

# Opposing the Sustainability Movement on Your Campus

The campus left gives a great deal of thought to student activism. Over the years it has developed many techniques to publicize its views and to influence institutional policy. Moderates, conservatives, libertarians, and others who do not necessarily see themselves as aligned to a political movement are often at a loss at finding effective ways to respond to the activist left or to make their own ideas more widely known. We have been thinking about good ways that students can respond to the aggressive tactics of the sustainability movement.

There are five levels of response: seek the facts, speak out, organize, protest, and campaign. Here are some suggestions for each level.

## 1. **Seek the facts.**

The sustainability movement often makes assertions that are not true. Get in the habit of questioning implausible-sounding assertions. What evidence is there, for example, that drinking bottled water is a significant threat to the environment?

The sustainability movement also presents itself as an established reality. It doesn't give the impression that it is being made up on the fly. Instead, students are asked to treat it with deep respect. Does it deserve that respect? An excellent way to find out is to ask people in authority where they get the right to impose the sustainability ideology on others.

- Find out whether your college president has [signed the ACUPCC](#) (American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment).
- Are any of your professors inappropriately mixing sustainability arguments with the subjects they're supposed to teach?
- Investigate how many campus groups have linked themselves to sustainability advocacy. You might be surprised at how remote some of them seem from environmental issues.
- Find out if your college is a [member of AASHE](#) (American Association for Sustainability in Higher Education).
- Is any portion of your student activities fee being used to support sustainability advocacy? Do you agree that your student activities fee should be funding such advocacy?
- How many courses taught at your college focus on sustainability? Does your college have a degree program in sustainability? How many courses in the course catalog mention sustainability?
- Has the student government taken a position on sustainability?
- Consider the speakers that come to campus. How many advocates of the sustainability movement are invited? How many critics? If there's an imbalance, point it out. Demand balance.

## 2. **Speak out.**

Once you know the facts, you need to bring them to the attention of others. This begins with summoning the courage to disagree with friends and acquaintances who speak with seeming authority on sustainability but don't really know what they're talking about. You can also write for the student newspaper, your blog, Facebook, or Twitter; send letters to campus authorities;

challenge people to debates, and let us know what you're doing. The occasions on which you might pursue these options include:

- Challenging the appropriateness of sustainability indoctrination in residence life.
- Publicly questioning demands that students decrease their carbon footprints.
- If your president has signed the ACUPCC, publicizing what this means. Do students know that their college president has signed them up for a radical political program without their consent? Do the college's trustees know it? If you attend a public college, has the college administration obeyed the law in refraining from partisan political activity? If not, protest.
- If your professor *is* inappropriately mixing sustainability arguments with the subjects he/she is supposed to teach, challenging your professor. If that doesn't work, consider taking your complaint to the college president and trustees, and let us know.

### 3. **Organize.**

If you begin to speak out, you will almost certainly find other students who agree with you. The next step is to encourage those who agree but who have not yet spoken up to join with you in presenting your message. Roughly 80% of the people who support any idea are passive; don't overlook them. Their support can often make the difference, but you have to be prepared to do a disproportionate share of the work. Organizing can entail:

- Seeking recognition of your group as an official campus group deserving of access to facilities and funding comparable to other student groups
- If your student activities office or student government association denies recognition or resources, using this injustice to win broader support.
- Seeking connections to off-campus organizations that have experience working with campus groups.
- Ask for advice and assistance from anti-sustainability activists (they exist!). The National Association of Scholars is happy to help.
- Set up a debate over whether sustainability should be the "foundation of all learning and practice in higher education."

### 4. **Protest.**

It's important not to protest unless there's good reason to. Protesting on trivial grounds will only undermine a more serious criticism of the sustainability movement. But chances are very good that you will find an abundance of serious issues and a great deal of resistance by campus authorities to deal fairly with complaints on these matters. A group that is organized to critique the excesses of the sustainability movement will find that its first task is to focus on a particular cause for protest. Such causes might include:

- The ACUPCC
- Use of student activity fees to support sustainability activism
- Pervasiveness of sustainability ideology in the classroom

### 5. **Campaign.**

A protest becomes a campaign when it gathers significant attention and support beyond its initial base. Sustainability has arrived on campus so suddenly that so far there is little organized resistance and nothing like a campaign. We would like to change that. We welcome your help.