Syracuse University

SURFACE

Spring 5-1-2005

The Attraction to Activism: Recruitment and Retention in Progressive Student Organizations

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Within the last 100 years, a body of literature and area of study has emerged within anthropology and sociology that focuses on the interaction and communication of individuals when confronted with a common grievance resulting in the need for collective action. This area has come to be called "social movement theory," and has moved between psychological or psychosocial explanations and structural, rational choice perspectives of how individuals come together to form groups fighting against the status quo. In this section, I will address past theoretical clusters of social movement theory, as well as their ability to address the interactions found in the recent research I conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Collective Behavior Approach

Early social movement research began with a negative outlook on what would later be termed "social movements." These theorists, writing in the mid-twentieth century, focused on one's subconscious, emotions, and sporadic impulses as the ways in which individuals join together in *collective behavior* (LeBon 1952; Adorno 1950; Smelser 1963). Slight changes in theory (Turner and Killian 1957), which described organizations and movements rather than mere "crowds," meant the emergence of more nuanced approaches to the reasons that individuals become part of movements.

In *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, LeBon (1952) began by explaining that when a group of individuals come together to form a "psychological crowd," independent thoughts vanish and each individual takes on the rationally deficient mindset of the entire group. In this way, the door is opened for irrational, unintelligent and extreme acts that would never have occurred had the individuals not been part of a "crowd." Therefore, according to the collective behavior approach, individuals get involved in social movements because the "hypnotic" effects of crowds psychologically manipulate the rational and self-serving thoughts of the individual.

Historically, some of the collective behavior theories were developed during a time of fascism and genocide, and attempting to understand their origins for preventative reasons was a major academic focus. Adorno (1950) co-authored *The Authoritarian Personality* in order to understand the "potentially fascistic individual." He found that individuals "susceptible to fascistic propaganda" had common characteristics that could be grouped together as a "syndrome." The "syndrome" to be studied included the needs of a person (drives, wishes, and emotional impulses) that create the opinions, attitudes and values of those who may potentially become fascist individuals. For Adorno, individuals will act in support of fascism if they are "susceptible" to fascist propaganda to the point of being "provoked" into doing something.

Rather than focusing on the irrational and inexplicable actions of crowds, Smelser (1963) furthered social movement theory work by attempting to understand where, when, and in what ways collective episodes occur.

Smelser discussed how the characteristics involved in collective behavior are not only psychological (Smelser 1963), and that individuals involved are not necessarily irrational or have lost their "critical faculties." He outlined the overarching determinants of collective behavior, noting that (1) the structural conduciveness of the environment, (2) precipitating factors, and (3) the growth and spread of a belief mix to mobilize participants for action. Smelser continued to rely, however, on psychological explanations regarding the personal reasons why individuals initially become involved in collective behavior.

Though written earlier than some collective behavior work, Turner and Killian (1957) made a distinction between "crowds" of collective behavior and "social movements." They defined a "social movement" as "a collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or group of which it is a part" (Turner and Killian 1957:246). Crowd behavior, then, could be used as a *tactic* by a social movement to arouse attention. This literature defined a social movement in terms of sustained and organized action, a collective identity, and a goal that requires some sort of societal change. Turner and Killian highlighted these factors as what determines involvement, and discussed how inflamed emotions actually interfere with building a movement working towards social change.

Overall, however, the collective behavior approach emphasizes that the psychological influences of an irrational and emotional "crowd" who are

often what attracts individuals into collective action. Soon, this approach

would be turned on its head by the emergence of resource mobilization.

Resource Mobilization Approach

With Turner and Killian adding some legitimacy by recognizing the

rationality of social movements, a new area of study called *resource*

mobilization emerged. Theorists attempted to disprove the psychological

explanations of the collective behavior approach by showing that actors in

social movements were indeed "rational." Resource mobilization approach

could be said to have begun with a rather biting critique of social movement

theory made by Mancur Olsen (1965).

Olsen questioned whether social movement participants were in fact

rational and organized actors. If so, he thought, what incentives do social

movements offer individuals that makes it a rational choice for them to

participate? Wouldn't participation in a social movement be irrational if

participation didn't mean some sort of personal reward for the sacrifice of

time, energy and money? The resulting responses aptly highlighted the tenets

of the resource mobilization approach (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Freeman

1979; Ferree 1992).

Olsen's (1965) question concerned collective and selective incentives

and the "free rider" problem. He questioned why individuals would want to

devote their time and effort to working within a social movement whose aims

and goals would benefit everyone—even individuals who had not fought for

the change (the "free riders"). If benefits won from the movement go to everyone, then what is the incentive for joining the movement? What non-collective goods does the social movement organization have to offer its members? Olsen's collective and selective incentives centered on the economics behind social movements in the same all-encompassing way that collective behavior theorists used the psychological mind. Responses to his *Logic of Collective Action* highlighted non-material benefits and incentives that encouraged working in social movement organizations in a rational way.

Responses to Olsen's critique of rational choice perspectives as to what guides participation in social movements looked very much like cost-benefit analyses. McCarthy and Zald (1977) developed a myriad of terms and definitions describing social movements and their participants, as well as 11 hypotheses regarding how size and structure of the group, types of participants, and general climate or environment affected the resource mobilization process of social movement organizations. Of primary concern was the aggregation and flow of resources (money and labor) and the costs and rewards of individual participation in social movements. Though certainly an example of "rational" social movement processes, more recent social movement theorists criticized the resource mobilization approach for moving too far to the opposite extreme, and not acknowledging the emotions and identities of individuals as factors of involvement and as strengths to the movement.

Over time, and due to the influences of various movements, the resource mobilization approach continued to develop. Freeman (1979) used examples of the old and new women's movement to discuss the different ways in which resources are allocated and used. Ferree made a new proposition, which highlighted the benefits of intangible resources to social movements (e.g., historical knowledge, networks, individuals with specialized resources, time, and commitment). This defended individual participation, as well as monetary donation, as resources needed by social movement organizations in the way that McCarthy and Zald (1977) had. Freeman (1979) continued, in the resource mobilization tradition, to focus solely on the capabilities of social movement organizations based on their various resources.

As time went by, rational choice theory and resource mobilization began to be criticized for wholeheartedly ignoring the role of emotion, grievances, values and ideology in social movement participation. Ferree (1992) addressed this shortcoming in "The Political Context of Rationality." Ferree maintained that resource mobilization theorists have utilized a "one-dimensional rationality," which does not consider conflicted personal interests as factors influencing recruitment and membership. Additionally, "group solidarity" and loyalty create a desire for positive group outcomes rather than individual benefits. Finally, resource mobilization treats a participant as a "pseudo-universal individual," with no gender, race, class or historical background that would alter the values and perspectives of the individual (Ferree 1992:41). Ferree looked to a post-resource mobilization perspective

in which one does not see "social movements as ad-hoc groups of self-interested, pseudo-universal individuals calculating their short-term gains and losses" (1992:47).

The Political Process Approach

The *political process* approach (Tarrow 1998) expanded on past theories of social movements and added the external influence of political process as an important new area within the analysis of social movements. Determining (1) how social movements arise, (2) why they do at the time that they do, (3) how they progress and change, and (4) outcomes and reasons for those results comprise the scope of the theory. While past theories were inward-looking and looked no further than the scale of the social movement organization, the political process approach examined how the external relations between those with political power and the type of government and institutions in place affect the formation and success of social movements.

Tarrow explained that the conditions necessary for movements to begin rest on political opportunities comprised of increased access to the political sphere, political realignment of power, splits within the elite, and decline in a state's level of repression. Tarrow contended that extreme conditions such as total state repression or complete freedom do not promote social movements. Only a mix of the two fosters righteous indignation at repression, yet allows for occasional opportunities to level one's power against the state successfully.

Tarrow's account of how social movements come into being, how they frame their political message and make public performances, the contention between violent and integrative means of achieving their goals, the polarity between institutionalization and disruption, and effects of participant burnout shed new light on the cycles of social movements on a broad scale. This large-scale view of social movements within society is important to recruitment and retention issues because it underscores the fact that recruitment does not happen in a bubble, but is influenced by large world events and other forces extraneous to social movements themselves.

The New Social Movements: Identity Politics Approach

Moving from Tarrow's wide-lens view of social movements back to individual interactions in social movement organizations, the *new social movements* approach (Johnston et al. 1994; Melucci 1989; Epstein 1988) is characterized by its emphasis on identity formation and reinforcement.

In order to distinguish new social movements from the old, Johnston et al. (1994) outlined some of the major changes in recent movements regarding what ties constituents together. These included (1) weakened ideological ties in movements, (2) a segmented and decentralized organizing structure that blurs the distinction between the collective and the individual and allows for more radical and disruptive tactics, and perhaps most importantly, (3) the "emergence of new or formerly weak dimensions of identity" (Johnston et al. 1994:7). As with the women's, gay rights and ethnic movements, constituents

> Are associated with a set of beliefs, symbols, values, and meanings related to sentiments of belonging to a differentiated social group; with the members' image of themselves; and with new, socially constructed attributions about the meaning of everyday life. (Johnston et al. 1994:7)

The emergence of identity politics was seen as a response to a world in which the space to create one's identity is being pushed out of the picture. Social movements are now filling this void and opening a space where identity is nurtured, and an interplay between individual and collective identity occurs (Johnston et al. 1994). Understanding the constant construction between individuals, their social environment and the collective or group they are a part of is another aspect of identity politics (Melucci 1989).

Epstein (1988) used her own experiences in non-violent direct action to define the role of identity formation and other characteristics of new social movements. In addition to being non-hierarchical and consensus-based, the non-violent direct action groups that Epstein was a part of also fostered identity by creating a supportive community, whose members felt they were bearing moral witness in order to better society as a whole.

The new social movements (also known as identity politics) approach was an important step in social movement theory. It considered individual feelings, convictions and identities to be important factors of joining and being part of a social movement. This approach moved away from the calculated and quantified resource mobilization approach of earlier theorists, while still viewing the role of emotions in a positive light.

The Framing Approach

In the 1980s, social movement theory focused on individuals and how they interpret social movement goals within their own cultural contexts. The approach aimed to understand what processes social movement organizations use to "frame" their issues in a way that moves individuals from supporters to actors in a particular cause (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1997; Swidler 1995). A "frame" is defined as a "'schemata of interpretation' that enables individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large."(Snow et al. 1986:484). This approach did not negate the value of previous approaches, but stated that, in order for recruitment and mobilization to be effective, the message of a social movement needs to resonate for the individual:

> Mobilization depends not only on the existence of objective structural disparities and dislocations, the availability and deployment of tangible resources, leaders' organizational skills, political opportunities, and a kind of cost-benefit calculus engaged in by prospective participants but also on the way these variables are framed and the degree to which they resonate with the targets of mobilization. (Snow and Benford 1988:213)

Snow et al. (1986) contended that the reasons for participation in social movements vary, and depends on how important the issues are to the individual. Using four types of frame alignment—frame bridging, frame amplification (value amplification and belief amplification), frame extension and frame transformation—issues are framed using various methods of compelling individuals to become mobilized. Snow, et al. focused on identifying types of frames, or lenses, that are created and understanding how they are combined with values and emotions to make the issue more important to individuals than they would be absent framing.

Two years later, Snow and Benford (1988) examined how movements engage in the "production of meaning," and how they are involved in the shaping and construction of different meanings. In any frame deployed by a social movement organization, Snow and Benford asserted that three core tasks must be addressed: (1) a diagnosis of an event as problematic and needing attention, (2) a proposed solution to the problem, and (3) a call to arms in order to engage in action. Snow and Benford contended that differences in participant mobilization depend on how well these three tasks are completed.

A critique of the framing perspective was offered by Benford (1997), who claimed that social movement theorists have created lists upon lists of types of frames (e.g., injustice frame, opposition frame, human rights frame, etc.) without developing an analysis of the process of negotiation and contention involved in the creation of frames themselves. Additionally, he pointed out that frames themselves do not "mobilize" constituents, people do, and that frames only work to the extent that they are used interactively with the background, language and culture of those in the group and those who are being recruited.

The cultural aspect involved in framing issues is also discussed outside of the social movement recruitment arena. Swidler (1995) wrote about everyday framing and how changing cultural codes and actions create change, no matter whether they attract members to a social movement or not. Creating new cultural frames is a weapon of social change because it alters cultural

norms and expectations in a way that people are forced to respond to, whether or not they agree with it.

