

Among the host of conspiracy theories out there, a perennial one depicts climate science as a global hoax perpetuated by scientists. There are thousands of climate scientists around the world, which is an awful lot of people for a secret conspiracy. But even if there were only forty or fifty, a successful conspiracy of any kind would probably be well outside their capabilities.

I speak as someone who, over the course of my career, has attended hundreds of faculty meetings and even more meetings of faculty committee. I once attended three very divisive two-hour meetings about whether to switch from a 14-week semester with 50-minute classes to a 13-week semester with 55-minute classes. Weeks later, some people still weren't speaking to each other because feelings ran so high.

Folks, these are people who couldn't conspire their way out of a paper bag. If someone had called a meeting thirty years ago to organize a climate conspiracy, the people at the meeting would still be there arguing with each other.

Of course, academics are by and large extremely intelligent people and contrary to rumor, many are very personable. But the hiring process is basically designed to weed out team players. We're not looking for people who are inclined to accept someone else's word for anything. We're looking for people who question the conventional wisdom and seek out new ideas. That's key to the whole enterprise. But it's also prone to produce people whose first impulse, if asked to join a group effort, is to question whether it's necessary and then endlessly debate how it should be defined and whether it wouldn't be better to do something else entirely.

We're also talking about people who aren't terribly good at keeping secrets. After all, universities are looking to hire people who will feel compelled to share their views with students and publish their ideas for the whole world to see. Keeping quiet about something is not a prized professional trait.

So, no, there's no conspiracy of scientists to cook up thousands of scientific papers about climate change. If anyone had ever actually organized one, it would have fallen apart in about two days.