

Faculty/Staff Open Letter

We, the undersigned faculty and staff of the University of Massachusetts, are proud to stand with our students who have initiated a call for fossil fuel divestment. We urge you, for the sake of ecological sustainability and social justice, to join other universities and colleges in divesting the UMass Foundation from the top 200 publicly traded fossil fuel companies.

The University of Massachusetts has received considerable recognition for its efforts in promoting sustainability; but with leadership comes responsibility. Our four consecutive years on the Princeton Review Green Honor Roll, gold star status from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, and the numerous awards received by our permaculture and dining program are just a few of the ways our university showcases its environmental leadership. A university celebrated for sustainability initiatives should be in the forefront of the movement to slow climate change through fossil fuel divestment.

UMass faculty all across campus teach about the ecological and social consequences of fossil fuel dependence; our university investments should reflect that wisdom. UMass has long been recognized for the commitment of its faculty and librarians to scholarship that promotes social justice. More recently, we have become an important center for science on anthropogenic climate change. In our research and teaching, we emphasize that climate change poses a danger to the entire planet, and that people of low income, people of color, indigenous people, and people in the Global South are disproportionately affected by the environmental consequences of fossil fuel dependence. Through fossil fuel divestment, the Board of Trustees would bring the UMass Foundation into alignment with the values and achievements of UMass faculty, librarians, and staff.

As long as fossil fuel corporations remain profitable, they will continue to influence government energy policy and undermine hopes for a sustainable future. A growing number of academic institutions, municipalities, religious institutions, and foundations have already divested from fossil fuels. Joining this movement sends a powerful message that saving the planet requires a rapid transition to renewable sources of energy.

The choice to divest has become more financially sound. Investment professionals have become increasingly concerned about the financial risks of continuing to invest in these industries, while numerous reports have shown that portfolios without fossil fuel investments may in fact outperform those with them.

UMass led the country in divesting from South Africa, a campaign widely recognized to have hastened the end of an unjust system. Since then, campaigns to divest from tobacco companies have further demonstrated the power of the purse to effect change.

It is time for UMass to join the movement to divest from fossil fuel companies.