



University of Victoria Faculty Association

THE

# F.A. RELAY



CLIMATE STRIKE 2020

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# PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

*Welcome to the second issue of our new FA Relay!*

Dear Colleagues,

In the six weeks since we put out the last issue of the Relay, it seems as though everything has changed. In response to the pandemic, you have worked hard to transition to online teaching, and are probably now just finishing your marking from this term. Some of you are now also preparing for teaching in the summer term. I have just heard that, as we requested, summer teaching will be supported by significant TA funding. That will help to reduce the challenges of teaching online, and will also help our graduate students, many of whom are struggling financially in this crisis.

As we learn to live with a level of uncertainty that most people of the 21st-century Global North have never experienced, many of us are wondering what the fall will bring. The provincial government has informed universities that there is little possibility of a full-scale return to face-to-face teaching in the fall. In light of this, UVic is working to finalize its decision regarding fall teaching, and has been consulting with Chairs, Deans and the FA. The administration's committee working on this issue is considering a number of options, recognizing that the majority of fall teaching will likely need to be done online. When a decision regarding fall teaching is finalized, it will be communicated to the UVic community.



There is some positive news on the research front. The university is starting to talk about beginning to reopen research facilities, though in a very cautious manner. NSERC is extending funding for research grants by one year, and the Tri-Agencies are providing an extra term of funding for graduate students holding Tri-Agency scholarship awards that end between March and August 2020. UVic has just announced a Research Recovery Fund to assist those researchers hit hardest by the pandemic.

The FA is continuing to advocate for your interests. We are currently working on trying to ensure that any online teaching in the fall would include the technical and TA support you need. We will continue to help those of you with major childcare or eldercare responsibilities to make requests for accommodation. We are also looking into the possibility of faculty members being allowed to make requests for Alternative Workload in such situations. Later this week, the FA will be sending you a survey to ask what you will need if you are teaching online in the fall, and what other concerns you may have about online teaching. We will also be surveying your perspectives on research issues.

These are difficult times for us all. We may be anxious, we may be lonely—or if we have children at home we may never be alone, and never have the time we need for serious academic work. Remember to be kind to yourselves and others, and not to expect too much of yourself. At the same time, please be aware that the work you are doing—or trying to do, under sub-optimal conditions—is crucial, both during the current crisis, and as we start to rebuild from it. Young people who cannot find work will be looking to universities to provide them not only with meaningful alternatives in the short term, but also with longer-term opportunities to acquire knowledge and credentials that will help them to manage in difficult economic times.

Teaching and supporting our students is always important work, but it is more valuable than ever now. This is work we can justly take pride in, as we try to make our way safely through the pandemic, and seek to rebuild the future—for our students, ourselves, and the community at large.

In concluding, I would like to let you know that Esme Friesen, General Manager and Communications Officer, will be leaving the FA as of the end of May. Esme started at the FA as Administrative Officer in May of 2015, but soon moved into her current position. We are grateful to Esme for all of the work she has done for the Association over the last five years. She has played a central role in the professionalization of the FA office, including the creation of strong and effective financial systems and communication methods, as well as popular member engagement strategies. Her professionalization of the office also meant that we were able to move into the last round of bargaining in a more structured and organized manner. We wish Esme well in all of her future endeavors.

Thank you and all the best,

Lynne Marks  
[presidentfa@uvic.ca](mailto:presidentfa@uvic.ca)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Chairs & Directors Forum on Issues Related to COVID-19

#### Session 1:

- Friday, May 8, 2020
- 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM
- Via BlueJeans

#### Session 2:

- Wednesday, May 13, 2020
- 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM
- Via BlueJeans

### Forum for New Chairs & Directors

- Upcoming in late May - TBD
- Via BlueJeans

### Workshop on Promotion to Full Professor

- Upcoming in May/June - TBD
- Via BlueJeans



# SOME PROGRESS TOWARDS DIVESTMENT AT UVIC

By Colin Goldblatt (SEOS) Member-at-Large, FA Executive Committee

In the distant past, before the pandemic, FA Members voted to support the campaign for UVic to divest from fossil fuels. 77% of those voting supported the motion, with a 68% turnout. Along with a strong student vote supporting divestment, this seems to have been effective in triggering action from the Administration. While they have not divested the University from fossil fuels—and continue to oppose this course of action—the Board of Governors recently passed a Responsible Investment Policy ([FM5215](#)) for the University's short-term investment funds.

FA Vice-President Monica Prendergast and Executive Committee member Colin Goldblatt had a very constructive meeting and follow-up email exchange with AVP Finance and Operations Kristi Simpson and University Treasurer Andrew Coward about the policy. We acknowledge a basis of shared values, in understanding the urgency and importance of the climate crisis, and the importance of the University responding through its financial conduct. We thank Kristi, Andrew, and their staff for their work on this policy, which they believe is the most effective way forward.

In the following, I offer my analysis of this policy,

based on the supporting and related documents, our meeting, and the subsequent clarifying correspondence. The policy is an interesting first step for the University to align its financial resources with its commitment to sustainability. Aspects of the policy are clearly good (and many of us may wish to celebrate), while others appear rather bad, and the remainder are anything but clear.

