

Sociomaterial Movement Learning in Evangelical Student Activism: A Case Study in Environmental Education

Sherrie Steiner, Assistant Professor, Sociology Department, Indiana University – Purdue University, Fort Wayne

Abstract

What began as a professor's classroom illustration to encourage students to take climate change seriously sparked a student movement that transformed Eastern University into a leader in environmental stewardship and social responsibility. How did this happen at an evangelical university in a conservative coal state that, at the time, was producing 1% of the world's climate change gases? Using the method of autoethnography, the author provides an explanation that involves political opportunity structures (recent legal changes now allowed consumers to purchase clean energy from the electrical grid), the influence of ideas (the professor had published a theory about the transformative influence of environmental education—students challenged her to operationalize the theories), intentional strategizing (by students who implemented best practices from other universities), student government (who conducted meetings across campus before holding a senate vote) and political struggle between university administrators and students that was only resolved after the student body president obtained media coverage by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. What really lit a fire under the student body, however, went beyond theory frames, politics, legal changes, social movement strategies, student government or individual charisma. Some might call it serendipity. By 2003, 37% of Eastern University's electricity came from wind energy. Within two years, Eastern University had 100% of the electricity for the main campus generated by wind energy. In 2004, they added a 56 kilowatt solar system to the roof of the Eagle Learning Center. On February 2, 2012, Eastern University made a seven-year commitment to 100% clean energy for the main campus. This is the story of the transformative and enduring influence of environmental education at Eastern University and the sociomaterial learning that influenced collective identity formation and student activism.

Introduction

From Lynn White's identification of a linkage between the Judeo-Christian tradition and domination over nature¹ to more specific critiques of evangelicalism's 1) anthropology as anthropocentric, 2) ethics as exploitative, 3) cosmology as escapist and 4) eschatology as ecologically apathetic,² the Christian tradition has been consistently critiqued for being anti-environmental. To the degree that these charges validly describe the evangelical tradition, then "it would seem", says J.A. Simmons, "that 'evangelical environmentalism' is an idea that is akin to a white supremacist group hosting a luncheon to promote racial diversity."³ Although Christian activism on energy policy can be traced back to the early 70s when the National Council of

¹ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10 1967), 1203-1207.

² See Millard J. Erickson, "Biblical Theology of Ecology," in *The Earth is the Lord's: Christians and the Environment*, ed. Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore, 36-54 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992) for a summary of the various anti-environmental charges against evangelical Christianity.

³ J. Aaron Simmons, "Evangelical Environmentalism: Oxymoron or Opportunity?" *Worldviews* 13 (2009), 41.

Churches prepared a report on the use of plutonium as a commercial fuel⁴ and the National Association of Evangelicals released a short *Resolution on Environment and Ecology*,⁵ evangelical attention to environmental issues from leaders, congregations, and institutions is a more recent phenomenon.⁶ For the most part, evangelicals have been popularly portrayed as taking conservative positions on social issues such as abortion and gay marriage.⁷

Danielsen identifies two issue attention cycles for environmental concern in evangelical culture in recent years: the first is from 1988 to 1995 and the second is from 2004 to 2010.⁸ Several key organizational developments occurred during this time period. In 1992, the Theological Commission of the World Evangelical Fellowship met for the *Au Sable Forum on Evangelical Christianity and the Environment* and the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) was established.⁹ The National Religious Partnership for the Environment was formed the following year. By 2002, the Director of the Evangelical Environmental Network was driving a Toyota Prius across the American South in a grassroots activism *What Would Jesus Drive Campaign*.¹⁰ Within two more years, the Evangelical Environmental Network garnered support from some of the highest levels of evangelical leadership; they co-sponsored a conference with *Christianity Today* magazine and the National Association of Evangelicals in support of creation care.¹¹ By 2006, eighty-six prominent evangelical leaders signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative to advocate for legislation to combat climate change; 45 percent of the signatories were presidents of either universities, seminaries or colleges in Christian higher education. The President and Board Chair of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities also signed the document.¹² By 2008, a “Green Bible” highlighting scripture related to environmental stewardship and creation care was being promoted in environmental circles.¹³

Despite these developments, evangelical elites, in particular, have been consistently characterized as oppositional to liberal concerns and culturally divisive.¹⁴ This ‘culture wars’ myth has contributed to an illusion of monolithic evangelical culture that masks evangelical diversity.¹⁵ But evangelicalism’s counter-socialization tendencies have contributed to internal polarization, as

⁴ Patricia K. Townsend, “Energy Policy in American Faith Communities: ‘The Power to Change,’” *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* 35, no. 1 (June 2013), 4-15.

⁵ Simmons, 51.

⁶ See Simmons, 51-57 for a timeline of engagement from 1970 through 2008.

⁷ Clem Brooks and Jeff Manza, “Social Cleavages and Political Alignments: U.S. Presidential Elections, 1960 to 1992.” *American Sociological Review* 62 (1997), 937-46.

⁸ Sabrina Danielsen, “Fracturing over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs Among Evangelicals, 1984-2010,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 1 (2013), 204.

⁹ Simmons, 52.

¹⁰ Laurie Goodstein, “Evangelical Leaders Swing Influence Behind Effort to Combat Global Warming,” *New York Times*, March 10, 2005. The official WWJDrive website can be found at <http://www.whatwouldjesusdrive.info>. (accessed June 3, 2015).

¹¹ Simmons, 55.

¹² Laurie Goodstein, “Evangelical Leaders Join Global Warming Initiative,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2006. The full text with signatories is available at <http://www.npr.org/documents/2006/feb/evangelical/calltoaction.pdf> (accessed June 3, 2015).

¹³ David Van Biema, “The Good Book Goes Green,” *Time*, September 29, 2008.

¹⁴ Jeremy E. Uecker and Glenn Lucke, “Protestant Clergy and the Culture Wars: An Empirical Test of Hunter’s Thesis,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 4 (2011), 692-706.

¹⁵ John P. Bartkowski, “Debating Patriarchy: Discursive Disputes Over Spousal Authority Among Evangelical Family Commentators,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36, no. 3 (1997), 393-410.

well, particularly between younger and older evangelicals on a number of social issues.¹⁶ Attitudes toward environmental issues have been identified as more divisive among evangelicals than nonevangelicals, and the evangelical age-based difference is more prominent on environmental concerns than on attitudes toward abortion, same-sex marriage, stem cell research, marijuana use, governmental spending, or the Iraq War.¹⁷ So, although attention to environmental issues among evangelical elites has steadily increased over time, the internal discussion has grown increasingly polarized and politicized over time with partisan lines on environmental debates solidifying by 2004.¹⁸ Environmentalism has been identified as the prime issue where evangelical elites are “not in sync with the Christian Right and the national Republican Party.”¹⁹

This article builds on literature on the age-based difference among evangelical elites on environmental issues.²⁰ In this qualitative case study of entrepreneurial-minded students, I find that their grassroots leadership resulted in a socially-oriented organizational legacy within an elite undergraduate evangelical university. The environmental activism that emerged among young elites on this campus in a conservative state occurred during a time when secular environmental campus activism was high but evangelical environmental issue attention among elites was low. The implications of this grassroots leadership are explored in the context of social movement learning and organizational change at both the university and broader higher education field levels. The case study describes the Sustainable Peace Initiative at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. The Sustainable Peace Initiative was a faculty sponsored student initiative that was led by entrepreneurial-minded activists who worked with student government and campus clubs to develop a grassroots movement that leveraged market conditions of the university to create remarkable organizational change and social transformation. This article reinforces literature on evangelical elites being deeply divided on how their faith informs their environmental views, and suggests that more research should explore the diversity that exists within evangelical culture.

