

Examining the Role of Activism & Action in American College Campuses

A CASE STUDY OF SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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Southwestern campus in 1967 – Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

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Executive Summary

Activism on college campuses has a long, storied history. In recent years, highly visible student protests surrounding issues such as income inequality, police brutality, indigenous rights, sexual assault, and climate change have garnered significant media attention. Although universities often bring together elements that allow student activism to flourish, they also present their own set of internal challenges. With every class that graduates, student activist groups contend with changing leadership, reduced membership, and the potential loss of institutional memory. Histories of student resistance, conflict, and activism may be erased from — or in some cases co-opted by — official institutional records. Thus, the challenge of passing knowledge down poses significant hurdles for any kind of ongoing activist work. This paper responds to this ongoing loss of institutional knowledge by chronicling a counter-history of student and faculty commitment to activism at Southwestern University. Using a combination of archival and quantitative research, including interviews with faculty, staff, students, and alumni, we examine the interactions between different activist movements on campus and identify the specific barriers to student activism present at Southwestern. By reclaiming this history of activism at Southwestern University, this paper seeks to outline activism trends at SU and provide a resource for students to use in future activist work.

Methods

We used several different methods to gather sufficient information for this project including. These methods include archival research and various methods of interviewing people. For our general definition and history of activism we did extensive background research using scholarly sources. For the Southwestern-specific history of activism we looked through digitized copies of Southwestern yearbooks from years 1904-1996, 2000-2002, the Southwestern newspaper, *The Megaphone*, which has been running from 1907-present, and collected information from interviews. Our interviews were performed either in person, over the phone, or by email — we would offer all of these options to the interviewees and let them choose what worked best for them. We utilized a few different methods of finding potential people to interview including contacting those who were suggested to be influential activists in interviews, and also names frequently mentioned in *The Megaphone* and the Southwestern yearbooks.

People we interviewed include:

Dr. Alison Kafer

Southwestern Professor of Feminist Studies since 2004.
Interviewed in person on October 10, 2018

Allie Watts

Southwestern alumna (class of 2015), Animal Behavior major. Helped start a chapter of H.E.A.T. (Human Environmental Animal Team) at Southwestern and was their first President. Interviewed by email on October 14, 2018.

Ari Solcher

Southwestern transfer student (class of 2014), Environmental Studies major. Interviewed in person on October 1, 2018.

Benjamin Galindo

Southwestern alumnus (class of 2016), Environmental Studies and Biology majors, Feminist Studies minor. Former member of SEAK. Interviewed by email on October 23, 2018.

Ben Nava

Lead of Landscape Services. Interviewed in person on November 28, 2018.

Cat Kelly

Southwestern student (class of 2015), Philosophy and Feminist Studies majors. Interviewed in person on October 25, 2018.

Chandler Hyatt

Southwestern student (class of 2015), Biology major. President of SEAK, and member of Kappa Sigma. Interviewed in person on September 26, 2018.

Dakota Cortez

Southwestern Student (class of 2019) Anthropology and Feminist Studies major, Race and Ethnicity Studies minor. Former co-President of PSA. Interviewed in person on October 22, 2018.

Dakota McDurham

Southwestern alumnus (class of 2016), Environmental Studies major, Theatre minor. Summer conference assistant, former VP of Pike, and a student board member for two years. Interviewed in person on October 16, 2018.

Dr. Edward Burger

President of Southwestern University since 2014.
Interviewed by email on November 5, 2018.

Dr. Emily Niemeyer

Southwestern Professor of Chemistry since 1998, helped start the Environmental Studies program. Interviewed in person on October 17, 2018.

Dr. Emily Northrop

Southwestern Professor of Economics, and on the Environmental Studies committee since 1999 (except for a three year sabbatical). Interviewed in person on October 5, 2018.

Emet Ezell

Southwestern alum (class of 2018), Feminist Studies major, Greek minor. Involved in the Debbie Ellis Writing Center, Garden Club, Alpha Chi, and Phi Beta Kappa. Interviewed by phone on October 11, 2018.

Dr. Eric Selbin

Southwestern Professor of Political Science since 1992.
Interviewed in person on October 3, 2018.

Jessica Olson

Southwestern alumna (class of 2014), Environmental Studies and Feminist Studies majors. Involved in SEAK, Paideia Program, and helped facilitate activist movements on campus. Interviewed by phone on October 4, 2018.

Dr. John Ore

Professor of Theatre and Former Chair of Sustainability Committee. Interviewed in person on October 29, 2018.

Dr. Joshua Long

Southwestern Associate Professor of Environmental Studies. Interviewed in person on September 28, 2018.

Kathryn Caudell

Southwestern student (class of 2019), Environmental Studies major, French and Economics minors. Interviewed in person on November 19, 2018.

Keara Hudler

Southwestern alumna (class of 2018), Environmental Studies major, Economics and Spanish minors. Former member of Alpha Chi and Phi Beta Kappa. Interviewed by email on October 14, 2018.

Keegan Taylor

Southwestern alumnus (class of 2015), Environmental Studies and Political Science majors. Former President of SEAK, and also involved in the Student Foundation and Alpha Phi Omega. Interviewed by email on October 9, 2018.

Kelly Lessard

Administrative Assistant. Interviewed in person on October 23, 2018.

Kenny Knowlton

Southwestern alumnus (class of 2017), Philosophy and Latin American Studies majors. Founder of the Philosophy Club. Interviewed by phone on November 28, 2018.

Kira McEntire

Southwestern alumna (class of 2013), Environmental Studies and Biology majors. Former member of Phi Beta Kappa and recipient of the King Creativity Fund. Interviewed in person on November 2, 2018.

Dr. Laura Hobgood

Southwestern Professor of Religion since 1998. Helped start the Environmental Studies program and is the faculty supporter for many on campus clubs, including SEAK. Interviewed in person with Dr. Melissa Johnson on September 27, 2018.

Leah Jones

Southwestern alumna (class of 2011), Environmental Studies major. Interviewed in person on September 28, 2018.

Dr. Max Taub

Southwestern Professor of Biology. Former member of the Environmental Committee from 2001-2013. Interviewed in person on October 2, 2018.

Dr. Melissa Johnson

Southwestern Professor of Anthropology since 1998. Head of the Environmental Studies department. Interviewed in person with Dr. Laura Hobgood on September 27, 2018.

Michael Miller

Associate Vice President for Facilities Management. Interviewed in person on November 27, 2018.

Randy Erben

Manager of Facilities Services. Interviewed in person on November 27, 2018.

Dr. Sarah Brackmann

Senior Director of Integrative and Community-Engaged Learning. Interviewed in person on October 26, 2018

Sarah Puffer Munger

Southwestern alumna (class of 2014), Environmental Studies major, Spanish minor. Interviewed in person on November 8, 2018.

Selina Fernandez

Southwestern Student (class of 2020), Anthropology and Feminist Studies majors, Spanish minor. Interviewed in person November 30, 2018.

Terri Johnson

Assistant Dean for Student Multicultural Affairs. Interviewed in person on November 6, 2018.

Ursula LaFosse

Southwestern alumna (class of 2011), Anthropology major. Former member of SEAK. Interviewed by email on October 15, 2018.

Vanessa Toro

Southwestern alumna (class of 2012), Biology and Environmental Studies majors. Former member of SEAK and the garden club. Interviewed by phone on October 12, 2018.

Veronica Espinosa

Southwestern student (class of 2019), Music Education major. Started FJA (originally RAVE), and also was involved in Spring Breakaway, SEAK and SU Pet Partners. Interviewed in person on September 27, 2018

Literature Review

I. Defining Sustainable Activism

Our capstone project seeks to document the history of student, faculty and staff commitment to environmental sustainability, and explore its relationship with the broader activist movements at Southwestern University. We will also examine how past and current activism may shape the future of sustainability on campus. However, before we explore the history of Southwestern, it is important to contextualize it within the history of the American Environmental Movement. Activism is a practice in which Americans are constitutionally permitted to engage so that they may voice concerns and demand change from their government, institutions, or peers (Sharp, 1973). Whether performed by an individual or a group of like-minded people, activism effectively combats an array of issues including racism, environmental degradation, sexism, LGBTQ discrimination, and a number of other systemic and societal problems. While activism is most widely practiced to promote changes for the better, it has also been used in ways that harm society (Obed, 2003; Salter, 2011).

Activism takes many shapes and is often classified as either violent/radical, or more commonly, nonviolent/peaceful. Violent activism includes domestic or international violence, often referred to as terrorism (Obed, 2003; Salter, 2011). However, most of the time activism is a nonviolent process in which groups or individuals spread messages in a variety of ways: going door-to-door expressing concerns with their community, performing public demonstrations such as tabling, marches, and speeches, displaying posters and banners that communicate concerns, or participating in walk-outs and silence (Dhir, 2007; Broadhurst, 2014). Gene Sharp (1973) outlines

nearly 200 other forms of nonviolent activism, suggesting that activism is a fluid action and may be observed in a variety of settings.

Due to its fluidity, activism is a broadly defined term that may be broken down into several subcategories. Activism has been practiced globally for centuries, but new subcategories such as LGBTQ and sustainability activism have only recently emerged at the turn of the 20th century (Broadhurst, 2014). Environmental activism, or environmentalism, is a specific form of activism which aims to change public attitudes and policies pertaining to the environment (Broadhurst, 2014). Environmental concerns were primarily addressed by John Muir and Gifford Pinchot at the turn of the 19th century (Miller, 1992). While these men set the stage for environmental activism, the larger environmental movement did not intensify until the 1960s. At this time, new publications informed the public on the rising levels of pollutants and their connection to social justice issues. These concerns paved the way for widespread environmental activism in the 1970s, in which massive reforms were made to American public policy and lifestyles (Buell, 2003). Activists such as Lois Gibbs of the Love Canal disaster used the power of media, petitions, and community education to demand change and attention to environmental crises (Brown & Clapp, 2002; Buell, 2003). Pollution and social justice-focused environmental activism prevailed as the primary characteristics of environmental activism until the late 1980s. At this time, the foundations of climate change activism were put forth- ultimately paving the way for climate change to become the forefront of future environmental activism (Agrawala, 1998).

Modern environmental activists are continuing to dedicate their time, effort, and resources to battle continued abuse and devaluation of the environment, people, and policies. These environmental activists educate their peers about ongoing environmental crises such as rising pollutant levels, ecological gentrification, climate change, and deforestation (Nicholson, 2016).

While the roots of environmental activism are still as prevalent today as they were in the 1960s, there is a more interconnected understanding of these ongoing ecological crises. This massive movement of sustainable, and specifically environmental, activism is seen in communities, cities, and places of higher education. College campuses continuously serve as a critical place for all forms of activism, as they allow developing young adults to understand and engage with world issues while educating those outside of universities about important matters (Brown & Hamburger, 2012).

II. Sustainable Activism on College Campuses

Environmentalism as a popular subject of student activism emerged in the 1970s, with the first Earth Day in 1970 serving as an important watershed event (O'Riordan, Clark, Kates, & McGowan, 1995). Though it culturally took off in the 1970s, mainstream environmentalism is rooted in the works of the 1960s. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962 inspired widespread concern about the chemical industry, the 1969 fire on the Cuyahoga River and Santa Barbara oil spill sparked public outrage over industrial water pollution and increasing concern about the severity of urban smog inspired a desire for stricter environmental legislation (Gottlieb, 2005). Events such as these created the necessary atmosphere of discontent for activism on college campuses to branch out into the field of environmentalism. The methods and organization of this new movement drew directly from previously established activist movements in higher education, particularly the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, which at the time was ubiquitous enough to be considered almost a natural component of university culture (Switzer & Vaughn, 2003).

These anti-war and environmental movements of the 1960s set the stage for the first Earth Day to be celebrated in 1970. Over 20 million people participated in teach-ins, celebrations, and discussions, establishing a large base of support for environmental activism. The main organizers

of the event were Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and Harvard Law student, Denis Hayes. With a budget of \$190,000, Hayes organized the event, building a network of supporters on college campuses across the country (Switzer & Vaughn, 2003). Following the 1970 Earth Day, the United States observed increased public activism, exemplified by the Love Canal Superfund Disaster relief efforts, the "big seven" environmental regulatory laws, and an overall greater awareness of destructive environmental processes and policies (Freeman III, 2002).

