

**Do Trent University Students Support the Divestment From Fossil Fuels  
Movement? A Methodology Development**

Includes:

**Final Report**

**By**

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Department:	International Development Studies
Course Code:	IDST 4220Y
Course Name:	Assessment of Development Projects
Term:	Fall-Winter 2016/17
Date of Project Submission:	April 2017
Project ID:	4683

**Trent Community Research Centre**

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A Methodology Development

Alaine Spiwak, Kristina Dergacheva

March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017



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Report of research submitted to Climate Justice Trent

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the divestment from fossil fuels movement, which is a recent socio-environmental movement aimed at pressuring Canadian universities and colleges to dissolve current investments, stocks, or bonds in the fossil fuel industry. This divestment campaign took place at Trent University from 2012-2015, but was unsuccessful in their lobbying for full fossil fuel divestment. As this is a recent movement at Trent, this paper aims to collect data on how to best survey the level of knowledge and support Trent students have for the divestment campaign. The specific research questions investigated are: What is the best method of collecting data to determine if Trent students support divestment from fossil fuels? What is the best method to engage students with the divestment from fossil fuels movement?

The methods used to answer these research questions involved implementing and testing four different types of data collection: online surveys, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and opportunity sampling. After analyzing all of the data collected, a methodology was developed which will be used by Part II of this project to survey the widest student population possible, and to break into previously untapped student demographics.

Keywords: divestment, fossil fuels, Canada, post-secondary, students, data collection

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe and Mississauga peoples on which we conducted our research. Originally named and known as Nogojiwanong (“place at the end of rapids”), the area was only renamed as Peterborough after being colonized by European settlers. We are grateful to have had a chance to live and engage in research on this land, and we are grateful for the difficult work Indigenous peoples have undertaken in trying to contain the damage from the global fossil fuel industry.

We would like to thank our host, Alex Campagnolo and Climate Justice Trent for working with us so collaboratively, and for being so patient while we navigated this new type of undergraduate research.

Secondly, thank you to our professor, Dr. Michal Avram, for sharing your knowledge and experience with us, and being such a source of support during our project.

Finally, thank you David Tough from the Trent Community Research Centre, for always offering words of encouragement, and providing the support we needed to be successful.

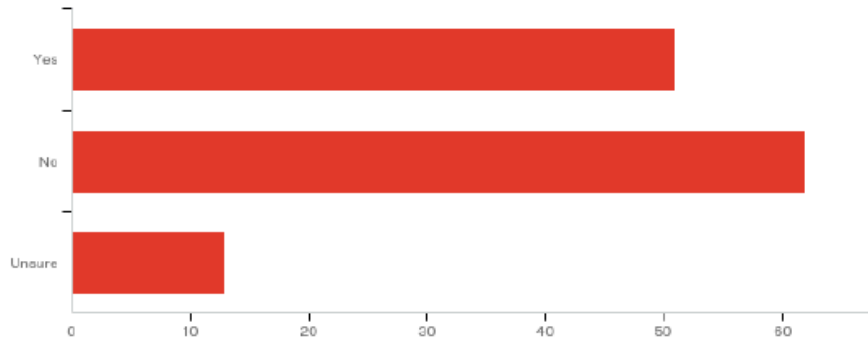
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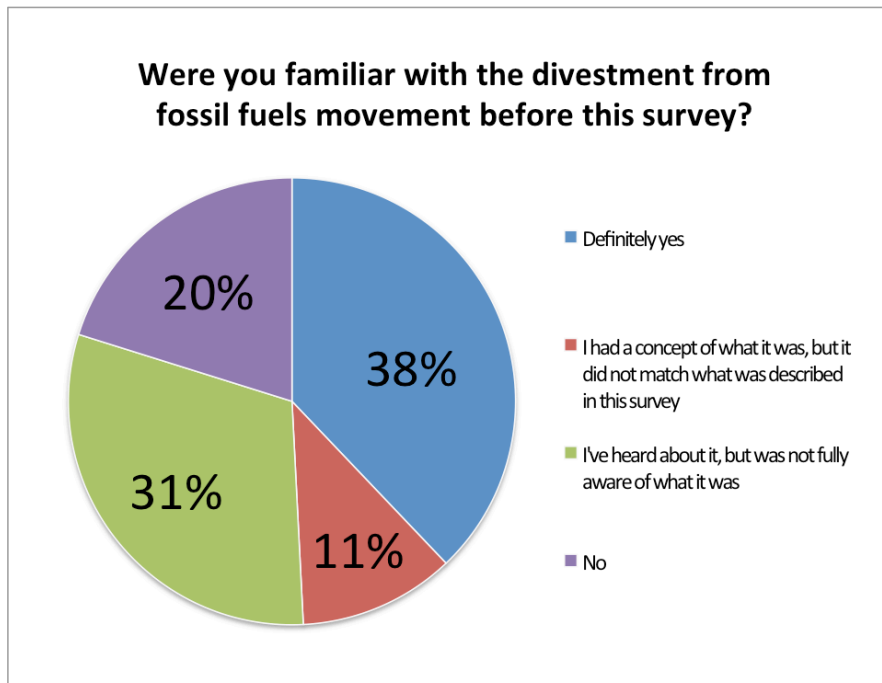
Figure A:

**Q5 - Are you aware that the divestment from fossil fuels campaign took place at Trent University approximately between the time of 2012-2015?**



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	40.48%	51
2	No	49.21%	62
3	Unsure	10.32%	13
	Total	100%	126

Figure B:





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many divestment activists at Canadian post-secondary institutions have asked their students whether or not they support the divestment from fossil fuels movement, but none have asked: what is best way to truly get that answer? This paper has implemented and tested four different data collection methods to see which yielded the most effective results, in terms of quality and quantity of information gathered. The data methods that were implemented and tested included: online surveys, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and opportunity sampling.