The Microstructural Recruitment Approach

Microstructural recruitment is the term used to describe the structural and person-to-person actions that influence individuals to become supporters or members of social movements. Social movement theorists in this area study social movement organizations in an attempt to understand what most frequently affects the recruitment of individuals into these groups. Most have concentrated on individual as well as group networks (Snow et al. 1980; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Klandermans 1993; McAdam and Paulson 1993). Others have discussed characteristics of (1) the individual, such as prior socialization and time availability (Downton and Wehr 1998), or (2) the organization, such as structure and action orientation (Hirsch 1990; Klandermans 1993), as accounting for differential recruitment among organizations. For the most part, focuses on the day-to-day interactions, social environments, structural availability and constraints, and histories of individuals, in order to understand how recruitment into organizations happens.

Snow et al. (1980) looked at "the microstructural avenues of recruitment" and asked, "What determines which potential participants are most likely to come into contact with and be recruited into one movement rather than another, if into any at all" (Snow et al. 1980: 789)? Their findings

suggest that networks available to both the social movement organization and to the individual who may be recruited are important determinants of recruitment. The more networks an organization has, the greater its access to potential new members. The more connections the individual has with others already in the organization, the greater the probability that they will become initially involved. Structural considerations, such as the amount of available time, proximity to the organization, and level of other commitments determine whether an individual can continue their involvement. Snow, et al. encouraged more research into "how movements solicit, coax, and secure participants, and more attention to the factors that account for variations in recruitment strategies and their efficacy." (Snow et al. 1980:799).

A study that looked into the reasons for and barriers against initial involvement was conducted by Klandermans and Oegema (1987). Studying the peace movement in the Netherlands, they highlighted four steps toward participation in a social movement: "becoming part of the mobilizing potential, becoming [a] target of mobilization attempts, becoming motivated to participate, and overcoming barriers to participation." (Klandermans and Oegema 1987:519). The mobilizing potential consists of the part of society that is sympathetic to the goals of the social movement. If an individual is not part of the mobilizing potential, this means that he or she is not in favor of the goals of a movement, and will not respond favorably to recruitment efforts. Being a target of a mobilizing or recruitment attempt means being approached by a member of the social movement organization through a network or

coming across its media, such as a flyer or radio commercial. If an individual

does not receive an "invitation" to get involved, he or she will probably not.

Even after he or she is sympathetic to the group and has received a mobilizing

invitation, being unmotivated (unconvinced of the effectiveness) or unable to

participate (due to barriers such as a job, children) will result in a failed

mobilization attempt. These factors highlight the step-by-step processes of

recruitment into social movement organizations, and distinguish between the

areas that organizations have control over (targeting mobilization attempts and

increasing motivation) and areas over which only individuals have control

(agreeing with the social movement and time constraints).

McAdam and Paulson (1993) addressed how recruitment is mediated

by social ties and identity. While they considered the multiple embeddings of

relationships in the lives of individuals, two questions emerged: Which

dimensions of social ties are most causally important? How do conflicting

ties affect the choice to participate in activism? There are four steps of initial

recruitment into high-risk activism (1993). First, the individual is the target of

a recruiting attempt. Second, the person feels a connection between his or her

identity and participating in the movement. Third, the individual receives

support from those who usually serve to sustain his or her identity, and fourth,

the absence of strong opposition against joining from those who support the

identity of the individual. The most significant tie that correlates to

movement participation is a connection to an activist already in the

movement, though not for the spread of information as commonly thought,

but as a source for social influence. When factors were added together, the results showed that an individual's strong identification with an identity that is in line with the organization, or "identity salience," coupled with organizational or individual ties, is what best encourages participation in high-risk activism.

Downton and Wehr (1998) also outlined the process of involvement as: how people become available for participation, the context that affects their involvement, and how their commitment is sustained. One's availability for participation is influenced by their attitude (their socialization to beliefs) and life situation (time constraints). Contexts for action also determine involvement, which means that the historical moment and how it affects activism also affects the choice for individual participation. Lastly, concrete and local opportunities for involvement are needed if an individual is going to utilize his or her attitudinal and situational availability. Sustained commitment develops after entrance into the movement, and requires a close bond with the activist community (friendships) and the group's ideology, the ability to manage commitment from competing sources, and incentives to continue (success in campaigns and public opinion).

The microstructural characteristics of social movement organizations and their implications for recruitment and membership retention were addressed by Hirsch (1990) and Klandermans (1993). Hirsch discussed four factors that influenced "political solidarity" in a Columbia University divestment sit-in: (1) consciousness-raising (informing individuals of the ways

that the campaign is morally right and that people should support it), (2)

collective empowerment (the feeling that the people and the tactics can make

a difference), (3) polarization (widening the gap between those in the

campaign and the "enemies"), and (4) collective decision-making (allowing

participants to feel bonded to the group decision by having a say in it). These

four factors can be implemented by the social movement organization in order

to increase participation in higher risk activism or to strengthen commitment

to the organization in general.

Klandermans (1993) compared organizations from three different

social movements (the labor, peace, and women's movements), looking at

what accounts for the differential rates of recruitment and participation among

them. Four dimensions were examined for each social movement, and

included (1) the magnitude of potential supporters or members ("mobilizing

potential"), (2) the number of social networks and movement networks

("multi-organizational fields"), (3) organizational characteristics and structure,

and (4) group attitudes regarding ideology and goals ("action orientation")

(Klandermans 1993). By creating a more standard set of dimensions that

reflect recruitment, Klandermans charged researchers with conducting

comparison research more accurately among different social movement

organizations, rather than extrapolating theory from only one organization or

movement that is supposed to be adequately generalizable.

The importance of looking at microstructural factors of recruitment in

determining differential outcomes is that the focus of social movement

research is again placed on the actual processes involved in recruiting individuals into movement organizations. It combines personal characteristics—such as being part of the mobilizing potential (attitudinal availability), having low time constraints, and being situationally close to a social movement organization with group characteristics (such as the level of networks available, the structure and type of the organization, and its action orientation)—into a step-by-step breakdown of the recruitment process.

My Research Approach

The research I conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison aims to further ideas of the microstructural recruitment approach by identifying how recruitment and mobilization into three progressive student organizations occurred for individuals who are now members. The microstructural social movement theory has guided the way I approached my data and structured the results. An important point that has guided my research is that:

> The question of 'why' people join social movements cannot be adequately understood apart from an examination of the process of 'how' individuals come to align themselves with a particular movement…the 'whys' or 'reasons' for joining arise out of the recruitment process itself. (Snow et al. 1980:799)

This study will examine "how" recruitment and involvement happen in three progressive student groups in Madison, Wisconsin, and contribute to an area generally understudied in social movement theory: that of campus and student organizing. Student-based social movement organizations have generally been an overlooked area of social movement research. The individuals involved in these groups possess different characteristics than

community-based organizations: students have more disposable time (they are generally not working full time jobs), fewer dependants and obligations to family, are all living in close proximity to each other, and are experiencing a time in their lives when exploration of society and their role in it is encouraged. Moreover, student organizations experience a high turnover rate because of the relatively short period of time individuals are in school. Thus, special attention should be paid to how recruitment and retention of student social movement organizations works, and this paper hopes to more fully illustrate this process.

DATA AND METHODS

Relationship to Study

The impetus behind this study is my own background as a member of a

progressive student organization at Syracuse University. Genuine interest in

how organizing and activism are done on a college campus led me to develop

a study that would allow me to study and compare progressive student groups.

I was able to interview members of these groups about how they viewed the

process of recruitment and retention.

Time and Length of Study

From late January to mid May of 2004 I spent four and a half months in

Madison, Wisconsin, studying three progressive student organizations: the

Sierra Student Coalition (SSC), an environmental group; the Student Labor

Action Coalition (SLAC), a labor group; and the International Socialist

Organization (ISO), a Socialist group. During this time, I attended weekly

meetings, additional planning or work sessions, events, teach-ins, rallies,

marches, and a strike, all of which were organized by one or more of the

groups studied.

Choosing Which Groups to Study

Before January 2004, I had no prior contact with the University of Wisconsin-

Madison campus or the participants of my study. I began my period of

observation by attending the spring semester's student organizational fair. I

attended meetings of the Sierra Student Coalition (SSC), the Student Labor

Action Coalition (SLAC), and the International Socialist Organization (ISO),

as well as the Madison Coalition for Animal Rights (MCAR), Stop the War

(STW), the Madison Warming Center Campaign (MWCC), and the

Wisconsin Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG).

I chose to eliminate groups because I would not be able to spend an

adequate amount of time studying more than three groups at once. I dropped

STW because its membership of 4-8 people was too small to adequately

study. I stopped attending MCAR because they began meeting bi-monthly

rather than weekly, and opportunities to observe became too infrequent. I

continued attending MWCC, but chose not to include the group in my study

because its membership was a combination of students, members of the

community, and homeless individuals. I felt that for more comparable results,

I should only research student-based groups. Additionally, I eliminated

WISPIRG from my study because some of their leaders are paid organizers,

whose motivations for joining and continuing in a group would be quite

different than a volunteer group. Ultimately, I chose SSC, SLAC, and the ISO

because they were all groups that were student-based, met weekly, and were

working on sufficiently different issues (environmental, labor and Socialist,

respectively).

After I determined that I wanted to study SSC, SLAC and the ISO, I

announced in their second or third meetings that I was a sociologist as well as

an activist wanting to do research on progressive groups on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus, and asked permission to observe and participate in their group. All members present agreed to allow my research to proceed. I also made it known that I would be asking for volunteers to participate in interviews with me at the end of the semester.

Research Design

This study employs qualitative research methods in the collection and coding of data. Qualitative data privileges the voices of the participants through the use of interviews and participant observation (Taylor and Bogdan1998:7). In order to adequately study the ways that individuals become interested in progressive issues, join progressive student groups and continue to be active in them, face-to-face interviews as well as participant observations of meetings and events were chosen as research strategies.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with 40 individuals affiliated with the three groups of my study. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and one hour, and questions asked about the political backgrounds of the participants—how they initially became involved in progressive issues, as well as general views about their group's recruitment strategies and tactics. Questions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their group and other campus groups were also asked. These questions were designed to elicit a general set of responses that would shed light upon the factors that facilitate or discourage participation and membership in progressive student organizations.

Each participant consented to the use of an audio recording device. All recordings were later transcribed, with some interviews summarized in sections because of low relevance to the research topic. Prior to my time in Wisconsin, I submitted an Institutional Review Board application through Syracuse University for the study of human subjects, and was approved.

Of the 40 interviewees, 18 were primarily affiliated with the ISO, 13 with SLAC, and 9 with the SSC. These numbers are somewhat proportional to the size of the groups themselves, though actual membership is difficult to determine as some members attend meetings and events infrequently, and only the ISO has a formal membership requirement (paying monthly dues). Those who were interviewed chose to sign up for an interview time on a sheet that I passed around on at least 3 occasions in each group's meetings. An estimated 60% to 80% of the members of each group participated in interviews. In this paper, footnoted names of participants are pseudonyms representing participants who were interviewed.

In addition, I collected as much literature produced by the groups as possible: flyers, posters, the Socialist Worker newspaper of the ISO, and newspaper articles about actions of the groups. I also took photographs of various actions and events.

Relationship with Participants

During my time with these groups, I not only observed but also participated in them. Through participation, I was given the opportunity to exhibit my passion for and experience with activism. In time, I gained the acceptance and trust of group members. This may have led to more honest responses during my interviews with participants than might otherwise have been the case.

The Setting

The University of Wisconsin-Madison provided many opportunities for involvement in progressive organizations. The city and university have experienced a history rich with protests and sit-ins. The progressive individual still finds a politically active place in Madison, even among its over 41,000 students (UW-Madison Campus in Profile: web page). Of over 700 registered student organizations at UW-Madison, 153 are registered under the Political/Environmental/Advocacy section (Registered Student Organization Directory: web page). Many of these organizations are active and, because of this, one will frequently see marches down State Street, from the university's "Library Mall" on one end directly to the State Capitol at the other. The progressive mindset extends beyond the campus itself; the city of Madison continues its liberal tradition with fair-trade coffee shops and co-op grocery and bookstores. These signs of support make the university and city ideal for involvement in activism, and perhaps atypical. Not all universities and cities

offer a setting as conducive to progressive politics as Madison, and generalizing conclusions about progressive student politics from this university to student groups at universities in other cities should be done with this in mind.

