

# Mobilizing Students

Now that you have a strong group and have chosen a campaign, here are some tactics you might want to employ.

## Your Rights

First you should know what your rights are. If you attend a private school, you are generally screwed as you do not have the legal right to freedom of speech or association. Those rights do not apply to people operating in the private realm and that is how the courts have interpreted universities (despite the fact that since the general public is allowed on campus they are only 'quasi-public'). So private universities can use their power over students for rallying, leafleting, petitioning, etc. Your organization can be banned if they don't like you. Fortunately, there is a vast difference between what your rights are and what you can get away with. For instance, activists at the University of Notre Dame chalk the sidewalks all the time. Chalking is not permitted by any rule in the student handbook, however, it is also not explicitly banned, and if you do it late at night and dodge security, you won't get hassled. Likewise, the unrecognized Notre Dame queer student group puts up posters even though they aren't allowed to meet on campus. The more people you have at your activity (and the more media), the less likely you'll get penalized for rule breaking. Colleges have a hard time standing up to public scrutiny and embarrassment, since their enrollment depends on their reputation.

The point in breaking rules (ex.: if you had a rule that requires that all rallies must be registered in advance), is not to have fun being deviant, but to create a situation where the rules (which many times hold the corporation or school's interests ahead of yours) are not being enforced, are ultimately removed, and students achieve unhindered free speech. Then your campus will be a safe environment for activism.

Public school students have the right to protest, leaflet, petition and form organizations. The university can put restrictions as to the time and place, and even require advance notice. This even goes for public high schools.

Older students should pass-on stories about past administrative attempts to censor their activities. At many universities you will detect a persistent pattern of administrative actions to maintain control over activists by limiting their activities.

Morally you should be able to do whatever it takes, outside of violence or anything that would destroy the integrity of your organization, to achieve justice. Occupying the administration building until they give in to your demands, blockading a building, or having everyone strike are all useful tactics if your supporters are ready to do them and you have demonstrated to the general public the righteousness of your cause.

## Choosing Tactics

Generally campaigns go through several phases:

1. Ask nicely: Make an appointment to meet with the people who can make the change you want. Often times, you can't get a meeting, or are denied your wishes. This is an exercise you must go through to be able to say later that you tried asking nicely, and it didn't work. This is not to say that it doesn't always work. Sometimes it does, and then congratulations you are part of a rare campaign!
2. Action & Education: These go hand-in-hand. You educate people about the problem and try to gain mass support by holding rallies, using petitions, holding public hearings, flying students on campus, writing letters-to-the-editor of the campus paper, bringing in speakers, etc.

3. Negotiations: After you've shown your strength, your target should be more willing to negotiate. However, they will probably stall.

4. Either you win or you'll need to intensify the campaign. Experiment with different tactics and keep up the heat.

You must have a target. This has to be an individual as bureaucracies will 'pass the buck.' You need concrete demands that this individual will have the power to grant.

Are you running a majority campaign or minority one? Majority campaigns rely upon educating the majority of people to support you publicly, whether or not they do it explicitly. If you have 20% support you will be limited in the tactics you can choose (militant rallies chanting, "1 2 3 4 Poverty is Class War, 5 6 7 8 Organize to Smash the State" are definitely out). However, you will also have a better chance of winning. The alternative is to mobilize a small group of really committed people and rely upon the neutrality or apathy of the masses. A minority could exert substantial pressure by occupying a building, sitting in trees threatened with logging, or holding weekly protests which cause your target to negotiate (and/or give-in) just to get rid of you. Generally, majority campaigns are best. You can keep your supporters on your side, even if you all get arrested, if you effectively communicate how important your issue is.

In what environment will the tactics be used (conservative, liberal, apathetic)? If you are trying something that violates rules, how tolerant are the security or police? What happened the last time your organization (or another one) tried this tactic? What and where are your targets' weak spots? And always remember, every President and CEO has a name and address.

Be creative.

### **Educational Tactics**

First, ask nicely and smile. If that doesn't work, set up a meeting with interested people. Hand out information and educational material on campus, pitch your campaign to groups working on related topics. Make announcements in your classes. Follow up the meeting by getting everyone's email and phone numbers and send out carefully taken notes. Hi-lite the next steps of action and what people agreed to do. Immediately schedule a follow up meeting and continue to build your strength! Soon you won't hesitate to have sit-ins on the university president's home lawn (be careful of all their nasty pesticides!). This is a survey of possible tactics. Depending on your situation, some of these tactics might seem too radical and drastic, or too moderate and ineffective. Pick what seems right.

### **Canvassing**

This means knocking on people's doors. If you want to build your organization, you should canvass on campus. If you want to build community ties or raise money, you should go off campus. You could ask people to write a letter or postcard, educate them about an upcoming election, tell them about a local fight against an incinerator or raise money. If you want to ask for money, you need a permit; contact the town clerk. Canvassing is a form of free speech, so they have to give you one; hopefully they'll be friendly.

To canvass, you need a Rap. This is a structured, yet flexible and open, "speech" you give to the people you talk to. Every rap at every door is different, but they all include the basic same elements. These should probably include:

- Who you are
- What your group is
- Legitimization of your group (why should they care?)