The connection of environmental activism to antiwar activism was not purely coincidental or convenience-based. Activism in higher education tends to use similar tactics — street theater, marches, sit-ins, and teach-ins — and taps into underlying feelings of discontent with established power structures (Broadhurst, 2014). A common sentiment of student activists from all periods is that “campus administrators are part of a greater power system in higher education that subjugates students” (Broadhurst, 2014, p. 12). This shared attitude of rebellion and desire for change connects student activists of various eras, despite their disparate agendas, tactics, and scopes. Therefore, while many issues faced by the environmental activism movement during the 1970s — namely, protecting endangered species, preventing pollution, and safeguarding human health — were seemingly independent and specific to the time, the underlying desire for student-led change as a whole has proven to be both adaptable to time, and compatible with other activist movements (O’Riordan et al., 1995).

The inclusion of environmental topics into the curriculum of higher education institutions came as a result of the increasing mainstream relevance of environmental issues during the 1970s and the demands of student activists (Ralph & Stubbs, 2014). However, as specific environmental issues changed, and the power structures of universities became accustomed to the presence of environmental activism, the priorities of the movement went through a gradual shift. A period of

curriculum and campus ‘greening’ occurred from the 1970s-1990s, with universities focusing on reducing their ecological footprints (Hooey, Mason, & Triplett, 2017). Scholars have worked to determine and analyze the significant environmental footprint of universities (Conway et al., 2008). The relatively small size of universities provides student activists with the opportunity to change this footprint. By researching water/energy usage and waste production, students can be more effective when taking action on creating a more sustainable campus (Venetoulis, 2001).

The endurance of environmental activism on college campuses can be attributed to the flexibility of activists to address ever-changing environmental issues connected to ecological problems to the broader world of activism (Hooey et al., 2017). In recent history, a wave of environmentalism has taken the form of adopting the various aspects of sustainability — environmental, social, and economic — on college campuses. The Talloires Declaration of 1990 and the Kyoto Declaration of 1993, both of which charged universities to educate students about sustainability and encouraged sustainable community outreach endeavors, are landmarks of this sustainability effort (Ralph & Stubbs, 2014). While past definitions of sustainability focused on sustaining solely the environment, more recent definitions of sustainability recognize that truly sustainable entities take into account the economic, social, and environmental well-being of all individuals (Hooey et al., 2017). Moving beyond the traditional ecological and energetic sustainability guidelines, campuses nationwide are beginning to perceive social equity and economic security as a critical component of environmental health (Hooey et al., 2017).

Universities that wish to be recognized as environmental leaders must embrace this multifaceted approach to sustainability (Hooey et al., 2017). By 2010 in North America, 783 institutions were members of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) (Brinkhurst, Rose, Maurice, & Ackerman, 2011). The Sustainability

Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS), developed by AASHE, acknowledges multi-faceted advancements in campus sustainability that include ecological sustainability, equity and social justice, and financial sustainability, and currently boasts 918 institutional participants (STARS, 2018; Hooey et al., 2017). The addition of a sustainability component to university curriculum exemplifies this ever-growing commitment to sustainability on college campuses (Carlson, 2006).

Many environmental studies programs still separate courses into two “categories:” those covering environmental issues (for example, geography, ecology, and climate science) and those covering social issues (such as environmental policy, communication, and economics) (DiChiro, 2006). In response to the demand that sustainability encompass more than simply recycling or installing energy-efficient light bulbs, a fair number of universities now possess interdisciplinary environmental studies programs that focus on preparing students to solve complex global problems (Brown & Hamburger, 2012). These programs bring faculty and staff from many disciplines together to inform students of the societal challenges that environmental problems pose and encourage them to become more sustainably-conscious citizens (Maniates & Whisse, 2000). At small and large universities alike, multidisciplinary curriculum increasingly addresses the complexity of environmental problems (Maniates & Whisse, 2000).

III. Intersectionality of Sustainable Activism

The Third Wave Feminist movement of the 1980s brought the term “intersectionality” to the mainstream when Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) described it as highlighting the ‘multidimensionality’ of marginalized subjects’ experience with discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; DiChiro, 2006). When applied to environmental issues, intersectional framework highlights the

challenges many individuals face, compounded by the environment they live in (DiChiro, 2006; Sze, 2006). Intersectional environmental activism acknowledges that humans have always coexisted with the environment rather than viewing them as two separate entities (DiChiro, 2006). The environment can be defined as anywhere that individuals live, work, and learn: thus, one's ability to grow up in a clean home, obtain a job, and maintain health all constitute aspects of the environment (DiChiro, 2006; DiChiro, 2008; Kafer, 2013).

The environmental justice movement recognizes the intersectionality of environmentalism and the ways that race, class, and gender affect one's environmental experience (Sze, 2006). Environmental injustice presents itself as the the disproportionate exposure of marginalized communities to environmental hazards and toxic waste (Cole & Foster, 2001; Dawson, 2007; Landrigan, Rauh, & Galvez, 2010). The environmental justice movement recognizes the unequal dangers that poor communities of color face and seeks solutions to ensure a healthy environment for everyone (Sze, 2006; Landrigan et al., 2010). Consequently, activists that are part of the environmental justice movement recognize the environment's role in a variety of social justice problems (DiChiro, 2006; Reed & Mitchell, 2003). This puts human health and survival at the forefront of environmental concerns and ensures that the social justice component of sustainability is not ignored (Arancibia, 2016).

Environmental justice activism is becoming increasingly popular on college campuses (Dawson, 2007). In 2004, 324 institutions signed onto the Campus Climate Challenge which combines scientific and human rights knowledge to combat climate change (Dawson, 2007; Hill, 2012). Students recognize climate change as a general call to action, noting its social justice and political participation components (Schlosberg & Collins, 2014). University students participate in national teach-in days, vote to increase student fees to help their university pay for renewable

energy credits, and generally express that climate change is about action, not debate (Krisberg, 2008). Students face climate change in a drastically different way when compared to their older counterparts because unlike previous generations, students of this generation have lived with the knowledge and reality of climate change throughout their adult lives. Today, students try and view climate change as an opportunity to take proactive steps in fixing what they see as the “definitive challenge” of their time (Krisberg, 2008). Additionally, many students now recognize that the U.S. Fossil Fuel industry simultaneously represents one of the largest greenhouse gas polluters and builds hazardous waste plants in low-income communities of color (DiChiro, 2008). In an attempt to reach carbon neutrality by curbing fossil fuels, many campuses have not only recognized, but started to address, the issues associated with fossil fuel dependency (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2016). Fossil fuel divestment politically empowers students and allows them to fight the social injustice that comes with climate change (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2016).

Marginalized groups on campus fighting against hostile learning environments is a prime example of twenty-first century university environmentalism (Broadhurst, 2014). Environmental justice events such as the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests and People’s Climate March increasingly have college students in attendance (Fandos, 2017; Elbein, 2017). The realization that environmental concerns are also social justice and human rights issues fuels intersectional environmental activism, and college campuses nationwide are joining the environmental justice movement (Hill, 2012).

IV. College Students as Activists

Universities are intellectual hubs that play an important role in the creation and development of activist movements. They are institutions of active research and knowledge production, where power relations are reconstructed (Flood, Martin, & Dreher, 2013). By bringing in-class awareness to local and global issues, students are able to take action outside of the classroom and work on making a difference in their world.

Institutions of higher education serve as a testing ground for many of America's most important social movements: women's rights, civil rights, peace movements, environmental movements, and sexuality and gender rights movements (Brown & Hamburger, 2012). College students are at a crossroads in their lives, deciding for themselves what they want to believe in and what movements to support. For already environmentally-conscious students, college is a place that provides institutional and infrastructural environmentalism support, as well as collaboration with like-minded peers (Fung & Adams, 2017). Activism on college campuses influences student civic engagement by bringing in new knowledge and college campuses are a convenient setting for fostering social activism (Brown & Hamburger, 2012).

Another driver for integrating and encouraging activism on campuses involves an ethical obligation that universities hold. Given their collective knowledge and large capacity for research, universities have a responsibility to educate future citizens and leaders on ways to create a more sustainable environment (Ralph & Stubbs, 2014). Rosas (2010) found that student activists are more committed to learning, hold a greater role in civic engagement on campus, and show increased extracurricular involvement. The advent of new technologies such as social media and text messaging have allowed student activists unprecedented ease of access to resources and instant communication capabilities (Biddix, 2010). Additionally, student leadership skills may be developed by participating in activism through the organization of, and participation in, campus

protests, boycotts, rallies, and debates (Kezar, Acuña Avilez, Drivalas, & Wheaton, 2017). This advances leadership in terms of developing a vision, implementing effective communication, and learning how to persuade and influence others. Students develop these skills when they feel that they are meaningfully engaged in an important and significant undertaking (Kezar et al., 2017).

Collective action and activism on campuses serves to create a more positive and connected campus climate. Activism builds solidarity, brings a greater awareness to oppression, and pushes for action that transforms rather than just alleviates. Activism is something that has always emerged from campuses and universities, and community engagement strategies have been a part of the teaching and service missions of higher institutions since their establishment (Kezar et al., 2017; Mitchell, 2017). Many institutions of higher education maintain a commitment to promoting civic engagement. This emphasis on activism and community engagement in universities has led to change that impacts thousands of students and their surrounding communities (Mitchell, 2017). Encouraging and teaching civic responsibilities, including activism, on campuses is a contributing factor to one's reflections on their overall experiences at a university. Neglecting to teach students the importance of social responsibility and action would be a disservice to the students and the general community (Martin, 2014).

A common form of student activism involves protesting against the policies and administrative decision-making of universities. Of the 4,656 protest events between 1968 and 1975, 24% targeted educational institutions (Arthur, 2011). Because student activism can directly critique and challenge the university's role in upholding existing hegemonies, it can make one question the student's place in a university (Hascall, 1970). Ideally, student activism serves as a partnership between students and campus administrators, working together to form more equitable

and just learning environments (Gismondi & Osteen, 2017). Unfortunately, as Boren (2013) notes, when institutions do negotiate, they do so because they are forced to, not because they want to.

Students feel empowered to enact change with they become involved in local issues and service opportunities as most are impressionable, enthusiastic, and eager to find answers to life's big questions (Rosas, 2010). Students involved in protest activities have a stronger commitment to the environment and its well-being (Rosas, 2010). More than that, environmental activism is often paired with a grassroots method for generating change, one in which the average citizen can participate (Fung & Adams, 2017). Students may then take this university-scale action and bring it to larger-scale movements in the form of active participation or direct political action.

V. Challenges to Student Activists

Although universities bring together elements that allow student activism to flourish, they also present their own set of internal challenges. Students occupy a unique position within the university. Despite the political and sociological power that student organizations wield, they can be small-scale and vulnerable to institutional amnesia, changing student interests, and student apathy (Boren, 2013). The increasing diversity of student populations across ages, countries of origin, and social and work backgrounds make it more difficult to cultivate a collective student identity (Klemenčič, 2014). Each individual student's presence on campus is brief compared to the potential tenure of a faculty member or administrator. With every class that graduates, student activist groups contend with changing leadership, reduced membership, and the potential loss of institutional memory. The challenge of constantly recruiting new members and passing knowledge down poses significant hurdles for any kind of ongoing student activist work (Klemenčič, 2014).

Student activists must also contend with the challenge of time-management. There are new,

increasing demands on student time, including the growing necessity of working part-time or full-time in addition to schoolwork: because “students constantly juggle multiple competing demands ... activism is woven into calendars with never-ending “to-do” lists” (Dominguez, 2009, p. 131). Students face the ongoing challenge of “[renegotiating] the relationship between school and activism,” making decisions about priorities and time while navigating “multiple and overlapping memberships in different networks and multiple identities” (Dominguez 2009, p.132; Klemenčič 2014, p. 403).

Activist faculty negotiate their own set of challenges. The increasing scarcity of tenure-track positions and overall uncertainty in the academic job market has left many professors in part-time, adjunct teaching roles — a precarious position from which to advocate institutional change (Slaughter & Leslie 1999). Teaching and research expectations may leave little time for activism. Considering the temporary status of students on campus, faculty involvement is critical to ensuring the longevity of a project or policy change: when there is a lack of attention and support from faculty and staff, student activism declines (Brinkhurst et al., 2011).

Activism surrounding sustainability faces its own specific set of university-imposed barriers. Teaching, research, and activism in the area of environmental sustainability requires a multidisciplinary approach that is often incompatible with university structures, staff, funding and incentive mechanisms. Abundant criticism exists for such programs, most often pointed at the fact that the great breadth of the curriculum makes it impossible for students to gain an in-depth understanding of any environmental issues (Soulé & Press, 1998). Even scholars who support these multidisciplinary programs acknowledge their inability to properly educate some students on basic environmental science concepts (Reynolds, Brondizio, & Robinson, 2010). The compartmentalization of the university community can prevent the systems-level integration

required to intertwine sustainability (Ralph & Stubbs, 2014). In addition to this, grants or donations from alumni tend to be designated for one specific area of study, working against the interdisciplinary approach that sustainability requires (Maniates & Whisse, 2000; Hooey et al., 2017). Financial constraints, resistance to change, and slow decision-making in university administrations pose barriers for student and faculty activism focused on changing campus policy (Hooey et al., 2017; Ralph & Stubbs, 2014). As budgetary restrictions have stopped many universities from hiring staff dedicated to sustainability, the task of implementing policy/sustainability measures often falls to faculty and facilities, adding to their workload (Hooey et al., 2017).

