

Student-Led Climate Movements Across the United States

Project Description and Intended Objectives (current objectives and findings)

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to analyze student-led climate justice movements across colleges and universities in the United States – their triumphs, successes, and failures. Based on personal experience, there is a gap in these movements and a learning opportunity for other groups that this research will work to fill. The compiled results of this study will be utilized as a blueprint for student groups in action and the many to come. In any movement, it is beneficial to look to other groups with similar goals. Student-led movements must learn how others are reaching their targets and the best way to implement those practices.

This project includes educational resources, being that intermediate knowledge is needed when advocating for change. Additionally, the project includes effective recruitment methods, as movements need a physical support system. This study questions that a forming group of students should consider ensuring that they are identifying accurate needs and goals for their institution given that each group is different. This guide includes a data table showing the struggles, successes, and failures of other institutions. Finally, in the supporting addendums, this resource has a point of contact per Jesuit higher education institution for starting movements to reach out to.

This study brings forth a number of key lessons for future student leaders to walk away with. All environmental activists on college campuses should keep in mind the adverse effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on social movements, as priorities have changed. Next, groups can save vast amount of valuable time by identifying the right audience early on. Third, take advantage of press and media as they hold great power and can be a strong ally in advocacy group efforts. Next, groups should avoid the potential downfall by ensuring strong continuity and investing in the next generation of leaders. Finally, keep the network open as a variety of leaders can spark activism on campus.

Methodology

Research Gathering Process

Preliminary research was gathered from Patagonia's Tools for Grassroots Activists. Further research was gathered through interviews with leaders, alumni, and allies of climate movements at several colleges and universities, including Seattle University, Creighton University, Gonzaga University, University of Notre Dame, Santa Clara University, and the College of St. Benedict. All of these institutions share a Catholic mission.

Implemented Timeline

From July 2021 to August 2021, a substantial amount of time was spent gathering contact information, networking, compiling resources, and discerning how to best structure this project. From August 2021 to September 2021, I read Patagonia's Tools for Grassroots Activists, and prepared questions for my interviews. Between October 2021 and February 2022, I conducted

20 meetings with leaders, alumni, and allies of climate movements from the universities and colleges that I would be conducting case studies on. Finally, between March 2022 and May 2022, I worked on finalizing my research, conducting follow-up research from interviews, and organizing my information.

Costs

No expenses were incurred by this study.

Study Limitations

This project took place during a transformative time in history. Colleges and universities were learning how to adapt and compensate for the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the momentum for climate justice advocacy declined as mental health and virtual community building became the forefront of many student groups.

Changes to Originally Intended Proposal

This projects original intention was to interview and survey the student body presidents at all 28 Jesuit Universities and Colleges. However, after a few initial meetings, it came to my attention that it would be of a greater benefit to focus on a few successful movements and a few movements that are not seeing as much success in their efforts.

Findings

Case studies of six universities and colleges with similar mission and values were conducted. Those six universities and colleges include: Seattle University, Creighton University, College of St. Benedict, Gonzaga University, Santa Clara University, and University of Notre Dame. In each of these case studies, it was important to get the perspective of both students, faculty, and staff as all are stakeholders in the conversation of sustainability on college campuses.

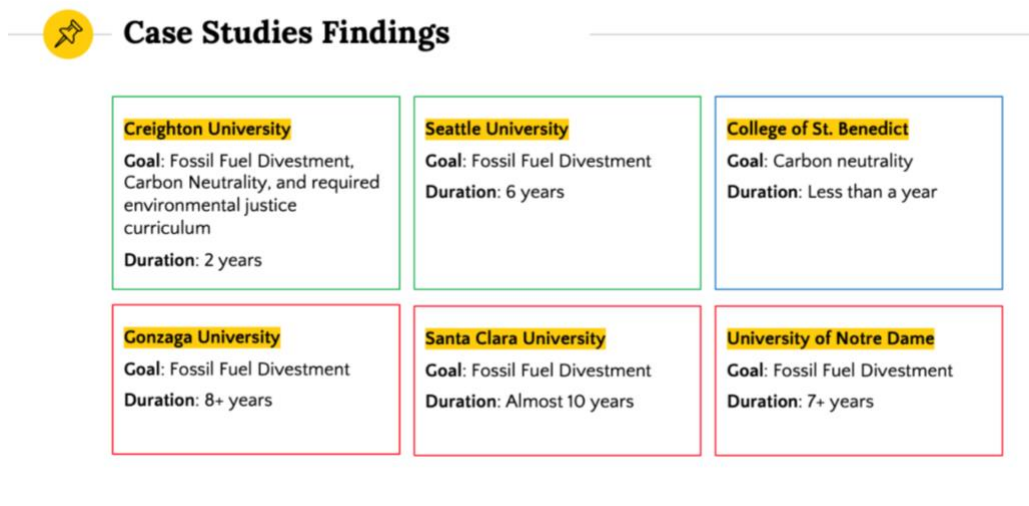


Figure 1 – green box notes successful movements; blue box notes moderate movement; red box notes struggling movements

Looking at *Figure 1* it can be shown that the movements with the shorter duration were more successful. Further research could look into the reasoning behind this finding.