- Discussion of an issue, or ask them what they're concerned about
- Here's a sample letter they can write (for instance)
- A request for a contribution (optional)

It might go like "Hi, I'm China and I'm with Chambana SEAC. We're in your neighborhood today seeking community input and support. We worked last year on improving the mass transit system, and now we're trying to clean up our water supply. Do you have any concerns about our water? Can you think of other issues that we should work on?"

This is the part that makes you unique—you're a local group that is actually interested in their input. It also sets up a very nice two-way communication.

"We're working to build a local network of groups to work on these issues. If you could make a contribution, that would be great." By that point they'll be falling over themselves (maybe) giving you money. You should also tell people about meetings, especially if they're students.

Once you've got the rap down, you can ad-lib. Some canvassing tips:

- Look decent—appeal to everybody.
- A clipboard makes you look really good, gives you something to write on, and gives you something to put in their hands. This seems to be really effective, especially if it has a form on the top with the names of some of their neighbors, showing that they've been contributing. It might look like a "Statement of Support" with columns like Name, Address, Amount, and Comments.
- Professional-looking background material on whatever issue you're working on, to impress them.
- To train, you should "role-play." Take turns being the canvasser and canvasee. Play being friendly, skeptical, stony-faced, and downright hostile. Sure it'll feel embarrassing and awkward, but how much worse will it be with strangers in their bathrobes? Keep at it until you feel comfortable.
- When you do finally go out, pair up. Two people feel more confident and can back each other up when one of them stumbles. Also, new people should go out with more experienced people, and should discuss what happened after each door. Canvassing is one of those things with a lot of little learned skills to pick up.
- KEEP GOOD RECORDS! Just as with phone calling, you need to keep track of where you've been, what they said, if they were interested, and so on. Your records need to be good enough so that others can pick up where you left off, so don't rely on your memory and don't leave your friends scraps of paper to decipher.

Note a few good points about canvassing. A lot of big organizations hire students to canvass, pay them a cut, fire them unless they make \$100 a day and give them no involvement whatsoever in the group. This is hardly the way to run a democratic, cynicism-free organization. So if you want to canvass the SEAC way:

- Have your own members, bona fide activists, do the canvassing.
- Just collect as much as people feel comfortable with. Set an overall quota and divide it based on what individuals can do. Check in with peoples' comfort levels and set goals for each person to reach. Be realistic with time, energy levels, things like that.
- Don't avoid low-income neighborhoods just because you can't raise money there. You can still petition, educate, and activate.
- Take people's ideas on local projects seriously and get back to them. This is what makes you a lot more attractive than some big national group cruising through the town.

- Make sure to have an action item, a way to plug in your canvassers and also the people they reach out to who would like a step to take or would like to get involved. This could be anything from making a phone call on the spot to their local decision maker, showing up to a rally scheduled within the next couple days, etc.

### **Dorm Education**

You might want to go into dorms yourselves and give brief presentations on recycling, economic globalization, environmental racism, etc. Contact your RAs or the Housing Office and arrange to be at a floor meeting or a social event—they're always looking for programs.

Some groups have established "ambassadors" or "environmental representatives" in each dorm, to teach people about things like recycling and conservation, to make sure they're going well. Make sure to connect with these folks!

### **Leaflets**

Leaflets might include any of the following: information on an issue, arguments for your position, suggestions for action, sources, references for further reading, announcement of a rally or event (especially emergency rallies) or information on when and where your group meets. Leafletting gets to people who would not stop at your information table.

Leaflet tips:

- At a busy time, one person can hand out several hundred per hour. A lot will be thrown away immediately—you might be able to retrieve these and reuse them. You can have a box nearby with a sign for discards.
- Using recycled materials ensures your practices are in line with your values.
- For mass distribution of a simple message, you could use smaller flyers, for instance ¼ page size.
- Be friendly but aggressive—step forward and hand it to people, saying "Here, can I give you one of these?," "Important information," "Stop environmental destruction!" etc. Always smile and look people in the eyes as you're handing them things.
- Have several people there to catch people moving in all directions. Besides, single leafletters look lonely and insecure, and probably feel that way too.
- Don't spend too much time debating people who have strong opposite opinions. Say your piece, give them your literature, and thank them for their time.
- Leafletting can become monotonous, ways to avoid this are to combine it with direct action, guerilla theater, a rally, or a public art or music performance. Including an engaging event can add more context to leafletting.

### **Posters**

Text should be clear and concise. Use a contrast of fonts and typestyles (bold, italics, etc.) to draw the eye. Graphics and cartoons are great too, but don't crowd it too much – you need some white space. Show it to someone outside of your group and see if they get it. If they don't, make it simpler.

Poster Tips:

- The lettering needs to be solid enough to be readable from 10-20 feet away. You might want to black it in with a marker by hand—hand-done posters can be catchier.
- Funky colors are good eye-catcher, but aren't that great for the environment.
- Recycled paper increases your credibility and solid black on unbleached cream color can stand out well.
- If you do a series of lectures, they need individual posters and don't make them in the same style—at a glance, people will think they saw them already.