Further, there may be a lack of understanding and awareness of the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability, preventing staff and student buy-in. For example, the addition of a socially-conscious component to university sustainability initiatives is not always accepted, and many fight to “reign-in” sustainability efforts that are not strictly environmental (Carlson, 2006). The literature on environmental policy change at universities indicates that campus sustainability is influenced by a number of factors including “psychological needs, physical facilities, personal motivations, public perception, price mechanisms, and policies” (Too & Bajracharya, 2015, p.57). If any of these factors listed are compromised, student activism may be less able to enact change.

VI. Conclusion

This research outlines that environmentalism, and other forms of activism, often all aim to promote sustainability. The constitution of activism varies from person-to-person, but the end goal is always production of change. The fundamental attitude of this research is that places of higher education serve as an important place for activists, with a specific emphasis on environmentalism. They assist

in spreading awareness, inspiring change, and providing evidence that activism can cause critical changes.

Southwestern University serves as a paramount setting from which to examine student activism. Southwestern prides itself in being a leading liberal arts university — one which fosters an education system that produces “21st century thinkers” (Southwestern University, 2018). The university also provides an interdisciplinary learning system through the campus’ Paideia curriculum in an environment containing over 90 student organizations. This environment is vital for fostering an environment which promotes student activism (Brown & Hamburger, 2012). In addition, the faculty present at Southwestern has been supportive of students throughout many years of activism on campus, and this support has been shown to be key in effective campus activism nationwide (Brinkhurst et al., 2011). Yet, activism at Southwestern has been subject to some of the same limitations and challenges seen at other universities.

The next section of this research provides the history of activism on Southwestern University’s campus, with a focus on environmental activism. We address notable activist achievements on campus, obstacles that students and faculty have faced during their activism efforts, and the larger impact of activists' efforts in Georgetown and nationwide. Following this detailed review of Southwestern University’s history of environmental activism, we propose future opportunities for activism and change to make Southwestern a more sustainable campus.

History of Activism at Southwestern University

I. Introduction

As we have just explored the national trends in college activism, we will now narrow our focus to Southwestern University as a case study. This history seeks to embody Southwestern's core purpose and cultivate a liberal arts mindset where its "values and actions encourage contributions toward the overall well-being of humanity." Liberal arts communities demand inquiry across multiple fields, and that is what we sought to do when characterizing environmental activism at SU. In documenting the history of sustainability and environmental activism and action at Southwestern University, it is important to recognize that the efforts made by students, faculty, and staff connect to activist movements beyond the environment. Examining the ways in which past and current activist movements have shaped campus culture informs the future of sustainability at SU and brings awareness to the obstacles faced when solidifying an environmentally and socially sustainable campus.

In order to outline a history of sustainability and environmental activism, it is important to first have a firm grasp of what activism is and the ways it can be defined. Student activism can be formally defined as: "work done by students to impact political, economic, social and environmental change... often focus[ing] on improving the educational landscape, or specifically on pressuring educational institutions to change curricula, funding schemes, and to amplify student voices and representation in decision-making" (Dominguez, 2009). By asking interviewees how they define activism, the scope of what it means to people at SU became more apparent. These definitions also help emphasize what is important to people at SU and makes it personal to what activism is at Southwestern. Thus, our history of Southwestern strives to incorporate the

perspectives of faculty, staff, and students involved in activism on campus. Alison Kafer, a Professor of Feminist Studies at Southwestern, cautions against relying heavily on any one definition, saying “[t]o limit activism is to make it exclusive and less accessible” (personal communication, October 10, 2018). These personal definitions of activism help inform issues unique to SU and bring light to what SU can do to incite positive change. One of the more traditional definitions of activism is “agitating for a common good” (E. Niemeyer, personal communication, October 17, 2018). This definition holds a stigma because the people participating may be labeled as singularly minded, biased, and extreme. On the other end of the spectrum are people who define activism as taking action within one’s own life and leading by example (A. Solcher, personal communication, October 1, 2018). As an individual, making an active choice in everyday activities such as what one eats, the products they choose to buy, or the people they choose to support can be seen as activism.

What sparked the growth of action and activism on the Southwestern campus? Who had the biggest roles to play, and how does campus compare today? Can the past help inform the future of environmental activism at SU? After defining activism, placing it in the context of SU is necessary when thinking about how it has developed over time. Southwestern University began to observe changes in environmental awareness and action in the 1960s. The catalyst for these changes can be traced back to the social justice issues present both nationally and on campus during this era. In the decades that followed, campus unrest would spur movements that extended beyond social justice and into environmental issues and concerns, demonstrating the adoption of a more intersectional approach to activism as time progressed. Campus activism at SU has become increasingly intersectional as individual organizations have adapted their efforts to address a multitude of issues and collaborated to incite change. Whether these clubs have emerged for the

sake of politics, race, culture, art, or the environment it is apparent in the history of Southwestern University that these organizations have begun to recognize their deeper relationship with one another. These relationships have built a foundation which fosters the coalescence of ideas that envelop a wide array of issues.

The establishment of activist-friendly spaces and the willingness of administration to accept change, and be open to sensitive discourse, aided in these intersectional activist efforts. The history of activism at Southwestern University is characterized by a search for alternative spaces of expression, the effort to change institutionalized problems on campus, and the obstacles faced when opposing an administrative goal of economic gain and an untarnished image. At Southwestern,



Anti-Vietnam War protest on Southwestern campus – Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

the history of environmental activism must be read through a socio-environmental lens: social awareness must be part of a discussion that fully appreciates environmental sustainability.

II. Early Activism

The earliest accounts of activism at SU began in the 1960s and 1970s, as the discussion of feminism nationally during the 1960s and 70s sparked similar conversation on Southwestern's campus. Feminism on campus was most visible through the Associated Women Students, founded in 1966, which held a seminar on "The Role of Women in the 20th Century" in 1969 (*Sou'wester*

Yearbook, 1966; Sou'wester Yearbook, 1969). Many students, primarily female, became appalled

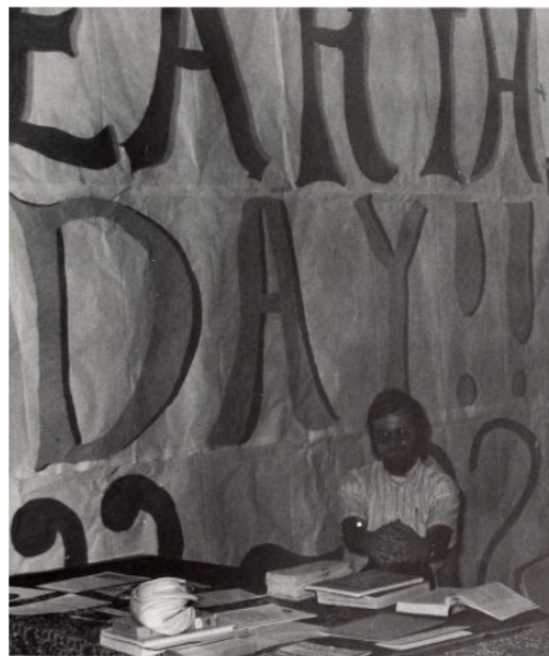


Associated Women Students in 1968 – Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

with the university's "archaic" dress code, notably following an incident where a female campus visitor was kicked out of the library for wearing pants (Williams, 1969). Students banded together and successfully convinced administration to eliminate the dress code on February 11th, 1969 (*The Megaphone Staff, 1969b*). In addition to the feminist wave, the Civil Rights Movement provided the backdrop for a discussion of race-related issues. Students began challenging racial discrimination on campus, specifically that of Greek organizations (Curtis, 1968). Other

universities, including the University of Texas at Austin, were contending with similar conflicts over desegregation (Austin History Center, n.d.).

For a time, these feminist and civil rights efforts were the only form of activism present on campus. Environmental action remained mostly absent from Southwestern until the 1970s, aside from the beautification of the campus through sprinkler system installation and tree planting (*Sou'wester Yearbook, 1963, p. 131*). It was only after a surge in national environmentalism that activism



Earth Day at Southwestern – Photo from *The Megaphone*

pertaining to the environment took off with the first Earth Day, which was celebrated at SU and nationwide on April 22nd, 1970. This campus-wide event featured environmental teach-ins, letter-writing to members of Congress, and an “Earth Concert” on the Academic Mall (Tyrrell, 1970). A panel that included US Senator Ralph Yarborough, a self-proclaimed environmentalist, commended the university’s efforts in contributing to national environmentalism (*The Megaphone* Staff, 1970a). The following year, Southwestern hosted its first-ever “Earth Week,” with Texas Land Commissioner, Bob Armstrong, providing an opening “Eco-Seminar” (Louls, 1971).

SU activism paralleled national environmentalism and environmental action throughout

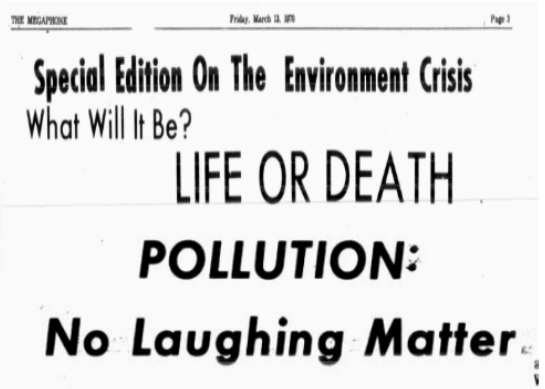


1970 Earth Day gatherings in Washington DC (top left), Denver (top right), Philadelphia (bottom left), and New York City (bottom right)
Photos from pbs.org

the 1970s, which was primarily focused on waste and pollution-reduction and conserving the environment for future generations. *The Megaphone*, Southwestern’s newspaper, dedicated an entire issue to “The Environmental Crisis” in 1970, and even had a section

called “Environmental Notes” in some early 1970s editions. An Ecology Task Force on campus began a recycling program for cans and bottles in 1971, and another recycling effort sponsored by the Blue Key Honor Fraternity took off in 1973 (*The Megaphone* Staff, 1973). Meanwhile, national environmental issues frequently appeared as justification for student environmental activism, including Nixon’s environmental record, the Trans Alaska Pipeline Project, and even the Justice

Department's role in regulating waste disposal (Massingill, 1971; Mitchell, 1971; Agnew, 1972). Widespread social unrest combined with a strong aversion to pollution caused



Environmentalism on campus in *Megaphone* articles and cartoons – Photos from *The Megaphone*

many SU students of the 1970s to realize the importance of student ecological activism, and many noted that it gave them a sense of control over their future (*The Megaphone Staff*, 1970b).

Aside from environmentalism, the fight for racial equality continued to receive some attention at Southwestern during the 1970s. During this time students, faculty, and staff began to comment on the “whiteness” of the university by calling out acts of racism on campus. A 1976 *Megaphone* article alleged that the few black students on campus at the time were expected to “act white” by administration, and many students acknowledged the negative attitude possessed by Greek life regarding minority students (Ross). Controversy abounded over the Kappa Alpha

Fraternity's celebration of “Old South” week in 1974, a week dedicated to celebrating the “glory of the Confederacy” (*The Megaphone Staff*, 1974).



Concerns over racism at Southwestern – Photo from *The Megaphone*

These situations served as

evidence that SU continued to be a school primarily for the white and privileged. The lack of

cultural integration that existed on campus led minority students to form a number of organizations of their own during this time, including the Black Organization for Social Survival in 1974, the Minorities Committee in 1976, and the La Gente Club in 1977 (*Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1974; *Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1976, *Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1977). The Society for Hispanic Oriented Students formed in 1981, followed by the Latin Friends and Ebony Organizations in the late 1980s (*Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1981; *Sou'wester Yearbook* 1988).



Members of EBONY and the Hispanic Awareness Society - Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

Although still present at Southwestern, strict environmental activism took a backseat to social activism as well as minority and gender awareness during the 1980s and early 1990s. Speakers such as Paul Loeb, a social and political activist, visited campus during the 1980s to discuss world peace and environmental concerns (*The Megaphone Staff*, 1985). The Student Coalition for an Organized Peace Effort (SCOPE) promoted recycling on campus and sold reusable shopping bags in an effort to curb



SCOPE in 1990 – Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

excessive plastic use (Miller, 1990). SCOPE encouraged students to write to Congress stating their desire for a more peaceful nation (Foster, 1987). Other SU students took matters into their own hands and joined protest

groups. In 1988, a caravan of Texas college students, including seven from SU, traveled to Nevada over spring break to protest nuclear testing. However, five of the seven SU students were arrested for trespassing on Department of Energy property to make their case (McNutt, 1988).

