

TOWARDS AN ECOPEDAGOGY
STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS, UNIVERSITY POLITICS AND STUDENT
EXPERIENCES AT THE NEXUS OF EDUCATION AND ACTION

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Abstract

Non-profit environmental organizations on post-secondary campuses provide both practical services and unique educational opportunities for students while also contributing to broader community well-being. These organizations function as progressive social movement actors, advancing sustainability and justice goals through a wide array of activities: DIY skill-sharing (e.g., bike repair, gardening), waste reduction (e.g., free stores, refurbishing old bikes), community economics (e.g., free food distribution, item lending), and social enterprise (e.g., fair trade cafés, cooperative grocery initiatives).

Sitting at the nexus of these social movements and education, these organizations cultivate engaged citizen-activists, equipping students with skills, values, and experiences that shaping their future careers, political engagement and community involvement. In doing so, they challenge dominant capitalist narratives and demonstrate what sustainable alter- or post-capitalist futures might look like. Their existence, however, presents a challenge to the neo-liberal educational institution, whose curriculum and programs also cultivate students who are in turn responsible for much of the world's environmental degradation and economic inequity.

This dissertation examines student-involved environmental organizations within that context. It integrates my fifteen years of experience as a campus-based environmental activist with a historiography of campus environmental initiatives in Canada, a national baseline survey of staff, executives, and volunteers, and in-depth interviews with twenty-two participants. Through this combination of lived experience, empirical data, and theoretical engagement with social movement and educational scholarship, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of how these organizations operate and the impacts they generate.

The goals of this study were:

(1) to understand student-involved environmental non-profit organizations' current situation (on a macro and micro level), including the socio-political contexts they reside in, and provide recommendations to ensure these organizations have the resources, knowledge, support and structures to:

- (a) be as effective as possible at creating and sustaining environmental change;
 - (b) succeed in delivering high-quality and transformative educational experiences for these student-activists;
- (2) to understand and improve the educational aspects of member-volunteer participation with these organizations and how the current socio-political situation of these organizations impacts the educational outcomes for member-volunteers.

The research concludes that student-involved environmental organizations are central drivers of sustainability and social justice in the university setting, and in the development of students into engaged citizens. These organizations improve affordability, strengthen community, and provide transformative educational experiences that formal curricula rarely match. At the same time, they face persistent structural challenges, including precarious funding, space insecurity, and political pressures from both university administrations and broader political shifts toward austerity. The evidence suggests that their resilience depends on supportive institutional frameworks, reliable funding mechanisms, and stronger recognition of their role as educational actors rather than peripheral clubs. More broadly, this work reinforces the need to reimagine universities not only as sites of credentialing but as incubators of democratic practice, collective agency, and sustainability innovation. Student-involved environmental organizations offer more than services; they model viable alternatives to the unsustainability of late-modern capitalism and train the future leaders and engaged citizens who will carry those alternatives forward.

Keywords

- Active Learning
- Adult Education
- Bildung
- Campus Activism
- Public Interest Research Groups
- Social Movements
- Student Organizations
- Student-involved Environmental Organizations
- Student Politics
- Student Unions

Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to the late Bryn Greer-Wootten, a friend and retired professor who I met through the Institute for Social Research. His sage mentorship help guide me in the research design for this dissertation, as well as other research I was engaged in through my activism and work. Rest in peace my friend!

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Preamble

My experience with formal education settings has been frustrating at times – moments from elementary school right to my Ph.D. program. I have always loved learning and consider myself an autodidact, but the aspects of rigidity in formal education led me to go down my own path. For a more detailed account of my experiences, I encourage you to read my article *Unschooling and How I Became Liberated: The Teenage Liberation Handbook, Quitting School and Getting a Real Life and Education* in the Journal of Unschooling, Volume 11, Issue 21 (2017). Both as a teacher and student, my biggest frustration with formal education is the rigidity – the measuring (and grade curving) of learning, academic knowledge transmission limited to formal writing in British English, intellectual silos, etc. I find it deeply strange, having attended graduate student defences and read theses and dissertations, that many are highly critical of the post-secondary institution; yet these institutions resist change. As it stands, one can spend significant time advocating for changes or accommodations within the institution – I have often felt I have spent considerable time asserting my agency as a student-citizen, such as with my activism on affordable student housing or environmental sustainability.

I am not content with how common it is for the knowledge contained in dissertations to sit on shelves collecting dust, unread and unused by society. Besides engaging in knowledge mobilization activities, such as research summaries, media coverage, and presentations, I want my dissertation utilized which means making the format accessible to those who are primarily interested in reading my dissertation. My audience will primarily be students interested in environmental sustainability and/or student organizations. I want them to know all the ideas that inform the topics I explore in my dissertation. Further, I want them to discover all the fantastic examples of student-involved environmental organizations, rather than just leaving them with a tertiary analysis and conclusions I came to. I want them to discover the knowledge and ideas in a similar order as I discovered them, as I feel this is the most logical approach for the reader to understand my conclusions. I want to empower them as close as I can to the full breadth of knowledge that I have on the subject so they may come to their own conclusions – whether they agree or disagree with my analysis and conclusions.

1.0 Introduction

As an environmentalist and educator, my concern for the negative impacts of late-modern capitalist society on people and the environment has motivated my work. It has been my impetus to understand the conditions in which young people take action towards environmental and social change and how their efforts can be successful and impactful. This includes attempting to look at the world in an honest and realistic way, and identifying pragmatic ways to influence and have an impact—while holding the line on the necessity of action to address the environmental crisis.

In this dissertation, I explore my experiences as a young adult, and that of other young adults, in the context of being students at post-secondary educational institutions and the environmental non-profit organizations and projects they participate in. I focus on our experiences with organizations and projects with a long-term focus and are sustaining environmental projects. I find these student projects fascinating as they can offer us alternative exchange and social relations to that of late-modern capitalism and provide a glimpse of what a post-capitalist or alter-capitalist society could look like.

In his famous 2009 book, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, author Mark Fisher comments that “The slogan ‘it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism’ has been attributed to Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek.”¹ Canadian sociologist Max Haiven expands on this concept further in his book *Crisis of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity and the Commons*, contending that capitalism has ‘colonized’ our imagination.² Modern political discourse has become dominated by neo-liberal capitalism, and any policy debates have been framed within that context—absent of any ideas outside of this context.³ Marxist Antonio Gramsci noted in his observations on hegemony that “...the old is dying and the new cannot be born.”⁴ We

¹ Mark Fisher. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* London, UK: Zero Books. 2009. Pg. 2.

² Max Haiven. *Crisis of Imagination, Crises of Power: Capitalism, Creativity and the Commons*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood. 2014.

³ This concept, known as the Overton Window, defines what range of policies is socially acceptable to the mainstream populace of a country at a given time. Ideas outside of what is perceived as socially and politically acceptable are deemed either unrealistic, too utopian, unworkable, dangerous, or mad. For more information on the Overton Window, please see: “A Brief Explanation of the Overton Window.” Midland, MI: Mackinac Center for Public Policy. <<https://www.mackinac.org/OvertonWindow>>.

⁴ Antonio Gramsci. “Wave of Materialism and Crisis of Authority.” *Selections From The Prison Notebooks*. New York, NY: International Publishers, 1971 (1930). Pp. 275-6.

struggle to imagine the future, let alone shape it in new and imaginative ways. Media theorist Marshall McLuhan often remarked, “We drive into the future using only our rear-view mirror.”⁵ Many modern critics, such as Daniel Singer⁶, Tom Moylan⁷, and Russell Jacoby⁸, have argued that the absence or loss of progressive utopianism has contributed to modern political apathy and hopelessness. The great frustration in this ‘crisis of imagination’ lies in how limiting it is to human and societal potential, regardless of any particular ideology. The dominant ideology always aims to limit alternatives—from the God-given right of monarchs to rule, to modern neoliberal capitalism.⁹

If we cannot imagine a world beyond capitalism's endless consumption and growth, how will we, as a society, ever get there? In this way, environmental action and education might offer us an escape—a way to see alternatives beyond the narrow and limiting worldview perpetuated by the ruling class. I believe that the work led by these post-secondary students offers hope to others through education and demonstrating alternative ways of living and interaction beyond the unsustainability of late-modern capitalism. Their “nowtopian” projects aim “to produce a different way of life... [and] to make the world we want to live in now.”¹⁰ C.L.R. James, a Trinidadian Marxist, theory of “future in the present”¹¹ asserted that we should not wait for revolutions or political parties for change; but that transformational and emancipatory possibilities exist in everyday practices, community organizing and cultural production—through these activities people can begin to recognize the new society in the present and thus begin to move towards alternative, more idealized futures. The existence of such alternatives helps

⁵ Donald Theall. The Medium is the Rear View Mirror: Understanding McLuhan. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1971.

⁶ Daniel Singer. Whose Millennium?: Theirs or Ours? New York, NY: Monthly Review Press. 1999.

⁷ Tom Moylan. Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination. Oxford, UK: 1986.

⁸ Russell Jacoby. The End Of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy. New York, NY: Basic Books. 1999.

⁹ Many academics in the past century have recognized and commented on this phenomenon of dominant ideologies reinforcing itself and neutralizing dissent by delegitimizing alternative ideas—these include Louis Althusser, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Noam Chomsky, Michael Foucault, amongst others.

¹⁰ Chris Carlsson. Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners Are Inventing the Future Today! Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008. p. 52.

¹¹ Geert Dhondt. “Econ-Atrocity. C.L.R. James: The Future in the Present.” Centre for Popular Economics. Amherst, MA: Centre for Popular Economics, 2004. <<http://www.populareconomics.org/2004/04/econ-atrocity-special-history-of-thought-series-clr-james-the-future-in-the-present/>>.

spark the imagination and encourages us to ask: What would a world that alters or evolves beyond our current late-capitalist economic system look like?

Examining the future from a more mainstream, alter-capitalist perspective (instead of a post-capitalist one), many futurists hold views of the future that are not entirely dissimilar from anti-capitalists—many hold the belief that technology will solve the climate crisis, reduce poverty, and eliminate the need for most work. Canadian science educator Bob McDonald argues in his 2022 book *The Future is Now* that the technology exists now to solve the climate crisis.¹² Further, many liberal economists have struggled to answer the question of increasing automatization and unemployment: what will we do with our free time? Economist and writer Jeremy Rifkin in his 1995 book *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era* argues that we need to grow and support the third sector,¹³ allowing for more community service and volunteer opportunities.¹⁴ Similarly, economics professor and writer Daniel Susskind, argues in his 2020 book *A World Without Work* that government must provide greater supports for the unemployed to ensure they find meaning in their spare time, although also identifying risks, such as American men's aversion to so-called “pink collar” education and care work.¹⁵

While I believe that there are intelligent and caring people on various sides of these debates—about the way our economy works, the environmental crisis, and the future of work—there are some fundamental differences. These can be summarized into four major debates:

[1] **An economy built on endless consumption and exploitation** versus the need to alter our economic systems to address the environmental crisis and growing inequality;

[2] **That technological innovation and adaptation alone will solve the environmental crisis** versus the recognition that further intervention is needed to adopt more environmentally favourable behaviours and curb consumption;

¹² Bob McDonald. *The Future Is Now: Solving the Climate Crisis with Today's Technologies*. Toronto, ON: Penguin Canada, 2022.

¹³ Third sector refers to organizations that belong neither to the public sector (i.e. the state) nor to the private sector (for-profit private enterprise).

¹⁴ Jeremy Rifkin. *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-market Era*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

¹⁵ Daniel Susskind. *A World Without Work: Technology, Automation, and How We Should Respond*. New York, NY: Henry Holt & Co., 2020.

[3] **Ownership and determination of how we use resources and land.** This debate involves two key aspects. The first concerns land: who should own and control it. Land, as a limited resource, is central to the speculative and pyramid-like nature of capitalism. A higher proportion of individual income now goes toward housing, while less is spent on other expenses like food.¹⁶ This distribution of income toward a speculative asset, rather than towards productive investment and labour, negatively impacts the quality of material goods produced and leads to a less equal distribution of wealth. Many argue that landlordism doesn't produce anything of value and is merely parasitic on the rest of society. Critics, however, contend that land ownership is essential for good stewardship, particularly considering the phenomenon of the tragedy of the commons.

The second aspect of this debate concerns raw resources. Similar questions arise about who should own these resources, how their usage should be determined, and how the wealth created from resource extraction should be distributed. For example, one argument is that we should leave fossil fuels in the ground, both for environmental reasons and to ensure future generations have access to this resource, should they need it.

Solutions to these issues have been proposed by both the far-left (advocating for the redistribution of ownership) and third-way political movements. The Catholic-rooted Distributism movement, for instance, advocates for small-scale, local ownership of land and raw resources. Georgism, on the other hand, proposes a land value tax to prevent real estate speculation and to avoid penalizing productive labor or investment. Both movements have significantly influenced Green politics;

[4] **The future of work.** There seems to be more unity on this issue than on the previous ones. The remaining debate revolves around the degree of government intervention required to help those without work survive economically (e.g., through universal basic income) and find meaning in their lives outside of employment, as increasing automation leads to greater unemployment.

These debates are important, but they are shaped by a fundamental power imbalance—with the rich and powerful, largely supported by societal institutions like

¹⁶ United States Bureau of Labor Statistics. 100 Years of U.S. Consumer Spending: Data for the Nation, New York City, and Boston. U.S. Department of Labor, 2006, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/100-years-of-u-s-consumer-spending.pdf>

corporations and mass media, on one side, and those who feel disempowered and unheard, such as young people and those in the global south, on the other.

I believe that student-involved environmental organizations can provide youth with a means for organizing and communicating their voices and options, which often differ from the dominant discourses in society. Further, I believe these student-involved environmental organizations can offer us an alternative to traditional education—a more effective form of organizational, environmental and activist education—education as a means of taking action and participating as good citizens in society. Students are “ideally located within both environmental movements and formal educational institutions, thereby bridging education and action.”¹⁷ Formal environmental education in a post-secondary setting (e.g. a class taught by a professor) contextualizes the environmental crisis at best within the context of capitalism and environmental careerism, and at worse as a tragedy that, given the current political and social climate, is an inevitable disaster barring some miracle. This impending disaster, on the minds of so many, has resulted in the modern phenomena of ecological (or climate) grief. This ‘grief’ is correlated to higher levels of hopelessness, which results in less action being taken.^{18,19} Many critics on the left will argue that solutions to late-modern capitalism’s environmental and social crises cannot be solved within the confines of the current system.^{20,21} These student-involved eco-organizations help show us alternatives to the late-modern capitalism through lived communities of practice on the edges of capitalism—or what might otherwise be described as part of the social economy (charities, non-profit organizations, co-operative organizations, community-based volunteer organizations). The learning engaged in through these student-involved organizations is hopeful, engaging and action-oriented. Through one’s lived experience with these organizations, one quickly learns what actions,

¹⁷ Elizabeth Lange and Aaron Chubb. “Critical Environmental Adult Education in Canada: Student Environmental Activism.” New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 124 (2009): 61-72.

¹⁸ Andrew McKinley. “Hope in a Hopeless Age: Environmentalism’s Crisis.” The Environmentalist, 28.3 (Aug. 2008), pp. 319–326.

¹⁹ Jay D. Hmielowski, Rebecca Donway and Meredith Y. Wang. “Environmental Risk Information Seeking: The Differential Roles of Anxiety and Hopelessness.” Environmental Communication, 13.7 (Oct. 2019): pp. 894–908.

²⁰ see discussions in Wolfgang Sachs. Planet Dialectics - Explorations in Environment and Development. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 1999.

²¹ see discussions in Kris Forkasiewicz. “Ecosocialism.” Capitalism Nature Socialism Journal. 12 March 2015. <<http://www.cnsjournal.org/ecosocialism/>>.

messaging and organizational structures are effective or ineffective. I also believe it is revealing that progressive student organizations are regularly targeted by well-organized and well-funded political efforts from the right wing over issues such as divestment, which I will explore in greater depth.

The environmental crisis has us on a precipice—one on hand, as a society, we can continue to rely on an economic system built on infinite growth on a finite planet and keep consuming, or we can change. Socio-political change is a complex topic. There are many actors, from nation states, intergovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, social movement organizations, mass media and many others. Those with power and wealth will not easily give up the policies and structures that benefit them financially and will continually undermine efforts to directly address the environmental crisis if it goes against their financial interests. Many in the capitalist class are hoping that technology alone will be our saviour, not wanting government regulation (longevity and quality of products over planned obsolescence, manufacturer take-back recycling programs, polluter pay programs, etc.). In the interim, we see efforts emphasizing individual behaviour change (buying organic, carbon credits, ethical consumption, etc.), in the hopes of capitalizing off new ‘green’ markets. The crisis, however, is here and now. Habitat destruction, biodiversity collapse, climate change and pollution cannot wait for technological solutions alone—solutions need to be political and social as well. Young people recognize the problems and want solutions, but those who wield power are reluctant to enact sweeping changes that majority of young people want to address inequality and the environmental crisis. This is why the work of these student environmentalists is so important—they challenge these narratives by showing us what a sustainable society could look like and push us towards actual solutions that can be implemented now. They are citizen-activists who are developing the skillsets to challenge those with power in democratic societies and implement what will be a sustainable society.

In my dissertation I take what I define as a broad pragmatic progressive stance.²²

²² While political ideology can be defined and compared in many ways, the most commonly used is the left-right spectrum, which can be explained in the simplest terms as those seeking progress and equality versus those seeking the preservation of power and tradition. I define the progressive left as seeking to advance society by addressing inequality, discrimination and injustice, and the conservative right in opposition,

My stance is rooted in the belief that the status quo capitalist economic system is environmentally unsustainable, and that democratic governments have been weakened by corporate special interests and neo-liberalism to the point of inaction (or inadequate action) on the environment. I believe that an alter-capitalist or post-capitalist²³ economic order is not only necessary to save the environment and will inevitably occur.

seeking to preserve the status quo (or revive a ‘nostalgic’ past—be it real or imagined) — including preserving the economic and political systems that benefit those in power and with wealth, and the current dominate cultural and religious traditions of the ethnic/religious majority in a nation state. There is obviously much more complexity to people and their political values—many values, such as communitarianism, volunteerism, and advancing greater economic opportunity—can be found on both the progressive-left and conservative-right. Where they differ the greatest is on (1) our economic system and policies, and related to it, the role of politics in society and the economy; (2) societal values, with the progressive left believing that ‘acceptance’, ‘love’ and ‘rationality’ should triumph over perceived nationalism, bigotry and superstition. I recognize that as individuals we all have views that don’t fit neatly into these boxes of left-right, and that politics are temporary and ever-changing coalitions of groups in society looking to advance their own interests (e.g. business interests in each economic sector, labour unions, religious politics, etc.). I expect we are due for a political realignment which would impact environmental sustainability—be it for better or worse.

²³ I believe it is important that I define capitalism. Capitalism has become one of those muddled terms that means vastly different things to different people. I define capitalism as the ability to accumulate capital on a scale well-beyond the needs of a single individual or household. I believe it is important to remind people that capitalism is not business itself. Capitalism is not commerce itself. Capitalism is not trade itself. Business, commerce and trade are essential to the functioning of any economy, be it capitalist or socialist. Capitalism is speculation—the idea being that the rich need to be encouraged to spend (invest), rather than hoard their wealth. The rich are incentivised to invest and loan their money with the reward collecting dividends and interest (usury), along with inflation eroding the value of stored wealth. This system is ethically justified by the neo-liberal establishment premised on that the rich know best how to spend and invest their money, and that would generate economic benefits. As someone who grew up in a fundamentalist Christian household, I have always felt that this billionaire level of wealth is not only morally disdainful but should be made illegal. Just because you set-up a system (e.g. a storefront, a supply chain, a factory, a sales funnel, etc.) doesn’t mean you should benefit to such a level of disproportionately that others in society suffer. Capitalism is specifically criticized for the unfettered accumulation of wealth (which creates inequality and wealth disparity) and that those who have controlled, gained or inherited capital can gain much greater amounts of wealth than workers. They rent out their capital instead of being productive members of society and contributing through work. This compounds the problem, as the rich get richer and hold ever greater percentages of overall wealth, resulting in an ever-increasing neo-feudal society. The rich subsequently use their wealth to undermine our democratic institutions to preserve the system and enact/enforce rules that allow them to accumulate wealth well beyond their needs. This includes undermining human rights, labour, and the environment. Capitalism cannot survive the way it is. Wealth accumulates at the top as monopolies, duopolies, or oligopolies are formed in key industries. Capitalism is structured as a pyramid scheme which depends on the confidence of capitalist members of a society have in the mechanisms of a capitalist economy such as currency value, property value and financial markets. Much of this confidence is placed in debt. Personal and government debt is at record levels in most countries in the world. When too much wealth accumulates at the top of the pyramid and too many at the bottom of the pyramid are trapped in debt-servitude, such a pyramid scheme collapses as confidence is lost when people are no longer able to pay back debts or purchase assets at the inflated prices. Capitalism is essentially a form of speculation and gambling that fails to recognize true levels of market demand and the value of assets. The added difficulty is supply-and-demand of land and non-renewable resources within a planet with an ever-growing population. Throughout history land ownership when concentrated in the hands of a few has been detrimental to society and long-term economic prosperity. Land ownership reform and taxation reform, such as those proposed in Georgism and Distributism, would also need to be

My broad progressive-left stance also has significant criticisms for segments of the anti-capitalist left. I believe that leadership is needed to face the threat, and strongly oppose non-hierarchical systems as being ineffective at scale, prone to infighting, and vulnerable to state and bad actor hijacking. The far-left broadly ignores the myriad of research from a variety of fields (psychology, sociology, statistics, organizational studies, etc.) on the necessity of leadership structures to achieve impacts at scale. Anything at scale will naturally develop such structures to reduce organizational stress and achieve greater results.²⁴ This argument is not to legitimize or delegitimize non-hierarchical organizations, but an assertion of the agency we have as individuals to join and participate voluntarily in whatever kind of organization we desire to, understanding that all organizational structures have benefits, drawbacks, and limitations. I believe that participation in the capitalist economy through social enterprise and volunteer involvement with existing social institutions are legitimate forms of activism, social participation, and even social protest. Some on the far-left criticize certain kinds of efforts of participation in civic society, including criticizing volunteerism, the ‘non-profit industrial complex’ and social entrepreneurship. Volunteerism is criticized for placing the focus on individualism (similar to how capitalism frames consumer choice, placing an emphasis on individual responsibility) rather than government solutions, as a replacement for paid workers, and reproducing problematic relations between those helping and those being helped that perpetuates inequality.^{25,26,27} I disagree, seeing volunteerism as individuals acting on what agency they have. Power is never static; it ebbs and flows

considered to prevent wealth hoarding. Capitalism has been forced to change before (e.g. labour unions, stricter regulations) and it will need to change again or be replaced with a new system. Technology will be a game changer, potentially allowing society to replace our economic system with one that is post-scarcity and post-currency, perhaps even akin to the socialist utopianism seen in the Star Trek universe (see Treconomics by French economist Manu Saadia for detailed analysis of the economics of the Star Trek fictional universe). Whether we alter capitalism (with greater taxation and stricter government regulation against monopolies and unlimited wealth accumulation), capitalism collapses on its own, or as a society we make the democratic decision to reshape our economic system, or some combination of the above, change is necessary and coming.

²⁴ Cedric Perret, Emma Hart, and Simon T. Powers. “From Disorganized Equality to Efficient Hierarchy: How Group Size Drives the Evolution of Hierarchy in Human Societies.” Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 287.1928, (2020), article 20200693. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2020.0693>

²⁵ Jon Dean. “Volunteering, the market, and neoliberalism.” People, Place and Policy, 9.2 (2015): 139-148.

²⁶ Elsa Lilja Gunnarsdottir. Volunteering in the Neoliberal Subjectivity: Repacking Problematic Narratives of the Past. Dissertation. Durham, NC: Duke University, 2016.

²⁷ Dimitrios Theodossopoulos. “Philanthropy or solidarity? Ethical dilemmas about humanitarianism in crisis-afflicted Greece.” Social Anthropology, 24.2 (2016): 167-184.

across history and geography. The vast majority of people just want to be able to live in peace, security and have their basic needs met—not engaged in a revolutionary struggle that might come to dominate their entire life and never happen. At best, society can gradually improve over time through education and effort—by putting limits on how power is structured and enacted, and by ensuring that both individual and collective agency are protected.

The social economy (the economy outside of private companies and government—NGOs, cooperatives, etc.) and solidarity economy (a series of experiments for a post-capitalist or alter-capitalist future) both overlap on having social missions, meeting social needs, and being embedded in the economy within society.²⁸ Criticisms of non-profits (and the third sector) include redirecting activist energies into career-focused modes of organizing, allowing corporations to direct attention away from their exploitative and destructive practices, the use of NGOs to control social movements and dissent, and non-profits fulfilling the role of government (part of a neo-liberal agenda of austerity and social service cuts).^{29,30,31} While I agree there is always room for critique and improvement, I see non-profit organizations as people acting within their agency and being able to scale solutions within the system we are all stuck living in. These social economy organizations seek to “include those who are excluded from the labour market and wider social relations.”³² We are all human beings, flawed and with limitations—I believe the solidarity economy concept works well to recognize this and that we are experimenting, learning, getting better, and learning to balance the many forces and challenges of organizing at scale—creating better organizations, structures, and cultures over time. Many NGOs developed out of activists growing tired of volunteering and

²⁸ Michelle Williams. ‘The Solidarity Economy and Social Transformation’. In The Solidarity Economy Alternative: Emerging Theory and Practice, edited by V. Satgar, 37– 63. Pietermaritzburg, ZA: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014. Page 50-51.

²⁹ See discussions in INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Eds.) The Revolution Will Not be Funded. Boston, MA: South End Press, 2009.

³⁰ Jennifer Ceema Samimi. “Funding America’s Nonprofits: The Nonprofit Industrial Complex’s Hold on Social Justice.” Columbia Social Work Review, 8.1 (2010): 17-25.

³¹ B. Mitchell Evans and John Shields. Neoliberal Restructuring and the Third Sector: Reshaping Governance, Civil Society and Local Relations. Working Paper. Toronto, ON: Ryerson University Centre for Voluntary Sector Studies. 13 July 2000. <<https://www.ryerson.ca/~cvss/WP13.pdf>>.

³² Michelle Williams. ‘The Solidarity Economy and Social Transformation’. In The Solidarity Economy Alternative: Emerging Theory and Practice, edited by V. Satgar, 37– 63. Pietermaritzburg, ZA: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014. Page 46.

becoming successful at organizing to build something more sustainable long-term. Far-left activists too often fall into dogmatism, internal conflicts, and the alienation of others whom they chastise for acting outside their preferred methods or structures—together, these tendencies are a recipe for failure. Social enterprise is similarly criticized, primarily as being a vague neo-liberal business concept that neutralizes more radical possibilities.^{33,34} Jarrodi, Byrne and Bureau interviews with social entrepreneurs led to classifying their political ideologies into one of three categories: anti-statist, reformist and neo-liberal.³⁵ Dey and Steyaert believe that “social entrepreneurship must not be judged according to what it says but to whether it creates the conditions for novel articulations and enactments of social entrepreneurship.”³⁶ Miller argues that social enterprises can act “as a ‘fifth column’ by influencing from within the system.”³⁷ Similarly, I believe that the social enterprise concept is emerging and can be shaped (or détourned)³⁸ towards alter-capitalist and post-capitalist ends.

I am focused on positive movement-building and allyship—believing in the old adage *those who say it cannot be done shouldn’t be interrupting those who are doing it*.³⁹ An environmentally and financially sustainable social enterprise such as The Tea Room, founded by famous Canadian entrepreneur Michele Romanow when she was a student at Queen’s University, is just as valid as the anti-capitalist Carleton Food Collective (at Carleton University), that received a fee-levy to distribute free and cheap food to students and activist events in the Ottawa area. When we were launching Regenesiis, we approached OPIRG for help, however, at an OPIRG York board meeting they expressed an opposition to us forming—this idea to deny the collective agency of others out of their

³³ Pascal Dey and Chris Steyaert. “Social entrepreneurship: Critique and the radical enactment of the social.” *Social Enterprise Journal*, 8.2 (2012): 90-107.

³⁴ Stephen Miller. “Getting political: Marxism and social entrepreneurship.” *Medium*. 21 November 2015. <<https://medium.com/@milski360/getting-political-marxism-and-social-entrepreneurship-67ce45beb334>>.

³⁵ Halima Jarrodi, Janice Byrne and Sylvain Bureau. “A political ideology lens on social entrepreneurship motivations.” *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 31.7-8 (2019): 583-604.

³⁶ Dey and Steyaert, *op cit*. Pp. 91.

³⁷ Stephen Miller, *op cit*.

³⁸ Détournement is the Letterist/Situationist concept of appropriating the concepts and images of capitalism and authority and turning those concepts against them (see *Détournement as Negation and Prelude* by Ken Knabb for a detailed history on the development and popularization of the concept by Gil J. Wolman, Guy Debord and others).

³⁹ Garson O’Toole. “People Who Say It Cannot Be Done Should Not Interrupt Those Who Are Doing It.” *Quote Investigator*. N.d. <<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2015/01/26/doing/>>.

own desire for ‘ideological purity’ seemed incredibly naïve.⁴⁰ We cannot escape capitalism—we are compelled to live and survive in the system. I find hard-left criticism towards those who choose to participate in the system in ways they know how (i.e. volunteerism, NGOs and social enterprise versus social movements) unproductive and naïve intellectual elitism. This should not be an either/or preposition, but rather a matter of acknowledging the lived realities of people. These are the only ways that many people know or have access to civic participation and agency.^{41,42,43} Instead of viewing volunteerism with disdain, the critics on the left should embrace the critical educational possibilities that can be offered through engagement with non-profits and social enterprises.

Macro (global and national) level economic and political factors impact the micro level (university politics, inter-organizational relations and intraorganizational culture). Universities face creeping neo-liberalism and austerity—which results in tuition increases as the government portion of funding for post-secondary education is shrunk. Neo-liberal university budgeting also impacts student organizations’ access to space, with these organizations often losing space or being forced to pay for space that was previously free. Outside (right-wing) political forces seek to influence and fight back against a perceived ‘leftist’ control of academic discourses, free speech on campus and control of student union locals. Campus radical leftism serves as an echo-chamber, pushing the left to a

⁴⁰ A bit of irony here is that I would later help save OPIRG York revive themselves between 2020 and 2022, helping to prevent them from losing their levy and closing.

⁴¹ I believe patriarchal and sexist attitudes from highly ideological men play a major role in these prevailing attitudes that both judge and exclude women from political spaces and organizations. Women have additional economic pressures, social expectations and household responsibilities that more limit their time. Men, who have more time and engage in politics at an earlier age, are more likely to be ideologically rigid and lacking appreciation and understanding for the lived realities of women, who might still be developing their political sense. Women are significantly more likely to volunteer, and more women lead more social enterprises versus traditional businesses (see footnotes 38, 39). These differences in gender experience and gender roles play a critical role in the increasing ideological divide between the sexes, with women leaning more left-wing and men more right-wing (see Burn-Murdoch, John. “A New Global Gender Divide Is Emerging.” *Financial Times*, 26 Jan. 2024).

⁴² Women, as a percent of the population, have consistently volunteered significantly more than men—on average about 30% more than men. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Volunteering in the United States, 2015*. Report. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016.

⁴³ While research in this area is only just emerging, what evidence exists shows that women are significantly more likely to start and run social enterprises versus traditional businesses. 42% of social enterprises in the United Kingdom in 2015/2016 were started solely by women. Source: British Council. *Activist to Entrepreneur: The Role of Social Enterprise in Supporting Women’s Empowerment in the UK*. Report. London, UK: British Council, 2017.

more radical extreme that both simultaneously moves the Overton window⁴⁴ to the left amongst most post-secondary students, but also alienates the young without post-secondary education and the older ‘mainstream,’ both within the university administration and outside in broader politics and culture.⁴⁵ These complex economic and political forces at play at the modern university have substantial impacts on student campus environmentalism that I explore in this dissertation.

⁴⁴ See footnote 3.

⁴⁵ An example of this is comedian Bill Maher, host of the HBO talk show Real Time with Bill Maher, who is generally considered to be a moderate progressive or liberal, but who regularly derides student activism and activists.

2.0 Research

2.1 Background

This research occurs within the modern, neo-liberal university. Post-secondary institutions have evolved over time, with the modern university originating from the Humboldtian model of the nineteenth-century.^{46,47} Under this model, universities were conceived as public institutions that served the broader cultural and intellectual development of society rather than narrow economic or state interests. This began to be challenged in the late twentieth-century due to neoliberal economic and political reforms, which has resulted in reduced public funding, increased tuition, partnerships with private industry, and corporate managerial practices.⁴⁸ Critics, such as Henri Giroux, contend that neoliberal approaches increasingly redefine education in terms of economic productivity and human capital development rather than democratic citizenship or critical thought.⁴⁹ These challenges increasingly create educational, campus service and campus life impacts, including impacting student-involved environmental organizations.

Post-secondary institutions are often hotbeds of student activism. For Chomsky and Polk⁵⁰ this is pedagogically important, as “a crucial part of education is coming to understand the world in which we live, and what we can do to make it a better place.” Education is a continuous, lifelong process—a journey, not a destination. Dewey states, “I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.”⁵¹ In this respect, I believe that activists and the social movements they take part in play an important role within democratic society, as they can often set or change the socio-political agenda, while bringing transformational benefits to participants. Contrary to popular perception, “student activism is not limited to resistance; efforts are often

⁴⁶ The Humboldtian model comes from Prussian philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt and his influence on the creation of the University of Berlin as a research university (combining teaching and research). It was deeply influenced by Enlightenment ideas, such as individual autonomy, *bildung* (education as cultivating good citizens), academic freedom and reason.

⁴⁷ Mark Olssen and Michael A. Peters. “Neoliberalism, Higher Education and the Knowledge Economy: From the Free Market to Knowledge Capitalism.” *Journal of Education Policy*, 20.3 (2005), pp. 313–345.

⁴⁸ Olssen and Peters, 2025.

⁴⁹ Henry A. Giroux. *Neoliberalism’s War on Higher Education*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2014.

⁵⁰ Noam Chomsky and L. Polk. *Nuclear War and Environmental Catastrophe*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2013. p. 32.

⁵¹ John Dewey. “My Pedagogic Creed.” *The School Journal*, 54.3 (1897).

made to create exemplars for learning what a sustainable campus and society can look like, from informal learning related to renovating student housing for energy sustainability, campus collective gardens, bicycle co-ops, and Food Not Bombs groups to extensive non-formal education opportunities through conferences, speakers, and workshops.”⁵² Many students would be comfortable to describe themselves as activists, although some shun the term. The term activism is a muddled and contested one. Sociologist Brian Martin states that “activism is not well defined, so different people often have somewhat different ideas of what constitutes activism.”⁵³ Activism can be conceived as any human activity that seeks social, political, economic or environmental change—I define this as progressive activism. There are also reactionary and regressive forms of activism, typically from the right-wing, that seek to preserve the status quo or reverse any social changes gained by progressive activists.