- For letter or phone campaigns, you could make a poster cut into strips at the bottom that people can tear off and take home (like a "for rent" poster) giving the phone number or address and what to say. This worked for us on the Clean Air Act – at least a lot of them were torn off!
- Make a poster that can be used throughout the semester to advertise your weekly meetings.
- Be creative about where you post—insides of bathroom stalls, garbage cans, "alternative" hangouts, etc. Be inclusive too. Don't ignore an area because you think no one would be interested.
- Just handing posters out at a meeting and asking people to put them up doesn't work very well. Assign people to specific buildings or areas of town, and tell them when it needs to go up. As usual, the more specific the task, the more likely it will get done.
- People should carry about extras to replace those torn down.
- It is especially important for posters to be up the day of the event (especially for things like rallies), so you might consider doing a second round beforehand.
- If your posters are always torn down you might want to wheatpaste them. Mix: flour, and water. Apply it with a brush. Note this should only be done outside and you may risk arrest.
- Be sure to advertise your group as well as your event.
- ALWAYS have someone else proofread it.
- Be prepared to shrug off snide comments. Don't let them dampen your cheerful enthusiasm!
- If you give facts, cite your sources.

### **Orientation: Table this Event!**

This is your best chance to reach large numbers of students when they first arrive, and when they're especially receptive. Distribute information on recycling, energy conservation, local issues, and progressive courses. Some groups distribute "Disorientation Guides" that explain what campaigns are going on, some history of student action on campus, what progressive groups exist, cool things going on in the local community, and other information that a school administration won't include in their orientation. Students at University of Florida produced a "Sustainable Living Guide" to introduce new students to green lifestyles in Gainesville, FL. At Boston University, a group of students made a Disorientation Guide for incoming students in 2010 which included local radical groups and campaigns, bookstores, community spaces, times and places of Food Not Bombs meals, and articles exposing the corporate control over the campus. They even included articles on issues such as radical consent.

### **Surveys and Referendums**

If you need to demonstrate how much support you have for a campaign, you can do a survey and/or a referendum. Develop a few simple, unbiased questions (ex. Should the university spend \$50,000 to do an environmental audit of its practices?). You can also use social networking sites, school organization list serves, and free surveying tools like Google Survey or Survey Monkey. Face-to-face, in person polling on campus works great too, and you can make human connections with potential comrades. Make sure your survey is representative of the student body and reaches out beyond your usual networks to increase the credibility and validity of your results. Surveying at least 10-15% of the campus also increases the accuracy your results reflecting the opinion of your campus. You should release the survey's results in a press release.

Most universities will let you put an issue to referendum by including it on the student government election ballot. Referendums have more credibility than surveys, though they can work together quite well. You need to determine the process your university and student government have to get a referendum on the ballot. If you choose to do this, be sure to do the survey first, as it can sometimes help you out through the referendum process. Also, be sure to plan your campaign timeline accordingly to include

the time needed for the referendum. For more on campaign planning.

### **Speakers**

Get a well-known professor or an outside speaker to give a talk. Only the audience will be directly affected, but the press you'll get and the fact the talk occurred gives your group and the issue visibility and prestige, as well as a new contact in academia or elsewhere. Make sure that the speaker is on a topic that builds your group's campaigns.

If the atmosphere is right, do something with all the people there. Don't let "political capital" go to waste. Get them to write letters, sign up for an activity, or fundraise. Hold a small group meeting after the speaker to draw people into your group.

### **Tabling**

This means setting up a table in a central location and enticing people to come have a look. This gives you a chance to talk to passers-by, tell them about your group, get them to write letters on the spot, sell buttons and T-shirts, sign petitions, and whatever else. Ideally get them to join the group. Always have a sign up sheet for your group mailing list! Put up a colorful banner to attract them, and spread literature over the table so that the titles show. Dining halls, student unions, outside on warm days, and events are good places to get a crowd.

Don't just sit behind a table with literature on it: juggle, breathe fire, sing, shout revolutionary slogans! Tabling should be dynamic and interpersonal. Ask passersby a question: "Should our school invest in corporations that kill indigenous people?" As with canvassing it's good to work in pairs, with a more experienced person training someone new. You can train by doing some role-playing with each other—coming up to the table, acting bored, interested, or antagonistic and practice how the conversation might go with each of those roles. One effective method is to have one person catching the flow of people and directing them to the table, while the other person talks to them in detail, signs them up, etc.

Tabling is a good way to involve new people and build a sense of group identity; do it weekly if you can. As with leafleting, make sure that people who are signed up are called or texted reminders, and that the first group of volunteers knows where to pick up the materials and where to leave them when done.

A few tabling tips:

- If you're signing people up for something, put a name or two at the top. Nobody likes to be the first.
- If you do collect money, put it in a visible jar—and put a few dollars in to start it out.
- Have a stack of your group pamphlets.
- Don't spend too long debating the issue or shooting the breeze with one of the converted.
- Never (or almost never, especially in heavy traffic areas) petition for two things at once. It's very confusing.
- Clipboards are very useful for collecting signatures and working the crowd. If you are in a high traffic area, have 2 people at the table and 2 canvassers working the crowd.
- FREE FOOD does wonders in attracting people

### **Teach-ins**

Teach-ins are useful for providing an array of opinions about a timely issue. They can be as short as having a single speaker, but are often an afternoon or day-long. They are most useful if organized swiftly in reaction to an event (wars, racist incident, environmental disaster). You can also use it to build momentum around your campaign. To ensure good attendance, you need to choose an issue which a lot of people have heard about (either through the mainstream media or because your group has made a

lot of noise), and want to know more about. A possible format is to break up your time into 30 minute segments, giving each speaker fifteen minutes to talk and fifteen minutes to take questions and for the audience to debate (both the speaker and amongst itself). Have drinks and snacks to encourage people to stay and talk.