Following this event, Southwestern hired its first Director of Multicultural Affairs, Dr. Gregory Washington, in 1989. This role intended to promote campus awareness of minority and foreign student's cultures, and to help the foreign students to adjust to a new culture (*Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1989). Though Dr. Gregory Washington's time on campus was minimal, the next person to occupy this position would ultimately serve a critical role in campus activism. Despite the creation of this position, the scope of activism on campus seemed to narrow as students' focus was almost entirely on recycling (Miller, 1990). In the years to follow, activists' focus would turn towards gender and LGBTQ+¹ issues.

III. Gender Awareness Center-Environmental Studies Program

The early nineties the formation of a number of student organizations, many for the first time, including the Gender Issues Committee (*Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1989), Equal Voice for Women's' Perspectives (1991), Reproductive Freedom Now! (1992), Organization for AIDS Awareness (1993), SU Students for Life (1993), and Lesbian, Gay, & Bisexual Association (1993). These organizations sought to unite those with a passion for LGBTQ+ and gender equality on campus. However, most of the groups' presence on campus was relatively brief.

By 1993, Allison Fontenot and Susanna Westbrook, after avoiding being kicked out of the Tri-Delta sorority for no longer shaving their legs, founded the Gender Awareness Center (GAC) (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018; *Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1993). Without much opposition from President Shilling², the GAC was able to occupy a room in Kuykendall Hall,

where Mabee Hall now stands. Supported by progressive faculty, the GAC provided a physical space for gender activists to gather and hold events. The foundation of the GAC was a landmark event for activism at SU that would set the stage for both gender and environmental activism in the years to come. As



Founding members of Gender Awareness Center in 1993 – Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

one of the first physical alternative spaces on campus, it provided a setting that allowed and encouraged students to talk about issues outside of the mainstream. It also demonstrated to students that there were supportive faculty members on campus, who were willing to engage in activism themselves (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

Very few students or faculty on campus were out at this time. In 1994, Jason Ragsdale came out and attempted to start an LGBT association, supported only by then Director of Multicultural Affairs Bruce Smail³ — an openly gay African American man — and a few faculty members (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 13, 2018). After facing significant harassment, Jason Ragsdale organized an open campus meeting at the Student Union Building. Dr. Selbin described the moment: “He named names, and he called people out — he called out faculty members, he called out staff members, he called out fellow students. ... It didn’t work very well, but it was also kind of a profound moment ... and that galvanized a set of people ... because

what they saw was someone willing to stand up and say stuff and that the skies didn't part, and a bolt of lightning didn't come out. There were classes the next day, and he stayed on campus" (personal communication, October 3, 2018). Although Jason Ragsdale's organization did not last, public conversations like this began to take place more frequently on campus. A number of public speak-outs about gender and sexual orientation issues were held in the semester following Jason Ragsdale's meeting. The GAC would continue to organize panels, protests, and discussions over the next decade.

During this time students began to campaign to add sexual orientation to Southwestern's anti-discrimination clause. The issue was pursued throughout the nineties and went to a faculty vote in 1991 and 1997. Each time the administration refused, likely because it would be seen as controversial for a Methodist school to endorse such a positive stance on homosexuality. In 1997, following the second unsuccessful faculty vote, philosophy professor Dr. Shannon Winnubst was quoted in *The Megaphone*:

"There's a lot of talk around this place being an inclusive community, and diverse. And every time we hear those kinds of comments, until this clause is passed, something about it rings hollow. I think the administration believes in the spirit of the clause. It is clear President Shilling has done things to fight for these issues ... but at the same time, until they pass the clause ... symbolically, SU has not taken any stance on this issue. ... I do think the heart of this is that concern of not wanting to take a controversial stand that might alienate some potential donors. Again, it stresses me enormously to think that that's a message we are sending to our students...."

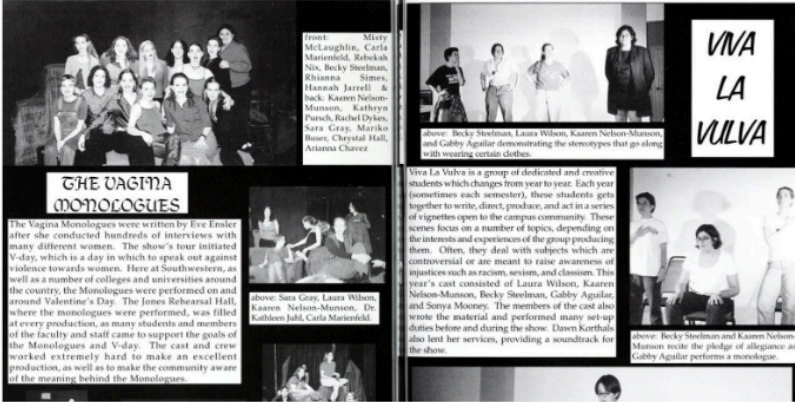
In 2000, after a decade of activism on the issue, a third faculty vote took place and President Schrum agreed to amend the clause during his first year on campus.

At the same time, issues surrounding affirmative action and unchallenged racism were prevalent on campus. Southwestern still had no permanent faculty of color and only a few black students on campus (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018). After three white

political science professors, including Dr. Eric Selbin, were hired to teach courses on Latin America, Latinx students took action to confront them about their positionality in the classroom⁴ (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018). However, Latinx and black student organizations were fragmented, preventing effective activism (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018), and feminist student activists largely failed to include race in their gender conversations.

Despite this lack of intersectional awareness, there were some gestures towards linking movements in the 1990s that hinted at what activism might look like at SU in years to come. For example, the Progressive Student Alliance, founded in the early 1990s, sought to articulate some of the connections between peace, justice, human rights, and the environment in their activist work (*Sou'wester Yearbook*, 1992; Pieper, 1996). After Dr. Selbin became their advisor in 1992, the PSA successfully co-sponsored many events with different organizations. However, despite all of the PSA's efforts, the group fell dormant for some years. During the same time as PSA's reign on activism, the Jessie Daniel Ames lecture series brought a number of intersectional feminist speakers to campus, including Gloria Anzaldúa in 1994. However, over time the gender activists' focus changed from bringing speakers to inciting institutional change. In 1996, the GAC reopened for the school year articulating a more inclusive, intersectional approach. Involved students Emily Hardt and Emily Davis described the shift away from "old school feminism," emphasizing that now "the GAC deals with race, class, and societal issues because they are inseparable from gender" (Martin, 1996). In addition, by 1998 a number of student activists from Latinos Unidos, Ebony, the PSA, and the GAC came together to cosponsor a Progressive Action Rally about the need for affirmative action and increased diversity at SU (McNeer, 1998). Over fifty students and faculty attended to hear Erika Aguirre (president of Latinos Unidos), Jason Hercules (involved in

environmental activism and would later found SEAK), Dr. Selbin, and others spoke. Though these kinds of intersectional approaches were often short-lived, they were beginning to be articulated.



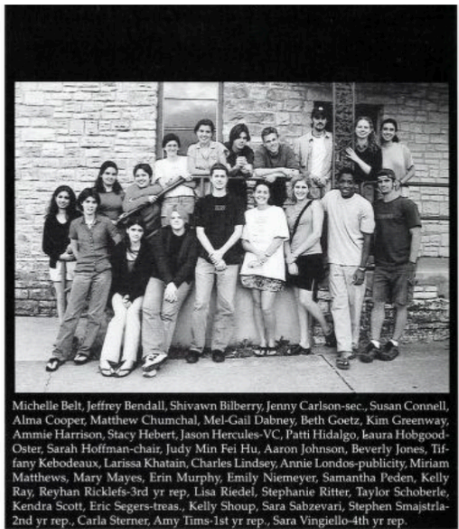
Feminist activism in 2000 – Photos from *Sou'wester Yearbook* (left) and *The Megaphone* (right)

IV. Formation of the Environmental Studies Program-Switch to 100% Renewable Energy

Within the context of increased student interest in environmental and social awareness, Southwestern’s Environmental Studies program. Dr. Melissa Johnson, Dr. Laura Hobgood, and Dr. Emily Niemeyer all arrived at Southwestern in 1998. Although they were housed in different departments, students’ demands inspired Dr. Johnson, Dr. Hobgood, and Dr. Neimeyer to establish the Environmental Studies program in 1999 (M. Johnson and L. Hobgood, personal communication, September 27, 2018; E. Niemeyer, personal communication, October 17, 2018).

S.E.A.K.

The Southwestern Environment Awareness Klub seeks to promote more environmental sound actions at SU, facilitate environmental awareness, participate in programs that promote a healthy environment, and make it easier for the SU community to make environmentally sound decisions. SEAK makes big plans for Earth Day in April to get the campus involved with these issues and tries to have discussions every month. One such discussion was on the ozone and the air quality in Austin.



Michelle Belt, Jeffrey Bendall, Shivawn Bilberry, Jenny Carlson-sec., Susan Connell, Alma Cooper, Matthew Chumchal, Mel-Gail Dabney, Beth Goetz, Kim Greenway, Ammie Harrison, Stacy Hebert, Jason Hercules-VC, Patti Hidalgo, Laura Hobgood-Oster, Sarah Hoffman-chair, Judy Min Fei Hu, Aaron Johnson, Beverly Jones, Tiffany Kobodeaux, Larissa Khatain, Charles Lindsey, Annie Londres-publicity, Miriam Matthews, Mary Mayes, Erin Murphy, Emily Niemeyer, Samantha Peden, Kelly Ray, Reyhan Ricklefs-3rd yr rep., Lisa Riedel, Stephanie Ritter, Taylor Schoberle, Kendra Scott, Eric Segers-treas., Kelly Shoup, Sara Sabzevari, Stephen Smajstrla-2nd yr rep., Carla Steiner, Amy Tims-1st yr rep., Sara Vingello-4th yr rep.

SEAK in 2000 – Photo from *Sou'wester Yearbook*

The newly available major gathered like-minded students and solidified faculty support,

encouraging new student activism focused on the environment. At the same time as the emergence of the new program, Jason Hercules and Jenny Carlson created Students for Environmental Activism and Knowledge (SEAK) that year (M. Johnson and L. Hobgood, personal communication, September 27, 2018). Other environmental organizations like the Sierra Club had existed on campus earlier in the nineties but were small and focused mainly on the water quality of the nearby San Gabriel River (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018). In comparison to these earlier efforts, SEAK grew quickly.

As Southwestern welcomed the new millennium and a new president, Jake B. Schrum,

Earth Day Celebration 2001



Gabe Hatcher and Karen Harton relax and play music in the sun at the Earth Day festivities 2001.

Students celebrate Earth Day on the Mall – Photo from *The Megaphone*

SEAK launched a surge of new environmental activism led by a core group of students supported by Dr. Hobgood, Dr. Johnson, and Dr. Niemeyer. One of SEAK's initial goals was to replace the shower heads in residences on campus with more water-efficient models (Smajstrla, 2000; Wheeler, 2001).

The group hosted the most successful Earth Day yet, celebrated on campus in 2000, distributing buttons and chalking sidewalks⁵ (Londos, 2000). Within a few years, SEAK enjoyed a significant position on campus as one of the largest student organizations. Dr. Selbin remembers SEAK's mailing list had over 190 students, while most other student organizations had less than 100 (personal communication, October 3, 2018). The club dealt with the usual cycles of student

involvement but maintained a campus presence tackling a variety of environmental issues through the 2000s.

Although students involved in SEAK were active in other student organizations, the environmental activism promoted by the group tended to focus on typical “green,” eco-friendly projects based on traditional understandings of environmentalism. During this decade, SEAK achieved major changes to food services on campus, including removing trays and adding composting in the commons (Bogs, 2009, Giuffre, 2008). The organization attempted to pick up recycling from student dorms on campus and briefly adopted the motto “Recycle, dammit!”



SEAK members sorting garden produce (left); 2000s SEAK activism on campus (right) – Photos from *The Megaphone*

(Johnson, 2003). In 2008, SEAK put on contests, films, and education booths during a campus energy challenge aimed at reducing energy consumption on campus by 5% (Buckley, 2008). SEAK also organized many environmental awareness and education events, including a summit for Georgetown High School students planned in conjunction with the Service Learning Office (Giuffre, 2007). In addition to addressing the environmental concerns of Southwestern University and Georgetown, SEAK members frequently attended environmental rallies in Austin which

allowed them to unite with other student activists from the area (L. Jones, personal communication, September 28, 2018; K. Taylor, personal communication, October 9, 2018).