Social Movement Models in Higher Education

Social movement models have been proposed as strategies more likely to effect widespread and lasting change in higher education than the effective innovations model usually endorsed for promoting pedagogical reform.²¹ Researchers have found that change efforts are more likely to succeed if they are developed from within the university while also being connected to an external network of others involved in similar efforts. Innovations within schools tend not to endure because the practices fail to achieve change deep enough to fundamentally shift the norms underlying the institution.²² Social movement models address all of the critiques of traditional

¹⁶ Justin Farrell, “The Young and the Restless? The Liberalization of Young Evangelicals,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 3 (2011), 517-32.

¹⁷ Buster G. Smith and Byron Johnson, “The Liberalization of Young Evangelicals: A Research Note,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 49, no. 2 (2010), 351-60.

¹⁸ Danielsen, 201.

¹⁹ Danielsen, 212.

²⁰ Danielsen, 199. See also Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* (Boston: Longman, 2011) and Rhys H. Williams, “Culture Wars, Social Movements, and Institutional Politics,” in *Cultural Wars in American Politics: Critical Reviews of a Popular Myth*, ed. Rhys H. Williams, 283-98 (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1997).

²¹ Adrianna Kezar, “The Path to Pedagogical Reform in the Sciences: Engaging Mutual Adaptation and Social Movement Models of Change,” *Liberal Education* (Winter 2012), 40.

²² C. Coburn, “Rethinking Scale: Moving Beyond the Numbers to Deep and Lasting Change,” *Educational Researcher* 32, no. 6 (2003), 3-12.

scale-up models while also directing attention to the development of internal and external networks of association, deliberation and discussion that transform institutional structures.²³ Education-related social movements have not only been identified throughout the educational system, but schools themselves are becoming places where the tactics of social movements are taught.²⁴ Theoretically linking critical pedagogy to organizational thinking provides a more robust theoretical model for understanding the relationship between education and social change via three theoretical frameworks: the notion of social movements as pedagogical spaces, the role of informal educational projects in facilitating the emergence and strength of social movements, and the role of universities as terrains of contestation that hold the possibility of linking to larger struggles for social justice.²⁵ These frameworks can offer insight into the importance of intentionally organizing for promoting educational change, and why grassroots educational processes are critical to the growth of social movements.²⁶

The grassroots leadership of entrepreneurial-minded students operate as collective efforts at the lower hierarchical levels of university institutions. Grassroots leadership is considered as a bottom up change process that is characterized by the strategic mobilization of actors and resources, the alignment with existing networks and social movements, and the expansion of desired change across applicable environments.²⁷ What makes the students entrepreneurial is the way in which they strategically leverage innovation and develop enterprises for purposes of accumulating social power as agents of change in ways that are notably independent of established authority.²⁸ Entrepreneurial grassroots leaders build platforms for action by mobilizing actors and resources that would otherwise remain disconnected, and they independently introduce innovations that disrupt the status quo in order to promote the reallocation of resources.²⁹ The method of storytelling is often employed to develop social support and institutional capital.³⁰ Grassroots social entrepreneurs tend to pay attention to mission-related impact as a central criterion, refusing to be limited by readily available resources. They are heavily dependent upon the ‘buy-in’ of individuals at the lower level of the organizational hierarchy, and they remain highly attentive to intended outcomes and groups most affected by the actual outcomes.³¹ Social movement learning theory explores the collective development of grassroots individual ‘buy-in’ as a learning process shaped by social experience and material conditions.

²³P. Palmer, “Divided No More: A Movement Approach to Educational Reform,” *Change* 24, no. 2 (1992), 10-17.

²⁴ Sandra Sirota, “Editorial Introduction: Analyzing Social Movement Actions and Outcomes,” *Current Issues in Comparative Education* 17, no. 1 (2015), 3-4.

²⁵ Rebecca Tarlau, “From a Language to a Theory of Resistance: Critical Pedagogy, the Limits of ‘Framing,’ and Social Change,” *Educational Theory* 64, no. 4 (2014), 369-92.

²⁶ Tarlau, 370.

²⁷ M.M. Mars, “Student Entrepreneurs as Agents of Organizational Change and Social Transformation: A Grassroots Leadership Perspective,” *Journal of Change Management* 9, no. 3 (2009), 339-57.

²⁸ A. Martinelli, “Entrepreneurship and Management, in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, ed. N. J. Smelser and R. Swedberg, 476-503 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

²⁹ Mars, 341.

³⁰ M. Lounsbury and M. A. Glynn, “Cultural Entrepreneurship: Stories, Legitimacy, and the Acquisition of Resources,” *Strategic Management Journal* 22 (2001), 545-64.

³¹ Mars, 344.

Unlike individualized learning processes, social movement learning is a collective process that produces a collective identity that is guided by development of a shared worldview.³² Collective action involves a group challenge to existing material, cultural, or psychological social conditions that is motivated by a collective sense of ‘righting a wrong.’³³ The agitation associated with sit-ins, protests, solidarity marches, freedom tours, etc. are constitutive of the diverse collective learning process where the group collaboratively learns altogether.³⁴ The process of assembling large groups of diverse people through the occupation of highly symbolic public places, for example, expresses dissent, creates solidarity and breaches the order of things.³⁵ Individual learning and development affecting personal identity, consciousness, a sense of agency, a sense of worthiness, and a sense of connectedness occurs as an interdependent group process of perspective coordination.³⁶ Collective identity becomes socially constructed “through continuous negotiation among individuals or between individuals and the community.”³⁷ Collective learning occurs as a developmental process that expands as the diversity of group membership increases.³⁸ For these reasons, the collective aspect of social movement learning pays attention to the dynamic interaction and mutual development of individual meanings and shared meanings.³⁹

Unlike organisational learning, social movement learning involves critical engagement with power inequalities and exclusion.⁴⁰ Activist learning involves a hope for social renewal in the critical social project and the creation of space for previously marginalized voices.⁴¹ Although social movement learning is an active process of potential transformation involving creativity and invention,⁴² sociomaterial movement learning theories also pay attention to the way in which agency is inclusive of the non-human ‘actants’ (such as placards, blockades, posters, etc.) which influence the learning process and outcome. This approach avoids ascribing too much agency to activists by displacing and distributing agency “so that the entire notion of ‘collective learning’ is redefined to include non-human matter.”⁴³ Lived experience in particular contexts can thereby be understood as constitutive, not supplemental, to social movement learning. As knowledge moves through spatialities, learning translates sensed and embodied experience and coordinates data as a way of ‘educating attention’ whether “through hindering, facilitating, amplifying, distorting, contesting, or radically repackaging knowledge.”⁴⁴

³² Deborah W. Kilgore, “Understanding Learning in Social Movements: A Theory of Collective Learning,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 18, no. 3 (May-June, 1999), 191-202.

³³ Kilgore, 194.

³⁴ E. Kasl and V. Marsick, “Epistemology of Groups as Learning Systems: A Research-Based Analysis.” Paper presented at 27th Annual SCUTREA Conference (London: England, 1997).

³⁵ Walter Nicholls, Byron Miller and Justin Beaumont, “Introduction: Conceptualizing the Spatialities of Social Movements,” in *Spaces of Contention: Spatialities and Social Movements*, ed. Walter Nicholls, Byron Miller and Justin Beaumont, 1-26 (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013).