### **Voter Registration, Education, and Third Parties**

One way for students to exercise power is to vote for progressive candidates. However, many students don't vote because they haven't registered. So a useful tactic can be to register students to vote, and then educate them about the different candidates' stances on environmental and social issues. Even better, run your own candidates!

A major shortcoming of our political system is that corporations control both the Democrats and Republicans. Corporations put profit before the environment and people, and so do both major parties. For instance, Clinton supported cutting welfare benefits, the North American Free Trade Agreement (which allows corporations to challenge government environmental regulations as 'barriers to free trade'), so called 'salvage' logging (a disguised successful attempt to double logging on our national forests), and tax cuts for the rich (Ex.: a capital gains cut). If you don't want to compromise your beliefs working for the Republicrats, then you should consider supporting one of the small, but growing, progressive alternatives. The Greens are most closely linked to the environmental movement, and have an international network of parties. Several SEACers have run as Green Party candidates. One has sat on the Santa Fe City Council as a Green, and another SEACer was elected in Chapel Hill, NC. Other important progressive parties are the New Party (they often work to support progressive Democrats), or the NDP and New Politics Initiative if you live in Canada. To clarify, as a non-partisan organization, SEAC doesn't support or endorse candidates from *any* party. Everyone should research their own candidates and make sure they vote for candidates that best reflect the interest of the people.

### **Action Tactics**

Banner Drops: Drop a banner from a high spot. Big Banner. Good photo-op. Note possibility of arrest. (See section below on civil disobedience.)

Bird-dogging: This is the art of hijacking a media event that your target organized with the intention of using it for your own purposes. A small group of activists can infiltrate an event with a hidden banner (like attending an election rally with a "Nuclear Executives for Gore" banner), releasing it at a strategic time. One or two activists should leaflet the crowd explaining why you protested, and handle the questions from the media. An advantage is that all of the media work that your opponent did will be used to your advantage.

Chalking: Get a couple buckets of sidewalk chalk and decorate campus. Chalking is cheap, fun, creative, and effective. Some schools don't like it, but it's pretty harmless and if you do it late at night, you'll avoid scrutiny. You can use it to educate, advertise, or put pressure on your administration. (Ex: Chalk a critique of a university policy the night before a lot of alumni or parents are visiting campus).

Civil Disobedience: Nonviolent direct action has a long and honorable history—from Gandhi and Martin Luther King to Thoreau. The Civil Rights movement didn't begin with a letter writing campaign: it took off when Rosa Parks refused to move from her seat in the white section of the bus and when people sat in at segregated lunch counters in the South. There's a wide range of opinion on what tactics are necessary to win the battle over our environment. There's a lot more to civil disobedience than we could possibly put in this guide; it's a big decision, and one that group should discuss very carefully. If you choose to do direct action:

- Prepare yourself and your group for what you're getting into.

- Build unity by agreeing beforehand on guidelines and principles for the action.
- Try to get non-violence training from community groups in your area, or SEAC can help find someone.
- Know what to do if you are arrested. Assign people in advance who are willing to be arrested, others who will join them with a legal demonstration (in which they will not risk arrest), and a police liaison to coordinate and deal with police in as friendly and neutral a way as possible.

### **Creativity**

Here are some other wild and wacky things people have done:

- Putting pollution tickets on congresspeople's cars with info about the Clean Air Act.
- Collecting a day's worth of styrofoam and building an enormous "styro-monster" in the middle of the school.
- Having 100 people (including faculty and administrators) carry their trash for a week.
- Marking campus trees for destruction, with attached leaflets describing clear cutting in the Pacific Northwest.
- Students upset about the lack of racial diversity at Rutgers took out a truckload of books from the library (on Western Civilization) to show how they felt not having their culture respected.
- Radical Cheerleaders with (optional) outfits, spirit, and radical cheers.
- Mail back lots of blank credit card applications so that the campus junk mailers get their junk back and have to pay the postage.
- April 1st is always Fossil Fool's Day. Pick a climate criminal target and do a creative action on them. People have done everything from locking down at banks funding mountaintop removal coal mining to disrupting meetings.

Don't get stuck in a rut. The old ways get boring—we need you to come up with new ones! Be visible, unconventional, and rock the world! Just be sure to always be mindful about keeping your events and tactics along a path which makes sense towards achieving your goals. Always keep in mind the things that would push passive allies into the active allies zone, or what could do the opposite. And tell us what you're doing. We'll put it in Threshold so everybody else in SEAC can read all about it.