Seattle University (SU)

Seattle University is a Jesuit Catholic institution located in Seattle, Washington. The endowment value on June 30, 2018, was approximately \$230 million.¹ In November of 2012, Sustainable Student Action (SSA) was launched, an official student organization that is still active at Seattle University. One of the founding members was Ames Fowler. According to Ames, before 2012 there was a bit of momentum, but nothing well organized. During that time, SSA followed in line with what 350.org had set out for them as strategy. SSA invited the Chief Financial Officer to their meeting and presented their demands. The CFO told the students they needed a “movement,” in order to make something happen. In response to that, SSA created a petition which had over 650 student signatures. They proceeded to paint a water jug to look like oil to make a statement when delivering the petition to the president’s office. The students were able to secure a meeting with the Seattle University Board of Trustees, but according to the students – it was unsuccessful.

When the students came back in the fall of 2013, they began to put together educational materials and connect with other universities. It was at this time that they pushed for a response from the university regarding the petition. This included holding a forum which was attended by about 175 students. SSA was able to partner with some professors who offered students extra credit if they went to the forum.

SSA worked to broaden their scope and purpose beyond fossil fuel divestment, by hosting environmental week and similar events. They had a solid core group of about 15 students without any formal structure. Ames admits that he was taking up too much space in the organization. SSA finally got a response from the university – a negative one; no, we will never commit to fossil fuel divestment, go away. The university offered to put two students on the Socially Responsible Investments (SRI) committee. Ames noted that many students felt powerless after the rejection by administration. Although this may have felt like a setback, SSA worked to stay involved in the community through 350.org. Through 350.org, SSA sent a few students to regional meet-ups and one student to the national meeting, which resulted in a meeting with Cambridge Asset Management. The students went to them directly asking what they could do for them regarding fossil fuel divestment, because Seattle University was labeling this as “impossible.”

Moving forward, SSA hosted a “No to No” Rally in 2014. Throughout the spring and summer of 2014, the students continued to stay involved in the community and retain strong connections to faculty and the faculty senate. Students identified Dr. Wes Lauer as a strong and consistent

¹ [Office of the President, 2018](#)

voice on the faculty side. Throughout Ames' senior year fall semester, he took a large step back from the organization to work on diversifying their membership and spent time training the next generation of student leaders that would be rising to take over the organization. Delaney – Ames' co-founder, noted a similar point. In an interview with current SSA leaders, Delaney reminded them to invest in leadership over the generations. She shared that senior members in SSA should take a step back from the movement and allow sophomores and juniors to rise to the occasion, to ensure longevity of the movement. "Empowering your volunteers to take ownership of projects or large pieces of projects will magnify your impact and increase the intensity of the work you are doing together."²

The work at Seattle University to map out their audience echos the advice of Gallagher et al. for grassroots activists. "Too often campaigns aim to influence too many people and spend vast amounts of time and resources trying to target people who can't help the campaign reach its goal."³ The students at Seattle mapped out their audience, specifically the Board of Trustees, identifying who they are and who and/or what are they connected to. Ames noted that engaging the student body was a struggle separate from the efforts to convince university administration. It was interesting to see how much students were paying attention. The students came to find that putting in too much energy in a community of people who do not care for your cause is not all that effective. "As you consider all the opportunities to reach and engage with your audience, you have to decide which activities produce the highest return on investment."⁴ Instead, SSA continued to build strong relationships within their team, as well as faculty and built their organization to command from there. Emily Nielson, a current SSA leader, notes that faculty have been invaluable with pushing these initiatives forward. An additional key takeaway in the movement was that persistence came from this type of community building, taking place over four generations of students.