STRUCTURE OF RESEARCH RESULTS

By observing and speaking with members of three progressive student groups,
I was able to gather information regarding how they became involved in
activism, how they viewed recruitment and retention within their own group
as well as other student groups on campus. I have divided these findings into
four categories: *early influences, initial involvement, continued involvement,*
and *barriers to involvement,* in order to demarcate the steps of involvement in
progressive student organizations.

 Early influences include the most prominent influences mentioned by
participants as to how they first began thinking or acting progressively. These
experiences occurred primarily before the individual went to college. They
include influences such as family, religion, and teachers, as well as previous
involvement in a progressive group. Looking at early influences allows for an
increased understanding of the reasons that placed individuals in the
"mobilizing potential" (Klandermans 1993), as individuals who are more
likely to be open to a recruitment invitation.

 Initial involvement includes the ways that participants first became
aware of or involved in their current group. This includes coming in contact
with formal group recruitment strategies such as posters, flyers, newspaper
sales, involvement tables and events. It also includes informal contact, such
as meeting members of the group through a friend, co-worker or member of
another group. For some participants, initial contact with the group was self-

directed-their involvement had little to do with a recruiting attempt. Initial involvement is perhaps most significant in determining how participants come to join a group because it is the first contact that individuals have with student organizations, and is often most influenced by the approaches groups take in recruiting new members.

Continued involvement refers to continued attendance and participation in group meetings and events after initial exposure. The characteristics of the group play a role in the individual's decision to continue their involvement or drop out. These characteristics include the ideology of the group, the strategy and type of tactics used, the reputation of the group, friendships or relationship with group members, group structure and the level of time commitment to the group. Continued involvement depends on how well the characteristics of the group fit with the individual.

Barriers to involvement are the drawbacks and weaknesses of a group, and were brought up by current group members themselves. Participants brought up barriers such as high time commitment, members being "too pushy," poor gender dynamics and meeting structure, and low number of members. Characteristics such as these may discourage individuals from joining initially, and may prevent long-term involvement in the group.

These four areas of concentration illustrate the major stages of group involvement, and can describe how individuals become involved and stay involved in progressive student organizations.

THE SIERRA STUDENT COALITION

Background and History

The Sierra Student Coalition (SSC) is a student branch of the Sierra Club, and was founded in 1991. Membership in the SSC is free, compared to yearly dues that the Sierra Club solicits from its members. The main focuses of SSCs around the country are on "conservation campaigns, legislative efforts, and the training and networking of young environmental activists" (Four Lakes Group Sierra Club: web page).

The UW Madison branch of SSC began in 2000 or 2001. One individual I interviewed was involved in the beginning with starting up the group. She noted, "in one of my wildlife ecology classes they said that the Sierra Club was trying to start a Sierra Student Coalition . . . they were having this meeting about starting it up."[1] She tells of how the new SSC group began to work on the "international right to know campaign," which focused on demanding information regarding the environment, labor standards, and human rights of U.S.-based firms doing business in other countries ("International Right to Know" Campaign: web page). The "right to know" campaign didn't last. She cited reasons for its decline in popularity:

> I didn't feel like there was a lot we could do locally to make it a successful campaign. I mean we could get the word out but there was no real campaign where it was like "look we helped those people."[2]

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[1] Suzanne SSC
[2] Suzanne SSC

The idea of seeing more immediate results became integrated into the strategy of the group. In the spring of 2004, SSC was involved in earth day events, tree plantings, garbage pick-ups and letter-writing activities.

In May of 2004, 9 of about 12 individuals who attended meetings at least a few times per semester were interviewed. Only one member was a member since the inception of the club, while the rest joined since that time.

Early Influences

Parents and family. Four participants identified family influence when asked how they got involved in progressive issues. "I can't pinpoint a specific time [of early involvement] because I was born into a 'died in the wool' liberal family—my mom, my grandpa . . . ," said one participant. [3] Another told of her father and his passion for progressive issues: "My dad is a big progressive guy; he's a huge advocate of Middle East issues and the state of Palestine . . . so he was the carrier of progressive issues for me." [4] One participant mentioned the economic situation she grew up in. Watching what her family went through prompted her interest in progressive issues. Through interviews, it became clear that family guidance and personal history shaped the ways that some individuals in the SSC became oriented towards progressive issues. However, most spoke of familial influences that were not specifically environmentally directed.

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[3] Eva SSC
[4] Andrea SSC

Teachers and early education. One third of the participants indicated that they were first exposed to environmental issues through a teacher or a class, and that this was the way they began thinking environmentally. One participant, who is considered to be a leader in the group, spoke of his elementary school experiences as shaping his environmental ethic:

> I started being interested way back when I was in elementary school. I would hear teachers give talks about the environment and I would hear that the world's forests are being cut down at a fast rate and animals are going extinct, and as a kid there's that logic that's really reasonable that asks, Why is that happening and why aren't we trying to stop it?[5]

Another participant spoke of her high school teacher, who emphasized that getting involved with the environment can be achieved by anyone. The third participant became involved in environmental issues and the SSC, through a University course on the environment.

Initial Involvement

Formal recruitment. In terms of initial involvement in SSC, there is some diversity in the way that participants learned about the group and had enough information in order to attend a meeting. Two participants first heard of SSC by attending to the student organizational fair, held at the beginning of each semester. The fair allows student organizations to have a table with literature and group representatives.

Three participants learned of SSC meetings through their college courses: one from members of the Sierra Club attempting to begin the SSC chapter, one from a teacher, and one from a class announcement made by a member of the

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[5] Mitch SSC

SSC. One participant recalled seeing a flyer up in the dorm, and another

attended an event put on by SSC:

> I went to a talk on Alaska put on by SSC. I had been to Alaska and the talk was interesting . . . they planned to have a meeting directly after the talk and they said stick around for the meeting and see if you like it.[6]

Thus, however participants were exposed to progressive and

environmental issues, most learned of the SSC through some act that the

group orchestrated—be it a table at the organizational fair, reading a flyer, or

attending an educational event.

Informal recruitment. Informal recruitment played a minor role in

SSC membership. Only one member got involved because his roommate was

in SSC and convinced him that he might like being in the group. "My

roommate had gone to SSC and he told me that it wasn't like the Sierra Club,

which is pretty corporate . . . so I thought I'd give it a shot."[7] This is

considered informal recruitment because it was not part of any plan from the

group for increasing visibility or advertising something, but rather involved a

connection between two people, in which one informally encouraged

recruitment into the group.

Group structure and reputation. The SSC is subject to the name

recognition of its "parent organization" the Sierra Club, a nationally known

environmental organization. Some members view this as a good thing,

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[6] Cory SSC
[7] Anders SSC

believing that the name recognition legitimizes and gives a positive reputation

to the Sierra Student Coalition.

> I think when we say Student Sierra Club [sic] it gives us a form of legitimacy—
> because, you know, the Sierra Club says that they have a million members—I think
> in terms of environmental groups they are one of the first to come to mind.[8]

Others feel that their group does not necessarily do the same things as

the Sierra Club does on a national level, and sees the connection as a bit of a

hindrance. "A weakness [of SSC] is the limitations of the Sierra Club in

general—we are an offshoot of them and we can't print anything with [the

Sierra Club's] name on it because they don't endorse it."[9]

Whether SSC's reputation should be grouped into initial or continued

involvement is difficult to determine. In either case, the SSC does not have

full power to shape its message and group reputation. To some extent, it is

clear that the Sierra Club's national reputation is an influence on initial

interest in the group.

Group attitude regarding recruitment. The SSC has a fairly uniform,

if informal stance regarding group recruitment efforts. Over half of the

participants in SSC discussed how recruiting new members into the SSC was

not a frequent activity. "I feel like member recruitment isn't that huge on the

front of our minds. Obviously, it's easier to do things if we have more

members, but we don't actively go recruiting."[10] Another participant

described the group as being less "aggressive" than other campus groups.

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[8] Anders SSC
[9] Todd SSC
[10] Eva SSC

Three participants made strong statements against doing too much recruiting,

and a recurring theme in these interviews was the idea of not "selling out."

Two of them said that:

> I feel like too much publicizing sells you out . . . And I think SSC is good because it subliminally gets the message out by cosponsoring events and doing little sorts of things, and at the same time getting the word out about the environment without selling the group out.[11]

> SSC hasn't done much, but I don't want to specifically get new members—it's like advertising, spending more money just to promote your product, not bettering product. Rather, do something in the community and people will notice. Self-promotion in and of itself is useful, rather it be coupled with something else.[12]

Another member talked about the differences between SSC and the Wisconsin

Public Interest Research Group (WISPIRG), noting an appreciation for SSC's

small size:

> It seems like [outreach is] mostly a word-of-mouth thing . . . We don't say you really need to be a member. In one sense that's a good thing because if SSC gets really big it might lose some of its organizational appeal . . . You ask most kids on campus what SSC is, they wouldn't have any idea, and that might be a good thing.[13]

The way that a group approaches outreach and recruitment is one

component related to initial interest and involvement. In essence, group

opinion regarding recruitment affects the amount of contact between current

members and prospective members. The expressed views suggest that for the

SSC, new members are joining the group even though current members are

not placing a high emphasis on recruitment.

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[11] Andrea SSC

[12] Steve SSC

[13] Cory SSC

Continued Involvement

Group strategy. Three interrelated aspects of SSC's strategy guide their tactics, and help to explain the low emphasis placed on recruiting. These aspects are: (1) working for immediate change that is local, (2) being non-confrontational, and (3) leading by example.

By observing and interviewing participants in the SSC, a general focus on lifestyle choices and small but immediate action became apparent. Members of the group considered making personal, individual changes and leading by example to be the best strategy for environmental action. Switching from the "international right to know" campaign to smaller, more local activities was a first step towards a strategy that continues to resonate with the majority of SSC members:

> Maybe we didn't change this huge thing that everybody noticed, but it's the small changes that we feel are going to make a difference in the end. And creating people that when they leave college they still want to do these things and they still care . . .[14]

> Starting small and making individual differences. The starfish story where someone is walking along a beach and starts throwing the starfish in, and it makes the difference for that one [starfish]. We start with ourselves and do what we can, and with our extra energy . . . we try to get other people involved in subtle ways to do what they can.[15]

Many members talked about how they have switched to more environmentally friendly lifestyles. "I became vegetarian, driving less biking more . . . I recycle everything that I can and try to re-use the same bottle over and over again until it dies."[16] Another participant outlined how individual choices apply on the Madison campus:

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[14] Suzanne SSC
[15] Erica SSC
[16] Erica SSC

> [There are] personal lifestyle choices and changes you can make to be environmentally friendly. I feel like that's where it has to start and we are a great organization because we do that. Instead of talking to UW students in Madison about ANWR [Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge], we are talking to them about re-using, and giving them a free coffee mug so they don't toss out 100 Starbucks cups every year.[17]

Being visible yet remaining non-confrontational is another facet of the SSC's strategy. Many participants juxtaposed SSC's non-confrontational and non-aggressive with the tactics of WISPIRG, and environmental lobby group on campus:

> They [WISPIRG] are just more in your face, and I hope to make a difference with SSC [without] being the kind of annoying environmentalist . . . WISPIRG is so much more like "chase you around library mall in a fish costume," [and] we're not trying to push our views on others.[18]

Running around in costume and performing skits in public places (known as guerilla theatre) is seen by some SSC members as too confrontational.

SSC members believe that actions that produce local and immediate results will cause others to continue their example. Participants talked about the hope that passersby see them picking up garbage and then think to themselves that they should not litter anymore because others are being forced to pick it up.

> And maybe the next time they have a bottle in their hand, they'll think, "Do I want this on the street where people have to pick this up for me?" And maybe they'll wait for a recycling container. And that's where real lasting change will come—by opening consciousness.[19]

Other SSC members spoke of roommates who came and asked them about recycling because the SSC members were known for doing it themselves. Participants justified teaching through example by saying that one cannot

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[17] Eva SSC
[18] Eva SSC
[19] Mitch SSC

force others into becoming environmentalists; if one tries, they will just resist more. SSC members believe you have to be a role model, and allow others to come to environmental consciousness on their own.

Group tactics. Two practices at meetings were frequently highlighted by SSC members as providing immediate results or personal gratification. These were (1) a letter writing "action" at the beginning of each meeting in which SSC members write to a governmental representative or corporation regarding a pressing environmental issue, and (2) a trash clean-up following each meeting in which members walk down a few neighboring blocks picking up litter. Regarding these actions, one member remarked "I think that's a great example of people taking action on something they believe in. I think that's effective and at the same time not annoying."[20] "Annoying" can be interpreted to mean confrontational behavior, where members are seen as being "pests" to passersby.

