee and divest from fossil fuels. They also called on the President to meet with UofT350 student leaders to expand upon the committee’s recommendations and craft a method of evaluating investments and implementing the committee’s recommendations. UofT350 also provided template emails to supportive faculty, Governing Council members, and allied groups to send emails to the Office of the President asking the President to meet with UofT350.

February 1st 2016: President Gertler meets with UofT350

After four years of campaigning, [President Gertler agreed to meet with UofT350 student leaders for the first time](#). Five students met with President Gertler at Simcoe Hall. The students praised the *ad hoc* committee’s recommendations for targeted divestment and shared their recommendations for how the University could implement and expand upon these efforts, in particular with regards to developing criteria for divesting from companies that violate Indigenous rights. They informed the President that UofT350 was working on a “Community Response” that would lay out their arguments and recommendations in more detail, and asked if he would be interested in collaborating in this effort. The President declined, stating that it would be better for the students to write and present their response separately. The students explained that they were aiming to have a response by February 25th, to coincide with the next Governing Council meeting, which the President acknowledged as “reasonable”. The President made no commitments on divestment, but stated,

after some prodding, that he was aiming to make a final decision [by the end of March](#). The students asked if they could be given 24 hours advance notice of the decision, to which the President again made no commitments but stated that he would “take the idea under advisement”.

February 8th 2016: Article in the *Harvard Crimson* on UofT Divestment and the “Toronto Principle”

[Benjamin Franta](#), a PhD candidate at Harvard University, [published an op-ed](#) in the *Harvard Crimson* praising the UofT *ad hoc* committee’s recommendations for targeted divestment. Franta introduced and coined the phrase the “[Toronto Principle](#)”, in reference to the *ad hoc* committee’s criteria for divesting from companies that show a blatant disregard for the 1.5 degree threshold. Franta argued that in aligning rhetoric and action, the Toronto principle “suggests that it is all institutions’ responsibility to give life to the Paris agreement” and urged Harvard and other institutions to adopt the Toronto principle.

February 25th 2016: [UofT Community Response to the Report of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Committee](#) published and delivered

February 25th 2016, Toronto350 published the “Community Response” to the *ad hoc* committee’s report on divestment. The authors called on President Gertler to “implement the recommendations of the Committee with urgency and determination commensurate with the scale and pace of climate change”. The Community Response also highlighted especially praiseworthy aspects of the *ad hoc* committee report and outlined possible metrics for defining and evaluating “non-conventional and aggressive extraction” and “disinformation and the distortion of science and public policy” - criteria for divestment noted but not defined in the *ad hoc* committee report. Finally, the community response also proposed some additional criteria for divestment, most notably “corporations that fail to achieve free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous communities or which violate Indigenous title.” The authors noted avenues for how to further define this criteria in consultation with Indigenous leaders on and off campus and in collaboration with the university’s soon-to-be formed [Truth and Reconciliation Steering Committee](#).

Governing Council member and UofT350 ally Susan Froom [delivered the Community Response in person to President Gertler](#) on behalf of UofT350 at the Governing Council meeting February 25th 2016.

March 23rd 2016: Banner drops in advance of divestment decision

UofT350 put up [fossil fuel divestment banners](#) at various [locations across campus](#) in advance of the President's decision on divestment. Internally, the group also prepared how they would respond to possible decision-scenarios.

March 30th 2016: Gertler rejects divestment and releases "Beyond Divestment" report

March 30th 2016, President Gertler rejected his *ad hoc* committee's recommendation for targeted divestment in a report entitled "[Beyond Divestment: Taking Decisive Action on Climate Change](#)". The report laid out a series of actions on environment and sustainability that the university would take instead of divesting, and argued that these actions would be "ultimately more impactful". In particular, Gertler announced that he would instruct the university's investment manager, the University of Toronto Asset Management (UTAM), to "articulate principles that will enable consideration of ESG [environmental, social, governance] factors in undertaking direct investments", and begin the process of evaluating the possibility of signing various climate and responsible investment initiatives. The report also outlined possibilities for increased actions on sustainable research, education, and energy consumption on campus.

Very little information is provided in the report on the process through which the President came to his decision, and why he went against his own *ad hoc* committee. The report does mention, however, that the President created several "working groups" composed of members of his senior administrative team in order to assist in developing his response, and that he undertook "further research and consultation" (p.6).