The results gathered were not far from what one would expect. Online surveys received the most amount of student participation, giving a more accurate idea of student opinion across campus. Focus groups were effective for gathering in-depth data about the level of knowledge or support a group of students have for the movement, and why. Semi-structured interviews collected useful data about successful or unsuccessful methods of student engagement in the divestment campaign at other Canadian post-secondary institutions. Finally, opportunity sampling reflected results found in the online survey, but on a smaller scale, with more gaps in the data.

What was most interesting was not the results of the data collection methods, but the information gathered from collecting background research on the divestment movement at Trent University and other Canadian post-secondary institutions through semi-structured interviews. This information allowed for more than just a methodology to be developed, but allowed for the creation of a list of recommendations on campaign implementation for Trent's campus.

Our research concluded that online surveys in combination with focus groups is the best way to get a true idea of the level of student knowledge and support for the divestment from fossil fuels campaign. This is the basis of our developed methodology, which we recommend be implemented by Part II of this project on a full scale. This methodology, in combination with the background research gathered, will be useful for environmental lobbyist groups such as our host, Climate Justice Trent, to sway Trent's Board of Governors away from fossil fuel investment.

## INTRODUCTION

The divestment from fossil fuels movement is a recent socio-environmental movement originating in the United States. Quickly spreading across North America, students from over twenty post-secondary schools in Canada have joined the campaign, and have begun lobbying their administration to divest their campus endowments from the fossil fuel industry. The movement in Canada is spearheaded by a coalition of groups, notably the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition and 350.org. The campaign is aimed at pressuring Canadian universities and colleges to dissolve current investments, stocks, or bonds in the fossil fuel industry to send a clear message that these industries no longer have the social license they require to operate.<sup>1</sup> This is a particularly relevant conversation for Canadians, as Canada has the second largest crude oil reserves in the world. With a considerable amount of non-renewable resources at Canada's fingertips, Canadians (notably students) are particularly conscientious about the possible negative implications of investing in, and supporting, this sector.

However, while this movement has gathered support from students, many universities in Canada have not divested from fossil fuels. The reality for post-secondary institutions in Canada is that the decision-making power needed to divest from fossil fuels lies with the Board of Governors, not the students. Universities are concerned about the financial implications of changing their investments, as they rely on the stocks they have in fossil fuels to contribute to their revenue. The movement also comes up against arguments from those that either do not believe in climate change, or those that argue that divestment from fossil fuels would have a negative effect on the Canadian economy, outweighing any possible benefits for the environment. Others, such as Murad Hemmadi, argue that the post-secondary divestment from fossil fuels movement can be ineffective. Hemmadi highlights that university foundations make up a small portion of the Canadian investment pool, totaling just \$12.1 billion.<sup>2</sup> Facing these arguments against the movement, campuses such as Trent University struggle to successfully lobby their Board of Governors to divest from the fossil fuel industry.

Our research project will explore a variety of literature on the subject, including main debates between scholars on the effectiveness and feasibility of the divestment movement. We will also gather archival data to provide a thorough background on student engagement in the divestment from fossil fuel movement at Trent University and a variety of other Canadian campuses. This literature review, in combination with archival data collection, and data collection from students at Trent University, will help us to develop a strategy for effectively engaging with students. This project is divided up over a two-year period, with our research

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<sup>1</sup> Fenton, Cameron. 2013. "Canada's New Climate Abolitionists: Youth And The

<sup>2</sup> Hemmadi, Murad. 2017. "How Fossil-Fuel Divestment Campaigns Could Affect Oil Stocks". *Canadian Business - Your Source For Business News*.

being Part I of II. Our primary goal is to uncover the best method(s) to survey and engage the widest student population possible. Part II of the project will utilize our findings and our suggested method to survey students, and potentially access previously untapped student demographics to successfully further the divestment movement at Trent University.

The specific research questions that we will investigate are: What is the best method of collecting data to determine if Trent students support divestment from fossil fuels? What is the best method to engage students with the divestment from fossil fuels movement?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While the divestment from fossil fuels movement is relatively new in Canada, there are many scholars voicing their opinions on the subject. Our primary literature review has identified a large number of economists, environmentalists, and social scientists that speak in favour of the divestment from fossil fuels movement. Our literature review will begin here, and briefly examine the arguments in favour of the divestment from fossil fuels movement. Catherine Moez, a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto, has written an extensive report for McMaster University lobbying for McMaster's divestment from fossil fuels. Moez's key argument is that: "the motivation for divestment is primarily ethical: there is significant harm to human health and the environment caused by the extraction and use of the fossil fuel industry's products. Coal, gas and oil produce the majority of climate warming carbon dioxide emissions."<sup>3</sup> Her report outlines these negative environmental effects and summarizes many other investment options McMaster could pursue. Another pro-divestment scholar and economist, Jeff Rubin, argues that the economics of divestment make sense. Rubin argues "many divestment decisions, in particular among institutional investors such as pension plans, are being based on a recognition that efforts to mitigate climate change will profoundly impact future fossil fuel use and hence the sustainability of the carbon fuel industry as we currently know it."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, as with any academic subject, there are those with opposing views. Some scholars like Murad Hemmadi argued that post-secondary schools divesting from fossil fuels will have little to no effect on the industry.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, scholars such as Mark Brooks suggest that while divestment may be good for the environment, we have to make sure it does not harm student success, or the functioning of post-secondary institutions: "because oil companies have

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<sup>3</sup> Catherine Moez, *President's Advisory Committee on Fossil Fuels Divestment FOSSIL FUEL DIVESTMENT: Review and Analysis of Options for McMaster University*, (FOSSIL FUEL DIVESTMENT: Review and Analysis of Options for McMaster University, 2016)

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Rubin, *THE CASE FOR DIVESTING FROM FOSSIL FUELS IN CANADA*, (n.p., 2016)

<sup>5</sup> See note 2 above

huge market capitalizations, any divested shares will simply be repurchased by less scrupulous Investors, making no real difference in the final analysis while hurting students who depend on the many scholarships and bursaries funded by fossil fuel companies.”<sup>6</sup> It is important to review the academic arguments for and against divestment, as Trent’s divestment movement will have to be prepared to combat these arguments and play on these strengths during any future lobbying efforts.