³⁶ Kilgore, 197.

³⁷ A. Melucci, “The Process of Collective Identity,” in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. H. Johnston and B. Klandermans, 41-63 (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

³⁸ Kilgore, 198.

³⁹ Kilgore, 200.

⁴⁰ C. McFarlane, “The City as a Machine for Learning,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36, no. 3 (2012), 5.

⁴¹ See also Kilgore, 191.

⁴² McFarlane, 6.

⁴³ Callum McGregor, “From Social Movement Learning to Sociomaterial Movement Learning? Addressing the Possibilities and Limits of New Materialism,” *Studies in the Education of Adults* 46, no. 2 (Autumn, 2014), 212.

⁴⁴ McFarlane, 10.

The preceding research and conceptualizations of grassroots entrepreneurial leadership in combination with social movement learning theory were used to develop the conceptual framework that guided the exploration of the Sustainable Peace Initiative at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. More state-centric social movement approaches were unable to make sense of the cultural and market goals associated with this type of “awkward” social movement that is composed of primarily middle-class white people in a religious institution.⁴⁵ Attention to organizational and social movement learning theory provides a broader definition of politics more appropriate for understanding the activities of this social movement.⁴⁶ The following research questions were asked:

1. What are the origins and characteristics of the Sustainable Peace Initiative?
2. In what ways, if at all, does the Sustainable Peace Initiative case demonstrate student entrepreneurial capacities to leverage market-like conditions for the purpose of creating organizational change and social transformation?
3. In what ways, if any, does the Sustainable Peace Initiative case demonstrate collective identity formation through collective learning?
4. In what ways, if any, does the Sustainable Peace Initiative case demonstrate dynamic interaction among diverse individual members in the formation of collective identity?
5. In what ways, if any, does the Sustainable Peace Initiative case demonstrate sociomaterial learning that involved critical engagement with power inequalities and exclusion?

Methods and Data

This study of the Sustainable Peace Initiative was conducted using the single case design as a preferred method, when compared to others, because the main research questions are “how” and “why” questions and the focus of study involved contemporary events (as opposed to being historical).⁴⁷ Although the researcher had limited control over events, the author was personally involved, so an autoethnographic methodology was used for purposes of systematic analysis of the case study.⁴⁸ Given the history of deviant labeling of peripheral religious groups within the dominant religious culture by some members of the social scientific community, becoming part of the data by playing a role in the social construction of reality has been argued to be more methodologically appropriate than clinically detached conventional methodologies for the kind of research that is needed for an acceptable secondary construction of new religious movements.⁴⁹ In

⁴⁵ F. Polletta and J. M. Jasper, “Collective Identity and Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001), 283-305.

⁴⁶ In Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein, “Culture, Power, and Institutions: a Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements,” *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 1 (March 2008), 74-100, Armstrong and Bernstein critique the political process approach to social movements for being dismissive of social movements that target corporations, involve cultural goals or do not involve people that are disenfranchised in the economic and political realms. They suggest taking a broader approach capable of encompassing the diversity of contemporary change efforts.

⁴⁷ R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 4th edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 3.

⁴⁸ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams and Arthur P. Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview,” *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (January 2011), Art. 10.

⁴⁹ Eileen Barker, “Presidential Address: The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must Be Joking!” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 3 (1995), 287-310.

keeping with best practices, the researcher has been careful to note and reflexively analyze her participation and influence on the primary construction of reality like any other part of the research.⁵⁰

Ethnographic case studies have several identifiable weaknesses. Case studies do not lend themselves to numerical representations, data is voluminous and data presentation is subject to selectivity and interpretive bias which raises doubts about researcher objectivity.⁵¹ Because case studies cannot be representative, they have very limited generalisability.

Small sample size notwithstanding, case studies present more than idiosyncratic understandings. While not generalizable in any conventional sense, they serve as illustrative data, not test data, for purposes of theoretical development (not hypothesis testing). The connection of case study data to theory tells social scientists something about situations beyond the actual case being studied in a number of ways. The findings may ‘ring true’ in other settings providing provisional truths that unmask some of the over-simplifications upon which some policy approaches are based. As Flyvbjerg notes, “a scientific discipline without a large number of thoroughly executed case studies is a discipline without systematic production of exemplars, and a discipline without exemplars is an ineffective one.”⁵²

Small scale qualitative case study research designs also have several identifiable strengths.⁵³ Case studies “facilitate exploration of the unexpected and unusual.”⁵⁴ The empirical boundedness and holistic focus of the case study approach facilitates an understanding of the causal processes involved in social transformation, and lends insight into the complex inter-relationships of the micro-politics of ‘lived reality.’ This empirically bounded case was chosen as an important contribution to research on evangelical diversity about environmental attitudes which has been identified as the prime issue where evangelical elites diverge from the Christian Right.

The researcher has made every effort to present an accurate and rigorous presentation of empirical data and a respectfully balanced reflexive account. Data used include secondary analysis of newspaper accounts and primary accounts by movement members. Newspaper articles were analyzed from *The Suburban Times*, *The Waltonian* student newspaper, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection press releases and publications, *Spirit Magazine*, *The Institute for Global Engagement Magazine*, and Sustainable Peace Initiative flyers and year-end reports. Primary accounts from student entrepreneurs include a student intern’s historical account, student wall postings from the *Jammin Java Boycott Wall*, and student emails that were circulated to the student body. Triangulation of measurement processes were used to reduce the uncertainty of interpretation associated with using just one set of measure or method.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Barker, 307.

⁵¹ Phil Hodkinson and Heather Hodkinson, “The Strengths and Limitations of Case Study Research,” Paper presented at *Learning and Skills Development Agency Making an Impact on Policy and Practice Conference* (Cambridge: England, 2001), 8-10.

⁵² Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (2006), 219.

⁵³ Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2-8.

⁵⁴ Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 4.

⁵⁵ Alan Bryman, “Triangulation,” *Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2003), 1142-44.

Original sources were revisited when inconsistencies in the data were revealed from comparisons between primary and secondary sources to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

The Sustainable Peace Initiative Case

The Sustainable Peace Initiative (SPI) case study covers the timeframe from Fall 2001 through Fall 2003 at the main campus of Eastern University, a private evangelical institution that is affiliated with the American Baptist Churches USA. The undergraduate campus is located in a suburb near Philadelphia and is primarily a residential facility for about 1,500 full-time students. SPI was formed as a campus initiative during the summer of 2002 when a small group of student leaders (including the president of the Student Government Association) and their faculty advisor met with a representative from Community Energy Inc. to strategize a plan to promote sustainable-peacemaking centered on intergenerational environmental justice at Eastern University. The vision for the initiative emerged out of previous dialogue between students and faculty sponsors whose vision for a more environmentally sustainable future as a way of peacemaking had manifested itself in their careers as academics. Students wanted to apply the theoretical principles to their university context in ways that demonstrated development of sustainable relationships between privileged and excluded locales—in the United States and internationally—as a way of educating attention through critical engagement with power inequalities. Students initially developed a three point program for their intergenerational environmental justice framework that involved transformation of Eastern students' way of life in favor of developing more just relations with people in marginalized urban (e.g., Camden, New Jersey) and international (e.g., rural Malawi) locations. From the beginning, the campaign was a form of 'prophetic activism in an age of empire' that linked a cosmopolitan emphasis on ethical responsibility to the empowerment of people experiencing contemporary forms of exploitation.⁵⁶ Students strategized how to transform campus life to be more ethically responsible even if it meant increasing their tuition. They adopted the term "leap frog" to communicate a development strategy that "hops over" fossil fuel dependency to organize directly around renewable energy resources. To generate discussion, participating students wearing neon green t-shirts with "Play Leap Frog!" written on their backs worked with participating faculty to randomly "leap frog" through classes while they were in session. After the "frogs" left the classroom, the faculty member would ask if there was anyone present who could explain what the leaping was all about. Inevitably, a student would stand and explain the concept of "leap frog" development. As faculty became increasingly interested in environmental issues, the Academic Dean's office supplied copies of *Greening the College Curriculum*⁵⁷ to a quarter of the faculty in 2002. During the 2002-2003 Academic Year, SPI demonstrated their sustainable development approach through five strategies:⁵⁸ 1) *The Rush to Recycle Campaign*, 2) *SPEAK Fair Trade/Organic/Shade Grown Coffee Campaign*, 3) *The Keep the Lights On for the Children Project*, 4) *The Rural Malawi Project*, and 5) *The Wind Energy Campaign*:

1) *Rush to Recycle Campaign*: The faculty liaison initiated Eastern University's membership in the Pennsylvania Consortium for Interdisciplinary Environmental Policy (PCIEP), an

⁵⁶For more on prophetic activism as counter-narrative to the dominance of conservative Christianity, see Helene Slessarev-Jamir, "Prophetic Activism in Age of Empire," *Political Theology* 11, no. 5 (2010), 674-90.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Collett, *Greening the College Curriculum: A Guide to Environmental Teaching in the Liberal Arts* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996).

⁵⁸ The entire program operated without any budgeted funds from the university. SPI was financed by donations from faculty, staff, student and members of the community. Moreover, the university financially benefited from SPI's efforts.

organization that provides external support services for universities attempting to “green” educational institutions. Membership was contingent, however, upon the university’s purchase of at least 3% of renewable energy. SPI raised funds for this purchase in accordance with the PCIEP membership deadline. Once Eastern became a member of the PCIEP network, Eastern’s Student Government Association voted to participate in the PCIEP intercollegiate recycling competition which involved weekly reporting of the weight of material recycled from October 7 through November 30, 2002. After entering the competition, students requested information from physical plant to report the weekly weights of recycled materials and learned that the recycling bins were mere facades. When the faculty liaison contacted PCIEP to withdraw the university from the competition, the Department of Environmental Protection promised to provide a grant that would cover the university’s recycling pull charges if students remained in the competition. Students organized volunteers, established work study jobs, designed two recycling routes, created recycling stations, painted the recycling containers the school colors, educated the university community, and lobbied the administration to ensure that the program would continue beyond the competition. Eastern’s Student Government Association (SGA) won second place in the “Total Average Pounds per Student Recyclables Collected, New Programs” category, collecting 3.59 tons of recyclables over a two month period. The Department of Environmental Protection presented SGA with a \$1000 award and the funds were put toward the university’s recycling costs.

- 2) *SPEAK Fair Trade/Organic/Shade Grown Coffee Campaign*: The leaders of this club asked to join the SPI initiative because they shared a similar emphasis on justice. SPEAK petitioned the Student Government Association for “just” coffee legislation to use their consumer power to purchase from companies that offered fair wages and used sustainable agricultural practices. Twenty percent of the student body signed a campus petition over a two day period to get the campus café to use fair trade coffee. The club successfully persuaded both on-campus coffee distributors to shift to companies that provided coffee farmers in Central America with a 440% monetary gain over conventional coffee sales.
- 3) *Keep the Lights On for the Children Project*: Students approached the administration to install a solar panel system and donate the estimated energy savings (about \$600/yr) to local non-profits to put toward the electrical bills of struggling urban families in the United States to demonstrate domestic sustainable relationships involving people who are economically disenfranchised. SPI failed to achieve this goal. Although Astro Power offered to donate a 1.5 kw solar panel system to SPI for installation on the gymnasium roof and The Sustainable Development Fund offered a grant to cover installation costs, in the past, a solar panel system had created extensive damage to a building that was expensive to repair, and SPI leaders were unable to galvanize the support necessary to achieve this goal. Several students found individual ways to affirm the domestic sustainability SPI vision (e.g., moving to Camden, New Jersey to participate in environmental justice activities, interning with Philadelphia’s Greensgrow to convert brownfields into sustainable urban farms, etc.), and eventually the university installed a 56 KW solar panel system on campus in 2009, but the energy savings were not donated to domestic urban non-profit organizations.
- 4) *The Rural Malawi Project*: In collaboration with the Green Fund Network and Thoroughbred Technologies, SPI students worked with a faculty member from Malawi to establish an inkjet and toner printer cartridge recycling program for the Philadelphia region. Funds raised from recycled cartridges were put toward building a solar powered 30-horsepower (22 kw) pounding and grinding mill and a medical clinic in Zowe, Malawi. Replacing wood with solar power

reduces deforestation and the energy burden of rural Malawians, expands business opportunities, increases food security and improves public health. The project was initially linked to an undergraduate course on poverty, oppression and development in Africa. The recycling program expanded beyond the university to include several local businesses and regional schools. Initially, the university was given 5% of proceeds to cover associated administrative costs. Work study jobs were created through the Federal Work Study program to assist with processing. Over 300 cartridges were recycled the first semester of operation, generating \$100 from the first shipment of cartridges alone. In December 2003, twelve students accompanied the faculty member to launch the program on site in Zowe. Between March 2003 and Fall 2004, students recycled 3,432 cartridges which raised \$5,500. The initiative has administratively separated from Eastern University over time, incorporating as a non-profit called Pamoza International, but the pedagogical linkage to the faculty member's courses on community development remains. Pamoza's programs have expanded to Kahelere and Mchingasanya communities. They have partnered with three middle schools who have developed their own fundraising projects in support of the solar powered grinding mill. The business venture supports a community fund and credit facility in support of individual microenterprises.

- 5) *The Wind Energy Campaign*: At a time when universities were improving energy efficiency and using the money saved to convert as much as five percent of their energy purchases to renewable energy,⁵⁹ SPI leaders collaborated with Community Energy to devise a plan to convert one hundred percent of Eastern's energy purchases to renewable sources within three years through a combination of raising tuition, increasing energy efficiency, and using the money saved to pay renewable premiums. At the initial SPI meeting, Community Energy Inc. provided student leaders with information on campus activism at the University of Colorado and other schools where students were using consumer power to change public electrical grids. In Pennsylvania, regulatory and legislative retail unbundling had already begun when the General Assembly adopted the 1999 Natural Gas Choice and Competition Act. This legal change presented students with a political opportunity structure. Consumers now had the right to influence their energy provider's choice of energy suppliers. SPI students reviewed their Student Government Association constitution and discovered that, unlike the University of Colorado, their constitution only gave them allocation power. They would have to devise a different strategy that was primarily based upon dialogue with the administration and the student body. To jumpstart the process, SPI incorporated as a non-profit and raised funds from students and faculty to purchase 3% of the university's energy supply from renewable resources.⁶⁰ Students presented the gift to the administration in a public forum on September 23, 2002 in accordance with a PCIEP deadline to be listed in their press releases as a member institution. Students approached the administration to provide a blueprint for their intention of holding a student referendum to incorporate a \$15 ethical energy fee into tuition costs. Students were told to 1) hold focus groups, 2) survey chemistry, biology and environmental studies majors concerning the importance of sustainable energy sources, 3) hold a student forum for open debate, and 4) pass a student referendum through SGA. The Vice President of Student

⁵⁹ For example, see Julie McWilliams, "Penn Announces largest U.S. Wind Energy Purchase," *Penn Green Campus Partnership*, October 24, 2001. Retrieved from Penn News.

