

Climate Justice Policy

Adopted by the Legislative Council: 2024-04-04

Ratified by the Board of Directors: 2024-04-11

Expires: 2029-05-01

[Adopted Motion](#)

1. Scope

This policy shall apply to the following individuals within the SSMU Environment:

- Directors;
- Councillors;
- Executive Officers;
- Senators;
- Regular Part-Time Employees;
- Regular Full-Time Employees;
- All other parties involved in Society decision-making processes for the duration of their formal involvement with the Society.

This policy shall be used as a guide for decision-making and a plan for taking action on the climate crisis. This policy does not necessarily represent the approach to addressing the climate crisis espoused by any faculty association, departmental association, or Independent Student Group.

2. Definitions

2.1. Global North: The Global North refers to the 59 countries with very high human development and the 53 countries with high human development as reported in the United Nations Development Programme¹. Most, but not all, of these countries are located in the Northern Hemisphere.

¹ [United Nations Development Programme: "2018 Update"](#)

2.2. Global South: The Global South refers to the countries of the rest of the world, most of which are located in the Southern Hemisphere. It includes both countries with medium human development (39 countries) and low human development (38 countries).

2.3. Oil Sands: Oil sand is a naturally occurring mixture of sand, clay or other minerals, water and bitumen, which is a heavy and extremely viscous oil that must be treated before it can be used by refineries to produce usable fuels such as gasoline and diesel.

2.4. Divestment: Fossil fuel divestment involves institutions, governments, and investment funds selling away shares in fossil fuel and related stocks. Divestment campaigns place high value in ethical principles and emphasize applying political and economic pressure to curb the harmful effects of the fossil fuel industry. The ultimate aim of divestment is reverting the anthropogenic contributions to the climate crisis in a just manner, placing a fair share of the onus on the producers of fossil fuels².

2.5. Climate Justice: Within the fight against the man-made climate crisis, this term comes from the understanding that the climate crisis has unequal effects on global populations, with communities in the Global South being more susceptible to many of the negative effects of the climate crisis such as droughts, mass migration, and flooding.³ Climate Justice recognizes that certain populations have greater constraints in combating the climate crisis, and calls on communities in the Global North to compensate with rapid decarbonization, progressive immigration policies, and other socially just solutions, while taking equity, circumstance, and development into account. Moreover, a Climate Justice analysis acknowledges that the populations that have, through heavy industrialization, contributed the most to greenhouse gas emissions are the least likely to experience the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

2.6. Fair Trade: Fair Trade is a trading partnership that prioritizes equitable compensation, sustainable practices, and empowering marginalized producers in developing countries. It seeks to ensure that farmers and workers receive fair wages, operate in safe conditions, and have access to resources for community development. Fair Trade promotes transparency and accountability throughout the supply chain, fosters long-term relationships between producers and buyers, and strives to mitigate the negative impacts of conventional trade by advocating for social and environmental justice.

² [ScienceDirect: "Summary of the Divestment argument"](#)

³ [UN: Climate Justice](#)

3. Context

3.1. Climate Crisis

Over 97% of actively publishing climate scientists agree that the primary cause of the climate crisis is human-induced in nature⁴. In particular, the burning of fossil fuels and the subsequent increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations is responsible for the majority of observed warming for the last fifty years. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) anthropogenic activity has caused “global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above 1850-1900 in 2011-2020”.⁵ Furthermore, given the emissions implied by current policies in place it is “*likely* that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century and make it harder to limit warming below 2°C”.⁶ This degree of warming will have severe and irreversible consequences for both the near future and for years to come. The World Health Organization suspects that over 250,000 additional deaths will occur per year due to the climate crisis between 2030 and 2050.⁷

3.1.1. Sustainability and the Climate Crisis

The SSMU Sustainability Policy states that SSMU will strive to “actively promote practices that will lead to resilient ecosystems.” It further elaborates the SSMU’s commitment to reducing our contribution to fossil fuel extraction and greenhouse gas emissions.⁸ The climate crisis touches on the three major dimensions of sustainability outlined in the Sustainability Policy: social, economic and environmental. The SSMU has a responsibility to encourage students and McGill University entities in combating a climate catastrophe, as it will affect students and global communities.

3.1.2. Equity and the Climate Crisis

The SSMU Equity Policy commits to creating a functional anti-oppressive environment through the use of “proactive steps to challenge and acknowledge the current and historical processes” that further marginalize certain groups of people⁹. The climate crisis

⁴ [IopScience: “Consensus on consensus: a synthesis of consensus estimates on human-caused global warming”](#) ⁶ [World Health Organisation: “Climate change and health”](#)

⁵ [IPCC: “Summary report for Policy Makers” 2023](#)

⁶ [IPCC: “Summary report for Policy Makers” 2023](#)

⁷ [WHO: Quantitative risk assessment of the effects of climate change on selected causes of death](#)

⁸ [SSMU: Sustainability Policy](#)

⁹ [SSMU: Equity Policy](#)

disproportionately affects low-income groups, people of colour, and Indigenous communities. As warming reaches 1.5 °C or greater, risks associated with food security, access to clean water, livelihood, health, and economic growth will only grow. The relationship between the climate crisis and equity is crucial and is referred to as Climate Justice.