#### i. Fossil Fuel Divestment History at Trent University

Now, we turn our attention to the history of the divestment from fossil fuel movement at Trent University. According to a report submitted by Julian Tennent-Riddell, co-leader of Trent’s divestment from fossil fuels campaign ‘Fossil Fuel Free Trent’ (a branch of Sustainable Trent), students were lobbying Trent University to divest its endowment and pension funds from fossil fuel industry beginning in 2012. This campaign at Trent was a part of an international movement which was arguing for divestment on the basis of it being ‘morally wrong’ to profit from damaging the world’s climate. It argued that institutions should remove their investments in fossil fuels as a statement of opposition to an industry driving climate change and putting the future of the planet at risk.<sup>7</sup> According to the Trent Central Students Association’s website, the majority of Trent students seemed to be in support of this divestment campaign, as 76% of students (706 students) voted in favor of fossil fuel divestment in the Trent Central Student Association (TCSA) 2013 Spring General Elections student referendum question.<sup>8</sup> According to an *Arthur* article by Calvin Beauchesne, the second co-leader of Trent’s divestment movement, there was also a large amount of staff and faculty support for the divestment from fossil fuels movement, with 50 staff and faculty signing a petition.<sup>9</sup> Riding on this support, Fossil Free Trent presented a report to Trent’s Board of Governors in February 2014, laying out arguments as to why Trent should divest, and the level of support their campaign had around campus. Regardless of the support gathered around campus, and the lobbying efforts made directly to the Trent University Board of Governors, the campaign was not entirely successful. Instead of committing to a full divestment from fossil fuels as requested by Fossil Free Trent, the board proposed an alternative solution. It took a year to come to this decision, and it was announced at the May 8th 2015 Board of Governors open session:

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<sup>6</sup> “Banking on Divestment,” ProQuest, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Tennent-Riddell, Julian. 2017. "Trent University Divestment From The Fossil Fuel Industry: An Analysis Of The Legal And Policy Implications Related To Investment And Divestment".

<sup>8</sup> Association, Trent. 2017. "Trent Central Student Association - Elections Statistics & Information". *Trentcentral.Ca*.

<sup>9</sup> Beauchesne, Calvin. 2017. "50 Trent Professors Call For Fossil Fuel Divestment In Open Letter - Arthur". *Arthur*.

“The Board had passed a motion to establish a socially responsible investment (SRI) category within endowment funds initially comprised of up to 10% of funds and guided by the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment which integrates environmental, social and corporate governance factors into investment analysis and decision-making. To help seed the SRI category and demonstrate confidence in the investment approach selected, the Board will move the Board Leadership Scholarship Fund, to which current and former governors make annual gifts, to this new category.”<sup>10</sup>

The reasoning behind this decision was stated as the “fiduciary responsibility to maximize investment income in support of our academic mission”. They had specified that proceeds from endowment funds are providing student bursaries and scholarships, research and public talks, including many that are environmentally-focused. In addition, the Board has a passive investment policy that protects the fund from below-index returns and, while they do not feel it is prudent to abandon our core passive investment approach, they do acknowledge that some donors would like to see their endowed funds investment in a socially-responsible investment.<sup>11</sup>

This decision was a blow to the progress Fossil Fuel Free Trent had made. Additionally, as this result was announced over the summer semester when many students were not around, it did not get as much attention as it would have during the school year. Our research also identified that many of the leaders of the divestment campaign at Trent, such as Calvin Beauchesne and Julian Tennent-Riddell, had graduated in June 2015 (a month after the decision), leaving the campaign without its core leadership team. This is where the actions by Fossil Fuel Free Trent came to an end. Renamed to “Climate Justice Trent”, the student group has been focusing on some different issues including the Dakota Access Pipeline. In this interim period, Climate Justice Trent has initiated the collection of this research in order to collect substantive data to survey students and develop the most effective way of student engagement, in order to restart an impactful divestment campaign.

## ii. Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaigns at Other Canadian Universities

Some Canadian university students have previously, or are currently, lobbying their universities to remove their investments in “dirty industries”. Below we have gathered some information on some noteworthy divestment campaigns, as they may be helpful pieces of information for Trent’s future divestment campaign.

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<sup>10</sup> Armstrong, D A, L Bignell, R Brown, K Dines, S E Fife, I Franklin, and T Lord et al. 2014. *Board Of Governors -Open Session Minutes*.

<sup>11</sup> See note 8 above

### *Dalhousie University*

According to *Divest Dalhousie*, Divest Dal is campaigning to have their university endowment fund divested from the worlds top 200 fossil fuel companies. They are calling for three main things: first, to freeze all new investments in the fossil fuel industry. Second, to divest all holdings in the fossil fuel industry within four years. Finally, they are calling for increased transparency in relation to investment policy and university governance. Their campaign is very organized and structured. They have done several rallies, protests, and banner drops, and they are constantly working to educate their members on what divestment is, and why it is important to divest from fossil fuels. They are still in the process of lobbying their board of governors, but big organizations like 350.org believe that they are one of many universities in Canada that will meet their goal relatively soon.<sup>12</sup>

### *Mount Allison University*

According to an article in *The New Mark Times*, Mount Allison University students have occupied an administration building in their lobbying efforts for divestment. So far, the occupation has not shaken the administration: “Mount Allison President Dr. Robert Campbell explicitly asserted that the University had no plans to engage with Divest MTA directly or negotiate the camp-out’s presence.” However, students at Mount Allison University have not taken no for an answer, and at the time of writing, they are continuing to fight for divestment from fossil fuels on their campus.<sup>13</sup>

### *McGill University and Concordia University*

Another important source was the article by William Mazurek on McGill and Concordia hosting their first Fossil Free Canada ‘Climate Convergence’. The information on this conference is very important for our research as it shows that even though the divestment movement is relatively new, many students are getting involved in the campaign. This conference was held by McGill University and Concordia University, and was organized by Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, which attracted over 100 students from post-secondary institutions across Canada. This article also outlines the importance of the relationship between young Canadians, Indigenous people and their rights, and the environment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "The Campaign". 2017. *Divest Dalhousie*.

