How to research fossil[1] ties at your university[2]

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www.mappingfossilties.org

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[1] Or military, or agrobusiness, or whatever

[2] Or other public institution

Introduction

We assume you know why ties between the fossil industry and your university (or other institution) should be transparent. This handbook is about **how** to find what ties exist.

This handbook starts with some general advice, then looks at practical approaches to finding ties. The rest is useful references: related initiatives you can reach out to, links to info or resources, and a glossary for legal and academic terms.

This manual is based on our experience with researching fossil ties in the Netherlands – some parts might not apply to your situation. We are happy with any suggestions and additions.

General

Researching fossil ties is a large undertaking. Consider forming a group to work on this topic together. You can join an existing group[3] or gather motivated people to start a group together.

Scope and Position

With your research group, determine the scope & purpose of your research and make sure this matches with your level of commitment and time available:

- What is your focus (which faculty/ies, which company/ies or organisations, will you include interest/lobby groups and other organisations active in the fossil fuel industry, or even banks that fund fossil exploration?)
- How deep do you want to go (do you want to just document the ties, do you aim to also investigate the story behind particular ties)?
- Are you looking to make an exhaustive list, or to document the most interesting/controversial/news-worthy ties that you can find?
- Your focus can be guided by what is a hot topic right now. Is there a lot of media attention on Tata Steel and do you expect that it will stay that way for a few months? Then you might want to make sure Tata Steel is on your list - more chance that your research will be picked up by news media or action groups.

Be aware of risks to your personal reputation and your relationship with the university -- universities will not always be happy with critique and possible news articles, effect on their ratings and financials. Do you want to stay anonymous?

[3] Activist groups such as End Fossil - Occupy!, Scientists4Future, Scientist Rebellion or University Rebellion are a good place to start looking - reach out to their chapter at your university. Otherwise campus newspapers sometimes have reporters who specialise in this sort of thing. Check if your university has any academics working on this, too.

Is your goal to provide an overview of fossil ties and to uncover news-worthy issues, or also to to campaign for cutting ties? Consider how to position yourself and communicate accordingly, e.g. as neutral researchers looking for transparency, or as an action group aiming to cut the ties.

What to publish?

Try to double check information before you publish (about) it: just because something is on a university website doesn't mean that it is correct – it may be outdated, for example.

In the Mapping Fossil Ties database, we have an internal **four-eyes principle** (one person inputs data and a second must review it and check the source before publishing), and we also provide an email address, in case a reader spots a mistake. If we have reliable public sources for the data (e.g. reliable news articles and/or recently-updated official web pages) then we display the data. If not, we work on collecting evidence, and also contact the person or organisation in question to allow them the chance to respond. Only then do we publish the data.

Be sensitive to researchers and individuals in general: even if you think someone is immoral for working with/for a fossil company in the way they do, they might see things differently. You may also be reliant on the good will of researchers or company employees to provide you information – if they think you are working "against" them, they won't be inclined to help.

In the Mapping Fossil Ties database, we only name heads of research groups, departments or board members (since postdocs, doctoral candidates and students typically have little choice or influence on external funding, so are not journalistically relevant), and we **never publish or link to any personal data** (e.g. home address, private phone number) that could lead to an infringement on an academics personal life, or harassment[4] . The latter is a very important point – publishing personal data with the purpose of intimidation (doxxing) is punishable by law, and while we are not intimidating anyone, we don't want it to look even remotely like that, or make it possible for others to do so.

[4] See our full policy at this link, under "How do you ensure that privacy of academics weighs against public interest?"

Finally, **keep an eye on the media** and publish what they are interested in picking up on. Is ConocoPhillips in the news because of the Willow Project, or RWE because of Lützerath? Are external professorships a hot topic? Talk to journalists (including campus journalists) and find out what they are interested in.

Approach 1: Web Search

You can find some fossil ties just by searching the web! You can use this information as it is, or as a starting point for an FOI request or to find people to interview.