In addition to SEAK's environmental activism and action, the Student Garden was established in 2008 and was a partner with Meals on Wheels and the Caring Place to provide food for the Georgetown Community (S. Brackmann, personal communication, October 27, 2018). Furthermore, the garden served as a source of locally-grown produce for use in the Commons on special "produce days." The SU garden and SEAK have often had high degrees of overlap, though the interaction between the two groups has ebbed and flowed over time. For example, SEAK has collected compostable materials from students to be used in the garden, as well as hosted their events there. However, at other times SEAK and the SU garden have operated separately (S. Puffer Munger, personal communication, November 8th, 2018).

Although this decade saw the rise of a significant number of "green" initiatives on campus, SEAK had not yet begun to articulate the connections between these environmental issues and social justice, particularly in regard to race and racism. Like Southwestern as a whole, SEAK was predominantly white — and was not always the most welcoming place for racially minoritized students (M. Johnson, personal communication, September 27, 2018). At times, a palpable tension existed between SEAK and black or Latinx activist organizations who felt there were more pressing issues on campus to fight (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

Some of these other battles were already being fought on campus — though administrative acknowledgment of the issues was mixed. Much of the activism taking place outside of Environmental Studies was focused on social justice: Feminist, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ voices called for discussion panels, organized protests, and petitioned the university⁶ (*The Megaphone Staff*, 2005; Lee, 2005; Elliot, 2005; Whiteman, 2006; Peel, 2007; A. Kafer, personal communication,

October 10, 2018). In addition, students and faculty also organized against the Iraq War (Freed, 2003), had a peace gathering on lawn after Bush's reelection in 2004 (A. Kafer, personal communication, October 10, 2018), and marched for immigration reform (Elliott, 2006) during this time.

During this decade activism surrounding sexual assault on campus was also prevalent. In 2001, a group of students including SEAK co-founder Jenny Carlson led a sit-in in the president's office demanding a discussion of sexual misconduct on campus (E. Selbin, personal



Students protest the Iraq War on the mall – Photo from *The Megaphone*

communication, October 3, 2018). Further activism calling attention to sexual assault would follow in the years to come, first through campus-wide meetings (Klosterman, 2001) and then, later, when students interrupted the Brown Symposium in 2004 (A. Kafer, personal communication, October 10, 2018). President Schrum was not exceptionally welcoming of this kind of student activism, considering it too combative (E. Niemeyer, personal communication, October 17, 2018). The lack of university response and communication about sexual assault sparked further discussion among students and faculty that would return in the years to come.

Also at this time, student activists concerned with Southwestern's whiteness and exclusivity began to bring the issue forward more explicitly, prompted by a series of conflicts on campus over race. In 2001, controversy erupted through campus-wide emails over the suspension of the Kappa Alpha (KA) fraternity from campus. Members of KA had used racial slurs in at least two separate incidents that spring, but the decision to suspend the fraternity from campus was made only after a group of pledges left a car marked with the message "Die Oldies, You Suck, We Hate Old People" outside of Georgetown's Sun City retirement community (Springfield, 2001).



SARAH MEYER/PHOTO EDITOR

KA suspended after writing ageist slurs (left) – Photo from Doug Potter, *Austin Chronicle*
 President Schrum holds a press conference announcing KA's suspension (right) – Photo from *The Megaphone*

The incident attracted enough media attention that President Schrum, a former member of Kappa Alpha, held a press conference on campus to announce the fraternity's suspension. Students of color questioned why the Sun City incident had served as the tipping point for removing the fraternity from campus rather than other issues pertaining to race.

Less than a year later, renowned feminist scholar bell hooks gave the commencement address to the Southwestern Class of 2002. hooks was serving as a visiting professor of Feminist Studies on campus at the time. At commencement, she rejected the typical format of the speech to instead call for continued action against “every imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal nation on the planet” and challenged the audience to “critically review” their time spent at Southwestern (Apple, 2002). hooks also directly addressed student



bell hooks speaking – Photo from *The Megaphone*

activists in the audience: “the radical, dissident voices among you have learned here at Southwestern how to form communities of resistance that have helped you find your way in the midst of life-threatening conservatism, loneliness, and the powerful forces of everyday fascism which use the politics of exclusion and ostracism to maintain the status quo” (hooks, 2002). The address proved to be extremely shocking and controversial to many alumni (Jones *et al.*, 2002). Jean Kilker, who had attended commencement, wrote in an op-ed to the *Austin Chronicle* that “the lovely school seems to have forgotten its foundations” (Apple, 2002).

Discussions around race on campus were ignited again in 2007 after a student posted racist remarks on Facebook (Valdez, 2007). Other students responded by publicizing the incident through campus email and on fliers around campus. Dr. Johnson wrote a campus-wide response email articulating her and other professors’ “distress over these acts” and “[reaffirming] [their] deep commitment to an inclusive and collegial campus environment in which we all treat each

other with respect and honor each other's differences" (Valdez, 2007). Open campus forums about diversity were held in the weeks that followed in an attempt to address tension on campus.

Although the majority of environmental student activism during this time did not interface with racial, sexual assault, or other social justice issues on campus, there were moments of overlap. Faculty such as Dr. Johnson, Dr. Hobgood, Dr. Selbin, Dr. Kafer, Dr. Sendejo, and other influential members cross-pollinated different student movements by being involved in multiple kinds of activism. By 2007, SEAK's activism efforts appeared to adopt a more robust and justice-oriented understanding of sustainability. That year, students successfully petitioned President Schrum to sign the Talloires Declaration, a ten-point plan for three-pillared sustainability in higher education institutions (Heinley, 2007; Ammons, 2007). The organization also successfully petitioned

Schrum to sign the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment in 2009, which aimed at increasing sustainability on campuses through both teaching and activism. Despite these



Southwestern President Schrum signs the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment – Photo from southwestern.edu

efforts towards increasing institutional sustainability, in 2008 Southwestern received only a C- from the College Sustainability Report Card, suggesting the need for more intersectional environmental activist work (Ertel, 2008).

Notwithstanding all of their limitations, SEAK was able to achieve a number of significant environmental victories on campus during the 2000s, in part because the organization's understanding of "environmental activism" aligned well with the administration's. Southwestern's new president, Schrum, and his wife were very receptive to the kinds of environmental issues SEAK was focused on — energy efficiency, water, recycling — but were not as content with other schools of activism (E. Niemeier, personal communication, October 17, 2018). When SEAK began to campaign for their most significant project yet in 2009/2010 — moving Southwestern to 100% renewable energy — this alignment would prove invaluable.

V. Switch from 100% Renewable Energy - Present Day

Southwestern University's switch to 100% renewable energy has been considered a turning point in Southwestern University's environmental activism by many (J. Long, personal communication, September 28, 2018). During the 2009 Earth Day Event, members of SEAK gathered signatures



for a petition that would soon become a monumental transition both on campus and in Georgetown (Giuffre, 2009). During the following year, SEAK met with George Carver, the mayor of Georgetown, to work towards their goal of the university becoming

In 2010, SU committed to receive all of its electricity from wind power – Photo from *southwestern.edu*

fully powered by renewable energy sources. On January 12th, 2010 the Georgetown City Council approved a resolution for Southwestern University to purchase only wind-powered energy. This decision made Southwestern University the first Texas college to become powered by renewable energy, and the sixteenth in the United States (Marsh, 2010). This effort ultimately contributed to Georgetown's decision in March of 2015 to switch the entire city's energy source to that of solar and wind energy. After two years, in 2017 the city's decision was successfully employed and has garnered Georgetown national attention (Hershberger, 2016).

During this monumental transition, Southwestern also hired its first dedicated Environmental Studies professor, Dr. Joshua Long, in 2011 which solidified the major's importance at the university (M. Johnson and L. Hobgood, personal communication, September 27, 2018). From 1999-2011 the Environmental Studies program had consisted of professors from various departments which led to organizational difficulties, and ultimately almost caused the program to collapse. The creation of Dr. Long's role at SU allowed the program to be more structured and eliminated the threat of its loss⁷ (E. Niemeyer, personal communication, October 17, 2018). Regarding Dr. Long's arrival, Theatre professor Dr. Ore asserted that "We didn't have a real person [dedicated to just Environmental Studies] — and because the quality of these professors we have, they made sure we got an outstanding person in that job. And he has been just lights out in my opinion ... He's totally engaged, he cares about the students, and about our environment – our campus environment" (personal communication, October 29, 2018). The continuation of the program also allows the prevalence of a campus environment which fosters sustainability-oriented mindsets.

Southwestern University also witnessed a change in administration during this transition with the inauguration of a new campus president, Dr. Edward Burger. Upon his arrival to

Southwestern University, President Burger made a statement regarding his major goals on campus. These goals included staying committed to sustainability on campus and encouraging student and faculty activism (*The Megaphone* Staff, 2014). Having a president that is vocally supportive of sustainability and activism was a positive indication that Southwestern would continue to move in a positive, sustainable direction. When interviewed more recently in 2018, President Burger stated that he is still “delighted that we have students who are interested in making our world a better place as well as saving our planet and its resources for future generations of humans and animals,” and “constantly working to amplify efforts here on our campus as well as across the nation” (E. Burger, personal communication, November 5). While the university underwent many greening initiatives under President Schrum, activists hoped that under the new administration, the university would adopt a more intersectional approach to environmentalism. When asked what advice he would give to student activists, President Burger said that he will always be supportive of student activism as long as it is “diverse and open-minded... and lifts the largest number of people, rather than trying to see who can make the most noise.” Despite these sentiments of support, not all activist movements receive the same level of administrative endorsement, as evidenced by difficulties when attempting to maintain the scope of the Green S.A.F.E. Fund.

The Green S.A.F.E. Fund was proposed, passed, and funded by a 2013 Environmental Studies Capstone group, and is a source of financial support which assists student and faculty projects pertaining to sustainability (Southwestern University Marketing and Communication, 2017). To further improve the social dynamic on campus, former co-Presidents of the newly refounded PSA, Dakota Cortez and Katherine Richter, along with several other of the club’s members, applied for the Green S.A.F.E. Fund during Fall of 2016. If awarded the grant, their goal was to restructure how Southwestern University handles sexual assault, develop a non-Title IX

affiliated Peer Sexual Assault Advising Network, and to bring guest speakers to campus to educate students about sexual assault. Cortez, Richter, and other affiliates were awarded the Green S.A.F.E. Fund through the Sustainability Committee, and eagerly began planning events and policies to better handle the issues with sexual assault on campus. However, after some administrative hurdles and withholding of information, they were informed that their project was no longer going to be supported by the Green S.A.F.E. Fund because social justice issues were not considered applicable for funding under the program. Though initially approved by the Sustainability Committee, members of administration reached in to cancel Green S.A.F.E. funding for the project. Funding was ultimately compromised and sourced from an alternate funding opportunity per Dr. Burger. These funds were ultimately used to bring guest speaker Chardonnay Madkins, from End Rape on Campus, to Southwestern (D. Cortez, personal communication, October 22, 2018). However, some faculty and students feared that the use of alternate funding for the project would establish a precedent prohibiting Green S.A.F.E. funds being used for social sustainability projects.

This situation prompted the 2017 Environmental Capstone project to petition the university to recognize the original intent of the Green S.A.F.E. Fund to acknowledge the ecological, economic, *and* social components of sustainability. While President Burger was initially reluctant to support the capstone group's proposal, he ultimately agreed to clarify the scope of projects eligible for said funding, achieving the group's goals of realizing the initial intent of the Green S.A.F.E. Fund, (K. Hudler, L. Dennis, M. DiNella, N. Ford, J. Mendez, E. Burger, personal communication, May 1, 2018).

