

In 2015 The New School's Board of Trustees approved a motion to divest from fossil fuels, making The New School the second largest university in the country to do so. Compared to many other colleges debating divestment, this decision came quickly. It was an issue raised by students, and supported by faculty, staff, and the university's Advisory Committee on Investor Responsibility. For many, the moral argument in favor of removing university endowment funds from investments in fossil fuels was clear and easily supported. Ultimately, the crux of much debate at The New School was the question "Is divestment enough?"

Divestment was a mostly symbolic action the university would take to address the climate crisis. The New School is not the place, however, for symbolic action alone. The Board of Trustees challenged the university to really walk the walk: to become the place and space for climate action rooted in social justice. The Board called for an expanded array of courses on climate change and climate justice, additional research and projects focusing on environmental challenges from design and policy perspectives, and review of our organizational culture and operations to identify opportunities for scalable change. This Climate Action Plan catalogues The New School's ongoing efforts and goals to reduce our climate impacts and advance solutions both in terms of university operations and academic pursuits.

I joined The New School in November 2013, just as talks and debate around divestment were gaining traction. Coming from the U.S. EPA where I served as Assistant Administrator for International and Tribal Affairs, I was proud to be joining an institution with a commitment to sustainability and social justice, and eager to support climate action on campus.

This is an era in which the causes of climate change are well known, the effects are already being felt -- most often by those who are most vulnerable: the poor, people of color, women, children, and the elderly -- and the time to act is now. As purveyors of knowledge, information, and ideas, institutions of higher education have a responsibility to contribute to climate action through research, education, and community engagement that will help society reduce greenhouse gas emissions and advance socially just and equitable solutions for the many effects of climate change. The New School is committed to being a preeminent intellectual and creative center leading the effort to address climate change, a defining issue of our age. This Climate Action Plan represents the steps we are taking post-divestment. It lays out a path toward carbon neutrality and a plan for engaging The New School's students, faculty, and staff in climate action and justice.

Michelle DePass

Dean, Milano School of International Affairs, Management, and Urban Policy

Director, Tishman Environment and Design Center

Tishman Professor of Environmental Policy and Management