On Campus

New Committee to Evaluate Fossil-Fuel Funding

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Eileen Barroso

In a major step toward answering questions regarding its use of fossil-fuel-industry funds for research, Columbia University has appointed a committee to evaluate the issue and to put forward recommendations for consideration.

Concerns about the potential undue influence of the fossil-fuel industry on academic research have been reported in the press and in scholarly publications in recent years. And while Columbia's conflict-of-interest policies address these concerns to some degree, they do not answer the question of whether funding from fossil-fuel companies should receive special scrutiny.

The new faculty committee will consider questions such as: Going forward, should Columbia receive support from fossil-fuel companies for its research? What are the potential risks and benefits of doing so? Does the type of research in question matter? Do all fossil-fuel companies warrant the same approach? In addition, the committee will consider what criteria should be used to assess fossil-fuel funding opportunities as they arise, and whether broad guidance can be developed to stand in for case-by-case evaluation.

The committee, to be chaired by arts dean Sarah Cole and engineering professor Keren Bergman, is expected to issue a final report by the fall of 2025. To carry out this work, the committee will seek input from students and student groups, faculty, researchers, and other constituents from across the University.



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