In my study, I use a broad definition of progressive activism, conceiving of volunteerism, educational opportunities, social entrepreneurship and similar activities within social and charitable causes as forms of “student activism.”⁵⁴ Activism can often lead to the creation of initiatives, projects and social enterprises on campus, requiring formal structures and legal recognition in order to receive university permission and meet all legal operational requirements. Such structural factors, such as registration as a non-profit organization, shape the nature of this expression of activism. In addition to focusing on the mission, legal requirements and the acquisition of resources become equally prime concerns. The struggle of social movement organizations obtaining and retaining resources is well documented.⁵⁵ While student environmental organizations are often part of wider social movements, there is a distinctiveness and permanence that campus-based organizations and their initiatives have.

Post-secondary environments are often more progressive and supportive than other places and they offer an abundance of freely available and low-cost resources,

⁵² Elizabeth Lange and Aaron Chubb. “Critical Environmental Adult Education in Canada: Student Environmental Activism.” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 124 (2009): 61-72.

⁵³ Brian Martin. “Activism, Social and Political.” In *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, edited by Anderson and Herr.. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007. 19-27.

⁵⁴ see discussions in Bickford & Reynolds, 2002 and Spanier, 2008.

⁵⁵ B. Edwards and J.D. McCarthy. “Resources and Social Movement Mobilization.” *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by Snow, Soule, and Kriesi. Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004. 116–152.

including space, funding, volunteers and mentors. This allows for the establishment of educational programs and connections with university courses and curriculums. Students themselves often possess passion and idealism for a cause that can serve as a driver for social change.⁵⁶ Post-secondary environments also possess distinctive challenges, including students' lack of experience, turn-over after each graduation, and potentially, infighting within student organizations.⁵⁷ Student-involved environmental organizations have distinctive circumstances, opportunities, and challenges given their social and geographic locations.

Student-involved environmental organizations⁵⁸ significantly involve students in their management (board of directors) and operations (staff and volunteers). These organizations 'nowtopian'⁵⁹ projects present us with alternate possibilities that we can see, touch, interact with, and experience; that can demonstrate alternatives to the ideas of dominant capitalist ideologies (e.g. neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, state capitalism) and change the way we interact with each other—thus allowing us to begin constructing new institutions and realities that are more just, equitable and sustainable. For example, instead of throwing away items or donating them to a thrift store for them to be sold, a free store can demonstrate the gift and sharing economies as alternatives to a reality where everything has a price and can be sold, and if it cannot be sold, it has no value. While all student-involved environmental organization have projects that attempt to challenge and change the ways we think and behave, many interpret their approaches through different ideological lens. The complexity of student-involved environmental organizations cannot be generalized into a single narrative, however, as mentioned in my discussion here, there are many similarities that they all share. Student-involved environmental organizations are significant in leading social change, providing community services, and their contributions to the personal development of those involved with them. They are a social economy response to the failure of markets and government to meet students' needs. These organizations are partially responsible for spreading concepts, such as community DIY bike shops and free stores, to a wider

⁵⁶ Diane Peters. "The hot mess of student activism." *University Affairs*, November 2015, pp. 27-29.

⁵⁷ Peters, *op cit*.

⁵⁸ I will thus forth refer to these organizations as student-involved environmental organizations.

⁵⁹ Carlsson, *op cit*.

audience.⁶⁰ The community services provided help students and community members, while creating a more positive university experience. Well-known individuals such as Ken Dryden^{61,62} (NHL Hall of Fame Goalie and Politician), former federal Minister of the Environment Steven Guilbeault⁶³, Michelle Holland^{64,65} (former Toronto City Councillor), Karen Farbridge^{66,67} (former Mayor of Guelph) and Michele Romanow^{68,69} (Entrepreneur and star of CBC's Dragon's Den) have all participated in these organizations while they were students or recent alumni. These student-involved service organizations, be their purpose environmental or otherwise, can provide a level of real-world leadership, operations and management experience that students cannot otherwise find without entering the workforce. Be their purpose educational, developing good citizens, or providing vital services via a social economy model, these organizations are important and worthy of further study.

2.2 Study Parameters

There has not been significant research on student-involved environmental organizations given the significant numbers of these organizations. A report by Regenesi identified 399 student environmental clubs on Canadian campuses in 2014—these are in

⁶⁰ Michael Kenny, Sayyeda Ebrahim and Seema Syed. Student-Involved Campus Sustainability and Social Justice Initiatives in Canada. Report. Toronto, ON: Regenesi, 2014.

⁶¹ Ken Dryden interned with Ralph Nader's USPIRG organization while attending law school. While interning, he brought together Ontario student union leaders calling for the creation of a provincial-wide PIRG organization.

⁶² Karen Farbridge and Peter Cameron. "The PIRG Power." Alternatives Journal, 24.3 (Summer 1998): 22+.

⁶³ Steven Guilbeault is a co-founder of community-supported agriculture organization Équiterre, which originally started as ASEED (Action for Solidarity, Equity, Environment and Development) with the support of local PIRGs/GRIPs in Montreal.

⁶⁴ Michelle Holland (formerly Berardinetti) founded a OPIRG animal rights working group while attending the University of Windsor. She served as a Toronto City Councillor from 2010-2018.

⁶⁵ Toronto District School Board. L'Amoreaux Model United Nations Assembly Program. 9 May 2011. Retrieved from schoolsdsb.on.ca/portals/LAmoreaux/images/LAMUN_TCC_BG.docx

⁶⁶ Karen Farbridge previously served as coordinator of OPIRG Guelph. She later served as Mayor of Guelph from 2000-2003 and 2006-2014.

⁶⁷ Karen Farbridge and Peter Cameron. "The PIRG Power." Alternatives Journal, 24.3 (Summer 1998): 22+.

⁶⁸ Michele Romanow developed and managed The Tea Room, an eco-focused student-run café at Queen's University, while completing her undergraduate engineering degree. She later went on to co-found SnapSaves and Buypotopia. She currently appears on the CBC show Dragons' Den.

⁶⁹ Lisa Jemison. "Tea Room Manager receives Tricolor Award." Queen's Journal. 5 April 2007. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2007-04-05/news/tea-room-manager-receives-tricolour-award/>>.

addition to 165 long-term sustainability related initiatives also identified.⁷⁰ One study found 196 climate-change initiatives (one-time, temporary and permanent) at 65 Canadian universities and colleges in 2009.⁷¹

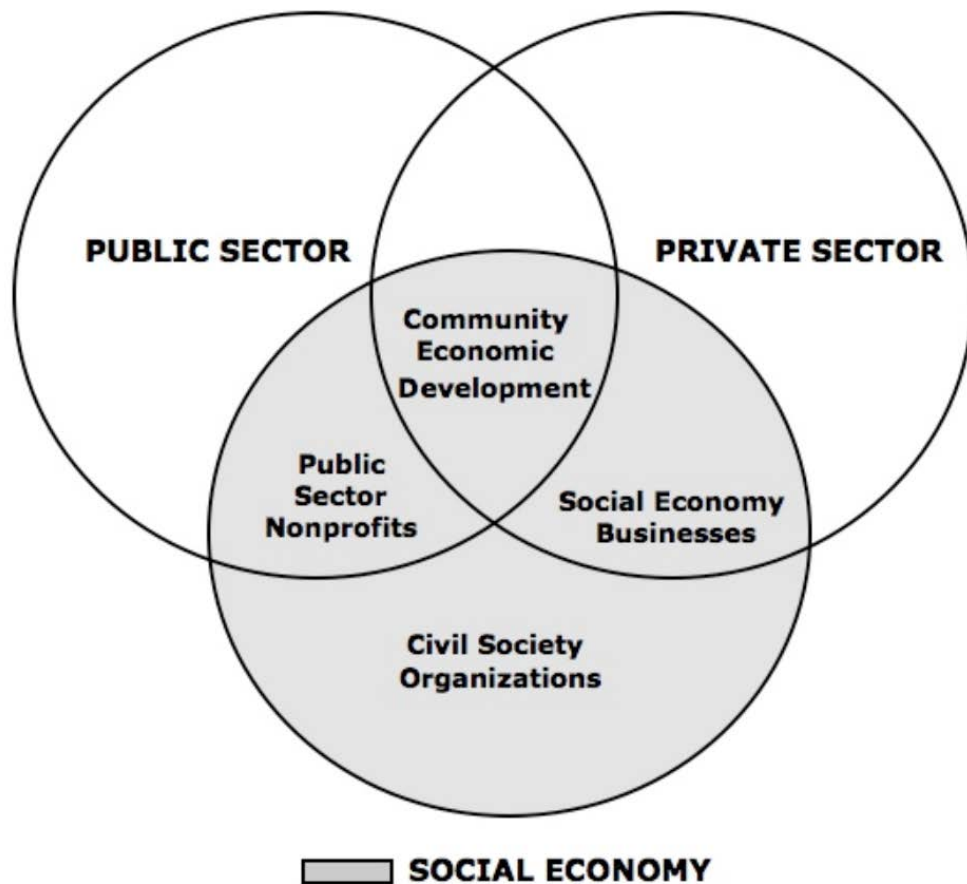


Figure 1: Venn Diagram of Social Economy Organizations⁷²

These organizations belong to the social economy sector, along with universities and student unions. They are uniquely independent civil society organizations embedded within a public sector non-profit (the university).⁷³ Structurally and legally, they sit at a

⁷⁰ Kenny, Ebrahim and Syed, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Anjali Helferty and Amelia Clarke. "Student-lead campus climate change initiatives in Canada." *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 10.3 (2009): 287-300.

⁷² Quarter and Mook. "An Interactive View of the Social Economy." *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 1.1 (2010).

⁷³ Civic Society Organizations are independent organizations that are not owned by the public or private sectors but rather have a social mandate. They can be grouped into two-distinct categories: those serving members and those serving the general public. See Quarter and Mook, 2010.

crossroads: they function both as recognized student organizations—whose recognition is solely the authority of the university and/or student union—and, most often, as federally or provincially incorporated non-profits organizations or co-operatives. Some incorporated non-profit organizations also have charitable status granted by the Canada Revenue Agency. Additionally, some also receive recognition as a student club by a student union. Student unions themselves are unique, in that in some jurisdictions (countries, provinces) they are recognized as legally distinct entities with special mandates and/or powers (Quebec), while in other jurisdictions (other Canadian provinces) they do not.

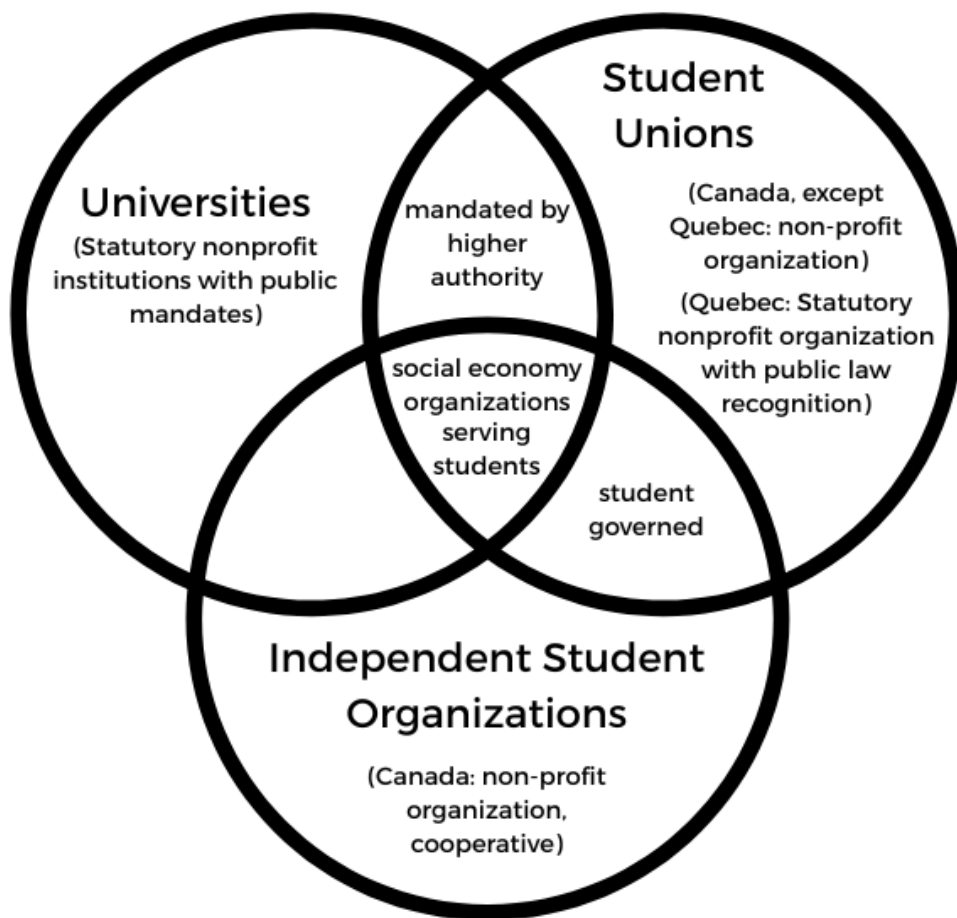


Figure 2: Venn diagram comparing universities, student unions, and independent student organizations.⁷⁴

Student groups that start initiatives can be classified into one of the following categories:

- Incorporated non-profit or charitable environmental student organizations (most often originating as a student club)
- Canadian Public Interest Research Groups or PIRGs (incorporated non-profit organizations that focus on social justice and environmental justice)
- Program-based student associations (e.g. Environmental Studies, Forestry, etc.)
- Student Clubs (aka Student Societies, Student Organizations, Student Associations) – Informal organizations that are only provided recognition by their university and/or student union.
 - Animal Rights groups
 - Community Service and Volunteer Services Clubs
 - Environmental groups
 - Faith-based groups
 - Food groups
 - Health groups
 - Human Rights and Social Justice groups
 - International Aid and Development groups
 - Political groups
- Student Unions – Student Unions (or Student Associations) are elected representative bodies that provide services to and advocate on behalf of students. They are also legally incorporated non-profit organizations.

⁷⁴ Student union classification depends on the jurisdiction. Some countries and provinces provide legal statute recognition as a unique legal entity with special mandates and/or powers, while others do not provide any such recognition.

- Student Centres – Student Centres are sometimes independently-run non-profit organizations,⁷⁵ but usually they are directly owned/operated by the student union directly.

Student-involved environmental organizations have both an environmental and educational purpose. Explicitly, these initiatives exist to promote or further environmental sustainability goals. Most of these initiatives also have other goals, like affordability, community, and positive health outcomes. Through their geographic location, population served, programming, mandates and daily operations, these organizations are providing educational opportunities. Student-involved environmental organizations provide students with a variety of educational opportunities, allowing involved students to gain knowledge and experience within a community of practice^{76,77} (e.g. bike repair and servicing, agricultural practices, food preparation and cooking), apply knowledge gained in university to real-world experiences, gain skills in organizing and leadership, and increase their knowledge on the environmental crisis and social justice issues. This study aims to examine student-involved environmental organizations with regards to their environmental mission (e.g. environmental sustainability, food justice, etc.), the socio-political contexts they exist in, and the educational opportunities (e.g. formal and informal learning) they provide.

There are three broad distinctions between student-involved environmental organizations, and they are: (1) if levied funded or no levy; (2) a broad sustainability or food focus or a narrow specific initiative focus; and (3) single-campus (most organizations) or multi-campus. For the purposes of this study, I did not include organizations that only engaged in one-time or temporary actions—while too numerous to list all, some examples can include awareness events, documentary film screenings,

⁷⁵ Examples include York University Student Centre, Sadleir House at Trent University, and the Palin Foundation (Oakham House) at Toronto Metropolitan University.

⁷⁶ Defined as “share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.” In Wenger-Trayner, Etienne, and Beverly Wenger-Trayner. “Introduction to Communities of Practice: A Brief Overview of the Concept and Its Uses.” June 2015, www.wenger-trayner.com/introduction-to-communities-of-practice/.

⁷⁷ First conceptualized in: Lave, Jean and Etienne Wenger. Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

public talks, rallies and protests. Neither did I focus on time-limited, goal-oriented campaigns (e.g. fossil fuel divestment, bottle-water bans). I am focusing on organizations that operate one or more long-term environmental initiatives or programs because of the ongoing benefits they can provide to students and universities. From a research logistics standpoint, it is easier to define study parameters and track the activities, project histories, educational endeavors, and social relations of these student organizations than it is for campaign-based student environmental movements (e.g., university divestment campaigns) or most environmental student clubs, which typically have short lifespans and focus solely on organizing occasional one-off events. Long-term initiatives and programs are distinct because they require greater resources and organizational capacity—aspects that can be crucial to provide high quality training, support and mentorship to their volunteer-members. Adequate resources and organizational capacity are also crucial to the implementation and maintenance of formal education programs and an environment where learning is cultivated. Examples of long-term student-involved environmental initiatives that can be found on campuses can include:

- Alternative Energy Demonstration Sites
- Beekeeping
- Bike Shares
- Borrowing Centre (Item Library)
- Cafes, Restaurants and Catering services (usually with an emphasis on environmental practices, fair trade, local and organic; Either student-run or owned and operated by a student association that hires primarily students)
- Community Bike Centres
- Community Gardens and Campus Farms
- Community Kitchen / Community Food Centre
- Eco-Store
- Ecological restoration (ongoing or long-term)
- Educational programs (both within the campus or in the wider community)
- Environmental-themed conferences (annual or semi-annual)
- Environmental-themed case competitions (annual or semi-annual)
- Environmental-themed retreats (annual or semi-annual)

- Farmers' Markets
- Food Co-ops
- Free schools
- Free Stores
- Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) (Canadian-model)
- Social justice centres
- Skill-sharing
- Soup Kitchens / Pay-What-You-Can (PWYC) Food Outlets (most of whom are vegan/vegetarian, many rely on food reclamation)
- Workshop series (e.g. vegan cooking classes)

These initiatives aim to improve the environment through education, behavior change, changed practices and sustained commitments to activism. Many of these initiatives also have secondary benefits, such as providing free and low-cost services for students. These initiatives are typically located on or near campuses, serving both the university community and the surrounding communities. Initiatives serve as sites for events, programming, and educational and volunteer opportunities. Student groups and student unions often run other long-term initiatives, but, as they do not directly relate to environmental sustainability, they were not included. Examples of these include campus pubs, convenience stores, printing shops and daycares. Other student organizations also run non-environmental related initiatives—primarily campus media and service centres for marginalized groups (women, indigenous, LGBTQ+).

I define the impact and efficacy along the following dimensions for these organizations as:

- Durability and longevity (ability to survive, adapt and thrive long-term, most often related to finances, staffing or volunteer commitment, space, internal culture and structure, and relationships/networks)
- Sustaining commitment to environmental and social justice values

- Engagement, participation and involvement (quality, quantity, level of involvement and impact on member-volunteers and the broader student population)
- Successfully equipping participants (member-volunteers) with organizational skillsets (e.g. leadership, communications, financial management, etc.)
- Successfully educating participants (member-volunteers) with knowledge on environmental and social justice issues and critical thinking skills
- Reach of programs (quality, quantity, level of impact on program users)
- Vitality and relevancy in their programming and services to students and the community
- Environmental and social justice impacts of initiatives and programs
- Creating lifelong politically engaged citizens
- Supported by post-secondary institutions, student unions and the wider community
- Not subject to attacks from outside political actors.

I define quality education (with the context of student-environmental organizations) as:

- Empowers learners
 - Knowledge and the framing of knowledge that empowers rather than disenfranchises
 - Recognizes we are all both teachers and learners
 - Learners exercise free will by choosing to participate
 - Dialogue, questions and debate are encouraged
 - Tough or challenging issues are addressed, not hidden
 - Maintains a learning environment where individuals can transform
- Can occur in both formal and informal settings
- Critical pedagogy and environmental pedagogy
 - Recognizes the environmental crisis and creates awareness of its causes, complexity and potential solutions

- Recognizes that the environmental crisis and social justice issues are connected
- Recognizes systems of power
- Makes aware to people their ability to collectively create socio-political change and what tools they have at their disposal
- Facilitates praxis (action); praxis results in the development of new skills, knowledge and confidence

2.3 Terminology

There is often confusion with the use of research terminology. This is because researchers in various fields use different terminology and often interpret words differently.^{78,79} It is necessary to define the common terms that were used in this dissertation to avoid any confusion regarding their meaning.

Participants in this study are member-volunteers, staff or executive members of student-involved environmental organizations. These organizations typically have: (1) paid staff (either full-time, part-time, summer contract or work-study positions provided by the university) who manage the day-to-day operations; (2) the core members, which are made up of the volunteer leadership or executive team or board of directors who have the legal obligation to provide oversight and management of the organization; (3) volunteers of the organization, and (4) members of the organization (those of which who have met certain criteria, such as a minimum number of volunteer hours or paid a membership fee), and (5) users of the services provided by the organization. Often individuals fell into multiple categories. For example, in almost all instances, all members are volunteers – I refer to these individuals as member-volunteers. When applicable, I will refer to these sub-terms.

⁷⁸ Patricia Leavy. Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches. New York, NY: Guildford Press, 2017. Pp. viii-ix.

⁷⁹ Isabelle Walsh, Judith A. Holton, Lotte Bailyn, Walter Fernandez, Natalia Levina & Barney Glaser. “What Grounded Theory Is . . . A Critically Reflective Conversation Among Scholars.” Organizational Research Methods, 18.4 (2015): 581-599.

I use the term Student-Involved Environmental Organizations to denote organizations that are campus-based, student-involved (a mix of non-student staff and student management) or entirely student-run, and whose organizational mission includes environmental purposes. While many student clubs exist with these purposes, this research only focused on student organizations that run long-term or permanent initiatives. Many of these organizations have a singular-focus and only operate one-initiative, such as a community garden, while some operate multiple initiatives.

2.4 Positionality

As an activist-researcher, I must be explicit about my background and how it may influence my research.⁸⁰ As someone who has been actively engaged in environmental and social justice activism, and as a co-founder of a student-involved environmental organization (Regenesis), my research is informed by those experiences. Further, being in a leadership role also impacts my perspective. My goal with this research is to positively affect social change. My background as an activist provided me with a deeper insight than outside researcher would have and has provided greater access to research subjects.⁸¹ I recognize that my positionality does impact my objectivity, however, I am open about my goals with this research and my political positions.

2.5 Summary of Research Paradigm, Framework and Methods

Purpose: Exploration and description, leading to explanation and evaluation

Paradigm: Critical realism

Framework: Mixed (grounded theory and qualitative survey research)

Methodology:

Methods: Surveys, interviews (semi-structured), analysis (website and social media, site visits, observation and notes)

⁸⁰ Kate McAlpine. "Integral activist epistemology: A model for researchers to act on personal values." *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, 9.1 (2014): 113-124. Naples 2003.

⁸¹ Nancy Naples. *Feminism and method. Ethnography, discourse analysis, and activist research*. New York, NY: Routledge. 2003.

Techniques: Coding of data, interview analysis, survey analysis, analysis of observational and field data

2.6 Paradigm, Framework and Methods

Walsh et al,⁸² provides common research definitions:

- (1) The methods are the data collection methods used in a research project (e.g. surveying, interviews, etc.)
- (2) The techniques are the tools used to understand and make sense of the data (e.g. text analysis, cluster analysis)
- (3) The methodology is what research methods and techniques are used in a research project.
- (4) The framework is a set of guidelines that a researcher chooses to use (e.g. grounded theory, action research, ethnography, etc.)
- (5) A paradigm is the shared system of beliefs and practices of a team of researchers. It is a worldview that frames and filters knowledge.⁸³ The paradigm is comprised of ontology (the study of being, existence and reality, what is predictable, patternable or re-created by people), epistemology (the nature of knowledge, what can possibly be known, the relationship of the knower, how knowledge is gained, what counts as knowledge) and methodology.^{84,85,86}

Another common research term is *research purpose*. Leavy⁸⁷ identifies six common purposes for research: (1) exploration, (2) description, (3) explanation, (4) action/community change, (5) evaluation, and (6) to evoke, provoke or unsettle. My research aimed to explore the topic broadly, provide clear descriptions (including definitions and boundaries), and using the two to provide explanations and evaluation.

⁸² Walsh et al., *op. cit.*

⁸³ Leavy, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Leavy, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵ T.N. Ghezaljah and A. Emami. "Grounded theory: methodology and philosophical perspective." *Nurse Researcher*, 17.1 (2009): 15-23.

⁸⁶ E.G. Guba and Y.S. Lincoln. "Competing paradigms in qualitative research." *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 1st edition, edited by N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln. London, UK: Sage Publications, 1994. 509-535.

⁸⁷ Leavy, *op. cit.*

Guba and Lincoln⁸⁸ warn that researchers often categorize paradigms differently and that there may be ‘no single truth’ for any particular paradigm. I have chosen a critical realism paradigm, as this best approach best suites my research aims to make rational claims and ethical judgements as to how to improve student-involved environmental organizations and the experiences of those involved. Critical realism is defined by four principles:⁸⁹

Ontological realism: Reality exists independently of our perception or knowledge of it.

Epistemic relativism: Knowledge is always situated (socially, culturally, historically) and is fallible.

Judgmental rationality: We can rationally judge some explanations as better than others.

Cautious ethical naturalism: Knowledge about reality can inform ethical judgments and social critique.

Creswell⁹⁰ classifies qualitative research into five types: (1) biography, (2) phenomenology, (3) grounded theory, (4) ethnography and (5) case study. Jansen⁹¹ criticizes Creswell’s typology and argues that while qualitative survey research is similar to grounded theory in the early stages of research, grounded theory can be too restrictive. Jansen⁹² establishes qualitative survey research as its own category—she states: “it is a simple research design that has quite often been reported under the labels of grounded theory or unspecified qualitative research.” Some scholars choose to only use some Grounded Theory precepts.⁹³ Grounded theory has become the dominant qualitative

⁸⁸ Guba and Lincoln, 2005, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Margaret Archer, Claire Decoteau, Philip Gorski, Daniel Little, Doug Porpora, Timothy Rutzou, Christian Smith, George Steinmetz, and Frédéric Vandenberghe. “What Is Critical Realism?” *Perspectives: A Newsletter of the ASA Theory Section*, 23 Dec. 2016, <http://www.asatheory.org/current-newsletter-online/what-is-critical-realism>.

⁹⁰ John W. Creswell. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

⁹¹ Harrie Jansen. “The Logic of Qualitative Survey Research and its Position in the Field of Social Research Methods.” *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11.1 (2010): <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs1002110>.

⁹² Jansen, *op. cit.*, online.

⁹³ Walsh et al., *op. cit.*

research approach.⁹⁴ However, grounded theory can also be used for quantitative research and any types of data, qualitative and quantitative, can be used.⁹⁵

I have chosen a mixed approach, primarily drawing from grounded theory and qualitative survey research. I believe this approach helped me best represent the data and lend itself to the development of theories relevant to student-involved environmental organizations. This research consisted of two surveys, interviews, and my own observations and experiences. The research had a sequential design, meaning that the surveys took place first, with interviews and field visits completed after an analysis of the surveys. The first survey had more of an organizational focus and be completed by staff and executives of student-involved environmental organizations. The second survey was directed towards the volunteers of these organizations and had more of an educational focus. Sampling was not required, as the survey was sent to all identified student-involved environmental organizations. To participate in the survey, individuals were required to have been involved with the organization and to have completed at least 20 hours of involvement with the organization. Student-involved environmental organizations assisted in the recruitment process. Survey data was collected through Survey Monkey, a web-based survey software. The survey data is preserved on Survey Monkey and downloaded as PDF and Microsoft Excel files.

This research included field visits at select university campuses. I visited these campuses and acted as a participant-observer as I accompanied the staff, executives and volunteers of student-involved environmental organizations in their daily activities related to their duties. As a participant-observer, I took field-notes of my observations, made audio and video recordings and conducted interviews with key staff and board members (e.g. executive director, president) and with member-volunteers. All data collected was via written and electronic notes, audio recordings and photographs. The selection of the chosen campuses was based on my analysis of the survey data, the willingness of individuals to participate and my ability to travel to the campuses.

⁹⁴ A. Bryant and K. Charmaz, editors. The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory. London, UK: Sage Publications, 2007.

⁹⁵ Walsh et al., *op. cit.*

This research study is primarily qualitative, with limited quantitative analysis where suited. Qualitative research can be described as: “Development of concepts which help us to understand social phenomena in natural (rather than experimental) settings, giving due emphasis to meanings, experiences and views of the participants.”⁹⁶ Berkwits and Inui provide an alternative definition: “Qualitative research is a form of inquiry that analyzes information conveyed through language and behavior in natural settings.”⁹⁷ Qualitative surveys can contain quantitative questions—the determination if research is qualitative or quantitative is prior established by the means of analysis.⁹⁸ Qualitative and quantitative research should not be viewed as a dichotomy, but rather as complementary approaches that can improve the quality of results and better explain complex phenomena. Most qualitative studies use the one-shot sample for pragmatic reasons.⁹⁹ The surveys were inductive, meaning that I interpreted topics and categories through interpretation of the raw survey or interview data.¹⁰⁰ Field visit locations were selected based on my knowledge of existing student environmental organizations and the availability of student-involved environmental organization staff, executive and member-volunteers to participate in this study. Qualitative interviews are usually semi-structured and open-ended, with the interviewer frequently adjusting the order of the questions and follow-up questions for each interview.¹⁰¹ While I had some pre-determined questions for interviewees, the interviews were primarily inductive, and I used a purposeful sampling method. I did not have a fixed sample size, but rather a minimum sample size goal. Purposeful sampling is used in research, as it allows the researcher to consciously select

⁹⁶ Catherine Pope and Nick Mays. “Reaching the parts other methods cannot reach: an introduction to qualitative methods in health and health services research.” British Medical Journal, 311 (1995): 42-45. p. 43.

⁹⁷ Michael Berkwits and Thomas S. Inui. “Making Use of Qualitative Research Techniques.” Journal of General Internal Medicine, 13.3 (1998): 195-199. p. 195.

⁹⁸ Jansen, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ Jansen, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁰ Jansen, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ Jerry Thomas, Jack Nelson & Stephen Silverman. Research Methods in Physical Activity, 7th Edition. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2015.

subjects that have experiences on the topic being researched.^{102,103,104} Often, as a study proceeds, selecting specific participants for direct interviews is done¹⁰⁵—some of my survey respondents were approached for interviews. Having previous conducting similar surveys with activist and DIY spaces (266 contacted, 124 responses) and intentional communities (975 contacted, 304 responses), I was confident that the surveys would receive a high response rate. I attempted to achieve this through the following recruitment strategy: (1) extensive research of university and student organization directories, (2) a previously established list of contacts, (3) a potential large sample size, (4) following up with contacts, and (5) leaving the survey website active for eighteen months. Common reasons for low-response rates include lack of perceived relevance, time required to complete the survey, and concerns about question bias.¹⁰⁶ My initial aim was to get 40-50 responses from the online survey from staff and executives and 80-100 responses from volunteers; I received more than my target for staff and executives (68), but considerably less for volunteers (26). My original aim to conduct interviews with approximately 12 people; I surpassed this target and interviewed 22. I believe the chosen research methods, sample size and breath of questions was sufficient to provide the data needed for a comprehensive analysis. These research methods were selected to achieve both breadth and depth of data. This research project had a flexible research design, allowing for adaptation as best suits the project it progressed.

There are five possible ways to go about integrating data from different sources:¹⁰⁷ (1) Corroboration (one set of data confirms the other); (2) Elaboration (one set of data contributes to the understanding gained from another); (3) Initiation (the first data

¹⁰² Kay Currie. "Using survey data to assist theoretical sampling in grounded theory research." Nurse Researcher, 17.1 (2009): 24-33.

¹⁰³ N. Burns and S.K. Grove. "Qualitative research methodology." The Practice of Nursing Research: Conduct, Critique and Utilization, 4th Fourth Edition, edited by N. Burns and S.K. Grove. Philadelphia, PA: WB Saunders, 2001. 591-622.

¹⁰⁴ J.R. Cutcliffe. "Methodological issues in grounded theory." Journal of Advanced Nursing, 31.6 (2000): 1476-1484.

¹⁰⁵ B.G. Glaser. Theoretical Sensitivity: Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press, 1978.

¹⁰⁶ R. Ford and G. Bammer. "A research routine to assess bias introduced by low response rates in postal surveys." Nurse Researcher, 17.1 (2009): 44-53.

¹⁰⁷ Julia Brannen and Rebecca O'Connell. "Data analysis: I. Overview of data analysis strategies." In The Oxford Handbook of Multi-Method and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry, edited by S. Hesse-Biber and R.B. Johnson. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 257-274.

set leads to new research questions or hypotheses); (4) Complementary (the data sets are juxtaposed to create complementary insights); (5) Contradiction (the data sets conflict with each other). As I collected data from a variety of sources, I integrated the data using these approaches. For this research, I coded according to themes that I identify within the data, such as common responses to questions. Themes were formed based on type of initiative and regional geography. Qualitative interview data takes a significant amount of time to transcribe and analyze¹⁰⁸—I have taken this into account and allocated significant time for transcription and analysis. The typical research cycle involves (1) research question(s), (2) data collection, (3) analysis and (4) report.¹⁰⁹ The five stages of qualitative analysis are:¹¹⁰

1. Familiarization: Immersion in the raw data
2. Identifying a Thematic Framework: Identifying all key or recurrent issues, ideas or themes that can be examined from the data
3. Indexing: Applying a thematic framework or index to all the data and codifying the data so that it can be managed
4. Charting: Rearranging data into their most appropriate sections (as much of the data touched on several themes)
5. Mapping and Interpretation: Using spreadsheets, charts and maps to help define concepts and find associations between themes, with the aim of explaining one's findings

My analysis of the data followed this sequence of analysis. To widely disseminate this research in an accessible way, I have begun engaging in knowledge mobilization (KMb) through social media promotions, conference presentations, the creation of research summaries and other KMb activities.

2.7 Research Scope

This research looked at student-involved environmental organizations that run initiatives that require ongoing operations and have fixed space; either owned, leased or

¹⁰⁸ Catherine Pope, Sue Ziebland & Nick Mays. "Qualitative research in health care: Analysing qualitative data." *British Medical Journal*, 320 (2000): 114-116.

¹⁰⁹ Jansen, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁰ Pope, Ziebland and Mays, *op. cit.*

donated physical space, regularly scheduled events that require the regular use of space, such as community gardens, bike centres or farmers' markets, or an online space (e.g. the sale of fair-trade goods), and participation in them. Some examples include community gardens, bike centres, fair trade/eco-cafes and free stores. This research did not look at temporary, one-time and end-goal activist initiatives, such as institutional policy change, energy retrofits, one-time events, or campus assessments. This research was limited to initiatives that involve post-secondary students, noting that some also allowed the participants of non-students (alumni, professors, university staff, members of the wider community). This research was limited to post-secondary institutions, noting that initiatives were located physically both on and off campus. The survey was disseminated to all identified environmental organizations at public universities and colleges in Canada.

3.0 Research Findings

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of my comprehensive research study examining the landscape of student-involved sustainability initiatives across Canada. The research employed a multi-method approach, integrating an environmental scan, surveys, interviews, site visits, alongside insights from my own experiences, to offer a nuanced understanding of the diversity, challenges, and successes of these initiatives. By synthesizing data from multiple sources, this study aims to provide a holistic perspective on the role of student-driven environmental activism in shaping sustainability and activism within higher education institutions and the broader culture.

