

April 30, 2016

Dear Members of the Ad Hoc Committee on Responsible Investing,

To begin, I want to thank you for inviting consultation on responsible investing. As this is a matter that impacts all of us - board members, faculty, staff, and students alike - it is important that we have discussions on this matter now and in the future. I will keep my remarks brief as I know you will have much material to wade through.

I am a professor in the Faculty of Education and my research and teaching focus on environmental sustainability and social justice. I am interested in how these two areas intersect and how educators can contribute to a world in which we all - humans and the natural community alike - can flourish.

In my teaching, I ask my students to consider not only the "explicit curriculum" (i.e., the content we purposely teach) but also the "hidden curriculum" (e.g., the messages that we send to students by what we choose to omit and through our actions). The explicit and hidden curriculum are as relevant to our work in the university as they are to elementary or secondary school. Currently, in our Academic Plan and many of our university promotions, we tout our commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability. We can provide numerous examples of the ways in which individual faculty members or particular programs or initiatives contribute to these. Alas, there are also numerous examples a rhetoric/reality gap; our investments are one example. If our investment policy was truly congruent with our professed mission, we would prioritize social and environmental flourishing above all else. This would mean doing our homework and ensure that our investments do not support the opposite. Unfortunately, a predictable response in these neoliberal times is to say, "Oh, but we cannot afford to do that given the fiscal constraints we face" to which I respond, "Balderdash!" With some effort and due diligence, ethical investing is not merely possible but profitable. (Think, for example, of the booming renewable energy sector versus the declining fossil fuel sector.) Plus, quite simply, it is the right thing to do.

I had been hoping that Lakehead University would have been the first university in Canada to divest from fossil fuels but the University of Ottawa beat us to it. What a missed opportunity for Lakehead - it could have given us bragging rights and indicated we truly were "exceptional and unconventional". Still, we can remain ahead of the curve and still be seen as the leader in environmental sustainability and social justice that we publicly profess to be. Please, it is time for us to live up to our rhetoric!

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