⁶⁰ A minimum purchase of 3% wind energy was needed to secure university membership in PCIEP. Fundraising ceased after this purchase due to backlash from some figures in the administration who saw the solicitation for donations as competing with the university's scholarship fundraising campaign.

Development was appointed as SPI liaison who helped SPI negotiate relations with plant operations, student development and the university president. If students succeeded in developing the necessary student support, the Vice President of Student Development would present the student referendum to the Executive Board for consideration. Eastern University's Board of Trustees would make the final determination at their January, 2003 board meeting. Tensions mounted on campus as SPI students worked through the blueprint, engaging public dialogue through forums, letter writing campaigns, lobbying efforts, door-to-door visitations, class visits, focus groups, and letters to the editor. Although green initiatives were not new to Pennsylvania universities, student activism raising the ceiling above 5% for renewable energy was distinctive. The activism drew the attention of state environmental leaders. On October 21, 2002, when SPI presented the wind proposal to SGA, Don Brown, former head of the Environmental Protection Agency, came to campus and spoke to students about the significance of what they were taking under consideration. After two weeks of campus discussion, David Hess, the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection in Pennsylvania, traveled to Eastern to witness the student vote. At the November 4th Senate meeting, the SGA passed by secret ballot (11-2-1) a formal recommendation to the administration to adopt a wind energy increase of adding \$20.89 to Eastern undergraduate students' yearly charges to cover the cost of buying New Wind Energy to meet 40% of Eastern's energy needs for the next three years.⁶¹ On November 19, the president of the university vetoed the proposal. A reporter from the *Philadelphia Inquirer* contacted the SGA president and the president of the university to run a story on the activism. Threatened with the potential for bad press, and with the help of a mediator, the president of the university and the SGA president negotiated a compromise. An ethical energy fee would be added to student tuition, but an "opt-out" box would appear next to the line item on the student bill. The administration would also make a \$10,000 addition to Eastern's Annual Fund Campaign (to be supplemented by \$5000 from Eastern's budget if donations were not significant) to support the initiative.⁶² The landmark decision was recognized in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Fox Television Network and student newspapers in several major universities.⁶³ In Fall 2003, 1,047 of the 1,500 full time students chose wind at a cost of \$22 each. At that time, thirty two Pennsylvania universities had been setting goals peaking at ten percent of their energy supply. Eastern University became a national wind energy leader when it announced the purchase of thirty seven percent of its electricity from emission-free, locally generated, wind energy. Eastern's commitment became the largest percentage purchase in Pennsylvania and the third largest percentage nationally. In 2004, Eastern University's main campus became one of the first universities to purchase one hundred percent of its energy from emission-free, locally generated, wind energy.⁶⁴ In 2012, Eastern made a seven year commitment with Community Energy Inc. to maintain 100 percent clean energy for the St. Davids campus.

⁶¹ Robin Weinstein, *SGA Wind Energy Decision*, email announcement (November 5, 2002 4:50 pm).

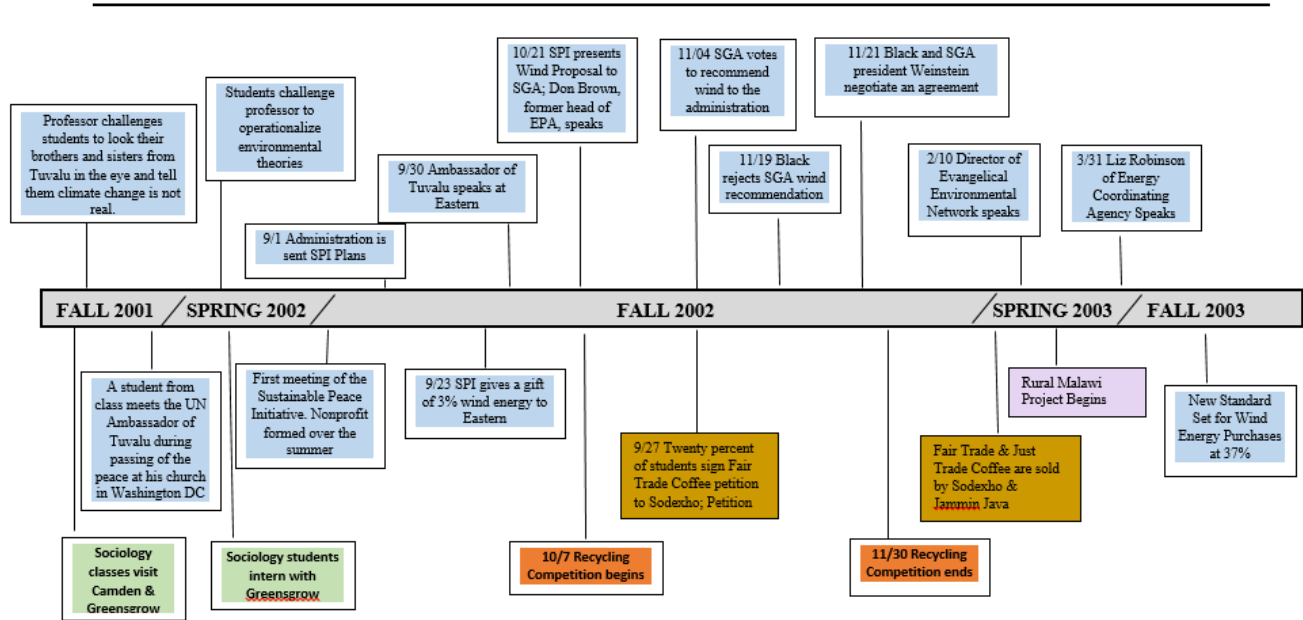
⁶² Nicole Priest, "Black Rejects SGA Wind Energy Recommendation," *Waltonian* (December 4, 2002), 1.

⁶³ Robin Weinstein, *State of the Students Address to the Board of Trustees*, email announcement (February 12, 2003), 2.

⁶⁴ Jim Henderson, "Eastern University Awarded Membership in 2014 EPA Green Power Leadership Club," *Eastern University News and Events* (February 28, 2014).

Student activism largely subsided by Fall 2003 at Eastern University. The entrepreneurial vision centered on intergenerational environmental justice is no longer a salient factor on campus, but the campus activism related to the wind energy campaign created enduring changes that has

Figure 1
Sustainable Peace Initiative Timeline (Fall Semester 2001-Fall Semester 2003)



solidified Eastern University’s national leadership role on environmental issues. In 2003, Eastern University received two Governor’s Awards from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection for Environmental Excellence, one of which was directly related to student activism. In 2004, Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future gave Eastern University the Green University Award. In 2007, Citizens for Pennsylvania’s Future gave Eastern University the Platinum Green Power Award in recognition of their commitment to 100% renewable energy. In 2014, Eastern University was awarded membership in the Green Power Leadership Club by the United States Environmental Protection Agency for exceeding the amount of energy purchases required to be a Green Energy Partner. SPI’s lasting legacy is Eastern University’s ongoing commitment to sustainable energy consumption.