The study sought to answer key questions about the scope and structure of student-involved sustainability organizations, the experiences and motivations of student activists, and the operational and institutional barriers they face. The research design enabled a multi-layered exploration of these questions, with each methodological component contributing unique insights.

- **An environmental scan** establishes a foundational overview of student-involved sustainability initiatives across Canada, mapping their distribution, focus areas, histories and institutional contexts. Notably, no previous national-level scan of such initiatives has been conducted, making this a crucial first step in documenting and understanding the landscape of student-driven sustainability efforts. This scan included site visits to some identified student-involved environmental organizations that allowed for direct observations of sustainability initiatives in action.
- **Survey data** offering a broad qualitative and quantitative overview of sustainability initiatives, capturing trends in participation, organizational structures, and leadership roles across different provinces.
- **Interviews with student activists** provide deeper qualitative insights into the motivations, challenges, and lived experiences of individuals engaged in sustainability efforts.

The results are organized by data source, reflecting the key dimensions of student sustainability engagement that emerged from the data, while the discussion section later synergies the research findings. The survey findings establish a national landscape of student-involved environmental initiatives, while the interviews enrich this perspective by illuminating personal narratives and organizational dynamics. These all offer opportunities for critical reflections on best practices and structural enablers that support long-term sustainability efforts. Together, these findings provide a robust empirical foundation for analyzing the effectiveness, resilience, and evolution of student sustainability movements in Canada. The following sections present the detailed results from each methodological component, highlighting the interplay between the student activist experience, organizational dimensions, institutional support, and the broader socio-political context in which these initiatives operate.

3.2 Environmental Scan of Student-Involved Environmental Organizations¹¹¹

I have classified all student-involved environmental organizations into the following groupings:

- Sustainability organization (broad mandate)
- Agricultural production (community gardens, campus farms)
- Cafés
- Community bike centres (aka community bike shops, DIY bike shops)
- Farmers' markets
- Food banks and free food initiatives (aka soup kitchens)
- Free stores and thrift stores
- Grocery and bulk-buying cooperatives
- Public Interest Research Groups (Canadian-model) and similar organizations
- Other food initiatives (including community kitchens, food centres, food coalitions)
- Other sustainability initiatives (including borrowing centres, eco stores)

3.2.1 Sustainability Organization (broad mandate)

The most common kind of student-involved environmental organization are those with a broad sustainability mandate. Most such organizations operate as student clubs with limited funding provided by the university or student union. These environmental

¹¹¹ A list of Canadian Student Involved Sustainability Organizations can be found in Appendix B.

student clubs typically operate on a budget of approximately \$200 to \$5000 annually. Some student-involved environmental organizations have significant student levy funding (from approximately \$10,000 to over \$300,000+ annually). These can be classified into two major groups: independent student-involved environmental organizations and student union environmental offices.

One problem with student union environmental offices is that they are often not prioritized, and many end up struggling with limited mandates, budget, staffing and space. The Lakehead Student Union cut funding to LUSU Sustainability Initiative when facing budgetary pressures from the Government of Ontario's Student Choice Initiative—they now only exist 'on paper' on the website of LUSU.¹¹² There are also concerns regarding the full independence of these groups, especially when they are often subjected to internal political issues of the student union (most often fighting between the left and right for control of the student union and budgetary decisions—with the right often cutting funding to equity-seeking and social cause groups). Further, the politics of the local student union (or the currently elected student union executive) might not align with those of student environmental activists at the campus, limiting the transformational power that a student union environmental office might be able to enact.

There are also university eco-volunteer programs run out of university sustainability offices, but these programs typically don't empower students democratically to take leadership roles and make decisions regarding the direction of projects or spending funds. These student volunteers are typically relegated to assisting at events and information tabling. This type of volunteerism is limited in its ability for transformative educational experiences and student self-actualization to occur, with perhaps only a couple lead work-study students receiving substantive benefits from their involvement. The transformational power that this type of volunteering offers is very limited, as university sustainability office staff will only enact environmental education, events and initiatives that align with their own interests (job protection) and the interests of the university (promoting neo-liberal capitalist approaches to sustainability, including

¹¹² Shark. Survey Response. Mar 6, 2019.

the idea of sustainable development, which is an oxymoron).¹¹³ There are also eco-funds accessible to students and student groups, either provided through a student-levy, via a student union, or via the university. Most are created and funded by universities. A few Canadian student unions have small eco-funds accessible to student clubs. There are also two eco-funds that are independent student sustainability levies. In addition, there are two sustainability funds that are a partnership between the university and student union.

Levied Environmental Organizations

Embark Sustainability¹¹⁴

Embark Sustainability has its origins in an environmentally-focused working group of Simon Fraser PIRG. Growing frustrated with their lack of success, they spun off the group in 2003 as the Sustainable Campus Coalition and adopted a ‘top-down’ approach—said co-founder Candace Ratelle, “Working within the system as opposed to against it is so much more effective.”^{115, 116} The group pushed for a university Sustainability Advisory Committee, which Simon Fraser University created in 2006. Following another name change (to Sustainable SFU) and incorporation in 2009 as a non-profit, the group ran a successful referendum in 2010 to secure a student levy. The organization changed their name to Embark Sustainability in 2015 and have since increased their student levies and expanded their presence to all three Simon Fraser University campuses. They currently receive a levy of \$3.50 per semester from full-time students (and \$1.75 per semester from part-time students), or about \$260,000 annually. The organization is managed and operated by staff (recent graduates and students) and overseen by a board of directors comprised of students.

The programs of Embark Sustainability include:

¹¹³ For the argument of sustainable development as an oxymoron, refer to: Wolfgang Sachs. *Planet Dialectics - Explorations in Environment and Development*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 1999.

¹¹⁴ Embark Sustainability. “History & Achievements.” *Embark Sustainability*. N.d. <<https://www.embarksustainability.org/about/history-achievements/>>.

¹¹⁵ Diane Lucknow. “Students promote sustainability.” *SFU News Online*. Dec 2, 2004. <http://www.sfu.ca/archive-sfunews/sfu_news/archives/sfunews12020404.shtml>.

¹¹⁶ Candace Le Roy (formerly Candace Bonfield, and previously Candace Ratelle) is now the Director of Simon Fraser University’s Sustainability Office.

- Food Rescue (imperfect produce is donated by local grocer Nestor Market, and sold on a PWYC donation basis)
- Community Kitchen events (students collectively prepare a free vegetarian meal, while exploring different issues related to food)
- Learning Gardens (community gardens located at the Burnaby, City Central and Surrey campuses, and educational events and workshops related to gardening)
- Annual career night for students
- A fund for sustainable social innovation (in partnership with the Simon Fraser University entrepreneurial incubator Radius)

Regenesis

Regenesis was founded by four young people from Toronto in 2007, and with starting chapters at the University of Toronto (St. George) and York University (Keele).¹¹⁷ Originally intended as a grassroots organization seeking to mobilize for environmental sustainability and justice, the group incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2009 and began moving towards a more formal and professional approach (secure funding, staffing to ensure quality, program continuity, and supporting education)—while seeking to maintain a distinctly progressive movement-building approach (co-operation with other organizations and groups, accumulation of capital and resources to support our activities, connecting the environment with broader issues) and grassroots empowerment (grassroots decision-making, student-agency, empowerment through education). I played a large part in this transformation after increasingly realizing that resources and organizational stability are crucial to social change, as I contrasted successes I had seen (largely driven by labour unions and progressive faith organizations) and failures (such as the anarchist driven Occupy Toronto movement). The organization currently has chapters at universities and colleges throughout Ontario and is funded through a combination of student levies, grants and social enterprises. Regenesis is structured as a reverse hierarchy, with the main Regenesis organization acting in service as an umbrella and support organization to more effectively and efficiently share resources and reduce costs across all chapters. Each chapter is governed by a board of directors, comprised of students, that makes decisions regarding that chapter. Education plays a key role within Regenesis, as we aim to educate student environmentalists to learn

¹¹⁷ I am a co-founder and current employee of Regenesis.

from the successes (and failures) of past activism. The organization and its initiatives are managed and operated by a combination of staff (recent graduates and students), chapter executives and volunteers. While the chapters have a representative board, the main Regenesi s board of directors is a mission-focused board comprised of working professionals, many of whom are former student-members of Regenesi s, and who are selected by the Regenesi s chapters. Many initiatives are operated by Regenesi s student members in collaboration with a specific university office (e.g. sustainability office, food services, housing, etc.). Regenesi s members have incorporated in the United States and have begun replicating our model there.

Regenesi s chapters operate a broad variety of initiatives, including free stores, community gardens, farmers' markets, community bike centres, food centres, and borrowing centres. In addition to these initiatives, Regenesi s hosts or co-host all kinds of events, workshops and other programming. Examples of these events include environmental retreats, workshops on a wide variety of eco-topics (e.g. bike repair, cooking, gardening, foraging, leadership, sewing, etc.), clean-ups, tree plantings, film screenings, discussion panels, group bike rides and nature hikes. Regenesi s chapters have occasionally engaged in policy-change campaigns on the campus level (such as fossil fuel divestment and bottled-water bans) and awareness campaigns. In light of a number of factors, including our members' interests and broad overlap with existing initiatives and programming, Regenesi s has begun rebranding to have a dual environmental sustainability and health mission.

Sustainable Concordia¹¹⁸

Sustainable Concordia was established in 2002 by two students passionate about the environment. The two students met with university stakeholders, conducted a sustainability assessment of the campus and fundraised \$25,000 to establish the group. Their philosophy emphasizes a holistic approach to sustainability that includes the social, the environmental and the economy, and an emphasis on broad collaboration and stakeholder input from across campus as necessary for widespread change to occur.

¹¹⁸ Sustainable Concordia. "A brief history of Sustainable Concordia." Sustainable Concordia. N.d. <<http://sustainableconcordia.ca/about-us/history/>>.

Sustainable Concordia helped pilot the Sierra Youth Coalition's Campus Sustainability Assessment Framework.

According to their website, they had some tension between the staff, board and volunteers regarding their roles and organizational priorities, leading to the organization restructuring itself 2014/2015. The decision was to focus on campaign-based programs, and that all working groups would be fully autonomous and self-sustaining. They seem to describe themselves as a resource and networking organization. Their vision statement states, "We envision a university which is run non-hierarchically by students, staff, faculty, and administration in a process based on transparency and maximum participation. This wide-spread participation will foster a 'Living Laboratory' in which all members of the community are encouraged to bring forward ideas and projects to further the shift to a more sustainable society. Through its partnerships, this university would advocate publicly in solidarity with global sustainability issues to become an agent of change."¹¹⁹ Sustainable Concordia was legally registered in October 2010. They currently receive a levy of .15 cents per credit from undergraduate students and .50 cents per semester from graduate students (or approximately \$124,000 annually).

Sustainable Trent¹²⁰

Sustainable Trent is a volunteer-run student environmental group. Current and past projects include a fossil fuel divestment campaign, a boycott campaign of Aramark, a campaign to stop a locally proposed highway, a 'lug a mug' program, providing free meals, organizing earth week events, hosting a campus sustainability conference and providing sustainability funding to campus and community groups. Sustainable Trent works with numerous other campus and community environmental and social justice groups. They currently receive a levy of \$1.19 per student (though they received more—\$2.15 per student—in the past). Sustainable Trent is housed in the Kawartha World Issues Centre (another levy organization) office in the Environmental Sciences Building.

¹¹⁹ Sustainable Concordia.

¹²⁰ Sustainable Trent. Sustainable Trent. N.d. <<https://sustainabletrent.org/>>.

University of Victoria Sustainability Project¹²¹

University of Victoria Sustainability Project was started in 1999 by two environmental studies students. UVSP held a successful referendum in 2003 and has since received a levy of .50 cents per full-time student and .25 cents per part-time student (currently approximately \$20,000 annually). Current activities include reducing single use plastics and coffee cups and providing small sustainability grants. UVSP has done a wide variety of activities over the years, including occasional farmers' markets, a community green mapping project, an earth festival, and a bike bursary program.

Other levied organizations

Kawartha World Issues Centre^{122,123}

KWIC started as a Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) funded learner centre in 1989. The roots of KWIC go back to local organizations working on international development, refugee support and social justice issues, and identifying a need for a learner centre in Peterborough. A successful student levy referendum campaign was held at Trent University in 1987 establishing a \$4 per term student levy in support of the new learner centre (about \$12,000 at the time). The proposal for the new centre described its purpose like this: "The centre should focus on international development issues, as commonly understood, but its mandate should be sufficiently broad to include topics such as environment and development, and domestic native rights issues. The learner centre should work not solely to increase awareness of the world's problems, but also to inspire people to act to overcome these problems."¹²⁴ Incorporation occurred in 1989.

In 1995, the federal government cut all funding to learner centres, which forced most learner centres across Canada to close down. KWIC faced a 65% (or approximately \$75,000) budget cut. KWIC was forced to sell their office, a home in downtown

¹²¹ University of Victoria Sustainability Project. University of Victoria Sustainability Project. N.d. <<https://sustainableprojectsvic.weebly.com/>>.

¹²² KWIC. KWIC. N.d. <<https://www.kwic.info/>>.

¹²³ Deborah Morales. The First Fifteen Years: A History of The Kawartha World Issues Centre (KWIC) 1989-2004. Peterborough, ON: Kawartha World Issues Centre. Report. 2004. <<https://www.kwic.info/sites/default/files/TheFirstFifteenYears.pdf>>.

¹²⁴ Morales, *op cit*.

Peterborough. KWIC was offered the opportunity by the Environmental Studies program at Trent University to operate their resource centre in exchange for free rent. This relationship has paid off for KWIC and has created many lasting connections with Trent University.

KWIC programs include an aboriginal knowledge program in partnership with Trent University, a social justice education certificate program for teacher candidates and community educators, and an environmental justice youth program. KWIC also has many citizen-initiated working groups, with one currently active working group focused on the issue of mining injustice. Like many PIRGs, KWIC has played a role in the creation of many Peterborough organizations. Peterborough Green-up, a local environmental organization, was started out of KWIC in 1992. Peterborough FoodShare, a local food organization, and ReFrame Peterborough International Film Festival are two other notable organizations that KWIC helped to create.

Sprouts^{125,126}

Sprouts is a sustainable food organization at the University of British Columbia's main campus. Sprouts runs multiple food initiatives including two cafés, grocery co-op store, food boxes, catering, PWYC community meals and educational workshops. Sprouts started in 1997 as the UBC Natural Food Co-operative, a bulk-buying co-operative, before later evolving to open a grocery cooperative (2004), a café (2007) and a second café (2013). Sprouts has a 25-person board of directors and over 150 volunteers. Sprouts also operated a community garden and a farmers' market at previous points in time. Sprouts very much operates as a volunteer-run community service and social enterprise, with most of its operating income coming from its initiatives. Sprouts is also supported by a small student levy fee of .15 cents per student (or approximately \$8,000 annually), secured in a 2018 referendum.

¹²⁵ Sprouts. "Who We Are." *Sprouts*. N.d. <<http://www.ubcsprouts.ca>>.

¹²⁶ Hilary Kuo, Sydney MacLennan, Yu Qing (Sunnie) Tang and Mercy Wanalo. "Community Engagement: Sprouts' History." Report. 10 Apr. 2018. <<https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/undergraduateresearch/18861/items/1.0374154>>.

Environmental Student Clubs¹²⁷

Student clubs are entities recognized by their university and student union(s) as a means for students to socialize and volunteer. They are provided with minimal resources (typically access to meeting rooms and event space, a club office, small amounts of funding, a website and an email address). Surprisingly most post-secondary institutions in Canada do not have any environmental student clubs when I conducted an environmental scan in the 2019/2020 and 2024/2025 school years.¹²⁸

3.2.2 Agricultural Production (Community Gardens and Campus Farms)

Community gardens are plots of lands that are collectively gardened, operated and managed. A community garden typically shares the grown produce amongst its gardener members and distributes surplus to community groups and the poor. Some student-involved agricultural initiatives are fully operating campus farms. Community gardens on university campuses offer students the opportunity to learn about food production and collective management. There are also health benefits for student participants by having production of fresh produce right on the campus, which increases local food security. Gardening is also a very physical activity, which in combination with the dietary and social benefits, contributes to a higher quality of life for participants. Besides the environmental and health benefits, community gardens allow for the development of leadership and facilitation skills through participation in garden activities.¹²⁹ Studies have also shown that gardening activity leads to improved school performance and

¹²⁷ Besides levy-supported environmental organizations and environmental initiatives on specific issues (e.g. bike centres, community gardens), there are approximately 30-40 environmental student clubs at Canadian post-secondary institutions (the precise number varies on a year-to-year basis). I am only highlighting those that are larger and that I feel are worth mentioning here.

¹²⁸ I believe that most post-secondary institutions do not have environmental student clubs for one or more of the following reasons: (1) The post-secondary institution has a small student body; (2) The post-secondary institution is a college or technical school; (3) Increasing neo-liberalism makes it more difficult for students to find time to participate in extracurricular activities and volunteering; and (4) Environmental concern typically comes in waves. These waves typically coincide with good economic conditions and high employment levels—see Riley E. Dunlap & Richard York. “The Globalization of Environmental Concern and the Limits of the Postmaterialist Values Explanation: Evidence from Four Multinational Surveys.” In *The Sociological Quarterly*, 49.3 (2008): 529-563.

¹²⁹ Joan Twiss, Joy Dickinson, Shirley Duma, Tanya Kleinman, Heather Paulsen, and Liz Rilveria. “Community Gardens: Lessons Learned From California Healthy Cities and Communities.” *American Journal of Public Health*, 93.9 (2003): 1435-1438.

mental health.^{130 131} Nutritional education, when combined with participation in gardening, has been documented as leading to dietary improvements.¹³²

Strong organization is essential to maintain an effective garden, as active participation from the students and community members who will benefit from a local, on-campus garden is critical to the success of the overall operation. A successful garden incorporates leadership roles, organizational skills and management techniques to enhance the effectiveness of the community garden.¹³³ The skills developed by participants can lead to an expansion in community development and organization in other areas.¹³⁴ Campus community gardens provide an opportunity to bring together individuals from various communities and backgrounds, allowing participants to learn about each other and the different ways we interact with food. Community gardens also play a role in normalizing sustainable food production, through participation, increasing awareness within the campus, food policy activism and the establishment of other food initiatives. These on-campus gardens give students the opportunity to put their agricultural knowledge into use as they understand the physical, social and economic benefits of local production and consumption. It lets students put their knowledge and skills to use, along with giving back to the community and helping it grow into a healthy environment for all. Many garden participants go on to start organic farms, CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) programs, food co-ops, and other food-related initiatives.

One of the first community gardens in Canadian universities or colleges was established at the Université Laval in 1978. Many other universities have adopted the idea of creating a community garden since then and continue to establish new gardens

¹³⁰ August John Hoffman, D. Thompson and A. Cruz. "Gardening, self-efficacy and self-esteem." The Community College Enterprise, 10 (2004): 91-101.

¹³¹ August John Hoffman, L.M. Knight Thompson and Julie Wallach. "Gardening activities, Education, and Self-Esteem." Urban Education, 42.5 (2007): 403-411.

¹³² R.M. Hackman and E.L. Wagner. "The senior gardening and nutrition project: development and transport of a dietary behavior change and health promotion program." Journal of Nutrition Education, 22.6 (1990): 262-270.

¹³³ Bill McKelvey. Community Gardening Toolkit. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Extension, 2009. <<http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/miscpubs/mp0906.pdf>>.

¹³⁴ Laura Saldivar-Tanaka and Marianne Krasny. "Culturing community development, neighborhood open space, and civic agriculture: The case of Latino community gardens in New York City." Agriculture and Human Values, 21 (2004): 399-412.

and expand existing ones via interested students or professors. A handful of universities own and operate farms, either on campus or at an off-campus site. These farms are primarily for research or recreational purposes, but many have grown to involve student volunteers in the production of organic produce.

Research has shown that conflicts and difficulties can occur within the construct of a campus community garden. They include inconsistent stakeholder involvement, providing ongoing and adequate care over the fruits and plants, and ensuring adequate volunteer support.¹³⁵ Building a garden requires hard work, a great amount of organization and time, which has to be collectively distributed amongst all the participants in order to ensure a successful community garden. The collective, manager or executive operating the garden should ensure each job is clearly defined and people are scheduled in regularly for garden duties in order to ensure the success of the garden.

Direct-levied gardens

Campus Community Garden¹³⁶

Campus Community Garden at the University of Victoria was started in 1996 and was previously entirely volunteer-run. In 2012, CCG passed a \$1.50 per full time student and .75 cents per part time student fee (approximately \$60,000 annually) that provided funding for student staff positions and equipment. CCG was able in 2019 to increase their referendum to \$3.00 per full time student and \$1.50 per part time student. This has increased their levy to about \$110,000 per year. The garden also brings in other revenue from plot rentals.

Concordia Greenhouse and City Farm School^{137,138}

Concordia Greenhouse is a very unique student initiative that is part greenhouse, part student lounge, part educational space, and part social enterprise incubator. They are

¹³⁵ Kristan McKinne and Angela Halfacre. ““Growing” a campus native species garden: sustaining volunteer-driven sustainability.” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 9.2 (2008): 147-156.

¹³⁶ Campus Community Garden. *Campus Community Garden*. N.d. <<https://communitygardenuvic.weebly.com/>>.

¹³⁷ City Farm School. *City Farm School*. N.d. <<http://www.cityfarmschool.com/>>.

¹³⁸ Concordia Greenhouse. *Concordia Greenhouse*. N.d. <<https://concordiagreenhouse.com/>>.

located on the 13th floor of the Henry H. Hall Building at Concordia University in a former biology department greenhouse. The Greenhouse receives a levy of .24 cents per credit from undergraduate students to support its operations and that of its sister initiative, City Farm School.

Current projects include:

- Atrium lounge, a study space for students surrounding by plants, with an accessible kitchenette where students can access free herbal tea
- Year-round greenhouse agriculture that supplies produce and herbs to other student initiatives, including Le Frigo Vert grocer, Concordia Farmers' Market and The Hive Café.
- House plant propagation, teaching volunteers about houseplants and propagating new house plants for sale
- Demonstration balcony garden to teach people about growing food on balconies
- Annual seedling sale and semesterly plant sales
- Educational workshops

The Greenhouse also acts as an incubator for other student initiatives and social enterprises, such as HydroFlora, a Concordia Food Coalition working group and consultancy promoting hydroponics. City Farm School is a large training initiative created by the Concordia Greenhouse. City Farm School offers apprenticeships and workshops on a variety of food and agriculture related topics, including market agriculture, medicinal herbs and food sovereignty. City Farm School is primarily based out of the Loyola City Farm located at the Loyola Campus of Concordia University. Concordia Greenhouse and City Farm School programs are open to both students and the general public.

Roots on the Roof¹³⁹

Roots on the Roof was established in 2015 after the UBC Orchard Garden was offered roof space for gardening at the new student union building. A new group was created for this purpose. Programs of Roots on the Roof include a community garden, CSA (community supported agriculture) program, a market stall and educational workshops. Produce is also provided to on campus restaurants and the campus food

¹³⁹ Roots on the Roof. Roots on the Roof. N.d. <<https://blogs.ubc.ca/rootsontheroof/>>.

bank. Roots on the Roof is supported by a student levy fee of .3 cents per student, secured in 2018 referendum.

Non-levied gardens

Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Garden¹⁴⁰

Located at Macdonald Campus of McGill University in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue in the West Island of Montreal, Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Garden is a unique student-run sustainable agricultural social enterprise. Started in 2009, originally as a gardening club, it has morphed into a permaculture-based market garden and farmer incubator program—operating from May to October, MSEG student-workers sell at two farmers’ markets in the Montreal area, and through a community-supported agriculture basket program with 75 subscribers. The unique model requires a two-year commitment, the first year as an apprentice, and the second-year as a manager who will train the new apprentices.

3.2.3 Cafés

Student-involved cafés are very common at post-secondary institutions around the world. The origins of these cafés are difficult to identify—many were born out of the height of the student co-operative movement between the 1930s and 1970s.^{141,142,143,144,145,146,147} In recent years, many new student-involved cafés have been established.

¹⁴⁰ Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Garden. Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Garden. N.d. <<https://macdonaldstudentfarm.wixsite.com/mseg>>.

¹⁴¹ Marythea Grebner. “Student Corporations in the West.” The Journal of Higher Education, 48.6 (1977): 697-708.

¹⁴² Marthe Marcelle Roy. An Analysis of the Educative Values of the Student Cooperative Stores in the Province of Quebec. Williamsburg, VA: College of William & Mary, 1952.

¹⁴³ Florence E. Parker. Consumers’ Cooperatives in 1941. United States Department of Labor Bulletin 703. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1942.

¹⁴⁴ United States Department of Labor. Developments in Consumers’ Cooperative Movement in 1946. Bulletin 904. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1947.

¹⁴⁵ United States Department of Labor. Consumers’ Cooperatives: Operations in 1947. Bulletin 948. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1949.

¹⁴⁶ United States Department of Labor. Developments in Consumers’ Cooperatives in 1951. Bulletin 1073. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1952.

¹⁴⁷ Joshua K. Bolles. The People’s Business: The Progress of Consumer Cooperatives in America. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1942.

Student-involved cafés are often cooperatively run and usually feature fair trade and locally sourced products—they are almost exclusively located on university and college campuses. These cafés are developed, operated and maintained by students, either directly as volunteer managers and operators, or indirectly through hired staff paid via a student-levy or university funding. Student-involved cafés are models of a sustainable food service on campus, as they provide students, faculty and staff with fresh and locally produced foods.¹⁴⁸ Cafés are not only a way for students to access locally produced food, but also have several other advantages. For example, Food for Thought, a café at Portland State University advocates for the adoption of sustainable food practices, as do most student-involved cafés.¹⁴⁹ The café space is rented to others for cultural events such as concerts and art exhibits. For a fee, the kitchen is also available for student use.¹⁵⁰ Cafés are excellent for students to “explore issues, test models, and educate one another simultaneously...Sustainability scholars proclaim this kind of ‘social learning’ as a means to alleviate our ecological and social crises.”^{151,152} In addition, a student-involved café can move away from mainstream expectations of food and can promote healthier lifestyles, as well as more ecologically-friendly habits.

Student-involved cafés give students the opportunity to partake in a ‘living laboratory,’ where students can explore sustainable practices and gain valuable experience. They can learn to meet ecologically sustainable food system ideals by finding locally sourced foods, fair-trade coffee and chocolate, and animal derived products that are produced humanely. Students also learn about equity in employment and how to meet sustainable economic ideals. While a class on sustainability has its

¹⁴⁸ Julien Benoît. “Official opening of the brand new Student Run Café at McGill University.” Student Society of McGill University. Oct 25, 2013. <<http://www.newswire.ca/en/story/1248951/media-advisory-official-opening-of-the-brand-new-student-run-cafe-at-mcgill-university>>.

¹⁴⁹ Ash Norton. Student lead campus café. Unpublished paper. Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 2007. <<http://141.218.1.75/sites/default/files/attachments/4100%2007%20Student%20Led%20Cafe%20Project.pdf>>.

¹⁵⁰ Norton, *op cit*.

¹⁵¹ Norton, *op cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁵² Harold Glasser. “Minding the Gap: The Role of Social Learning in Linking Our Stated Desire for a More Sustainable World to Our Everyday Actions and Policies.” Social Learning: Toward a More Sustainable World. Ed. Arjen E.J. Wals. The Netherlands: Wageningen University Press, 2007.

advantages, this lived experience can enhance a students' knowledge at a more interdisciplinary level.¹⁵³

Cafés, or coffee houses, were traditionally used as a place to socialize, it then shifted to being a more individualized space for work. Historically, researchers found that cafés were used as a space for individuals to speak openly and freely about social and political issues. However, with the advent of technology and its easy methods of communicating, cafés are used for individual practices such as reading, writing or working, rather than socializing.¹⁵⁴

Chain coffee shops lack creativity in their design and portrayal, because they are all standardized to fit a certain mold. Most mainstream coffee shops do not place emphasis on their traditional role in society and disregard their significance in relation to the community. More individuals need to support locally owned coffee shops to reintroduce these “third places” that create a forum for free speech and community integration.¹⁵⁵

Student-owned restaurant pubs are places where students and professors can socialize after classes. Student-owned restaurant pubs are owned and operated either by a local student union local or a student organization. Unlike student-involved cafés that are mostly cooperatively run, student-owned restaurant pubs are often operated along the lines of a more traditional business model. However, they often have unionized employees, unlike private drinking establishments. There are many safety advantages to having a pub located on campus, including: the ability to control the environment in comparison to a private, off-campus establishment where overdrinking and underage drinking is commonly encouraged, increased and better monitoring of patrons, a lesser likelihood of having driven to the establishment, and as a tool for revenue generation.¹⁵⁶ In addition, many student-owned restaurant pubs have healthier food options in comparison to private establishments that lack a concern for student health.

¹⁵³ Norton, *op cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁴ Rachael A. Woldoff, Dawn Marie Lozzi, & Lisa M. Dilks. “The Social Transformation of Coffee Houses: The Emergence of Chain Establishments and the Private Nature of Usage.” International Journal of Social Science Studies, 1.2, (2013): 205.

¹⁵⁵ Woldoff et al., *op cit.*, p. 205.

¹⁵⁶ Robert J. Chapman. On-Campus Taverns: A Look at the Pros and Cons of Operation. Unpublished essay. 2007. <<http://www.robertchapman.net/essays/taverns.pdf>>.

Direct-levy supported cafes

Agora Café¹⁵⁷

Agora Café was created in 2005 after UBC Food Services made the decision to abandon a café site they operated. Food Nutrition and Health Student Committee requested use of the space, and led by dietetics student Ashley Wan, organized the new café into a volunteer student-run café. The majority of the food used in the café is grown by the UBC Farm and UBC Faculty of Land and Food Systems Orchard Garden. Agora Café is supported by a .7 cent per student levy fee secured in a 2018 referendum (Yes 7471, No 1283)—approximately \$4,000 annually.

Hive Café¹⁵⁸

Create in 2014, the Hive Café Solidarity Co-op operates two cafés at Concordia's Main and Loyola campuses. A solidarity co-operative is a very unique model that can empower all stakeholders in a project, with user-members, worker-members, and community-members all having reserved seats on the board. Both locations of the Hive were previously coffee houses operated by the Concordia Student Union that shut down due to mismanagement by the student union. The growing acceptance amongst students towards independent student groups receiving levies to manage initiatives precipitated the Concordia Student Union, Concordia Food Coalition and student activists to work towards re-opening these spaces, securing levies and establishing the solidarity co-operative. The Hive Café priorities local food sourcing (where possible) and healthy, just and sustainable food options, while organizationally emphasizes student empowerment, representation, and fair labour relations.

The Seasoned Spoon^{159,160}

¹⁵⁷ Agora Café. "About Us." Agora Café. N.d. <<https://blogs.ubc.ca/agora/about-us/>>.

¹⁵⁸ Hive Café. Hive Café. N.d. <<https://hivecafe.ca/>>.

¹⁵⁹ The Seasoned Spoon. The Seasoned Spoon. N.d. <<https://www.seasonedspoon.ca/>>.

¹⁶⁰ Rebecca Anderson. The History of a Young Non-Profit. Peterborough, ON: Trent University, 2009. Student report.

Started in 2001 as a free soup and bread student initiative called Stone Soup started by an OPIRG Peterborough (Trent) working group. The group was able to take advantage of a contract renewal negotiation between Trent University and multinational food service provider Aramark to allow the creation of a student-run café. The Seasoned Spoon used the Cat's Ass Pub (now closed) in Otonabee College at Trent for one year before getting their own space in Champlain College at Trent. The café features local, organic, fair-trade and sustainably grown food. The Seasoned Spoon is open during the school year (September to April). In addition to operating the student-run café, they also offer catering services and free educational workshops.

Cafes – no levy

The Tea Room^{161,162,163}

The Tea Room is a zero-waste, sustainability themed café located at Queen's University. Started by Michelle Romanow, later known as a Canadian serial-entrepreneur and a venture capitalist on the CBC television show Dragon's Den, she spent three years to lobby, plan, open and later manage the café. Michelle later said of the experience, "I was like, 'Let's actually see if we can build a sustainable business that makes money. And we'll take a simple industry like coffee, which should be fairly high margin, and try to do things totally different.'" ¹⁶⁴ Capital to start the café was raised from the university, grants, fundraisers and student business competitions. Each year the new incoming class of Queen's engineering students gets to manage the café.

3.2.4 Community Bike Centres (aka community bike shops, DIY bike shops)

Do-it-yourself and community bike repair shops and collectives are spaces used for bike repair, bike refurbishing and cycling advocacy. They exist as cooperatives and mutual aid organizations that provide public benefits to the communities they serve via a

¹⁶¹ The Tea Room. The Tea Room. N.d. <<https://www.tea-room.ca/>>.

¹⁶² Queen's University. "From barista to Dragon." Queen's Gazette. 20 May 2016. <<https://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/barista-dragon>>.

¹⁶³ Jemison, *op cit*.

¹⁶⁴ Jeanie Tran. "This summer job helped spark Michele Romanow's career as a serial entrepreneur." BNN Bloomberg. 25 July 2019. <<https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/this-summer-job-helped-spark-michele-romanow-s-career-as-a-serial-entrepreneur-1.1292341>>.

gift economy model. Services are offered free or at a reduced cost in comparison to commercial bike shops. The key difference between DIY and community bike repair, is that while community bike repair shops will repair your bicycle for you, DIY shops will show you how to repair your own bike, either for free or a small cost. Bicycle parts are often also sold, either at cost or for a modest profit to help cover other expenses. All DIY and community bike repair shops share similar goals and purposes, which include DIY empowerment, the promotion of alternative transportation, community building and reliance, and addressing social justice and equity issues.¹⁶⁵

DIY bike shops are an extension of the DIY subculture, which itself is an extension of the punk subculture.¹⁶⁶ This anarcho-punk/DIY punk subculture emerged in the nineteen-nineties, and included a focus on cycling and urban scavenging.¹⁶⁷ An “outlaw” bicycling subculture has developed, and has grown to include DIY bike repair shops, critical mass group bike rides, and bicycle “chopper” clubs.¹⁶⁸ Outlaw bike culture aims to assert the rights of non-drivers and reclaims the streets from motor vehicles, as we live in a world of overconsumption and auto-vehicles have become a symbol of our unsustainable consumption and waste. DIY and community bike repair shops are part of a larger movement of anti-capitalists, alter-capitalists and post-capitalists creating autonomous spaces—not content to wait for an alter-, anti- or post-capitalist society, activists are embarking on this and similar “nowtopian” projects that aim to create a more ideal world in the present.¹⁶⁹ ¹⁷⁰ DIY and community bike repairs shops often struggle to maintain economic sustainability while maintaining their original purposes; “they exist on the verge of co-optation. Everyday rent and survival confront DIY bike shop staffers with the necessity of making money. This in turn pushes them towards converting cooperative spaces based on sharing and mutual aid into small businesses. Even when officially not-for-profit, cash flows inexorably begin to shape

¹⁶⁵ Dan Godin. Cycling Advocacy, DIY Urbanism and the Transformation of Automobility. Thesis. Toronto, ON: York University, Faculty of Environmental Studies, 2012. 62.