<sup>13</sup> "Emotions Run High As Mt. A Students Step Up Protest Against University Ties To Fossil Fuels". 2017. *Warktimes.Com*.

<sup>14</sup> Mazurek, William. 2017. "Mcgill And Concordia Host The First Fossil Free Canada Climate Convergence | The Mcgill Daily". *Mcgilldaily.Com*.

## *Laval University*

Finally, we set out to explore what schools had already divested, and what actions led them to their success. At present, Laval University in Quebec City is the first and only school in Canada to commit to full fossil fuel divestment. A student named Ethan Cox had written an article on Laval's divestment from fossil fuels but it unfortunately included no data on methods of student engagement, or the level of student support for divestment at Laval.<sup>16</sup> However, we did interview the campaign organizers for additional information. Campaign organizers at Laval started their campaign on November 9<sup>th</sup> of 2016. They were gathering detailed information for a month before they started the campaign, and on January 29<sup>th</sup>, they were able to get the support of the two biggest student organizations on campus: the undergraduate and graduate student associations. The whole campus was in consensus that the time had come for the school to divest. Laval promotes that the institution has a commitment to sustainable development, and the administration wants to preserve that image. The divestment campaign fit nicely with this desired image, and was ultimately the reason why their institution decided to divest. During a simple meeting between campaign organizers and university administration, Laval took the opportunity to become leaders in this area. On February 26<sup>th</sup> of 2017, Laval committed to full divestment from fossil fuels over five years. This result may have been achieved faster and easier than other institution's, as the decision did not need to go to Laval's Board of Governors.

In regards to divestment movements at other Canadian post-secondary institutions, the following chart developed by Catherine Moez at McMaster University is a useful summary:

University	Date	Divestment Campaign result
Queen's University	November 2014	No
University of Ottawa	October 2014	No
University of Waterloo	January 2016	decision in progress
University of Toronto	March 2014	No
McMaster University	October 2015	decision in progress
University of British Columbia	-	-
University of Alberta	-	-
University of Calgary	-	-
University of Saskatchewan	-	-
University of Manitoba	April 2015	decision in progress
McGill University	Fall of 2012	No
Dalhousie University	February 2014	No
University of Victoria	January 2014	No
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	October 2013	No

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<sup>16</sup> Cox, Ethan. 2017. "Laval Becomes First University In Canada To Divest From Fossil Fuels | Ricochet". *Ricochet*.

Capilano University	-	-
Simon Fraser University	Fall of 2013	-
University of Winnipeg	January 2015	No
Lakehead University	February 2014	No
University of Guelph	April 2014	No
Ryerson University in 2015	2015	decision in progress
York University	September 2014	No
Trent University	March 2013	No
Carleton University	October 2014	decision in progress
Concordia University	Fall 2013	No
University of PEI	December 2015	decision in progress

This report highlights that numerous post-secondary institutions across Canada have been unsuccessful in divesting from fossil fuels. We suggest future organizers of the divestment from fossil fuels movement at Trent utilize this report as it provides strong arguments for divestment, and provides in-depth information about possible financial implications of divestment. Moez suggests some useful alternative investment options, and talks about student engagement methods specific to McMaster University, but that could be tailored to other campuses such as Trent.<sup>17</sup>

### iii. Identifying Gaps in Data

Finally, it is important to note that there is a gap in the availability of data surrounding the level of student engagement in the divestment from fossil fuel movement on Canadian post-secondary campuses. The higher education sector produces a large amount of data and literature on the correlation between the level of student engagement in campus life and academic success, but not surrounding what the best way to engage with students is. We hope our research can begin to fill this gap in available data, and draw importance to why knowing this information is useful for social campaigns involving students, including the divestment from fossil fuels movement. Our research can add to this conversation as we explore the level of student engagement in the divestment from fossil fuels movement at Trent University, and whether or not it varies due to different factors such as year of study or program.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Our study aimed to develop and test a methodology to determine the best way to survey the level of knowledge and engagement that Trent University students have with the divestment from fossil fuels campaign. This study was initiated on behalf of our host Climate Justice Trent, in partnership with the Trent Community Research Centre. A project proposal was submitted and

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<sup>17</sup> See note 3 above



approved by Trent University's Research Ethics Board, Climate Justice Trent, Trent Community Research Centre, and our professor, Dr. Michal Avram.