A) Do a web search

It's evil and everything, but Google is still the best search engine out there. **Use advanced search** such as:

- **Searching within a webpage**, e.g. `site:wur.nl Shell` (to search all hits for the term Shell, only within the website of WUR)
- **Quotes**, e.g. `"Royal Dutch Shell"` (to search for pages which contain the entire phrase "Royal Dutch Shell")
- **Excluding terms** with a minus sign, e.g. `BP -"blood pressure"` (Here it searches all the times BP shows up but not when it refers to blood pressure. Make sure there is no space between the minus sign and the term you want to exclude.)
- Looking at hits only within a certain **time frame**. You can do this by clicking on "tools" under the search bar, and selecting a custom time frame
- Use tools like web crawlers (see below)

B) Save your results

Keep track of your results in e.g. a shared Google Sheet[5], to ensure that people in your research team don't research the same thing twice. You can divide up the search, for example by fossil organisation, to avoid double work. Think about which info you want to collect before starting your research.

C) Preserve the evidence

Finally, make sure you keep sources/links for everything you find, and **webarchive weblinks**, so that the information is still available even if the owner of the website changes or removes it.

[5] For Mapping Fossil Ties we use a Google Sheet. Contact us if you want to know what ours looks like.

Here is a link[6] to the Wayback Machine, a commonly used webarchive. Note that some websites, such as LinkedIn, do not always webarchive well – this is due to the websites taking measures against web crawlers. If your page fails to webarchive, or gives an error, try another webarchive such as archive.today . If you want to be absolutely sure that the archiving worked, open a new browser window and paste in the archived URL to check. If absolutely nothing works, you can right-click a website and select 'print' and then 'print to PDF' to save a PDF copy of the website.

Tips on finding information:

- Search uni website, check profile pages of employees for previous work, and current ancillary activities
- Search Linkedin pages to find people's past connections/employments
- Search websites from funding agencies, such as NWO
- Search the university archive if you have access
- Search google scholar/websites such as ResearchGate (see below)
- distill.io and visualping alert you to changes in the website (we've never used these but they could be helpful)

Google Scholar

This is a search engine which searches **academic papers and patents** (you need to check a box on the left to search patents). A few cases where it is useful is:

1. **You suspect that an academic works together** with a particular fossil fuel company. You put that academic's name in plus the company name, and you get papers and patents where their name appears as well as the company. This can be:
    a. in the acknowledgments ("this work was partially funded by a grant from ExxonMobil..."");
    b. in the author affiliations, if the academic has a co-author from that particular fossil fuel company;

[6] To save a page on this web archive, click the link, then enter your link (e.g. wur.nl) in the 'save page now' box. Click 'save page' and copy the link (e.g. https://web.archive.org/web/20210909101924/https://www.wur.nl/) into your overview. There is also an extension you can install for the Chrome browser, which makes it very easy to webarchive pages.

    c. a patent is filed by a company in the academic's name, like this one filed by TotalEnergies with academic Gadi Rothenberg (UvA) as an inventor
    d. a mention of the company in a published paper by the academic, or of the academic in a published paper by the company.
2. you want to see if there are **any links at all between a university and a company**. This is likely to yield a lot of results (papers with authors from the university and the company, papers funded by a grant from the company, papers mentioning the company for any reason) so it's only really useful for **obscure companies** or where there are expected to be **few links**. We did this while looking at unis working with tobacco companies, for example, which universities don't work much with any more.
3. You know that an academic got a grant, and you want to find out **what that grant went towards (patents, papers, direction of research).** For example, Estella A. Atekwana got a 4-year, 1.1M$ grant from Chevron. You can go to Google Scholar and search for her name + Chevron. On the first hit, scrolling to the acknowledgments, you see a grant number. Searching her name and the grant number yields 18 papers, dating between 2013 and 2019 with a few later. That's about right for a grant of that size in her field so it would be a good guess that that is the grant. Clicking on some of the papers and reading the acknowledgments makes this apparent.
4. You want to check an individual's academic publications, to see **what topics they publish** on (e.g. they may hold a chair of sustainability but publish on fossil topics). You can often click on the author in the search results and go to "their" page, where you can search in their publications and sort by date. You can also use ResearchGate for this.
5. You can check who cited an article to try and find **networks of fossil-involved researchers**. For example, these are the papers that cited Comment on "How Green is Blue Hydrogen". This is a non-peer review comment published by a lot of fossil-involved researchers to try and cast doubt on a peer reviewed paper questioning the claim that blue hydrogen has a low environmental impact.