¹⁶⁶ Zack Furness, One Less Car: Bicycling and the Politics of Automobility. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010. 142-143, 150.

¹⁶⁷ Furness, *op cit.*, p.p. 150, 154.

¹⁶⁸ Chris Carlsson. “‘Outlaw’ Bicycling.” Affinities, 1.1 (2007): 86-106.

¹⁶⁹ Andre Pusey. “Social Centres and the New Cooperativism of the Common.” Affinities, 4.1 (2010): 176-198.

¹⁷⁰ Chris Carlsson. Nowtopia: How Pirate Programmers, Outlaw Bicyclists, and Vacant-Lot Gardeners Are Inventing the Future Today! Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2008.

decisions and behaviors.”¹⁷¹ DIY and community bike shops have grown immensely in popularity in the past two decades. They can now be found in most North American cities and are commonly found on Canadian university campuses.

Some campuses also have bike share or bike lending systems. Manual systems are more common on college/university campuses located in mid- or low-density municipalities. They are often operated alongside other services, such as an information desk or security desk. Alternatively, they use a shared lock system and are parked at campus bike racks. Rent-a-bike programs are operated similarly to manual bike share systems. However, they usually only have one centralized location, usually at the campus bike centre. Rent-a-bike programs have significantly lower start-up costs—one report estimates the start-up cost for a fleet of 25 bicycles at \$7,745 (US) and operating costs of \$710 (US) per semester.¹⁷² Over 100 universities in the United States and Canada now have on-campus bicycle sharing or rental programs.¹⁷³

Cycling Initiatives and Centres - Levy supported, Independent

AMS Bike Co-op (Bike Kitchen and Purple and Yellow Bikes)^{174,175}

Founded in 1998 as the AMS Bike Co-op, with the support of the AMS student union and Trek, a bicycle manufacturer, AMS Bike Co-op operated a bike share fleet of purple and yellow bicycles that members could borrow using a universal key that would work on all of their bike locks. AMS Bike Co-op’s Bike Kitchen was founded in 1999, with the assistance of Better Environmentally Sound Transportation, a BC organization promoting green transportation, and Pedal Society Our Community Bikes, a downtown Vancouver community bike centre. The Bike Kitchen community bike shop is located in the UBC Student Centre basement. Despite the name, AMS Bike Co-op is fully independent from the student union with their own board of directors. At the Bike

¹⁷¹ Chris Carlsson, “Outlaw Bicycling,” *op cit*.

¹⁷² Andrew Brenner, Christopher Camp and Andrew Stahlke. The Feasibility of a Case Bicycle Rental Program as a Solution to Campus Transportation Problems. Unpublished paper. Cleveland, OH: Case Western University, 2003.

¹⁷³ Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE). “Bicycle Sharing & Rental Programs.” AASHE. N.d. <<http://www.aashe.org/resources/bicycle-share-programs>>

¹⁷⁴ Daniel DeGagné. Interim Report – Housing and Community Development. N.d. Report. <<https://conseil-jeunesse.mb.ca/sites/default/files/interimreportmbcoop.pdf>>.

¹⁷⁵ The Bike Kitchen. The Bike Kitchen. N.d. <<https://www.thebikekitchen.ca/>>.

Kitchen, students and community members can come to maintain and repair their bike and learn about bike maintenance and mechanics. They also recycle bikes and hold bike sales, receiving donated abandoned bikes from the City of Vancouver. The co-op also offers bike storage. Purple and Yellow bikes is a fleet of refurbished bikes across the UBC campus that can be unlocked and borrowed by members of the co-op. AMS Bike Co-op is staffed by two or three paid full-time staff (depending on the time of year), but mostly relies on volunteer staff. They are funded by a dedicated levy fee, through the AMS student union, of \$1.12 levy per full-time student (approximately \$60,000 annually, with a voluntary opt-out). AMS Bike Co-op is part of the Vancouver Community Bike Shop Network.

Bikechain (University of Toronto)¹⁷⁶

Bikechain was established in 2005 as an initiative of the University of Toronto Sustainability Office. The initiative initially struggled due to limited funding and inadequate space (originally starting at the OISE underground parking garage and later moving to the basement of Cumberland House international student centre). Later becoming an independent student initiative, Bikechain held a failed student referendum in March 2007 (before later winning in October 2007 establishing a .25 cents levy from all undergraduate students). Bikechain later received a larger and more visible space in the North Borden Building, across from the Graduate Student Union Building and Pub. Bikechain is operated by two full-time staff, and part-time student staff, and volunteers. The services offered by Bikechain include a DIY bicycle repair space, bike loans, bike sales, on-campus lock cutting and womyn/trans/non-binary only shop hours. In 2025, they increased their levy referendum to \$1.58/per undergraduate student.

Cycling Initiatives and Centres – Non-direct levy (financial support via larger environmental levy organization, Regenesis or PIRG)

Regenesis - Cycle York (York University)

¹⁷⁶ India McAlister. "Bikechain, 10 years on." *The Varsity*. 23 March 2015. <<https://thevarsity.ca/2015/03/23/bikechain-10-years-on/>>.

Cycle York Community Bike Centre was the culmination of years of effort by student cycling advocates at York University. The idea of a community bike shop at York University's Keele Campus had first been suggested by a student cycling club in the early 2000s. In 2008, a new cycling club, called Bike2York was founded and began hosting group rides and bike repair clinics. The Bike2York club also drafted and submitted a proposal to York University for the creation of a community bike hub. In 2010, when the two remaining members of the club were graduating, they reached out to merge the club with Regenesi. Regenesi continued to host group rides, bike clinics, and other cycling-related activities (such as conducting counts of cyclists on campus). Regenesi entered into negotiations with the York University Development Corporation and the City of Toronto to obtain rent-free space under a Section 37 agreement in a new private student residence being built on campus. An agreement was reached in 2015 and the community bike centre finally opened in 2018. Cycle York offers a variety of bike services and programming, including mechanic-guided DIY repair (for free), paid mechanic repair, a free build-a-bike program for students, community group rides, workshops, learn-to-rides, and bike clinics in the community. With the arrival on campus of Toronto Bike Share, a City of Toronto bike share system, Cycle York ceased loaning out bikes. Cycle York is supported by a portion of the levy received by Regenesi at York University's Keele campus, donations, fee-for-service repair, and the sales of bikes and accessories. Cycle York, led by Regenesi York President at the time, Darnel Harris, played an important role in lobbying for Toronto Bike Share to come to campus.

Cycling Initiatives and Centres – Multi-stakeholder and Solidarity Co-operatives

Coop Roue Libre (Université Laval)^{177,178,179}

Coop Roue-Libre is the largest university cycling co-operative in Quebec, opening in 2009. Coop Roue-Libre is a multi-stakeholder co-operative, with 450

¹⁷⁷ Coop Roue-Libre. Donner le goût du vélo. Brief presented to Quebec City Council. September 2010. <<http://cooprouelibre.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/M%C3%A9moire-Coop-Roue-Libre.pdf>>.

¹⁷⁸ Renée Larochelle. "La Coop Roue-Libre opens its doors." Université Laval. 9 September 2009. <<https://nouvelles.ulaval.ca/vie-universitaire/la-coop-roue-libre-ouvre-ses-portes-b7611e7e59b3c0f60bdfdf2fbba856f7>>.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel DeGagné. EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF STUDENT CYCLING COOPERATIVES IN MANITOBA. 17 August 2015. Report. <https://conseil-jeunesse.mb.ca/sites/default/files/ccs_-_exploring_the_potential_for_student_cycling_cooperativesfinalreport_.pdf>.

individual members, and four institutional members—Université Laval, the two student unions on campus, and the campus bulk-buying co-operative, Co-op Zone. The co-op offers bike repair stands (charged per hour or unlimited pass), free bike rentals for members, and education. The co-op also offers event services to the wider Quebec City community, including bicycle stand rentals, bike fleet rentals, and an event bike valet service. Coop Roue Libre is funded in part by Université Laval, two Desjardins caisses populaires (credit unions), the foundation of the Quebec Student Health Association (ASÉQ), MEC and Co-op Zone. Individual memberships are \$10.

Coop Vélo-Cité (Université de Saint-Boniface)^{180,181,182,183}

Inspired by Coop Roue Libre at Université Laval, two students at this small Francophone campus of the University of Manitoba established a bike co-op for the 1,250 students. Founded in 2016 inside two indoor garages at a Cathedral at the university, the co-op has over 400 members. The bike co-op is a project of Conseil Jeunesse Provincial, a provincial Francophone youth council, Association Étudiante de l'Université de Saint-Boniface (student union) and the Université de Saint-Boniface.

Cycling Initiatives and Centres – Member Co-operatives

Sanctoral Cycle Bike Co-op (Canadian Mennonite University)^{184,185}

Sanctoral Cycle Bike Co-op name comes from the liturgical cycle of feast days in honor of the saints. Membership costs \$10 for students and \$20 for others. Membership includes free access to the workspace and tools, access to used parts, occasional mechanic workshops, bikes for sale, affordable paid bike repair, and new parts and accessories for purchase. The co-op has a partnership with a nearby local bike store—members can receive a 15% discount, allowing them to purchase items that might not be available for

¹⁸⁰ Jean-Louis Bordeleau. “LA COOP ROUE-LIBRE... AU MANITOBA!” *Impact Campus*. 24 November 2015. <<http://impactcampus.ca/actualites/ca-roule-pour-la-coop-roue-libre/>>.

¹⁸¹ DeGagné. *op cit*.

¹⁸² Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba. “COOP VÉLO-CITÉ.” *CDEM*. 3 April 2016. <<http://www.cdem.com/en/publications/coop-v-lo-cit>>.

¹⁸³ Coop Vélo-Cité. *Coop Vélo-Cité*. N.d. <<https://coopvelocite.wordpress.com/>>.

¹⁸⁴ John Longhurst. “What Would Jesus Drive?” *Canadian Cyclist*. 24 November 2006. <<http://www.canadiancyclist.com/dailynews.php?id=11504&title=What%20Would%20Jesus%20Drive?>>.

¹⁸⁵ DeGagné. *op cit*.

sale at the co-op. The university provides a free space and covers the utility costs. The co-op does not receive any university funding or student levies.

3.2.5 Farmers' Markets

Farmers' markets are temporary (usually once weekly) marketplaces where farmers and artisans sell their food and goods directly to the public. Many Canadian universities have embraced the idea of incorporating a farmers' market into their campuses. Farmers' markets provide students an opportunity to purchase fresh locally grown fruits and vegetables. This is important, as many campuses are food deserts with no grocery store nearby.¹⁸⁶ One reason farmers' markets and other food initiatives are increasingly appearing is due to the work of food activists that are working towards establishing a more sustainable food system, one that promotes nutrition and healthier food options for citizens, encourages purchasing local and organic food where possible, and contributes to the long-term viability of family farms and rural communities.¹⁸⁷ We have seen a large increase in food initiatives and food activism on campus in the past fifteen years. Student food activists are increasingly organizing food security initiatives, such as campus farmers' markets.

There are extensive benefits of having a farmers' market on campus. Since the food is locally grown, the food maintains higher nutrition levels, eliminates the need for most pesticides and preservative usage, and reduces the carbon delivery footprint of the food item. However, fresh healthy organic food costs more than chemically treated, mass-produced fruits and vegetables. This is a common barrier encountered during farmers' markets, as some citizens are unwilling or unable to pay more for food. In addition to the food being more expensive, it is sometimes difficult to locate farms that will participate in local food initiatives.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario. Task Force on Campus Food Services – Final Report. Toronto, ON: Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario, 2013.

¹⁸⁷ Mustafa Koc, Rod MacRae, Ellen Desjardins and Wayne Roberts. "Getting civil about food: the interactions between civil society and the state to advance food security in Canada." Journal of Health, Environment and Nutrition, 3.2 (2008):122-144.

¹⁸⁸ R.A. Atkinson, M.L. McKenna, J. Bays, D. Lahey, B. Wylie-Toal, and M. Vrins. Local Foods: Canadian schools, campuses, and health care facilities speak up. Fredericton, NB: Farm to Cafeteria, 2013.

Farmers' markets are usually run by not-for-profit community organizations. Farmers' Markets are increasingly appearing at many universities and colleges across Canada. Campus farmers' markets are most often student-run operations. Others are operated by outside groups or the university itself via its food services division. University of British Columbia was recently acknowledged for their incredibly successful farmers' market by being named one of Canada's most ambitious and successful farmers' markets.¹⁸⁹ Their market is entirely student driven, operates twice weekly, and sells produce grown from the UBC Farm.

Along with providing people with fresh local produce, farmers' markets create an environment of positive interaction and social learning in which the farmer vendors can sell their products as well as educate others on the importance of healthy and sustainable living.¹⁹⁰ The main reason most farmers' markets are not better known and attended is from a lack of awareness of their existence and inefficient advertising, in addition to competition from conventional food markets.¹⁹¹ These factors decrease the chances of the growth potential of a market and could lead to the closure of some farmers' markets.

McGill Farmers' Market^{192,193}

Founded in 2008, the McGill Farmers' Market is a large farmers' market serving the university community and Downtown Montreal. The McGill Farmers' Market formed the Kohlrabi Collective in 2015 as a partnership between themselves, Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Gardens (MSEG), and the now defunct Organic Campus, a produce stand initiative at McGill University. The partnership allows for community supported-agriculture through a subscription to a weekly produce basket grown by MSEG.

¹⁸⁹ Macleans Magazine. "Farmers' Markets Hit University Campuses." [Macleans.ca](http://www.macleans.ca/education/uniandcollege/farmers-markets-hit-university-campuses/). 27 Aug 2010. <<http://www.macleans.ca/education/uniandcollege/farmers-markets-hit-university-campuses/>>.

¹⁹⁰ Chris Hergesheimer and Emily Kennedy. *Farmers Markets, Local Food Systems and the Social Economy: A Thematic Literature Review*. Port Alberni, BC: BC-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance, 2010.

¹⁹¹ Hergesheimer & Kennedy, *op cit*.

¹⁹² McGill Farmers' Market. *McGill Farmers' Market*. N.d. <<http://mcgillfarmersmarket.com>>.

¹⁹³ The Sandbox. "The Kohlrabi Collective: Creating a Connected Local Food System." *The Sandbox: Stories of Sustainability at McGill University*. 15 May 2017. <<https://publications.mcgill.ca/sustainability/2017/05/15/kohlrabi-collective/>>.

Regenesis York's YUM (York University Market)

The idea of a weekly farmers' market at York University arose through a partnership between a class project and the Regenesis chapter at York University in 2010 that ran a pilot farmers' market.¹⁹⁴ It took three years of lobbying before York University gave permission to run a weekly farmers' market, which commenced in the fall of 2013. The market was an immediate hit and became popular with students and university staff alike. The market originally located in the TEL (Dahdaleh) building was moved to Central Square, the busiest part of York University's Keele Campus in 2017. We also expanded YUM to York University's smaller Glendon Campus in 2017. Our bi-annual visitor counts in 2019 shows that YUM @ Keele has on average 20,891 visitors per week (or 501,400 annual visitors over the 24 weeks the market is held during the Fall and Winter terms), making it one of the largest farmers' markets in Canada.¹⁹⁵ However, post-pandemic, the market has been significantly scaled back due to York University Food Services restricting potential vendors due to food service contracts.

3.2.6 Food Banks and Free Food Initiatives (aka Soup Kitchens)

A food bank is a non-profit initiative that collects food from donors and distributes them to individuals and families who lack the funds to purchase food. Food banks have their origins in soup kitchens, which provided hot meals to the poor. Hunger in North America was considered a problem that was under control until the mid-1960s, according to sociology professor Janet Poppendieck.¹⁹⁶ A number of American states stopped distributing free federal food surpluses to those in need by the mid-1960s and began providing food stamps that allowed recipients to choose foods to take with them from a grocery store rather than being given that which was in surplus. Due to the minimum charge for food stamps, several people in need could not afford the stamps and went hungry. In 1967, John van Hengel founded the first food bank in the world, the St. Mary's Food Bank Alliance in Arizona. When he was volunteering for a community dining hall in 1965, he learned that grocery stores threw out food that was nearly expired

¹⁹⁴ Personal experience and knowledge.

¹⁹⁵ Regenesis. Annual Report, 2020. Toronto, ON: Regenesis. Report. 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Janet Poppendieck. "Introduction, Chapter 1". Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement. Toronto, CA: Penguin Group, 1999.

or was packaged incorrectly. He began to collect that food for the dining hall but soon realized it was too much food. With the help of St. Mary's Basilica, he created the first food bank, after which food banks spread across the U.S. and Canada.¹⁹⁷

Food insecurity is very prominent among post-secondary students and there is a growing need for on-campus food banks. This could be a result of a number of factors such as, high tuition rates, inadequacy of student loan networks, lack of affordable childcare, and the fact that minimum wage has not increased with the rate of inflation. Even students who have graduated continue to struggle to pay off debts and are often classified as the working poor, because when work can be found, it is most often temporary work that pays up to 40 percent less than other jobs. It is a myth that if a student has enough money to pay for tuition that he/she can live a comfortable life and afford nutritious meals. Many students are living on their own while trying to earn enough money to get by with the little they get from their part-time jobs.¹⁹⁸ In addition, food prices on campus are often very high. A recent report from the Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario states, “High prices can be attributed to the monopoly food companies have on campus. With many institutions being located in remote locations, food vendors have the ability to charge higher prices than usual due to the lack of alternative options. This ‘food desert’ environment allows current food vendors to exploit their presence on campuses through price gouging of students.”¹⁹⁹

The first food bank in Canada opened its doors in 1981 in Edmonton, Alberta.²⁰⁰ In 1991, the University of Alberta established the first campus food bank at a post-secondary institution in Canada.²⁰¹ By 2004, 51 campus-based food banks existed in Canada.²⁰² In 2004, the Canadian Association of Food Banks and Canadian Alliance of Student Associations did a national survey of campus-based food banks. They found that

¹⁹⁷ Poppendieck, *op cit.*, p. 112.

¹⁹⁸ Andrea Gordon. “Need for campus food banks on the rise.” *Toronto Star*. 19 September 2011. <http://www.thestar.com/life/2011/09/19/need_for_campus_food_banks_on_the_rise.html>.

¹⁹⁹ Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario. *Task Force on Campus Food Services – Final Report*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Federation of Students – Ontario, 2013.

²⁰⁰ Edmonton's Food Bank. “History.” *Edmonton's Food Bank*. N.d.

<https://www.edmontonsfoodbank.com/about/history/>

²⁰¹ Campus Food Bank. “About the Campus Food Bank.” *Campus Food Bank*. N.d.

https://omekaprojects.artsrn.ualberta.ca/campusfoodbank/s/campus-food-bank/page/about_CFB

²⁰² Alberta Centre for Active Living. “Hunger on Campus: Understanding Food Insecurity in Post-Secondary Students.” *Research Update*, 14.2, 2007.

campus-based food banks distributed food hampers to 3,121 clients in an array of households, most of which went to single households.²⁰³

Campus food banks are primarily run and funded by student unions. Food donations come from purchasing food, individual and corporate donations, and food bank networks. The University of Guelph has a student levy where each student contributes \$1 each semester to go towards the campus food bank. Ryerson University's food bank gets biweekly food donations from the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto and the student union has started their own community gardens around campus that grow fresh vegetables and herbs for the food bank.²⁰⁴ Many campus food banks have rebranded themselves as food centres so as to destigmatize the usage of the food bank, however, this term is different the usage of food centres by the organization Right To Food Canada, which is a food-centred community centre that integrates food access with education, skill-building, and social support.²⁰⁵

While soup kitchens are hundreds of years old, campus student-run soup kitchens (or free food initiatives) are a new phenomenon that can trace their roots to the Food Not Bombs movement, local collectives that serve free vegetarian and vegan food using donated produce from community gardens, foraged and surplus food. Many universities have Food Not Bombs chapters that weekly or periodically offer a free meal. In the past ten years in Canada, campus food activists have begun establishing student-run soup kitchens that offer free or pay-what-you-can meals. Soup kitchens have been established at UBC, Concordia and Dalhousie, offering students a free or PWYC meal each weekday. Many soup kitchens no longer use the terminology either, also aiming to destigmatize usage, however, there is no dominate new replacement term that has been universal adopted, but other monikers include: meal programs, community kitchens, or meal services.

Levied groups

²⁰³ Matt Ferguson. Campus Hunger Count 2004 - Struggling to Feed Hope to Canada's Students: Food Banks Emerge in Response to Student Hunger. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association of Food Banks and The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, 2004.

²⁰⁴ Gordon, *op cit*.

²⁰⁵ Right To Food. "Community Food Centres." Right To Food. N.d. <<https://righttofood.ca/community-food-centres/>>.

Carleton Food Collective^{206,207,208,209,210}

Carleton Food Collective was established by members of OPIRG Carleton who secured a \$1.50 per term undergraduate student levy in 2002, with a graduate student levy of \$2.00 per term established in 2006. Similar to many other universities, Carleton's food services are provided by a single multinational provider, Aramark, whose current contract ended in 2023. Only non-Aramark operated food venues, being three student-union owned restaurants, grandfathered in. The main initiative of the Carleton Food Collective is The Garden Spot, a service that provides PWYC locally sourced vegetarian meals to the Carleton University community. Some produce is collected through the practice of dumpster diving. Carleton Food Collective cooks their food in a leased space off-campus. The collective has faced a number of obstacles over the years. In 2011, the collective became inactive due to members graduating, but it was restarted soon after by two graduate students. A common obstacle when student levy groups become inactive—the two students restarting the collective faced difficulty and delays in receiving the levy from the undergraduate student union. By 2013 they had enough volunteers to start running again, but they faced obstacles in 2014 when the undergraduate Carleton University Students' Association denied them their levy and refunded students due to accusations of inadequate financial controls. The collective was run by around 10 active members (as of 2019). As of 2025, they no longer appear to receive a student levy due to non-compliance.²¹¹

²⁰⁶ Wesley Petite and Damiano Torre. "What is food at Carleton?: How Carleton Food Collective talks and acts about sustainability." The Leveller. 8 October 2013. <<https://leveller.ca/2013/10/what-is-food-at-carleton/>>.

²⁰⁷ Mark Colley. "Carleton club pushes for termination of Aramark contract over prison abuses." The Charlatan. 12 September 2020. <<https://charlatan.ca/2020/09/carleton-club-pushes-for-termination-of-aramark-contract-over-prison-abuses/>>.

²⁰⁸ Omar Elsharkawy. "Building community through food: The Carleton Food Collective." Community First Research Project. 10 August 2016. <<https://carleton.ca/communityfirst/2016/building-community-through-food-the-carleton-food-collective/>>.

²⁰⁹ Sue Stefko. "The Garden Spot." The Glebe Report. 17 January 2019. <<https://www.glebereport.ca/the-garden-spot/>>.

²¹⁰ Olivia Carey. "Then and now: Catching up with the Carleton Food Collective." The Charlatan. 12 March 2015. <<https://charlatan.ca/2015/03/then-and-now-catching-up-with-the-carleton-food-collective/>>.

²¹¹ Carleton University. "*The 646th Meeting of the Board of Governors: Open Agenda, Tuesday, April 29, 2025.*" Carleton University Board of Governors, 29 Apr. 2025, Pg. 172. carleton.ca/boardofgovernors/wp-content/uploads/sites/157/2025/10/Full-Binder-Open-Consent-2_compressed.pdf.

Midnight Kitchen (McGill University)^{212,213}

Midnight Kitchen was created in 2002 by student activists who had been involved in grassroots organizing for causes such as the 2001 Summit of the Americas protests in Quebec City and who established an activist network at McGill called Graspé. Those involved in mass cookings for demonstrations decided to start Midnight Kitchen as a way to empower people with food and challenge the corporate control of food on campus of Chartwells, an international contract food service, who at the time had a contract with McGill University. In 2003, Midnight Kitchen established themselves as a ‘student service’ with the Students’ Society of McGill University—unlike many other student unions, student service groups at McGill University are generally fully autonomous and receive their own levy separate of that of the student union. Midnight Kitchen lobbied SSMU for a new kitchen and was able to successfully gain full autonomy and access to the space. A \$1.25 per student per term levy, separate of the SSMU budget, was established in 2007 to support Midnight Kitchen which allowed the creation of paid student positions. The levy was increased in 2010 to \$2.25 per student per term. The levy was increased again in 2013 to \$3.25 per student per term. Midnight Kitchen provides a weekly free lunch for students and community members, a food bank, a garden (to grow food to serve), educational events, solidarity servings (at protests), and discretionary funding for food projects.

People’s Potato^{214,215,216,217}

The People’s Potato was started by student food activists with the support of the Concordia Student Union and QPIRG Concordia with a mission of providing PWYC vegetarian meals to hungry students. Like many other universities, food services were controlled by a multinational company (Sodexo at the time). The first serving started in

²¹² Midnight Kitchen. Midnight Kitchen. N.d. <<https://midnightkitchen.org/>>.

²¹³ The McGill Daily. “The Cash Flow of Student-Run Food Services.” The McGill Daily, 21 Jan. 2012, <www.mcgilldaily.com/2012/01/the-cash-flow-of-student-run-food-services/>.

²¹⁴ Concordia University. “In-Brief: Help the People’s Potato.” Concordia Thursday Report, 27 January 2000. <<http://ctr.concordia.ca/archives/is270100/art24.html>>.

²¹⁵ The People’s Potato. Vegan on a Shoestring 2. Montreal, QC: The People’s Potato, 2010.

²¹⁶ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. N.d. <<http://concordiafoodgroups.ca/>>.

²¹⁷ Justin Giovannetti. “A Walk on the Radical Side.” The Link, 28 September 2010.

January 2000, despite having difficulties with Chartwells, the food service provider at the time for Concordia University. Chartwells had an exclusivity contract which prevented The People's Potato serving food on campus at events like QPIRG's annual disorientation. The People's Potato was part of an emergence of left/anti-capitalist politics at Concordia University that included many other student organizations that sought alternatives to capitalism. Arguably the most successful student-run soup kitchen in Canada, The People's Potato employs 11 students annually and provides 400 meals each weekday. They have inspired others to create their own food initiatives, across Canada and at Concordia University (which has had over 21 student-run food initiatives according to the Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project).

The Loaded Ladle^{218,219}

The Loaded Ladle is a weekly PWYC vegetarian meal soup kitchen at Dalhousie University and The University of King's College. Established in 2010, The Loaded Ladle has steadily grown. In 2016, a new kitchen and servery was opened in the Dalhousie University Student Union Building. The Loaded Ladle serves over 200+ meals each day they are open. In addition to the soup kitchen, The Loaded Ladle also runs other food-related activities such as workshops and a book club.

Defunct groups

Harvest Noon / Hot Yam^{220,221,222,223}

Hot Yam was established in 2009 as a non-hierarchical collective providing PWYC vegan meals at the International Student Centre at the University of Toronto. The group incorporated as the Toronto Sustainable Food Co-operative and started the Harvest Noon café inside the Graduate Student Building at the University of Toronto in the fall of

²¹⁸ The Loaded Ladle. The Loaded Ladle. N.d. <<https://loadedladle.com/>>.

²¹⁹ Jessica Hirtle. "Student-run society offers free food and much more." The Signal. 20 October 2016. <<https://signalhfx.ca/student-run-society-offers-free-food-and-much-more/>>.

²²⁰ Taryn Parker. "The Wonderful World of Student Run Cafés." Life @ UofT. 21 January 2016. <<http://blogs.studentlife.utoronto.ca/lifeatuoft/2016/01/21/the-wonderful-world-of-student-run-cafes/>>.

²²¹ Hot Yam. "Hot Yam." 7 July 2011. <<https://archive.org/web/20110907042704/http://www.hotyam.ca/>>.

²²² Harvest Noon. "Harvest Noon." 20 July 2012. <<https://archive.org/web/20120720012603/http://harvestnoon.com/>>.

²²³ Personal knowledge.

2011. The group succeeded in securing levies from University of Toronto St. George Campus undergraduate and graduate students, which allowed the hiring of some staff to supplement volunteer labour. Due to food safety violations, the University of Toronto threatened the University of Toronto Graduate Students' Union to either close Harvest Noon or risk being evicted from their building. This resulted in their closure.

3.2.7 Free Stores and Thrift Stores

Free stores (also known as give-away shops in the United Kingdom or swap shops in parts of the United States) give away items in the store for free or using a swap model (donate something in order to take something). Free Stores help us to reduce our consumption and waste by providing a venue of exchange for unwanted items. Individuals and organizations can keep items out of the landfill by donating unwanted items to a Free Store. For those without a fixed physical space for a Free Store, temporary Free Stores known as Really Really Free Markets (RRFM) are commonly held in parks across North America. Also common are swap events, where people are required to bring items in order to take items. Really Really Free Markets and swap events are common on university campuses. Both Free Stores and Really Really Free Markets have their roots in anti-capitalist and anarchist movements.²²⁴ The first Free Stores were started by The Diggers in San Francisco and New York in the late nineteen-sixties.^{225 226} Free stores provide educational awareness and dialogical opportunities on issues such as consumption, waste, simple living, reuse and recycling. Global-level social and environmental concerns and achieving personal commitments to simple living and consumption reduction motivate Free Store and RRFM participation.²²⁷ Individuals typically can take as much as they want or leave as much as they please. Items that are not taken after a certain period are often donated to charities or shelters.²²⁸ Donated

²²⁴ Pia Albinsson and B. Yasanthi Perera. "Alternative marketplaces in the 21st century: Building community through sharing events." *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 11 (2012): 303-315.

²²⁵ Ted Purves, (Ed.). *What We Want Is Free: Generosity And Exchange In Recent Art*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006. 163.

²²⁶ The New Yorker. "Talk of the Town." *The New Yorker*. 14 Oct 1967: 49.
<http://www.diggers.org/free_store1.htm>.

²²⁷ Rajesh Iyer and James Muncy. "Purpose and object of anti-consumption." *Journal of Business Research*, 62 (2009): 160-168.

²²⁸ Albinsson and Perera, *op cit*.

items are often repaired—repair café and repairathon events provide tools and recruit repair volunteers to repair items en masse. Besides traditional uses, items are often repurposed for creative uses. Many school boards now operate Creative Reuse Centres, which are Free Stores that accept non-toxic items that can be made into art by children and youth. Student-involved Free Stores exist at some universities in Canada, including Trent University in Peterborough (OPIRG Peterborough), University of Toronto Scarborough and St. George campuses (Regenesis UofT) and York University Keele and Glendon campuses in Toronto (Regenesis York).

Thrift stores, or charity stores, sell used clothing and goods. Money raised is used to keep the initiative alive and surplus funds are used for charitable purposes. Only two student-run thrift stores exist in Canada—Get Thrifty at UBC and the Regenesis Thrift Store (a section of high-end items in the Regenesis Free Store) at York University’s Keele Campus, that was started after resellers would come and take all the higher end items at the free store, so in order to deter resellers, we launched a thrift store for higher end items to deter them, while keeping prices low enough for students to afford (comparable to prices at cheaper thrift stores like Goodwill and The Salvation Army Thrift Store).

Levied

Project Imagine UBC Get Thrifty^{229,230}

Project Imagine is a sustainable fashion design club at UBC that operates a thrift store on campus. They started with monthly pop-up events in 2018 and secured a referendum in 2019 for a .95 per student levy fee, secured space in the student centre and opened their thrift store in February 2020. They sell both donated items (for a maximum of \$20) and consignment items (for a maximum of \$150). Their project is unique in Canada, as it is a thrift store supported by a student levy (when typically, these types of initiatives are supported by a student levy, the items in the store are typically free, or primarily free).

²²⁹ Project Imagine UBC. “Get Thrifty.” Project Imagine UBC. N.d. <<https://www.projectimagine.ca/get-thrifty/>>.

²³⁰ Get Thrifty. “Get Thrifty.” N.d. <<https://www.getthrifty.ca/pages/about-us>>.

3.2.8 Grocery and Bulk Buying Cooperatives

A student-involved food (grocery) co-op provides local and organic food to students, faculty and staff on campus.²³¹ These food co-ops, modeled similarly to natural food co-op grocers, provide fresh produce, baked goods, meats, dairy, packaged foods and prepared meals. Student-involved food co-ops are not only advantageous to students by increasing access to healthy and nutritious food, but also to the environment through the reduction of greenhouse gases. Transportation is the source of 25% of greenhouse gas emissions. Food co-ops reduce or eliminate the distance for commercial transportation of produce through the purchasing and/or production of local organic food. Food miles is a term used to define the distance food travels from its place of production to consumption. This is important because it determines roughly the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted in the air, the further the food travels, the more gases are released. For instance, when comparing California-grown carrots to locally produced carrots, those produced in California emit 59 times the amount of greenhouse gasses than those produced in the Greater Toronto Area.²³² Student-involved food co-ops can contribute to a reduction in the overall carbon footprint of the university.²³³ Students gain hands-on opportunities to be a part of an operation that allows them to learn about eating locally and gives them experience on how to supply locally sourced, organic food. According to a survey done by the student union building of Dalhousie University, most students are willing to pay \$2 or more annually as a levy in support of the co-op and over 60% would be willing to pay more for sustainably sourced food.²³⁴

The first co-op started in Rochdale, England in 1844 when “a group of weavers pooled their resources to create a business that operated for the benefit of the people who used it rather than for the economic gain of an individual or small group of owners.”²³⁵

²³¹ Bridget Antze, Gregory Bathe, Alexander Brandt, Anita Nipen, Adrian Orlik and Molly Warner. The Feasibility of Supplying Locally Sourced and Organic Food for a Student-Run Food co-op on Studley Campus. Unpublished Paper. Halifax, NS: Dalhousie University, 2009.
<http://www.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/science/environmental-science-program/ENVS%203502%20projects/2009/The_Feasibility_of_Supplying_Local_Food_for_a_Student.pdf>.

²³² Online emissions calculator.

²³³ Antze et al., *op cit.*, p. 5.

²³⁴ Antze et al., *op cit.*, pp. 13, 16, 23-26.

²³⁵ Community Food Co-op. “Co-op History.” Community Food Co-op. N.d.
<<http://www.communityfood.coop/join/history/>>.

Co-operatives exist as mutual benefit organizations, and its profits are reinvested into the cooperative through higher wages, improved services and workplace conditions. There are two main types of cooperatives: worker cooperatives that are owned and managed by the workers, and membership (or consumer) cooperatives that are owned by the consumer members. Depending on the size of the cooperative, decisions could be made directly by the members, as is the case with smaller co-operatives and unregistered collectives, while larger member co-operatives will hire managers and staff, with decisions made by the membership through voting at meetings.

