October Meeting

At a meeting of the Advisory Committee on Socially Responsible Investing, held on October 14, 2015 in Garden Room 2 at the Faculty House, the following members participated:

- Michael Apfel
- Marshall Bozeman
- April Croft (non-voting)
- Stephen Christensen
- Alessandra Giannini
- Paul Goldschmid
- Jeffrey Gordon, Chair
- Brennon Mendez
- Sameer Mishra
- Gail O’Neill
- Ailsa Röell
- Maureen Ryan
- Anne Sullivan (non-voting)
- Ramon Verastegui

The following members of the administration were also in attendance:
- Gail Hoffman
- Colin Redhead

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m.

Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the May 5, 2015 and September 16, 2015 meetings.

Acceleration of Tobacco Screening Process
The Committee approved voting on the tobacco noninvestment list in November rather than waiting until February/March.

Veteran’s Day Conflict with November 11 Meeting
The committee members were polled to see if the November 11th meeting is a conflict with Veteran’s Day. There were no conflicts relating to the holiday.

Anne Sullivan commended the Committee on its work and its efforts to try to propose a new way forward beyond evaluating student proposals. She commented that it takes more time to carve a new path.

Presentation of Fossil Fuel Divestment Proposal by Student Group, Columbia Divest for Climate Justice (CDCJ)
In response to an invitation by the chair, a student delegation from the Columbia Divest for Climate Justice formally presented their proposal calling for Columbia’s divestment of stocks in the Carbon Underground.
The student presentation, which followed up on a previously submitted written presentation attached to these minutes, included these elements:

- The student delegation said that they would not accept compromise on their proposal, i.e., partial divestment rather than the full divestment called for in the CDCJ proposal. They specifically rejected the approach attributed to the Committee of “stand up for science” [divestment targeted at companies that “deny” climate change by “word” or “deed”] for this reason. They said that one cannot demonize certain fossil fuel companies while upholding others.
- The students said that the ACSRI is the voice of Columbia and that divestment changes people’s minds. The students continued that “Big Oil and Gas” supports political leaders so these companies will not support transitioning to renewables. The students commented that Columbia can be a leader and should use its power as a global institution to change attitudes about climate change.
- The students said that renewables will never have a level playing field until fossil fuel subsidies end. They felt that Columbia is doing great research, but its research is being undermined by the University’s investments.
- The students said that civil disobedience could follow if their proposal is rejected.

**Question & Answer**
The students presented for approximately 40 minutes. Thereafter several Committee members raised questions which led to a 45 minute discussion with the students that included discussion on the following:

- Why does a divestment campaign by Columbia have any effect on the underlying issue? Will a symbolic statement by a University affect political leaders? Why not contact legislators directly?
- Why is divestment the preferred solution? Divestment means you cannot engage with the company and another investor can purchase the investments that Columbia sells.
- Why not focus on utilities that are not transitioning to renewables?

**Follow-up Discussion on Student Presentation**
The committee members discussed the role of the University’s internal endowment management process versus the role of ACSRI. In general the endowment managers seek to maximize returns with acceptable risk. However, there may be times when ACSRI will look at a particular company or a sector to determine if such an investment would conflict with the University’s mission or its obligations as a “socially responsible investor.” The Committee’s responsibility is to look at ethical and social concerns relating to the management of the investments.
The Committee then discussed various options relating to the CDCJ proposal. These included:

- approve the student proposal
- revisit the “stand up for science” approach
- explore divesting from coal and tar sands companies
- recommend to the Trustees to invest in renewables / alternatives
- recommend to the Trustees to create an ESG Fund

The Committee took straw polls to determine where the members stood on these various possibilities.

**Next Steps**

- Gordon will work with Sullivan and Goldschmid to obtain research and data that might be valuable to define review criteria for fossil fuel divestment.
- Giannini will draft a summary of the CDCJ proposal and organize a follow-up discussion for the Fossil Fuel subcommittee to work on a report as a basis for a committee vote on the student proposal.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
April B. Croft
Associate Director
ACSRI