



Students Push Universities to Stop Investing in Fossil Fuels

Discussion > Advanced 9



Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

tout	To try to convince people that something is good, important, etc.
[verb]	<i>Ex: The parliamentary election was touted as the beginning of the kingdom's democratization.</i>

leverage	The power or ability to make people or things do what one wants.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Our strong cash position gives us a lot of leverage.</i>

endowment	Money or assets given to a person or organization in order to provide income.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Harvard's endowment now totals 36.4 billion dollars, making it the world's richest university.</i>



prevalence	The state of being very common.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Government data shows the prevalence of obesity among children has increased.</i>

index fund	A collection of investments designed to track or match particular financial market indexes.
[noun]	<i>Ex: Warren Buffett believes that low-cost index funds are the smartest investment most people can make.</i>

divestment	The act of selling shares, assets, investments, etc.
[noun]	<i>Ex: The company suffered a \$100 million loss due to divestment following the scandal.</i>



Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

Students Push Universities to Stop Investing in Fossil Fuels

Students are increasing pressure on universities to pull investments from fossil fuel industries, an effort that is gaining momentum at top schools like Georgetown, Harvard and Yale.

The push that is underway at hundreds of schools began nearly a decade ago, and student activists have learned from one another's tactics as predictions about the effects of climate change continue to worsen.

Georgetown University announced in February that it will end private investments in coal, oil and gas companies within the next decade, and some faculty at Harvard have called for a similar shift.

Several dozen schools have stopped investing at least partially in fossil fuels, but there is debate over how much the move slows the effects of climate change or affects the profits of companies like Chevron and Exxon Mobil.



Many schools have defended their investments, citing a duty to preserve and grow the income they receive from donations, while touting efforts to use investments as leverage with energy companies.

At Yale University, which has a \$30 billion endowment, fossil fuel investment became a big issue partly due to a student protest that disrupted a November football game between Harvard and Yale.

Environmentalist and author Bill McKibben, a leader of the movement to stop such investments, said students have played a huge role. "They've kept it up through two generations of undergraduates. Administrators hoped they'd graduate and that would be the end of the pressure, but instead it keeps building," he said.

A challenge for institutions is the prevalence of investments in index funds, which makes it difficult to separate out the roughly 4% of energy stocks in such funds, said John Jurewitz of Pomona College. Colleges pulling their investments also wouldn't likely hurt oil companies, which have their own internal cash flows, he said.

"It's mainly a political statement about what the university is willing to invest in," Jurewitz said.

The Independent Petroleum Association of America has pushed back with its own campaign, arguing divestment would cost university endowments millions a year with little impact on carbon emissions.



Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. What are your thoughts on student-led effort to stop universities from investing in fossil fuels?
2. Why do you think fossil fuels are still so widely used?
3. Where does most of your country's energy come from? Please explain your answer.
4. Which of your friends and family would you say does the most to help protect the environment?
5. Have you taken any steps to reduce your impact on the environment? Please explain your answer.
6. How important would you say it is to get young people interested in social and political issues?
7. Are most of your friends and family politically engaged? Please explain your answer.
8. Have you ever taken part in a protest? If so, please share your experience.