Nationally, college protests began targeting campus sexual assault following Brock



Various sexual assault-awareness activism on campus – Photos from *The Megaphone*

Turner's trial in early 2016 who raped a fellow student at Stanford University. Events surrounding this trial contributed to the national movement which began in 2015 (Buncombe, 2016). This included Southwestern University, in which the administration was criticized for failure to respond to an instance of social injustice in 2015 due to

increased exposure of issues pertaining to sexual assault. Students were very outspoken about the fraternity Pi Kappa Alpha allegedly spiking drinks at a party which ultimately lead to the sexual assault of a female student. Approximately 100 students protested around campus about the university's failure to produce safe spaces for women on campus. This movement, commonly referred to as the "Fed Up" movement sparked a series of protests on campus regarding sexual misconduct. President Burger was present and supportive of this protest as he listened to women's stories, but the Southwestern University



President Burger listens to personal experiences during protests against sexual assault on campus – Photo from *The Megaphone*

Police Department ultimately shut the protest down after multiple Georgetown residents filed noise complaints (Beatty, 2015). This was a hindrance for students who were a part of the movement, however they continued to protest for a better plan of action for dealing with sexual misconduct on campus. The response to this protest was a Facebook forum called “Southwestern, It’s on Us Gathering”, in which students could openly discuss stories and ongoing issues on campus. These protests continued throughout the year with the “Take Back the Night” protest in April of 2015 which was part of a national movement targeting sexual assault (Hershberger, 2015). As a response to these series of student protests, Southwestern University changed its Zero-Tolerance policy in 2015, in which “consent” was redefined, and the hearing process for sexual assault allegations was restructured in such a manner that further benefited survivors (Murphy, 2015). Though Southwestern University has aimed to create a less hostile campus environment for women, student concerns still led to the Federal Office of Civil Rights launching two separate investigations for Title IX violations pertaining to failure to notify students of incidents — once in 2016, and again in 2017 (Hershberger & Gu, 2016; McMichael, 2017).

Campus experienced additional upheaval following the election of Donald Trump as



Chalkings and graffiti on campus after the 2016 presidential election – Photos from Amy Gu and *The Megaphone*

president in 2016. The night of the election, a group of students chalked slurs and hate speech on sidewalks across campus. An email chain of “professors and some fire-raisers” discussed the election and the ongoing

chalking late into the night (E. Ezell, personal communication, October 11, 2018). While progressive students were able to erase the chalkings before morning, tensions remained high in the days that followed. Concerned about the wellbeing and future of marginalized students on campus, students gathered in groups on the mall (A. Kafer, personal communication, October 10, 2018; D. Cortez, personal communication, October 22, 2018). Kenny Knowlton and others decided to cancel a philosophy club panel at the last minute to discuss the election instead. More than 50 students, faculty, and staff gathered in the Mood Atrium to process reactions to the election and discuss its implications for campus in a “really beautiful” showing of “fantastic, . . . very authentic solidarity” (K. Knowlton, personal communication, November 11, 2018). In an email to those that attended, Kenny wrote that “Tonight *theory* met *practice*” (personal communication, November 10, 2018).

Although this sense of solidarity following the election lingered, student protest against hate crimes on campus and efforts to change SU’s hate crime policies proved to be more complicated. On November 11th, students and faculty held a sit-in on the mall and then walked to interrupt Dr. Burger’s class in Olin. While the protest was meant to critique the “administration’s lack of response, of taking seriously, all the homophobic and racist things that were happening [in



Student activists after the 2016 election with Dr. Burger after marching to his class – Photo from *The Megaphone*

the days following the election],” Dr. Burger reframed the protestors lining his classroom into a photo opportunity (K. Knowlton, personal communication, November 11, 2018). Kenny described the moment a photo was taken of leaders of the protest at the front of the classroom with him: “there I was in a hammer and sickle shirt taking a picture with Dr. Burger ... Here we are trying to disrupt something, and this fully neoliberal subject of authority — the most authoritative position in the university — just flipped this on its head, and now we’re stuck.” (K. Knowlton, personal communication, November 11, 2018). While SU’s hate crime policy was not strengthened, Keara Hudler believes that the activism that followed the election had lasting effects on campus culture: “A lot of people were moved by the presidential election in 2016. Fewer people appeared to be complacent the following year” (personal communication, October 14, 2018).

Although Southwestern has struggled with social sustainability on campus for some time, the university has made remarkable advancements in other areas of sustainability in recent years.



Heather Hall solar panels (top left), Students in SU’s EcoLab (top right), Members of H.E.A.T. (bottom left), Campus cats fed by Cat Partners (bottom right) – Photos from southwestern.edu

Heather Hall, the black box theatre, underwent a sustainability project which involved a zero-energy usage room and the installation of solar panels and LED lighting in an attempt to reach carbon

neutrality (J. Ore, personal communication, October 29, 2018). Cat Partners of SU was founded in 2011 by Alex Brown in an effort to curb overpopulation of feral cats on the university’s campus

(K. Lessard, personal communication, October 23, 2019). Several years later, in August of 2013, another environmentally-focused organization, Human Environmental Animal Team (HEAT), was founded at Southwestern and was “devoted to bringing environmental issues to the forefront of students’ minds through positive activism” (A. Watts, personal communication, October 14, 2018). HEAT’s topics of interest encompass a wide array of environmental issues including “human rights, animal welfare, and environmental preservation and conservation” (Southwestern University Student Organizations, n.d.). SEAK has continued advocating for a number of significant changes on campus, adding water bottle refill stations and meatless options in the Commons. Due to the similarity in interests, HEAT and SEAK have worked together on occasions over the past few years.

Concurrently in 2014, a group of students founded EcoLab, a 25-acre environmental field studies site located on university-owned land east of campus. Supported by a 2016 King Creativity grant and multiple Green S.A.F.E. Fund awards, the property has been used to provide field-based ecological experiences in a class setting (Environmental Studies Capstone Group, 2017; D. McDurham, personal communication, October 16, 2018).



Southwestern students march to spread Climate Change awareness - Photo from *The Megaphone*

Also in 2014, SEAK, HEAT, SU Democrats, and the Environmental Studies program co-sponsored a climate march with Dr. Emily Northrop acting as point person. This march was one of hundreds taking place around the world in advance of the 2015 Paris climate negotiations (E. Northrop, personal communication,

December 5th, 2018). Later, in Fall of 2017 an SU student, Selina Fernandez, organized an on-campus walkout that centered undocumented and DACA-recipient students in solidarity with national actions demanding a clean DREAM Act (personal communication, November 30, 2018).

Perhaps one of the most significant student-led accomplishments at Southwestern University has been the university's recognition from AASHE (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education) as a STARS Silver Institution since 2015 for its commitment to sustainability (Southwestern University, n.d.). Although other universities typically employ full-time sustainability professionals to compile and submit STARS



Southwestern students plant a tree as part of the university's TreeCampus USA commitment – Photo from southwestern.edu

reports, Southwestern's accreditation has only been made possible due to a tremendous amount of labor by the 2014 Environmental Studies capstone group, student workers Keara Hudler,

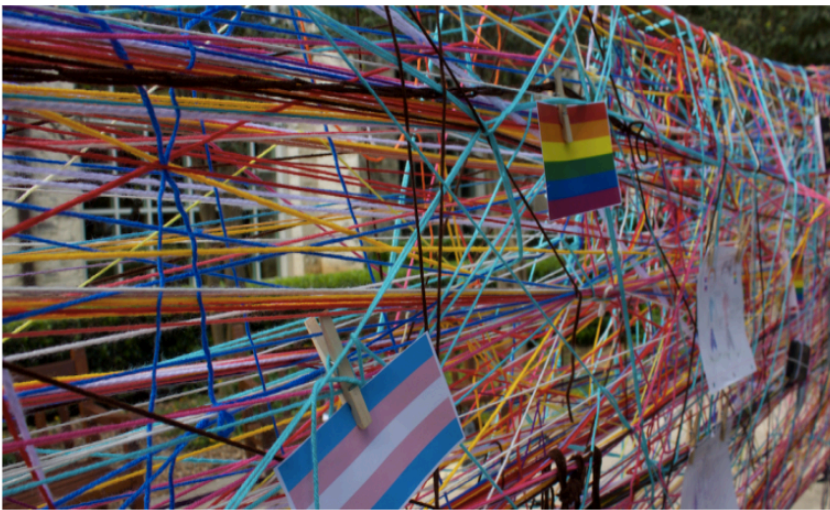
Keegan Taylor and Kathryn Caudell, and also Dr. Joshua Long (Environmental Studies Capstone Group, 2014). During the 2017-2018 academic year, Southwestern University was awarded the EPA Green Power Champion award for the 7th year in a row (Southwestern University Marketing and Communication, 2018). This same year, Southwestern University became part of the Arbor Day Foundation's Tree Campus USA program following an Environmental Studies capstone project (Arbor Day Foundation, 2018).

Aside from sustainable advancements regarding campus organizations and infrastructure, in 2017 Southwestern University faculty members took a monumental step towards their commitment to sustainability. Members of the Southwestern community called upon representatives in congress to take serious action towards addressing climate change. The decision, covered in *The Williamson County Sun*, was a tremendous victory resulting in a 62-10 win with 9 members of the Southwestern faculty abstaining. Given that this is such a controversial subject in politics, it was a turning point for faculty activism in higher education, as Southwestern University was the first American university to ever challenge the government on climate change. Faculty member Dr. Joshua Long responded to the efforts by saying “In making that statement, we’re not only urging policy action, but we’re also hopefully promoting a broader cultural shift,” alluding to the idea that other universities and communities must recognize and take action on this serious issue (Borovykh, D., 2017).



SU faculty urge Congress to take action and address climate change – Photo from southwestern.edu

Currently, during the 2018-2019 academic year, SEAK is working to educate the Southwestern community on ongoing environmental issues, including recruiting students to attend a rally to bring attention to the U.S. government's failure to acknowledge climate change (E. Northrop, personal communication, October 14, 2018). Additionally, Southwestern University recently committed to hiring a sustainability coordinator, a full-time staff position that "works collaboratively with administration, faculty, staff, and students to develop, coordinate, and promote effective sustainability initiatives to reduce the University's impact on the environment" (Southwestern University, 2018). While students and faculty are moving in a positive direction towards environmental sustainability, there are still fallbacks pertaining to social sustainability on



Yarn designs created by Pirates for Pride and Art Association – Photo from *The Megaphone*

campus⁸. Other campus activism this year includes the revitalization and growth of Pirates for Pride. Their resurgence became clear when they united with another SU organization, Art Association, to co-host an event pertaining to National Coming Out Day in which they created an

intricate yarn design on campus in October of 2018. This installation sought to emphasize LGBTQ+ identity (Pavlina, 2018). In addition, students are working towards the establishment of a student union through the Student Labor Action Coalition (C. Kelly, personal communication, October 25, 2018). The large efforts made by students over the past decade pertaining to social and environmental activism hint at a brighter future for activists at Southwestern University. Some

of the more notable efforts have been part of past Environmental Studies Capstone Projects (Table 1).

Table 1. 2014-2017 *Southwestern University Environmental Studies Capstone Projects*

Capstone Project Title and Year	Goal of Capstone Project
Sustainability Strategic Plan (2014)	“Challenging the Southwestern University community to lighten our environmental footprint, improve our quality of life, engage in meaningful partnerships with the community, and promote the core values of sustainability so that our graduates will enter the world as role models who will promote justice and the common good.”
TORCH (2014)	“Recommendations for future initiatives, an introduction and history of the Green S.A.F.E., and how to go about collecting and entering STARS information.”
Establishing an SU Office of Sustainability (2015)	“This proposal outlines the background, benefits, and logistical details for creating an Office of Sustainability at Southwestern University.”
Interactive Memory: Chronicling Sustainability Efforts at Southwestern University (2015)	“To combat the loss of institutional knowledge at Southwestern University, an interactive map was created to chronicle the past and present efforts of students, staff, and faculty.”
Strengthening the Southwestern Community Garden (2016)	“This project aimed to solidify the Southwestern University Community Garden as a valuable and sustainable institution of the campus community.”
Sustainability and Social Engagement (2016)	“Our ultimate goal was to understand what drives the sustainability on the Southwestern campus and implement a greater awareness into our campus.”
Sustainable Infrastructure for the Walzel Gymnasium (2016)	“In an effort to introduce more sustainable practices to Southwestern University's campus, this project will update the lighting in the Walzel Gymnasium to reduce energy load and increase efficiency.”
Southwestern Ecological Laboratory (2017)	“This manual will help to determine appropriate levels and locations of development within the site [EcoLab], protocols for research and recreational activities, and proper wildlife/land management protection practices.”
Sustaining the Southwestern Ecological Laboratory (2017)	“In 2017, the Environmental Studies Capstone group decided to address and resolve these issues by outlining the following goals: 1) Clean-up the Ecolab by removing trash from the site and improving the accessibility of Ecolab through the construction of a trail. 2) Identify invasive species within the Ecolab and create a species distribution model of one of these species using GIS applications in order to create a protocol for their future control. 3) Develop a curricular structure for Ecolab. 4) Secure grant money to continue funding of projects. 5) Create a land management and protocol plan to provide guidelines for future research and classroom use.”
TreeCampus USA (2017)	“After reviewing the impact of establishing a Tree Campus USA certification on colleges and universities around the nation, the Environmental Studies Capstone group has worked to add Southwestern University to the Arbor Day Foundation's list of national Tree Campus USA members.”
Intersectional Sustainability and Student Activism (2017)	“This paper takes a student activist perspective on these issues, suggesting that a comprehensive and intersectional approach toward university sustainability can empower students and their allies, raise awareness about the causes of these issues [social sustainability and social injustice], and allow a more constructive environment for collaborative approaches and policy formation on college campuses.”
A Red City Goes Green (2018)	“This paper presents a contemporary history of the renewable energy partnership between Southwestern University and its host municipality of Georgetown, Texas.”