Two fundamental groups formed out of this movement, after the SSA. First, the "Joint Initiative" group forms in August of 2014– consisting of SSA, Student Government Seattle University (SGSU), and university administration. In 2015, the University created the Socially Responsible Investment (SRI) Task Force as a way to explore options in which Seattle University could further its commitment to social responsibility in making investments consistent with its Investment Policy Statement. One of the student recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees was to establish a working group to engage with interested students, faculty, and staff on relevant matters of social responsibility in investing and advise the Investment Committee on an ongoing basis. The SRI serves as the liaison between the campus community and the Committee. The Working Group consists of eight members, at least three of whom will be members of the Committee or the University's Board of Trustees. Student members will be appointed by the Seattle University Student Government (SGSU) and the Graduate Student Council (GSC). Faculty will be appointed by the Academic Assembly.⁵

² Gallagher, N., Myers, L., & Chouinard, Y. (2016), pg. 147. Tools for grassroots activists: Best practices for success in the environmental movement. Patagonia Books.

³ *Id* at 58.

⁴ *Id* at 224.

⁵ <https://www.seattleu.edu/finance-and-business-affairs/treasury-and-risk-management/sri/>

Student organizing continued for years to come. In early 2017, pushback from the university president was that he did not know enough about divestment to suggest it to the Board of Trustees. In response, the students organized a campaign where an informative book regarding environmental justice was delivered to the president's office every hour. In early 2018, the SRI working group submitted their *Divestment Recommendation Letter* to the Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees. After a long, hard fight, the Board of Trustees vote in favor of divestment in July of 2018.

In January 2022, the Chief Financial Officer of Seattle University took part in an interview hosted by the Center for Environmental Justice and Sustainability and students from SSA. In this interview, we learned that Seattle University's commitment to divestment has made an impact on divestment decisions at other universities and colleges. The CFO attested to occasionally getting phone calls from financial leaders at other institutions inquiring how Seattle University was able to accomplish this goal while also maximizing returns. He stated that he takes opportunities he has to spread the word about the positive effects of fossil fuel divestment.⁶

Dr. Zamora provides key insight to the faculty perspective of the divestment movement at Seattle University. When she was asked what made the SU movement successful, she pointed to three main points: (1) it was a student-centered commitment – students, an important stakeholder, established their voice early on, (2) there was oversight involved and an overarching governance, and (3) winnable arguments were curated and presented. Regarding the third point, Dr. Zamora acknowledged that groups could make a lot of science or stakeholder arguments, but groups need to focus on arguments that will win. How can your arguments intersect and change the behavior that is already seen in a similar space? For example, if the University has already made a statement in the past or signed onto things, or participates in STARS, student groups should work to show incentive to make progress on the lines of a more sustainable campus. Finally, Dr. Zamora provided some recommendations for student groups to come establish short-term milestones. If an institution claims to divest in five years avoid the notion of “we will see you in five years,” at all costs. Students should hold the university accountable by establishing periodic goals for each year, as well as tangible goals – for example, universities should not strive to just show up on a top schools list, but rather remain on it.

Creighton University

Student government at Creighton University has been a driving force in sustainability initiatives. In 2018, Creighton Students Union (CSU), spearheaded a campaign known as Referendum 2 Sustainability Initiatives (2SI): phasing out plastic bags on campus and phasing out plastic straws on campus. These two initiatives were approved by a student body vote, exceeding 80%

⁶ The current CFO of Seattle University who was interviewed was not employed by the University during the fossil fuel divestment movement.

majority, and then implemented by the university, in partnership with Student Auxiliary Services and Campus Dining.

In the fall of 2018, the research for the student-led fossil fuel divestment began. Students were inspired by Bill McKibben⁷, Hardy Merriman⁸, and a climate change course. Some students began contacting university leadership to inquire on specific percentages but were unsuccessful in securing the data or substantial meetings. When the students faced a roadblock after a number of runarounds, they came to student government to be a voice, collaborate, and push the initiative forward. Throughout January and February of 2019, the movement began to get organized internally – setting up channels of communication and informal leadership structure. The Creighton Climate Movement (CCM) is unique as it is not a registered student organization and does not have an official executive board. The CCM decided it was best to use official channels through student government.

Once the movement was internally organized and goals were established, the movement went public by hosting a “Silence for the Climate Demonstration” on earth day – April 25, 2019. The event consisted of a student speech, a student-led prayer, and 3 minutes and 50 seconds of silence, representing the 350 parts/million. Similar to all Creighton University demonstrations, this event was approved by the Division of Student Life. CCM invited local news stations to attend for media coverage. Nearly 300 students were in attendance. Marketing was key in the success of this event. Business card sized handouts were distributed, leaders made announcements at the beginning of class, and tabling occurred all over campus to notify the community about the event.