Student activists at other universities have continued to vote by wide margins to pay additional fees to cover their institutions’ clean-energy purchases. By 2006, students at Bowdoin and Evergreen State Colleges had won campaigns for 100% renewable energy usage. More than 330 colleges across the country participate in the Campus Climate Challenge, a national network of activists promoting sustainable change.⁶⁵ Christian colleges, in general, are not playing much of a leadership role, but they continue to participate in the movement.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sara Lipka, “Students Call for Action on Campuses,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (October 20, 2006).

⁶⁶ Peter Frick-Wright, “Holy Change Agents,” *Sierra* 92, no. 6 (2007), 37.

Discussion

Although the vision of the Sustainable Peace Initiative (SPI) resonates with environmental justice values found among some evangelical elites, the student activism at Eastern University occurred during a latency period (1996-2003) between two identified environmental issue attention cycles by evangelical elites.⁶⁷ Evangelical culture provided enough social support to enable students to successfully access several organizational layers within the university. SPI obtained support by the student government association, administrative cooperation for work study jobs, the appointment of a special liaison, collaboration with the Chemistry Club, Fellowship for Peace and Justice Club, SPEAK Club, YACHT Club, Earth Keepers Club,⁶⁸ cooperation with plant operations, access to faculty classes, media relations support, and permission to use facilities to host special campus forums. Collaborative responses throughout multiple layers of the university's organizational structure contributed heavily toward the students' ability to achieve the majority of their goals. But common ground for cooperation based on shared values by some cannot explain the origins and characteristics of SPI.

Several external social movement actors played an influential role on the movement, especially Community Energy Inc. Their representative informed students about how student activists at other universities were using consumer power to change public electrical grids in light of regulatory and legislative retail unbundling. Students were particularly interested in the strategy taken by students at University of Colorado. Student activism was strong during the 2002-3 Academic Year on the West Coast, as well. The California Student Sustainability Coalition campaign, backed by Greenpeace, was gathering thousands of student signatures in support of greening the entire UC system using solar power.⁶⁹ Community Energy Inc. kept students informed about case studies in other parts of the country and provided them with an Eastern University Wind Energy Analysis, developed in light of energy consumption information students obtained from plant operations, that was useful for communicating the business plan and environmental benefits to constituents during the campaign. Students intentionally leveraged the market opportunity for the purpose of creating organizational change and social transformation by collaborating with Community Energy Inc. to purchase wind energy and with Green Fund Network and Thoroughbred Technologies to recycle used printer cartridges. Community Energy Inc. also introduced one of the faculty liaisons to the Pennsylvania Consortium for Interdisciplinary Environmental Policy (PCIEP). As members of PCIEP, Eastern students were able to participate in the statewide recycling campus competition and attract the attention of high profile environmental leaders in the state of Pennsylvania. At the time when students were discussing a push towards 40-60% dependence upon renewable energy, administrators at University of Pennsylvania, Penn State, Carnegie Mellon, Dickinson, Bucknell, and Swarthmore were

⁶⁷ In a study covering the timeframe 1984-2010, Danielsen, 204 identifies the issue attention cycles as occurring between 1988-95 and 2004-10.

⁶⁸ Susan Varga, Andrea Ferich, Pauline Sachar, Leah Wilson-Hartgrove, Mary kay Otterstedt, Sarah Hughes, Jessi Herman, Chris Haw, Elizabeth Leidy, Rosabelle McCullough, Sherrie Steiner, Leonora Eubanks, Sarah Wilson, Jesse Straight, Rhea Horan, heather-Leigh Sommerville, Drick Boyd and Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, "Letters to the Editor: Readers Respond," *Waltonian* (October 2, 2002), 10.

⁶⁹ Ashley Dawson, "Greening the Campus: Contemporary Student Environmental Activism," *Radical Teacher* 78 (Spring 2007), 19-23.

purchasing between 6-11% of renewable energy.⁷⁰ The attention environmental leaders paid to the student activism provided, and attracted, media attention.

SPI students demonstrated entrepreneurial capacities most notably in relation to the Wind Energy Campaign. They engaged in fundraising efforts to finance the initial wind purchase. They held focus groups and circulated surveys to solicit student feedback regarding the proposed tuition increase. They adapted their plan over time to pragmatically implement a strategy that had the best chances of succeeding, dropping some goals and adapting others in light of student concerns. They canvassed all of the dormitories to better engage individual students face-to-face with one-on-one conversations about the issues, clarifying any misunderstandings about the campaign, and obtaining signatures to indicate popular support for presentation to the trustees. Students paid attention to public relations and engaged with the media, where possible, to further the debate.

SPI built a platform for action through the initiative, which was intentionally broader than a club, which enabled them to mobilize student government and club actors and resources that would otherwise have remained disconnected. By forming a non-profit, they were able to independently introduce the innovation of purchasing wind, presented to the university as a gift, which was an action that disrupted the status quo in order to promote the reallocation of resources. SPI students paid attention to the mission-related impact as a central criterion, refusing to be limited by readily available resources (which is why they initially proposed increasing their tuition in the form of an 'ethical energy fee'). Students quoted the university's mission statement at the public forum, in letters to the editor, and in the *Jammin Java* postings. Since they lacked the student constitutional power to raise their tuition independent of the administration, the SPI campaign was heavily dependent upon 'buy-in' of individuals at the lower level of the organizational hierarchy. SPI students recognized that their campaign was for the 'hearts and minds' of the student body. For this reason, they were attentive enough to the intended outcomes, and the groups most affected by the actual outcomes, to lobby student government representatives, contribute letters to the student paper, post discussions on the *Jammin Java* café wall, visit classrooms and canvass dorms. In addition to these various ways in which collective identity was formed through collective learning, SPI hosted a series of alternative forum speaking engagements that were open to the entire campus community. Speakers from within and without the evangelical community addressed issues relevant to the campaign. For example, the Director of the Evangelical Environmental network spoke about environmental ethics, and the former head of the Environmental Protection Agency and representative to the United Nations on environmental policy during the Clinton administration spoke about environmental conditions.

Social movement learning was a collective developmental process that produced, in the end, a collective identity that was socially constructed through continuous negotiation among and between individuals and the community. "It felt like a dream," wrote one student, "where all different types of students came together around wind energy. There was a culture that we could make a difference at a unique time in history." Collective learning expanded as the diversity of group membership increased, fostering open debate using formal and informal communication venues. As student tensions increased, the student paper published challenges, corrections and clarifications to the news coverage.⁷¹ Administration and student government took opposing

⁷⁰ Cheron Allen, "SPI Pushes for Wind Energy," *Waltonian* (October 30, 2002), 1.

