

Dear all,

My name is Noah Pellikaan, I am a second-year student of political theory here at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, and I am an activist for a democratized; decarbonized; decolonized university. My institutional positions within UvA are as the delegate from the Student Council of the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Science (FSR-FMG) to the Centrale Student Council (CSR), as the only student member of the UvA's General Institutional Ethics Commission (AIEC), and as a member of the Programme Committee Political Science (OC-POL). I do not, however, submit the following due to any formalized ethos which I've attained through a number of titles and position within a bureaucratic structure of corporate academia. Rather, I submit the following in three parts. First, I submit due to my positionality as an activist within the Amsterdam Autonomous Coalition (AAC), second as the treasurer of Activistenpartij UvA, and third as a student of UvA who has been working on this issue over the past year, both in- and out- side of the institution.

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The Amsterdam Autonomous Coalition is a coalition of 8 different activist organizations, consisting of:

University Rebellion UvA; Activistenpartij UvA; the Decolonization Club; Mokum Kraakt; Students for Justice in Palestine; ROOD Socialistische Jongeren; Autonomous Student Struggle; End Fossil: Occupy!

And is responsible for, among other actions, the peaceful & nonviolent 16 January 2023 occupation of the Amsterdamse Academische Club. The AAC has collectively written the following statement to say in regard to the UvA-wide discussions on collaboration with the fossil fuel industry:

### **Amsterdam Autonomous Coalition (AAC):**

In light of UvA's ongoing and future research projects with Shell, the first discussion of the UvA-wide dialogue on collaboration with 3rd parties went ahead as scheduled last week. Although we welcome this forum for dialogue, professors were defending Big Oil, often with deceitful arguments constructed by BP and other Big Oil companies themselves (e.g. blame consumers, take it easy on Big Oil, give Shell a chance). We don't see this as a great example of a "democratic" process.

**We express overall skepticism towards this dialogue and the intentions of the CvB.** The CvB has a track record of not fulfilling what they promise. For example, not implementing the outcome of the [referendum](#) for democratization after the 2015 Maagdenhuis occupation, not providing for, and not writing a report about, investigating police violence during the recent occupation (*Minutes, CSR/CvB Overleg Vergadering; 17 January 2023*).

**We demand that the outcome of the dialogue will be announced before the 3rd of July (end of the academic year).** The "dialogue" must be more than a delaying tactic. By next autumn, many people of our movement will have moved on from university, and a new CSR might be more cooperative towards the CvB.

**! We demand full disclosure of all collaborations with Big Oil including the contracts of research projects, because we can only have a discussion when all the facts are on the table.**

**We demand an end to all legitimizations of Big Oil** - i.e., the facilitation of internships; UvA taking students to visit Shell; fossil fuel representatives coming to campus, declaring themselves "sustainable"; being guests in career events; being interviewed or hosted as guest lecturers. The UvA must cease to that none of their student & study associations host, collaborate with, or be financially involved in the fossil fuel industry. climate wreckers who lied and fought climate policy for decades will not be legitimized by us. Ogoni people not forgotten, Mapuche people not forgotten!

**We acknowledge the concerns for funding at the university** - this is a general problem, not one for "sustainability research" only. We envision a university that gets oil-free money, which is not made by violating human rights. The university must find alternative sources of funding and dependency on (and legitimization of) such horrible partners.

**We continue to demand an apology for the police/ME violence that the CvB initiated upon us.** The UvA must eliminate their procedure to immediately evict any occupation, which was adopted after the 2015 Maagdenhuis occupation. Occupations are a legitimate form of protest and must not be dealt with (police) violence.

We are not satisfied by cheap and obvious delaying tactics and will continue to act as if we were already free!

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The second part of this submission, separate from the AAC statement, is on behalf of the Activistenpartij UvA due to my position on the board as the treasurer:

### **Activistenpartij UvA**

The world, and the University of Amsterdam is facing a climate crisis. If we do not drastically reduce CO2 output and do our utmost to restore planetary health in the next 10 years, then we face a world unrecognizable from today. Thus, we wholeheartedly encourage any steps the university can take to battle fossil fuels and fossil fuel interests, and support any measure to help reduce the climate footprint of the University.

It is a well-known fact that industry-funded studies, on the whole, produce results favourable to industry in far greater amounts than independent studies. Or, in other words, that there exists a fairly widespread mechanism whereby companies bribe and/or influence research teams and institutions to muddle the waters and, essentially, deceive the public. Furthermore, skewing

results isn't the only way business interests can exploit or interfere with the academic process. As was the case with Shell, corporations can use R&D investments to boost their public image and distract from wrongdoing elsewhere, including serious crimes. The flaunting of such projects in the interest of saving face is not only highly cynical, but explicitly meant to hold back public debate regarding the negative impact these corporations are having on our societies and the climate.

Of course, this does not mean that corporations can't work with universities at all, or that there's necessarily always foul play going on. There just needs to be far more transparency and oversight regarding the partnerships the university enters. And current and past partnerships need to be critically reassessed.

That being said, ideally, we would like to see a situation where the university is not dependant on such partnerships financially, as that would serve to promote the independence and integrity of the institution. And, of course, ending malpractice at UvA will by no means cause it to disappear entirely. It is but a small step in a fight for greater transparency and integrity. And, besides, the idea that *if we don't sell out, someone else will* is hardly a defence for compromising yourself as an institution.