Finally, in May of 2019, University President revealed the percentage of the endowment invested in the fossil fuel industry – 10.6%.

During the summer of 2019, five student leaders began drafting the official legislation that would go to a student body vote and become CSU Referendum #19-02. “You need someone keeping volunteers engaged and on track – providing updates and jobs that need to be done – and you need someone to encourage activists to stretch outside their comfort zones. You need someone to constantly close the loop, letting volunteers know the results and value of their actions, and the results of each tactic attempted. This is an organizer.”⁹ The five student authors of the referendum became the core leaders of the CCM – setting meeting times and locations, organizing volunteers within the movement, being the face and voice of the movement, and keeping volunteers informed. The Referendum was brought to the first body of the student government – Cabinet, where an almost three-hour discussion took place, resulting in a 0-8 vote failing the referendum and sending the authors back to make requested revisions, including increasing the number of sources and adjusting the tone used – from emotional to

⁷ *Oil and Honey*

⁸ <https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/contributor/hardy-merriman/>

⁹ Gallagher, N., Myers, L., & Chouinard, Y. (2016), pg. 142. *Tools for grassroots activists: Best practices for success in the environmental movement*. Patagonia Books.

informative. On September 23, 2019, the Referendum passes all three bodies of student government and was ready for a student body vote.

Nearly all of fall was spent on educating the student body of the cause, recruiting other members for the movement, and ensuring that students across all nine schools and colleges, as well as Creighton's satellite campuses, were aware of the vote. This included attending every student organization meeting to share CCM's story, table on campus, and the greatest asset – filming an informational video. On October 30, 2019, the five authors of the referendum received a Cease-and-Desist notice from Creighton University's General Counsel. If Creighton's name was to be further used in CCM's efforts, the authors would be faced with reprimand.

On November 5, 2019, the student body voted and passed with a majority. Referendum #19-02 demanded the university to divest from the top two percent carbon emitting companies (otherwise known as the Carbon Underground 200) in the next five years, commit to a more aggressive carbon neutrality goal (one that is sooner than 2050), and to implement mandatory climate justice education in the curriculum. Shortly thereafter, on November 13, 2019, the university president says no and rejects the referendum. One of the few reasons provided was that divestment does not diversify the university's endowment and portfolio.

The rest of the month included meetings between the CCM leaders and university administration. The students still felt unheard by administration; therefore, efforts were relocated to protesting. On December 17, 2019, a protest was organized at the Creighton Men's Basketball game. Posters spelling out "DIVEST" were made and banned from entry. At the next home game, the students spelled out "DIVEST" on their t-shirts and were able to get front row seats in the student section.

In response to these student efforts and great push by university faculty, university administration hosted "Seeking Hope: Intentional and Ignatian Responses to the Global Climate Crisis" on January 27, 2020. The forum was announced by the Office of the President as an opportunity to hear from experts on campus and discern other ways to move forward. All were invited and questions were allowed, so the students used this opportunity to their advantage by coordinating in a group effort ahead of time to plan out which questions were best to ask given the student's platform and short amount of time. The panel consisted of nine faculty and two students, and it was a general consensus of the audience that the panel was not on the same page and not much change came as a result of this forum.

Student activism continued, in light of World Fossil Fuel Divestment Day. The students organized 19 hours of straight tabling in the student center, which occurred during the full operational hours of the building. That same day, February 13, 2020, the students walked to the President's office to hand deliver a letter that was from the students, addressing the Board of Trustees. It was brought to their attention that the president had "just left through the back door."

On February 18, 2020, the students had a small victory to celebrate. Creighton University announced it would divest \$18,784,000, reducing their investment in the fossil fuel industry from 8.9% to 5.7%. On February 20, 2020, over 200 students participated in the CCM's "March to the Boardroom." According to the university's scheduling program, the Board of Trustees was holding their quarterly board meeting on campus in Omaha, Nebraska, so efforts were organized around this information – to march together and be a united front for fossil fuel divestment. However, just the day before, the Board of Trustees meeting was relocated to the Creighton's campus in Phoenix, Arizona.

On June 29, 2020, the university announced further decreased investment in fossil fuels, in honor of the fifth anniversary of the publication of *Laudato si'*. The university president stated that it totaled a five percent decrease¹⁰. Looking forward to December 31, 2020, the president announces further divestment from fossil fuels – public companies within five years and private companies within ten years.

The Creight*n Climate Movement faces similar struggles to other student-led movements across the country. Once strong student leaders had graduated, CCM struggled to recruit rising leaders who were willing to take over and press forward with holding the university accountable to the additional two demands of the referendum. Student drive and passion for this injustice had calmed down since 2020 – continuity in leadership and the COVID-19 pandemic are to blame.