In order to develop a methodology, we tested four different forms of data collection: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, opportunity sampling, and an online survey. We recruited students at random to participate in each form of data collection (more details provided below), from every year of study, from both the undergraduate and graduate population. The study was hosted exclusively on Trent University's Symons campus in Peterborough, Ontario. Before participating in a focus group or interview, all students signed an informed consent form. To respect their privacy (even when not requested to do so), we labeled our data using only their first and last initials. Each participant was sent a copy of the notes taken during their session, or a copy of the transcript if their session was recorded and transcribed. Each participant was allowed to review and request any changes to what was recorded, and restated their consent to participate in either the focus group or interview. Informed consent was also gathered from those who participated in the online survey and random sampling, but as this data collection was anonymous, no measures need to be taken to respect privacy. As we carried out four different types of data collection, the specific methods for each are listed below:

### Online Survey

We created an online survey using the survey platform Qualtrics, which allowed people to participate by clicking a link. Our targeted sample size was 800 students, roughly 10% of the undergraduate population. The survey was open from February 24th 2017 to March 24th 2017. The survey had open access, meaning that anyone was able to take this survey regardless of where they clicked the link to participate. However, settings were put in place to ensure that people could not take the survey more than once, to prevent possible ballot box stuffing. Initially the survey was only distributed through the Trent University College Newsletters, which are weekly or biweekly emails sent out by each Trent University college<sup>1</sup> offices with a list of events, services, or announcements pertaining to campus life. We had confirmation from all of the Symons campus colleges (Lady Eaton College, Gzowski College, Champlain College and Otonabee College) that our survey was successfully included in their newsletters between the time of February 24th 2017 and March 24th 2017. However, after one week, we had not received a significant amount of responses. As such, we began to post the survey on Facebook on pages or groups only open to Trent University students, as well as on the Trent Central Student Association mobile app. While we were unsuccessful in reaching our targeted sample size, we saw a much higher response rate after posting the link on social media, and received a total of 143 responses.

This online survey was completely anonymous. Before the survey began, a paragraph was included that stated what our research was about, who we were (including our contact

information), and that participants had the right to stop the survey at any time. Our questions asked students to classify themselves by year of study, program, level of study (graduate or undergraduate), course load (full or part time), as well as other major demographics on campus (international, indigenous, domestic). We asked closed questions, open questions, scaled questions, and multiple-choice questions. See Appendix A for a copy of our online survey questions.

### Focus Groups

We directly invited the following student groups on campus to participate in our focus groups: Trent International Student Association (TISA), Trent Central Student Association (TCSA), Trent University Native Association (TUNA), Trent Graduate Student Association (TGSA), Sustainable Trent, Trent Business Student Association (TBSA), and Trent Conservatives. Additionally, we reached out to first year students and students in professional programs such as Nursing. All parties were emailed several times, however only TISA, TCSA, TUNA, TGSA, Nursing students, and Sustainable Trent answered. We scheduled 3 one-hour focus group sessions on the Symons campus on March 14th at 6pm, March 15th at 10am, and March 16th at 3pm. We asked all the groups that responded to send one representative to each focus group session. Unfortunately, our focus groups were unsuccessful, as participants only came to one out of three scheduled focus groups. Our March 16th session had two participants attend: one student from the TCSA, and one from TUNA.

The focus group that was run on March 16<sup>th</sup> 2017 was recorded with the permission of the participants. The recording was transcribed identifying participants by their initials, and was sent to participants to check for accuracy. The recording was destroyed immediately after the transcription was complete. The questions used for our focus groups were the same set of questions we used for the online survey. Please see Appendix A for a list of these questions.

### Opportunity Sampling

We executed opportunity sampling by printing out the questions from our online survey and leaving physical copies in high traffic areas: Otonabee College outside of Wenjack Theatre, Bata Library by the Tim Hortons, and the Great Hall in Champlain College. In each area, we left a stack of 20 surveys, pens, a basket to deposit completed surveys, and signage that read: "Please fill out this short survey". We had our random sample set up for eight days from March 10<sup>th</sup> to March 18<sup>th</sup>, and the results were as follows: Bata Library yielded 10 completed surveys, Champlain College had 17 completed surveys, and Otonabee College had 17 completed surveys.

## Semi-Structured Interviews

We conducted 7 interviews in total. As most participants were not in the Peterborough area, 6 out of 7 interviews were conducted electronically over Skype in private rooms. One interview was completed in person in a private office in Wallis Hall at Trail College. Interviews were not recorded, but one researcher was typing extensive notes while the other asked questions. These notes were distributed to each participant for confirmation of accuracy. Each interview had a semi-structured format, using essential, throw-away, probing, and extra questions.

Our interview questions focused on extracting information about successful and unsuccessful methods of student engagement with the divestment from fossil fuels campaign. We asked about the participant's involvement with the campaign on their campus, and for advice about rallying student support and running a successful campaign. Please see Appendix B for a list of our interview questions.

## **FINDINGS**

Since it has been over a year since the divestment from fossil fuels movement was active on Trent's campus, we assumed that students would be unaware of what divestment was, or would be apathetic towards the movement. However, our findings revealed that this was not true, as our sample data collection showed that students at Trent University are still supportive of the divestment from fossil fuels movement, regardless if they fully understand what it is. We had also assumed that the discipline or the year of study the student is enrolled in would affect their level of interest. After conducting our research, we can say that this was also not correct, as we have not seen a particular pattern in students' majors or their year of enrolment in regards to how they answered our questions. However, we would like to acknowledge that the majority of students that participated in our data collection were undergraduate students, but this could be because of the difference in population size between the undergraduate and graduate cohort.

There may be no perfect data collection method for determining student opinions on divestment, as each data collection method had its advantages and disadvantages. Below we will navigate the findings of each data collection method, and analyze the effectiveness of the method based on number of participants, and quality of the information gathered.

## Online Survey

Our online survey received the highest number of responses out of all of the data collection methods. The majority of students that answered the online survey were in their third or fourth year, with 29.23% and 33.85% respectively. Only 4 graduate students completed the survey, and 5 participants identified as not being students (and were directed to stop the survey).

There was a notable amount of responses where participants identified themselves as studying environmental studies, but overall, the respondents were in a wide variety of programs. The majority of students that completed the survey were full-time domestic students, which is the largest student demographic at Trent. We assumed that we would get multiple indigenous students participating in our survey as divestment is so closely linked to the environment and indigenous issues, but only one student that participated identified as indigenous. We also assumed not many international students would participate, as there might have been confusion about what divestment was, or potential language barriers, but 14 international students did participate.