The President's rejection of divestment garnered wide-spread [media attention](#) in [national](#) and [campus-based](#) news. The CBC's radio interview show *As It Happens* also did two interviews on the topic with [President Gertler](#) and with a [UofT350 student activist](#). UofT350 later posted on their Facebook page a [side-by-side snapshot](#) of passages from the President's report and rebuttals contained within his *ad hoc* committee's report.

March 30th 2016: Leaked internal email instructing UofT administration to keep the doors to the President's Office locked to avoid a possible sit-in

A UofT administrator accidentally copied UofT350 on an internal email instructing that the doors to President Gertler's office remain locked until further notice, noting that McGill university was currently experiencing a sit-in over their divestment rejection. The administrator quickly replied, asking that UofT350 maintain "strict confidentiality" and not share the information. UofT350 replied that it was good to know the administration was aware of how inadequate the divestment decision was and advised that the administration keep the doors locked for the foreseeable future. UofT350 [posted the exchange](#) (with names blurred) on their Facebook page.

April 1st 2016: "Fossil Fools Day" action outside Office of the President

A small group of UofT350 members protested the President's rejection of divestment with an [art installation outside the Office of the President](#). Students draped banners reading "Shame" and "Your Oil Is Showing" across the steps of the Office of the President, dipped their feet in black paint and left black footprints on a banner meant to look like oil. Students briefly stopped traffic on St George street. UofT350 also called on UofT alumni to [pledge to withhold donations](#) until the university divests from fossil fuels.

April 1st 2016: ["It's not easy being green"](#) satire piece published in "The Farsity" (a.k.a. *The Varsity's* April Fools' edition)

The Varsity published a satire piece on April Fools' Day making fun of President Gertler's decision not to divest from fossil fuels. The article, written by *The Farcity* contributor "Sun Cor" (real author is Sebastian Yue), explained that "Geric Mertler" opted for more individualistic actions to tackle climate change such as printing double-sided, forgoing steaks, wearing faux fur coats, and decorating his office with exotic house plants.

April 4th 2016: UofT350 hosts open meeting in the wake of divestment rejection

UofT350 held an [open-meeting](#) for students, faculty, alumni, campus groups and UofT community members to discuss next steps in the wake of the President's rejection of divestment. The meeting was attended by over 40 people and birthed the slogan "Beyond Bullshit", in response to the title of the President's report "Beyond Divestment".

April 4th 2016: Select former members of the *ad hoc* committee publish an open letter in *The Varsity* in defense of the "Toronto principle"

Nine former members of the President's *ad hoc* committee on divestment published an [open letter](#) in *The Varsity* in defense of the "Toronto principle". The letter argued that while actions on climate change proposed in the President's report were positive measures, they did not go far enough. The authors highlighted how the Toronto Principle, unlike other measures such as ESG, explicitly positions investment decisions as questions of morality, not only financial risk. "The reason to divest from the blatant disregards", the authors argued "is that it is wrong for the university to participate in and contribute to their socially injurious activities. The Toronto Principle maintains that such investments should be dropped not only because they are bad investments, but also because such investments are morally wrong."

April 7th 2016: Emergency Rally for Divestment

April 7th 2016, UofT350 organized an [emergency rally](#) for divestment outside Simcoe Hall to coincide with a Governing Council meeting. UofT350 also secured time for one of its members to address the Governing Council (including President Gertler) directly inside Simcoe Hall during the meeting. Several of the posters and art pieces at the rally [referenced President Gertler](#) in particular, including [satirical posters mimicking](#) the UofT "boundless" fundraising [campaign banners](#) and mocking President Gertler's divestment rejection as greenwashing. Many of these posters would continue to show up at climate rallies and events (not always affiliated with UofT) in the years to come.

April 20th 2016: UofT350 disrupts Gordon Cressy Student Leadership Awards

UofT Gordon Cressy Leadership award recipients and UofT350 members [disrupted the annual Gordon Cressy Student Leadership Award ceremony](#). They carried two banners into Con Hall that read “divestment=leadership” and “real leaders don’t invest in climate change” and stood at the back of the auditorium while President Gertler made [a speech on “leadership”](#). Three students wore [t-shirts](#) that read “divest from fossil fuels”, “stop profiting from climate change”, “which side are you on?”, and [“complicity is not leadership”](#). Other award recipients and supporters wore pins with an orange “x”, the symbol of 350.org and divestment, and pointed to the divestment banners as they crossed the stage. In general, the action was well-received and the banners and t-shirts were met with applause from attendees.