College of Saint Benedict

The College of Saint Benedict (CSB) is in a unique position as the sister school to Saint John's University (SJU)– two different university administrations and presidents, but simultaneously work together on many institutional matters. Maggie Morin, a student at the College of Saint Benedict, was interviewed for this case study. It was noted that social movements have been a great struggle on their campus as neither president gives students a platform to have their voice heard, especially in light of the line three pipeline and the murder of George Floyd.

There are a lot of agencies involved in the fight for climate justice on their campus. First are the two student senates - each holding a sustainability representative position. Next, is the Climate Justice Club, of which Maggie describes herself as the central focal point with horizontal leadership (an 8-person board). Next, there is the Sustainability Council which both the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University's Vice President's for Finance are on that committee. Maggie had the opportunity to speak in front of this committee but was quickly turned away and told to write a letter of opposition for the community to get behind. Another active party was the faculty senate. Finally, the university president, who turned the students away and encouraged them to work directly with the Vice President for Finance. Students felt unheard and ignored as they were constantly being redirected. Due to the number of parties

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSLHA6cmeak>

involved and multiple campuses, a lot of crucial time was spent going back and forth to attend meetings, one on one's, and present to the faculty senate – a meeting that had 400 people on zoom and students were given just 60 seconds to talk.

After about a year of disorganization, CSB/SJU has committed to achieve carbon neutrality by 2035.

Gonzaga University

The discussion around divestment began in 2015 with the creation of Fossil Fuel Gonzaga – created and ran by a few young women at the time. After student push through the student divestment campaign, Gonzaga's Board approved the purchase of a tool to determine the nature of Gonzaga's endowment investments. The analysis was completed in the summer of 2016 and the President was briefed in the fall of 2016. As a result of that meeting, the Board asked the Associate VP for Finance, to share the results of the analysis with the community, which he did in two venues in February of 2017. The MSCI analysis revealed that, of the portion of Gonzaga's endowment analyzed, only 4.4% of Gonzaga's portfolio is in fossil fuel related stocks (approximately \$3.8 million). The analysis also revealed that, since these fossil fuel stocks are often part of mutual fund holdings, more than 4.4% would be affected by divestment.

In February of 2017, the faculty divestment campaign presented to the Faculty Senate. As of the end of the spring term 2017, 33% of all faculty had added their signature in support of the divestment resolution. More than 450 people have signed the student petition. On May 1, 2017, the Gonzaga Student Body Association (GSBA) Senate voted nearly unanimously in favor of the Fossil Fuel Divestment resolution (22 yes, 1 no, 2 abstain).¹¹ After a year of deliberation, conversation, and research, the Gonzaga Faculty Senate voted in favor of the resolution and an attached amendment on April 4, 2018. In May the Staff Assembly Executive Council adopted statement in support of the student divestment campaign. In December 2018, The Gonzaga Board of Trustees voted unanimously to not divest from fossil fuels.

In the midst of a global pandemic, students continue to organize via zoom and create plans to divest Gonzaga's endowment with its mission statement. Students are continuing to increase student involvement during a time of strenuous and challenging circumstances. By organizing a new petition, students have circulated and are encouraging yet another re-evaluation of the university's participation and dedication to student well-being and climate health.

Marisa Montesi, previous President to Fossil Free Gonzaga stated that they struggled with student engagement because many students were worried about how their scholarships would be affected. Additionally, Montesi noted that the COVID-19 pandemic put a wrench in their movement, and they were no longer making headway. They lost their main source of traction – the ability to be in person and in community was. Montesi, now a post-grad staff member in

¹¹ <http://gogsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Senate-Divestment-Resolution.pdf>

the Sustainability Office does not think divestment will take place at Gonzaga until it is more popular, and more universities take part, because public pressure is necessary.

When asked to note a moment of success and a moment of struggle, Montesi shared that the students hosted two rallies during her time as a student, including a climate strike – where many students participated and left class. A moment of struggle for the group was the unifying of different stakeholders. This is common for many student-led movements across the country – when there are multiple groups with similar goals, combining for solidarity and numbers can make the movement stronger and propel you forward.

Dr. Andrea Bower, faculty, and ally of Fossil Free Gonzaga shared their perspective. Dr. Bower speaks to the political nature of this advocacy effort. She says Gonzaga does a good job of holding “listening sessions” but does not make substantial change. Gonzaga is noted to care more about their image and marketing over listening to activists. It is Dr. Bower’s opinion that students have a hard time because there is not a lot of radical professors or curriculum at their disposal. Dr. Bower places some responsibility on other faculty as they come with critique, rather than guidance and activism.