One of the most interesting results gathered from the online survey was that many people who supported divestment did not fully understand what it was. 30 responses (76.92% of people who clicked this answer) said that they had heard about divestment but was not fully aware of what it was, but still said they supported the movement. 15 responses (60% of people who clicked this answer) said they did not know what divestment was, but said they supported it. 19.84% of respondents said they did not know what divestment was. Overall, more people were unsure about what the movement was or did not know what it was at all compared to those who did (see Figure B). Furthermore, the majority of respondents said they were not aware a divestment campaign ran at Trent between 2012-2015 (see Figure A). 72% (90 respondents) said they supported Trent University divesting from fossil fuels, which is really close to the percentage of students (76%) that said they were in favour of divestment in 2014.<sup>18</sup> The main reason students said they supported divestment was for environmental reasons, and because Trent promotes itself as an environmentally conscious institution and should live up to that image. The main reasons given for not supporting divestment was that it was unrealistic in today's economy, and divestment would have negative financial implications for the university. 47.1% of people that indicated that they didn't know enough to decide if they supported divestment said that they would like to learn more about the divestment campaign, and 52.9% said maybe. Interestingly, no respondents said that they were not interested in learning more at all, highlighting a desire or willingness to be more informed. The most suggested method of engaging students with the divestment campaign was utilizing social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, as well as engaging with larger media outlets like Chex, CBC, and CNN. Protests and letters to the *Arthur*, which have been popular on Trent's campus in the past, received the least amount of votes with 40 votes and 47 votes respectively. Some interesting alternative suggestions that students submitted included a panel of professionals debate this topic, and giving short presentations to classes.

The survey revealed interesting information about international students and their relationship to the divestment campaign: 91.6% of international students that responded said that they supported Trent divesting from fossil fuels. Additionally, a higher percentage of international students (compared to domestic students) understood what the campaign was, and knew it ran at Trent previously. This information leads us to believe that international students

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<sup>18</sup> See note 7 above

on campus are aware and interested in the divestment campaign, and might be an important demographic to target in the future.

Overall, the online survey results gathered the highest number of responses from the widest variety of students. Qualtrics allowed us to easily break down the data and look at how specific groups of people answered certain questions, in order to find any correlation between year of study, program, course load etc. and how they answered each question. It was the most time effective method, and also resulted in valuable, detailed data.

### Focus Groups

Our focus groups were effective for gathering in-depth data about the level of knowledge or support students have for the movement, and why. The clear challenge with hosting focus groups lies with the time commitment needed from the participants, and general scheduling and time management issues. However, even though our single successful focus group involved only two participants, it allowed us to engage in comprehensive discussion that was not possible through online surveys or opportunity sampling. Focus groups also allow for in-depth discussion to happen with multiple people (assuming that multiple people attend), whereas interviews are limited by their one-on-one structure. Focus groups allow you to gather multiple different people from various groups, disciplines, and years of study, increasing the chance of inspiring new opinions and new ideas. Focus groups can also be potentially used as an engagement method, as students with previously little experience with the divestment movement get to interact and be inspired by students that are passionate about this issue.

The focus group we conducted revealed the importance of incorporating indigenous peoples and indigenous views in the divestment campaign. Participants articulated the willingness of TUNA to work with the campaign in order to engage more students, and to engage local members of the indigenous community. They also expressed how they wished the movement would incorporate more of a focus on the environmental and social impacts fossil fuels has on indigenous communities in Canada, and why that is another reason Trent should divest from fossil fuels. This additional information and its depth would not have been possible to gather through our other data collection methods.

### Opportunity Sampling

Opportunity sampling reflected results found in the online survey, but on a smaller scale. The two main correlating results between the online survey and opportunity sampling were: 1) many people had stated that they don't understand the concept of divestment, but they still said they supported it and 2) opportunity sampling revealed that many people didn't know that the divestment from fossil fuel campaign happened at Trent University in the past, but they still supported it. Opportunity sampling did achieve some different results than the online survey: more students across all locations indicated that they did not know enough about divestment to

decide whether or not they supported it. Furthermore, more participants in the random sampling said they did not know that the campaign happened at Trent from 2012-2015 compared to the online survey.

We anticipated that a challenge with opportunity sampling would be that students would not take the time to fill out the survey, but for the most part, that was incorrect. Almost all the surveys left in Otonabee College and Champlain College were filled out, and half the surveys left in the Bata Library were completed. However, opportunity sampling posed the challenge of having incomplete survey responses. The results from Bata library were missing 8 answers, Champlain was missing 19 answers, and Otonabee was missing 15 answers. This resulted in incomplete data, and hindered our ability to find correlations between how a student identified, and their level of interest in the divestment campaign.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are extremely useful for collecting data about successful or unsuccessful methods of student engagement in the divestment campaign at Canadian post-secondary institutions. Most of the people that we interviewed had run a divest campaign on their campus, or were from organizations such as 350.org or the Canadian Federation of Students that assisted multiple campuses run divestment campaigns. The following is consistent advice given by these individuals on how to run a successful campaign.

First, it was stressed that it was very important to educate students on the issue in a very user-friendly way, using popular platforms such as social media. Workshops were also suggested as helpful educational tools, as they make the divestment issue personal and foster discussion, which is an important way of recruiting dedicated and long-term supporters. Past organizers said it was important to report on any successful divestment story, as it makes organizers and supporters of the campaign excited and enthusiastic. Suggested methods of student engagement included: tabling, buttons, stickers and posters, as they are all good ways of becoming visible on campus. Tabling was also stated as a good way to engage with students one on one, where organizers can have in-depth conversations with students and answer any complicated questions.