At this stage in the campaign, UofT350 organizers were feeling burnt out after years of organizing and responding to the U of T administration. Many of the long-time student organizers were also graduating. Uof350 as a group was struggling to work through ongoing ideological disagreements, and needed time to re-assess and re-strategize next steps following the divestment rejection. As a result, UofT350 fizzled out as a group following this action. Toronto350 continued to exist but focused on other campaigns.

June 1st, 2016: USW1998 hosts panel discussion on “The Role of the University in the Fight for Climate Justice”

Activists in the [United Steelworkers \(USW\) Local 1998’s Next Generation committee](#) organized a panel discussion on [“The Role of the University in the Fight for Climate Justice”](#). USW1998 represents administrative and technical staff on campus. The purpose of the event was to raise member awareness on climate justice initiatives on and off campus and advocate for the local to endorse U of T divestment and [the Leap Manifesto](#). Panelists Suhail Barot (Toronto350.org), Jamie Kirkpatrick ([BlueGreen Canada](#)), and Carolyn Egan (President of the [Steelworkers’ Toronto Area Council](#) and one of the co-authors of the Leap Manifesto) highlighted how a “just transition” to a green economy is critical for both environmental sustainability and good, secure jobs. Attendees also identified fossil fuel divestment for their pension funds as an important priority. Professor Matt Hoffman, one of the UofT divestment *ad hoc* committee members, attended the event and provided some remarks.

Fall 2016: LeapUofT is founded, re-launches the UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign

[LeapUofT](#) was founded in the Fall of 2016 as the UofT campus branch of [The Leap](#), an international organization co-founded by Naomi Klein and colleagues that fought for justice-based solutions to the climate crisis from 2015 until closing its doors in 2021. LeapUofT was created to re-launch the UofT fossil fuel divestment campaign and promote and localize the goals of [the Leap Manifesto](#) on campus.

November 26th, 2016: USW1998 Passes Motion Endorsing Divestment

On November 26, 2016, USW1998, one of the largest unions on campus, passed the following two motions on a 'just transition', the Leap Manifesto, and fossil fuel divestments:

MOTION 2016-108: Given that, as the Environmental Report to the USW 2016 National Policy Conference succinctly states, there are "No Jobs on a Dead Planet," all Steelworkers must work together and with their various allies to begin the immediate, full and just transition to the green economy. Immediate actions in this regard are necessary to secure the future of all jobs, our pensions, and the environment in which we live and work. THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT Local 1998 contribute meaningfully toward a "Just Transition" to the green economy by standing in solidarity with President Carolyn Egan and our sisters and brothers at the Steelworker Toronto Area Council and officially endorse the Leap Manifesto: A call for a Canada based on caring for the Each and One Another.

MOTION 2016-135: BE IT RESOLVED THAT Local 1998 join with Toronto 350, the U of T students' union, CUPE 3902, UTFA and other University of Toronto groups in opposing President Gertler's refusal to adopt targeted fossil fuel divestment as per the recommendation of his Advisory Committee on Divestment from Fossil Fuels. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Local 1998 Executive and Next Gen Committee be tasked with working together with CUPE 3902 to issue a joint public statement in an effort to convince President Gertler to reverse his decision and adopt his Advisory Committee's recommendation for fossil fuel divestment. BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Local 1998 Next Gen Committee work with the Local's Executive Committee in taking further steps to convince President Gertler to reverse his decision and adopt his Advisory Committee's recommendation for fossil fuel divestment.

February 6th 2017: LeapUofT screening of “This Changes Everything”

LeapUofT hosted their first public event February 6th 2017, [a film screening](#) of Naomi Klein and Avis Lewis’ documentary [“This Changes Everything”](#), based on the best-selling book by the same title.