In addition to student co-op grocers, a few post-secondary institutions have student-owned non-profit or co-op food service operations, including Collège Boréal in Ontario, and Laval University and Université de Sherbrooke in Quebec. Chartwells (Compass), Sodexo and Aramark are the three main companies responsible for providing food services to university campuses across Canada. These multinational companies claim to make an effort to provide locally grown fruits, vegetables and meats, when it is feasible. However, having a large corporation ironically makes the feasibility of providing local and organic food more difficult, as such companies will only buy meat and produce from industrial producers who can afford to buy costly insurance that most local farmers cannot manage to pay for. Another concern with large food service companies is that there is no opportunity for student involvement, preventing students from a potential opportunity to learn about the importance of locally produced food if a food co-op were to exist instead.²³⁶ Student-owned food service operations offer an alternative that can better reflect the desires of students regarding the food they want and the prices they are willing to pay, and ultimately empowers students as agents that are able to enact the food changes they want to see on their campuses and in their communities.

While few universities have student food co-ops, many universities (primarily through student unions) are now offering students Good Food Boxes—local, organic produce baskets—that are delivered to a central campus location for pick-up by any student or community member that orders it. Similarly, I found one campus CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) initiative that allows students to pre-pay for direct-

²³⁶ Antze et al., *op cit.*, pp. 5-6.

from-the-farm produce. Before the start of a growing season, individuals can purchase membership in a CSA. When produce is grown and available, each member receives a weekly basket of fruits, vegetables and herbs.

En Vrac^{237,238,239,240,241}

En Vrac is a student-led organization at the Université de Montréal, offering an eco-friendly, zero-waste approach to food shopping through a bulk buying co-operative. Founded in 2017 by Samuel Frappier, it operates from the local 1103 in the Marguerite-d'Youville pavilion at the Université de Montréal, focusing on bulk, organic food products such as nuts, grains, and seeds. Customers use their own containers to purchase these items, promoting environmental sustainability. Influenced by its roots in the Département de Nutrition, En Vrac also emphasizes healthy eating and educates its community through recipes and product information. The initiative, which faced early challenges in securing a free space and university approval, has inspired similar projects at other universities in Quebec and has gained recognition for its impactful contribution to sustainable and healthy living on campus.

Le Frigo Vert^{242,243,244,245}

²³⁷ En Vrac - économie & écologie. "En Vrac - économie & écologie." N.d.

<https://commandeenvrac.wixsite.com/accueil>.

²³⁸ Quebec Circulaire. "En Vrac - économie et écologie." N.d.

<https://www.quebeccirculaire.org/initiative/h/en-vrac-economie-et-ecologie.html>.

²³⁹ Bernard Lavallée. "En Vrac : l'épicerie bio, locale et zéro déchet des étudiants en nutrition."

Nutritionniste Urbain. March 11, 2018.. <https://nutritionnistebain.ca/portraits/en-vrac-lepicerie-bio-locale-et-zero-dechet-des-etudiants-en-nutrition/>.

²⁴⁰ Faculté de Médecine, Université de Montréal. "En Vrac, bio et écolo à petit prix sur le campus." Nov. 14, 2018. <https://medecine.umontreal.ca/2018/11/14/en-vrac-bio-et-ecolo-a-petit-prix-sur-le-campus/>.

²⁴¹ Celine. Interview. Oct 8, 2019.

²⁴² Concordia University. Concordia Campus Sustainability Assessment 2003. Montreal, QC: Concordia University.

<<https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/concordia/services/sustainability/docs/EHS/Assessment/CCSA2003.pdf>>.

²⁴³ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. N.d. <<http://concordiafoodgroups.ca/>>.

²⁴⁴ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. "Maria Forti on the History of le Frigo Vert."

Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. 3 August 2016. Youtube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOlgL_9k0IA>.

²⁴⁵ Le Frigo Vert. Le Frigo Vert, n.d., <<https://lefrigovert.org/>>.

Le Frigo Vert is a student-run “anti-capitalist food and alternative health community space” at Concordia University. They operate a grocery store, in addition to hosting workshops and community events in their space. Originally started in 1993 as Eat Your Peel, a bulk buying co-operative that was established as a QPIRG Concordia working group, the group established a student levy in 1994 and opened Le Frigo Vert in January 1996. Originally located at 2130 Rue Mackay in a space shared with QPIRG Concordia originally, QPIRG moved out and Le Frigo Vert had the entire space until they moved in 2016 to a current location at 1440 Rue Mackay.

Defunct groups

Fed Up The Affordable Food Project^{246,247,248,249}

Created by Matt (Em) Heppler and Ellie Donahue-Miller in 2011, Fed Up held a mission to provide affordable, healthy and ethical food to Brock students on a non-profit basis. This included grocery pick-up and delivery, a bulk buying co-op, a community kitchen, and providing food servings to students, along with other services such as food education, events and providing food safety training. An MOU between the Brock University Students’ Union and Fed Up imposed strict conditions on the levy, including requiring any purchase over \$500 to get pre-approved by the student union. The project received a levy of \$2.80 per credit in 2014, but lost funding in 2015 because of the Brock University Students’ Union defunding the initiative over allegations of financial mismanagement.

3.2.9 PIRGs (Canadian-model) and similar organizations

²⁴⁶ Amanda Moore. “Fed Up with the status quo.” *Niagara This Week*. 16 October 2015.

<<https://www.niagarathisweek.com/news-story/5964044-fed-up-with-the-status-quo/>>.

²⁴⁷ Brock University Students’ Union and Fed Up The Affordable Food Project. *Memorandum of Understanding between Brock University Students’ Union and Fed Up The Affordable Food Project*. March 2014. <<https://www.brockbusu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014-March-Fed-Up-The-Affordable-Food-Project-MOU.pdf>>.

²⁴⁸ Melanie Pfaeffli. “Fed-Up issue still not finished: BUSAC deals with leftover funds.” *The Brock Press*. 10 November 2015. <<https://www.brockpress.com/fed-up-issue-still-not-finished-busac-deals-with-leftover-funds/>>.

²⁴⁹ Brock U Gadfly. “The ‘FED UP’ Hold Up.” *Brock U Gadfly*. 8 February 2014. YouTube. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8P3XN55AoM>>.

Canadian Public Interest Research Groups (or PIRGs) are grassroots activist organizations that are active both on-campus and in the community. PIRGs exist in the provinces of Nova Scotia (1), Quebec (3), Ontario (11), Saskatchewan (1), Alberta (2), and British Columbia (2). Each PIRG is independently run and operated, with the membership deciding what ‘action groups’ or ‘working groups’ (or campaigns/projects) exist—this is most often based on the level of interest from the membership. Most working groups start with a person or small group bringing forward a proposal. If approved, the PIRG provides the working group with resources and it is up to those involved in the working group to recruit members and organize their activities (e.g. campaigns, events, projects, etc.). PIRGs support a variety of social justice, human rights, anti-oppression, anti-racism, economic justice, and environmental causes. PIRG working groups engage in a variety of activities, including advocacy, campaigns, events, organizing, policy development and lobbying. The grassroots approach used by PIRGs in Canada allows each PIRG the ability to focus on the concerns, issues and struggles important to that local community.

PIRGs originated from the growing popularity of public interest advocacy as championed by American, Ralph Nader, then known for being a consumer advocate after his exposé on the automobile industry and their resistance to improved vehicular safety measures. The idea of on-campus Public Interest Research Groups was created by Ralph Nader, along with the National PIRG staffers Jim Welch and Donald Ross, in an aim to “develop an effective, enduring model for student activism.”²⁵⁰ Taking into consideration exams, summer vacation, and turn-over after graduation, they established a model that would hire professionals to train students to become effective activists—funding would occur through student levies established at universities and colleges. U.S. PIRGs exist at three levels: national, state and campus chapters. U.S. PIRGs are operated as state non-profit organizations with on-campus chapters, funded through a combination of grants, donors, direct-appeal fundraising and student-levies. State PIRGs are affiliated with the national U.S. PIRG and the Fund for Public Interest Research.

²⁵⁰ David Bollier. Citizen action and other big ideas: a history of Ralph Nader and the modern consumer movement. Washington, D.C.: Center for Study of Responsive Law, 1992.

David Robertson, a former OPIRG (Ontario PIRG) staff person, said of public interest research:

“Although “research” and “public interest research” may both be performing the tasks of problem posing and problem resolution, the similarity ends with the words. The way that we pose problems and the way we struggle for resolution is very different from the research that is the domain of experts. In fact, it would be more accurate for us to talk about social investigation rather than research. We are not interested per se in adding to the sum of knowledge—knowledge for the sake of knowledge has little place in OPIRG. Instead our Investigations are goal-directed: they imply action. In this sense, our research is a politically-motivated and directed undertaking both in terms of the problem posing and the problem resolution stages. It is not neutral or value-free—but then again no research is either neutral or value-free.”²⁵¹

It is important to understand the vast differences between Canadian and U.S. PIRGs. Canadian PIRGs and a small number of independent PIRGs in the United States are student-run and independent of each other. Independent and semi-independent U.S. PIRGs include MPIRG (Minnesota), VPIRG (Vermont), AkPIRG (Alaska) and NYPIRG (New York)—however, none of these resemble the Canadian PIRG model. Canadian PIRGs are autonomous, grassroots non-profit activist organizations; as such, the issues they address are issues important to the local communities they serve. U.S. PIRGs operate on a corporate non-profit model and focus on organizing statewide or nationwide campaigns—sustainability and social justice on individual campuses is not a priority for them.²⁵² Canadian and U.S. PIRGs take different approaches to tackling issues—U.S. PIRGs aim to change government policies through lobbying, investigative journalism and litigation, while Canadian PIRGs aim at more systemic change through grassroots activities such as popular education, anti-oppression and solidarity organizing. Canadian

²⁵¹ David Robertson. "What is Public Interest Research?" OPIRG Congress. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. March 1978. Conference Address. <<https://www.opirgcarleton.org/research>>.

²⁵² Elizabeth Lange and Aaron Chubb. "Critical Environmental Adult Education in Canada: Student Environmental Activism." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 124 (2009): 61-72.

PIRGs do not have national or provincial offices. With the exception of the province of Ontario and the loosely-affiliated provincial OPIRG network, no national or provincial networks exist that could coordinate campaigns across multiple campuses, or provide the training and expertise that comes from having a central organizing body. In Ontario, most PIRGs in the province are members. Some PIRGs were not part of the network later joined, while others left the network (with some rejoining later).²⁵³ U.S. PIRGs often engage in scientific and legal research as part of their public interest advocacy.

Community-based research is conducted by some Canadian PIRGs. A few Canadian PIRGs operate initiatives, such as OPIRG Brock that previously operated an infoshop in Downtown St. Catharines, and OPIRG Peterborough that operates a free store.

Many Canadian PIRGs have recently come under attack from conservative groups on campus, in particular, from student activists associated with the Ontario Progressive Conservative Campus Association.^{254,255} In the past decade or so, defunding attempts have been launched against WPIRG (2002, 2005, 2016), NSPIRG (2009), SFPIRG (2010), QPIRG McGill (2010), OPIRG Toronto (2011), OPIRG Kingston (2012, 2013), OPIRG Carleton (2013)^{256,257}, OPIRG Guelph (2013), OPIRG Ottawa (2023), OPIRG McMaster (2025).^{258,259,260,261,262} This has occurred in addition to misinformation

²⁵³ These include LSPIRG (Laurier Student PIRG), Carleton PIRG, McMaster PIRG and Waterloo PIRG (see specific entries for more detail).

²⁵⁴ Clare O'Connor & Kalin Stacey. "Defunding the public interest: Conservative strategy and the fight for the PIRGs." *Briarpatch Magazine*. 1 September 2012.

<<http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/defunding-the-public-interest>>.

²⁵⁵ Chris Jai Centeno. "Tiny Tories plot campus takeovers." *Xtra*. 31 March 2009.

<<https://www.dailyxtra.com/tiny-tories-plot-campus-takeovers-36888>>.

²⁵⁶ Greg Macdougall. "Campus activism at Carleton under threat." *Rabble.ca*. 1 April 2013. <<https://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/campus-notes/2013/04/campus-activism-carleton-under-threat>>.

²⁵⁷ Joanne Plucinska. "Smear free." *The Queen's Journal*. 1 February 2013.

<<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2013-02-01/editorials/smeared-free/>>.

²⁵⁸ Niko Block & Kristin Li. "The anti-PIRG campus conservative conspiracy." *The McGill Daily*. 29 January, 2011. <<http://www.mcgilldaily.com/2011/01/the-anti-pirg-campus-conservative-conspiracy/>>.

²⁵⁹ Guelph Mercury. "OPIRG defends against de-funding campaign." *Guelph Mercury*. 18 January 2013. <<https://www.guelphmercury.com/news-story/2792315-opirg-defends-against-de-funding-campaign/>>.

²⁶⁰ Colleen McDonell. "OPIRG faces defunding campaign." *The Ontarion*. 24 January 2013.

<<https://www.theontarion.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/web-170.3.pdf>>.

²⁶¹ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "NOPIRG plans to stop student fee." *The Queen's Journal*. 31 January 2012. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2012-01-31/news/nopirg-plans-stop-student-fee/>>.

²⁶² McMaster Students Union. "MSU Referenda." *McMaster Students Union*, 2026, <https://msumcmaster.ca/2026-msu-referenda/>.

campaigns, attempted PIRG board takeovers, such as at Guelph in 2009,²⁶³ attempts to evict PIRGs,^{264,265,266} and opt-out campaigns that targets students to request refunds of the levy fees they pay to their PIRG.^{267,268} In a leaked WikiLeaks recording, one conservative activist said of their strategy regarding OPIRG, “So, um, how about instead of necessarily fighting [OPIRG] we just get our own non-profit corporation that receives student fees, and just have our own student funding to fight them. Or the alternative, if you can get student government which in some places you can, because OPIRG is a non-profit and not a club or a charity, just amending the student funding rules, like, ‘in order to receive funding you must be a club or a charity,’ and then, bam, they’re just not eligible to receive fees.”²⁶⁹

Between the late nineteen-eighties and early nineteen-nineties, OPIRG Western, OPIRG McMaster and OPIRG Windsor were defunded—however, McMaster and Windsor later re-established student levy funding.²⁷⁰ More recent Canadian PIRGs to be defunded include VIPIRG, who tired of the continual attacks by the University of Victoria Students' Society, decided in 2019 to leave the University of Victoria and become a community non-profit organization,²⁷¹ OPIRG Brock, who lost defunding votes initiated by the Brock University Students' Union in 2017 and 2018,^{272,273} KPIRG who

²⁶³ Ari Altstedter. “Accusations of Rigged Elections and Tory Takeover Plot.” The Ontarion. 26 March 2009.

²⁶⁴ Fernandez-Blance, *op cit*.

²⁶⁵ Fraser MacPherson and Kym Nacita. “Fighting for Grey House.” The Queen’s Journal. 9 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-09/opinions/fighting-grey-house/>>.

²⁶⁶ Luca Dannetta and Raechel Huizinga. “As move-in nears, equity groups prepare for new campus space.” The Queen’s Journal. 29 July 2019. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2019-07-29/news/as-move-in-nears-equity-groups-prepare-for-new-campus-space/>>.

²⁶⁷ O’Connor & Stacey, *op cit*.

²⁶⁸ Block & Li, *op cit*.

²⁶⁹ Clare Clancy. “Agendas & accusations.” The Queen’s Journal. 19 March 2009. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2009-03-19/news/agendas-and-accusations/>>.

²⁷⁰ Karen Farbridge and Peter Cameron. “PIRG power: Public Interest Research Groups in Canada celebrate 25 years of student activism.” Alternatives Journal. 24.3. (1998): 22+.

²⁷¹ Emily Fagan. “VIPIRG terminates lease with UVSS, moves to Fifth Street office.” Martlet. 27 August 2019. <<https://www.martlet.ca/vipirg-terminates-lease-with-uvss-moves-to-fifth-street-office/>>.

²⁷² Sandor Ligetfalvy. “BUSU v OPIRG : ‘Student Justice’ Endgame?” Medium. 27 January 2018. <<https://medium.com/@sandorligetfalvy/busus-unlikely-referendums-are-the-endgame-of-switching-opirg-with-sjc-f977541f8f38>>.

²⁷³ Kerry Duncan. “OPIRG Brock needs your help.” The Sound. 10 January 2020. <<https://thesound.rocks/opirg-brock-needs-your-help/>>.

was defunded by the Kwantlen Student Association,²⁷⁴ WPIRG who lost a right-wing initiated defunding referendum in 2016, and OPIRG Kingston, who lost a 2012 defunding vote 62%-38%, and lost a subsequent 2013 vote that attempted to re-establish their funding 58%-42%.²⁷⁵ ²⁷⁶ KPIRG and WPIRG have subsequently closed down entirely, while OPIRG Kingston regained their levy funding. OPIRG Brock is unable to access levy funding due to the Brock University Students' Union (BUSU), as a conservative slate who ran the union at the time signed an agreement with Brock University to only allow BUSU to collect and receive student levies.^{277,278} OPIRG Brock has been able to survive by finding some alternative sources of funding, including campus labour unions. Canadian PIRGs have additionally come under attack by conservative and Zionist groups for Palestinian organizing.²⁷⁹ PIRGs are routinely accused of anti-Semitism.^{280,281,282} Former OPIRG Kingston coordinator Erica Spink D'Souza says in response "Taking a stance against Zionism or human rights abuses enacted by any country does not mean you are against a group of people or a religion from that country."²⁸³

Right-wing critics, who dislike the collectivist idea of using student levies to fund advocacy activities, attack both Canadian and U.S. PIRGs. U.S. PIRGs have faced similar defunding attempts dating back to the Reagan-era. However, they are targeted on different grounds—using student money to fund off-campus jobs and being an overall poor value for students. Canadian PIRGs do not face that criticism, as they are student controlled and provide resources to students, which makes it easier for students to see the

²⁷⁴ Tristan Johnston. "What Went Wrong with KPIRG?" *The Runner*. 10 February 2019. <<https://runnermag.ca/2019/02/what-went-wrong-with-kpirg/>>.

²⁷⁵ O'Connor & Stacey, *op cit*.

²⁷⁶ Kathleen Saylor. "OPIRG-Kingston loses funding again." *The Charlatan*. 13 November 2013. <<http://www.charlatan.ca/2013/11/opirg-kingston-loses-funding-again/>>.

²⁷⁷ Ligetfalvy. *op cit*.

²⁷⁸ Duncan. *op cit*.

²⁷⁹ O'Connor & Stacey, *op cit*.

²⁸⁰ Shefa, Sheri. "Trent Group Apology Rejected, Anti-Israel Policy Rescinded." *The Canadian Jewish News*. 27 January 2015. <<https://www.thecjn.ca/news/trent-group-apology-rejected-anti-israel-policy-rescinded/>>.

²⁸¹ Olivia Bowden. "OPIRG opted-out." *The Queen's Journal*. 15 October 2013. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2013-10-25/news/opirg-opted-out/>>.

²⁸² Curry, Bruce. "Update: Human Rights Group Rejects Apology Over Anti-Semitic Logo." *The Peterborough Examiner*. 26 January 2015. <www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/news/update-human-rights-group-rejects-apology-over-anti-semitic-logo/article_1432cf56-e39b-51d0-a428-650ce2e9b019.html>.

²⁸³ Curry, *op cit*.

benefits of supporting a PIRG.²⁸⁴ The U.S. right-wing has issued court challenges against the idea of student levies and has lobbied at the state level for various restrictions to be placed on who can receive mandatory student-fees and what activities are eligible to receive such fees. U.S. PIRGs have also faced criticism from the left-wing for their aggressive fundraising and poor labour practices.²⁸⁵ U.S. PIRGs have been in decline and now exist at fewer than one in twelve campuses²⁸⁶—Canadian PIRGs have remained somewhat steady in numbers until recently.

APIRG²⁸⁷

APIRG was founded in 2001 after a student levy referendum was passed with 66% of voting students in favour to support the creation of a PIRG at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Alberta. APIRG officially opened in 2002. APIRG receives a levy of \$3.50 (full time) or \$1.75 (part time) per term for the Fall and Winter Semesters from each student—or about \$200,000 annually. Current working groups include local chapters of Amnesty International, Islamic Relief Greenpeace and the Palestinian Solidarity Network, a poetry collective and a Muslim basketball association. APIRG, in addition to hosting working groups, holds events, workshops, and two reading clubs, provides funding for research and activism, hosts a resource library, publishes an annual almanac and provides access to resources (e.g. software, recording and event equipment, printing, button maker).

LPIRG^{288,289}

Similar to most PIRGs, LPIRG was established after a student levy referendum (\$5.00 per student per term) was passed with 71% of voting students in favour in 2002 to create a PIRG at the University of Lethbridge. They officially opened in 2003. LPIRG is

²⁸⁴ Elizabeth Lange and Aaron Chubb. “Critical Environmental Adult Education in Canada: Student Environmental Activism.” *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 124 (2009): 61-72.

²⁸⁵ Dana Fisher. *Activism, Inc.: How the Outsourcing of Grassroots Campaigns Is Strangling Progressive Politics in America*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006.

²⁸⁶ Arthur Levine and Jeanette Cureton. “Student Politics: The New Localism.” *Review of Higher Education*, 21.2 (1998): 137-150.

²⁸⁷ APIRG. *APIRG*. N.d. <<https://apirg.org/>>.

²⁸⁸ LPIRG. *LPIRG*. N.d. <<https://lpirg.org/>>.

²⁸⁹ University of Lethbridge Student Union (ULSU). “LPIRG Referendum.” *ULSU*. N.d. . <<https://ulsu.ca/lpirg-referendum>>.

one of two independent PIRGs in the province of Alberta. Like other PIRGs, LPIRG host events, has a resource library, and provides small amounts of funding. LPIRG takes a different approach to their working groups—they have three working groups with broad topics: reproductive rights, racial justice and climate justice.

NSPIRG^{290,291,292,293}

NSPIRG (Nova Scotia Public Interest Research Group) was started in 1990, with a successful levy established in 1991. NSPIRG receives a levy of about \$100,000 annually (\$3.00 per student per term) from a student levy at Dalhousie, set to increase in Fall 2020 after a March 2020 referendum to increase their student levy by \$1.50 per term passed. NSPIRG also receives a student levy from another university, the University of King's College. NSPIRG has two full time staff and two part-time staff. NSPIRG initiatives include emergency hijab kits, a journal called Margins, an alternative frosh week, and various workshops and seminars. NSPIRG also provides funding and resources, including a Community Solidarity Fund, research grants, loans of event and promotional equipment, and an alternative library. Current working groups include a divestment coalition, a community garden and a Palestinian solidarity group.

NSPIRG has an impressive history, with previous working groups now well-established organizations in their own right, including The Grainery Food Co-op, South House (formerly the Dalhousie Women's Centre), Nova Scotia Rainbow Action Project, The Loaded Ladle and the Dalhousie Students Union Sustainability Office. Other previous working groups have included a group trying to establish a student housing co-operative, a Halifax anti-war coalition, a Haitian solidarity committee, a weekly vegan potluck group, an animal rights collective and an activist puppeteering troupe.

In 2009, a provincial conservative party youth organizer led a 'stop NSPIRG' campaign to evict and defund NSPIRG. Also in 2009, the student union attempted to de-

²⁹⁰ NSPIRG. NSPIRG. N.d. <<https://www.nspirg.ca/>>.

²⁹¹ Dal News. "The Fate of NSPIRG." Dalhousie University. 19 March 2009. <<https://www.dal.ca/news/2009/03/19/discuss-nspirg.html>>.

²⁹² Stop NSPIRG. "DSU Council votes to refer referendum to Board of Operations." Stop NSPIRG. 13 May 2009. Internet Archive. <<https://archive.org/web/20090513184051/http://www.stopnspirg.org/>>.

²⁹³ Ben Sichel. "NSPIRG faces funding cut." The Coast. 26 March 2009. <<https://www.thecoast.ca/halifax/pirg-purge/Content?oid=1095216>>.

fund the PIRG and evict them from their space in the student union building after activists disrupted the Dalhousie Student Union AGM to question the corporate contracts and advertising in the student centre, along with demanding the union take an anti-war stance.

PGPIRG^{294,295}

PGPIRG (Prince George Public Interest Research Group) was founded in 1995 at the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George, with a student levy commencing in the summer 1995 term. PGPIRG has had a wide variety of initiatives throughout the years, such as a ‘good’ store, a good food box program, composting, and mug lending for campus events. PGPIRG also has action (working) groups—current and previous groups have addressed fossil fuel divestment, decolonization, activist skill sharing, and food poverty in Prince George. PGPIRG receives a student levy of \$4.18 per term (Fall, Winter, Summer) per student. In 2019 PGPIRG held a successful referendum to increase their levy by having it adjusted to inflation based on the Canadian Consumer Price Index.

OPIRG Brock^{296,297,298,299,300,301,302,303}

OPIRG Brock was founded in 1988 at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. Current OPIRG Brock working groups include pop-up free store events, a coming-out monologue event series, a community discount card for OPIRG Brock

²⁹⁴ PGPIRG. PGPIRG. N.d. <<https://www.pgpirg.com>>.

²⁹⁵ PGPIRG. PGPIRG. 16 May 2016. Internet Archive. <<https://archive.org/web/20160516000915/http://pgpirg.tumblr.com/actiongroups>>.

²⁹⁶ OPIRG Brock. OPIRG Brock. N.d. <<https://www.opirgbrock.com/>>.

²⁹⁷ The Brock News. “OPIRG Brock fundraises to keep its downtown InfoShop.” The Brock News. 6 July 2011. <<https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2011/07/opirg-brock-fundraises-to-keep-its-downtown-infoshop/>>.

²⁹⁸ Niagara This Week. “Outreach centre needs help.” Niagara This Week. 2 July 2011. <<https://www.niagarathisweek.com/community-story/3259393-outreach-centre-needs-help/>>.

²⁹⁹ OPIRG Infoshop. “OPIRG Infoshop” OPIRG Infoshop. 2009. <<https://opirginfoshop.wordpress.com/>>.

³⁰⁰ Duncan, *op cit*.

³⁰¹ OPIRG Brock. OPIRG Brock. N.d. <<https://www.opirgbrock.org/>>.

³⁰² Ligetfalvy, Sandor. “How Many Infractions Do You Count In BUSU’s “Unfair” Engagement Levy Referendum?” Medium. 21 October 2018. <<https://medium.com/@sandorligetfalvy/how-many-infractions-do-you-count-in-busus-unfair-engagement-levy-referendum-2dc9f68970>>.

³⁰³ Ligetfalvy, Sandor. “BUSU v OPIRG : ‘Student Justice’ Endgame?” Medium. 27 January 2018. <<https://medium.com/@sandorligetfalvy/busus-unlikely-referendums-are-the-endgame-of-switching-opirg-with-sjc-f977541f8f38>>.

members, plots at the university's community garden, and a coalition of Niagara Region social justice groups. Past working groups include a project hiding cassette mix-tapes around downtown St. Catharines, hosting the local Amnesty International chapter, a project to build relationships with migrant farm workers, an inter-cultural dialogue group, an anti-free trade activism group, a campaign working group to promote eating local, a critical mass cycling group, collecting books for prisoners, an animal rights club, a queer activism working group, a feminist activism working group, and a No One Is Illegal local chapter. OPIRG Brock operated a downtown St. Catharines InfoShop from 2009 to 2011, which hosted a bike repair shop KindCycle, a bike donation program for migrant farm workers, art projects, a free school, activist library, movie nights, and a free store and operated as a community organizing space. Originally opened at 73 St. Paul's Street in Downtown St. Catharines, they later moved to 10 Summer Street before having to close due to a lack of rent money. At that time OPIRG Brock had two staff and would supervise approximately 20 placement students a year from the university.

OPIRG Brock had a bit of a rough patch during the mid-late 2010s. The Brock University Students' Union created a social justice centre in 2010 and seemingly has since tried to shut down OPIRG Brock. OPIRG Brock lost two defunding referendums within a year. The first, occurring in March 2017, with 1980 (or 76.3%) voting to defund, and 593 (or 23.1%) in favour to keep funding OPIRG Brock—because of a lack of quorum, the referendum was run again the following year. They were officially defunded after a February 2018 referendum (3446 or 74.8% to 1163 or 25.2%, with 963 abstentions)—a 1988 agreement between the BUSU student union and OPIRG Brock had set the quorum for all OPIRG referendums at 25% quorum and 60% voting in favour. BUSU approved increasing the funding for its social justice centre in the same 2018 referendum period.

An “administrative agreement” established in April 2019 between Brock University and the Brock University Students' Union halted any independent student group from seeking or receiving a levy. This move is widely seen as a tactic to prevent PIRGs and other progressive groups from receiving student levy funds. OPIRG Brock still exists, albeit without a student levy. They have looked at innovative ways to get operational funding, such as allowing CUPE 4207 members to join OPIRG Brock as part

of their union dues.³⁰⁴ However, in 2024 CUPE 4207 voted 26-23 to cease providing 0.25% of their wages in dues to OPIRG Brock.³⁰⁵

OPIRG Carleton^{306,307,308}

OPIRG Carleton is one of the largest PIRGs in Canada in terms of funding and staffing. OPIRG Carleton was established in 1980. They started the recycling program at Carleton University in 1988. In 1991, they increased their student levy. In 1994, OPIRG Carleton got the administration to stop using pesticides on campus. Examples of current and past working groups include: Burma Solidarity, Anti-Apartheid (South Africa), Students Against Sweatshops, a free school, a direct action orchestra, boycott campaigns of Pepsi (over Burma) and Weston (over logging in old-growth Ontario forests), a prisoner solidarity and support group, Students Coalition Against the War (in Iraq and Afghanistan), Students for Electoral Reform, a local tenant group, Cuba solidarity, and Indigenous solidarity. Notable events include bringing in famous speakers such as David Suzuki, Helen Caldicott, Murray Bookchin, bell hooks, Noam Chomsky, and Keith McHenry (Food Not Bombs founder).

OPIRG Carleton staff and volunteers wrote and published a local tenants guide and a local guide to seeking employment. OPIRG Carleton has also spawned other levy groups and initiatives, including The Leveller, a left-leaning school newspaper, and the Carleton Food Collective (Garden Spot). Recycle Cycles was started by a former University of Waterloo student Lloyd Deane who had come across WPIRG's Recycle Cycles project. After moving to Ottawa in 1994 he approached OPIRG to establish a working group. Recycle Cycles bike shop opened in Gloucester Mall in 1995/96 in a free space, then moved to another free space at La Nouvelle Scene on King Edward Ave for two years. In 2000, the initiative became independent and changed their name to Re-

³⁰⁴ CUPE4207. "OPIRG Brock." CUPE4207. N.d. <<https://4207.cupe.ca/opirg/>>.

³⁰⁵ Cameron Sauder. "Despite its recent defunding, OPIRG Brock promises to continue its activist work in the Niagara region." Brock Press. 10 April 2024. <<https://brockpress.com/despite-its-recent-defunding-opirg-brock-promises-to-continue-its-activist-work-in-the-niagara-region/>>.

³⁰⁶ OPIRG Carleton. OPIRG Carleton. N.d. <<https://www.opirgcarleton.org/>>.

³⁰⁷ Plucinska, *op cit*.

³⁰⁸ Lloyd Deane. "About Us." Re-Cycles. 2010. <<http://www.re-cycles.ca/about.html>>.

Cycles after they secured funding from various sources and were finally able to secure long-term space.

OPIRG Carleton has a small free store outside their office, they host a radio show on the campus radio station, and host the Tools for Change workshop series (similar to one hosted by PIRGs in Toronto in partnership with other groups that aims to build the skills of activists). They also provide grants and equipment loans, research support, and have a publicly accessible resource library. In 2024, OPIRG Carleton left the OPIRG provincial network citing “allegation of racism, white supremacy, a failure to uphold democratic mandates, and other improprieties.”³⁰⁹

OPIRG Guelph^{310,311}

OPIRG Guelph was founded in 1976, the fourth PIRG to open in Canada. In March 1976, they brought in consumer advocate and PIRG founder Ralph Nader to speak just prior to their levy referendum campaign. They are supported through a student levy of approximately \$315,000 annually and are staffed by three full-time persons and multiple part-time student job positions. Notable accomplishments include getting the University of Guelph to divest from South African apartheid, establishing the Guelph Resource Centre for Gender Empowerment and Diversity, getting the City of Guelph to implement one of the first recycling and organics programs in Ontario, establishing the CSA Bike Centre (started as an action group), getting the City of Guelph to ban the cosmetic use of pesticides, and getting the University of Guelph to divest from fossil fuels (via Fossil Fuel Guelph action group). Examples of current and past action groups include: East Timor Solidarity, local watershed conservation and rehabilitation on the Speed River, James Bay Indigenous Solidarity, Rhythms of Resistance protest band, migrant worker solidarity and community care, anti-pipeline efforts, and a Latin America solidarity action group.

³⁰⁹ Carleton PIRG (@carletonpirg). "Opirg carleton has rebranded to carleton pirg!." *Instagram*, 10 September 2024., https://www.instagram.com/p/C_wTRX1RqeG/?img_index=2

³¹⁰ OPIRG Guelph. *OPIRG Guelph*. N.d. <<http://opirgguelph.org/>>.

³¹¹ Western News. "Nader to visit Western Monday." *Western News*. 11 March 1976. <<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11762/9435>>.

OPIRG Kingston^{312,313,314,315,316,317,318,319,320,321,322,323,324,325}

OPIRG Kingston was founded in 1992 and incorporated in 1993. Examples of current and past working groups include the Elm Street Community Garden, Sunnyside Community Garden, People's History Project on Kingston's social movement history, Yellow Bike Action—a DIY cycling education, recycling and repair initiative, Loving Spoonful, a local Kingston food charity, ReelOut LGBTQ+ Film Festival, RadFrosh alternative frosh, a local hip hop festival, and a women's safety program (education in student residences). Until recently, OPIRG Kingston was supported by a levy with the student union and had full-time staff. OPIRG Kingston's problems began when Ontario provincial conservative party youth activists began targeting PIRGs for defunding and successfully ran slates in student union elections. AMS (Alma Mater Society—the undergraduate student union at Queen's University) attempted eviction in 2011 of OPIRG Kingston, Levana Gender Advocacy Centre and Education for Queer Issues Project (EQuIP) from The Grey House, a house that has since 1975 housed progressive and equity-seeking groups. The newly elected AMS executive willfully ignored an MOU

³¹² OPIRG Kingston. OPIRG Kingston. 9 August 2018. Internet Archive. <<https://archive.org/web/20180809172949/http://opirgkingston.org/>>.

³¹³ Saylor, 2013.

³¹⁴ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "Groups to be moved from Grey House." The Queen's Journal. 6 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-06/news/groups-moved-grey-house/>>.

³¹⁵ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "Groups say space has historic importance." The Queen's Journal. 9 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-09/news/groups-say-space-has-historic-importance/>>.

³¹⁶ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "Grey House groups face removal." The Queen's Journal. 9 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-09/news/grey-house-groups-face-removal/>>.

³¹⁷ MacPherson and Nacita, *op cit*.

³¹⁸ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "Grey House groups re-ratify with AMS." The Queen's Journal. 16 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-16/news/grey-house-groups-re-ratify-ams/>>.

³¹⁹ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "Others reallocated." The Queen's Journal. 20 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-20/news/others-reallocated/>>.

³²⁰ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. "OPIRG & Levana to remain in Grey House." The Queen's Journal. 30 September 2011. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2011-09-30/news/opirg-and-levana-remain-grey-house/>>.

³²¹ Dannetta and Huizinga.