Web crawlers

You can use programmes to speed up and help with your web search. Web crawlers, web spiders and web scrapers are all examples of these. Don't be put off by the technical-sounding language - they can be easy to use!

You can use a **web crawler**, or **'web spider'** to systematically search websites. You give it the website(s) you want to search and a list of "search terms" – words or phrases like "Shell" or "Aramco" that mean a page is interesting for you. The web crawler will make an index of pages where the search terms were found. You can then further investigate these links.

With a **web scraper**, you can let the bot create a document with specific information taken from the searched pages. This works for extracting information from several pages that have a similar structure. For example, you can identify where certain information is placed on a website (let's say NWO website) and let the scraper take the info you need (for example the size of a project and the involved parties) from each page and put it in a spreadsheet for you .

If you have $50, Visual Web Spider is a useful tool and works on Windows. You can download a trial to see if it is worth your while. Be aware that one licence only works on one computer – so if you are in a team, install it on a computer that all of you can access.

If you can spare the time and effort though, you can use our web spider based on scrapy. It gives you a lot more control and if you're handy with Python, you can modify it for your own needs. **If you're not sure if your technical skills are up to the task, give us a call or an email, and we can help you!**

Approach 2: Crowdsourcing (via online form)

You can create a simple online form using Framaforms (Google alternative) or Google Forms, and circulate this as broadly as you can – through an article in university media, passing on to friends, in your activist network, printing out a QR code and pinning it up somewhere (e.g. during relevant events).

Make sure the form can be filled in anonymously. But ask people to leave contact details if they are okay with that so that you can contact them for potential follow-up questions.

Think through what information you need and check in which way you can best structure the form so that:

A) It takes **minimum time and effort** to fill in the form,
B) The results are **easy to analyse** and add to your overview of fossil ties. Both Framaforms and Google Forms allow you to output the results as a spreadsheet, and you can make sure the fields (e.g. "Start date of collaboration", "type of collaboration") and the formats (e.g. of dates or amounts of money) are consistent between the form results spreadsheet and your overview of fossil ties).

Here is our form, for inspiration.

Make sure you **check the info that comes in carefully**, and have a source (like an archived web page – see previous section) that you can refer to in case you want to publish the information.

Approach 3: Interviews/field research

You can gather information by talking/listening to people.

A) Be in the right places

By going to relevant events and meetings, and being in relevant online channels, you can learn a lot: you can discover ties, get tips for where to further investigate, and understand how the university and its staff work and who they interact with. If there are in-person discussions on fossil ties, go there and talk to people afterwards. By building a network, you can reach more and – hopefully – the right people to talk to.

B) Find the right people to speak to

You can ask people for an interview – which does not necessarily have to be a structured interview, but can also be a conversation where you "pick their brain".

Interviews can give you a lot of information and directions in which you can research further. If someone ignores or declines your interview requests, that also can be cause to research this person further – maybe they have something to hide?

C) Build trust

Build trust with your sources, promise confidentiality (never give away the name of your source, consider signing a contract), so that people will be comfortable with sharing information with you (while for example they remain anonymous).

Be careful about your channels of communication. Some of your contacts may not feel comfortable using their university/work email to talk about topics related to fossil ties – ask them what things you can talk about in their university email and what things you should use a private (secure) email for, or a secure messenger app like Signal.

D) Stay up to date on current events

It is helpful to stay up to date on discussions taking place at universities and to read statements that the university is putting out, to understand their narrative. Your contacts (e.g. in the university administration) can give you tips or maybe even inside information on discussions happening behind closed doors.

Approach 4: Freedom of Information request (aka FOI, WOO, or WOB)

Almost all countries in Europe have a "Freedom of Information" (FOI) law. In the Netherlands, this is the "Wet Open Overheid" or WOO, formerly known as the "Wet Openbare Bestuur", or WOB. For other countries see this section - we will focus on the Netherlands here.

The FOI request, or "WOO-verzoek" is a powerful tool, allowing an individual to see documents at any government body. That includes most universities[7]. However, it requires preparation and patience. Below are just some quick pointers, if you're thinking of doing a request, please get in touch with us, or speak to someone else who has experience with this.