### **Disruption**

This means shutting down the normal operations of something. It is not necessarily illegal—it might just be clever. For instance (from SASU's Organizing on the Campus, by Bruce Conin):

You can also try the "Zap Fax"—20 pages of form letters signed by people opposing the corporation's practice taped together to tie up their fax line. Faxing pages of black paper tied in a circle has been known to burn out the ink in the target's fax machine. Or the "phone-in". Have 100 people call all the numbers in the Administration building, over and over, in shifts.

### **Electronic Civil Disobedience**

While the following tactics could antagonize your supporters and should be used carefully (if at all) you could hack a target's webpage, replacing it with your own information (U.S. government pages are often targeted), hold a web sit-in (people from all over the world set their browser so that you access the page every second or so, this causes other people to be unable to visit it), flood (a.k.a. 'spam') their email account with junk, or plain hack into their computer system (or voicemail) to find information that can be leaked to the press. Do everything anonymously. Note that hacking is illegal, risky, and requires special skills.

### **Fasts or Hunger-Strikes**

While not eating does not directly exert power over a target, hunger strikes can be useful by demonstrating your commitment and will cause inactive people to join in on your side. It can also be an effective way of getting media coverage. It might cause your target to grant your demand, rather than see people suffer (and risk their health) because she or he is refusing to give in. Most people can go without (any) food for several days without major consequences other than fatigue however for longer periods you'll want to consult a doctor. If you are going on an unlimited hunger strike, have some leaders not join, so that they will have enough energy to organize support behind your struggle. Be sure to drink lots of water. Be aware that there are many people who deprive themselves of food because they have eating disorders and be very cautious that you are not promoting that. Fasting is a traditional non-violent tactic that has been used by women suffragists, Gandhi, Dorothy Day, political prisoners and others. If you are going on a prolonged hunger strike (more than 1-3 days), read up on it first, so you know what you're doing.

### **Letter-writing**

We need to write letters constantly, to legislators and corporate heads. A personally written letter is much better than a form letter or a postcard—handwritten is better than typed. A good letter states its case quickly and concisely. Don't write a lengthy essay, they won't read it.

You can get people to write letters by tabling or canvassing, but it's even easier to take 5 minutes at a meeting and have everyone write one. Normally politicians will write you a reply, trying to make themselves look good on the issue even if they totally oppose your position (you need to read through the lines). A letter to a Representative or Senator might look like this:

Oct 5, 2010

The Honorable Dope Embexel  
House of Representatives [or U.S. Senate]

Dear Representative [or Senator] Embexel:

I am writing to urge you to support H.R. 292 which will end the taxpayer subsidized logging of our national forests. There is enough wood available from private lands to leave our national forests untouched. Furthermore, the use of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to subsidize large forest corporations is totally unjustifiable.

I know that you are a strong supporter of the environment and appreciated your vote in support of the Western Colorado Wilderness Act (\*give them a compliment\*).

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,  
[your name]  
[your address]

Letters to the editor, of publications large and small, are another good idea. Often you can email them, but hand-delivering them increases your chances of getting them printed. Type them (double-spaced), including your name, address, and phone number. Generally, letters must be short; however look at what they publish and keep it within that size. Make it punchy and readable. The list of letters waiting to be printed is often quite long, so don't be upset if your letter is delayed a few days. If it's a school paper, you can time it (and/or make a request) so that they print it on a specified date (like the day before your big rally!). Longer opinion pieces are also very useful, if you can get them printed. School and small city papers will print a large percent of the letters they receive – so write!

### **Lobbying: Politicians, Administrators, etc.**

This is a lot of fun, although in Congress you usually get a staffer instead of the Congressperson, even though you traveled thousands of miles, sigh... Often groups sponsor Lobby Days at the state and national level, and feel free to go by yourself any chance you get. Your representative may have a local office near you as well. Here are some dos and don'ts:

- > State, in a friendly manner, that you represent a student environmental group.
- > State your case concisely: "We're concerned that S.666 is being weakened too much. We'd like you to introduce an amendment to protect all whistle-breasted throat catchers, not just the ones with Ph.Ds."
- > Try to get a commitment on a vote, co-sponsorship, or whatever; if they haven't decided yet, ask them for a date you can get back to them.
- > Don't lie. If you don't know something, say "I'll get back to you on that." You can write a letter later.
- > Discuss the issue if you like, but don't get sucked into a complicated argument. State your case and stick to it.
- > Don't threaten or brag, like: "If you don't vote for this, I'll boot you out of office this fall." It'll get you nowhere.
- > Don't bargain, like: "If you vote for this, I'll work for you in the fall."
- > Don't question their motives, like: "It seems to me you're actually a tool of the coal industry." Everybody, even Ronald Reagan, thinks they're an environmentalist—the point is to draw on that, not attack it.
- > If your group is non-profit (a.k.a. 501(c) (3)) you're not supposed to spend more than 20% of your budget lobbying.

You can also call people and harangue them—this is probably the easiest way to reach someone. For Congress, call the Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121 (or 225-3121 for the Senate) and ask for your representative. You'll be connected to a staffer at his or her office, and they'll take a message. It's especially effective to have everyone call on the same day. You can also locate your Congressperson here: <http://www.house.gov/zip/ZIP2Rep.html>, and your Senator here: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov).