³²² Victoria Gibson. "Student Constables & Golden Words denied fee increases in referendum." The Queen's Journal. 29 January 2016. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2016-01-29/news/student-constables-and-golden-words-denied-fee-increases-in-referendum/>>.

³²³ Bowden.

³²⁴ Rachel Herscovici. "OPIRG presses on." The Queen's Journal. 14 September 2012. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2012-09-14/news/opirg-presses/>>.

³²⁵ Anisa Rawhani. "2016-17 SGPS executive elected." The Queen's Journal. 11 February 2016. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2016-02-11/news/2016-17-sgps-executive-elected/>>.

agreement signed by the previous AMS executive and these groups. As a result, these three groups were reluctant to re-ratify with the student union. Said then OPIRG Kingston coordinator Kavita Bissoondial: “There’s been hesitation about re-ratifying because OPRIG and the AMS don’t always see eye to eye... A lot of it has to do with our historical relationship with the AMS and them not being very supportive and actually taking actions that are in opposition to our actions and goals and aims.”³²⁶ These groups stated in an open letter, “The groups occupying the Grey House have sought to create an environment that is supportive for the most vulnerable members of the Queen’s and Kingston communities for decades.”³²⁷ This MOU was signed because of concerns regarding AMS and a desire to secure their space. “The AMS’s decision to evict OPIRG, Levana and EQuIP based on policy technicalities not only shows a disregard for the historical and contemporary work of these organizations but is a willful abuse of power.”³²⁸ These groups sought to keep Grey House as a space for vulnerable groups. OPIRG Kingston and The Levana Gender Advocacy (Women’s) Centre were evicted in 2017, and in a blatantly disrespectful and sexist move by AMS, replaced by Queen’s for the Boys, a men’s mental health group.³²⁹ After some conservative students threw an allegedly racist house party, a Queen’s University anti-racism committee recommended in 2019 that a separate, inclusive space be provided on campus for equity-seeking groups—Levana Gender Centre, along with three other equity-seeking groups, were able to receive space. However, OPIRG Kingston, currently operating out of the school’s cafeteria, was not able to receive space because they did not want to ratify as a student club with the student union due to past issues, an instead sought to be a recognized group under the anti-racism committee. This is a clear example of why student club ratification, space decisions and funding should not be subject to student politics.

In addition to space problems, OPIRG Kingston has had to constantly defend their funding. Prior to 2012-2013, OPIRG Kingston received a \$4 per student annual levy. After a new policy was brought in to force all levy groups to renew their levy every three

³²⁶ Katherine Fernandez-Blance, *op cit.* 6 September 2011.

³²⁷ MacPherson and Nacita, *op cit.*

³²⁸ MacPherson and Nacita, *op cit.*

³²⁹ Sarina Grewal. “Levana Gender Advocacy Centre to be evicted from the Grey House.” The Queen’s Journal. 29 May 2017. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2017-05-28/news/levana-gender-advocacy-centre-to-be-evicted-from-the-grey-house/>>.

years, OPIRG Kingston lost their levy after a “NOPIRG” misinformation campaign was run by right-wing students in 2012 and 2013.^{330,331} One example of these misinformation attacks was the claim of OPIRG Kingston hosting an armour-making workshop, when in reality, the workshop was on protest safety and medical aid in advance of the G20 protests in Toronto in 2010. They lost both funding referendums in 2012 and 2013.^{332,333,334,335} In 2015, the OPIRG Kingston undergraduate levy referendum was tossed out on a technicality.³³⁶ Similarly, in 2016, an OPIRG Kingston graduate student referendum with the Society for Graduate and Professional Students was tossed out on the accusation of unauthorized campaign material. OPIRG Kingston finally re-gained a student levy in 2016 by winning 51% of the vote in a referendum.

Laurier Students’ Public Interest Research Group (LSPIRG)^{337,338,339}

LSPIRG was started in 2001 as a student club and submitted a proposal to the Wilfrid Laurier University Students’ Union to hold a referendum. However, this request was denied, with the student union claiming more refinement was needed. LSPIRG successfully secured a student-levy in 2006, with a slim majority (50.9%) voting yes of 3034 students that voted for a \$4.75 per term levy, adjusted to inflation, and incorporated the same year. They currently receive a student levy of approximately \$220,000 a year. At Wilfrid Laurier University, LSPIRG receives their levy directly and not through a student union, which insulates it more from student union politics relative to other PIRGs.

³³⁰ OPIRG Kingston. “NOPIRG?” VOTEPIRG. 2012. <<https://voteopirg-blog.tumblr.com/vote4>>.

³³¹ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. “NOPIRG plans to stop student fee.” The Queen’s Journal. 31 January 2012. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2012-01-31/news/nopirg-plans-stop-student-fee/>>.

³³² The Queen’s Journal Editorial Board. “Campaign an insult game.” 3 February 2012. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2012-02-03/editorials/campaign-insult-game/>>.

³³³ Clare Clancy and Katherine Fernandez-Blance. “OPIRG fee voted down in referendum.” The Queen’s Journal. 2 February 2012. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2012-02-02/news/opirg-fee-voted-down-referendum/>>.

³³⁴ Katherine Fernandez-Blance. “OPIRG to appeal fee.” The Queen’s Journal. 3 February 2012. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2012-02-03/news/opirg-appeal-fee/>>.

³³⁵ The Queen’s Journal Editorial Board. “OPIRG lacking, sent packing.” 1 November 2013.. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2013-11-01/editorials/opirg-lacking-sent-packing/>>.

³³⁶ Anisa Rawhani. “Referendum tossed out, clubs say.” The Queen’s Journal. 17 November 2015. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/story/2015-11-17/news/ams-referendum/>>.

³³⁷ LSPIRG. LSPIRG. N.d. <<http://www.lspirg.org/>>.

³³⁸ Victoria Begin. “LSPIRG ready to take it up a notch.” The Cord Weekly. 1 February 2006. <<https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=2194&context=thecord>>.

³³⁹ Adrian Ma. “Cayenne wins clear mandate.” The Cord Weekly. 8 February 2006. <<https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2195&context=thecord>>.

LSPIRG was initially not part of the provincial OPIRG network and chose to operate in a more traditional non-profit approach, employing an Executive Director between 2006 and 2013. LSPIRG once had conservative win the majority of seats on their board.³⁴⁰ LSPIRG has supported a wide variety of working groups, causes and events over the years, including Buy Nothing Day, anti-war organizing, supporting larger campaigns like Make Poverty History, and aiding student groups like Amnesty International @ Laurier.

OPIRG McMaster^{341,342,343}

OPIRG McMaster was established in 1974 after a successful levy referendum campaign, and became the second PIRG to open in Canada. After about 10 years of operation, it was defunded and closed. A new iteration was established in 1995 thanks to a successful referendum. OPIRG McMaster has continually faced difficulties with the McMaster Students' Union, from their closure in 1985, to facing continual scrutiny or being forced to go to referendum in 2017/18 and 2020 to keep their student fee.^{344,345,}
^{346,347} OPIRG McMaster activities include a fossil-free divestment campaign, a campus free store, Meals with a Purpose (a free bi-weekly meal program served out of the local YMCA), a knitting circle, a sock-drive for the homeless, providing free menstrual products, and lending out button makers. OPIRG McMaster tried to leave OPIRG Provincial Network in 2025, resulting in the student union trying to defund them.

³⁴⁰ Clare O'Connor & Kalin Stacey. "Defunding the public interest: Conservative strategy and the fight for the PIRGs." *Briarpatch Magazine*. 1 September 2012.

<<http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/defunding-the-public-interest>>.

³⁴¹ OPIRG McMaster. OPIRG McMaster. N.d. <<https://www.opirgmcmaster.org/>>.

³⁴² Ontario PIRG. "OPIRG McMaster Update from OPIRG Provincial." *Ontario Public Interest Research Group*, 28 Aug. 2025, <https://ontariopirg.org/mcmasterupdate/>

³⁴³ McMaster Students Union. "MSU Referenda." *McMaster Students Union*, 2026, <https://msumcmaster.ca/2026-msu-referenda/>.

³⁴⁴ Bongard, Josh. "Students Union objects to arbitrary actions of OPIRG." *The Silhouette*. 21 September 1995. Web <<https://opirgmcmasterhistoryarchive.wordpress.com/1995/09/14/students-union-objects-to-arbitrary-actions-of-opirg/>>.

³⁴⁵ Malik, Shamir. "Student Representative Assembly passes motion to send OPIRG McMaster to referendum." *The Silhouette*. 5 March 2020. <<https://www.thesil.ca/student-representative-assembly-passes-motion-to-send-opirg-mcmaster-to-referendum>>.

³⁴⁶ Balaranjan, Sarun. "OPINION: The referendum for OPIRG's fee is unjust." *The Silhouette*. 14 March 2020. Web <<https://www.thesil.ca/opinion-the-referendum-for-opirgs-fee-is-unjust-2>>.

³⁴⁷ Fiala, Clare. "OPINION: OPIRG: a vital part of the McMaster community." *The Silhouette*. 9 July 2020. Web <<https://www.thesil.ca/opinion-opirg-a-vital-part-of-the-mcmaster-community>>.

OPIRG Ottawa³⁴⁸

OPIRG Ottawa was established after a successful 1977 levy fee referendum with 75% of students voting in favour of funding the organization, officially opening their doors in the 1978 fall term. In 2011, graduate students also established a fee levy to support OPIRG Ottawa. OPIRG Ottawa established a successful community-based research program in 2014. The program assists student research, helping to secure funding positions or course credit, providing community connections and general support. OPIRG Ottawa was one of the largest PIRGs in Canada in terms of budget, staffing and activities, until in 2023, it was defunded in a referendum by University of Ottawa Students' Union which represents undergraduate students.³⁴⁹ OPIRG Ottawa asserted this was a part of a larger attack on independent student-levy supported organizations by the University of Ottawa Students' Union (which was formed in 2018 to replace the Student Federation of the University of Ottawa) and that a previous proposal was to transfer the OPIRG student levy to a UOSU-controlled fund.³⁵⁰ Examples of current and past working groups include: Outrage LGBTQ+ group, Animal Rights, an action group challenging environmentally harmful Ontario Hydro Projects, A Learning Garden, a vegan meal program (called People's Republic of Delicious), a prisoner support group and an Indigenous circle of elders. OPIRG Ottawa Pride Centre and Bike Coop both originally started as OPIRG Ottawa working groups.³⁵¹ OPIRG Ottawa is seeking to reestablish their referendum as of March 2026.

OPIRG Peterborough^{352,353}

OPIRG Peterborough (originally known as PeterPIRG) opened in 1976 after a successful \$5 levy referendum and became the third PIRG to open in Canada. Levy referenda brought increases in 1986 (\$5 to \$7), 1991 (\$7 to \$9) and 2011 (\$9 to \$12 and

³⁴⁸ OPIRG Ottawa. OPIRG Ottawa. N.d. <<https://opirg-gripo.ca/>>.

³⁴⁹ CBC News. "Students vote to end funding for campus radio station CHUO." 17 October 2023. <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/chuo-university-of-ottawa-referendum-uottawa-funding-lost-1.6997294>>.

³⁵⁰ OPIRG Ottawa. "OPIRG Referendum question." The Fulcrum. 10 October 2023. <<https://thefulcrum.ca/opinions/opirg-referendum-question/>>.

³⁵¹ OPIRG Ottawa. 2023.

³⁵² OPIRG Peterborough. OPIRG Peterborough. N.d. <<https://opirgptbo.ca/>>.

³⁵³ OPIRG Peterborough. OPIRG Peterborough 2014-2015 Annual Report. 2015. <https://issuu.com/opirg-peterborough/docs/2014-2015_annual_report_web_-_copy>.

inflation indexing of the levy fee). OPIRG Peterborough played an important role in anti-nuclear organizing in the 1970s and 1980s, publishing the national anti-nuclear newspapers Birch Bark Alliance and Nuclear Free Press. OPIRG Peterborough was crucial in the efforts to lobby Aramark, the former food service provider to Trent University, to allow a student-run café to be established (later known as The Seasoned Spoon). OPIRG Peterborough operates a resource library and a free market (free store) in their space at Sadleir House, an independent student-run community centre in Downtown Peterborough. OPIRG Peterborough helped secure an Ontario Trillium Grant Capital Grant to make the first floor of Sadleir House fully accessible. Examples of current and past working groups include: Eco-Feminist, Ecology Community Garden, campus recycling, anti-globalization (e.g. sending two buses to the Summit of the Americas protest in 2000), free distribution of menstrual products, a campaign to stop public transit cuts, and a campaign to stop Enbridge Line 9.

OPIRG Toronto^{354,355,356,357}

OPIRG Toronto was started in 1982, after a successful graduate student levy referendum. OPIRG Toronto serves as the de facto PIRG for much of the Toronto area, as there are no PIRGs at other major universities such as Toronto Metropolitan University and OCAD (the only other PIRG in the Toronto area is OPIRG York, established in 1992). OPIRG Toronto has engaged in a variety of activities over the years. These include hosting a campus radio show, funding activist groups (such as No One Is Illegal), and funding and hosting an annual “disorientation” week. Toronto Research and Action Community Exchange (TRACX) is a program of OPIRG Toronto that assists students in conducting community research for course credit. OPIRG Toronto also operates the Dr. Chun Resource library, an activist library named after a University of Toronto professor who was denied tenure due to racism within his department and who famously challenged

³⁵⁴ OPIRG Toronto. OPIRG Toronto. N.d. <<http://www.opirgtoronto.org/>>.

³⁵⁵ Cassidy Bereskin. “Student Representative Assembly sends OPIRG fee to referendum.” The Silhouette. 11 January 2018. <<https://www.thesil.ca/student-representative-assembly-sends-opirg-fee-referendum/>>.

³⁵⁶ Daniel Kim. “Behind the OPIRG referendum.” The Varsity. 22 November 2017. <<https://thevarsity.ca/2017/11/22/behind-the-opirg-referendum/>>.

³⁵⁷ Daniel Kim. “Referendum for OPIRG-Toronto levy fails to meet quorum.” The Varsity. 27 November 2017. <<https://thevarsity.ca/2017/11/27/referendum-for-opirg-toronto-levy-fails-to-meet-quorum/>>.

the university in court, eventually winning a financial settlement and tenure. Tools for Change, a local activist workshop training series founded in 2010, is funded by OPIRG Toronto, along with OPIRG York, Greenpeace, No One Is Illegal, Toronto350.org, OCAD University and the Student Association at George Brown College. Tools for Change provides free and low-cost workshops for activists on topics such as fundraising, media relations, campaign organizing and anti-oppression.

OPIRG Toronto was targeted in a 2017 defunding referendum that failed to meet quorum. The ‘sole member’ of the campaign to defund OPIRG Toronto feared backlash and said in an interview with The Varsity school newspaper, “There’s been a history of [individuals] personally going after people in campaigns and referendum of these sorts. The other people involved in the campaign weren’t comfortable with that.”³⁵⁸ A former OPIRG Toronto board member said in response to the defunding referendum, “I think it’s important to note that it’s a part of OPIRG’s mandate to help specifically marginalized communities... As a student at U of T, I was happy to pay into services that I didn’t use. I supported Bike Chain, even though I don’t own a bike. I supported the Blue Sky Solar Racing team, even though I’m not an engineer. I believe that these are good things to fund.”³⁵⁹ The results of the 2017 fall referendum were: 40.1 per cent voted to remove the levy, and 59.9 per cent voted to keep the levy. Only 3.1 per cent of all University of Toronto undergraduate students (represented by UTSU student union), or 1,165, actually voted. A quorum of 7.5 per cent would have been needed, along with 50% + 1 voting to remove the levy. Examples of current and past working groups of OPIRG Toronto include: AIDS education, \$15 and Fairness minimum wage increase, Mining Injustice Solidarity Network, Students for Reproductive Justice, Showing up for Racial Justice, Toronto Queer Film Festival, a Palestinian Solidarity group, TTC Riders Accessibility Action Committee, and a prisoner correspondence project.

OPIRG Windsor³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Kim (a), *op cit.* 2017.

³⁵⁹ Kim (a), *op cit.* 2017.

³⁶⁰ OPIRG Windsor. OPIRG Windsor. N.d. <<http://www.opirgwindsor.org/>>.

OPIRG Windsor was originally formed in 1978, before closing down in the early 1980s. OPIRG Windsor was re-established in 1994 with the passing of an undergraduate levy referendum. In 2002, a graduate levy referendum was passed. OPIRG Windsor, by their own admission on their website, have faced considerable challenges due to volunteer and staff turn-over. OPIRG Windsor only has enough money for one permanent staff position, who only works part-time. OPIRG Windsor also provides part-time student jobs funded through the university's work-study jobs program.

Current and previous activities of OPIRG Windsor include an activist library, ShakeUp campus radio show, and an initiative to establish a UWindsor good food hub. Examples of current and past working groups include: A City of Windsor bike share advocacy group, animal rights, Palestinian solidarity, a student-led community kitchen, a cannabis advocacy collective, an anarchism discussion group, a pesticide action group, and a project to build an earthship. OPIRG Windsor previously operated OPIRG House, a coffeehouse and activist library in an off-campus space across from the University of Windsor, located at 372 California Avenue, beside the Campus Community Garden (operated by the university).

OPIRG York^{361,362}

OPIRG York was established in 1992 after a successful student referendum. OPIRG York has at times had a very successful organizing presence at York University. One example is the Sustainability Purchasing Coalition, which lobbied and held a sit-in at York University that demand a fair-trade purchasing policy be implemented at York University (which eventually was achieved through a fair trade campus steering committee). OPIRG York also operated a campus newspaper, the York University Free Press between 2009-2014. OPIRG York also supports work in the local Jane-Finch community, including supporting the Jane-Finch Action Against Poverty group. Factionalism resulted in OPIRG York becoming dormant between 2019 and 2021. OPIRG York (and another dormant student levy organization, Centre for Women and Trans People York) were both revived thanks to the help of members of Regenesys York,

³⁶¹ OPIRG York. OPIRG York. N.d. <<http://www.opirgyork.ca/>>.

³⁶² Niloofar Golkar. CRO Report, OPIRG York Fall elections 2019. 2019.

another student levy organization at York University. Current and past working groups of OPIRG York include: The Rent Tent collective to promote menstrual health and distribute menstrual products, a project that collected books and distributed them to prisoners, a Haiti solidarity group, an animal rights collective, a fair trade coalition, a progressive Filipino youth group, an environmental justice group, Students for Co-operatives (a group promoting co-operative organizations), Arts for Justice art activism collective, Fight for \$15 and Fairness (to raise the minimum wage), a local chapter of Cinema Politica, and a Palestinian Solidarity group.

QPIRG/GRIP Concordia^{363,364}

QPIRG Concordia was established as a student club in 1981, eventually establishing a student fee levy via referendum in 1989. In 2010, Concordia Graduate Students passed a fee levy in support of OPIRG Concordia. Like other PIRGs, QPIRG Concordia played an important role in local activism and social movements, including nuclear disarmament, LGBTQ+ rights, anti-racism, anti-globalization and anti-apartheid in South Africa. Like many other PIRGs, many well-known Montreal and Concordia University organizations evolved out of PIRG support and working groups. QPIRG Concordia members started Right to Move/La Voie Libre, the community bike centre at Concordia University (now operating as a separate, independent organization); Popular Film Series (which later evolved into popular Cinema Politica, a non-profit organization that exhibits, distributes, and streams independent political films around the world using a local chapter model); Santropol Roulant, a community food organization in Montreal; a vegan lunch program that became the People's Potato free vegan meal program at Concordia University's main campus; Project Take Root, which later became the food co-operative Le Frigo Vert); Action Rebut; ASEED, which later became the Quebec community-supported agriculture organization Equiterre. Well known Canadian activist Jaggi Singh worked for QPIRG Concordia for nine years. QPIRG Concordia currently supports over 30 groups.

³⁶³ QPIRG Concordia. QPIRG Concordia. N.d. <<https://www.qpirgconcordia.org/>>.

³⁶⁴ Miriam Lafontaine. "Jaggi Singh Will Leave QPIRG Concordia." The Link. 10 May 2018. <<https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/jaggi-singh-will-leave-qpirg-concordia>>.

QPIRG/GRIP McGill^{365,366,367,368}

QPIRG McGill was established as a student club in 1980, becoming an “independent student organization” after passing a fee levy referendum in 1988. McGill Student Society changed levy rules in 2007, forcing all “Independent Student Groups (ISGs)” to run an “existence referendum” in order to keep their levy fee. In 2007, 2011 and 2016, QPIRG McGill was successful in defending their student levy. They also successfully passed a levy-increase referendum in 2009. In addition to this, McGill University in 2007 imposed an online levy fee opt-out system on all student groups—this has slowly led to increased opt-outs for all student groups, with only a marginal (.5-1.5%) difference between groups such as QPIRG McGill and apolitical student organizations. QPIRG McGill supports over 20 working groups—everything from drug-use harm reduction, a meal program for the homeless called Community Cooks Collective, various international solidarity groups, a Prisoner Correspondence Project, a Black Healing Centre, a street medic collective, a disabled writers club, a temporary workers association, and more. In 2025, McGill University issued a notice of default of QPIRG’s Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) for violating university policies for their support of the Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights student club and QPIRG working group that occupied the campus in 2024 in protest of the Gaza War—a similar move was previously made against McGill’s undergraduate student union.

GRIP UQAM^{369,370}

³⁶⁵ QPIRG McGill. QPIRG McGill. N.d. <<https://qipirgmcgill.org/>>.

³⁶⁶ Cherry Ng. “QPIRG-McGill runs Existence Referendum.” McGill Tribune. 8 November 2016. <<https://www.mcgilltribune.com/news/qpirg-mcgill-runs-existence-referendum-1324723/>>.

³⁶⁷ Max Honigmann. “PIRGs, Quebec PIRG, and Social Justice: A General Introduction.” N.d. <<https://hist370qiprg.omeka.net/exhibits/show/intro/history/introresearch>>.

³⁶⁸ Forrest, Maura. “4 McGill Unions Say University Is Threatening Free Speech over Pro-Palestinian Support.” CBC News, 9 Aug. 2025, <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/mcgill-unions-free-speech-palestine-1.7605230>>.

³⁶⁹ GRIP UQAM. GRIP UQAM. N.d. <<https://gripuqam.org/>>.

³⁷⁰ GRIP UQAM. “Fonds autonome AutoGestion Interassociative en Écologie Sociale – GRIP UQAM.” GRIP UQAM. N.d. <https://nanopdf.com/download/auto-gestion-interassociative-et-fonds-autonome-en-ecologie_pdf>.

Groupe de Recherche d'Intérêt Public de l'UQAM was founded in 1994. They are funded through grants from Service à la Vie Étudiante UQAM. GRIP UQAM previously held a student levy until 2001 through the now defunct Association Générale des Étudiants et Étudiantes en Sciences Humaines, Arts, Lettres et Communication (AGÉESHALC-UQAM). Current and past working groups of GRIP UQAM include: Student Collective in Community and Ecological Food Processing (Collectif Étudiant en Transformation Alimentaire Communautaire et Écologique), Student Collective for the Fight for Liberated Urban Places (Collectif étudiant de lutte pour des lieux urbains libérés), The Antispeciesist Collective for Animal Solidarity (CASA) (Le Collectif Antispéciste pour la Solidarité Animale), La Riposte Féministe, a collective of struggles for bodily autonomy, Mad Pride (a pride organization for those with mental illness), Free Media (Media Libres) an independent media collective, Solidarity Without Borders (Solidarité sans frontières) a collective fighting against deportation and towards providing status for all undocumented migrants, a Colombian Solidarity collective to support the struggles of leftists in Colombia, and Research collective in landscaping and sustainable agriculture (Collectif de recherche en aménagement paysager et agriculture durable).

RPIRG³⁷¹

RPIRG is an independent PIRG founded in 2007 at the University of Regina. RPIRG is the only PIRG in the province of Saskatchewan. RPIRG receives approximately \$175,000 annually from their student levy. RPIRG engages in a wide variety of activities, similar to what you would see at other Canadian PIRGs, including events, workshops, an alternative library, community research and working groups. RPIRG's working groups (past and present) include supporting a community arts organization, providing books to people in prison, anti-bullying education in local elementary schools, a support group for South Sudanese refugees, a chapter of Cinema Politica and a group to create local high school PIRGs. RPIRG supports a garden, RPIRG Green Patch, that grows produce to give out to students and the community. RPIRG also provides funding for events, research and attending conferences.

³⁷¹ RPIRG. RPIRG. N.d. <<https://rpirg.org/>>.

SFPIRG^{372,373,374}

SFPIRG was established in 1981. SFPIRG is one of two PIRGs in province of British Columbia. SFPIRG receives a levy of \$3.00 per term from full-time students (and \$1.50 from part-time), which provides about \$220,000 annually. SFPIRG has three full-time staff members. Examples of current and past working groups include: Ancient Forests Committee (a SF chapter of Ancient Forests Alliance non-profit organization), committee to end ableism, left (socialist) alternative (a Trotskyist ‘revolutionary vanguard’ organization), a racialized wellness collective, and a wild salmon protection action group.

Former PIRGs

CREAN (formerly VIPIRG)^{375,376,377,378,379,380,381,382,383,384}

VIPIRG (Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group) was established in 1983 as BCPIRG at the University of Victoria, as part of a larger BCPIRG that existed at other universities, including Simon Fraser University (1981). BCPIRG ceased to exist in

³⁷² SFPIRG. SFPIRG. N.d. <<https://sfpirg.ca/>>.

³⁷³ Simon Fraser Student Society. “Simon Fraser Student Society Referendum History.” Simon Fraser Student Society. 9 September 2020. <<https://sfss.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Referendum-History-Report-2020.pdf>>.

³⁷⁴ SFPIRG. “SFPIRG Policy and Procedures Manual.” SFPIRG. 19 November 2019. <<https://sfpirg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SFPIRG-Policy-and-Procedures-Manual-November-19th-2019-Update.pdf>>.

³⁷⁵ CREAN. CREAN. N.d. <<https://creansociety.ca/>>.

³⁷⁶ VIPIRG. VIPIRG. N.d. <<https://vipirg.ca/>>.

³⁷⁷ Fagan, *op cit*. 2019.

³⁷⁸ VIPIRG. “Keep Student Jobs: Save Our Non-Profit.” Change.org. N.d. Petition. <<https://www.change.org/p/university-of-victoria-students-society-board-keep-student-jobs-save-our-non-profit>>.

³⁷⁹ Anna Dodd. “VIPIRG threatens legal action against UVSS Board for libel.” Martlet. 26 February 2019. <<https://www.martlet.ca/vipirg-threatens-legal-action-against-uvss-board-for-libel/>>.

³⁸⁰ Mike Graeme. “UVSS ELECTIONS | VIPIRG referendum.” Martlet. 26 February 2019. <<https://www.martlet.ca/uvss-elections-vipirg-referendum-briefer-2019/>>.

³⁸¹ Anna Dodd. “VIPIRG referendum fails.” Martlet. 11 March 2019. <<https://www.martlet.ca/vipirg-referendum-fails/>>.

³⁸² Josh Kozelj. “UVSS CEO recommends second VIPIRG referendum.” Martlet. 23 March 2019. <<https://www.martlet.ca/uvss-ceo-recommends-second-vipirg-referendum/>>.

³⁸³ Alec Lazenby. “New Public Interest Research Group conditionally accepted by UVSS.” Martlet. 23 January 2020. <<https://www.martlet.ca/new-public-interest-research-group-conditionally-accepted-by-uvss/>>.

³⁸⁴ University of Victoria Students’ Society. “UVSS Referenda.” University of Victoria Students’ Society. N.d. <<https://uvss.ca/referenda/>>.

1992 and BCPIRGs at each university became independent. VIPIRG was the largest and most well-known PIRG in British Columbia during the latter part of its existence. VIPIRG's downfall began when VIPIRG supported opposition candidates for University of Victoria Students' Society (student union) elections in 2017.³⁸⁵ A UVSS director introduced a board meeting motion to hold a VIPIRG defunding referendum. The escalating situation led to VIPIRG pursuing legal action against the University of Victoria Students' Society. UVSS proceed to run a defunding referendum in 2019 that failed, with 57.3 (1661) students voting to keep the VIPIRG fee and 42.7 (1238) voting to end it. The chief returning officer for the referendum recommended holding a new referendum, due to a prejudicial and archaic rule that prohibited VIPIRG from campaigning. VIPIRG decided to give up their lease and leave the university due to these ongoing disputes with University of Victoria Students' Society, who ceased to remit the levy. UVSS proceeded to hold the levy in trust and struck a working group to determine what to do with the funding. A group of students attempted to establish a new VIPIRG that was conditionally accepted by UVSS, however, a referendum to establish a new fee in 2020 failed to meet quorum.

CREAN has taken the traditional non-profit approach, with an Executive Director and possessing a larger staff contingency than PIRGs thanks to a focus on providing services and soliciting grants. CREAN engages in various consulting services, such as research, facilitation, program evaluation and reports. In addition, CREAN runs programs for newcomers, youth and BIPOC folks, and provides funding for events and activism. CREAN also publishes an academic peer-reviewed journal, *In/Versions*.

Waterloo Public Interest Research Group (WPIRG)^{386,387,388,389}

Founded in 1973, Waterloo PIRG was the first PIRG to open in Canada. In 1972, Ralph Nader came to speak at the University of Waterloo. Soon afterwards students

³⁸⁵ It is generally uncommon for PIRGs to endorse or support candidates for student elections.

³⁸⁶ WPIRG. WPIRG. N.d. <<http://wpirg.org/>>.

³⁸⁷ Greg Mercer. "UW advocacy group loses funding." Waterloo Region Record. 7 October 2016. <<https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2016/10/07/uw-advocacy-group-loses-funding.html>>.

³⁸⁸ Nijjar, Paul. "End of the Road for WPIRG." Paul's Internet Landfill. 23 March 2016. <<http://pnijjar.freeshell.org/2016/wpig-threat/>>.

³⁸⁹ Paul Nijjar. "Goodbye, WPIRG." Paul's Internet Landfill. 29 September 2016. <<http://pnijjar.freeshell.org/2016/goodbye-wpirg/>>.

began organizing a levy fee petition. With the support of the Waterloo Federation of Students (FEDS) President Andrew Telegdi,³⁹⁰ the petition was approved by the University of Waterloo Board of Governors in the summer of 1973. OPIRG Waterloo did many interesting things in their early years, including operating a Consumer Complaints Centre in Downtown Kitchener (1974-1976), publishing a weekly list of grocery prices in the Kitchener-Waterloo Record newspaper, and working with the City of Waterloo on a new bikeway plan. In 1979, OPIRG Waterloo quit the provincial OPIRG Network because of the move away from consumer advocacy and research, and towards community activism and activation. WPIRG would continue to focus on research and public interest advocacy on issues such as occupational health and safety, pollution and toxic waste. WPIRG eventually rejoined the OPIRG Network in 1988. WPIRG was an early leader in advancing recycling and reducing packaging waste through research, activism (petitions) and sitting on government task forces. In 1994, Recycle Cycles, an initiative of WPIRG and The Working Centre³⁹¹, received free space in the Old Button Factory in Uptown Waterloo and received a donation from Canada Trust to purchase tools and equipment. Also in 1994, WPIRG implemented mandatory anti-racism training for all volunteers. In 2004, WPIRG received \$140,000 from Environment Canada to lead the One-Tonne Challenge in Waterloo Region to reduce carbon emissions. Examples of more recent working groups include: Adbusters Media Literacy group, student tenant activist campaigns, a campaign to lower tuition for international students, Fossil Free UW divestment campaign, Palestinian Solidarity Action Group, Food Not Bombs, Cinema Politica, a local gay film festival, Electric Green campus radio show, and a community garden.

Increasing conservative activism and a take-over of student politics at the University of Waterloo resulted in WPIRG becoming a target for de-funding. In July 2014, the FEDS student union targeted WPIRG by terminating their lease on office space

³⁹⁰ Andrew Telegdi would later serve as the Member of Parliament for Waterloo from 1993 to 2008, as a member of the Liberal Party of Canada.

³⁹¹ The Working Centre is a social services agency in Kitchener, Ontario. There programs are too numerous to list all, but include a food centre for homeless and vulnerable people, a tool library, a community film studio, computer recycling and donation program, a community bikeshare, multiple community gardens, a community arts and craft space, Recycle Cycles community bike centre, two thrift stores, Queen Street Commons Café - an affordable food café, a community development school, housing access support and a job centre.

in the Student Life Centre. WPIRG moved to the Centre for Peace Advancement (CPA) at Conrad Grebel University College. WPIRG was defunded in 2016 due to a misinformation campaign run by right-leaning students. This was not helped when a WPIRG working group, Foods Not Bombs, ended up campaigning against WPIRG due to disproportionate funding being provided to divestment groups. 7156 (82%) voted to defund WPIRG, while only 1570 (18%) voted to keep WPIRG funded in a referendum that saw 27% of all University of Waterloo students vote. They had previously received a levy of \$4.75 per student (or approximately \$270,000 annually). WPIRG officially closed in 2018. Remaining funds were donated to the University of Waterloo to provide scholarships and wards to Indigenous students and those engaged in environmental and social justice research. Many WPIRG working groups continue to operate as independent organizations.

3.2.10 Other food initiatives (community kitchens, food centres, food coalitions)

The growing interest and recognized connections between food and environmental sustainability and justice, has greatly increased the number of campus food initiatives in the past twenty years or so. This growing interest has resulted in both the challenging of the domination of university food options by multinational food service corporations like Aramark, Compass (formerly Chartwells) and Sodexo, with the creation of campus community gardens and other student-involved food initiatives. While community gardens, cafés and farmers' markets are common student-run initiatives that can be found at numerous post-secondary campuses across Canada, new types of initiatives are emerging as students are increasingly demanding a re-localization of our food systems, sustainable (permaculture) agricultural practices, and fair-trade for products (such as chocolate, coffee and fruit) from abroad.