Think about:

- What kind of documents or other pieces do you want to receive? Do you know of specific documents that you want to read? What about communication, like emails or text messages?
- Which kind of relationships are you interested in? Funded projects? Part-time professors? Memoranda of Understanding?
- Who will hand in the request and be the main contact person for the request and who would fill in when that person is not available? You can file an authorisation form ('machtiging' in Dutch) for the backup person. It can be useful to file the request from an email address that another person or other people have access to when necessary.

[7] All publically funded universities (institutions) are subject to the Wet Open Overheid (WOO) and you can send them a freedom of information request, which they are obliged to respond to. All universities in the Netherlands are publically funded universities subject to the WOO, except the VU, Radboud and Tilburg University. Although they receive public funds, the VU, Radboud and Tilburg University are not public entities and thus not subject to WOO - though you can try! Be aware also that some universities have constructions that make it hard or impossible to request information via WOO-verzoek. For example, Wageningen University is a separate (public: WOO-able) entity from the Wageningen Research (private: not WOO-able) entity. Rotterdam School of Management is part of Erasmus University Rotterdam (WOO-able), but Rotterdam School of Management B.V. is not woo-able!

Bear in mind:

- The university can only provide existing documents or other pieces of evidence, they are not obliged to create new documents, such as lists.
- The university can only provide information about their own activities, for example student associations are separate entities and make their own decisions.
- It will take a long time to hear back from them, with a lot of back and forth:
    - Officially, they need to respond within 4 weeks (they can ask for 2 weeks of extension because of the size of the request), but if they may exceed their deadlines. You may also need to make a legal complaint. Count on at least 4 months, up to 12 months.
    - Make sure there is documentation of all your contact with the university, so that you can refer to this if they do not adhere to agreements. This is particularly important if you would take the case to court.
    - Show that you are willing to cooperate and be flexible with the university. This will make sure the relationship with the university stays positive and will also look good if you would go to court at a later stage.
    - The government body must list all documents pertaining to your request, but if a document mentions an external party – such as a company – they may need to ask its permission to share that information. The external party may ask for parts or the whole document to be redacted[8] because of reasons of privacy or 'business interest'. Asking for this review or 'zienswijze' from external parties can take 4 weeks or more – there is no official limit for that.
- Do your research: make your request specific enough to ensure you get the answers you need, but include all possibilities so that they can not withhold pieces of information (because then they can say 'you didn't ask specifically for that detail').
- Define a list of companies or organisations in the fossil industry, about which you want to ask your university. If you're not entirely sure that you can make an exhaustive list, you can say "including, but not limited to". However, they might ask you to be more specific and even reject your request if you can't specify. Then you might need to go to court and fight the rejection. To avoid this, you can try to provide an exhaustive list – this may save you time at the risk of not getting all results.
- If you are asking for multiple sets of documents, make a numbered list and write a separate request under each number. There are multiple possible exceptions to the Woo

[8] If more than 80% of the document is redacted, the whole document can be withheld.

(Woo Article 5.1) that the university can use to deny part of a request. If you later want to appeal a decision on any of the requests, it's helpful if each request is as specific and detached as possible.

How to analyse FOI results

FOI results will likely be a big batch of documents. It is helpful to divide the work between multiple people - but make sure everyone on your team knows what they are looking for and that you agree on a **common methodology** to file, sort and flag. Example of shared approach. You can use software to help you with the analysis, such as Pinpoint - a research tool from Google Journalist Studio (recommended to us by ARIA - our main funder).

- You can use **smart searches** (e.g. 'fossiel' will also give results back such as 'fossil' - but somehow not the other way around, so be careful with this)
- Identify **common entities** (give a list of most common people, organisations and locations found in the documents)
- You can **label documents** (name of fossil party, research theme. but potentially also type of document, type of tie, how important a document is)
- Searches for text **within images** (will help a bit with identifying logos) and audio files
- You can convert similarly-structured documents into **spreadsheets**
- When you **highlight** something, it will create a specific URL so that it's easy to find
- Audio files are **automatically transcribed** and searched for keywords

Related initiatives

Fossil ties

In the Netherlands we have the Mapping Fossil Ties Coalition, which we (authors) are part of.

In the UK, USA and Canada, Fossil Free Research is active, both in investigating fossil ties as well as campaigning for cutting these ties. They also created a useful Research Guide.