SSC throws a big Earth Day event annually where there are activities and information tables on the "Library Mall" of the University. It is a relatively high visibility event where skills such as bike-fixing are shared, reusable mugs are given out, and a massive trash clean-up competition combines competitiveness with environmentalism. Finally, the SSC also shows educational movies and hosts guest speakers (like the one on Alaska, that encouraged one member to get involved), and has group outings for tree plantings and various outdoor activities.

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[20] Eva SSC

Friendship ties. Often, individuals participate for reasons other than just believing in the cause. They become friends and develop social ties with other members of the group. As one person put it, "now, actually, most of the hanging out I do is through other activist [events]."[21] For some, the reason for continuing their involvement in a group is due in part to the friendships they made: "I liked the people I met and stayed because of the people."[22] In these cases, SSC members mentioned the presence of social ties as a reason for continuing their involvement.

Barriers to Involvement

Small organization. Although most participants appreciated that the SSC does not focus on recruitment or do massive outreach drives, some mentioned that the group's smaller size prevented it from doing bigger and more productive things. As one member said, "our weakness is the small size of our group. We can't accomplish as much as we'd like."[23] Another participant who mentioned small group size talked about how a larger group would give current members more free time:

> Our weakness is numbers. We're a small organization and if we had more people, maybe we could do more. People wouldn't feel like they had to do everything that we are doing. They could take a day off from an event and not feel like they have to be there.[24]

Thus, a shortcoming seen by some members of this "smaller" group is its lower capacity for projects and actions.

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[21] Mitch SSC
[22] Andrea SSC
[23] Eva SSC
[24] Suzanne SSC

Time commitment. Only a few participants mentioned time commitment as a factor in their involvement. One rather active member of SSC reported having to drop out of other groups because he was taking on too many things and had to cut back. He remained active in the groups that he felt needed the most support or could best utilize his resources.[25] One participant felt some pressure from other members of the group and felt that he was expected to put in more time: "if it comes to someone telling you that you have a job and you have to fulfill the needs of other people, then it's not fun anymore."[26] This suggests that for that individual, increased time commitment is a weakness of the SSC because it diminishes the amount of fun he expects to have in the group.

Inexperienced members. A few members who have had previous involvement in progressive groups mentioned that the SSC's members were very "new." For many of its members, SSC is the first progressive student group they are a part of.

> [Our] biggest weakness is most of the people in SSC are "green" activists. A lot of them come to meetings and help out with things here and there, but it's not as much of a consuming part of their lives as hard-core activists. That can be a strength, too, because they might be able to relate to the average person better, but it's a weakness because I'd like to . . . have a more even workload [among members].[27]

Both individuals who mentioned SSC's weakness as being a group with many "new" members seem to have stayed with SSC because they felt like they

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[25] Mitch SSC
[26] Anders SSC
[27] Mitch SSC

were needed, and had a role to play in the group. Thus, in some cases, the

"newness" or small size of the group urged individuals who understand this as

problematic, to strengthen their involvement.

THE STUDENT LABOR ACTION COALITION

Background and History

The Student Labor Action Coalition (SLAC) is the second group that I

observed and participated in. SLAC began on the University of Wisconsin-

Madison campus in 1994 to support hundreds of workers locked out of the

A.E. Staley Company in Decatur, Illinois (Featherstone 2002). Since then,

SLAC merged with a group called the Madison Anti-Sweatshop Coalition

(MASC), bringing local and international labor issues together in one

organization. According to their website, SLAC's mission includes:

> (1) Educating students and the community about Unions and worker's struggles for
> social justice. (2) Organizing students to engage in labor solidarity activities locally
> and worldwide. (3) Building active coalition work with Unions and other
> community activists. (4) Training students to be activists and organizers in the labor
> movement. (5) Actively supporting the struggle for social justice for all. (SLAC
> mission statement: web page)

SLAC is an affiliated member of United Students Against Sweatshops

(USAS), established in 1998 as a national network of campus anti-sweatshop

organizations (Featherstone 2002:12) Though the mission of USAS has since

broadened to include support of local labor struggles as well as international

sweatshop issues, it was originally focused on getting universities to sign on

to the Worker's Rights Consortium (WRC), a body which monitors labor

conditions in the apparel industries that universities have contracts with. As a

member of USAS, SLAC at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was one of

the many student groups that had sit-ins in 2000, pressuring their university to

sign on to the WRC. Because of the USAS network linking university anti-sweatshop and labor groups, SLAC has coordinated actions with other university USAS groups, and attends conferences that allow for inter-university strategic planning and information sharing.

SLAC meets once a week and, at the time of research, has supported the striking Tyson workers in Jefferson, Wisconsin, the Immokalee workers' struggle for higher wages as Taco Bell tomato pickers, and the Teaching Assistants' Association (TAA) of Madison in their strike for an equitable contract. SLAC has also been working towards forcing manufacturers with contracts with the University of Wisconsin to disclose the wages they pay their workers. In April of 2004, I interviewed 13 of roughly 18-20 individuals who attended meetings fairly regularly.

Early Influences

Parents and family. A substantial number of SLAC members had family involved specifically in issues of labor rights and social justice struggles. Of the 13 participants interviewed, 5 had progressive family members, with most involved in rather radical work:

> I grew up in a family where my grandmother was in the Communist party for 50 years. Both my parents work or have worked in the labor movement, and I'd like to think that I came to my beliefs on my own, but you can't deny that they played a large part.[28]

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[28] Jason SLAC

An older participant spoke of the influence of her aunts in shaping her political consciousness: "[I was a] radical little kid. My elderly Quaker aunts took me to an army camp and they used to lie down in front of trucks at army bases. So [I was] always doing things against things that were wrong, against injustices."[29] Another participant spent her childhood in Mozambique, and watched her mother participate in the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Parental and familial influence may have provided the impetus for thinking about and working on issues specifically related to labor, as it is an issue not widely publicized.

Prior interest and participation. Five SLAC members had experiences during high school working for progressive issues. One participant joined her high school Amnesty International group, which was doing anti-sweatshop work. She even participated in a youth delegation to El Salvador:

> I think that was very inspiring because you actually got direct contact with the people that you're working with, and you really heard their personal stories. They were really inspiring.[30]

Another became interested in the 2000 presidential election and sought out an organization:

> I got interested in Ralph Nader, found a local chapter and got involved with them. Through them, I met a girl doing anti-sweatshop work in Milwaukee and became a paid organizer with them.[31]

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[29] Whitney SLAC
[30] Leslie SLAC
[31] Lola SLAC

One participant found a local labor party and was active with them throughout high school. The fact that some SLAC members had already been members of activist groups before joining SLAC may have influenced the way that they reacted to recruitment attempts by various student organizations.

Religion. Three members of SLAC are also involved in a progressive Jewish group called Kavanah. The purpose of Kavanah is "to encourage dialogue and promote understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To represent a liberal Jewish voice that supports a peaceful solution in Israel/Palestine."[32] One of the three had been involved in a leftist Zionist camp throughout her childhood.

> A lot of my counselors and role models were politically active, and one of the things the organizations really involved with social justice issues and things like that, so it got me really interested from a young age.[33]

Growing up with an emphasis on the progressive aspects of religion may have made them more available for recruitment into other progressive organizations.

Another participant spoke of going to a Catholic high school, even though he was not religious, and being jealous of the service projects that members of the Catholic youth group were working on. "Kids would be involved in campus ministry and I got a little jealous of them. I wasn't involved because I'm not a Catholic and I don't even believe in God and they

[32] http://soo.studentorg.wisc.edu/sooform/search/pages/organiza1.asp?RegHistoryID=8190
[33] Michaela SLAC

said, 'Well, you better not be involved in campus ministry.'"[34] The religious

backgrounds and experiences of almost one third of the members of SLAC is

interesting to note because often, progressive student organizations are

secular, and do not recognize that religion may have been a part of early

socialization to progressive ideas.

World events. A few participants spoke of the influence of historical

events as precursors to their interest in progressive politics. Growing up

amidst the turmoil and victory of South African politics was mentioned by one

participant as a primary reason for becoming active. Another participant

mentioned her reaction to the war on Iraq as a time when she was frustrated

and felt something had to be done. "[It was] during the upcoming war on

Iraq, and it kind of alienates you, or you feel like you need to latch on to

something, to do something. It's those moments that you can get people

together."[35] In this way, large political events spurred a couple of participants

to find an outlet for their feelings and to become active.

Personal connection to issue. Two participants were interested in

SLAC because their own experiences were connected to labor rights and

social justice. One participant, through the experience of his family losing

their farm to massive factory farms, developed an awareness of economic

inequality that fit in well with SLAC's focus on labor issues. The other

participant was an employee at UW-Madison, and became involved in SLAC

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[34] Randy SLAC
[35] Rebecca SLAC

because the group was working on a campaign to increase wages and benefits

for long-term employees, like her, who were classified as Limited Term

Employment (LTE).

> I was an LTE for years, and in this one job for nine years and they said there was no way that they could make me permanent, and I started checking into LTEs, and he said to talk to this girl [in SLAC], and she told me to come to the SLAC meeting.[36]

Thus, some members of SLAC had been directly affected by labor and

social justice issues, and this influenced how they became involved in the

group.

Initial Involvement

Formal recruitment. Of the 13 members interviewed, only two cited

a formal recruiting attempt (e.g., posters, flyers, information tables, etc.) as the

reason they heard of SLAC and decided to attend a meeting. One received a

flyer about SLAC during her freshman year advising period. After that, she

said: "I would always see the stuff . . . I would always get all the fliers and see

their name around."[37] The other was given a flyer by a SLAC member while

walking through campus. Two other participants, though initially recruited

informally, referenced attending an event by SLAC that brought Maria Daisy

Hernandez, a worker from El Salvador. Thus, whether formal recruitment

was a primary or secondary contact between the individual and the

organization, it served to attract four participants at most.

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[36] Whitney SLAC
[37] Amy SLAC

Informal Recruitment. Seven SLAC members (almost half of those interviewed) were informally introduced into the group through friends and networks. "A friend of mine—someone who is friends with [someone] in SLAC said, 'Oh, you might like SLAC.'"[38] One member put it well by saying that a lot of people were "invited" to groups.

> I was invited. I met [someone] last year and he invited me. I'm in a class with [SLAC members]. [Someone] is in Kavanah with me . . . a lot of the time it's a friend [who introduces you], and I feel that's the best way.[39]

A third member talked about how she had a friend who was going to SLAC meetings, and joined up with a few more friends to attend their first meeting together.

SLAC, as a group, seems to place a strong emphasis on word-of-mouth and networking strategies, with the understanding that more tangible benefits apart from member recruitment can result. As two members put it:

> We manage to do what we need because we have support from other places, from other unions—AFSME, the TAA, and other student groups like ASM—student government, MECHA . . . [because] we have these connections with other unions and student groups . . . that allow us to function as a group—to get into a whole network of people.[40]

> We're there for other people. When people ask us, they know we have their back . . . I've made it my goal to make sure that other people feel that way about SLAC. . . it takes time, but I've become friends with a lot of people in other groups. And we hang out outside of meetings, and so I can call them up and they can call me up and ask each other what's going on.[41]

In this manner, more networks for communication are formed, as well as a channel for exchanging resources, whether human or monetary.

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[38] Michaela SLAC
[39] Jason SLAC
[40] Rebecca SLAC
[41] Jason SLAC

Individuals already looking for SLAC. Two participants were recruited through neither formal nor informal methods; they had heard of SLAC long before coming to school at UW-Madison and sought the group out themselves. One member looked for the labor groups that were active at the schools he was thinking of applying to as a large factor in his decision of where to go to college. Another member, who was also quite active in high school, had a similar way of joining SLAC:

> One of the reasons I chose Madison was that it was active and I wanted to get involved in a lot. I had heard of SLAC . . . I went to their general meeting—before kickoff [meeting each semester]—I sought them out before coming to campus.[42]

A combination of the participants' early involvement in labor issues and SLAC's reputation as a student labor organization influenced the recruitment of these two participants more than formal or informal recruiting did.