February 9th 2017: Joint union open letter calling for divestment

The Presidents of four major unions on campus - USW1998, CUPE3902, CUPE1230, and APUS - released an [open letter](#) addressed to President Gertler condemning his decision to reject his own advisory committee’s recommendation for targeted divestment and calling on him to reverse his decision. The letter argued that a refusal to divest shows a lack of respect for Indigenous treaty rights, Canada’s COP21 commitments, and the rights of future generations to a livable environment.

Winter-Spring 2017: LeapUofT outreach, petitions, solidarity work

LeapUofT started new divestment petitions focusing on the federated colleges, especially Victoria College, University College, and St. Michael’s College, while continuing to advocate for the university as a whole to divest from fossil fuels. Organizers worked on building relationships with other campus groups and organizations, and participated in solidarity work on causes that intersect with climate change.

July 8th 2017: Op-ed in *The Varsity* calling for President to revisit divestment

Following the release of the University of Toronto Asset Management (UTAM)’s first ever [Responsible Investing Report](#), five UofT community members published an [op-ed](#) in *The Varsity* calling for President Gertler to revisit his decision not to divest and “implement the spirit and letter of the divestment policy, and stop funding an industry that is burning up the future of U of T’s students.”

September-October 2018: LeapUofT in conversation with Victoria College on divestment, sidewalk chalk action outside Victoria College

LeapUofT spent much of the fall of 2018 focused on work at Victoria College. The group made contact with the Victoria college administration on divestment, met with the bursar and finance committee, and began building support for divestment on the [Board of Regents](#), Victoria College's governing body. LeapUofT's first public-facing action at Victoria College was a [sidewalk chalk party and signature gathering](#) outside the college October 11th 2018, set to coincide with a meeting of the Board of Regents. Students filled in a large chalk illustration of a pipeline with messages in support of divestment. Organizers collected divestment petition signatures, distributed flyers and buttons, put up posters in the area, and spoke with passerbys about the campaign.

November 19th 2018: LeapUofT and Fight for \$15 and Fairness UofT co-host panel on climate and labour precarity

November 19th 2018, LeapUofT partnered with [Fight for \\$15 and Fairness UofT](#) to host a [panel discussion on organizing against climate and labour precarity](#). Panelists Carolyn Egan, (President of the [Steelworkers' Toronto Area Council](#)), Bruno Dubrosin ([Green Economy Network](#)), and Megan Whitfield (President of [CUPW Toronto Local 626](#)) discussed alliance building between labour and environmental movements. The panel was followed by breakout groups where participants discussed campaigning skills, communications, and actions.

December 2nd 2018: Commentary in *The Varsity* on UofT's "Carbon footprint" report and fossil fuel divestment

William Cuddy, a then-fifth year undergraduate student at UofT unaffiliated with any on-campus divestment groups but supportive of the cause, [published a commentary](#) in *The Varsity* revisiting the issue of fossil fuel divestment. He offered a critique of various measures undertaken by the UofT administration in the years following the "Beyond Divestment Report", including the university's first [Carbon Footprint Report](#). Cuddy also called on students to stand with climate activists on campus continuing to push for fossil fuel divestment.

December 2018: LeapUofT hosts “carbon birthmark” event outside Victoria College, meets with Victoria College Investment Committee

December 13th 2018, LeapUofT hosted an event outside Victoria College offering students free [“carbon birthmark” temporary and permanent stick-and-poke tattoos](#). The tattoos showed the amount of carbon dioxide in parts per million that were present in the atmosphere in the tattooee’s birth month (e.g. a person born in 1998 would receive the tattoo “366<”). Carbon birthmark tattoos were originally conceived by [Liberate Tate](#), an environmental justice artists collective that seeks to liberate artwork (specifically at the Tate art galleries in London) from oil sponsorships. They have since been adopted by fossil fuel divestment groups.

Following ongoing email correspondence with the Victoria College administration and repeated deflections on the issue of divestment, LeapUofT met with the Victoria College Board of Regents Investment Committee. The students’ aim was to pressure the college to produce a concrete timeline to investigate fossil fuel divestment at Victoria college. The Investment Committee expressed that they were continuing to consider the issue but refused to provide a timeline.