VI. Conclusion

Detailing a history of environmental activism at Southwestern University concerned only with actions that directly relate to traditional aspects environmentalism would paint an incomplete picture and do disservice to the intentions of many activists. It must be acknowledged that the past two decades of renewable energy efforts and environmental sustainability initiatives were made possible by the efforts of earlier student activists, with the support of faculty and staff members. These individuals helped to establish spaces on campus, such as the GAC, which were geared toward activism and to break down barriers that discouraged changes that could be considered uncomfortable (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018). It is likewise important to note that during the past decade, many of those who could be considered primarily environmental activists have actually embraced a multitude of topics to rally behind, including ones that are traditionally categorized under fields like gender rights or social justice.

A core value of the activism at Southwestern is related to the idea of social spaces. Several of the student activists and faculty that were interviewed commented on the importance of having areas where students felt free to express themselves, especially LGBTQ+ and other minority students for whom the default university space was not designed to accommodate (D. Cortez, personal communication, October 22, 2018; D. McDurham, personal communication, October 16, 2018; E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018; E. Ezell, personal communication, October 11, 2018; C. Kelly, personal communication, October 25, 2018; S. Brackmann, personal communication, October 26, 2018; V. Espinosa, personal communication, October 27, 2018).

Beyond striving for designated spaces, the connections between various kinds of activism in Southwestern's history can be explained by examining trends in how members of the Southwestern activist community define activism. Individual definitions vary, but a common underlying theme is the idea of organizing to create change in an institution. There is confusion

about what actions can be considered activism; it is easier to point to the more extreme forms, like marches and protests as activism, but harder to label measures like education as activism because they take place within the institution itself. Nevertheless, if the objective of activism is to bring about institutional change, then any effort that works toward that end — be it inside or outside of the institution, heavily opposed or welcomed — can be considered activism. Recognizing this allows for activists to increase their efficacy; multiple approaches working together can affect change better than any approach by itself.

Because the goal of activism is to bring about change in institutions, the institutions themselves do not always view it in a positive light. However, the administration of Southwestern University has often been supportive and willing to embrace change as long as activists can make the case that there is a significant base that wants it (L. Jones, personal communication, September 28, 2018). The university is enthusiastic about initiatives that have the potential to save money and/or act as a marketable image boost. Much of what can be traditionally considered environmental activism falls under this category. Less welcome however, is activism that demands changes that will cost the university money and even more so, activism that risks exposing unpleasant problems at the university to public scrutiny. The current administration in particular has been criticized for being unwilling to engage with these more controversial types of activism beyond a superficial level.

It is important to celebrate the many successes that activists have achieved at Southwestern; in terms of environmentally beneficial initiatives and sustainability commitments the university has made admirable strides forward. However, it is equally important to acknowledge the failures and shortcomings of Southwestern. The future of Southwestern activism may be focused not just on reacting to new issues as they emerge, but on re-exploring avenues of activism that did not

achieve their full potential in the past. To have success in the future necessitates acknowledgement and understanding of the obstacles that activism faces on campus.

Future Projections and Ideas for Activism at Southwestern University

I. Introduction

Institutions of higher education increasingly serve as places that foster environmental action and sustainability efforts. Furthermore, these environmental endeavors often include a social justice component as more universities recognize the importance of environmental justice. Southwestern is no exception, and our history of environmental initiatives emphasizes the university's commitment to empowering students to "contribute to the overall well-being of humanity" and activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good as stated in Southwestern's Core Mission, Purpose, and Values (2011). Student-driven, faculty-supported activism is prevalent on SU's campus, and many of Southwestern's most important achievements in sustainability were catalyzed by student efforts.

Georgetown and Southwestern's switch to 100% renewable energy started as a SEAK petition, students ensured both the formation and evolution of SU's Green S.A.F.E. Fund, and the university's STARS reporting would not be possible without dedicated student workers. Furthermore, numerous student-founded organizations are in place to try and ensure that every member of the Southwestern community has a voice in campus-enacted changes. These sustainable achievements are not realized without difficulty, however, and obstacles – including student transience, lack of resources, busy workload, or administrative concerns – cause many student-proposed projects to either lack university backing or lose momentum before they are achieved. Through interviewing administration, current students, alumni, staff, and faculty, we have identified several common themes that characterize past obstacles to activism at Southwestern University. This section of our manuscript will explain and provide examples of

how these factors have acted as barriers and provide recommendations for measures that could be taken to address them in the future. To conclude, we will explore advice from faculty, staff, students, and alumni that we interviewed to serve as guidance for current and future student activists.

II. Obstacles to Activism and Potential Steps Forward

Problems: Student Transience, Lack of Transparency, and Institutional Amnesia

Students have a limited time at Southwestern and do not always complete the initiatives that they start. Unfortunately, in many cases, this results in loss of progress and necessitates the repetition of efforts in the future. Intentionally or not, the administration of Southwestern has sometimes used the reality of student transience to resist measures that student activists wish to achieve. The longer it takes for the university to implement activist demanded changes, the more likely students will be unable to see their efforts materialize.

Likewise, as several students noted in interviews, a lack of transparency from the administration over the progress of their projects and proposals can leave students feeling lost and unsupported (C. Hyatt, personal communication September 26, 2018; V. Espinosa, personal communication, September 27, 2018; D. Cortez, personal communication, October 22, 2018; C. Kelly, personal communication, October 25, 2018). All of this contributes to the problem of student apathy. Some students activists have expressed feeling demoralized and exhausted when trying to implement changes on a campus whose administration at times seems more supportive of activism in its rhetoric than in actual policy.

Finally, when students leave the school, their incomplete projects, and even sometimes their established achievements, are routinely forgotten or neglected within a few years such as the EcoLab and SU Garden. Since the typical turnover rate of students is four years, it takes a relatively short amount of time for this to happen. As with student transience, a degree of institutional amnesia is natural in college campuses, but there are measures that can be taken to combat these obstacles to activism.

Solution: Easily Accessible History of Activism, and Club Leadership Transitions

We hope that the work we have done for this project will stand up as a valuable tool for future activism at Southwestern. What we have accumulated is by no means a complete history of the activism at Southwestern University and should not be approached as such. However, it does provide information about the efforts of various students, faculty, and staff and the obstacles they have faced. Having a written history of this work easily available to students may combat the issues of institutional amnesia and student transience by publicizing the efforts of the past so that they are not so easily lost when students move on from the university. A detailed history will not fix institutional inefficiency and lack of transparency — these require the transformation of Southwestern as a whole — but it may help future activism efforts by making clear what steps have been taken already. In addition to providing a better jumping off point for activists, the history may increase the ability of activists to hold the university accountable for past promises and present shortcomings. In addition to keeping activism records, detailed on-campus club records should be documented and held for future member use. As alumna, Sarah Puffer Munger, suggested in an interview, clubs should encourage making leadership transition training a mandatory responsibility for officers in order to preserve continuity over time and prevent the loss of group knowledge and identity (November 8, 2018). The ebbs and flows of student involvement are an inevitable

characteristic of student activism, but these practices can mitigate the damage done to organization during periods of lower activity.

Problem: Reluctance to Commit Financially and Reluctance to be Exposed to Negative Press

Southwestern University, like any academic institution, requires money and resources to operate. At times, living up to its core value of “encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good” by improving environmental sustainability requires a significant financial commitment. In order to make themselves more palatable to the university, activists often have to struggle to make economic appeals in addition to the environmental and social appeals. In other words, activists are tasked not only with proving the validity of their causes, but their financial viability as well. Some initiatives that activists would like to see implemented — for example, the 2016 initiative to get rid of plastic water bottles in the campus vending machines — have been rejected by the university because of their economic infeasibility (C. Hyatt, personal communication, September 26th, 2018). Additionally, the university is understandably concerned with the image that it presents to its donors, supporters, and potential students. The better the reputation and image of Southwestern, the better able it is to attract students and other financial supporters. Aggressive forms of activism and actions that prompt outside attention and criticism are therefore looked upon with caution by the administration because they are not perceived to reflect positively upon the image of the university. For example, protests that have taken place recently regarding sexual assault have been downplayed by some of the Southwestern community after they received attention from the both the residents of Georgetown and local news.

Solution: Positive Progressive Marketing

Southwestern University should frame campus activism in terms of how it demonstrates students’ passion for social justice, and the betterment of the school in general. Ideally, rather than

attempting to present an unrealistic image of the school, Southwestern should publicly acknowledge the problems that students care about, use the publicity accompanying activism to advertise how these problems are being addressed, and even use the problems as opportunities to seek out advice from the community and/or experts.

This kind of marketing spin could prove similarly useful for cases in which activist proposals would be economically burdensome. Even when the demands of activists would mean a financial cost to the university, they may still provide the opportunity for positive advertising, which in turn would benefit both the school and the students. The university has already shown the efficacy of this advertising strategy; as noted by multiple interviewees, many students chose to come to Southwestern University specifically because of its commitment to environmental initiatives and sustainability (L. Jones, personal communication, September 28, 2018; K. Lessard, personal communication, October 23, 2018). By embracing and advertising activism, Southwestern would be making an investment that may save money in the future.

Students activists may find certification programs to be effective tools that “spin” policy changes into attractive opportunities for the university. Certifications and awards can provide additional justification for policies through recognition and positive press for the university. Creating more of a “green” reputation for Southwestern would also serve to attract more environmentally-conscious students, furthering activism on campus. Southwestern has received several awards for environmental work on campus, including eight years of EPA Green Power awards and the 2017 TREIA award (Southwestern Marketing and Communications, 2014). However, the most significant ongoing environmental certification that has been obtained by Southwestern is the STARS rating recognized through AASHE. STARS, which quantifies a number of measures of sustainability, has allowed Southwestern to be recognized with a Silver

rating for its commitment to renewable energy sources, LEED-certified buildings, among other accomplishments. However, Southwestern's has not been able to improve this rating due to a lack of policies and/or measurements for a number of other STARS categories, including disciplinary procedure following discriminatory acts (K. Caudell, personal communication, November 19th, 2018). The potential to earn a prestigious Platinum rating could function as powerful motivation for the administration to support additional sustainable measures on campus. Not only does this certification enhance Southwestern's commitment to sustainability to prospective students, but it also improves Southwestern's standing on college ranking lists including Sierra Club's Cool Schools and the Princeton Review's Guide to Green Colleges.

Other certifications addressing components of sustainability could be pursued, including the following:

- US Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools (ED-GRS)
- NQA EcoCampus
- Green Office Certification Program
- Sustain Yosef Green Workplace Certification
- Green Teaching Certificate
- Green Restaurant Association
- Fair Trade University
- Nature Explore Classroom
- Spirit of St. Francis Sustainability Award

However, it is important to recognize that many certification programs are still based on traditional understandings of environmentalism. It should be a priority to identify awards and certifications that emphasize a broader understanding of sustainability, including the intersectional nature of economic, social and ecological sustainability. In these cases, awards or certifications not only have the potential to incentivize action towards increased justice, equity, and access on campus, but may also help expand university understanding of what true sustainability entails.

Problem: Balancing Activism with Academic Responsibilities

Student activists at Southwestern University mainly engage in activism out of a desire to improve the school and call attention to important issues. Their activism work is done in addition to being full time students, a situation that often makes it difficult to balance their responsibilities. A contributing factor to the ebbs and flows of activism at Southwestern is that some students are more willing to sacrifice their academic success for the good of their activist causes. It would be unrealistic to expect the administration to advocate the prioritization of activism over academics, but there are ways to lessen the tension between the two, and even use them in conjunction.

Solution: Increased Institutional Support

If Southwestern wishes to claim activism as a core value, then it has a responsibility to support the students engaging in it. The Office of Community-Engaged Learning (OCEL) and Office of Diversity Education (ODE) are excellent examples of institutional platforms that provide resources for students. Additionally, there are ongoing efforts to increase the institutional support for students; the recent hiring of a greenhouse technician and the opening of a sustainability coordinator serve as promising examples. There is a need for more positions created on campus that increase all aspects of sustainability without the expense of student GPAs. The new sustainability coordinator on campus must listen to student ideas. Therefore there must be a means for students to readily communicate with the coordinator. Another responsibility of the sustainability coordinator could be collecting and sharing activist and club records. Proper funding aside from the Green S.A.F.E. Fund/other funds must be allocated to the coordinator to ensure progress is made in all aspects of sustainability: environmental wellbeing, social equity, and economic vitality. All decisions/projects the coordinator chooses to take on must also be transparent, with readily-accessible information for students. The sustainability coordinator should serve as a

contact for all things pertaining to sustainability. In addition to a sustainability coordinator and greenhouse technician, the school could employ someone to run a Sexual Assault Peer Network and allow already established professors and other students to maintain a role in this network.