Reputation. Due to SLAC's organizing strategies, their focus on active campaigns, and their 10 year history as an active student labor group, participants report that SLAC has developed a reputation for themselves. "SLAC has a reputation on this campus—after the sit-ins in '99 and 2000 about the sweatshop stuff."[43] Another participant spoke of the reputation SLAC has for doing actions:

> Because we're doing stuff pretty consistently and constantly, there's also a name—having a reputation—and that's another good thing. We have a reputation which is pretty good in general, and that means that we can get the kind of help that we need.[44]

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[42] Lola SLAC
[43] Jason SLAC
[44] Rebecca SLAC

The fact that two members became involved in SLAC and even chose to go to the University of Wisconsin due in part to SLAC's reputation, shows that a group's reputation plays a significant role in attracting new members. SLAC's reputation is spread through networks between members and other groups on campus and nationally, through USAS and the AFL-CIO.

Group attitudes regarding recruitment. The low number of participants who joined SLAC through the group's formal recruitment tactics has to do with SLAC's opinions and strategies regarding recruitment. Members of SLAC explained that minimal time and emphasis was placed on recruiting new members. "In terms of recruitment, I think it's a low priority. I don't see SLAC as a group trying to reach out and bring a person in as much, I think that's a huge difference between SLAC and the ISO."[45] Instead of recruitment, SLAC focuses on their campaigns, and challenging those who have the power to change things in order to make a positive difference.

> Usually it's that we're working on an issue. If people are attracted to the work that we're doing, we try to involve them . . . we make a flier that says "come to SLAC" or something like that, and we advertise for a meeting, like, 2 or 3 times. But otherwise we advertise for an event like a film, teach-in, discussion or an action. And hopefully people are inspired by that to want to do the work of our organization.[46]

Another participant made a similar remark: "It doesn't really seem to me that we try to reach out and get new members. If people come we welcome them into the group, but we don't actively go out and [recruit]."[47]

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[45] Ben SLAC
[46] Trevor SLAC
[47] Amy SLAC

Relying on campaign events to draw in new participants also conveys the message that SLAC is primarily interested in individuals who are already passionate about the issue and ready to work on campaigns, rather than attracting a multitude of people who may be very new to the issues at hand.

> We used to put a lot of energy into recruiting people but that's not as important as people who are interested in the issues getting involved, and they are more likely to do the work . . . We don't do educational events unless they're really part of a campaign with very specific goals. There's no capacity for mass education [in our] group.

Thus, campaign events, informal recruitment and SLAC's reputation are the vehicles by which most individuals became members in the group.

Continued Involvement

Culture of active participation and commitment. Though some shy away from involvement in groups that are time-consuming and often require a lot of work, many in SLAC praise this quality as a reason why they are effective in their campaigns. One participant spoke of a "culture of action" within SLAC:

> One thing that's good is that we are not about what you look like or how you talk, but about what you're going to do. Not even how nice you are, or if you have dreads, but if you're going to show up to make the calls. The more we can make the group's culture one of action, the better.[48]

Others mentioned the time commitment that members put into SLAC: "The strength I see in SLAC is there are at least a dozen people willing to devote a lot of time to their cause and knowledgeable enough to spend their time wisely and make a difference."[49] When one participant was asked why he stayed in the groups that he did, he responded with: "I saw the ones that were

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[48] Caleb SLAC
[49] Randy SLAC

doing things . . . [SLAC] works hard and they make me work hard because they do . . . what separates SLAC from a lot of groups is that we focus on action . . . and we get stuff done."[50]

The level of constant action that SLAC maintains also creates more space for individuals to come into a group and become involved right away.

> When you're trying to get new people involved, you need to have some kind of action or some kind of way that people can feel like they're being involved, not like they're there to listen to the elders of the group . . . in SLAC there were people doing stuff that I could easily latch on to, to partner up with somebody and go do something . . . actions make you learn and makes you feel like you're valued, you belong.[51]

Being immediately recognized by the group helped another individual to feel like a member of SLAC: "the people were always asking for my opinion and I felt empowered."[52]

Strategy and tactics. Occasionally individuals choose to stay involved in a progressive group based on the strategy and tactics employed in working towards their goals. SLAC's actions are highly visible. Their tactics confront those in power using demonstrations and direct action, as well as working within the University's system through committees and with administrators. Here is what a SLAC member had to say about the group's strategy, and why he agrees with it: "You can't be nice with a lot of stuff—you have to play hardball. They [those in power] won't respond unless you make their daily

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[50] Jason SLAC
[51] Rebecca SLAC
[52] Lola SLAC

lives pretty miserable until you get what you want."[53] Another member

echoed his sentiment:

> I think there needs to be more agitation on the ground. That's what the state responds to—to popular demands, public interests. When there's that, lobbying is useless.[54]

One SLAC member talked about participating in university committees in

order to work towards wage disclosure, which is considered by SLAC to be a

non-confrontational tactic:

With wage disclosure a lot of it was bureaucratic crap that we had to go through as far as the committee and I think it was good to do that because now we have allies on the committee and it is really functioning how it should be, rather than being a useless symbolic thing.[55]

Generally speaking, SLAC members expressed willingness for direct action,

though of primary importance was the effectiveness of the tactic chosen for a

particular time in a campaign. The level of comfort in turning to direct action

may be an attraction or deterrent to individuals thinking of joining this group.

Friendship ties. Many participants spoke of their friendships with

other SLAC members as a reason for continuing their involvement in the

group. "A lot of us get along really well and we're friends. And I think that

helps with things a lot; it makes it easier for people to . . . go to meetings and

work together."[56] Talking about retention of SLAC members also came back

to friendship ties within the group:

> Retention is important, and we have good retention because we have parties, we invite people. We go to Nick's [restaurant and bar] after [meetings], and they make people feel like they're part of a group. It's a fun experience and creates bonding.[57]

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[53] Caleb SLAC
[54] Trevor SLAC
[55] Leslie SLAC
[56] Amy SLAC
[57] Lola SLAC

The same participant also described how friendship increased accountability

within the group:

> One strength is the friendships that have developed because it makes people feel
> more obligated to come to meetings and get stuff done. This is because they're not
> just letting the group down; they're letting their friends down, too.[58]

In this way, friendship ties not only tighten the bond of individuals to the

group and increase retention, but also serve to increase the productivity of

SLAC.

Barriers to Involvement

    Group structure. Most participants mentioned that SLAC has a rather

laid-back atmosphere and runs its meetings in a loose and relaxed way. While

a few enjoyed this way of running meetings, at least six members mentioned a

lack of group structure as a weakness of SLAC:

> What SLAC does in meetings is the biggest problem—we keep stack [a list of who is
> next to speak], but when we make the decision the facilitator is supposed to ask for
> objections . . . those with strong feelings keep talking over again . . . it's the
> facilitator's job to push it to a vote instead of allowing 3-4 people to take over the
> meeting.[59]

> The way that we make decisions . . . if someone is vocal enough, saying "this is what
> we should do," then we do it. We don't really weigh the pros and cons, whether it's
> strategic, if we have the resources to make it successful. I think we need to work on
> that.[60]

Three participants mentioned reading "The Tyranny of Structurelesness" by

Jo Freeman, and applying the point of the article to the way SLAC functions:

> The one thing that could be negative is that while I like no hierarchy, I think it can
> kind of harm a group. Have you read "The Tyranny of Structurelesness"? It just
> talks about the problems of having no hierarchy or just no leaders because there's

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[58] Lola SLAC
[59] Randy SLAC
[60] Amy SLAC

> always informal hierarchy that develops . . . I think the problem is that people don't really have the structure that promotes more facilitation, and leaders just sort of pop up by themselves.[61]

Thus, according to some members, a lack of a clearly defined non-hierarchical structure in meetings was identified as a group weakness, and could be a barrier to continued participation for some.

Gender dynamics. A few SLAC members mentioned gender dynamics as on of the group's weaknesses. "We had some issues last year with gender issues in the group. It probably wasn't the first thing that struck me, but there was some struggle, and when people wanted to deal with gender issues, that was a big deal."[62] By "gender issues," I believe this member is referring to the unequal distribution of talking time during meetings, men having stronger and more forceful opinions, and differences in the distribution of tasks. Another member mentioned gender roles, but felt that this issue was prevalent among many groups, and not unique to SLAC: "[There] needs to be more equitable distribution between men and women, what sorts of tasks they take on, roles and how valued the roles are. And those are going to be issues in any organization"[63] While not hugely divisive, the group's gender dynamics may be a barrier for women's participation.

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[61] Ben SLAC
[62] Caleb SLAC
[63] Rebecca SLAC

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANIZATION

Background and History

The International Socialist Organization (ISO) is the third and final group studied. The University of Wisconsin-Madison ISO is one "branch" of the organization, and split a few years ago into a university and city branch in order to continue growing. In the spring of 2004, the campus branch had 26 dues-paying members, of which 18 were interviewed.

The ISO was founded in 1977 after splitting from the International Socialists (Fisk 1977:51), and is a Socialist organization dedicated to the teachings of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Leon Trotsky. Though international in name, the ISO is currently a U.S.-based organization with branches in universities, cities and workplaces.

According to the "who we are" section of their website:

The ISO believes that capitalism produces poverty, racism, famine, environmental catastrophe and war. By getting involved in struggles big and small, the ISO aims to build with others a society where we all have control over our lives. We believe another world is possible. (International Socialist Organization 'who we are:' web page)

Additionally, the "where we stand" section summarizes the ISO's position on important topics. These include supporting workers' power over union bosses; revolutionary rather than reformist tactics; international workers uniting; full equality for all; Black, women's, lesbian and gay liberation; and building a revolutionary Socialist party.

To achieve Socialism, the most militant workers must be organized into a revolutionary Socialist party to provide political leadership and organization. The

activities of the ISO are directed at taking the initial steps to building such a party. (International Socialist Organization 'who we are:' web page)

Every ISO member must agree to the "where we stand" points before joining.

ISO members are required to pay monthly dues to the national organization in addition to attending group meetings and events. As outlined on the ISO membership card,

> A member is one who agrees with the politics of the ISO (as outlined in the "Where We Stand"), accepts its Rules and Procedures, pays dues, and works within and under the appropriate bodies of the organization. Where possible, all members shall be members of an appropriate trade union. Every member must take and sell *Socialist Worker* [the ISO's weekly newspaper].[64]

Thus, the ISO has very explicit expectations of its members, which are outlined before or when a member "joins."

The UW-Madison branch of the ISO meets every week, alternating between internal and public meetings. Internal meetings are where members organize and plan, and the meeting agenda generally includes announcements, organizing SW paper sales, and breaking into various "fractions." Fractions are comprised of a few members who are working on a particular area of interest for the ISO. One fraction is called "branch building," where members strategize how to recruit more individuals into the ISO, and how to better integrate newer members. Other fractions focus on the "movements," or other campaigns that the ISO is involved with. In the spring of 2004, these fractions focused on anti-war actions, the warming center campaign (a new group working on homelessness issues), and labor issues.[65] These fractions

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[64] ISO Rules and Procedures, Section 11A, as found on membership card.
[65] Madison ISO meeting agenda 2/18/04.

strategize the best way for the ISO to get involved in events and actions that other progressive student organizations are working on.

Open meetings are where a current (and often controversial) topic is discussed and opened for discussion. Topics have included "How the Russian Revolution was Lost," "Why Oppose the Occupation of Iraq?" and "Gay Marriage is a Right." The purpose of these meetings is to attract people who are interested in the topic, to educate them about the ISO's position regarding that topic, and to provide information about how people can get more involved with the ISO.

Early Influences

Prior interest and participation. 4 out of the 18 ISO members interviewed had previous experiences that prompted them to become politically active before coming to UW-Madison. One member worked with the homeless for six years: "that really solidified my political ideas because I started thinking about its causes and why it's there among so much wealth, and that brought me to Socialism."[66] Another ISO member felt that her involvement in the "alternative crowd" in high school prompted her to apply to a university that was politically active.

> I was in the alternative crowd and we would do things, go to the Wal-Mart and get really angry and get kicked out . . . And I actually came to this university explicitly because it was a political university with a history, and I knew I could get involved here. So I got here and looked for a group.[67]

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[66] Rob ISO
[67] Lisa ISO

Living with "a lot of left, extremist people"[68] before coming to school at UW

got one person interested in politics. He worked in a few anarchist

organizations and a Food not Bombs group.

Parents and family. Of 18 ISO members interviewed, 3 had family

who had been involved in progressive politics. These participants mentioned

the influence of their family in first thinking about progressive issues.