April 2nd-4th 2019: LeapUofT Hosts “Divest Fest”

LeapUofT hosted [“Divest Fest”](#), three days of educational and community-building divestment events on campus leading up to a protest outside the Victoria College Board of Regents meeting April 4th 2019. The first two days of events included a [“Divestment 101” workshop and free lunch](#), a [guided walking tour](#) centering Indigenous history on campus and learning from urban environments, a [public lecture on disability and environmental \(in\)justice](#), a [community discussion on organizing for a Green New Deal in Canada](#), and a [LeapUofT contingent](#) flyering at and attending a public lecture by Bill McKibbon (featuring a special recorded [message from McKibbon](#)). April 4th LeapUofT organized an art build and “good climate news party” as well as a non-violent civil disobedience training in advance of a [divestment rally outside Victoria College](#). Students eventually [entered the Victoria College Board of Regents meeting](#) with banners and signs and delivered a divestment petition.

Fall 2019: LeapUofT participates in Global Climate Strikes, submits Freedom of Information Request to UofT

LeapUofT participated in the [September 2019 climate strikes](#), a series of strikes and protests across 4,500 locations in 150 countries inspired by the Fridays For Future movement and calling for action on climate change. LeapUofT [took the issue home to campus](#) with [a rally](#) outside Simcoe Hall September 20th 2019, and [brought a contingent of students](#) to the [Toronto climate strike](#) September 27th 2019. In October, LeapUofT also filed a Freedom of Information (FIPPA) request asking UofT to publicize its investments in oil and gas companies. With no response to the FIPPA request a month later, LeapUofT hosted a “[Divest for the Holidays](#)” event November 28th 2019 where students made and delivered divestment themed “holiday decorations” to the UofT administration calling on them to make their investment information public.

Fall 2019: Divestment & Beyond Coalition is founded

In the fall of 2019, a group of UofT students, faculty, and staff founded “[Divestment & Beyond](#)”. The coalition initially formed with the intention of encouraging the UofT administration to be more proactive in supporting the 2019 global climate strike, and later pivoted to pushing for fossil fuel divestment at UofT as well as other actions on sustainability and climate justice. The name “Divestment & Beyond” is a response to President Gertler’s 2016 report “Beyond Divestment”, as the group promotes divestment as a necessary step for climate justice alongside other actions.

Winter 2020: Divestment & Beyond organizes town hall meetings, hosts Winona LaDuke for public lecture

Divestment & Beyond, with support from LeapUofT, held town hall meetings in the early months of 2020 designed to broaden their base and help shape their agenda. The outcome of these meetings was that Divestment & Beyond decided to focus their efforts on “[convincing the Administration to declare a climate emergency at the U of T, to divest its financial holdings from fossil fuel companies, to commit to net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and to orient itself towards climate justice \(broadly defined\).](#)”

Divestment & Beyond and LeapUofT collaborated again to host renowned Indigenous economist, environmentalist, and writer Winona LaDuke for a [public lecture February](#)

[27th 2020 at UofT](#). LaDuke spoke about fossil fuel economics and the Indigenous Green New Deal.

Summer 2020: LeapUofT joins the Divest Canada coalition

Leap UofT joined the [Divest Canada Coalition](#), a coalition of 30 student groups from institutions across Canada calling for their universities and colleges to divest from fossil fuels and invest in a just recovery.

September 8th 2020: Divest Canada coalition open letter released

The Divest Canada coalition released an [open letter](#) with three main demands for universities and colleges across Canada: 1) divest from the past, 2) reject false solutions, and 3) invest in the future.

“Divest from the past” encompassed divesting from fossil fuel companies, reallocating funds by 2025, and initiating divestment campaigns from other harmful industries such as police foundations, private prisons, arms manufacturers, and corporations that violate the rights of Indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent as outlined in the [United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).” “Reject false solutions” encompassed rejecting environmental, social, governance (ESG) screening and reductions of “carbon intensity” of an institution's investment portfolio as viable alternatives to fossil fuel divestment. “Invest in the future” encompassed taking meaningful action in support of a Canadian [“Just Recovery”](#) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic by investing at least 5% of investment funds in community projects advancing racial, economic, environmental, and social justice. LeapUofT, Divestment & Beyond, the UofT School of the Environment, and the UofT Schools’ Sustainability and Environmental Action Committee all signed the letter.

Reactions to the letter from the UofT administration and student and faculty campus groups were reported in [the Varsity](#) the following month.