### **Petitions**

Petitions are the time-honored way of showing anybody that the public supports you and can also be a tool for introducing people to an issue. There's a trade off between how thorough a statement it has on it and how many signatures you'll get. We suggest a paragraph or two, tops, in large print. If you get lots of signatures on a general statement, you can use it to back up a more detailed demand.

We've found that rather than assigning a few people to sit at a table and collect signatures, it's more efficient for everyone in the group to get in on the act, and collect 20 or so signatures per week (or more if you can) from friends, people in their dorms, etc. Give people a basic rap to say, hand out the petitions at a meeting and send them off! Or you can use clip boards and stand in a high traffic area (like in front of a building before classes), and ask everyone walking by if they want to sign.

As with other kinds of sign-up sheets, it's good to put yourself and a few friends at the top of the sheet so nobody has to be the first. Keep the original petition and send copies of it to your target(s).

If you're a masochist, or do a lot of petitions and rallies, you might want to add everyone who signs up to your rarely used BIG mailing list. Because if someone signs a petition to save a forest, they'd likely want to attend a rally to support getting the school to use recycled paper. With databases, spreadsheets, and email or voicemail lists this

can be done without too much work and the investment can pay off big in the future.

There is no such thing as an email petition. They're effectively chain letters and they are not a useful time of resources.

Don't forget to ask petition signers to come to your next meeting—and remember to get lots of press for your hard work!

### **Phone calling**

You can also call people on your phone list to try and get them to do something. If you want to do something big like hold a rally or go to a conference, you should do two rounds of calls.

The key here is to keep good records on who you've reached, left a message with, etc. This is vital both for your own peace of mind and so others can pick up where you left off.

If several people are working on it, write out a script (a.k.a. "rap") to go through ("Hi, I'm Keegan from People Against Everything. We're organizing a rally on Monday to protest a landfill, the lack of recycling, our administration, and . . .) so people will feel more confident and won't forget major points; just as with canvassing, people can practice on each other until they feel confident.

If you leave a message with a roommate, give them your number and/or email address—that way you know they'll actually write the message down, instead of just trying to remember it. If they have an answering machine, it might actually be better to ask them to let it answer the call so you can leave a detailed message.

### **Proposals**

Environmental issues are complex; to be effective, you have to be in command of the facts. Sure you want your school to get recycled paper: but your demand has more weight if you know the distributors, prices, and other schools that did the same. Not only is this impressive, but your school might not actually have that information and you remove an excuse for them to stall. By showing your competence and determination, you are more likely to get a reply of similarly high caliber. Proposals should be backed up by petitions, polls, rallies, and support from friendly faculty and even administrators. Don't go overboard and spend all of your time on research, as you also need to organize student support for them to succeed.

### **Public Hearings**

To promote the democratic process, host a hearing or speak-out to have students voice their concerns. Invite administrators, set the agenda, and let them hear the students. Ask the administrators to meet your demands. Write down whether they support, oppose, or waffle on a large piece of paper. Make it a media event. If the targets don't show up, make an issue of it. Fake chickens or at least empty chairs with names on them are good stand-ins for targets who fail to show up.

You should also attend hearings held by the town or school to show your support of an issue. Bring lots of members. Designate spokespeople and plan a set of questions or statements. Be polite if you want but don't let the agenda get taken away from you. If Administrators try to control the agenda and format of the meeting from the start, it might be better to not meet with them, rather than having an undemocratic meeting where your group cannot make its point.

### **Rallies**

The purpose of a rally is to show your level of support to your target, to invigorate your supporters and to attract media attention to bring new people into the campaign. Rallies can include chanting, signs, banners, music, marching, poetry, drumming, street theater, impassioned speeches, humor, presenting petitions and anything else you like.

The advertising could and should include:

- Press releases to papers, radio, and TV (with follow-up)
- Announcements in classes and to other groups
- Chalking on the sidewalks and blackboards
- Mailings to your mailing list, calls to your phone list, and emails.
- Posters

Develop a sensible time-line and make sure everything gets done on time, with people assigned to specific tasks—as usual, you can do a good job at a reasonable pace with a lot of people, or a bad job frantically with just a few. It's especially important to have some last-minute advertising the day of the rally—chalk on the sidewalks the night before, leaflet the day of, etc.

Rallies usually begin with a short introduction by an Emcee and then a series of speeches, chants, music, and so on. Some things to help rallies go well:

- Keep speakers on strict time limits that you warn them about in advance. Have a fearless emcee signal 'timeout' if they go over.
- Use the rally to promote your group. You deserve the reward for organizing it.
- If it's outside, remember to put a rain location on the posters.
- Have a good diversity of speakers (gender, race, etc.) and don't rely again and again on the same good speakers. New people need to develop those skills too, and they'll have a blast. Trust them.
- Have several people designated as representatives to the press.