Dr. Bower also provided feedback for the students as she sees a lot of students in her classroom who express radical climate justice beliefs, but are very shy with organizing, and she credits this to the fact that the university does not offer this for students or many safe spaces or classes to talk about social change and organizing. She also touches on the disconnect in student organizing – that many of the student leaders in Fossil Free Gonzaga are white environmental studies majors with little connections to minority groups. She urges students to learn and understand the intersectionality and diversity that comes with social justice and activism and to stray away from white saviorism.

It is a common understanding across Gonzaga University that a struggle is continuity within this student-led movement. Lack of continuity can be the downfall of a movement. Dr. Bower says that they’re trying to solve it by recruiting the next generation of *them*, rather than spreading it across campus and building bridges among other organizers. Finally, Dr. Bower shares the sentiment against the negative effects the COVID-19 pandemic played into activism on campus, as she says that movement work is based on relationships and the pandemic put a stop to community building, while simultaneously increasing fatigue and mental health issues.

Jim Simon, Gonzaga’s first Director of Sustainability spoke to a number of other movements Gonzaga has seen propelled forward by students, including carbon neutrality, real food, renewable energy, and solar powered buildings.

Brian Henning, Director and founder of the Gonzaga Center for Climate, Society, and the Environment, took time for an interview. Dr. Henning can be described as a mentor and ally to student climate activists on campus. He provided advice for other mentors. First, provide continuity and help students bridge the gap that opens when students graduate. Mentors and advisors hold that intellectual history of the movement and can be of great assistance here.

Next, build a connection with the faculty senate, write petitions, sign them, and pass them. Next, help students navigate and make sense of the institutional bureaucracy that they are working with. Also, a mentor can really help students understand the basics of endowment finance, as it is frequently non-business students doing this work, which can make the research intimidating. For example, explaining the difference between active and passive investing.

Dr. Henning believes that a challenge for the student movement at Gonzaga is the lack of transition and coaching between generations with digital organizing that cannot be dependent on one individual. Six years later, Dr. Henning describes Fossil Free Gonzaga as a movement on life support.

Santa Clara University

Fossil Free Santa Clara University (SCU) has been around since about 2013. The group had a brief dead period and is now working to get their momentum back after the COVID-19 pandemic. Emily Pachoud, program coordinator, took part in an interview for this case study. Emily was asked to share the groups most effective organizing method and least effective. She shared that Fossil Free SCU was most effective in their relationship with the press. The university does not like bad press, and they noticed they would get more feedback and action when press was in the picture. Emily believes that if press is not involved, most of their work is pointless as it is unseen. The students shared their least effective method was meeting with the university Chief Financial Officer, as nothing came out of the meeting, they were talked down to, and were not taken seriously. This stands true for other meetings with university administration – Fossil Free SCU learned quickly that any meetings without the Board of Trustees at a private University are pointless attacks and a waste of resources, time, and energy. “Your campaign should focus like a laser on the decision makers who can give you what you want.”¹²

Student activism is not new for Santa Clara University. The students have taken bold steps of action. They were able to find a list of all the university donors and emailed all of them. They had a protest at a university event where donors and the Governor of California were present, which gained a lot of attention. Similar to Harvard University, Fossil Free SCU is working with a team of attorneys to draft a complaint and put out a press release. Unlike any other university interviewed for this study, Fossil Free SCU hosted a wedding as a form of demonstration to take a stand on fossil fuel divestment, where the mascot married big oil companies.

Some student groups have partnered with their student government, however, that was not the case for Fossil Free SCU. When asked to describe their relationship, Emily said they are “independent from Fossil Free SCU,” as their goals and efforts are not aligned at the moment. Fossil Free SCU wanted to reach out to student government to pass a resolution, but student government had just passed private prison divestment and Israel divestment resolutions and

¹² Gallagher, N., Myers, L., & Chouinard, Y. (2016), pg. 59. Tools for grassroots activists: Best practices for success in the environmental movement. Patagonia Books.

there was nothing to come out of it. The other students view student government as “inactive and powerless.”

As previously noted in other case studies, faculty partnership is key. The faculty senate president, who has experience working with the Board of Trustees and university administration, brought a resolution to the faculty senate to support the students’ efforts in advocating for fossil fuel divestment. The faculty senate resolution passed.