September 21st 2020: LeapUofT hosts online progressive clubs fair

Leap UofT hosted a [progressive clubs fair](#) (online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic) bringing together campus groups “whose principles promote justice, equity, and liberation of life and land”. The fair included [workshops, socials, and events](#) hosted by the featured groups and was intended to foster alliances and coalition building across student groups in order to forward a progressive agenda at UofT.

November 2020: LeapUofT runs divestment training sessions for students groups and unions

LeapUofT and Divestment & Beyond were preparing to deliver a new divestment petition to the Governing Council at a Governing Council meeting the following month. In the lead-up to the meeting, Leap UofT ran [divestment training sessions](#) for students groups and unions on campus to build broader understanding of the issue on campus. The trainings covered how the university's investments work, what the divestment campaign is, and other sustainability initiatives on campus to be aware of. The trainings ranged from 10-30 minutes and were designed to be folded into student groups and unions' existing meeting schedules.

December 17th 2020: LeapUofT and Divestment & Beyond deliver new divestment petition to Governing Council

LeapUofT and Divestment & Beyond jointly delivered a petition to the Governing Council calling for the university to [declare a climate emergency, divest from fossil fuels, and commit to a socially just climate transition at the university](#). Regarding commitments for a just transition, the petition also called on the University to work with the University of Guelph and Queen's University to seek commitments on fossil fuel divestment for the newly formed University Pension Plan (UPP) involving all three universities, to commit to achieving carbon neutrality across UofT by 2030, to increase delivery of environmental and sustainable education across all three UofT campuses via community outreach programs, and to sign the [Global Universities and Colleges for the Climate Letter](#). Professor Paul Downes and a representative from the University of Toronto Students' Union Board of Directors both spoke on divestment at the [Governing Council meeting December 17th 2020](#).

May 12th 2021: Divestment & Beyond attends consultation for new University Pension Plan (UPP)

Divestment & Beyond attended a [consultation session](#) May 12th 2021 for the University Pension Plan (UPP), a new jointly-sponsored pension plan for faculty and staff at UofT, Queen's University, and the University of Guelph that would come into effect the following month. Divestment & Beyond encouraged their members and supporters to ask questions at the consultation about the UPP investment policy, and

to call for investment policy aligned with the Paris climate agreement goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

July 1 2021: UTAM transfers management of the University of Toronto's pension fund to the newly formed University Pension Plan (UPP)

July 1st 2021, University of Toronto Asset Management (UTAM) transferred management of the University of Toronto's \$10.2 billion pension fund to the newly formed [University Pension Plan \(UPP\)](#). The UPP will jointly manage the pension plans of the University of Toronto, Queen's University, and the University of Guelph, with [plans to expand to include Trent University the following year](#). Preliminary research on the UPP investment process and accountability can be found [here](#).

October 27th 2021: UofT announces divestment

October 27th 2021, in [a letter to the University of Toronto community](#), President Gertler announced that the University of Toronto was committing to divest from investments in fossil fuel companies in its endowment fund beginning immediately. In particular, President Gertler announced that UTAM will divest from direct investments in fossil fuel companies within the next 12 months, and divest from indirect investments by no later than 2030 and preferably sooner. The announcement also included plans to make the St. George campus "climate positive" by 2050. The announcement was covered across [mainstream and campus-based news outlets](#).

Post-Divestment announcement actions

Various groups on campus continue to monitor and advocate in favour of divestment at the federated colleges at UofT as well as in the UPP. November 11th 2021, members of Leap UofT and Divestment & Beyond spoke about the U of T divestment announcement and next steps at the [U of T School of the Environment's Beatrice and Arthur Minden Symposium](#). LeapUofT member Julia DaSilva was also interviewed on the [Divest Canada podcast](#). November 13th 2021, two students published an [op-ed](#) in *The Varsity* calling for divestment at the federated colleges. The same day a group of faculty and students published an [open letter](#) in *The Varsity* condemning the President for delaying so long to commit to divestment and calling for more ambitious decarbonization targets as well as more honest and transparent reporting on *The Varsity* condemning the President for delaying so long to commit to divestment and

calling for more ambitious decarbonization targets as well as more honest and transparent reporting on progress. LeapUofT and Divestment & Beyond continue to meet virtually and advocate for climate justice on and off campus.



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