Press tips:

- Find them—don't wait for them to find you. Control the media, instead of letting them control you.
- Have several "sound bites" ready beforehand. Saying these, and repeating them if necessary, is a higher priority than answering the reporter's questions (sad, but true).
- Don't make long-winded speeches; they'll be edited to death.
- A press packet prepared beforehand with detailed information always helps.
- Do what you can to make the audience well informed—it looks bad for them to say, "Well, uh, I guess I came cause, well, yah know, I'm really concerned about the earth."
- Getting people to crowd together and having colorful banners in the background will make for good pictures.
- Have a few marshals on hand to direct the crowd, lead chants, and so on.
- Make the rally visually attractive—lots of signs and banners, T-shirts with slogans, costumes and theater and so on. You can cheaply make full color T-shirts with color inkjet printers, an iron, and T-shirt transfer paper (\$1.50 a sheet). How about a nighttime march, carrying torches?

Ooooh!

Create your own media. Have people taking pictures and videos to include in your press release (refer to this guide's section on press releases for more info!). These could also be used for social media resources such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.

### **Socially Responsible Investing**

As stockholders and leading social institutions, colleges and universities are in a powerful position to challenge corporations. Our schools must use their power as shareholders to demand that corporations stop socially and environmentally destructive activities. Our schools should publicly disclose what they invest in, so that they are subject to public scrutiny. They should pressure corporations to reform harmful practices, firstly by shareholder activism (voting on shareholder resolutions), and secondly by divesting from corporations, if needed. Shareholder activism and divestment are good tactics to use as UW Madison students learned when in the spring of 1997 they got their school to divest \$239,000 of Texaco stock, and that same year Texaco withdrew from an important oil project in Burma (the oil revenue

would have helped fund the brutal SLORC dictatorship)! Ultimately, you want your university to adopt a set of socially responsible principles governing its investments and a democratically chosen committee to enforce them.

### **Sit-Ins**

Sit-ins are a tactic that first gained popularity in the Thirties in the labor movement, then in the Sixties in the Civil Rights movement. They have recently gained notoriety for their successful use by the student anti-sweatshop movement. Occupying (or sitting-in) a building is one of the strongest non-violent forms of action that a group can take. By sitting in your school president's office, or an important part of the administration building (or the office of a politician or corporation), you exert power over your target by reducing its ability to operate. When you directly attack and challenge an institution's control system, the result can be anything from confusion, to intense hostility, to capitulation. You risk punishment and arrest, but by acting boldly you will get extensive media coverage and greatly increase the likelihood of negotiations and their success.

You should not hold a sit-in until you have worked through the initial stages of educating people and holding one or more protests. A sit-in is a last resort, and should not be done out of the blue. However, if after having worked on an issue for a substantial period, if you are hitting your head against a brick administrative (or corporate or political) wall, then the time might be ripe to strike your target at the heart.

You'll need a core group of people to start the effort. Organize a series of meetings over the course of which you introduce and discuss the sit-in option. Don't force reluctant people to commit, but over a couple weeks build up a list of people willing to sit-in. Get them to sign a pledge and repeatedly verify that they are comfortable doing so. Aim for group consensus on the decision to sit-in. Members who do not want to sit-in will hopefully be supportive of those who do, and you need some activists on the outside to organize rallies in your support. Discuss what you will do if security tells you to leave. Scout out the site. It should be strategic (a site of power), ideally near the center of campus (where you can gather supporters), and large enough to accommodate your group of people for a couple days or more.

To avoid security stopping you before you can get in the building, you should keep the discussion of doing a sit-in off all email lists (especially details of date and time). Rely upon word-of-mouth, calling people and group meetings.

Here is a list of things to bring:

- Backpacks
- Food and water
- Personal hygiene items
- Blankets, sleeping bags, pillows
- Books, cards, homework
- Cameras
- Signs
- Laptops
- Cellular phone(s): to call outside supporters and the media
- List of outside supporters and media to call
- Scanner radio: for \$50-\$100 you can buy a handheld scanner that will let you listen to your security and city police, hopefully giving you advance warning before they take any action (though using it to do so is slightly illegal). Tip: Try [www.grove-ent.com](http://www.grove-ent.com) for scanner. Also you should be able to find a list of frequencies on the web.)
- Reporter(s): the more reporters present, the better you will get treated by your target (the more likely they are to negotiate and grant your demands).

Don't overpack.

You might have the freedom to come and leave, in which case you can arrange to deliver assignments and stay on top of your courses. Leave the space neat and tidy. Don't punish the underpaid office staff and janitors who will have to clean up any mess you leave.

### **Street Theater**

Street or "guerilla" theater is a short play created for a specific issue. The message should be simple and clear, and mostly visual: people watching will frequently not be able to hear, and the media often emphasizes the visual aspects of the event. Thus, creative costumes, props, signs and other components are vitally important. Always have people handing out information on the issue you are bringing up as well as ways to get involved with or keep updated on your group. Some funky examples are:

- Perform a marriage ceremony between a person representing your school and a person representing the military-industrial complex.
- March around campus with people representing consumers pulling products out of bags, consuming them and tossing them aside, followed by garbage collectors picking up these things and putting them in trash carts, with everyone loudly chanting, "Buy it! Unwrap it! Consume it! Throw it away!"
- Have two people dress as the McDonald's Gods, covered with trash, and stand outside of a McDonald's, with 50 people bowing and praying to them for an hour.
- Organize a fake 'clear-cut' on campus, sponsored by your favorite logging corporation.
- Auction your school off to corporations ("And I hear \$15 million from Monsanto for the bioengineering department...").