> My family has a history of members in the communist party. My grandfather on my mother's side, my great grandfather . . . was a member of the communist party and secretly printed Communist Party documents in the 1920s . . . My father is an anarchist from the 1968 general strike in France and that alone will do a lot to shape one's politics. And my sister . . . ran into revolutionary politics when she went to school at Columbia.[69]

This person heard about progressive politics from all angles of his family life,

and his family later prompted him to become active in the ISO:

> I was partying a lot [when I first got into college] and wasn't very convinced about the importance of politics. I was a political person, and would argue plenty but in that respect I was just an armchair liberal moralist . . . [Then] my sister told me to get off my ass and actually change the world instead of complaining about it.[70]

Another member mentioned coming from a "liberal" background: "My dad

went to Madison [the University of Wisconsin] and got involved in politics in

'68 and SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], and is basically a Marxist-

orthodox."[71] Another member was influenced by his parents' involvement in

labor unions: "I sort of grew up in a union household—my father is a factory

worker and my mother is a teacher, so I got the whole 'yay unions' thing from

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[68] Peter ISO
[69] Cameron ISO
[70] Cameron ISO
[71] Ned ISO

the very beginning."[72] Thus, when individuals were approached by members

of the ISO, individuals with progressive parents may not have been scared

away from the progressive and Socialist ideas of the group.

Religion. Religion seemed to have both positive and negative

influences on participants. Two participants spoke of the positive role of

religion in their involvement in progressive issues. One member said that "it

began with my church, because my parents are Unitarian Universalists, and

the church is pretty involved in a lot of progressive issues . . . that's what got

me started in thinking about a lot of progressive issues."[73] The other

participant talked about growing up in a Catholic community concerned with

poverty and homelessness issues. After coming to school, she got involved in

a "friendship fast" after September 11th in order to raise money for relief aid

for Afghanistan. In these cases, religion played a helpful role in individuals

becoming more progressive.

In other cases, religion was a negative influence on individuals. Two

ISO members mentioned that they both went to Catholic high schools and this

made their interest in progressive issues more difficult to follow. "I went to a

Catholic high school and I told my sister that I had a gut level feeling that

what they taught me about abortion was terribly wrong, that their moralism

and guilt were so wrong."[74] Both positive and negative experiences with

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[72] Victor ISO
[73] Aaron ISO
[74] Cameron ISO

religion shape how participants feel about the world and about progressive

issues.

World events. The impact of world events caused two participants to

begin thinking more progressively. One member was frustrated for some time

before finding a group to get involved in:

> After 9/11 I got really frustrated and angry. The first political thing I went to after 9/11 were some really small political rallies . . . I wanted to do stuff but didn't know how to get involved . . . Before I joined a group I went to the protests in DC and NYC and after February 15, 2003 I started going to Stop The War meetings.[75]

Another member noted world events and their impact on his world view:

"The first issues that radicalized me were September 11th, the war on

Afghanistan and the war on Iraq. Those are the big three that made me see a

lot of the contradictions in the government, and realize a lot of shit is fucked

up."[76]

Initial Involvement

Newspaper sales (formal recruitment). Of the 18 members

interviewed, 5 mentioned buying the *Socialist Worker*, as a primary way that

they first began their involvement in the ISO. The *Socialist Worker* (SW) is

the ISO's weekly newspaper, and is mailed to each branch for distribution.

The *SW* costs one dollar, and is distributed by ISO members individually or

through organized paper sales. One woman described her first experience

buying the paper:

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[75] Bob ISO
[76] Aaron ISO

> I started reading it and realizing that a lot of what it was saying I was in agreement with. And I had done no activism prior to that. I just started reading the newspaper and it tapped into something that I had always sort of thought about but not concretely—I didn't know anything about left tradition and left politics. So I agreed with it and joined the group, and have been active since then. [77]

Another participant met ISO members at a paper sale, and decided to go to a meeting:

> I just met one of them selling their papers outside of the library and I started talking to them . . . They were selling right before the meeting . . . and the next week I came and it was . . . about the Russian revolution and I was pretty interested, so I joined right away after that. [78]

The number of individuals who were recruited through the ISO's newspaper is an interesting finding due to the fact that some ISO members, and members of other groups felt that the paper scared people away. As one ISO member put it, "I thought the paper was tabloidy and weird."[79] Learning that five current members became involved through the newspaper credits this as an effective recruitment tactic.

Student organizational fair (formal recruitment). Three people initially heard about the ISO through the student organizational fair held at the beginning of each semester. "I ran into [someone from the ISO] at the organizational fair the day before classes [began], and he told me about the meeting."[80] Another said that

> There was a fair on Library Mall and there were all kinds of organizations. I started talking to [someone in the ISO] down there and then I just started going to meetings. I became a member and everything.[81]

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[77] Deb ISO
[78] Alan ISO
[79] Lisa ISO
[80] Kristin ISO
[81] Victor ISO

Though having a table at the student involvement fair is fairly simple, it is successful in bringing a fair number of individuals into the organization.

Educational events (formal recruitment). Educational events, which are often advertised through paper sales and posters, are another avenue of formal recruitment that the ISO engages in. Three ISO members talked about going to a public meeting as their first exposure to the ISO. For two people, the process was pretty straight forward: "I saw a flyer for a meeting for the ISO, and went. I identified with what they were saying, and joined after the first meeting."[82] The other said that "I was looking for a Socialist group on campus and the first thing saw was the ISO and I went to their first meeting and joined that first meeting."[83] Another participant, though first exposed to the ISO at the student organizational fair, talked about how she went to an educational meeting on Iraq and that suddenly "everything clicked."[84]

Informal recruitment. The largest contingent of ISO members, six individuals, got involved in the ISO because they were connected in some way to someone who was already a member of the ISO, and he/she prompted them to get involved. For some it was a girlfriend, for others a sister or a classmate. One participant said that: "The first political meeting I ever went to was an ISO meeting. And it was one that my sister invited me to in New

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[82] Rob ISO
[83] Ned ISO
[84] Kristin ISO

York City when I was a senior in high school."[85] For three ISO members, it

was the same co-worker who was a member of the city ISO branch that

convinced them to go to an ISO meeting.

> I work at the deli. I met [a member of the ISO] there and he is big in the ISO in the
> city branch . . . So he got me involved with the ISO . . . A lot of us at the deli ended
> up joining.[86]

Another member began attending ISO meetings through network

connections between the ISO and another student organization: "Through

Stop the War I met a lot of people who were in the ISO, and I got involved

this semester in gay marriage issues and the Civil Marriage Equality

Coalition."[87] In fact, the Civil Marriage Equity Coalition is a student group

that began during an ISO open meeting earlier that semester.

Group attitudes regarding recruitment. The ISO places a great

emphasis on recruitment and retention because this relates directly to their

goals as an organization. As one member stated,

> A big priority is recruitment. Basically, it's an organization that's working to bring
> in people by getting out there and spreading the message and having it snowball
> large enough so we can make major changes in the way things are done.[88]

The goal of constantly attracting more members in order to enlarge the

organization is rooted in the ISO's ideology and Socialist history, as another

member spoke of:

> I think it has to do with the fact that we're a Socialist group and we are based on
> Lenin's conception of a revolutionary party. And in a relatively low time of struggle

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[85] Cameron ISO
[86] Taylor ISO
[87] Peter ISO
[88] Victor ISO

like now, you actively recruit . . . the most politically conscious portion of society . . A lot of [other groups] . . . don't believe in party building per se as we do.[89]

Because the ISO prioritizes recruitment, it has clearly defined and regularly implemented strategies and tactics which aim to bring in new members. One member outlined recruitment measures in a three part process:

> There are three main ways: Paper sales, that's basically how we figure out how the general population views the ISO and also how we get people from the general population of the city into branches if they are Socialists not belonging to a group. And then, secondly is what we call 'periphery,' where it's just your friends and people you know who you think are interested in those kinds of politics. And you give them the paper; you talk to them and bring them to a meeting. The third tiers are probably meetings, as you meet a lot of people through them.[90]

Members of the ISO acknowledge that the newspaper is an organizing and recruiting tool. In interview after interview, selling the newspaper was named as one of the primary recruitment tactics that the ISO employs in order to get new members:

> We are out there selling our newspaper. Lenin . . . likened it to the scaffolding of a building through which not only can revolutionaries communicate to help building and setting the foundation of a structure, but also to build it upwards to the sky. And the newspaper fills that role because it's the way that we meet people, it's the way that we make ourselves available to the public, and it's proven to work if not historically through the use of when the Bolshevik party did it, to what we're doing today. Because we started a year and a half ago with 6 members and now we have 26, so it's helping us to build in numbers but almost more importantly in depth. Because the newspaper gives a weekly assessment of what's going on in the world... and only through the *Socialist Worker* do I see that happening right now on the left.[91]

Another member talked about the added benefits of selling the newspaper:

> The main point of the paper is to talk to people—political discussion sometimes leads to buying the paper . . . But it's the contacts we make from the sale that are way better than someone just selling three dozen papers. Paper sales are about engaging people, getting our politics out there and to gauge where people are at politically.

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[89] Deb ISO
[90] Aaron ISO
[91] Cameron ISO

ISO members have observed that the newspaper alone does not attract all members, but that it's the personal contact, a moment to debate a current issue and an invitation to the next meeting or event that solidifies people's involvement with the organization.

Members of the ISO are also cognizant of the attraction of current and controversial issues in attracting new people. This strategy is used in public meetings as well as during newspaper sales: "[we use] current events that everyone is talking about [as] the topic of the meeting. So we have a meeting on the recent torture of Iraqis—something that is really on people's minds."[92] When selling the newspaper, one member talked about her strategy: "It's always around issues—I had success when the Haiti thing was big because people knew about it and wanted to learn more about it and so they would stop."[93]

Another recruiting strategy discussed by many members was that of recruiting new members through involvement in other movements and groups. For example, ISO members often attended other progressive group meetings in order to (1) support that particular cause or campaign, (2) sell the *Socialist Worker*, and (3) recruit new members into the ISO.

> One of the reasons we're involved in movements is to change the way things are now, but also to engage in a movement we want to talk about the ISO, what we see the issues as. Also to recruit out of particular movements and to build our organization to fight for the larger struggle.[94]

Other opinions echoed that "A primary tactic is getting out there and involved in organizations. If people see bright organizers out there, it's more likely to

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[92] Deb ISO
[93] Matt ISO
[94] Rob ISO

bring in new membership,"[95] and by "joining other groups and being open and

upfront about our politics in those groups and being active,"[96] the ISO will

recruit more people. Thus, through newspaper sales, connecting current

events to the ideology of the ISO, and recruiting out of other movements, the

ISO works to increase their membership.

Continued Involvement

     Knowledgeable members. One theme that came up among

participants is that members they encountered from the ISO were

knowledgeable and willing to debate political issues. This convinced some

individuals that the ISO was a rational organization that had all their facts

together. One participant spoke of his reaction to hearing an ISO member

speak:

> He kept chiming in and he just knew so much, and to this day knows so much . . . He
> made good suggestions and I liked that [the ISO] was an organization that was
> political, first and foremost . . . You talked to [ISO members] if you wanted to talk
> about politics on a bus to a demonstration.[97]

A member who joined the ISO at another branch recalls her first ISO meeting:

"The things that stand out were how smart everybody was, how people were

really knowledgeable."[98] The ISO members' understanding of history and

application to current issues was a draw for another member:

> People in the ISO know a lot about history and issues and that really impressed me,
> and they were able to convince me that the way I look at issues was a bit distorted.
> So, just their ability to make arguments and to see society in a holistic manner, that's
> what I liked about them."[99]

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[95] Peter ISO
[96] Philip ISO
[97] Karl ISO
[98] Deb ISO
[99] Ned ISO

Overarching analysis of issues. About one third of participants talked about how the ISO combined many issues that they were concerned with into a total analysis of how the world works. One participant was surprised to see this at her first meeting:

> They were connecting so many issues. There was anti-death penalty, stuff against the war, and stuff about abortion. I was just like "oh my gosh people are actually connecting these issues" and all the other groups I went to were focused on one issue . . . and they had a really good political line. It was very coherent and it's hard to find that in groups.[100]

Another member argued that "one reason I think we're growing is that we have a comprehensive analysis about what's going on out there."[101] A third member felt he had the freedom to work on multiple issues through the ISO:

> I liked the fact that it was a broad-based political organization working on more than one issue. I wanted to work on a whole bunch of things that I thought were wrong with society, not just one small aspect of it.[102]

The ISO's Socialist analysis has helped clear things up for some ISO members. One talks of how she has changed since joining the ISO:

> My whole outlook on how the world works [has changed]. Making sense of all the things that happen in the world. Things used to not make a lot of sense to me, and they were disconnected. I didn't really have an understanding of where all these problems were coming from.[103]

Revolutionary politics. The ISO believes in a revolutionary strategy, and therefore does not feel that making small, individual changes will result in change on a large scale. One member was relieved when she joined the ISO and learned that the group had a political explanation for not engaging in lifestyle change:

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[100] Lisa ISO
[101] Rob ISO
[102] Victor ISO
[103] Deb ISO

We attempt to keep the focus on the real enemy rather than shifting the blame onto ourselves. Like some people will go out there and say "don't drive a car today-save the environment" . . . But that type of thing takes away the real task at hand which is the system, and you have to blame the right people. It's not the people who buy the SUVs. The problem is the people who are making the cars and forcing them down our throats basically, or the corporations who pollute more than any one person.[104]

Another participant felt that lifestyle change is a beginning step to understanding how to change societal problems:

> It's fine to practice lifestyle politics but it's another thing to consider it as some sort of program for social change. This was the first thing I was attracted to: "change yourself." It appeals to a middle-class atomized lifestyle, and I was won away from that from the people in the ISO. Change yourself and the world will change is a utopian way of looking at things. It's an understandable first reaction to a world that does bad things and that you don't want to be a part of. [105]

De-emphasizing lifestyle politics (changing one's daily consumption patterns so not to participate in environmentally or socially destructive processes) is a result of one of the ISO's most basic points: work for revolution and not reform. One participant described the tactical differences between doing reformist work and revolutionary work.