Fossil Free SCU has concluded that they want to prioritize action and educating the student body before prioritizing recruitment, especially post-pandemic.

University of Notre Dame:

Student advocacy began in 2016. Although the university has shown little resistance, the university has not made any commitments. The students took a different approach than the other case studies – rather than focusing on just the endowment and fossil fuels, they expanded their horizon to all investment funds. The seed planted with private prisons and retirement funds. They began by researching the efforts at other universities and aligning their efforts with the USSCB guidelines. Surprisingly, the university started the conversation surrounding fossil fuel divestment with the annual ND forum and “care for God’s creation.”

Student government at the University of Notre Dame has a strong voice, so Fossil Fuel ND wanted to build on that connection. In addition to student government, Fossil Free ND has paired with a number of other student organizations on campus, including ND energy – research group; greeND – environmental club on campus; and the Students for Socially Responsible Investing club. The coal plant in near vicinity to the residential halls created a conversation and Fossil Free ND grew from there. Their biggest student activism movement was the march they hosted which had about 50 attendees, both students and faculty. Faculty, notably economic professors, have been instrumental in research. In addition, a petition with now 500 signatures has been circulating. Students at the University of Notre Dame describe their movement as hitting the right stride at the wrong time, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lessons Learned

For environmental activism, progress can be hard to spot and measure. The commonly asked question is how do we ensure our campaigns are truly making a difference and we are not spending vast amounts of time, energy, and money on efforts that don’t win? There is a common misconception that in order for a movement to be successful, strategies must be complex, mysterious, and completely new and intuitive.¹³ Hope is not a strategy. Questions campaign leaders must ask themselves in terms of strategy include: do you have a clear goal? Do you have a careful plan that, if followed and well implemented, will *guarantee* that you will achieve your goal? If I asked your colleagues, key volunteers, board members, and allies, what

¹³ *Id.* at 52.

your strategy is, would they all say the same thing?¹⁴ It is important to remember that everyone needs to be on the same page – otherwise, the movement will struggle for success.

“Be a guardian of your strategy and do not include any proposed tactics that are inconsistent with your strategy.¹⁵” At Creighton University, among other schools, student groups fooled themselves by focusing on people who already agree with them. “If they could deliver the goods, you wouldn’t likely need a campaign in the first place.¹⁶” As a leader of the CCM, I continued to remind the team to avoid preaching to the choir. Student activists must keep their audience in mind and understand the hierarchy of their institution – identify who the decision makers are.

Consumer outreach and engagement is a critical component of student climate activism. Environmentalists tend to understand the science and wish everyone else did. We sometimes come off too strong and inadvertently end up pushing people away due to the technical and depressing nature of our work. May we fight the good fight by “talking to people where they’re at, not where we’re at.¹⁷” Recent research has shown that people find climate change especially disempowering because the solutions usually proposed seem pathetically small, such as changing your lightbulbs, to impossibly large, like reforming the United States Congress.¹⁸ Some tangible suggestions for groups include: maintain a list of conversation starters and use them regularly and “gather contact information from every single person who attended (your event) to build your networking list. List building is a critical aspect of community organizing. If someone attends your event, that means they have taken time away from their busy life for your cause. They should be thanked and re-engaged.¹⁹”

Hand in hand with consumer outreach is communication. A common mistake in activism is defining your purpose. A purpose is a concrete change. We often hear groups’ purpose is to “raise awareness.” Many movements and issues have high awareness with little to nothing to show for it. To successfully push forward, make it a priority to want more than awareness – want action. Student-led movements often need to be reminded that buildings are not persuadable; people inside buildings are. Do not simply list institutions or groups that need to be engaged, list the people inside – by name.²⁰

When comparing the case studies, we see that both Creighton University and Seattle University administration instructed mostly non-business students to conduct all of the research and leg work and make the reality happen and to “imagine the solutions.” Additionally, both Creighton University and Seattle University are in a unique position of looking to the future and what’s next – asking themselves, “now what.” Now that the University had met their initial demands of

¹⁴ *Id.* at 54-55.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 67.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 59.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 85.

¹⁸ *Id.* at 160.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 148.

²⁰ *Id.* at 217.

commitment to fossil fuel divestment, these student movements are in an interesting “post-divestment” position. Both student-led movements are focusing on this recovery time and asking themselves: (1) how much do we want to pursue divestment further? (2) what does ESG Impact investing look like at our institution? and (3) specific to Seattle University, working on a petition to get the university to cut its contract with Coca Cola and reduce plastic use. At Creighton University, the movement has weakened due to strong activists graduating. One of the most important lessons learned from Creight*n Climate Movement and Fossil Free Gonzaga is that investing the next generation is worth it and fundamental to a successful movement.