## The Good

The policy establishes that UVic should use its investments to further our Strategic Framework goals to be a global leader in environmental, social and institutional sustainability and to review and renew our approach to sustainability in every domain. The VP of Finance and Operations' [submission](#) to the Board of Governors states:

*"The climate crisis, caused by excessive emissions of anthropogenic greenhouse gases, is the key global issue of our time. The university's Responsible Investment Policy provides direction on the investment of short-term funds such that, within our fiduciary duty, these funds can be utilized to help to address the climate crisis."*



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The goals of the [Policy](#) are to:

- Use the strategic framework of the University to guide its short-term investment decisions in promoting sustainable futures and supporting Indigenous economic development;
- Use university short-term investments to address the physical and transitional risks and opportunities of climate change;
- Use positive and negative screening to reduce the carbon intensity of investments by at least 45% by 2030;
- Use a responsible investment approach to manage investment risks

The University has also become a signatory to the United Nations Principles of Responsible Investing.

All of the above is good, and we are optimistic that it will lead to positive change.

## The Bad

The Responsible Investment Policy is not divestment. It permits the University to retain substantive holdings in fossil fuel extraction or pipeline companies—contrary to the clearly expressed wishes of both students and faculty, two fundamental stakeholders in our institution.

While the policy's goal is to reduce the "carbon intensity" of the University's short-term investments by 45%, it proposes to disregard the burning of fossil fuels produced by the extraction companies we invest in. It will count what are known as Scope 1 and 2 emissions (direct emissions, and emissions related to purchase of electricity and so on), but will exclude Scope 3 emissions (everything else). It might be reasonable to omit some Scope 3 emissions, such as those generated by student and employee commutes. However, [90%](#) of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with fossil fuel companies come from burning the fossil fuels they extract. Selling fuels to be burned is the core business of these companies. Excluding this factor, while claiming to reduce emissions by 45%, is highly misleading.

Furthermore, the policy's narrow definition of emissions misses the fundamental role of fossil fuel companies in creating the climate change crisis—by actively using their financial and political power to discredit climate science and forestall timely action to prevent climate change. It ignores the fact that their core business model will never be compatible with the University's sustainability goals.

In the broader Canadian context, responses to university divestment campaigns have been coordinated through the Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO). The [summary](#) of a two-day workshop on divestment hosted by CAUBO in November 2016 (and chaired by UVic's own VP Finance and Operations, Gayle Gorrill) sets out an ideology which appears to be very similar to UVic's current practice and policy. This summary provides university administrators with what is fundamentally a toolkit for resisting divestment requests, with policies such as [FM5215](#) to be presented as an alternative.

One key talking point provided in the summary is that "climate change is driven by the consumption of fossil fuels, not the supply." This statement neglects the fact that the supply of cheap energy—made possible by offloading social and environmental costs to current and future generations of the global population—has distorted the market and induced demand for polluting fuels. This view also neglects the [academic literature](#) arguing that supply-side measures may be more effective than measures addressing demand alone. Moreover, it neglects the fact that current investments in new fossil fuel extraction will commit us to decades of burning more than is safe—unless, of course, those assets become stranded, in which case the investments are financially unsound ones.

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## The Unclear (and opportunities for success)

As noted above, UVic’s new Responsible Investment Policy calls for a 45% reduction in the “carbon intensity” of the portfolio by 2030. This percentage is contextualized as the emissions reduction identified by the [IPCC](#) as necessary to limit warming to 1.5°C. However, the policy makes no commitment with regard to a variety of key details—the baseline relative to which emissions should be reduced; the reduction schedule; the definition of “carbon intensity”; the method for obtaining data on carbon emissions from our investments—and these are fundamental to determining how effective the policy will be.

The 45% goal in the [IPCC report](#) used a baseline of 2010 emissions, and showed pathways of linear reductions in emissions between 2020 and 2030. Total warming is directly proportional to cumulative emissions, so if a later baseline year or a slower decline in emissions is chosen, then a deeper cut in emissions than 45% will be required.

The policy does allow for “negative screening” of investments (i.e. divestment) in support of sustainability and Indigenous development goals, but the criteria are open to interpretation. In principle, negative screening could be used to exclude a company with a documented history of disruption to climate science, a fossil fuel company with no plan to transition to supplying 45% carbon-emission-free energy in the next decade, an infrastructure project

that risks decades of new emissions, or a company that seeks to build a pipeline through unceded First Nations territory. But what effect will negative screening actually have? The decision-making framework, and the ethical-environmental criteria to be applied, have yet to be defined.

## A Positive Future: YES to FM5215 and YES to divestment

As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, responding strongly and rapidly to an escalating crisis saves lives. Responding to the climate crisis has a parallel logic: acting now will be cheaper and more effective than waiting for the problem to get worse. The ethical response is to do everything we can. Divestment is informed by a broader range of considerations than simply accounting for a subset of emissions, and FA Members have expressed a clear judgement that it is an appropriate response. A truly sustainable solution would be for the Board of Governors to divest from fossil fuels, then to reduce the carbon intensity of the subsequent portfolio by 45%.

## Postscript

The University is presently convening a Decarbonisation Working Group, to be chaired by Rachel Scarth (Associate Vice-President Research Operations), which will provide advice over the next 12-18 months on the implementation of the Responsible Investment Policy (i.e. to address many of the points that are presently unclear), and we are optimistic that good progress on this front will be made. ■

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