Another issue seriously affected by questions of funding is the quality of education at smaller courses. For example, in the Humanities and Natural Sciences, many programs have seen courses cut or merged, to the detriment of students. Language and culture students from different programs find themselves taking shared courses, with extremely broad subjects, yet, little substance. The Activistenpartij is wholly opposed to a policy whereby the quality of programs is sacrificed as a cost cutting measure. Furthermore, we believe it is far from an accident that it was the humanities that saw the brunt of cost-cutting, as it is a faculty specialized in distributing knowledge that's harder to monetize. Nevertheless, this doesn't mean this knowledge is in any way less valuable or needed by society and, as such, we oppose cuts at less profitable programs.

We find it crucial that the University stops any agreements they have with fossil fuel interests. The University should break all its ties with companies like Shell whose business model relies on destroying the planet. That is why we also actively participate and support student protests against these ties, which recently culminated in the occupation of the Amsterdam Academic Club in January 2023. While the university has declared a temporary moratorium on Shell, we will not stop until we get a permanently fossil free university."

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And, consequently, a short statement on my own behalf:

Research which is conducted under self-interest on behalf of the financier is by no means unbiased nor egalitarian research. As it is conducted for the promotion of the financier, for accumulation of capital; power; influence; PR of the financier, it is then for me intrinsically unethical research—for it is not research conducted to produce knowledge, it is research conducted out of self-interest. To fund research selectively, and only insofar as said research serves the purposes of promotional self-worth, is to restrict academic freedom. It is to deny that

the true purpose of research and academia is for the free and fair production of knowledge, and it is to covertly deny the ability for research which may oppose the goals or efficacy of the financier to take place. When the argument about third party collaboration with the fossil fuel industry takes place, often there is the argument that to deny funding is to deny the researchers, the scientists, their academic freedom. On the contrary, the usage of unethical corporate funds to selectively allow for some research to only conduct specific research will allow for continuity of fiscal-power relations of the financier, is restricting academic freedom greatly. It is denying the ability for knowledge production.

For one more point, we often hear of the energy transition. Of this monumental incoming shift from global energy reliance on fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas, to cleaner methods of energy production: wind and solar power, hydro-electric, nuclear even. The argument in essence goes as follows: To not conduct research funded by the fossil fuel industry which works on green energy is to slow down the energy transition. The result of not collaborating on such projects would in reality be exactly the antithesis to the purported demands of climate protestors (seen as a greener world). First of all, this argument ignores any arguments on behalf of the climate protestors which is anti-colonial, it ignores any arguments on behalf of the climate protestors which is anti-capitalist, anti-corporatist, or anti-monopolistic, as well as ignoring the blatant complicity which Shell, for instance, had on the deaths of the Ogoni 9<sup>1</sup>, not to mention the consistent violations of workers' rights which the corporations partake in (in the case of Shell, only a few of many examples are in Iraq, Uganda, Brazil, Pakistan<sup>2</sup>, Nigeria<sup>3</sup>).

While the non-inclusion of such aforementioned arguments could still be excused by some in the name of prioritizing this necessary and impending energy transition, I argue here that the energy transition is a farce, a façade, an efficient catchphrase which, while providing a very effective counterargument, does not exist in reality. We know full well that over 95% of Shell investments go to the fossil fuel industry<sup>4</sup>, that they haven't been trusted to be honest in the past about their supposed green energy transition<sup>5</sup>, and that fossil fuel green energy executives

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<sup>1</sup> "Ogoni People vs Shell"

<https://www.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=a43f979996aa4da3bac7cae270a995e0>

<sup>2</sup> "Unions at Shell to protest violations on Human Rights Day" *IndustrialAll Global Union* (2017)

<https://www.industrialall-union.org/unions-at-shell-to-protest-violations-on-human-rights-day>

<sup>3</sup> "Shell worker abuses in Nigeria taken to UN Human Rights Council" *IndustrialAll Global Union* (2019)

<https://www.industrialall-union.org/shell-worker-abuses-in-nigeria-taken-to-un-human-rights-council>

<sup>4</sup> "10 ways Shell is destroying our Earth (complete with supporting documents)" *MilieuDefensie*

<https://en.milieudefensie.nl/news/10-ways-shell-is-destroying-our-earth-complete-with-supporting-documents>

<sup>5</sup> "Top oil firms spending millions lobbying to block climate change policies, says report" *The Guardian* (Laville, S. 2019) <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/mar/22/top-oil-firms-spending-millions-lobbying-to-block-climate-change-policies-says-report>

"The dark secrets behind big oil's climate pledges" *The Guardian & Floodlight* (Green, M. & Chilukuri, S. 2021)

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/04/dark-secrets-big-oil-climate-pledges-greenwashing>

have quit in protest to inaction<sup>6</sup>. There is no reason whatsoever, absolutely no assurances we have, other than blind faith, that the fossil fuel industry will now, after years of rhetorically supporting yet monetarily destroying the possibility of a green energy transition, finally fulfill their promise. To keep the ties is to for UvA to knowingly disregard academic freedom and integrity, and to structurally implement a hierarchical naïveté regarding funding sources, in the name of a transition we know full well will not occur from the goodwill of the industry.

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<sup>6</sup> "Shell executives quit over green transition disagreements" *Offshore Energy* (Lepic, B. 2020).  
<https://www.offshore-energy.biz/shell-executives-quit-over-green-transition-disagreements/>