Secondly, even though students mostly support the divestment campaign in Canada, many faculty members have shown a great level of support for these campaigns. Professors are very useful for these campaigns as they have the power over an entire classroom, and they have the knowledge of the Board of Governors and other administrative spaces that students may not.

Finally, some overall advice from organizers was the following: it is important for students to really understand divestment and its causes, so they can be passionate about it. Having passionate campaign members will create a long-lasting campaign that will not die out as it did at Trent University in 2015. Also, a committed and organized group of students is needed to lead the divestment movement, that is not all third and fourth-year students, so there are people to keep the movement going. Finally, it is important to note that many universities began to pay attention to divestment campaigns when students utilized university logos in creative and embarrassing ways (example: oil dripping down them). This could be used as a way of promoting the campaign, bringing awareness, and lobbying the Board of Governors.

In conclusion, semi-structured interviews served an important role of gathering advice from other campuses, but are not recommended as a tool for surveying Trent students on their

level of knowledge or support for divestment. This is because interviews are generally conducted one-on-one, and as a result are extremely time-consuming.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, testing several different types of data collection not only allowed us to develop a methodology for surveying students, but also revealed information on current levels of engagement students have with the divestment movement, albeit on a small scale. For example, through all of our data collection it was revealed that the divestment from fossil fuels movement still has support from students at Trent, regardless of the fact that the campaign has not been active in over two years. Our results also showed that students support the movement, even without a full understanding of what it is. All of these results are positive for future organizers of the divestment campaign at Trent, as students are more likely to be in support of their efforts than not.

Our project performed a literature review on divestment campaigns across Canadian post-secondary campuses, and tested several chosen data collection methods to determine the ideal method for answering our research questions. Additionally, we have analyzed the results of the methods tested and came up with several recommendations. By the end of this research project we understand the current level of student knowledge of fossil fuel divestment at Trent University, and determined some strategies for the future campaign organizers to utilize. We believe that our host will benefit from this research project as this information may sway Trent's financial team away from fossil fuel investment, to areas that are more socially conscious. Details on our recommendations can be found below.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The methodology we would like to pass on to Part II of the project would recommend using an online survey, in combination with focus groups, to engage with students and determine the level of support and knowledge Trent's population has for fossil fuel divestment.

Online surveys are recommended as the highest number of students answered it, giving the most accurate picture of overall student opinion. It is also quicker and easier for students to answer an online survey than to participate in opportunity sampling or semi-structured interviews. This became evident to us as participants wrote with more detail on the online survey than they did for the opportunity sampling. Additionally, it is much faster and easier to execute an online survey than any of the other data collection methods. It is also easier to process the results after conducting the online survey. Last, but not least, it also guaranteed that every question was not only answered, but legible.

We recommend focus groups be run in addition to the online survey for several reasons. First, during the focus groups we got the most amount of accurate and detailed information. It was easier to identify what someone's true level of knowledge of divestment was in the focus groups over the online survey. Finally, it was more effective than the opportunity sampling

because students are always in a rush walking around campus, and not always have time to stop and fill it out.

With these recommendations in mind, we would like to make some suggestions in regards to how the online survey and focus groups are carried out by Part II of the project.

#### i. Improvements to the Online Survey

Our experience facilitating the online survey revealed that more promotion of the survey is needed in order to receive more responses. Increased promotion could include having student volunteers walk around campus to promote it by word of mouth, hanging up posters, and entering the name of all participants into a raffle for a prize (providing their name for this raffle would be voluntary). We would also suggest asking The Office of Student Affairs to send out the survey to all students through their Trentu emails if possible.

There are also improvements that could be made to the content of the survey. A new and improved list of questions for an online survey are attached as Appendix C, but for convenience they are summarized below:

- 1) Our initial survey asked whether students identified as international, domestic, English as a Second Language (ESL), Indigenous, part-time, or full-time in one question. It is our suggestion to have one question that asks students to identify as domestic or international, and have a separate question that asks about whether or not they are part time or full time. This way the data can be more organized, as asking students to identify multiple different ways within one question caused some respondents to click one, but not all, identities. We know this because only 111 respondents identified if they were full or part time, but 143 took the survey.
- 2) Asking students to identify as ESL or Indigenous did not result in any useful data. No participants identified as ESL and only one identified as indigenous. It is our suggestion to omit this question unless our host thinks it would be useful on a large scale, or that identifying indigenous students is important considering the feedback received.
- 3) Question 10 should have made students rank each engagement method from most effective to least effective, in order to get a better idea of what engagement methods should be used. The current question let students pick as many as they liked, so for the answers that got a similar amount of votes, it is impossible to distinguish which is better than the other. This question should also only be available to students that said they supported the campaign, as those who do not probably do not have suggestions.

#### ii. Improvements to Conducting Focus Groups

We recognize that there could be several improvements made to the process of conducting focus groups. For the second year of this project to successfully implement this method of gathering data on a larger scale we suggest few things:



- 1) It is necessary to approach students and ask them to participate in focus groups in September, when course work is at the lightest. Setting up multiple times and dates for people to choose from early in the first semester will allow students to easily find time in their schedules, and will give you the ability to find a perfect time to meet with everyone.
- 2) We suggest conducting two types of focus groups. The first one would involve 1-2 participants from each major club, group, or levy on campus (ex. TISA, TUNA, TCSA, TGSA, Sustainable Trent etc.). This will create a space for more diverse and opinionated discussion. The second type of focus group could consist of 4-6 people from the same group, by attending a previously scheduled meeting of theirs. By doing so you would be able to collect in-depth data on reasoning behind each group's stance on divestment from fossil fuels. Coming to their already scheduled groups meetings would make things easier to schedule and would increase your chances of having people attend.
- 3) Last, but not least, we suggest you advertise and bring free food to entice students to participate in your focus groups.