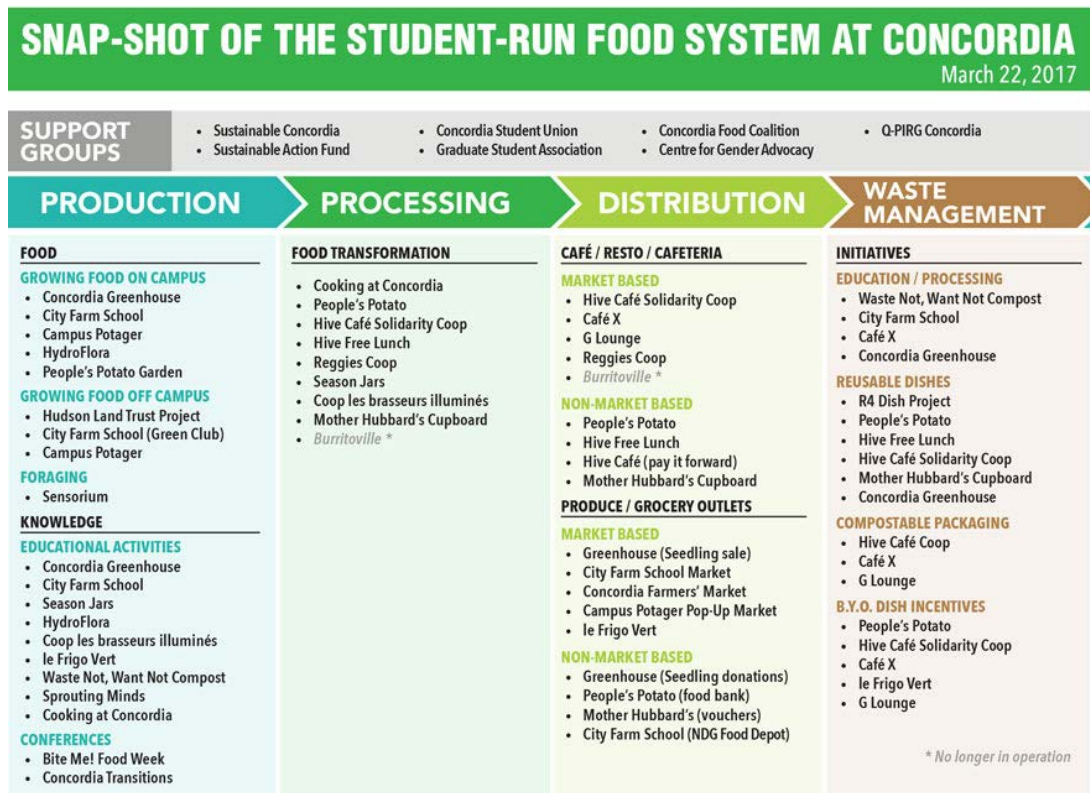


Figure 3: Snapshot of the Student-Run Food System at Concordia³⁹²

Community Food Centre / Community Kitchen

A community kitchen is a shared space typically used by a group of individuals or families within a community to prepare, cook, and sometimes share meals. It serves as a central hub where members can access facilities, equipment, and resources to cook, store, and sometimes distribute food. These kitchens often promote collaboration, resource-sharing, and social interaction among community members while addressing issues related to food insecurity, fostering a sense of unity, and supporting collective well-being.

A community food centre is basically an enhanced community kitchen. It is a multifaceted community food hub that focuses on providing access to nutritious food, fostering food skills, and promoting social engagement. These centers typically offer a range of programs and services, such as community kitchens, gardens, cooking classes, meal programs, food education, advocacy efforts, and initiatives aimed at addressing food insecurity, poverty, and social isolation. They serve as inclusive spaces that aim not only

³⁹² Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project, *op cit.*

to provide food but also to empower individuals and communities by offering education, resources, and support around food security and healthy eating.

While no community food centres or community kitchens at Canadian universities currently exist, Regenesys UofT previously operated one as part of the Youth Food Centre initiative that operated from 2017-2020, and is trying to re-open one at the University of Toronto and launch a new one at York University.

Food Coalitions

Mac Regenerative Food Hub (MRFH)^{393,394}

Mac Regenerative Food Hub is a great campus-community initiative started by students and a professor at the small suburban MacDonald Campus of McGill University. The hub serves to connect a network of local food initiatives at the MacDonald Campus and in the communities of Ste. Anne de Bellevue and Senneville. The groups involved include Macdonald Permaculture Club, McGill Permaculture Club, Senneville Permaculture Food Forest, Macdonald Student-run Ecological Gardens (MSEG), McGill Apicultural Association, Fruit Tree Bike Path (La Piste Cyclable Gourmande), and the Gardenvale Permaculture Gardens. The hub received start-up funding in 2019 from the sustainability office of McGill University to employ student coordinators.

Concordia Food Coalition^{395,396,397,398,399,400}

³⁹³ McGill Sustainability. "SP0217: Mac Regenerative Food Hub." McGill University. N.d. <<https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/mac-regenerative-food-hub-sp0217>>.

³⁹⁴ Mac Regenerative Food Hub. "Mac Regenerative Food Hub." Facebook. N.d. <<https://www.facebook.com/macregenerativefoodhub/>>.

³⁹⁵ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. "Anastasia Voutou on the History of the Concordia Food Coalition." Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. 11 July 2016. Video. <<https://concordiafoodgroups.ca/anastasia-voutou-on-the-history-of-the-concordia-food-coalition/>>.

³⁹⁶ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. "Jessica Cabana on the history of the Concordia Food Coalition." Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. 24 November 2015. Video. <<http://concordiafoodgroups.ca/jessica-cabana-on-the-history-of-the-concordia-food-coalition/>>.

³⁹⁷ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. "Ben Prunty on the History of the CFC." Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. 6 July 2015. Video. <<https://concordiafoodgroups.ca/ben-prunty-on-the-history-of-the-cfc/>>.

³⁹⁸ Concordia Food Coalition. Concordia Food Coalition. N.d. <<http://www.concordiafoodcoalition.com/>>.

³⁹⁹ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. N.d. <<http://concordiafoodgroups.ca/>>.

⁴⁰⁰ Nil Alt Kecik. Discourses and Practices of Campus Food Sustainability at Concordia University. Thesis. Montreal, QC: Concordia University, 2017.

Concordia Food Coalition was created from a Fall 2011/Winter 2012 after a lecture by Concordia food studies professor Dr. Satoshi Ikeda and looming out a concern about the upcoming university food service provider renewal. Concordia University is very unique in that they have had 23 independent student-run food initiatives as of 2018 (with 20 still operational before the pandemic).⁴⁰¹ The Concordia Food Coalition envisions a food system at the university that is “outside of the pursuit of private financial profit, constituted and grounded in inclusivity & cooperation (not hierarchy & competition).”⁴⁰² The Coalition serves as a hub for students, student groups, faculty and the wider community to convene, engage, learn and connect around issues of food. The activities of the Coalition include operating the campus farmers’ market, organizing a food-themed orientation week, supporting student food research, assisting emerging student food initiatives and hosting educational events and tabling.

3.2.11 Other sustainability and sustainability-related initiatives

Borrowing Centre

A borrowing centre, sometimes referred to as an item library or library of things, is a place where individuals can borrow various items or resources for temporary use. These centres go beyond traditional libraries that primarily lend books and can offer wide array of items, such as tools, games, sports equipment, electronic devices. The concept behind borrowing centres is to promote resource-sharing, reduce consumption, and provide equitable access to items that might be either too expensive, too large to keep, or not be used frequently enough to justify purchasing them outright. Members of the community can borrow these items for a limited period, allowing for more efficient utilization of resources and promoting a sense of community collaboration. The only borrowing centres at Canadian universities are those hosted by Regenesys at York University and the University of Toronto campuses.

⁴⁰¹ Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. Concordia Student-Run Food Groups Research Project. N.d. <<http://concordiafoodgroups.ca/>>.

⁴⁰² Concordia Food Coalition, *op cit*.

Eco Store

The Earth Centre^{403,404,405}

The Earth Centre at Queen's University is a levy-supported student environmental organization that runs an 'eco centre' that offers sustainable products for sale, recycling services and an environmental-themed library. Originally part of the sustainability committee of the student union, it became an independent organization in 2009, before later rejoining the student union due to limitations on income-generation. The Earth Centre previously additionally sold sustainable food products from the Ontario Natural Food Cooperative.

SEIZE (Solidarity Economy Incubation for Zero Emissions)⁴⁰⁶

SEIZE (Solidarity Economy Incubation for Zero Emissions) grew out of the 2012 Quebec student strike movement and the group of progressive activists that were elected to the Concordia Student Union and help support other progressive initiatives like the Hive Solidary Co-operative, Reggie's Bar Solidarity Co-operative, and UTILE's Woodnote Co-operative, an affordable student housing co-operative in downtown Montreal for Concordia University students. SEIZE secured a student levy in 2015 from Concordia students. In 2016, Concordia Students' Union (CSU) divests from fossil fuel companies and instead invests in financing new co-operatives. In 2019, SEIZE's student levy is blocked due to "warring political factions within the CSU."⁴⁰⁷ In 2021, SEIZE secures a levy again in a referendum passed by Concordia students. SEIZE has since helped found other co-operatives, including Populus Financial Services Co-operative (provides financial services to non-profits, cooperatives, and student levy organizations), The Breach (an independent media outlet), and New Roots Worker Co-operative, a tree planting cooperative in British Columbia.

⁴⁰³ The Earth Centre. "The Earth Centre." N.d. <<https://the-earth-centre-at-queens.myshopify.com/>>.

⁴⁰⁴ Lauren Raham. "Responsible Campus Consumerism." *The Queen's Journal*. 23 October 2007. <<https://www.queensjournal.ca/responsible-campus-consumerism/>>.

⁴⁰⁵ Pahwa, Tarini. "AMS Queen's Earth Centre Becomes an AMS Service." *The Queen's Journal*, 2 June 2015, *The Queen's Journal*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁰⁶ Solidarity Economy Incubation for Zero Emissions (SEIZE). "History." *Solidarity Economy Incubation for Zero Emissions (SEIZE)*, 2025. <<https://www.solidarityeconomy.ca/history>>.

⁴⁰⁷ Solidarity Economy Incubation for Zero Emissions (SEIZE), *op. cit.*

3.3 Summary of Survey Results

Survey responses were received from students representing 94 sustainability or sustainability-related student initiatives and organizations, representing the Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland & Labrador. Both surveys were distributed in both official languages of Canada—English and French. No responses were received from Prince Edward Island or the Canadian territories.⁴⁰⁸ While 186 responses were received, many of those were largely incomplete likely due to the length of the survey, so those with insufficient or limited answers were entirely omitted. 132 completed or partially completed survey responses were used.

The types of initiatives and organizations represented include:⁴⁰⁹

- Bike co-operatives – 23
- Community gardens – 22
- Food organizations (including student-run cafes, cooperative grocery stores, farmers’ markets, food centres, bulk buying co-operatives, free/pwyc meal programs, vegetarian/vegan) – 25
- Free Stores – 1
- PIRGs / PIRG working groups – 16
- Regenesis chapters – 23
- Sustainability organizations – 15
- Other – 7 (e.g. Concordia Greenhouse, Kawartha World Issues Centre, Enactus)

The survey was branched off depending on the response of the student, into leaders (staff, founders, board members) and general members and volunteers. Each received a different set of questions that would better correspond with their level of knowledge and experience with the sustainability initiative or organization they are involved with. The survey questions were written to solicit responses from a diverse array of perspectives about the topic. Using my own experience and observation of others, I created survey questions aimed at soliciting responses from all identified major perspectives: (1) those who primarily see the topic from an educational lens; (2) those

⁴⁰⁸ No campus sustainability initiatives were identified at post-secondary institutions in these locations—these include University of Prince Edward Island, Holland College and Collège de l’Île (PEI); Yukon University (Yukon); Aurora College (NWT); Nunavut Arctic College (Nunavut).

⁴⁰⁹ Some respondents identified and shared experiences with more than one initiative/organization.

who primarily see the topic from a largely social entrepreneurial lens; (3) those who largely see the topic from a political perspective; (4) those who primarily see the topic from a community service lens.

3.4 Survey Results – Staff and Core Members

3.4.1 Background – Staff and Core Members

Question: Why did you decide to get involved with this organization? What made this organization more desirable to you than other groups?

This open-ended question received 46 responses. The most frequently cited motivation (37%, or 17 respondents) was the desire to be part of a community. Support for environmental sustainability (26.1%, 12 respondents) and a drive to give back or help others (26.1%, 12 respondents) were also common motivations. Additionally, 15.2% (7 respondents) were motivated by interests in food security and/or gardening. Skill development or learning opportunities were noted by 15.2% (7 respondents), while career or academic relevance was mentioned by 13% (6 respondents). Another 13% (6 respondents) cited alignment with social or environmental justice values, and 6.5% (3 respondents) were motivated by an interest in learning bike repair and maintenance.

Highlighted comments include: A campus farm respondent said, *“I wanted to be more engaged in the campus community, and to gain experience in my field of study. The success, level of commitment, welcoming culture, and values of this group were very attractive to me.”*⁴¹⁰ A bike shop respondent says, *“I started out by using the space as a client and then began to volunteer and become more and more engaged in the space.”*⁴¹¹ A community garden respondent said, *“I saw it at the clubs day fair. they needed board members when I attended the AGM and it was easy to sign up.”*⁴¹²

Question: What motivates your involvement and why do you remain committed to the organization?⁴¹³

⁴¹⁰ Clementine (pseudonym), survey respondent

⁴¹¹ Crevaision (pseudonym), survey respondent

⁴¹² Sandy (pseudonym), survey respondent

⁴¹³ NOTE: Some responses were assigned to more than one category due to overlapping themes.

This open-ended question yielded 46 responses. Respondents most commonly cited two motivations for continued involvement: the sense of making an impact (34.8%, 16 respondents) and the importance of community and belonging (34.8%, 16 respondents). Passion for the organization's activities motivated 21.7% (10 respondents), while environmental concerns were cited by 17.4% (8 respondents). An additional 17.4% (8 respondents) referred to practical benefits, such as employment, access to equipment or space, or other tangible resources. Another 17.4% (8 respondents) mentioned their desire to support the long-term success of the organization. Shared values and beliefs were referenced in two ways: alignment with the organization itself (15.2%, 7 respondents) and with fellow members (13%, 6 respondents). A smaller portion (6.5%, 3 respondents) identified skill development—both learning and teaching—as a motivating factor. A few respondents indicated they were no longer involved, citing reasons such as graduating, time constraints, organizational politics, job-related stress, or harmful work environments.

Notable responses include:

- A PIRG member said, *“The violence and oppression a lot of individuals and communities that is often silenced or swept under the rug drives me to be a part of something that works to provide marginalized folks with supports and resources to keep surviving and fighting.”*⁴¹⁴ A
- Regenesys respondent emphasized, *“I remain committed because of the relationships I've built and the passion I have for the projects Regenesys puts forward.”*⁴¹⁵
- Another participant involved in a food organization highlighted unmet needs on campus, *“I see how much potential there is for the organization to grow because there is still an unmet need on campus for interesting, tasty food that reflects the values of the students. The amount of community support the project has seen over the years is also very encouraging.”*⁴¹⁶
- A eco-house resident shared, *“I really like communal living, and I like contributing my*

⁴¹⁴ Opal (pseudonym), survey respondent

⁴¹⁵ Lady (pseudonym), survey respondent

⁴¹⁶ Alex 1 (pseudonym), survey respondent

time to an organization that prioritizes sustainability. It feels meaningful."⁴¹⁷

Question: What motivated you to create the initiative/organization? [founders-only]

Only 9 respondents answered this question, as most were not involved in founding their organization. Among those who did, the most common motivations were the recognition of an unmet need and a desire to address issues related to environmental sustainability or food access.

Question: How is reflection part of your activism?

This open-ended question revealed a range of perspectives on the role of reflection in participants' activism. Of the respondents, 16 emphasized the importance of reflection, while 7 expressed uncertainties about its role. One respondent stated their work was not activism related. In terms of how reflection is practiced, 7 respondents identified meetings and discussions, including post-event debriefs and quarterly reviews, as key avenues for reflective engagement. Other methods, each mentioned by a single respondent, included retreats, community engagement, surveys, learning about activist burnout, evaluation of activities, and reflecting on privilege and oppression. I also would note that many respondents did not answer this question. These varied practices suggest that while reflection is valued by some, its implementation is often informal and personalized across organizations, suggesting there is room for improvement.

3.4.2 Organization – Staff and Core Members

Question: Are there any programs or initiatives that no longer exist?

Most respondents did not report any closed programs or initiatives, as either none had closed, or they had not been around long enough to know (as some organizations have existed for decades). 46.51% of (40) respondents indicated no programs or initiatives of their organization closed in the past. 22.09% of (19) respondents indicated that there were initiatives that no longer existed. Some examples of initiatives that closed include a food centre, a community bike shop, a free store, a campus left-leaning newspaper, bike rentals and a mobile PWYC meal service. Additionally, a couple

⁴¹⁷ Francesca (pseudonym), survey respondent

respondents indicated their organization no longer exists. One respondent said a free store initiative they started fell into disuse after they left. Another respondent mentioned that because of high turnover and precarious funding that programs are always shifting. 18.60% of (16) respondents said that specific programs, events or services no longer existed. Some examples of programs and events that closed include hours for DIY-assisted bike repair services in other languages, annual trash clean-ups, a reoccurring event to drink tea and discuss sustainability, seed-saving, and potlucks. For those that reported closed programs, the reasons given include due to logistics complications (e.g. winter clean-ups, bike rentals), lack of popularity (e.g. potlucks, Bike to Work week, tea and sustainability discussions) and turn-over of volunteers and staff. 12.79% of (11) respondents were unsure.

Space was another main reason mentioned for closing. A Regenesiis respondent mentioned losing the kitchen and dining hall space that a youth food centre operated out of. One respondent from a campus bike centre said that it closed due to the student union cutting funding and space. Some examples from food initiatives include a campus farm initiative respondent mentioning that they no longer host summer camps for children, a respondent who said a mobile meal service for students called Ambulunch no longer operates, and lastly a respondent who said the frequency of free meal servings was more common in the past. Most PIRGs in Canada operate on a working group model, meaning students start a working group and it continues each year if there is student interest. One PIRG respondent said working groups come and go with student turnover. A PIRG respondent mentioned no longer publishing a campus alternative newspaper and no longer hosting a social justice themed show on the campus radio station after it was cancelled when the radio station's board was taken over and turned the station into a for-profit all hip-hop format. Another PIRG respondent mentioned running a campus-wide composting initiative until the university took over the responsibility, resulting in a transfer rather than a closure.

Question: How did the organization start?

This was an open-ended question answered by 86 respondents. By a 4:1 margin, organizations and initiatives were started by groups (usually groups of entirely students)

instead of individual student founders. Groups of students indicated they met in various ways, including class projects, committees, and case competitions. A few initiatives emerged from research projects, collaborations between students and professors, involvement of university staff or alumni networks (especially with garden-related projects), or other sources (e.g. university committees, student unions, PIRGs or outside organizations). Common motivations included identifying an unmet need, shared interest (especially with cycling initiatives), or a desire to create positive change. Many groups began by registering as student clubs, while others sought funding first, either through student levy referenda, university or government grants, or case competition awards. Five (5) respondents indicated they were unsure of the origins of the organization or initiative they were with.

Some highlighted responses include:

- *“A university student realized that buying large quantities of food saves a lot of money, so he decided to buy bags of several kilos of food and separate it with the interested students. The craze it created convinced him to offer the service on a larger scale, creating our zero waste grocery store: “En Vrac économie et écologie.”*⁴¹⁸
- *“A group of students organized and mobilized educate students about the value of our type of organization, then submitted a petition to our student union that triggered a referendum on the creation of our levy group.”*⁴¹⁹
- *“It started when the university wanted to demolish the biology greenhouse, and a group on campus (sustainable concordia) petitioned to save it. From there, the Concordia greenhouse collective was born.”*⁴²⁰
- *“If I recall correctly, a few hippies met up at a library or coffee shop to discuss how they could bring about social and environmental change to the campus.”*⁴²¹
- *“It started through a student referendum to introduce a refundable levy placed on all undergraduate students, at a time when research-oriented non-profits were being established across the continent to support social action.”*⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Calif (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴¹⁹ Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴²⁰ Marigold LaFleur (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴²¹ Wade Wilson (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴²² Arkady Nirgal (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Question: How did the organization grow?

Respondents typically described growth as gradual and often multi-faceted process driven by both internal initiative and external support. Common themes included increasing membership, new connections and collaborations, improving or expanding services, and greater awareness and visibility with the student body, especially through word-of-mouth. Growth was also attributed to dedicated and persistent founders, increasing student interest in issues like sustainability and food, and structural developments such as gaining non-profit status, securing student levies or grants, and hiring staff. Promotional strategies (e.g., social media, lecture announcements, posters, newsletters), hosting events, and participation in orientation week and club fairs also contributed. Several respondents noted that growth required navigating university administration and securing physical space. The dedication and quality of staff and volunteers were cited.

A respondent from a Regenesys chapter highlighted, “...*apart from time, hard work, and dedication, it was the gaining of traction with the initiatives.*”⁴²³ They noted that having a highly visible location, winning a student levy referendum, and cultivating relationships were key drivers of growth. A campus farm respondent explained, “*As the farm developed a more organized management and knowledge transfer structure, and as the CSA production increased, the farm grew to a larger size, and gained financial independence.*”⁴²⁴

A respondent from BikeChain, a campus bike centre at the University of Toronto said, “*It began in a parking garage. Two years later, Bikechain secured its first student levy. It was entirely volunteer run at first, gradually gaining more paid staff. Bikechain still relies heavily on volunteer labour, with two full-time paid staff, a handful of part-time seasonal staff, and the participation of approximately 50 volunteers each year. Support from the university's Facilities and Services department, as well as the student unions, has been crucial in the organization's growth and continued success.*”⁴²⁵

Organizations don't always grow. A respondent from the Kawartha World Issues

⁴²³ Raphael (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴²⁴ Clementine (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴²⁵ Annie Kopchovsky (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Centre said, “*KWIC grew with federal funding until the cuts in 1995 - unexpected and severe. Staffing was reduced from 12 to a few and then one coordinator. We are the last remaining Learner Centre in Ontario.*”⁴²⁶ Similarly, a respondent from OPIRG Toronto, expressed frustration over a referendum they had won, but because of irregularities with the student election held alongside the referendum, the referendum had to be held again. They subsequently lost the re-held referendum due to a story ran by then Varsity editor Naomi Klein about an internal staff dispute between an OPIRG Toronto staff member and the OPIRG Toronto board—they mention that many activists involved with OPIRG Toronto at that time continue to resent Naomi Klein, who has gone on to become a famous author. A community garden respondent reflected that the garden became overrun and unused when the previous president graduated—she continues, “*The club hasn't necessarily grown more every year. It has gone through cycles of growth and rest, as the commitment of participants has waxed and waned.*”⁴²⁷

Questions: How is the organization/initiative structured?

Is the organization legally registered? If so, as what?

Among the 48 respondents, 62.5% of (30) respondents said their organization was legally registered. The majority (20) of these identified as non-profits, while 4 respondents specified registration as a cooperative, 3 reported having charitable status, and 1 noted registration as a business. An additional 4.2% (2 respondents) indicated that their initiative functioned as a unit within a larger entity—one as part of a student union and another as part of a university department. Two respondents said their organization was registered only as a student group. Meanwhile, 25% (12) stated their organization was not formally registered, though some of these likely have recognized status through their university or student union. Two respondents were unsure. These findings parallel my examination of the organization’s websites and legal documentation. The most common structure is that of a registered non-profit that also holds official student organization status through a university and/or student union, with the remainder simply registered as a student organization. In such models, governance is typically led by a

⁴²⁶ Jac (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴²⁷ Kate (pseudonym), survey respondent.

board of directors—most often composed entirely of students, or a majority of students alongside university faculty or community members. These organizations frequently employ a mix of full-time staff, part-time student staff, and volunteers. Organizations registered solely as student groups more commonly operate with an executive board or steering committee, volunteer teams, and occasionally student part-time staff. Other less conventional structures noted included informal or ad hoc governance models, steering committees embedded within university or student union systems, and non-hierarchical, consensus-based collectives.

Question: What structures and policies have benefited the organization?

This open-ended question revealed that the most frequently cited benefit was access to reliable funding—particularly through permanent or recurring student levies, as well as university and grant-based financial support. A second major theme involved organizational documentation and internal policies. Respondents highlighted the importance of preserving institutional memory, maintaining a clear vision and mission, and documenting and implementing well-defined policies, roles and procedures. As one PIRG respondent noted, *“The structure ... made the group survive student cycle as student leaders come and go with cycle of graduation etc... permanent staff that carry wisdom and provide experience.”*⁴²⁸ Permanent full-time staff were consistently viewed as key to organizational stability. University support was also frequently mentioned as a significant enabling factor. Additional structures and policies mentioned as beneficial included: collaboration with other organizations, low levels of bureaucracy, consensus-based decision making, volunteer engagement, support from the broader student population, space allocation, local government support, organizational structure and governance, non-profit registration, and maintaining an apolitical stance.

Question: What structures and policies hindered the organization?

Respondents most commonly cited challenges stemming from university policies, difficulties with the university administration (especially in terms of treatment, attitude and blocking), and third-party service contracts. For example, a Regenes member

⁴²⁸ TJS (pseudonym), survey respondent.

managing a farmers' market remarked, *"Policies which privileged the current contracts with corporate entities like Aramark."*⁴²⁹ Issues surrounding capacity and turn-over were frequently mentioned. These include annual board and staff recruitment (school year) cycles, funding cuts to work-study programs, students being too busy resulting in neglecting their volunteer commitments and not having enough staff. Several respondents flagged internal policy issues such as the absence of clear guidelines, overly complex procedures, ideological rigidity, or simply not having policies or structures in place. One food organization member criticized political purity and gatekeeping by more extreme members: *"People would also propose highly restrictive policies such as wanting people who organized to have particular political views. I always fought this heavily but since I was in the minority these policies kind of came into place whether they were voted on or not."*⁴³⁰ Another food organization respondent expressed concerns over balancing goals and process, stating: *"There was tension between process oriented members and goal oriented members, policies would have really helped—a few cases of goal oriented members going "rogue" and harming the [organization]."*⁴³¹ A lack of physical space or disruptions to existing space—such as renovations or university delays in providing new space—was a recurring theme. As one bike centre respondent put it, *"The administration and renovations have caused significant problems with people being able to find the space."*⁴³² Additional challenges included the absence of non-profit or charitable status (noted as a barrier to funding access), provincial government policy changes (specifically under the Ford government in Ontario), issues with insurance, recruitment difficulties, interdepartmental siloing within universities, internal miscommunication, wage parity disputes between staff, and the general inexperience of students.

Question: How does the organization go about deciding which activities to pursue or not to pursue?

This open-ended question, answered by 50 respondents, revealed a range of

⁴²⁹ Darnell (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³⁰ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³¹ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent. Organization name removed.

⁴³² Crevaision (pseudonym), survey respondent.

decision-making processes shaped by organizational structure, values, and resource constraints. The most common approach (15 respondents) involved decisions being made by a board, executive team, or designated committee. Ten respondents emphasized the role of discussion and decision-making during meetings. Leadership-driven decision-making—by staff, chairs, or co-chairs—was mentioned by 7 respondents.

Resource-related factors also played a significant role. Seven respondents identified organizational capacity as a key consideration, while six referenced budgeting constraints or the ability to secure funding. Five respondents described using a docracy model, commonly found in DIY bike shops and hackerspaces, where individuals are free to initiate actions as long as they align with the group’s mission and values. Four respondents cited consensus-based decision-making. Other decision-making influences, each cited by three or fewer respondents, included: prior experience with the activity’s success or demand; consultation with members or the student body (e.g., through surveys or conversations); perceptions of where they saw student need or interest; that the activity was student-driven; an application or proposal processes; strategic planning alignment; pros-and-cons evaluations; and seeking advice.

Some highlighted responses include:

- A sustainability organization respondent explained, *“Our Theory of Change/Strategic Plan is developed by our student Board of directors, which informs our priorities. Every new program/event/collab is reviewed for alignment with the Theory of Change before moving forward.”*⁴³³
- A Regenesiis respondent noted, *“Activities that make ethical, economical and environmental sense will go forward in the deciding stage. Board and executive members finalize after research and discussions. The probability of getting grants will also affect if the initiative will move forward.”*⁴³⁴
- A PIRG respondent commented, *“Informal, based on student leadership and passions, generally small enough that everyone got to do what they wanted or had energy to do...what staff had time to work on.”*⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Chase (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³⁴ Ria (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³⁵ TJS (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Question: How would you describe the culture of the organization? Is there anything you think would improve the culture of the organization?

This open-ended question was answered by 44 respondents. The majority offered positive or generally positive assessments of their organization's culture. Sixteen respondents provided unambiguously positive descriptions, while 14 respondents expressed overall satisfaction with some minor reservations or suggestions for improvement. One respondent from a sustainability-focused organization described a supportive and inclusive atmosphere: *"We strive to support staff and student volunteers in being themselves and exploring what that means within the context of our work. We do this by fostering a work culture that enables self-expression and exploration and honoring individuals' understandings based on the combination of their background, claimed and unclaimed identities, and experiences. The atmosphere that we foster, allows those involved to show up as their whole, authentic selves. This means that we make space for emotion and connecting on a personal (not just "professional") level."*⁴³⁶ A Regenesiis respondent emphasized social connection: *"I liked the culture of the organization more than all of the other organizations I've ever been a part of. there were lots of fun parties with delicious food and I made a lot of friends."*⁴³⁷ A garden organization respondent offered a more reserved but positive view: *"culture is good - but a little bit like 'if you leave us alone and let us garden, we won't have any issues."*⁴³⁸

Six respondents reported mixed experiences, three said the culture needed improvement, and two were unsure. Three respondents described the organizational culture negatively. One particularly critical account came from Mimi, a food organization participant, who stated: *"The culture was so, so toxic most of the time. People blatantly abusing power, the idea that you had to be a "radical leftist activist" to fit in, people having a holier-than-thou approach to politics, call-out culture taken to a toxic level where there was no room for mistakes. People would come to one meeting and never come back because they were so put off."*⁴³⁹ Suggestions for improving organizational

⁴³⁶ Chase (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³⁷ Hick (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³⁸ Naimeless (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴³⁹ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

culture included increasing student engagement and recruitment, fostering better work-life balance for volunteers and staff, addressing overly relaxed environments that hinder task completion, reducing bureaucracy or top-down decision-making, and clarifying organizational goals.

Question: What shared activities/practices/rituals/gatherings contribute to creating a community and a positive environment?

This open-ended question yielded a wide range of responses, reflecting the diverse ways organizations foster community and positive culture. 18 respondents cited events, activities, and workshops as central to building community. 17 emphasized social gatherings, celebrations, hangouts, and parties. 16 described the community-forming role of working together or participating in regular programming. Bonding over shared meals and potlucks was noted by 11 respondents, while 8 identified meetings as important community-building spaces. Conferences and trips were mentioned by 5, and 4 highlighted volunteer appreciation events. Other practices—each mentioned by three or fewer respondents—included group chats, mutual aid and community care, friendships, dating or co-living among members, mentorship relationships, access to shared resources, and open-office or drop-in policies.

Highlighted responses include:

- A bike shop respondent described a recurring informal ritual: *“We have ‘tasskarades’ where we get together in the space with pizza and do things like clean the space or repair bicycles for sale.”*⁴⁴⁰
- A farmers’ market participant emphasized both formal and informal community practices: *“We hold a weekly/biweekly staff meeting where everyone is debriefed and we discuss our recent strengths/weaknesses and any upcoming matters. At staff meetings, everyone is welcome to discuss any concerns they may have in their sect of the organization and we can discuss ways to improve that. We also tend to have frequent staff ‘parties’, we hold potlucks, or we all go out for drinks to get to know each other better outside of a work environment.”*⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴⁰ Crevaision (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁴¹ Jacqueline Nicole (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Together, these responses suggest that a combination of structured collaboration and informal social interaction contributes to fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.

Question: What (if any) are the ongoing challenges facing the organization?

This open-ended question was answered by 46 respondents. The two most frequently reported challenges—each cited by 11 respondents—were limited financial resources and inadequate people capacity. These included insufficient funding and staffing, as well as difficulty attracting and retaining members or volunteers.

Eight respondents cited space-related challenges. These included the absence of a designated space, lack of visibility, accessibility concerns, inadequate space size or quality, or the absence of specific infrastructure (e.g., a kitchen). Political factors were also noted, with 5 respondents identifying the impact of right-wing politics—such as the Student Choice Initiative or austerity measures—as barriers to their work.

Staffing limitations were mentioned by 4 respondents, while 3 referenced the challenges of annual team or board turnover tied to the academic calendar. Another 3 respondents discussed difficulties with marketing, visibility, or campus name recognition. Volunteer turnover was also mentioned by 3 respondents.

Highlighted responses illustrate the range of challenges:

- A bike shop respondent noted, *“We deal with the move and the challenges to working in a VERY non-optimal space.”*⁴⁴²
- A PIRG respondent remarked, *“Conservative groups have always been a threat to our organization. I think we also need to find new ways to engage more students. Students also have less time now to engage in extracurricular activities because they are normally working and going to school.”*⁴⁴³
- A grocery co-operative respondent stated, *“Limited opening hours. Bad location. Arrangements with product suppliers (we are not an open store every day we can deliver to and it's complicated to manage, not all of them are understanding).”*⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴² Crevaision (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁴³ Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁴⁴ Calif (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Together, these responses reflect the complex and layered nature of the challenges facing student-involved organizations, with resource constraints, space insecurity, and shifting student engagement being especially prominent.

Question: Imagine the organization in ideal circumstances, what would those circumstances be and how might the organization's practices/impacts differ?

This open-ended question was answered by 45 respondents, whose visions of an ideal organization covered a broad range of improvements across infrastructure, staffing, visibility, and institutional support. The most commonly cited ideal was improved location and space, mentioned by 11 respondents. Specific desires included better physical visibility, more accessible or larger spaces, the availability of specific infrastructure (such as a kitchen), and completed repairs. Eight respondents emphasized having enough members or volunteers, while six identified the need for adequate staffing levels, while four respectively said greater university recognition and support and greater visibility and student engagement through outreach.

Some respondents articulated comprehensive structural or political shifts.

- A food organization participant envisioned: *“Ideally, we'd have a fully functional kitchen that we could access most of the week to serve food all day. If we were to expand and offer paid positions, we could also benefit from MCSS funding or levies.”*⁴⁴⁵
- An eco-house respondent focused on retention: *“There would be incentives to encourage facilitators and coordinators to stay on for 2+ years. That way we could spend less time on training and more time on projects.”*⁴⁴⁶
- A PIRG respondent linked student affordability to engagement: *“I think that post-secondary education needs to be free. The rising costs of tuition, housing, food, transit means that students must work as well as go to school. I think this would make it easier for interested students to engage in the work that OPIRG does. This would bring new energy and ideas to the organization. I also think that it would be good if we had access to more funding so we can support more research projects that fall within our*

⁴⁴⁵ Alex 1 (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁴⁶ Francesca (pseudonym), survey respondent.

mandate.”⁴⁴⁷

One respondent said things are already great. Together, these responses suggest that while visions for ideal conditions are diverse, they generally center on sustainable infrastructure, reliable human resources, financial security, and broader institutional and campus support.

3.4.3 Finances – Staff and Core Members

Question: Describe your sources of income (levy, grants, membership fees, social enterprises, etc.)

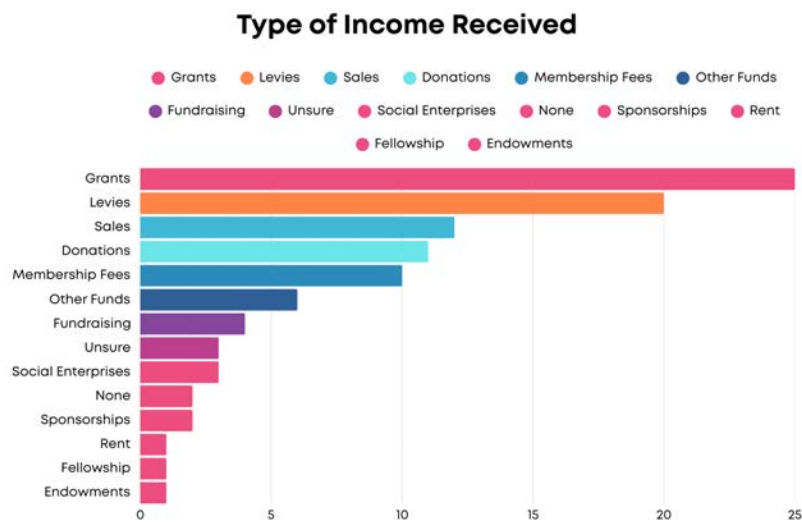


Figure 4: Income Sources

Respondents identified grants and student levies as the primary sources of income, cited by 25 and 20 respondents, respectively. Other funding sources included sales (12), donations (11), and membership fees (10). Additional sources mentioned less frequently were unspecified institutional or external funding (6), fundraising (4), social enterprise revenue (3), sponsorships (2), rent (1), fellowships (1), and endowments (1). Three respondents were unsure of their funding sources, while two reported having no funding at all.