WISPIRG or PAN [Poverty Action Network] are more about working within the institutions that we have in place . . . but the ISO is more about disruption and direct action and protesting because we believe that it is historically what shifts things to the left."[106]

The fact that the ISO is against lifestyle politics and employs a revolutionary strategy were two of the characteristics of the group that fostered participants' continued involvement in the organization.

Friendship ties. In the ISO, friendship ties are mentioned in varying contexts. Most interviewees mentioned that members of the ISO are friends and go to gatherings such as drinking beer at the memorial union or to

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[104] Lisa ISO
[105] Karl ISO
[106] Rob ISO

fundraising parties together, but that "everyone lives their own lives." [107]

Another member spoke of relationships between members of the ISO as being

"political:" "a lot of the relationships you have with people in the group are

political relationships . . . In the ISO people are allowed to do their own thing

and organize around Socialism and it's not really a social group."[108] Social

relationships also affect group productivity, as one member mentioned:

> After a while you get to know people, and on top of agreeing with the ideology you
> feel socially obligated to [participate], just because you're also friends with these
> people, and feel a responsibility to do your part. That has a small amount to do with
> it.[109]

Thus, friendship ties within the ISO loosely link members together and may

account for a more productive atmosphere.

Barriers to Involvement

    Overcoming group and ideological reputation. Because the ISO is a

Socialist organization, it has to overcome Socialist stigmas and stereotypes

from the era of McCarthyism.

> There are a lot of people that shy away from the ISO because people have been
> conditioned through the Cold War with Communist and Socialist stereotypes . . . As
> soon as they see us, they automatically have a set of ideas that normally wouldn't be
> there had the Cold War not happened and had the Red Scare not happened.[110]

As another member noted, "I feel like there's this huge negative stigma

against the Socialist thing, so I think if you join you must be really dedicated

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[107] Peter ISO
[108] Aaron ISO
[109] Rob ISO
[110] Aaron ISO

to the politics and want to see change."[111] The barrier to recruitment occurs

not only with the general public, but also within the leftist community.

> There's a lot of Red-Baiting in Madison on the campus in which other left groups on the campus will discriminate against us because they don't agree with our politics. They will try to shut us out of important things . . . Despite our differences we always want to work with people. Whatever makes the movement stronger and more powerful.[112]

This negative group reputation was mentioned not only by ISO members, but

my participants in other groups, confirming that for some, the ISO's

reputation is a barrier to recruitment.

Being "too pushy." A few ISO members mentioned that the group

was "too pushy" at times with their recruitment:

> Personally, a lot of people in the ISO can be a little too pushy with their politics. I've seen members try to approach others and they can come off as overbearing and can scare other people away.[113]

Another characterized this trait as ISO's weakness: "The biggest weakness

[the ISO has] is that sometimes I feel like we're forcing our beliefs on other

people."[114] One participant said that he was almost scared away from the

group, but stayed because a friend of his was a member. Others discussed the

short time frame involved with asking people to join:

> I was against asking people to membership after one meeting, and I still am. And I argue at every meeting—let people make up their own minds. If you don't ask they can't join that's true, but I think they should have a more subtle approach because they almost scared me off![115]

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[111] Taylor ISO
[112] Deb ISO
[113] Peter ISO
[114] Victor ISO
[115] Matt ISO

> I brought up how we are coming across. I said it's awkward to say to people "hey do you want to join do you want to join?" . . . If someone who just joins hears that it's like "ok we got 'em." I don't really agree with that philosophy.[116]

Time commitment. Some current members spoke of the shock of learning how much time and effort is asked of ISO members. As one member put it,

> Joining the ISO is a huge commitment. [Someone] just joined the ISO this year, and I remember the meeting after he joined he was just like "oh what have I gotten myself into I've thrown my life away!"[117]

Two other members had the same initial reaction: **"**It was weird when I first started coming around because I thought they were a really high pressure group. [ISO members were] asking me if I was thinking about joining and I thought 'leave me alone!'"[118] Though an initial shock, the time commitment makes sense to those who became members:

> It was very intense at first. I didn't know what to expect and joined after my first meeting because I agreed with them, but a member is supposed to do two [paper] sales a week, come to the meetings, and they expect a lot of time from you. I see the importance of that. If we're going to make change we have to be disciplined and work hard. [119]

Those who stay involved regardless of the time commitment and other barriers to involvement may end up being more dedicated in the long run. As one member put it, "Our contact list might be smaller because we don't pass our email thing around at pizza parties, but a higher percentage of people are dedicated to our politics and work."[120]

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[116] Taylor ISO
[117] Taylor ISO
[118] Karl ISO
[119] Rob ISO
[120] Philip ISO

DISCUSSION

The findings presented within each student group (the SSC, SLAC, and the ISO) highlight interesting areas for discussion regarding recruitment and retention in progressive student organizations. Each of the three student groups, because of their different characteristics, suggest different conclusions regarding recruitment and retention, and will be discussed individually. For a summarization of factors influencing recruitment and retention, please see Table 1 in the Appendix. Shortcomings of the research and areas for further study will conclude the section.

Often, when research is conducted on movements and activist groups, the results are so abstract and theoretical that they no longer provide clear information to those who would most benefit from this knowledge, namely, the individuals in progressive organizations working hard to achieve positive changes in society. Thus, these findings are written with the intent that they be not only informative to academics, but also to activists who may benefit from my research. The following conclusions are prospective suggestions based on a combination of my research experiences, as well as my personal background and experiences organizing with progressive organizations.

The Sierra Student Coalition

The following was learned about the SSC regarding recruitment and continued involvement: of nine members interviewed, virtually all individuals initially

heard about the SSC through formal recruitment measures such as the table at the student organizational fair, a flyer, and attending an event put on by SSC. This is interesting, in light of the fact that most members feel that their group does not go out and actively recruit members, but rather leads by example and lets individuals come to them.

Increasing membership. Increasing membership, though not something that all members prefer, could be accomplished using what has been learned about recruiting in this study. First, because so many individuals now in SSC first got involved through formal recruitment measures, the SSC (and groups like it) could increase their emphasis on formal recruitment and expand on its applications. For example, since having a table worked at the student organizational fair, it may also be effective to set up a literature table on a weekday in the student union.

Second, an increase in membership in SSC may result by increasing word-of-mouth publicity about the organization, such as doing more classroom announcements about the group, or by talking to others in residence halls. Through networks and word-of-mouth, many individuals were recruited into SLAC and the ISO. Such measures may have similar effects for the SSC.

Lastly, many SSC members spoke of their trash pick-ups as the way that they get into people interested in and thinking about the environment. One member referred to these actions as "pricking holes" into people's

bubbles by challenging their daily routines.[121] It is certainly probable that

individuals have thought about environmental issues after encountering

members of the SSC picking up trash, though no participants cited this as how

they first get involved. A way to improve this could be to hand out small

flyers advertising the date and location of SSC meetings to passersby, or some

other way to show individuals intrigued by the trash clean-up or other public

events how to get involved. Otherwise, trash clean-ups could be viewed as a

way for current participants to make an immediate and positive environmental

difference, and not necessarily as a tool to inspire membership.

Increasing Retention. SSC participants had few negative things to

say about the group, but mentioned the small number of group members and

the "newness" of members as weaknesses of the group. If enough members

are interested in increasing group membership, this can be accomplished by

increasing formal and informal recruitment strategies. Having a young group

with less experienced activists can change by either "waiting it out" until

those who have recently joined become more experienced, or by "tailoring"

recruitment in such a way (perhaps by launching a campaign) that attracts

individuals with prior experience into the group. The benefits of increased

membership and more experienced members would, of course, need to be

weighed against desire to not "sell out" or inappropriately "advertise the

group."

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[121] Mitch SSC

The Student Labor Action Coalition

The majority of SLAC members became involved either through word-of-mouth invitations to attend meetings and events, or due to SLAC's reputation on campus (which is also often carried through networks). This is understandable, due to SLAC's acknowledged inattention to the process of recruitment.

Increasing membership. For those interested in increasing recruitment, a few things can be learned from the interviews with current SLAC members. First, word-of-mouth successfully recruited many individuals, and should be kept in mind by current members; the next person you talk to about SLAC may be the next dedicated member.

Second, many members of SLAC mentioned that if individuals are interested enough in the campaigns that SLAC is working on, then they will hopefully end up at a SLAC meeting and get more involved. However, a low number of individuals attended a SLAC event first, and then came to a meeting; most often it was vice versa. If SLAC wants to continue to focus solely on their campaigns, more of an effort could be put into making sure that the dates and times of SLAC meetings appear on all campaign literature in order to maximize probability that an individual will see the information and attend a meeting.

Increasing retention. SLAC members mentioned that, although they appreciated the laid-back atmosphere of SLAC in general, the unstructured meetings led to informal hierarchies and, gender disparities in participation and decision-making. It cannot be determined who has left SLAC because of these barriers to involvement, but steps to correcting these potential barriers may include establishing an agreed-upon meeting structure (whether consensus-based and non-hierarchical or otherwise) and then investing in trainings or literature so that members can become familiar with, and appropriately use the new group decision-making structure. Dealing with gender issues is a difficult and delicate process, and may require group meetings or a break-up into men's and women's meetings in order to discuss specific and general gender issues. By implementing these measures, SLAC can improve its group dynamics, and members may increase their involvement because some barriers to participation were reduced.

The International Socialist Organization

Of the members of the ISO, two thirds initially got involved in the group through formal recruitment strategies of the group, such as *Socialist Worker* newspaper sales, public meetings, and their table at the student organizational fair. The other third became involved because they had initially heard about the ISO through informal recruitment (e.g., a co-worker, girlfriend/boyfriend, etc.) It is understandable that most got involved through formal recruitment,

because the ISO has a highly-developed and strongly emphasized recruiting approach.

   Increasing membership. A few things can be learned from the ISO members that were interviewed. First, selling the newspaper recruits people. There is a lot of skepticism among members of other organizations, as well as initial concern from new ISO members, that the *Socialist Worker* does more harm than good by scaring people away. While it is difficult to determine how many individuals were turned away by particular group characteristics and strategies, it can be said that almost one third of the individuals interviewed who now belong to the ISO were initially recruited through newspaper sales. Second, word-of-mouth and having political discussions with friends and co-workers were successful recruiting tools, and should continue to be utilized by ISO members.

   Interestingly, one recruiting approach spoken of frequently by ISO members, was not shown to be a significant cause of recruitment among those interviewed: The strategy of getting involved in other movements and other campaigns in order to recruit more experienced and more "left" activists into the ISO (in addition to supporting the campaign or movement in question), seemed to do more harm than good. Both ISO members, as well as participants from other groups, talked about distrust of the ISO among other progressive student groups because of fear that the ISO will take over a group or try to "steal" members. Though recruiting out of existing movements may

have led to success with other ISO branches, it seems that a university campus is too small and close-knit, and that any attempt to recruit new members out of existing organizations will only be met with hostility and distrust. Since only one ISO interviewee got involved though this form of recruitment, the group may gain more by earning back the trust and respect of other student activists than continuing to try to recruit in this way.