LittleSis created 'A Field Guide to Identifying Fossil Fuel Industry Presence on Campus'.

Other sorts of ties

The Rights Forum and the Palestine solidarity student movement investigate Dutch universities' ties with Israeli institutions, and campaign to cut these ties in light of Israeli human rights violations towards Palestinians.

Mark Akkerman (Stop Wapenhandel and the Transnational Institute (TNI)) investigates European university involvement with military and security companies. As well as ties with (mainly) military and security companies, he looks at the EU-level involvement of universities in border security and control (including EU-pushed border externalisation to non-EU-countries)[9]. Mark chooses to look deeper into only a few key universities, since at least a few hundred European universities are involved in such work. In terms of methodology, Mark offers the following sources and tips:

Ties can include:

- meetings with authorities (see transparency registers)
- participation in official advisory and expert groups,
- academics with functions at companies,
- participation in arms and security fairs, conferences and congresses organised by industry or the authorities,

[9] Often this does include cooperation, for example in consortia for research projects with EU funding from the Framework Programmes (currently Horizon Europe (2021-27)).

- or the other way around: participation by companies in academic meetings
- sponsorships, scholarships, internships (regular, not one-offs), visits to companies etc.
- direct teaching work (e.g. Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management – Frontex + several universities)
- structural ties (ie Frontex Partnership Academies Network)
- universities als subcontractors, for example for projects of International Organisation for Migration (IOM) which are funded by the EU or national governments

Universities involved:

- most technical universities (depending on their curriculum) will be involved in military work/have ties with military companies
- other studies might be involved as well, for example on issues of policy-making, strategy, statistics, forecasting, behaviour and so on
- spin-off companies from universities (trying to market technologies developed at universities, often also located at universities)

General:

- for EU funded research (Framework Programmes), cordis.europa.eu gives information about all projects, including consortia partners and the money they get (in most cases);
- for contracts via tenders (both on EU level and for international tenders on member states' level) see ted.europa.eu
- many other ties need a lot of work to research, for example by sifting through websites of universities, companies and authorities (in this case, Frontex for example)
- also worth to look at how this kind of work and cooperation should be judged in the light of ethical guidelines on university level (but these are often bendable)
- naming and shaming can be very effective

If you have any questions or tips on military/security ties of universities – contact Mark Akkerman.

Useful links

On methodology

- Netherlands Press Council (RvdJ) Guidelines
- Report from Changerism to see how they set up their research into the fossil ties of the Rotterdam School of Management (part of the Erasmus University Rotterdam) in 2017

On campaigning

- Fossil Free Universities – The quick guide to a successful campaign

Information on FOI/WOO requests

- In the Netherlands: de WOO-knop
- In Germany: Frag den Staat
- In the UK: What Do They Know?

Investigative journalism platforms (list non-exhaustive)

- Platform Authentieke Journalistiek (NL)
- Investico (NL)
- Follow the Money (NL)
- Het Financieele Dagblad (NL)
- Nu.nl (NL)
- The Investigative Desk (international)
- DeSmog (international, UK, US)

Glossary (English and Dutch)

Academic

A term for anybody in a research position at a university (and sometimes also at a research institute), from doctoral candidate to full professor.

Academic Freedom

Defined by Britannica as "the freedom … to teach, study, and pursue knowledge and research without unreasonable interference or restriction from law, institutional regulations, or public pressure."

Proponents of collaboration with the fossil industry often argue that cutting ties impinges on academic freedom: researchers would no longer be free to set up projects with their preferred partners, or may be denied access to equipment (belonging to fossil organisations) essential for their direction of research. Opponents counter that cutting ties can be good for academic freedom, since it relieves academics of the need to research what the (fossil) collaborator or funder is interested in, and can lead to less (self-) censorship due to conflicts of interest with a funder. In practice, academic freedom is always constrained to some extent - researchers are bound by ethics committees, for example.

Adjunct

A term used for an academic in a very temporary contract (usually less than a year)

Assistant Professor

A junior professor

Associate Professor

A professor, slightly less junior than an assistant professor

Bijzondere leerstoel

A research chair funded by an external party. The professor is still entitled to use the word "professor", teach, and supervise students, but the funding for their appointment comes from outside the university, for example a company or foundation.

Bilateral

With two parties (e.g. a university and a company).

Carbon Capture & Storage (CCS), Carbon Capture and Utilisation (CCU), Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR)

- CCS refers to processes that directly capture CO2 emissions from "point sources", i.e. from fossil fuel use or industrial processes, with the CO2 subsequently being stored for a long period.
- CCU refers to processes that after capture, utilise the CO2 in secondary processes such as synthetic fuels, chemicals and materials.
- CDR, by contrast, refers to processes that remove CO2 from the atmosphere instead of simply reducing what is added/emitted, and if combined with long-term storage can result in negative emissions.

Distinctions need to be made between the roles and system values of CCS, CCU and CDR. The total impact on atmospheric CO2 concentration in the next few decades is the key criterion; while CCS and CCU technologies can "reduce" adding additional CO2 to the atmosphere, CDR technologies actually "remove" CO2 emissions from the atmosphere (IRENA, 2021).

While forms of CCS, CCU and CDR will be necessary to reach net-zero emissions for certain sectors (according to for example IRENA, 2021) , it should not be used as an excuse to keep using fossil fuels and emitting CO2 (see for example this open letter).

Casual

Informal labour without a secure, permanent contract

Catalyst/Catalysis

Catalysis means "speeding up or enabling a chemical reaction", a chemical that does this is called a catalyst. It can be any chemical reaction, but reactions used in oil or chemicals refineries make use of catalysts. See also Fischer-Tropsch process.

Consortium

A group of organisations working together, usually in the context of a research project. It can be only universities, only companies, or a mixture of universities, companies and/or other organisations (such as NGOs, museums, research organisations, etc.)

Crawler – see web crawler

Doctoral Candidate
A researcher working towards their PhD (aka. doctorate)

Externe leerstoel – see bijzondere leerstoel

Fischer-Tropsch Process
A series of chemical reactions used for making liquid hydrocarbons, such as synthetic fuel, out of coal. See Wikipedia.

FOI (request)
Freedom of Information (FOI) laws exist in almost every democratic country. Usually, they allow anyone to see documents or information from public institutions (like many universities). I

Fossil fuel
These are fuels – coal, oil, natural gas and peat – that come from the remains of fossilized plants and animals . The reason that fossil fuels are so dangerous is because when they are burned, they release carbon into the atmosphere which
They are also sometimes referred to as `petrochemicals`, or `hydrocarbons`, even though this term includes non-fossil fuels

Full professor
A senior professor (Dutch: *hoogleraar*), usually with tenure.

Geheimhoudingsverklaring – see non-disclosure agreement (NDA)

Geldstroom (1st, 2nd, 3rd)
In the Netherlands, funding streams can be classified as:
1st stream (1e geldstroom) – funding direct from the government

2nd stream (2e geldstroom) – funding via national funding organisations such as NWO or KNAW
3rd stream (3e geldstroom) – all other funding. This can be EU funding, or funding from companies, NGO, museums, etc.

Geo-engineering
Technologies that aim to influence the climate in a way that is intended to counteract the effects of global warming. Examples are cloud seeding (to produce rain) and arctic refreezing.

Proponents point out that drastic measures are necessary to prevent the earth reaching tipping points. Skeptics point out that use of geo-engineering could be used as an "excuse" to delay phase-out of fossil fuels (see also CCS), and that certain technologies have not been tested at scale.

Hoor en Wederhoor – see rebuttal

Hydrocarbon
A chemical that is made entirely out of the elements hydrogen and carbon. In the context of fossil fuels: coal, oil and gas and the products of these (e.g. after refining).

Intellectual Property (IP)
Knowledge or understanding, sometimes including documentation, sometimes patents. It is typical that, when a researcher is working at an organisation (it could be a company, university, or research institution) that the inventions and intellectual work that they produce as a result of their employment belong to the organisation as its IP.

Lakken – see redact

Lecturer – see assistant professor

Letter of Intent
Sometimes, before getting funding for a project, funders want to see that the outcomes will be useful. An industry partner may be asked to write a "letter of intent", essentially stating that they would be willing to invest in the project if the funder also invests. There are other contexts in which a "letter of intent" is used.

Leerstoel – see research chair

Machtiging/Authorisation form

A 'machtiging' authorises someone else to act on your behalf in administrative proceedings. Here an example of a Dutch machtiging, which you fill out, sign and send to the university staff that you are in contact with about an FOI request.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

An agreement between two parties (it could be two research institutions, or a company and a university, for example) about how they will work together. For example, what information, intellectual property (IP), or human resources they will share.

Memorandum van Overeenkomst – see Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Multilateral

With multiple (usually more than 2) parties, for example a cooperation between two universities, a company, and a research institute like TNO.

Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA)

An agreement that a party will not pass on or publish certain confidential information or intellectual property that they might have access to. It is often used in cooperations between researchers and companies, so that researchers working on a project with the company will not divulge "company secrets" or intellectual property (IP).

Petrochemical

Chemicals derived from petroleum. Oil and gas companies sometimes call themselves `petrochemical companies` as a euphemism. see Wikipedia to read more details.

PhD Candidate – see doctoral candidate

Postdoc

An informal term used to refer to a researcher who has a PhD, but isn't (yet) a professor. They are often under a lot of pressure to publish in prestigious journals, get third-party funding, get

good evaluations for their taught courses, and set up workshops and research collaborations – so that they can get a professorial position.

PPS

"Privaat-publieke samenwerking" – cooperation between a public body such as a university, and a company.

Promovenda/Promovendus – see Doctoral Candidate

Reader

A term used in the UK to mean something like associate professor

Rebuttal

Allowing people or organisations, whom you accuse of something, the opportunity to respond before publication. This isn't relevant for reporting of a factual nature, such as reproducing publicly available documents or minutes of a public meeting. It is fundamental to the Netherlands Press Council code of conduct. Here is the Wikipedia article (in Dutch).

Redact

Information withheld from your freedom of information request, usually by blacking out part of the document. This can be for a variety of reasons – companies may argue that it harms their competitiveness to reveal certain information, such as the exact amount of a payment.

Refining/Refinery

The process of converting crude oil (oil in the state that it comes out of the ground) into products such as kerosene (aircraft fuel), diesel (car and generator fuel), tar (or bitumen, used for many things), and other products.

Research chair

A research group headed by a senior professor. Sometimes these can be externally funded, see bijzondere leerstoel

Researcher

Anyone who conducts research – can work for a company, a research institution (such as TNO) or a university. See also: academic

Scraper – see web scraper

Spider – see web spider

Spin-off
A term for a company that develops out of research conducted at a university or research institute. Sometimes, academics work part-time at the spin-off company and part-time at the original institution. Spin-offs are often encouraged by the institution since they are assumed to show that the research is useful (since it can be commercialised), and can sometimes be a metric in evaluating certain research groups or institutes.

Stream (1st, 2nd, 3rd) – see geldstroom

Stroom – see geldstroom

Tenure
A professor with tenure has a permanent contract at the university and cannot be fired easily. It allows them more academic freedom without the continual pressure to publish and find third-party funding – though that doesn't mean they aren't under stress! They still need to manage a team of researchers and all the research projects they have, as well as teaching duties.

Tenure-track
Prior to achieving tenure, academics may be employed on a trial basis for a few years (typically 4-5). During these years, they need to prove to the university that they are worthy of keeping as a tenured professor. This means that they are often under immense pressure to publish research in prestigious journals, get third-party funding, get good evaluations for their taught courses, and set up workshops and research collaborations. Their official position may be "associate professor" or "assistant professor", in Dutch, "universitair hoofddocent".

Web crawler

A computer program which automates searching the web. Same as a web spider except "crawler" is also used to refer to search-engine crawlers which index websites.

Web scraper

A computer program that tries to get useful data out of a website or websites. This is not per se illegal, but you should take care to avoid collecting personal data.

Web spider

A computer program which automates searching the web. Usually used interchangeably with a web crawler (a crawler is often a broader term).

WOB (Wet Openbaarheid van Bestuur)

The Dutch freedom of information law, superseded by the WOO in May 2022. Read the text here.

WOO (Wet Open Overheid)

The Dutch freedom of information law, from May 2022. Read the text here.

Zienswijze

If there are any documents related to your FOI request which contain information about another party (such as a company) that might be sensitive, the legal team dealing with your FOI request will inform the company and give them the chance to request that part of the information is redacted. Usually this takes 2-4 weeks

Zwartlakken - see redact

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