Aside from creating positions with job responsibilities that include supporting student activists, there is potential to bridge the gap between academics and activism by creating opportunities for students to use their activism in student worker positions or for academic credit. Southwestern University has used work study positions and independent projects in the past to allow students to work on sustainability and environmental initiatives (S. Puffer Munger, personal communication, November 8, 2018). Expanding and advertising these opportunities would allow many students to engage in activism while being supported with funding and/or academic credit.

Problem: Lack of Understanding on Behalf of Students and Visibility of Resources Available for Students

Students often lack an understanding of important terms like “sustainability” and “intersectionality.” Unless they explore the concept of systemic issues in classes, students are often under the impression that environmental issues like climate change are related only to what is considered the “natural environment.” They may think that the major effects of climate change are only in distant places like arctic habitats, instead of recognizing the far reaching impacts on marginalized groups and the politics that come into play. In addition, the resources that outline sustainable practices like composting, recycling, and energy usage at SU are not advertised very publicly; students can learn about these campus policies by researching individually, but this results in only limited exposure.

Solution: Integrate sustainability courses into SU general education and Create resources that give clear explanations of sustainable practices on campus.

SU already has a social justice curricular requirement but lacks anything that explicitly delves into the environment and its intersectionality with social justice, the economy and other aspects of life. This might take the form of a course similar to “Introduction to Environmental Studies” that takes a more expansive approach on the intersectionality of sustainability would be beneficial to incorporate into SU general education. There must be a resource that explains how sustainable practices are enacted on campus. Composting processes, recycling process, energy usage reports, a calendar outlining environmental opportunities for non-majors/non-SEAK/HEAT members need to be accessible for all students either digitally or on a bulletin board.

III. Advice and Hopes for the Future

When looking to the future of activism and action at SU, input from faculty, students, and alumni is valuable and necessary. Hopes and advice from these individuals can speak to Southwestern’s sustainable future. One of the common threads of hope for activism is that it will grow and continue. Increased and sustained action on campus, conducted by students and supported by faculty, was a common theme throughout multiple interviews. Contradicting hopes for the future also emerged throughout these talks and brought light to the diverse opinions held by people at Southwestern.

The types of issues and how they be dealt with differed greatly among interviews in that some were specific to SU while others wanted focus on issues beyond the university. The scope of the people’s hopes differed as well. Some hopes spoke only to campus life and change while others spoke with hopes for Georgetown, Texas, and the world. Some of the most compelling

pieces of advice came from professors who had concerns regarding student attitude. This fear that students have, because of precarity in their futures or fear of angering the administration, is something that makes students hesitate when taking action. For some professors, they feel that students should not feel stopped by these problems. Alison Kafer, a Professor of Feminist Studies at SU, had this to say regarding student mindset:

“I think that as a whole students undersell how much they know and how right their guts are and so I would hope for students to increasingly recognize that intuitively they know what the right things is to do and to stick to it. Activism comes with consequences, activism often means that you make enemies-make people pissed off. In the school setting there is this fear of getting in trouble and I think the administration relies on fears about getting in trouble that then leads students to question their guts. We need student activists to push us. Everything that I do right is because students push me to do things better and everything I do wrong is because they have not yet helped me realize what wrong things I’m doing” (Personal communication, October 10, 2018).

Eric Selbin, a professor of Political Science at Southwestern, said this regarding student involvement:

“I think y'all expecting more of us and by us, I mean faculty, staff, and administration expecting us to live up to who we say we want to be. We just need more pushing.” (Personal communication, October 3, 2018).

Randy Erben, the Manager of Facilities Services, said the following about his hopes for the future of sustainability at Southwestern:

“What I’d like to see... is the whole idea of environmental sustainability becoming not something that has to be sold, but just a part of how Southwestern University does business in every aspect” (Personal communication, November 27, 2018).

From these interviews, advice for the future of Southwestern activism involved students demanding and expecting more from faculty and administration. Students need to hold their mentors accountable when asking for action and change. The need for better communication and

the need to sit down and talk with other parties about the issues came up multiple times in interviews as well. Dakota McDurham, an alumnus and former Board of Trustees member, said

“For anything to really happen on campus we have to have input from students, faculty, and staff and administration. And in order for that to happen there has to be a discussion with all three and just having faculty and administration talk, and just having students and faculty talk is not going to do it; students need to talk to them [administration]. When I’m envisioning future of activism and environmental activism on Southwestern’s campus, that discussion needs to happen, and it needs to be a student led one. It need to be students going into office hours sitting down with Burger and saying ‘let’s talk about this.’ (Personal communication, October 16, 2018).

Alumna Sarah Puffer Munger shared some advice for future generations of activists when having those discussions with faculty and administration.

“Just because the environmental initiatives you want to see aren’t there and maybe you don’t see a way it can happen right away, don’t settle for no. Don’t be overly pushy because so much of activism is relationship building and you need to understand administrative concerns. But show that you are able to be trusted with a project and are willing to take a chance and make this an independent study or even a grow this into a program. Coming straight forward with a plan, saying ‘Here’s how this could work. How can we make this happen?’ was really effective for me. You ask with your plan already in mind and they see that you’ve already thought through this and it’s not just a whimsical thing.” (Personal communication, November 8, 2018).

Many interviewees had a lot to say regarding hopes for SU and the curriculum. Emily Niemeyer, an SU chemistry professor, wished to see the university as a lab for students to experiment with how they could be more active on campus and off. She also stated that:

“When we first started the Environmental Studies program and through the years I was involved, I always thought it would be great if we had every student take an ES course in the same way students take a social justice class. It should just be an integrated part of what students are learning on campus” (Personal communication, October 17, 2018).

Terri Johnson had something similar to say regarding how she would like to see Southwestern spaces emerge and grow:

“I would like to see the student have like a social justice center. Places that faculty, staff,

and students come together with these resources. We could host national conferences and host speakers. I hope that students are taught how to do activism and training and we could see it known as a place to come and go too and to be trained. A whole building where documentaries and films are being screened, and plays, any type of engagement.” (Personal communication, November 6, 2018).

Beyond what the school could do for the students many interviewees expressed interest in how students could work together. Students and faculty alike want the SU population realize that their strength lies in solidarity. Cat Kelly, a senior at SU, had this to say,

“I hope that there's more widespread involvement with students... one problem is that the same students are involved in every club and it's kind of a burden on them to always be the ones to participate in activism. I partially chalk it up to some students not caring, but I also think that it's a skill to... bring in new students and give them an opportunity to be involved in campus activism. I hope that I can learn how to pass down my knowledge and reach out to younger students. I hope for us that we create a culture of solidarity, by seeking out and making connections with more people on campus. We are stronger together” (Personal communication, October 25, 2018).

When asked about their hope for the future of activism at Southwestern, Emet Ezell, a 2018 graduate said:

“I hope the activism never dies.... I think about those really dark moments and my deepest hope is that whatever happens next in the world, whatever resistance or response, I want the students at Southwestern to be able to access joy while they're doing it ... and [I think] that the solidarity between the professors and the students is such a critical part of fostering that joy.” (Personal communication, October 11, 2018).

Another 2018 graduate, Keara Hudler, said this about the future of campus activism:

“I hope that students will continue to act. I hope that complacency will become so socially unacceptable the students who are privileged enough to turn a blind eye will no longer be able to. ” (Personal communication, October 14, 2018).

Leah Jones, an alumna, also talked about the importance of Southwestern's connections with other schools nationally in regard to why she thinks that environmental activists during her time were so successful.

“We had such a bigger network to get support, resources, inspiration, and ideas. I think that's really important to create a larger community that just your school.” (Personal communication, September 28, 2018).

Along with solidarity should come an awareness of the connections between the environment and social matters. Dr. Johnson expressed her wish that:

“... [Activism] continues to be always wedding environmental issues with social issues and that more and more people do it.” (Personal communication, September 27, 2018)

Similarly, Dr. Hobgood emphasized the importance of making these connections explicit, both in “the campus culture” and to the administration (Personal communication, September 27, 2018).

Accepting that these topics are connected and inform one another is essential when trying to think about how to create a sustainable and active campus. Jessica Olson, an alumna from SU, highlighted the importance of the connections we need to make as students. She stressed that in order to conduct impactful action and activism diversity is needed:

“As tuition gets higher and it becomes less accessible to have a broader scope of society on campus. I hope that the activism on campus challenges that and makes sure we continuously support people from across different backgrounds to be a part of the SU community. During my time at SU it was a predominantly white middle upper class atmosphere. I think in order for us to have powerful activism it can't just be that demographic. If activism on campus needs to be more internal and focusing in campus dynamic as opposed to how we are contributing to larger societies then that needs to be done” (Personal communication, October 4, 2018).

However, the quote that summarized the underlying theme among all other quotes was Dr. Kafer's response to what she hopes the future of activism will look like at Southwestern. She simply responded, “More” (Personal communication, October 10, 2018).

IV. Conclusion

This research aimed to highlight the importance of activism in higher education. Our Literature Review clarified what activism truly is, how it functions in colleges, and how it gets both suppressed and amplified. Using Southwestern University as a case study, we demonstrated that sustainability-based activism is rooted in social justice activism, and that at its core should be an intersectional practice — one that recognizes the complex relationship between the environment and its inhabitants. Southwestern's history demonstrates the effectiveness of activism in prompting change on campus, and also in the community. Through students, the institution has seen monumental changes: creation of the Gender Awareness Center, campaigning for the eventual success of the Talloires Declaration, and SU's switch to renewable energy sources. Students also helped pave the way for the city of Georgetown's switch to renewable energy, showing that universities have a large influence on their greater community (SU Capstone "A Red City Goes Green", 2018).

Though the future of Southwestern's activism remains dependent on the will possessed by students, it is apparent that many alumni, faculty and current students are pleased to assist activists. In our research we have emphasized the necessity of faculty roles in student activism as the facilitator, and we hope that faculty continue to be a beneficial resource for willing student activists. Organizations must continue to unite and find a common ground in which they can effectively combat issues and make changes. This has been present throughout the history of Southwestern, but the amount of club participants has been declining in recent years. The future of activism at Southwestern University is uncertain, but we hope this document will be helpful in providing context, advice, and ideas for a better and more sustainable SU.

Endnotes

¹LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and others) was not an established term until recently. Prior to this, the movement was more popularly known as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender). Throughout this paper both terms are used depending on which is more suitable for the time period.

²At the time, Shilling and the administration were moving to make southwestern a national liberal arts university... recruiting out of state students, faculty from elsewhere, etc. changes happening on campus were somewhat accepted by shilling as a necessary part of this process (E. Selbin, personal communication, October 3, 2018).

³Bruce Smail was ultimately fired from Southwestern University for his participation in this event.

⁴Dr. Eric Selbin was quoted regarding this moment: “Students, then and now, were so inspiring ... there were students here who wanted stuff. Henri Munoz and Marisela Orta come into my office ... and they’re saying ‘A white guy like you shouldn’t be teaching—’ in those days I thought like three courses on Latin America ‘—you shouldn’t be teaching this stuff, you can’t teach this stuff’ ... ‘We can talk about it, but you need to rethink what you’re doing’ — and it was huge for me. ... and again, it made me think about it, it made us think about a set of us. I used that [interaction] as the basis for why, as margaret and matt [two other white profs focused on Latin America] moved on why we needed to replace them not with more white people — and that came from students!”

⁵This chalking was later removed and deemed “unacceptable”

⁶The Vagina Monologues were performed on campus a few times in the 2000s, but in 2006 the university cancelled the event, citing complaints of a “hostile workplace environment” (A. Kafer, personal communication, October 10, 2018). Later the event would be revived into the more inclusive We Are Women.

⁷The Environmental Studies program nearly collapsed in 2006 due to a lack of coherence.

⁸On September 13, 2018 an alleged hate crime took place, in which two members of the LGBTQ+ community were harassed by a fraternity member of Phi Delta Theta. While the authors of an article covering this issue in The Megaphone claim this was a hate crime, as homophobic slurs were yelled at the harrassed members, Southwestern University’s administration prefers to call it a “bias related incident” (Miller, et al., 2018; Oza, 2018). Students on the Southwestern University app opened discussion to this incident in order to better understand the issue and raise awareness, but within twenty-four hours many of the posts regarding the subject were removed from the app.

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