### iii. Bringing it All Together: Building Campus-Wide Interest in Divestment

To address the second research question posed for our project, we did want to summarize some suggestions for building campus-wide interest in the divestment from fossil fuels movement at Trent University. Our semi-structured interviews with past campaign organizers at Trent and other institutions highlighted the importance of having a dedicated set of students to lead the divestment campaign. Organizing volunteers and lobbying efforts takes an extremely large amount of time, so it is important that those who take on this task do so with help, and are able to balance their school work with this initiative. A committed and organized group of students is needed to lead the divestment movement, that contains first and second year students, so that after seniors graduate there are others well prepared to carry on the work that was started.

Once a strong team is established, the campaign will have more success gaining the support of their peers. Our results had shown that this most easily done by making sure students really understand what divestment is and why it is beneficial, in an effort to make students passionate about it. Spreading the word about divestment is best done by: utilizing social media, tabling around campus, and making materials such as buttons, stickers, and posters.

Finally, it is important for the future organizers of the divestment campaign to target some previously untapped student demographics. Our online survey, as well as opportunity sampling, has shown that there are more international students engaged with this issue than we had originally anticipated. We suggest that international students may be an untapped demographic, and that lobbying them to be more involved and vocal about the campaign will be beneficial to the cause overall. International students are aware of what divestment is and support it, but the movement in the past has not effectively utilized them.

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## APPENDIX

### A. Online Survey Questions

1. What year of study are you in?

- 1<sup>st</sup> year
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year
- 4<sup>th</sup> year
- 5<sup>th</sup> year +
- Graduate student
- Not a student

2. What program are you studying?

- Blank entry box

3. Click any of the following that apply to you:

- International student
- Domestic student
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Indigenous Student
- Part-time
- Full-time

4. The Divestment from Fossil Fuels Movement is a recent social and environmental movement aimed at pressuring Canadian universities and colleges to dissolve (get rid of) current investments, stocks, or bonds in the fossil fuel industry. The movement includes students who are concerned about the potential negative environmental impacts that the fossil fuel industry has on the planet, and therefore they do not want their institution to economically support these industries.

Prior to taking this survey, were you familiar with the Divestment from Fossil Fuels Movement as described above?

- Definitely yes
- I had a concept of what divestment from fossil fuels was, but it did not match what was described above
- I've heard about it, but was not fully aware of what it was
- No

5. Are you aware that the divestment from fossil fuels campaign took place at Trent University approximately between the time of 2012-2015?

- Yes

- No
- Unsure

6. Do you support Trent University divesting from fossil fuels?

- Yes
- No
- I don't care
- I don't know enough to decide

7. *If answered yes:* Why do you support Trent University divesting from fossil fuels?

- Blank entry box

8. *If answered no:* Why do you not support Trent University divesting from fossil fuels?

- Blank entry box

9. *If answered I don't know enough to decide:* Would you like to learn more about the divestment from fossil fuels movement?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

10. What do you believe to be the best way to engage Trent University students with this campaign? Check all the apply:

- Tabling with information
- Large protest on campus
- Hanging posters around campus
- Hanging a large banner outside of Bata Library (or other high traffic area)
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- Letters to the Arthur
- Engaging with larger media outlets (Chex, CBC, CNN etc.)
- Other (blank box)

## B. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Your name, program, year of study, and what your involvement was with the divestment from fossil fuels movement?
2. Can you please tell us about the divestment from fossil fuels campaign at your university?
  - 2.1 What did you accomplish exactly? What did divestment look like for your school?
  - 2.2 What were some of your biggest challenges?
3. How do you make people more aware of divestment?
4. How do you rally student support for your campaign?
5. Who is most likely to support divestment? Were any specific groups of students that you found really supported the campaign?
6. What does a divestment campaign need to be successful?
7. Where should future organizers of the divestment from fossil fuels movement at Trent University target their energy?

### C. Improved Online Survey

1. What year of study are you in?

- 1<sup>st</sup> year
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- 3<sup>rd</sup> year
- 4<sup>th</sup> year
- 5<sup>th</sup> year +
- Graduate student
- Not a student

2. What program are you studying?

- Blank entry box

3. Please identify as either:

- International student
- Domestic student

4. Please identify as either:

- Part-time student
- Full-time student

5. The Divestment from Fossil Fuels Movement is a recent social and environmental movement aimed at pressuring Canadian universities and colleges to dissolve (get rid of) current investments, stocks, or bonds in the fossil fuel industry. The movement includes students who are concerned about the potential negative environmental impacts that the fossil fuel industry has on the planet, and therefore they do not want their institution to economically support these industries.

Prior to taking this survey, were you familiar with the Divestment from Fossil Fuels Movement as described above?

- Definitely yes
- I had a concept of what divestment from fossil fuels was, but it did not match what was described above
- I've heard about it, but was not fully aware of what it was
- No

6. Are you aware that the divestment from fossil fuels campaign took place at Trent University approximately between the time of 2012-2015?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

7. Do you support Trent University divesting from fossil fuels?

- Yes
- No
- I don't care
- I don't know enough to decide

8. *If answered yes:* Why do you support Trent University divesting from fossil fuels?

- Blank entry box

9. *If answered no:* Why do you not support Trent University divesting from fossil fuels?

- Blank entry box

10. *If answered I don't know enough to decide:* Would you like to learn more about the divestment from fossil fuels movement?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

11. What do you believe to be the best way to engage Trent University students with this campaign? Please rank the following options from most effective to least effective:

- Tabling with information
- Large protest on campus
- Hanging posters around campus
- Hanging a large banner outside of Bata Library (or other high traffic area)
- Social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
- Letters to the Arthur
- Engaging with larger media outlets (Chex, CBC, CNN etc.)
- Other (blank box)

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<sup>i</sup> The Colleges at Trent are local communities that create intellectually and socially meaningful