Increasing retention. The ISO coming on too strong, an expectation of significant time commitment for members, and the group's reputation were the three areas that ISO members identified as barriers to continued involvement. While changing the intensity of ISO recruiting attempts and the amount of time commitment asked may alleviate some of the pressure felt by its members, these changes may have effects on the overall numbers of individuals that the group comes into contact with on a weekly basis. Thus, decreasing the time commitment of present members may result in fewer weekly paper sales, and therefore the ISO will come into contact with fewer individuals whom they can attempt to recruit. In terms of improving the ISO's image and reputation (mentioned as a barrier to recruitment), discontinuing the strategy of recruitment through other organizations, and instead working solely to achieve the goal at hand seems most promising.

Limitations of the Research

The limits and scope of the findings in this paper should be understood. The data and findings of this study represent how *present* members who I interviewed became and stayed involved in their respective groups. Because of this, individuals who were either unsuccessfully recruited, or who attended one or two group functions and then did not continue with the group were not interviewed. Additionally, participants were self-selected. Thus, the opinions and experiences of those who were uninterested, too shy or too busy to participate in an interview are not reflected in the findings of this paper. Nevertheless, because three groups were studied, members of one group frequently discussed why they never attended or stopped participating in one of the other two groups studied. This allowed some cross-group analysis of the factors that promote or deter participation for different people.

Additionally, interviewing present members rather than those who dropped out, and developing recruitment programs based on the information provided, may lead to increased recruitment of individuals with preferences similar to those already in the group. Therefore, recruitment of a general cross-section of college students may not increase, but only recruitment of individuals with backgrounds and ideas similar to those of current participants.

Areas for Future Study

There are many questions left unanswered, and future research could continue to explore the question of how individuals get involved and continue their involvement in progressive social movement organizations. The first addition to this research might be to conduct a study that adequately collects data from individuals who were not recruited into a progressive organization, or who stopped participating. This would require access to contact information of those individuals, either through sign-in sheets from events or meetings, or by requesting contact information of those who are part of the "mobilizing potential," but who have not joined a progressive organization. This could be accomplished through a mailed survey to university dorms.

While a comparison of three different organizations on one campus provided some insight into the differences and similarities of recruitment and retention, it may be fruitful to research recruitment and retention of a single social movement and its organizations on different campuses in order to understand differences based on setting. For example, it may be interesting to study student environmental groups on various campuses to understand the differences and similarities between different groups within the same movement. Comparing results of recruitment and retention strategies should also be compared across race and gender as well as setting. If the success of strategies varied among participants in my study, there may also be very interesting differences in successful recruitment strategies for a White male and a Black female.

CONCLUSIONS

Almost four months of observation, participation, and interviewing provided the information needed to draw conclusions regarding recruitment and retention processes in progressive student organizations. More broadly, however, it allowed for a "bigger picture" of student activism to emerge. For instance, many participants in the SSC and SLAC spoke of the low emphasis their group placed on recruitment. Citing feelings of not wanting to "sell out" or become overly focused on selling themselves (SSC), or the need for focus to be placed primarily on campaigns (SLAC) indicated additional and varied group priorities. The question then becomes, why *is* recruitment important, despite findings that show it as a low priority for many members? The answer lies in understanding the unique characteristics of student social movement organizations. Because turnover is so rapid, student organizations do not have the stability of long-term, committed members. Therefore, recruitment and retention concerns not only groups that are looking to increase the number of members; it concerns the *survival* of all student organizations. A few consecutive years with low recruitment could mean that no-one will be left to continue the organization, and it will die out with graduating members. Therefore, though it is important to respect the voices of members and their opinions, values, and priorities regarding issues other than recruitment, the findings presented in this paper should provide an opportunity to discuss effective recruitment and retention strategies. The following points are

extrapolated from the data presented, and represent notable aspects of the recruitment and retention process. Moving chronologically from early influences to issues of retention, these eight areas of discussion suggest where further examination of the recruitment and retention process could yield increased membership.

(1) Influential early experiences. About 35 of the 40 participants interviewed, spoke of family, teachers, religion, personal circumstances, world events, and prior participation as catalysts for their involvement in progressive student organizations at UW-Madison. It is important to understand the value and significance of early influences in relation to group recruitment efforts. Individuals who were socialized to progressive beliefs are considered to be part of the "mobilizing potential," making them attitudinally dispossessed to accept a group's recruitment invitation (Snow et al. 1980). This is consistent with the assessment made by Downton and Wehr (1998) of an individual's attitudinal availability towards activism, which is developed "in certain life settings and time periods and from their experiences. Family and religious life during childhood exert particularly strong influences" (Downton and Wehr 1998:535).

Activists involved in university student groups cannot greatly impact the ways that individuals are socialized before coming to college or into contact with their groups. It is nearly impossible to alter the influence of parents and family in the recruitment process, other than perhaps framing

posters and flyers in a way that will remind individuals of their parents' or families' own progressive history of involvement.

By creating contacts in schools and by providing teachers with information about upcoming events and classroom-ready materials, groups may improve the ability of K-12 teachers or college professors to influence their students. Additionally, getting involved in high schools through projects, events, helping to start groups, and speaking in classrooms can also increase early interest and involvement in an issue. At the university, members can have an impact in the classroom by making class announcements about their groups or an upcoming event. These tactics can positively affect recruitment.

(2)The role of religion. For some, religion played a role as an influence in their childhood, and continues for others as a part of their identity. Religion is difficult to strategize around because people fall on both ends of the spectrum; individuals who became interested in social justice issues through their religion (Downton and Wehr 1998), and those who felt confined and constrained by the weight of religion in their lives.

In order to attract the most members, information gained during interviews suggests that, since many progressive organizations are prominently secular, there should be some space made for the acknowledgment of religion in the creation and continuation of one's social consciousness. Forging networks between religious youth organizations and

progressive organizations may allow for religious youth to see more than just the service component of social problems, but other, more structural ways to solve social problems.

(3) Group appeal versus group issue. In many cases, individuals got involved in a group without prior interest in or concern for the particular issues that the group works on. There were some members in each group who spoke of having no prior knowledge of the issue. This dispels assumptions that those involved have had prior interest and concern for the issue at hand, and calls for a more complete understanding of how the recruitment process works. Individuals with no prior got involved through microstructural recruitment factors such as formal recruitment attempts and informal word-of-mouth networking (Snow et al. 1980), which not only alerted individuals to the existence of the issue, but also conveyed an appeal for joining the group.

For SLAC and the ISO this is understandable, as labor and Socialist histories are not frequently discussed in high school curricula. In this way, it is not only the issue itself, but also how individuals hear about the issue and the work that is being done around it that determines potential involvement. Thus, student organizations may need to focus not only on increasing the number of individuals exposed to the group through recruiting attempts, but also on the attractiveness and appeal of the group itself. This is in line with Snow et al., who mention that "the 'whys' or 'reasons' for joining arise out of the recruitment process itself" (1980: 799).

(4) The effectiveness of group recruitment strategies. Recruitment tactics that are employed by the group in question are not necessarily the ways in which the present members initially became involved. Often, recruitment strategies become over-used and are not evaluated for their effectiveness, leading to their continued use even if they are unsuccessful. For example, SLAC members cited preference for getting new members involved through campaign work, while in actuality, most were being recruited through informal word-of-mouth discussions. Many members of the ISO spoke of the benefits of recruiting out of existing movement organizations, though this tactic alienated more people from the group than it attracted. This underscores the need for looking more closely at the actual histories of organizational members, and re-evaluating recruiting strategies as needed.

One generally under-recognized recruitment tactic was that of networking and person-to person contact. While participants often attributed successful recruitment to more formal strategies, many members initially became involved through informal word-of-mouth communication. Participants spoke of how they met a member of the group through another group they were in, from their workplace, from a class, from a group of friends, or from their dorm floor. This fits in with the microstructural theory approach, which regards networking as a successful recruitment tool (Snow et al. 1980; Klandermans and Oegema 1987; Klandermans 1993; McAdam and Paulson 1993). A practical application of this finding requires that group

members should always be ready and willing to talk about the group with others, and invite them to participate.

Whether word-of-mouth and network connections work because they adequately carry information about a student organization and its upcoming events (Klandermans and Oegema 1987), or whether the connections between the individuals are strong enough for advice to be trusted (McAdams and Paulson 1993) is beyond the scope of this research. In any case, spreading information through personal connections and other networks is a strategy that was successful in recruiting a portion of those interviewed, and is a no-cost approach to recruitment that should not be ignored.

(5) Combining formal and informal recruitment strategies. When applicable, mixing formal and informal recruitment strategies may yield positive results. For example, the ISO's newspaper prompts members go out on weekly newspaper sales. While selling the *Socialist Worker*, members distribute literature framed by the ideology of the ISO (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1997). Additionally, ISO members are physically present to make one-on one-contact with prospective members, thereby prompting discussion and debate. In this way, even if the individual chooses not to buy the paper, they may still walk away with a positive view of the organization and something to think about. This approach could be applied to other organizations whose members are willing to interact and have discussions with prospective members.

(6) Current events. Making connections between issues of the group, and international and national events, often attracts people to a group who had particular interest in a large-scale issue. For example, many individuals who had strong feelings regarding the election of President Bush, September 11th, the war on Afghanistan or the war on Iraq felt that they needed to do something and got involved with organizations that spoke to that issue and had some solutions in mind. So, whether a group is environmental, Socialist, labor-oriented, etc., there are always connections to be made to broader issues, which may attract members. This strategy combines a bit of the "political process approach" (Tarrow 1998) with the "framing approach" (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford 1997). By framing macro-structural events in a way that adequately captures the feelings and frustrations of individuals, a rationale for acting and getting involved can be presented.

(7) Action expectations. My research has shown that the characteristics or dynamics of a group influence involvement. The biggest areas for consideration are whether the group is perceived to be "active" and "effective," and whether individuals feel that there is a space available for them to become responsible for an aspect of an action or event. This is very much connected to Klandermans' (1993) dimension of "action orientation." Three orientations are significant: *value* orientation (employed by the ISO), which emphasizes the goals and ideology of the group; *power* orientation

(used by SLAC), which emphasizes exerting influence and power; and *participation* orientation (used by the SSC), which focuses on the individual benefits of participation. Klandermans stated that "depending on their action orientation, movements appeal to different aspects of the motivational dynamics of participation" (1993:389). Thus, for each type of orientation, various types of participation and perceived rewards of participation are expected.

When group strategies are being successfully implemented, the level of time commitment and the strategy and tactics of the group will become secondary. If individuals see that some tactics they wouldn't have used or participated in are working, it is easier for them to follow that strategy. Thus, it is important for a group to convey how active and effective they are in order to convince individuals of their strategy.

Once a new person joins a group, he or she needs to become engaged with it somehow. Granted, some come to learn in the beginning and are content to observe the workings of the group. Though members may initially join to educate themselves, many participants later became frustrated because they didn't feel as though there was anything they could do or that they weren't needed in the group. Thus, the suggestion to progressive groups is to pay special attention to how individuals can see the good work that is being done and how, new people, once they attend an event or meeting, can become personally involved.

(8) Barriers versus benefits to participation. In any group, the barriers to participation must be outweighed by the positive attributes of the organization (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). For any group, individuals are members participate because, for them, the benefits and rewards of affiliation with that group outweigh the barriers. Thus, it is important for an organization's members to listen to each other's criticisms of the organization. With this knowledge, the group can work to either reduce the barriers that are making it more difficult or less pleasant for people to participate (Klandermans and Oegema 1987), or increase the attractions and positive incentives of the group that members enjoy (Hirsch 1990). This will increase retention and strengthen long-term involvement.

CLOSING REMARKS

In this paper I endeavored to explore the ways in which progressive student organizations can grow both larger and stronger through certain recruitment and retention strategies. My findings suggest that while varied approaches taken by different groups can yield successful results, the strategies undertaken by each can be strengthened by studying others. Thus, I encourage activists, as well as academics, to continue the relationship between sociological research and practical application in the activist setting. If both groups step out of their prescribed boundaries, the process of making social change may move a little faster.

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