⁷¹ See Varga, et al., 10.

positions early in the debate.⁷² The next week, the managing editor of the student paper argued for rejection of the SPI proposal on the grounds that “no organization, regardless of the nobility of its purpose or the worthiness of its cause, should be allowed to use students’ bills to solicit group-specific funding.”⁷³ Student rebuttals were published in the student newspaper, and distributed independently through informal means.⁷⁴ The Senior Class Representative, Jesse Herman, noted in a rebuttal that “Ms. Nixon’s argument would be quite convincing if it were not based on misinformation.” After clarifying several misconceptions, Herman concludes that “The bottom line: SPI is not requesting ‘group-specific funding’ from anyone...They are asking us to choose energy that is clean, sustainable and just.”⁷⁵ Another student also disagreed with the editorial, saying “It’s hard to believe that students on this campus cannot afford \$20 to save a planet that is not ours to trash.”⁷⁶ The Student Government Association delayed voting on the proposal twice to solicit more information and student feedback. The SGA president clearly believed that wind energy was a good thing, but the SPI proposal was an “unrealistic expectation” given the complications it would introduce into the university’s finances.⁷⁷ SGA held a wind energy forum that drew a crowd of more than 75 students who made it clear that “the Sustainable Peace Initiative is something they want to talk about.”⁷⁸ The editor-in-chief called for more information, reasoned argument, and administrative thinking on the issue, describing the forum as frustrating for people who wanted handouts to study the statistical information that was presented. “Signs that say, “Don’t drop acid: support wind energy at Eastern,” or, “Wind energy at Eastern = more attractive resume” are eye-catching,” said Kriss, “but they don’t educate.”⁷⁹ When the University President finally supported the wind energy recommendation after a semester-long campaign by SPI and SGA to educate students on wind energy and garner support, the development office pledged enough support from their Annual Fund Campaign to ensure that tuition would not rise for students choosing to ‘opt out’ of the renewable energy choice.⁸⁰

The method of storytelling involving critical engagement with power inequalities and exclusion proved important for the development of social support and institutional capital. Students heard stories of how recycling their printer cartridges could transform village life in rural Malawi bringing food security and microenterprise development to a region ravaged by AIDS/HIV. Students heard stories of how changing their choice of coffee could raise the standard of living for Central American farmers by 440%. But one story, in particular, stirred student passions for activism more than the others.

In Fall 2001, the faculty member who would eventually become the SPI liaison, struggled for a way to address climate change in the classroom. She knew that many of the students considered the issue to be a social construction too fraught with scientific uncertainties to be taken seriously.

⁷² Daniel Klotz, “SPI Pushes for Wind Energy,” *Waltonian* (October 2, 2002), 3.

⁷³ Abbie Nixon, “Administration Must Reject Wind Power Funding Proposal,” *Waltonian* (October 16, 2002), 12.

⁷⁴ Allen, 2.

⁷⁵ Jessi Herman, “Wind Energy”, *Waltonian* (October 30, 2002), 11.

⁷⁶ Heather-Lynn Holmes, “Dear Editor,” *Waltonian* (October 30, 2002), 11.

⁷⁷ Allen, 1.

⁷⁸ Daniel Kotz, “Student Speeches Overrun SGA Wind Energy Forum,” *Waltonian* (October 30, 2002), 4.

⁷⁹ Rachel Kriss, “Wind Energy, Again,” *Waltonian* (October 30, 2002), 12.

⁸⁰ Nicole Priest, “Black Rejects SGA Wind Energy Recommendation: President Offers Counter Proposal, Meets With Weinstein, and Finds a Third Option,” *Waltonian* (December 4, 2002), 1-2.

In addition, the state of Pennsylvania, at the time, produced one percent of the world's greenhouse gases and had the most acidic rain and mercury pollution in the United States.⁸¹ Pennsylvania was a coal state and Eastern University drew students heavily influenced by coal culture and conservative religious values. Climate change was a distant social construction for most students, but the professor knew that the issue was 'up close and personal' for Pacific Islanders, many of whom were already struggling to preserve freshwater drinking supplies amidst rising ocean waters. The professor searched for information on the impact of climate change on islanders, and one set of islands, in particular, caught her attention. According to the World Council of Churches, more than 95% of Tuvalu's population considered themselves members of the Protestant Congregational Christian Church of Tuvalu.⁸² If the professor could shift the focus away from causes of climate change to its uneven consequences, attention could be paid to the unequal exposure to environmental hazards as an issue of environmental justice for vulnerable people who are members of the same Christian community shared by the students in her classroom. Eastern University had a strong student activism culture centered on justice around poverty issues. At the beginning of class, the professor told students that she was going to address the relationship between social organization and climate change knowing that many of them did not think oceans were really rising. "Tell that to the people of Tuvalu," she said, "who are your brothers and sisters in Christ. Their freshwater supplies are already at-risk from rising seawater levels." She then presented information on climate change based upon the assumption that the social problem was real, and discussed adaptation literature that affirmed an alternative hopeful future. Operating as an ingroup member, the instructor engaged in 'social identity unfreezing' tactics by rendering the Tuvaliese as a salient group and using inclusive language as a core communication construct to reframe a positive group identity in affirmation of climate justice.⁸³ Unlike global narratives of climate change that have used the Tuvaliese to problematically position them to speak for an entire planet under threat,⁸⁴ the professor employed a climate justice discourse that emphasized accepting responsibility for local contributions to a global injustice that were under local control in an effort to 'do no harm.'⁸⁵ Shortly thereafter, during fall break, one of the students from the class serendipitously met the Ambassador of Tuvalu to the United Nations while attending church with his family in Washington D.C. Stunned, the student told the Ambassador what his professor had recently said in class, and the Ambassador gave the student his card. A small group of students began to talk among themselves. During spring semester, students challenged their professor to 'operationalize her theories' and collaborate with them to strategize an application to the campus context. In Summer 2002, they held their first meeting. Lighting struck the building while they met, causing minor facility damage and splitting a tree in half but injuring no one. Students approached the Ambassador of Tuvalu to be the first speaker for the SPI forums. The student invitation was the first time the Ambassador was asked to present their concerns in the United

⁸¹ Community Energy Inc., *Eastern University New Wind Energy Proposal*, (Wayne, PA: Community Energy, Inc., August 2002), 6.

⁸² See <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/congregational-christian-church-of-tuvalu>.

⁸³ See Viviane Seyranian, "Social Identity Framing Communication Strategies for Mobilizing Social Change," *The Leadership Quarterly* 25 (2014), 468-86 for further discussion of the framing phases involved in changing social identities.

⁸⁴ Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, "The First Climate Refugees? Contesting Global Narratives of Climate Change in Tuvalu," *Global Environmental Change: Human and Policy Dimensions* 22 (2012), 382-90.

⁸⁵ See Rene Audet, "Climate Justice and Bargaining Coalitions: A Discourse Analysis," *International Environmental Agreements* 13 (2013), 369-86 for analysis of the three types of discourses currently used in climate justice discussions regarding the North-South ideological divide.

States about the need to balance the use of fossil fuels and renewable energy. The university communications office issued a press release and the university president hosted a luncheon in honor of his visit. In recent years, representations of the Tuvaluese have been highly circulated as displaced islanders and future climate refugees, often externally imagining Pacific Islanders as a laboratory and litmus test for the effects of climate change on the planet.⁸⁶ In response to the marginalization of indigenous voices, Tuvaluan civil society has been reframing the debate on the future of their country in terms of human rights and global citizenship,⁸⁷ but this was September 2002, and students were eager to hear directly from fellow Christians about their environmental justice concerns. Students collected a free-will offering and the Ambassador used the funds to start a student educational scholarship for Tuvaluese youth. The SPI strategy offered students a practical way to creatively affirm hope for social renewal in a critical social project. By providing a platform for the Ambassador of Tuvalu to speak about his concerns, students created a public space for previously marginalized voices. Social movement learning became an active process of potential transformation that involved creativity and invention. The SPI strategy involved collective action that presented a group challenge to existing material, cultural, and psychological social conditions in a Pennsylvania evangelical university setting that was motivated by a collective sense of ‘righting a wrong.’ The agitation associated with the wind campaign actions that ensued were constitutive of the diverse collective learning process where the group collaboratively learned altogether.

