



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Pitzer College Students Win Fossil Fuel Divestment 2012-2014

- Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement (2010 - )

November  
2012  
to: April  
2014

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Claremont, California

**Location Description:** Pitzer College

### Goals:

According to the Claremont Colleges Divestment Campaign website, the campaign called on Pitzer (and the other 4 Claremont colleges) to "immediately freeze any new investments in fossil fuel companies, and to divest within five years from direct ownership and any commingled funds that include fossil fuel public equities and corporate bonds."

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 034. Vigils › Candlelight March
- 038. Marches

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 050. Teach-ins

### Methods in 3rd segment:

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches

- 021. Delivering symbolic objects › Valentines day card
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support › "Human Oil Spill"

**Methods in 6th segment:**

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Environment

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- Pitzer college students
- students at other Claremont Consortium Colleges

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Claremont Colleges Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign

**External allies:**

350.org, Pitzer College Sustainability Office

**Involvement of social elites:**

Investments Committee Chair Don Gould

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Claremont Colleges Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** 3 months

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Some members of the Pitzer College Board of Trustees

**Campaigner violence:**

No campaigner violence.

**Repressive Violence:**

No repressive violence.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Following the Pitzer Victory, the 5 Colleges Divestment Campaign became inactive as the other 4 schools' Boards resisted divestment.

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The Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement began in 2011 at Swarthmore College when Swarthmore Mountain Justice founded the first divestment campaign. The movement slowly grew throughout over the next year until 350.org launched their Do the Math nationwide speaking tour, which sparked rapid growth of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement around the country. Pitzer and Pomona College students who attended a Do the Math event at UCLA in November 2012 founded the Claremont Colleges Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign later that month. In line with campaigns around the country, their goal was for all five colleges to immediately freeze new investments in fossil fuels and fully divest within five years.

Students in the Claremont Consortium coordinated the Claremont Colleges Fossil Fuel Divestment Campaign. The consortium includes Pitzer, Claremont, Pomona, Harvey Mudd, and Scripps Colleges, all of which adjoin one another. Students across the campuses held actions together, but Pitzer College students negotiated with their administration independently and their primary goal was for Pitzer College to divest.

Students spent several weeks planning and then officially launched the campaign on 3 December 2012 when 50 students held a candlelight march to deliver a demand for divestment to Pitzer President Skandera Trombley's office. Students also delivered a statement to the presidents of the other four colleges in the consortium. They demanded their colleges immediately freeze new investments in fossil fuel companies and eliminate any existing fossil fuel investments within five years.

Following this action, Pitzer students received their first meeting with members of the administration. In January 2013, they met with President Trombley and Treasurer Lee, who both responded favorably to the proposal for divestment. Following the meeting, Trombley requested the campaign compile a report on the financial implications of divestment.

Meanwhile, the campaign continued to build support among Pitzer students. On 10 February 2013, the Student Senate passed a resolution calling for divestment from the 200 fossil fuel companies with the largest reserves. The next day, the campaign co-hosted an educational panel discussion with faculty members on divestment. Following President Trombley's request, the campaign issued a report to the Trustee Investment Committee on February 15, laying out the financial justification for divestment and drawing on research supporting claims that divestment would not hurt the College's endowment.

In late February, Pitzer students attended "Power Up," the first national divestment convergence, at Swarthmore College. At the convergence, students from the Claremont Colleges Divestment Campaign and other campaigns around the country began planning a National Day of Divestment Action for Climate Justice called 'March Fo(u)rth.' The Claremont Colleges Divestment Campaign organized a joint rally on 4 March 2013 as part of this day of action.

Hoping that the Board would make a decision at their May Board meeting, the campaign issued a second report to the Trustee

Investment Committee on 23 April 2013 outlining the moral and political reasons for divestment, and argued that investments in fossil fuels conflicted with the College's mission. The campaign called on the Board to vote on divestment at their 17 May meeting. In May, the Board postponed the decision on divestment until the fall without revealing their reasoning.

Students continued building pressure into the fall. On 11 October 2013, 100 students rallied for divestment outside Pitzer's Board of Trustees meeting as the Trustees considered the campaign's proposal. Pitzer College students met with the Board to personally present and explain their proposal. However, the meeting was voluntary and only half the trustees attended.

On 12 October 2013, the Board again postponed their decision on divestment. Instead, they created a task force to explore Pitzer's approach to climate action more generally. The Climate Change Working Group (CCWG) included 3 board members, 3 students, 2 faculty, and 2 staff. The committee's discussion took place in private, only one student from the campaign was involved, and Board members resisted divestment strongly at first. During this process, Jesse Meisler-Abramson, the Sustainability Coordinator, supported the students by helping them publish answers to frequently asked questions in order to better educate the campus and the Board of Trustees on divestment. The committee developed a proposal over the following months, which they brought to the Board of Trustees' Climate Action Task Force.

On 14 Feb 2014, 100 students staged a human oil spill outside the Climate Action Task Force as the Board members entered. The action included a short rally with speeches from students and faculty. Since 14 Feb was Valentine's Day, students presented President Trombley with a large valentine asking her to "break up with fossil fuels."

The next week, the campaign established the Pitzer Responsible Endowment Fund, an alternative for alumni considering making a donation to the College. Rather than going directly into the endowment, the Responsible Endowment Fund held donations until the Board agreed to divestment. By April, the fund reached \$12,000 in donations. The fund provided students and alumni with a means of leveraging financial pressure, supporting their argument that divestment could help increase donations to the College. Based on the CCWG's recommendation, the full Board of Trustees unanimously approved a plan for full fossil fuel divestment on April 2014, as part of a comprehensive climate action plan. They agreed to divest "virtually all College endowment investments in fossil fuel stocks by December 31, 2014, develop an environmental, social and governance policy to guide endowment investment decisions, [and] create the Pitzer Sustainability Fund within the endowment to make environmentally responsible investments. Additionally, the Board voted to implement sustainability measures on campus, aiming for "a 25 percent reduction of the College's carbon footprint from current levels by the end of 2016, and establish a Campus Sustainability Taskforce to bolster on-campus measures to promote sustainability."

Pitzer College's decision made it the most prestigious and well-endowed college to divest at the time. Board of Trustees Investment Committee Chair Don Gould became a vocal advocate for divestment nationally in the wake of his institution's decision. Following Pitzer's divestment, Stanford University divested from coal, and the University of Dayton divested from all fossil fuels later that spring.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The 350.org Do the Math Campaign, and the growing fossil fuel divestment movement influenced the Pitzer Campaign. The Pitzer campaign's success built national momentum and preceded to a series of divestment victories over the next year.

### Sources:

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**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/fossil-fuel-divestment-movement-2010>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>

[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/local-community-or-neighborhood-level-campaign>