3.1.3 Land Use and the Climate Crisis

The SSMU constitution commits the SSMU to demonstrate leadership in matters of Human Rights, social justice and environmental protection. When it comes to land use and its link to the climate crisis, the Society shall provide support to students campaigning against unchecked and nonconsensual land use. More specifically, as mandated by the Indigenous Solidarity Policy, the SSMU will act in solidarity of Indigenous students and communities.¹⁰

4.1. Climate Justice

The fight against the climate crisis is inextricable from a movement to combat systemic inequalities and the dominance of capitalist and colonialist paradigms in the Global North. The SSMU's efforts to combat the climate crisis must include the protection of human rights; respecting the right to development; ensuring transparency, accountability, and fair participation; addressing gender inequities, and emphasizing education and partnership¹¹. Groups affected the most are often lacking in representation within structures that make crucial decisions impacting the Earth's climate and ought to be granted more leniency in their progression to a low-carbon economy.

4.2. Causes

The climate crisis is unequivocally caused by human activity, namely by greenhouse gas emissions, atmospheric aerosols, and land-use change (e.g. land degradation)¹² as described by the last IPCC report: "Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals".¹³ Carbon emissions in particular are the responsibility of both consumers and producers. In this Policy, the Society details not only its commitment to reducing our consumptive

¹⁰[SSMU: Indigenous Solidarity Policy](#)

¹¹ [Mary Robinson Foundation Climate Justice: "Principles of Climate Justice"](#)

¹² [IPCC: "Climate Change and Land"](#)

¹³ [IPCC: "Summary report for Policy Makers" 2023](#)

impact, but also mandates those identified in Section 1 to challenge producers and the systems that allow them to function through the exploitation of natural resources.

4.2.1. Fossil Fuel Companies

By continuing large-scale exploration and extraction, lobbying governments, and influencing the media, fossil fuel companies worldwide currently act as a barrier to action on the climate crisis. For example, the Canadian fossil fuel lobby, one of the most active in the country, exerted massive pressure to amend legislation regulating their activities between 2011 and 2018.¹⁴

5. Framework

5.1. Principles for Advocacy

The Society will formally adopt a framework of climate justice, in accordance with its values and based fundamentally on anti-oppression. The Society will refer to the following framework when organizing around climate justice:

- a. **Anti-oppression.** The Society will organize initiatives centered on the recognition that climate change, extraction, and environmental destruction disproportionately impact the most vulnerable groups in society. The Society will strive to ensure that disproportionately affected communities are centered in environmental initiatives, and provide educational resources on the links between oppression and the climate crisis.
- b. **Solidarity.** The Society will act in meaningful solidarity by maintaining relationships with directly affected communities, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous groups in accordance with the Indigenous Solidarity Policy. Acting in solidarity includes, among other things, consulting groups before publicly discussing content related to their lived experience and providing every opportunity possible for groups to self-represent rather than being spoken for.

5.2. Just Transition

In light of the context and advocacy principles presented above, the Society will advocate for a timely transition away from fossil fuels with the goal of moving away from a catastrophic climate crisis fed by unchecked capitalism and colonialism, and toward a more equitable society. The SSMU shall root its

¹⁴ [Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: "Big Oil's Political Reach"](#)

climate initiatives in the recognition that the historical and ongoing burden of emissions is overwhelmingly carried by Global North countries like Canada, and it is these communities that must take responsibility, while the communities of the Global South are entitled to resources and technology to heighten their standard of living as they plan a transition to a low-carbon economy. The transition of the Global South towards a low-carbon economy should not be held to the same standards as the Global North and should receive different support, due to aforementioned colonial constraints, socioeconomic circumstances, and reduced responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.

6. Operations

6.1. Business Partnerships

The SSMU will, through purchasing and investment, support businesses that share our values and comply with provincial and federal environmental and labour laws.

6.1.1. Ethical Purchasing

The SSMU will prioritize the purchasing of products from companies that display a strong commitment to sustainability and adhere to the requirements of McGill's current Fair Trade Campus Certification designation.

6.1.2. Investment

The SSMU will continue to avoid all investments in the fossil fuel industry and follow guidelines outlined in previous Internal Regulations of the Society's Finances when it comes to socially responsible investments.¹⁵

6.2. Carbon Footprint

While recognizing and prioritizing the need for systemic action, the SSMU will strive to reduce our carbon footprint as reasonably possible and encourage the membership to do the same.

¹⁵ [SSMU: Internal Regulations of the Society's Finances](#)

6.2.1. Transportation

The SSMU will have greater accountability for its transportation impacts. It will promote opportunities for collective transportation to meetings and assemblies and encourage the usage of public transport whenever possible. Additionally, when applicable, teleconferencing will be a strong consideration in attendance at events to minimize carbon outputs. As it still contributes to carbon emissions, it is recommended to reduce video quality or switch it off completely when not necessary.