### **Strikes**

Ultimately the most powerful tactic (especially against your administration) is for students to not attend class. This removes all legitimacy from the administrative bureaucracy and places in the hands of the students who can now use their time to organize your campaign. During the strike you should organize rallies, street theater, a teach-in and other activities to mobilize people. A student strike requires a very high level of support, as you want the majority of students to walk out. This is possible, but hard. Several times in the mid-thirties 100,000 to 500,000 students held a one hour strike, walking out of classes to show their opposition to war. Also in May 1970, over two million students went on an extended strike after the National Guard killed five Kent State students and the U.S. announced its invasion of Cambodia. In 2009-2010, students in California faced public education budget cuts, tuition raises and layoffs. Thousands of students and community members took to the streets organizing strikes and actions across the state, and then occupied almost all of the University of California campuses. These escalations created an occupation movement, and California's governor's Chief of Staff, Susan Kennedy, said in an interview, "Those protests on the U.C. campuses were the tipping point, our university system is going to get the support it deserves."

### **Press**

Press should be one of the first things you think about for any event as the press coverage will often reach many more people than the event itself, build your members' confidence, and increase your organization's credibility. Every time you do something really interesting, a press release should at least go out to the local papers, the local Associated Press (AP wire) writer, radio, and TV. Also try alternative media such as Pacifica (see [www.pacifica.org](http://www.pacifica.org)), Indymedia, the Center for Environmental Citizenship's newswire: Earthnet News, and Threshold.

First make a list of local, alternative, and national media outlets. You'll want the news and education desks. For important events, fax out a press advisory early on (a week or two before). Send out your first press release three days before, following up with a phone call to pitch the story and make sure they saw it. On the day (or night) of an event, call to see if they are covering it. If they forgot about it, email them another copy

of your press release.

A press release should clearly include the reasons for the event, your demands, when, where (and how to get there), who will be there, quotes from your members, list two or more spokespersons (who will be easily accessible by phone).

For example:

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Progressive Student Alliance  
314 La Fortune Center, University of Notre Dame  
Notre Dame, IN 46556

For more information contact:  
Aaron Kreider, Fast Coordinator, 419-634-4346  
Tim Byrne, Public Relations Director, 419-332-1284

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Notre Dame Students Go On Hunger Strike for Gay Rights

Notre Dame, Indiana — February 1-5, 1999

Over a hundred students at the University of Notre Dame will be going on a three-day hunger strike in support of gay rights at the Catholic university. The fast will last from Wednesday, February 3, until Friday, February 5. This is part of a week of activities on campus which aims to show student support for including sexual orientation as a protected category in the university's non-discrimination clauses and to pressure the Board of Trustees who plan to vote about it on Friday.

"It's very frustrating. All this work, and finally it comes down to a showdown between this small, unresponsive, cabal of administrators versus a large majority of faculty and students," said David Hartwig, a member of the Progressive Student Alliance (PSA).

The rest of the press release contained a short history of the issue, emphasizing how critical the Board of Trustees meeting was, the level of homophobia on campus, more arguments (in the form of quotes), and ended with a listing of events (photo-ops!) that were part of the week of action that the press might want to cover. While the students lost the battle, the story was covered in the national media (and even in the English London Observer!), deeply embarrassing the administration.

Often a good conversation or lunch meeting or two with an editor, editorial board, or columnist can greatly increase your coverage. Appeal to their sense of muckraking political journalism! Convince them that the issue is important and worth covering. If you read the paper regularly and know what positions they've already taken, it'll help a lot.

When talking to the press, remember a couple of things:

- Be nice to them, even when they screw up, if you want good coverage.
- Don't be too professional, they like students. Be honest and personable.

- Feel free to stop, pause, edit, or rephrase. Relax—you're in control. This is your chance to say whatever you want—if you come up with a particularly good quote, say "Oh, that's a good way of putting it! I'd like it if you used that."
- Tell them what's important. Often you'll groan when you see the article because they emphasized the wrong thing and completely missed the point. Spell it out for them.
- Feel free to ignore a question—don't get put on the defensive. If they don't ask the right question, ask it yourself, and answer it. Besides, a lot of reporters will have next to no idea what's going on, and they're probably racking their brains about what to ask you. Give them a break and ask it yourself. Like...

*Reporter:* So, you want to ban cars from campus. Isn't that going to be pretty inconvenient?

*You:* Well, I think most people would agree that clean air is worth a little inconvenience. (10 points—great sound bite)

*Reporter:* I see. And how will this affect the blueberry harvest in August? (Stupid question)

*You:* Well, I think the real point here is that Flaky City High will be doing its part to fight smog and global warming.

*Reporter:* (impressed): Ah. OK. (Writes it down.)

- Have a Press Table at your event (official group spokespersons could wear armbands) and have press packets on hand to provide background for their article. They'll love you for doing their research for them – and this will mean that they'll have enough information to do a longer article!
- If reporters don't attend your event, write a summary and send it to them anyway. They might have had a time conflict and still want to cover it.
- Finally, you can also do Public Service Announcements (PSAs) for upcoming events on local radio—usually the station will want a 30-second message on a 3x5 card. Local celebrities, bands and so on might want to do the announcement for the publicity.