



Undergraduate Assembly
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

UA Climate Townhall Proposal for President Amy Gutmann

Background

The Undergraduate Assembly and our interactions with climate demands

Members of the Undergraduate Assembly's cabinet have spent years serving on the body as student advocates for tangible change on campus. Many of us would agree that the most vocal, passionate advocates we have met have devoted their time to addressing the way our university interacts with the climate. In fact, numerous members of environmental groups have articulately presented at our General Body Meetings, asking the Undergraduate Assembly to undertake projects directed at addressing climate change. Furthermore, the Undergraduate Assembly has had extensive conversations with University administrators such as Provost Pritchett and representatives from Facilities and Real Estate Services regarding the actions the University has taken thus far as well as opportunities for future improvement on this issue. Whenever student groups appeal to us and we appeal to administrators, we are reminded that a 2016 student referendum on Penn's potential fossil fuel divestment garnered 88% support. One thing was clear from the referendum: this is an issue of great importance to Penn students.

When addressing Penn's interaction with the climate, we must first applaud the university for the steps it proposed in a January 29th email. The steps of most significance to student groups include:

- *Notably, Penn does not hold, and would not expect to hold going forward, any direct investments in companies focused on the production of thermal coal or bituminous (tar) sands, a reflection of the significant carbon intensity—and the corresponding risks—of such businesses*
- *Penn's Climate & Sustainability Action Plan 3.0 calls for the University to enter into a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) to buy green electricity for Penn's campus. We are currently negotiating a long-term PPA that will support the development of two new solar energy facilities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

While Penn's acknowledgement that it does not expect to hold any "direct investments in companies focused on the production of thermal coal or bituminous (tar) sands" is in line with an Undergraduate Assembly resolution passed in the fall of 2018, we must admit that many students (including members of the Undergraduate Assembly) were surprised at the announcement given the numerous concerns previously expressed by the Board of Trustees regarding 'divestment.'

In a letter to Fossil Free Penn, in response to a 2015 proposal, Chairman Cohen restated the Trustee guidelines for divestment which include, but are not limited to: (1) the existence of a moral evil, (2) the recipient company's connection to a nexus of moral evil, and (3) the broad and sustained consensus of the University community. With this criteria in mind, in June of 2016 the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee on Divestment to the Board of Trustees unanimously agreed that the divestment proposal "did not meet the criteria set forth in [the Trustee guidelines for divestment]." As a result, the student environmental community came to believe that no formalized avenue existed for achieving 'divestment.' This is what



Undergraduate Assembly
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

made the January 29th email so surprising: it was a huge step undertaken seemingly without any faculty or student input.

The mission of our following proposal is not about any climate change issue specifically. Rather, we see a lack of clear communication through the divestment issue, and we want to change that for any future conversations. Open and productive dialogue prevents misunderstanding, and we believe a Climate Town Hall could be the first step to create that.

While we believe the university's recent actions are noble and valuable, the Undergraduate Assembly is convinced that a conversation must be had regarding the urgency of the climate crisis, specifically regarding Penn's carbon emissions and divestment from fossil fuels. The proposal is as follows:

Proposal

Purpose

In order to close this perceived communication gap, the UA wishes to host a Climate Town Hall to discuss Penn's approach to a number of climate change issues. We hope this Town Hall can be an opportunity for the Administration to publicize and educate the Penn community on its climate change initiatives and for the community to ask relevant clarifying questions. We hope this event will create productive conversations, promote mutual understanding, and build collaborative relationships to strive for a sustainable tomorrow.

Topics

We wish to focus on two specific topics through this Town Hall. First, how does the Administration plan to **reduce carbon emissions** in line with the 2018 IPCC Special Report on Global Warming? What specific steps does Penn plan to take to meet the guidelines stated in the Paris Climate Accord?

Second, what is the University's plan regarding **fossil fuel divestment** in the near future? And what are the justifications regarding these decisions?

We welcome the Administration to add any other relevant topics it wishes to address. However, the event is time-sensitive, and we wish to focus on fewer topics in order to have in-depth and comprehensive conversations.

Structure

The event would have an estimated duration of 1.5 to 2 hours. It would be held at either Bodek Lounge or Hall of Flags.

Ideally, the panel speakers would consist of President Amy Gutmann, Chief Investment Officer Peter Ammon, Chairman of the Board of Trustees David Cohen, and relevant high-level Administrators from Business Services and Facilities, the Office of Investments, and Real Estate Services. Of course, any



Undergraduate Assembly
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

member of the Penn Board of Trustees would be welcome to attend. The Town Hall would be moderated by faculty and external experts, proposed by the Undergraduate Assembly and approved by the Administration.

The Administration, student representatives, and faculty representatives would be invited to give opening and closing statements to provide context and restate the goals and purpose of the Town Hall. Then the audience members would pose a series of prepared questions, and the selected moderators would orchestrate speaking time. Finally, any extra time would be devoted to an open question-and-answer period where the audience may pose questions.

Relevant Details

The Undergraduate Assembly will organize an RSVP process for audience members to submit pre-approved questions, and we hope to have the list of approved panel speakers finalized by early March 2020. Questions from the audience could come from Penn students, faculty, administration, and alumni, as well as Philadelphia community members. Reporters from the Daily Pennsylvanian and other Philadelphia news organizations would be invited to attend. The Undergraduate Assembly encourages the Administration to finalize plans alongside all other stakeholders so that this Town Hall can occur before or during the first week of April.