Recommendations for Further Research

It would be interesting to see how these six institutions progress in about five years’ time – how do student-led movements bounce back after the COVID-19 pandemic? The pandemic has drastically changed campus climate, and this is something student activists will keep in mind in their efforts for years to come, as many student organizations have been adapting to virtual activism.

Great success stems from strong leaders. Further research could be in the area of leadership. What motivates students to be leaders and how do they maintain the momentum on top of their personal academic and workloads? What are commonalities in strong climate movement leaders?

Supporting Materials (in addendum)

1. [Seattle University Divestment Case Study](#)
 - a. [Seattle University Divestment Timeline](#)
2. [Fossil Free Gonzaga](#)
3. Creight*n Climate Movement Timeline attached on pages 15 and 16
4. [Student leaders points of contact](#)

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CREIGHT*^N CLIMATE MOVEMENT

THE STUDENTS OF CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY SUCCESSFULLY PUSHED THE UNIVERSITY TO COMMIT TO FULL DIVESTMENT FROM THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY

SEPTEMBER 2018
Students email AVP for Finance to get more information; specifically, the % of the endowment invested in fossil fuels. AVP for Finance says he does not know and does not respond to student meeting requests.

JANUARY 2019
Students hold two meetings: (1) Student Government President and (2) Executive Director for Finance

FEBRUARY 2019
Group Me created as the main platform of communication for the movement. New students and allies were continuously added throughout the next two years.

APRIL 25, 2019
Silence for the Climate Demonstration with about 300 students in attendance. The event consisted of a speech, prayer, and 3 minutes and 50 seconds of silence for the 350 parts/million

SUMMER 2019
The movement receives negative pres from multiple news anchors

SEPTEMBER 23, 2019
Referendum #19-02, after edits, passes through CSU. Next step is for the referendum to go to a student body vote

SUMMER 2018
After reading "Oil and Honey" by Bill McKibben, students are exposed to the idea of fossil fuel divestment.

DECEMBER 2018
Students wait at "Finals with Father" to get University President's stance on divestment. He says it's a "complex issue" and recommends students talk to AVP for Finance.

FEBRUARY 2019
Georgetown commits to divest

MARCH 22, 2019
Students meet with AVP for Finance

MAY 2019
University President reveals the % of the endowment invested in the fossil fuel industry. 10.6%.

SEPTEMBER 17, 2019
Referendum #19-02 brought to CSU Cabinet and fails 0-8

OCTOBER 30, 2019
Authors of the movement receive Cease and Desist notice from Creighton General Counsel

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE
CREIGHT*^N
CLIMATE
MOVEMENT**

NOVEMBER 2019
Educating the student body on divestment by holding meetings, tabling, making and circulating an informational video

NOVEMBER 2019
Social media platforms established

NOVEMBER 5, 2019
Student body votes and passes Referendum #19-02 with a majority to: (1) Divest from the top 2% (Carbon Underground 200) in 5 years, (2) More aggressive carbon neutrality goal (sooner than 2050), (3) Mandatory educational aspect

NOVEMBER 13, 2019
University President says no, rejects Referendum #19-02

NOVEMBER 15, 2019
Authors meet with University President

DECEMBER 17, 2019
Student protest at Creighton Basketball game – stopped upon entry

JANUARY 27, 2020
"Seeking Hope: Intentional and Ignatian Responses to the Global Climate Crisis." This event included a panel. Approximately 150 attendees.

FEBRUARY 13, 2020
World Fossil Fuel Divestment Day
19-hour tabling event in the student center

FEBRUARY 13, 2020
Students write a letter addressing the Board of Trustees and University President. 20 students walked to President's office to hand-deliver the letter (after it had been emailed)

FEBRUARY 18, 2020
University announces partial divestment – decreasing from 8.9% to 5.7% (divesting approximately \$18,784,000)

FEBRUARY 20, 2020
200+ students march to the Boardroom

JUNE 29, 2020
University announces further divestment

DECEMBER 31, 2020
University announces commitment to full divestment from fossil fuels
In 10 years – from private companies
In 5 years – from public companies

2021-2022
The Office of Sustainability Programs launches the Creighton Student Sustainability Action Fund and the Sustainable Creighton Initiative

THE STUDENTS OF CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY SUCCESSFULLY PUSHED THE UNIVERSITY TO COMMIT TO FULL DIVESTMENT FROM THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY