

# Mapping conflicts of interest between universities and fossil fuel interests

Simonne Dodge<sup>1</sup>, Will Kattrup<sup>2,3</sup>, Geoffrey Supran<sup>2,3</sup>, Julian Barg<sup>2</sup>, Sofie Hiltner<sup>4</sup>, & Jake Lowe<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science, University of Miami; Miami, FL

<sup>2</sup>Brown University; Providence, RI

<sup>3</sup>Campus Climate Network

<sup>4</sup>University of Michigan; Ann Arbor, MI

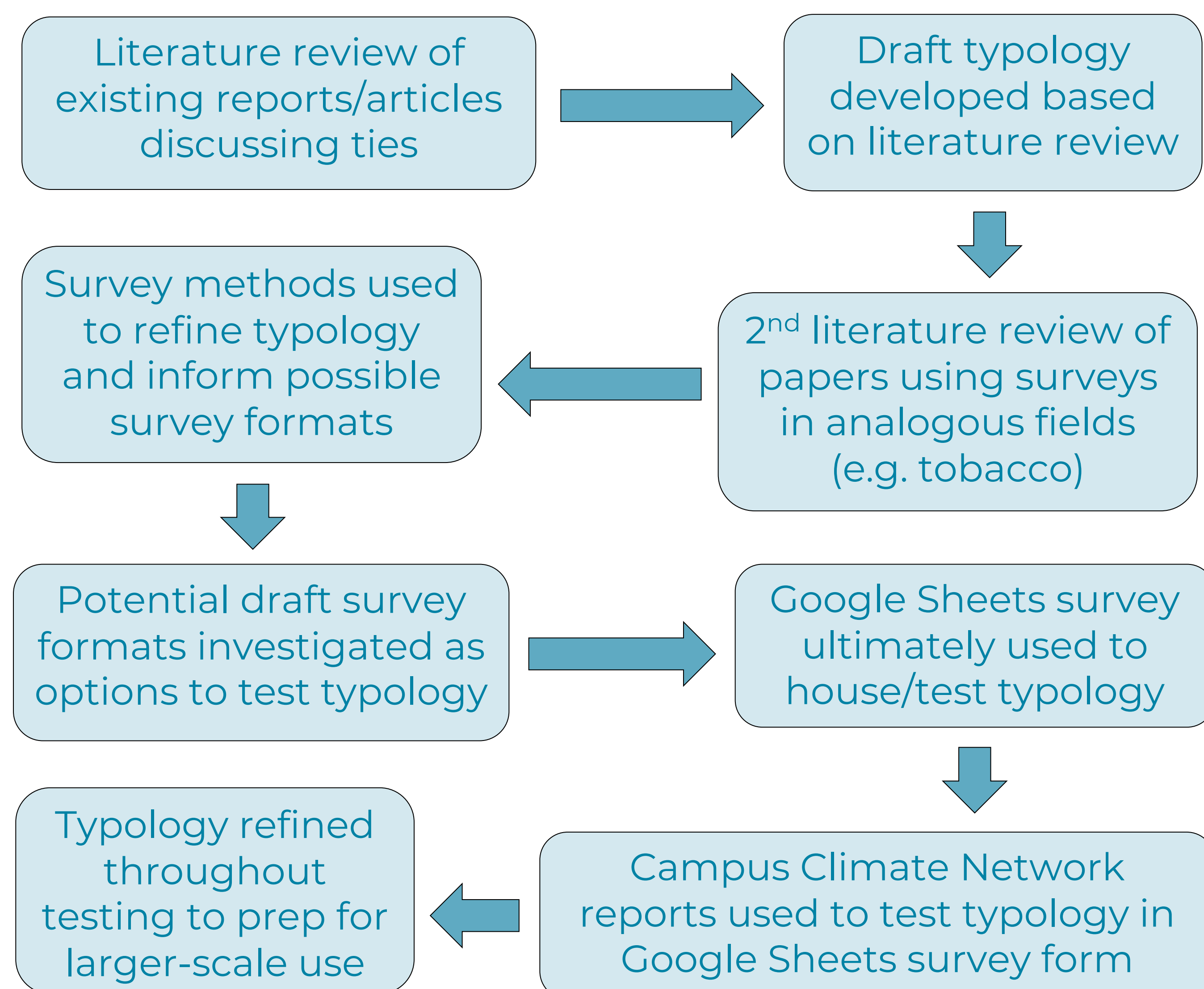
## Introduction

A central underlying issue of the climate crisis is political power—an often under addressed and disregarded aspect of the problem. Although climate science and policy are key steps for tackling this crisis, they alone likely cannot solve it without the dismantling of political power and its subsequent bottleneck to social change.

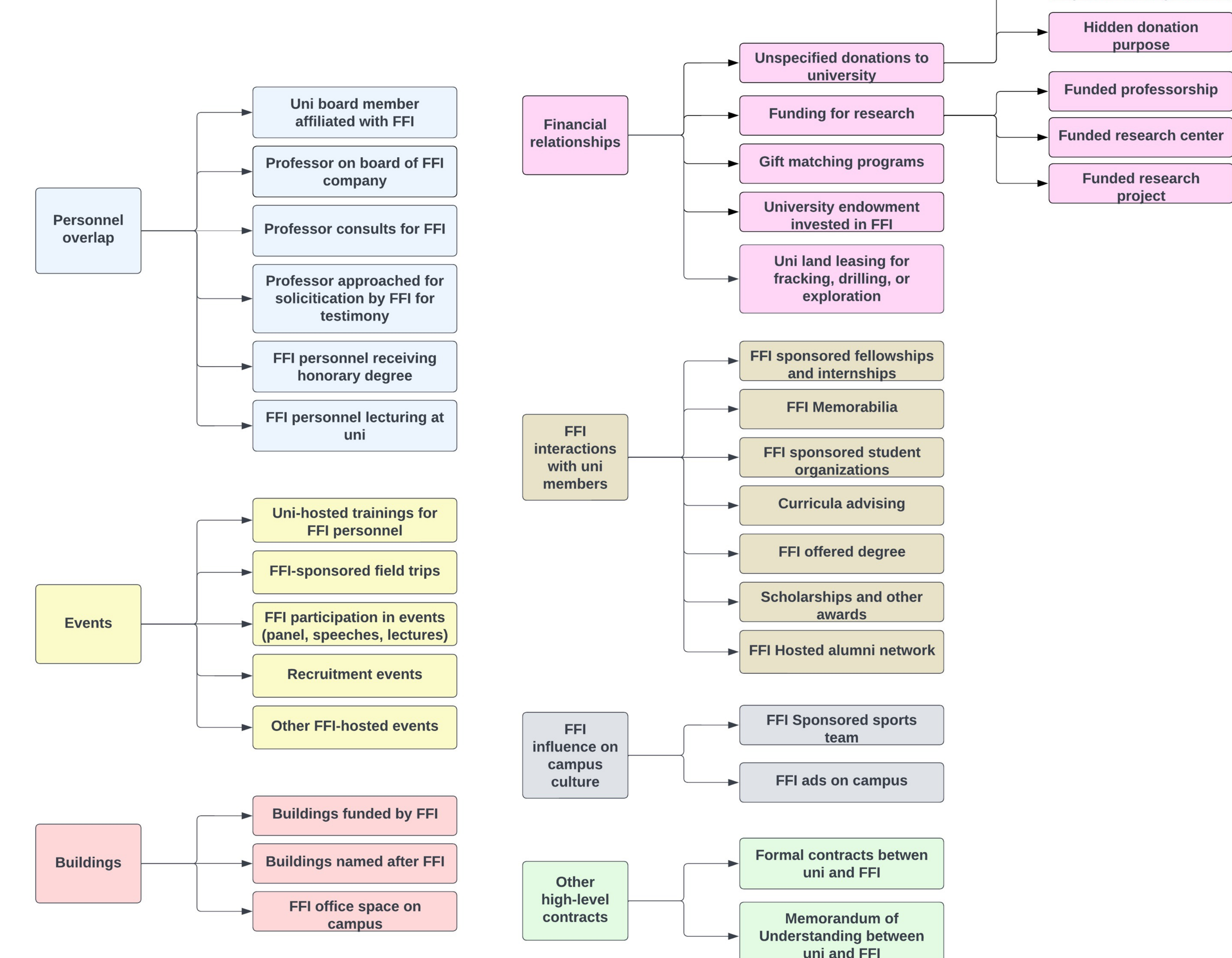
One of the platforms in which this political power manifests itself is higher education. Fossil fuel interests have infiltrated many climate and energy research centers at leading institutions in the United States and around the world, potentially undermining their objectivity and integrity. This climate obstructionism has almost certainly influenced climate research and social change for the past several decades.

The purpose of this research project is to develop a functional typology that encompasses the plethora of potential ties between fossil fuel interests and universities. This typology will serve as the basis of a large-scale survey aimed at mapping these ties on a global level.

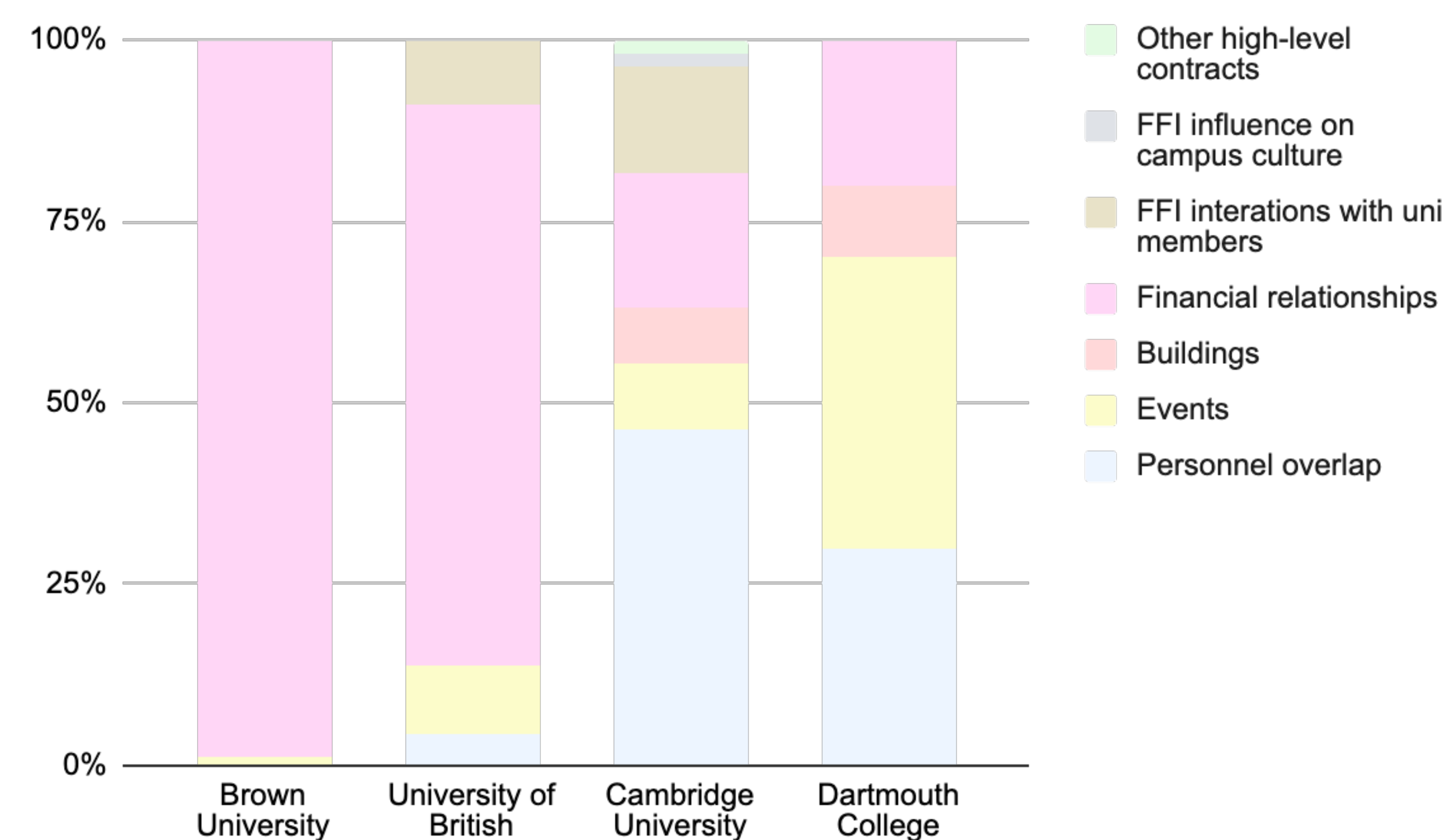
## Methodology



## Results



**Figure 1:** Finalized typology outlining six major categories of ties between fossil fuel interests (FFI) and universities (uni) and the subcategories that exist under each one



**Figure 2:** The prevalence of each of the six major categories of the typology within four of the Campus Climate Network reports

## Discussion & Moving Forward

Initial testing of the typology through Campus Climate Network reports shows that it is functioning well and few issues have arisen in the Google Sheets survey format. A question that remains is how to address more generic statements about ties that do not fit well into a subcategory. The Google Sheets survey has an additional tab marked “Other” for these broader ties, which is effective currently but may need to be reevaluated in the future. If patterns begin to emerge in the “Other” tab—especially once true data collection begins—additional subcategories may be necessary.

Overall, the typology does appear ready for formal surveys and data collection. As can be seen in Figure 2, all six major categories are appearing in at least one report. It is clear that **fossil fuel interests are intertwined with higher education in a number of ways**, although financial ties do appear to be the most prevalent. The values of these financial ties are substantial as well. Brown received over **20 million dollars** in research funding from 2003 to 2019, and Cambridge similarly accepted over **18 million dollars** from 2001 to 2021 from fossil fuel interests.

The next steps will be to gather survey data through connecting with others who are a part of the climate movement at universities around the world. The foundational work completed through this preliminary project will ideally allow for systematic and streamlined data management and analysis.

## Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to my advisor, Dr. Geoffrey Supran, for his continued mentorship and support, as well as his willingness to take on a thesis student during his first year as a University of Miami professor. Additional thanks to Will Kattrup, Julian Barg, Sofie Hiltner, Jake Lowe, Ralph Wilson, Solid Sustainability, Climate Social Science Network, and Campus Climate Network for their insights, collaboration, and support.