Sociomaterial Learning

All five of the initial SPI strategies involved a sense of ‘righting a wrong,’ but only the wind campaign motivated student activism enough to capture the attention of the entire community and socially transform the university. Why did students respond to this issue differently than the other strategies? When students met and invited the Ambassador of Tuvalu to come share the concerns of the Pacific Islanders, what they experienced was sociomaterial movement learning. The professor who had initially challenged students to accept responsibility for their energy consumption choices had nothing to do with this chance encounter. When students finally convened the first meeting of SPI to discuss wind energy, the faculty advisor also had nothing to do with the lighting strike. From a sociomaterial perspective, the chance meeting of the Ambassador and the lighting strike can both be considered as non-human ‘actants’ that influenced the social movement learning process and outcome. Students’ lived experience in this particular context was constitutive, not supplemental, to collective social movement learning. As knowledge moved through spatialities, learning translated the sensed and embodied student experience and coordinated data as a way of ‘educating student attention’ whether through emphasizing, blocking, protesting or radically repackaging knowledge. Many students interpreted these events in terms of spirituality or serendipity, the reality of which, however much it is contested, became real in the behavioral consequences of student activism. Students’ perceptions were shaped by the events. Attention to the sociomaterial learning that occurred prevents the analysis of SPI from ascribing

⁸⁶ H. Lazrus, “Sea Change: Anthropology and Climate change in Tuvalu,” in *Tuvalu, South Pacific in Anthropology of Climate Change: From Encounters to Actions*, ed. S. A. Crate and M. Nuttall (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009).

⁸⁷ Farbotko and Lazrus, 392.

too much agency to student activists by displacing and distributing agency “so that the entire notion of ‘collective learning’ is redefined to include non-human matter”.⁸⁸

Conclusion

Higher education has become a force in expanding the green-power movement.⁸⁹ Interest in engaging climate change action has become widespread among chancellors and presidents of public and private, two- and four-year, small and large, and research-and teaching-oriented universities,⁹⁰ and among national higher education presidential and management associations.⁹¹ Students at almost 600 U.S. and Canadian schools have organized around the Campus Climate Challenge, a project founded in 2004 to support student activism to convert schools to 100 percent clean energy policies.⁹² The Energy Action Coalition of thirty youth-led social and environmental justice organizations was formalized in 2005 and now includes members engaged in campus activism such as the California Student Sustainability Coalition, the Sierra Student Coalition, the National Wildlife Federation Campus Ecology, Student Environmental Action Coalition, the Environmental Justice and Climate Change Initiative, the Responsible Endowments Coalition and the Energy Justice Network.

Higher education, including the student activism, has contributed to shifting the public debate from scientific analysis of causality to political discussion about the regulation of greenhouse gases by serving as living laboratories in global diplomacy discussions.⁹³ Despite the increase in networks that support student environmental activism and the widespread administrative support for engaging climate change action in higher education, significant progress on climate change remains a particularly intransigent environmental issue outside the walls of higher education.⁹⁴ Even within universities, a recent survey of academic systems indicate that sustainable efforts tend to be compartmentalised despite several examples of sustainable development being implemented throughout the system.⁹⁵ Student activism in recent years has tended to focus on economic issues such as anti-foreclosure activism, anti-tuition hikes, and the Occupy Wall Street movement including tent occupations on several campuses.⁹⁶

⁸⁸ McGregor, 212.

⁸⁹ Megan Meline, “Clean and Green Get a Head of Steam,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 50, no. 30 (2004), A27-A28.

⁹⁰ Stacey Swearingen White, “Early Participation in the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment,” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 10, no. 3 (2009), 215-27.

⁹¹ Terry Calhoun, Anthony D. Cortese, and SCUP’s Sustainability Advice and Review Panel, *We Rise to Play a Greater Part: Students, Faculty, Staff, and Community Converge in Search of Leadership From the Top - A 2005 Update in Support of Campus Sustainability Day III* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Society for College and University Planning, 2005), 1-7.

⁹² Jennifer Hattam, “Go Big Green,” *Sierra* 92, no. 6 (November 2007), 32-33.

⁹³ Bill St. Arnaud, Larry Smarr, Jerry Sheehan, and Tom DeFanti, “Campuses as Living Laboratories for the Greener Future,” *Educause Review* (Nov/December 2009), 15-31.

⁹⁴ Luiza Savage, “Obama’s Climate Change Fix,” *Macleans* 127, no. 22 (June 9, 2014), 28-30.

⁹⁵ Rodrigo Lozano, Kim Ceulemans, Mar Alonso-Almeida, Donald Huisinigh, Francisco Lozano, Tom Waas, Wim Lambrechts, Rebeka Lukman and Jean Huges, “A Review of Commitment and Implementation of Sustainable Development in Higher Education: Results From a Worldwide Survey,” *Journal of Cleaner Production* (March 2014). Doi: doi:10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.09.048, retrieved from Science Direct.

⁹⁶ Michael A. McCarthy, “Occupying Higher Education: The Revival of the Student Movement,” *New Labor Forum* 21, no. 2 (Spring 2012), 50-55.

This study of student environmental activism is particularly interesting because of the unlikely context where it occurred: at an evangelical university located in a politically conservative state that has a strong coal culture. Several researchers have identified a significant negative relationship between diverse measures of conservative religiosity and various indicators of environmental concern.⁹⁷ Research on the connection between religion and environmental concern and activism reveals contradictory findings which points to the importance of research that attends to variations in the religious framing of environmental issues.⁹⁸ This case study contributes to the literature on evangelical diversity, lending insight into the complex inter-relationships of the micro-politics of 'lived reality' that influence environmental attitudes which is the prime issue where evangelical elites diverge from political conservatism.

This investigation concludes that student activism for social transformation cannot be fully explained without attention to sociomaterial learning. Since social transformation in relation to environmental issues most often involves collective political action,⁹⁹ and collective action is only possible when collective identity has formed, case studies that lend insight into how collective social movement learning occurs are beneficial. This case study contributes illustrative data that informs theory on how material conditions contribute to the relationship between social movement learning and social change.¹⁰⁰ Future studies investigating the connections between student activism and a host of other political concerns would benefit from adapting a more holistic understanding of how nonhuman agency shapes social movement learning. In particular, this study suggests that future research would benefit from considering how experience is constitutive of, rather than peripheral to, collective social movement learning.

⁹⁷ See, for example, D. L. Eckbert and T. J. Blocker, "Varieties of Religious Involvement and Environmental Concerns: Testing the Lynn White Thesis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28 (1989), 509-17; D. L. Eckbert and T. J. Blocker, "Christianity, Environmentalism, and the Theoretical Problem of Fundamentalism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35 (1996), 343-55; J. L. Guth, J. C. Green, L. A. Kellstedt, and C. E. Smidt, "Faith and the Environment: Religious Beliefs and Attitudes on Environmental Policy," *American Journal of Political Science* 39 (1995), 364-82.

⁹⁸ Darren E. Sherkat and Christopher G. Ellison, "Structuring the Religion-Environment Connection: Identifying Religious Influences on Environmental Concern and Activism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 1 (2007), 71-85.

⁹⁹ D. E. Sherkat, "Social Movements and Politics," in *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions*, ed. H.R. Ebaugh, 1-21 (New York: Springer, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ Eurig Scandrett, "Theorising Education and Learning in Social Movement: Environmental Justice Campaigns in Scotland and India," *Studies in the Education of Adults* 42, no. 2 (October 2010), 124-38.