6.2.2. Events

As mentioned in the Sustainability Policy, events within SSMU shall reflect the training Event Administrators received by the Sustainability Commissioners as they will work together to identify events' climate impacts and how to mitigate them. Larger-scale events will make use of a carbon calculator, such as the McGill Office of Sustainability's McGill. The Society will work toward limiting those activities found to have an elevated carbon footprint, and will, when necessary, work toward offsetting remaining activities with carbon credits.

6.2.3. Waste and Energy Reduction

The SSMU will strive to minimize overall material consumption of the organization by investing in reusable supplies through a close collaboration and promotion of the Plate Club, using already owned supplies and following the Sustainability Policy when it comes to waste management concerns.¹⁶ The SSMU, as a joint effort led by the Sustainability & Operations Vice President and the Sustainability Commissioners, will also periodically conduct research into potential energy reductions in the University Centre and present the findings of this research to the Legislative Council.

6.3. Education

6.3.1. Research

The SSMU, through a collaboration between the Sustainability & Operations Vice President and the University Affairs Vice President, will lobby the University for increased research funding and internship opportunities in fields such as renewable energy that contribute to a just transition to a zero-carbon future. The SSMU will also support student-run research opportunities that assist

¹⁶ [SSMU: Sustainability Policy](#)

lobbying efforts as outlined in Section 7 such opportunities shall be advertised at least once per academic year through the Sustainability Corner on the Society's listserv

6.3.2. Showcasing Solutions

The Society will host or partner with events which aim to showcase the viability of alternative energy and job opportunities within the renewable energy sector at least once per academic year. It will be advertised by the Sustainability Commissioners during the annual SPOKES conference mentioned in the Sustainability Policy.¹⁷ It can also be promoted as the Sustainability Commissioners support or collaborate on events with concerned clubs such as McGill Energy Association or SEAM.

6.3.3. Support for Applied Student Research

The SSMU will seek to partner with on-campus actors that support applied student research in climate change initiatives such as the McGill Office of Sustainability and Teaching Staff.

6.3.4. Capacity Building

In line with the framework laid out in Section 2, the Society shall strive to foster better awareness and capacity to act within the McGill Community on the realities of the climate crisis, the need for urgent action, and its intersections with struggles against racism, austerity, inequality, capitalism, sexism and other social justice movements. This involves allocating resources for equity work and climate justice organizing, awareness campaigns around these subjects, and educational event series that teach anti-oppression and community organizing skills.

7. Advocacy and Mobilization

7.1. Advocacy

To support the push to keep warming at or below 1.5 °C, the Society will advocate for all institutions and communities to reach carbon neutrality by 2050. This goal is crucial as the IPCC makes it a requirement to stay below 1.5°C of global warming.¹⁸ The Society will actively oppose fossil fuel

¹⁷ [SSMU: Sustainability Policy](#)

¹⁸ [IPCC: Global Warming of 1.5°C](#)

extraction or distribution projects that are being conducted without the free, prior, and informed consent of the Indigenous communities whose lands they affect.

7.1.1. Lobbying

The SSMU will advocate for solutions to address the climate crisis in communities and at all governmental levels. This should include: community renewable energy projects, fair, ambitious, and binding carbon pricing systems, and initiatives contributing to more sustainable food systems. This may be done independently or in conjunction with other organized groups campaigning for climate justice (e.g. *Rage Climatique*, *La planète s'invite au parlement*)

7.2. Tactics

The Campaign Coordinators from the External Department, in its mandate to mobilize the student body, shall support a diversity of tactics such as grassroots movements or land-based indigenous resistance efforts needed to address the climate crisis effectively and equitably, in line with the framework in Section 2 and in recognition of the context presented in Section 1. In particular, it shall support the following groups insofar as they pressure various institutions to take action on the climate crisis:

7.2.1. Fossil Fuel and Human Rights Divestment

Fossil fuel divestment has been the most visible tactic towards the goals of climate justice supported by the Society. SSMU divested its funds from fossil fuels in 2013 and in December 2023 McGill University's Board of Governors decided to divest from fossil fuels by 2025. The Society will support student groups pressuring the University to meet its commitments. Furthermore, the SSMU has actively supported the autonomous Divest McGill campaign through funding, outreach assistance, space booking, and task completion as needed through the Campaigns Coordinators and Vice-President (External Affairs) and will continue to do so inline with its Divest for Human Rights Policy.¹⁹ The Society shall continue to assist in these ways and coordinate initiatives between campus divestment campaigns.

7.2.2. Emission Reduction

Within the University context, emission reduction takes the form of divestment from fossil fuels. The Society shall support student groups campaigning for emission reduction through

¹⁹ [SSMU: Divest for Human Rights Policy](#)

Association étudiante de l'Université McGill
Students' Society of McGill University

Située sur les territoires traditionnels des collectivités Haudenosaunee et Anishinaabe.
Located on Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe, traditional territories.

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