Highlighted responses show the different financial models:

⁴⁴⁷ Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- A student run café cooperative respondent said, *“Essentially all of our funding comes from our levy. Food sales represent a small source of income but since things are sold at cost, these do not represent profit for the cooperative.”*⁴⁴⁸
- A community bike shop respondent says, *“We sell used bikes and both used and new bike parts. That’s our only source of income.”*⁴⁴⁹

Overall, while some organizations operate with hybrid funding models, recurring levies and grant funding appear to be the most common and stable financial foundations.

Question: If levied, how did your organization successfully obtain a levy?

Respondents indicated that obtaining a levy typically involved a multi-step process requiring institutional approval and student engagement. Most commonly, organizations first secured permission to hold a vote—via approval from a student union, university administration, or by gathering a petition—and then launched a referendum campaign to win student support. One respondent noted an alternative path: direct university approval for levy implementation. In some cases, additional oversight was required, such as final approval from the university’s board of governors following a successful referendum. At least one respondent mentioned that levies are subject to periodic review and re-approval, with one student union requiring a new levy referendum every five years. A PIRG respondent detailed the process as follows:

*“It was a multi part process. First students and campus allies ran a campaign to get enough signatures on a petition, to be able to get a referendum approved through the student union AGM. Once the referendum motion was passed, a campaign ensued to encourage students to vote for the levy. This was passed and the student union, who through legislation is allowed to set their rates, had the final vote approved through the board of governors of the university (although I have been told they would rarely not approve these funding increases).”*⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ Myra (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁴⁹ Crevaion (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵⁰ Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

These findings reflect the procedural complexity and political effort often required to secure stable, long-term funding through student levies.

Question: If levied, how does a student levy support the work of the organization? If you did not have a levy, how would it impact the organization and its activities?

Among respondents whose organizations receive a student levy, the majority (75%) stated that without it, the organization or initiative would likely cease to exist. The remaining 25% said they would face significant reductions in services, including program cuts and staff layoffs. A respondent from Regenesiis noted, *“The levy provides full and part time staff with employment opportunities. Without a levy, the organization would be unable to provide its current level of service and programs to the community.”*⁴⁵¹

Similarly, a PIRG respondent emphasized, *“The levy allows us to pay two full time staff that can support the organization through regular student turn over by maintaining historical memory and assisting in the navigation of legal requirements for non-profit organizations. It also provides funding for us to bring in trainers to lead workshops on various topics.”*⁴⁵²

For organizations without a levy, many expressed that having one would enable them to expand operations and offer greater stability through paid staffing. One Regenesiis respondent from a chapter without a levy said, *“A levy would allow for more consistency in the group membership as students are often seeking paid work and quit volunteering. A levy would also support ongoing initiatives so that they stay active long term and draw more people.”*⁴⁵³

Two respondents were unsure or hesitant about pursuing a levy, and two explicitly stated they were not interested in doing so. A student-run café cooperative noted, *“Our goal is to be a self-sustaining operation, and we are currently in a good financial position with some money left over from our SPF startup grant.”*⁴⁵⁴ Meanwhile, a sustainability organization respondent in Alberta remarked, *“No levy, would discourage*

⁴⁵¹ Wade Wilson (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵² Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵³ Alice (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵⁴ Alex 1 (pseudonym), survey respondent. SPF stands for Sustainability Projects Fund.

membership and participation.”⁴⁵⁵ These responses highlight the central role levies play in organizational survival, capacity-building, and continuity.

Question: Do any of your activities generate income? If so, how would you describe the success or challenges of the income-generating activities you have?

Most respondents (24) indicated that their organization does not have income-generating activities. However, 18 respondents described generating revenue through various means. These activities included:

- Selling goods: food, meals, produce, groceries, bicycles, bike parts, used clothing
- Renting goods: bicycles, equipment (e.g., button makers)
- Renting space: garden plots, vendor tabling
- Selling services: bike maintenance and repair
- Selling experiences: ticketed events, fundraisers
- Membership fees and donations

A respondent from a bulk grocery cooperative described their model: *“Sales, our core business. We are a non-profit organization that wants to ensure a great service for its customers. Success is if we have enough profit to ensure our sustainability and eventually the remains will be reinvested in the student community.”*⁴⁵⁶

Several campus farm respondents elaborated on the complexity of generating income from food production. One noted: *“Yes; I gained an income from selling the produce at the Farmer’s Market at from CSA boxes. There are challenges that come with generating an income from small-scale farming.”*⁴⁵⁷ Another added, *“Yes. CSA and markets. CSA gives us a predictable, stable source of income before the season even starts, as members pre-pay for the season. However, this involves more coordination and communication. Markets are a great source of income as well, but the success of markets can be unpredictable based on time of year, weather, etc. so we can end up with leftover veggies if we don't predict well. Markets are less stable than CSA, but doing both forms*

⁴⁵⁵ James Wood (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵⁶ Calif (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵⁷ Monkey (pseudonym), survey respondent.

of marketing works well for us.”⁴⁵⁸

A student-run sustainable café respondent reported difficulty reaching financial sustainability: “*We generate revenue from our food sales, but it is a challenge to breakeven. We’re relatively small and are only open two days per week, so a lot comes down to the 8 hours we actually spend selling food every week.*”⁴⁵⁹

Overall, while income-generating activities provide some financial autonomy, many respondents noted that success depends heavily on scale, timing, staffing, and consistent community engagement.

Question: Ideally, what level of resources would be needed? (e.g. more space, more money, more staff, more members, etc.)

This question revealed that the most commonly cited resource needs fell into three categories—funding, space, and people—with 19 respondents naming each as a top priority.

- Funding needs included stable income sources such as student levies or reliable grant streams.
- People referred to both more volunteers and increased membership to support the workload and expand activities.
- Space concerns encompassed acquiring a space (for those without one), increasing space size, improving accessibility, or securing facilities with specific infrastructure (e.g., kitchens).

The next most frequently cited need was staffing, mentioned by 14 respondents. This included both hiring staff (where none currently existed) and expanding staffing levels to reduce workload stress and increase organizational capacity. Four respondents stated that their current level of resources was sufficient. These findings suggest that while core needs are relatively consistent—money, people, and space—specific operational gaps vary significantly across organizations.

⁴⁵⁸ Clementine (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁵⁹ Alex 1 (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Question: What strategies would you recommend to other student organizations to help them acquire the resources they need to operate?

Respondents offered a broad range of strategies for resource acquisition, with collaboration and outreach emerging as the most widely recommended approach. This included forming partnerships, sharing resources, and seeking support from like-minded organizations, student unions, campus PIRGs, and other student groups. Nine respondents emphasized the importance of securing a student levy, while eight recommended pursuing grants as a key funding strategy. Four respondents advised building relationships with university departments and administration for additional support.

Six respondents highlighted the role of visibility, campaigning, and public relations—including efforts to raise awareness of the organization’s work, ensure students understand how funding is used, and build a reputation for transparency and efficiency. Three respondents advised taking time to grow strategically and develop long-term plans. Together, these responses reflect both the practical and relational aspects of building resource capacity in student organizations, with a clear emphasis on community-building, institutional navigation, and strategic planning.

3.4.4 Geography and Space – Staff and Core Members

Question: What contextual factors (e.g. geographic location, campus political culture, local community) have impacted the organization positively or negatively?

This question revealed three primary themes shaping organizational experiences: location or space (25 respondents), geography and surrounding community (19 respondents), and campus political culture (11 respondents). Respondents highlighted both positive and negative impacts under each theme. For those discussing space and location, responses were mixed. Positive comments focused on convenience and visibility, while negative ones cited inaccessibility, poor visibility, being far from key campus areas, or the burden of rent costs. For example, one meal organization respondent reflected:

“Our location on campus has been a great positive impact for the market. We are located

in the lobby of the student union building right by the entrance. The SUB gets a lot of student traffic and our location in the lobby is very convenient for our set-up but also great for being discovered by students. Our location on campus, while great for being discovered by students, is quite poor for being discovered by members of the community at large since we are only located on campus. We are yet to think of a better and more convenient way of reaching the greater Halifax community while still remaining primarily at a convenience to students."⁴⁶⁰ Similarly, a food bank respondent noted, *"We are in a basement of a building near residences. As such, many people have trouble finding us."*⁴⁶¹

Geographic and community factors also yielded varied responses. Some organizations benefited from being in politically engaged or supportive neighbourhoods, while others faced challenges related to being on commuter campuses with limited student life, or having facilities located off-campus or across multiple campuses, complicating coordination and visibility. Regional political climates also played a role. One respondent from the Prairie provinces cited a *"racist"* regional culture as negatively impacting their work. Others noted the difficulties of connecting with broader communities while remaining student-focused. A PIRG respondent shared, *"We are difficult for community members to access and tucked in a place where students are unlikely to stumble across us. But we do have a lovely office that is open to any student if they need."*⁴⁶²

Campus political dynamics were described as either positive, oppositional, or divisive. This was as broad as having supportive university administrators, to having to navigate working with a *"corrupt"* student union. One student café cooperative respondent summarized several of these challenges: *"Our campus culture has been problematic where fewer people come to events or get involved in any substantial way so we have decreasing attendance at our events and fewer volunteers each year. The decreasing enrolment has also taken a toll on our funding."*⁴⁶³ These findings highlight the complex interplay between organizational operations and their physical, cultural, and

⁴⁶⁰ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶¹ Truss Bunyon (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶² Pirate (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶³ Myra (pseudonym), survey respondent.

political environments—each capable of shaping support, engagement and initiative effectiveness in profound ways.

Question: How did your organization obtain its space(s)?

Most respondents reported receiving space through the university (14) or student union (8), often by approaching specific departments such as sustainability offices, academic units, research centres, or campus operations. 9 respondents mentioned other. In some cases, organizations were offered space within student centres. A smaller number of respondents mentioned renting space off-campus or through non-university entities. A few noted having formal agreements with the university or student union outlining their space use. In one instance, a respondent described occupying unused university space without formal permission, stating that they had not yet been asked to leave. 5 respondents were unsure how their space was obtained. Overall, space access appears to be deeply shaped by institutional relationships and infrastructure availability, with a mix of informal arrangements and formal negotiations.

Question: Is the organization provided space rent-free? Now or previously?

Most respondents (33) indicated that their organization currently receives or has received rent-free space from the university, student union, or a student centre (where operated separately from the union). Six respondents stated that their organization pays rent, either for space on-campus or at an off-campus location. Three respondents were unsure about the financial terms of their space arrangement. Among those who pay rent, the shift was often attributed to changing institutional attitudes. Increasing neoliberal approaches by universities, student unions, and student centres—where student-levy-funded organizations are now being asked to pay rent, even if they previously had space free of charge. These findings underscore the growing precarity of physical space access, with a noticeable trend toward the monetization of campus facilities, even for student-run, non-profit, or volunteer-based initiatives.

3.4.5 Education and Training – Staff and Core Members

Question: What educational, leadership and personal development opportunities do you give?

This open-ended question revealed that nearly all respondents offer experiential, learn-by-doing educational opportunities. These opportunities span a range of activities including participation in governance (e.g., serving on a board of directors), acquiring practical skills (e.g., bike repair, cooking, food cultivation), and developing organizational competencies (e.g., event planning, communications, workshop facilitation, etc.). Workshops, events, and awareness campaigns, on topics such as environmental issues or sustainable diets, were frequently mentioned. These efforts typically serve broad audiences, targeting the entire student or campus community. Several organizations provide formal training programs or structured classes, including one two-year program combining mentorship and experiential learning in the operation of a revenue-generating campus farm. At least one program offers a certificate upon completion. Many respondents also referenced internships, placements, and paid employment opportunities. Mentorship opportunities were mentioned by several respondents, as were options for conducting research, earning academic credit, or having participation formally recognized on a co-curricular transcript. These responses suggest that most organizations provide hands-on, practical opportunities for skill-building and leadership development, with an emphasis on doing meaningful work rather than formal instruction. While some programs offer structured training or recognition, most learning takes place informally through active participation in the organization's activities.

Question: How does the organization contribute to educating your members and volunteers? (e.g. informal learning, workshops, formal training programs and partnerships, courses, independent course credit and research)

This open-ended question found that informal learning was the most frequently cited method of education. Respondents described learning through doing, observation, conversations, informal mentorship, and peer-to-peer interactions as central to how members and volunteers develop knowledge and skills. Workshops and events were also commonly mentioned. These included activities such as film screenings, lunch-and-learns, guest speakers, and public lectures, which often serve both internal members and

the broader student community. One respondent noted the value of having an “open-door policy” that allows for casual engagement and learning opportunities at any time.

Formal training was referenced by several respondents, though less often than informal approaches. These included multi-week classes or training series, student employment, internship placements, research opportunities, and the ability to receive course credit through community service learning or independent study courses. Participation in conferences was also noted as an educational opportunity. Other methods of member education included awareness campaigns, both in-person and online (via social media and email), as well as providing access to learning resources, including libraries and digital materials. These responses show that while formal educational structures exist in some cases, most learning occurs informally, shaped by active involvement, peer relationships, and day-to-day participation in the organization’s work.

Question: How does the organization train new members/volunteers? How do you feel about the process?

This question revealed that informal training methods are the most widely used approach. Of the 68 respondents, 63.2% (43) indicated they rely solely on informal methods such as shadowing, peer learning, or learning by doing. A smaller portion—19.1% (12)—reported using formal training methods, such as orientations, structured workshops, or certifications. Another 11.8% (8) said they used a combination of both. In total, 75% of respondents indicated that informal training plays some role, while 31% used at least some form of formal training. Two respondents (2.9%) said they offered no training, and another two were unsure. Organizations with more complex operations or legal compliance requirements—such as Regenesys chapters with multiple programs, or community kitchens requiring food safety certifications—were more likely to use formal training. In contrast, DIY bike centres, community gardens, and similarly informal or peer-led organizations tended to rely on informal approaches.

When asked how they felt about the training process:

- 58.8% (30) responded positively
- 35.3% (18) expressed dissatisfaction or concerns

- 5.9% (3) were neutral

Examples highlight this divide:

- A Regenesys respondent reported, *“All volunteers undergo an orientation where they are helped to understand the organization's overall goal and its initiatives as well as the role they would play and the policies and rules they would abide by. New volunteers are always paired with a senior member of the organization to ensure they understand their role. I feel pretty confident in the process.”*⁴⁶⁴
- A PIRG respondent expressed concern: *“Disorganized. Very honestly, me and my coworkers have not been trained completely either and the same goes for some of our board members. We need to be better at this. We can't serve our communities through this organizations without knowing it's mission and having collective training.”*⁴⁶⁵
- Another PIRG member said: *“We have an annual board retreat. Volunteer training is ad hoc. We need stronger policies and procedures. Students tend to flake on pirg responsibilities.”*⁴⁶⁶
- A third PIRG respondent stated: *“We offer training workshops through the Tools for Change program that we are a collective member of. For board members we provide a day long training session that includes finance training, employment law (how to be good employer) and consensus/facilitation training. Our provincial network also provides some training for board members. We have had issues with volunteer uptake on the trainings. Technically, it is a requirement for volunteers to participate in anti-oppression training, but we have not really enforced this requirement and I think we need to do so given the diverse range of people we have coming into our space.”*⁴⁶⁷
- A bike centre respondent commented: *“Rather poorly. Depending on what time of years volunteers come we may not be able to teach them much of anything due to how busy we are. Board member training is very lacking as well. Very much a, sink or swim environment, where sinking is just not contributing.”*⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Raphael (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶⁵ Opal (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶⁶ Pirate (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶⁷ Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁶⁸ Dy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Overall, while some organizations have developed structured onboarding processes, many rely on informal, inconsistent approaches. Even among those with formal components, a lack of follow-through and uneven volunteer participation often undermines their effectiveness.

Question: How would you improve on formal training and educational opportunities?

This open-ended question received a wide range of suggestions. The most frequently cited improvements—mentioned by 15 respondents—was the development of more formal training programs, including multi-week training sessions and structured classes. Workshops were also widely suggested (12 respondents), with calls for increased frequency, and more diversity of topics.

Resource constraints were a common barrier, cited by 8 respondents, who said they would expand formal training if they had more staff capacity or financial support. Handbooks or manuals for volunteers, staff, or board members were suggested by 7 respondents as a means of standardizing and supporting onboarding. Another 6 respondents called for improvements to training accessibility and consistency—including better scheduling, more frequent sessions, set intake cycles, and the use of digital tools such as videos or online modules. Institutional memory was highlighted by 5 respondents, emphasizing the need to document processes and practices to support continuity. Also, with 5 respondents was bringing in professional experts for facilitation or specialized training. Collaborating with academic programs or external organizations had 4 respondents. Several respondents mentioned their formal training was sufficient, or that informal approaches were adequate on their own.

Highlighted responses include:

- A food organization respondent reflected: *“Honestly it's hard to think of improvements because the whole system worked pretty smoothly. Maybe some form of handbook for volunteers could be present at each initiative for reference. My friend and I did create a package for training volunteers on how to lead servings at the university. We wanted to emphasize this because that was the actual mandate of the organization. None of this was*

formalized and due to backlash from members we did not make training mandatory.”⁴⁶⁹

- A PIRG respondent shared: *“This year I spread out our board training over the summer—just including a small component in each board meeting rather than having a more intensive 1-2 full days training. I also had some other community members run some of the sessions, who could present a better and more engaging workshop than me! I think this helped board members feel less overwhelmed with information, and gave them the chance to hear from more than just me/different facilitation styles and experiences. This is the approach I’d like to work on moving forward, as well as trying to find better ways to acknowledge the existing knowledge among our board members.*”⁴⁷⁰

- Another PIRG member noted: *“It would be good to have more space within the university system. The AntiO and decolonization we have developed should be mandatory for all the students, professors and staff, but that is not going to happen for now. We are able to do the training with specific classes but it is also at the request of the professor.*”⁴⁷¹

- A free store respondent proposed, *“I would appreciate more formal training where we go through procedures, important documents, club history and current initiatives etc. Either in a casual setting (i.e. over dinner) or in a more formal business like setting (i.e. a Roundtable).*”⁴⁷²

- A community garden member noted: *“It has improved over the past year, such as that we had a training workshop for board members, and made a board member training manual.*”⁴⁷³

- A respondent from a campus sustainability group with a student levy said: *“Offering them would be a good place to start.*”⁴⁷⁴

- Others were more skeptical of the need for formalization. A food organization respondent noted *“It is a very hands-on operation: jumping right into it plus the orientation that takes place at the beginning does suffice our needs as a new member.*”⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁶⁹ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷⁰ Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷¹ Lala (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷² JJ (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷³ Sandy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷⁴ Marty Buttons (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷⁵ Shungo (pseudonym), survey respondent.

These responses reflect a shared interest in improving training structures—balanced by resource constraints and recognizing that important role that experiential learning plays.

Question: What does it mean to think of the organization as an education organization?

This open-ended question yielded a broad and nuanced set of responses, many of which echoed themes raised in earlier questions—particularly around experiential/informal learning, skill development, learning from others, knowledge sharing, and self-efficacy.

A number of respondents touched on themes of holistic or alternative education, offering learning opportunities not typically available in the formal university curriculum. This includes challenging dominant narratives, addressing topics underrepresented in academic settings, and serving as a supplement to classroom-based learning. Many respondents highlighted learning through action, including these initiatives being student-led/student-involved, or being united through a common goal. A farmers' market respondent described it this way: *"I think this organization can be an education organization because it is student-run and student-led and it is open to students of all backgrounds."*⁴⁷⁶ A bike centre participant shared, *"I definitely gained a lot by running and growing the bike shack all by myself. It gave me space to learn and develop complex skills (like running my own community bike shop), gave me connections as well to other organizations and individuals (which I now utilize in my business)."*⁴⁷⁷

Several respondents emphasized empowerment, citizenship, and community learning. A Regenesiis respondent states, *"An education organization empowers change in a way that can be carried forwards, independent of itself. This would mean that what members and the community learn, they can apply in their lives and pass onto others."*⁴⁷⁸ Another added, *"It teaches about becoming a responsible citizen."*⁴⁷⁹

Many responses highlighted the creation of shared learning spaces, or

⁴⁷⁶ Jacqueline Nicole (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷⁷ Dan (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷⁸ Raphael (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁷⁹ Ria (pseudonym), survey respondent.

communities of practice, where students learn from one another and from more experienced mentors. A campus meal initiative respondent noted, *“A community of practice, where members and people involved could share experiences, participate activities together, and convey the ideas to and impact other people.”*⁴⁸⁰

Some respondents were more reserved or skeptical in their framing. A food organization member said, *“I don't think of the (organization name) as such, more as a support organization.”*⁴⁸¹ A café organization respondent reflected, *“It means that we are more than a cafe. That our space is both economic and social.”*⁴⁸² Similarly, a garden respondent noted, *“It means that our primary purpose is to offer opportunities for learning and personal growth. The amount of food we produce is secondary to our mission.”*⁴⁸³

A PIRG respondent emphasized the organization's role in provoking critical thought: *“In our case, it is about pushing boundaries and forcing people to think outside their comfort zone. It is also about using critical reflection, a lot of times is going against the establishment and what student are taught by the institution.”*⁴⁸⁴ Overall, these responses point to a broad and evolving understanding of what education can look like outside the classroom—grounded in lived experience, collective learning, and a shared commitment to creating change.

Question: What does the organization do to educate its volunteers/members on social and environmental justice?

This open-ended question revealed that most organizations approach social and environmental justice education through informal methods, with varying degrees of formalization and intentionality. 53.9% (35 respondents) reported providing informal education only, including learning by doing, informal discussions, social media engagement, awareness-raising, and education embedded in the organization's day-to-day activities. 41.5% (27 respondents) indicated that they use both formal and informal

⁴⁸⁰ (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁸¹ Lydia Forsyth (pseudonym), survey respondent. Organization name omitted for anonymity.

⁴⁸² Bonnie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁸³ Billie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁸⁴ Lala (pseudonym), survey respondent.

approaches, with the most common formal methods being workshops, film screenings, guest talks, and conferences. A smaller number of respondents mentioned formal training, and some expressed a desire to develop more formal education in the future. 4.6% (3 respondents) said their organization does not provide education on these topics.

Several responses highlighted tensions or limitations. A community garden respondent noted, *“That can be a very polarizing/controversial subject - it is discussed but not taught, but it is a very environmentally friendly group that promotes and has statements in the constitution.”*⁴⁸⁵ A PIRG respondent reflected, *“OPIRG did this in the past,”* implying a decline in programming.⁴⁸⁶

Other respondents described more deliberate educational strategies. A Regenesiis respondent stated, *“Regenesis regularly engages in sustainability education events and programming. The organization creates an ambient where education and praxis are essential for creating active and engaged community members who recognize the importance of living in a sustainable manner and the collective impact they have on our biosphere.”*⁴⁸⁷ A sustainable café cooperative respondent said, *“One of our pillars being sustainability, this is quite important to us. We provide information and workshops on the importance of social justice and environmental awareness. Our advocacy has been slowly decreasing over the past few years though because of a seeming lack of interest and participation from our community members.”*⁴⁸⁸ These responses suggest that while social and environmental justice are widely valued, education in these areas is often integrated into broader programming or informal community practices rather than offered through sustained or structured curricula.

Question: How does the organization create space and time for reflection and discussion to occur?

This open-ended question was answered by 45 respondents. The most common way organizations facilitated reflection and discussion was through meetings or debriefs, cited by 25 respondents. 12 respondents mentioned general discussions, whether formal

⁴⁸⁵ Rose (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁸⁶ Dickie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁸⁷ Fake Name (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁸⁸ Myra (pseudonym), survey respondent.

or informal. 4 respondents mentioned hosting events such as weekly coffee sessions, town halls, and decompression activities like yoga. 3 respondents said physical space, including meeting rooms or office areas designed for conversation. These responses suggest that while formal structures such as meetings are the most common venue for reflection, many organizations rely on a mix of intentional planning and informal opportunities to make space for dialogue and reflection.

Question: How does the organization facilitate action based upon those reflections and discussions?

This question revealed a more diffuse and often informal link between reflection and action, with many respondents providing vague or generalized answers. The 45 responses varied widely. 5 respondents mentioned facilitating action through open dialogues and discussions. 3 respondents emphasized the importance of follow-through on decisions or feedback. Another 3 respondents indicated that members or staff do so independently. A few respondents were unsure how reflection translated into action within their organization, and several acknowledged that no formal process existed to ensure this connection. These findings point to a general recognition of the value of reflection, but also a lack of consistent structures for systematically translating reflective insight into practice.

3.4.6 University Relations – Staff and Core Members

Question: How well do you feel you understand university politics and the structure of the university?

This open-ended question revealed that most respondents had a limited understanding of university politics and governance structures. Only 21.7% (10 respondents) reported having a good understanding, while 39.1% (18 respondents) said they understood these systems somewhat, 32.6% (15 respondents) said they did not understand them well, and 6.5% (3 respondents) indicated they had no understanding at all. Many respondents described university structures as complex or difficult to navigate. For example, one respondent commented, *“Not very well. We had to face several*

problems due to this.”⁴⁸⁹ Another added, “I feel that York is a large university with multiple departments. As such, it isn't always clear who to reach out to.”⁴⁹⁰ One respondent commented, “I don't. And on the short timeline that I am here it does not feel like a valuable time investment.”⁴⁹¹ Those who reported stronger levels of understanding were generally more experienced, often graduate students or long-term staff involved with the initiative. One such respondent remarked, “I've spent 15 years in post-secondary institutions, and it seems to be a lot of ignorant bureaucrats.”⁴⁹² These findings suggest that while some organizational leaders and staff develop a working knowledge of university governance over time, most participants struggle with navigating institutional systems, which can pose challenges to securing resources, building partnerships, or advocating effectively.

Question: Do you feel the university values and prioritizes the work you do?

This open-ended question revealed a broad range of perceptions, though most respondents felt that their work was undervalued or unsupported by their university.

- 44.4% (32 respondents) said the university does not support or value their work. This response spanned across all types of initiatives, from sustainability to food security to social justice.
- 27.8% (20 respondents) felt their work was supported by the university, with community gardens being the most frequently cited as receiving institutional support.
- 15.3% (11 respondents) expressed mixed feelings, citing supportive departments or individuals alongside broader institutional barriers.
- 6.9% (5 respondents) felt the university offered only limited support.
- 4.2% (3 respondents) were unsure, and 1.4% (1 respondent) reported the university was completely unaware of their organization.

A number of responses described adversarial or indifferent relationships with university administration:

⁴⁸⁹ Calif (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹⁰ Raphael (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹¹ Rose (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹² Crevaision (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- A Regenesys respondent said *“York absolutely does not. It feels like a corporate university where student orgs are constantly fighting the administration just to exist. I feel like the university, especially the private company in charge of food services, actively dislikes student groups and doesn't value their work in the slightest despite profiting from them.”*⁴⁹³
- A respondent from a campus sustainability organization stated, *“Absolutely not. We have heard from the university's governance structures very clearly that they do not support our involvement in university governance and planning.”*⁴⁹⁴
- A PIRG respondent at a small university noted, *“Many in the UNBC community value, appreciate, and engage with the work being done by PGPIRG, but the university administration does not prioritize environmental justice and sustainability as much as they claim.”*⁴⁹⁵

Some respondents acknowledged partial or evolving support:

- One PIRG respondent reflected, *“Certain actors within the university valued and prioritized the work we did, other elements were opposed. As an institution, we were able to see a lot of progress and the level they valued the work grew over time.”*⁴⁹⁶

Others described a complete disconnect:

- A community bike centre respondent said, *“No -- I think we are less than an afterthought to campus administration. We are supported by our student union so I don't think the university proper has much opportunity or reason to think about us.”*⁴⁹⁷
- A respondent from a food organization that served meals and produce on campus shared, *“I don't think a large portion of the university or its staff are even aware of us.”*⁴⁹⁸

Still, a few organizations reported strong support:

A respondent from a student-run sustainability café at a small university said, *“We are in*

⁴⁹³ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹⁴ Marty Buttons (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹⁵ Timothy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹⁶ B Green (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹⁷ Bobby Briggs (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁴⁹⁸ Lydia Forsyth (pseudonym), survey respondent.

*our 16th year of operation and wouldn't exist without the support of the larger institution we are in. It has been critical to our success and we feel very supported.”*⁴⁹⁹

These responses reflect a fragmented institutional landscape, where support is often inconsistent, highly dependent on individual departments or actors, and shaped by political dynamics and institutional priorities.

Question: What departments support you or do you work with? Describe the relationship

This open-ended question revealed a range of departmental relationships, varying significantly in terms of support, collaboration, and alignment of goals.

- 46.3% (44 respondents) reported working with or receiving support from one or more academic departments.
- 14.7% (14 respondents) indicated that they mostly or exclusively work with their student union(s).
- 12.6% (12 respondents) reported working with the university sustainability office, often on environmental initiatives or campaigns.
- 7.4% (7 respondents) said they worked with university facilities, operations, or planning departments, typically in relation to space, infrastructure, or logistics.

A small number of respondents reported not working with any university departments.

The nature of these relationships ranged from collaborative to strained:

- A Regenesiis respondent described tensions with food services: *“Tenuous. Had difficulties and found our goals were often at odds.”*⁵⁰⁰
- A bike centre respondent offered a mixed view: *“Campus and Community Planning (CnCP) loves us and everything we do, very willing to sponsor us with grants and listen to us. The rest of UBC (The AMS, construction management, building management,*

⁴⁹⁹ Bonnie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁰⁰ Darnell (pseudonym), survey respondent.

traffic planning, AMS payroll, etc) seems against cycling and accessibility concerns and our organization in general, or at least ambivalent. ”⁵⁰¹

These findings suggest that while many organizations can build meaningful partnerships with specific departments, others experience conflict or indifference from administrative or operational units. The quality of these relationships often directly impacts an organization’s ability to access resources, secure space, and scale their programming.

Question: Have university institutional factors (attitudes of administrators, policies, supportive administrators, etc.) impacted the organization (positively or negatively)?

This open-ended question revealed a broad range of experiences regarding the role of university institutional factors, with a notable skew toward negative impacts.

- 42.6% (26 respondents) reported negative policies or experiences, or described negative impacts as significantly outweighing the positive.
- 21.3% (13 respondents) reported experiencing positive support from the university.
- 14.8% (9 respondents) shared mixed experiences, with both supportive and obstructive encounters.
- 9.8% (6 respondents) were unsure.
- 4.9% (3 respondents) described their experience as neutral.
- 1 respondent reported no impact at all.
- 3 respondents noted the university had no influence on their operations, as they functioned solely under the student union or were otherwise outside university oversight.

Negative experiences were often linked to:

- Space-related issues, including inadequate or subpar space, difficulties with renovations, or not being able to access or secure space on campus.
- Food service contracts (e.g. Aramark, Chartwells, Sodexo) restricting alternative food-related initiatives, such as farmers' markets or student-run meal services.

⁵⁰¹ Dy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- Lack of engagement or responsiveness to student proposals or concerns, especially around university policy or sustainability planning.
- Risk aversion or bureaucratic hurdles blocking innovation or limiting the scope of student-led initiatives.

Highlighted responses include:

- A Regenesi respondent emphasized that: *“The support of the administration is vital to an organization that operates on somebody else's property. Without administrative support, many initiatives would not be able to move forward. As such, although some progress has been slowed (sometimes) due to hesitance from the administrative side, for the most part, the organization has received support.”*⁵⁰²
- Other Regenesi members offer a more critical view: *“I think university institutional factors impact the organization negatively. I do see how sometimes it can affect us positively, however it seems to be more negative. For example, the recent cutting of the work study program, the new student choice initiative, are all going to negatively impact the organization and few administrators seem willing or care enough to do anything to better support Regenesi as a result of those decisions.”*⁵⁰³ Another says, *“I think that the university only lets Regenesi have its way when they are forced to. I have personally witnessed lots of roadblocks that the university threw in the way of the farmers market for no good reason.”*⁵⁰⁴
- A campus food organization respondent stated, *“Private food service companies on campuses almost always work to quash alternative food sources, so in that way they impacted the org negatively. University admin seem to usually support these companies implicitly so they contribute to the problem. Alternatively, student unions and PIRGs have been far more supportive.”*⁵⁰⁵ Another respondent from a campus food organization that provides meals says, *“non-compete contracts with food service organizations necessitated ‘illegal’ servings and an initial adversarial relationship with the institution.”*⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰² Raphael (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁰³ Dave (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁰⁴ Hick (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁰⁵ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁰⁶ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- A respondent from a PIRG working group shared, *“Yes, depending on the various administrators or policies we were dealing with. An example of negative influence was when they banned Fair Trade Fairs weeks before we were organizing our annual fair. An example of positive influence was when they provided students the ability to take the lead and prioritize their issues with the President’s Sustainability Council’s Student Subcommittee.”*⁵⁰⁷
- A community garden respondent noted, *“The attitudes are very passive around the university from administration. They think the garden looks nice but it doesn’t go much beyond that. It has hindered our ability to get proper funding as well as to grow our organization the way we wish to.”*⁵⁰⁸

Overall, these findings underscore the critical influence of university institutional attitudes and policies—whether in the form of support, neglect, or opposition—on the success and growth of student-led sustainability initiatives.

Question: Universities are prioritizing experiential education. How could the organization take advantage?

This open-ended question prompted a wide range of responses, with many organizations already leveraging experiential education through academic partnerships through classes and professors, student placements, and research collaborations. Several respondents indicated they are well-positioned to expand their role in experiential learning as universities continue to prioritize it.

- 39 respondents suggested pursuing or expanding formal academic involvement, including course-based partnerships, official placements, and integrated class projects.
- 8 respondents spoke about the opportunity to gain greater exposure and awareness, which could lead to increased engagement with their services or participation in programs.
- 6 respondents saw potential to secure more funding, particularly through programs linked to experiential learning mandates.

⁵⁰⁷ B Green (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁰⁸ Jay (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- 5 respondents highlighted research partnerships and use of the organization as a research site for faculty and students.
- 5 respondents noted the opportunity to hire more students through programs like work-study.

One highlighted response:

A PIRG respondent said, “We already do try to take advantage of this—over the years we have worked with lots of professors and programs to develop ways for students to connect their learning to campus and community issues, initiatives, etc. This has ranged from students doing soil research in our campus garden to students in an environmental education class hearing from local Indigenous leaders about pipeline developments in and near Regina as part of our social justice conference. We have also for years supported the work of a community clinic run predominantly by student volunteers. It's in our mandate to encourage experiential education so always part of our focus.”⁵⁰⁹

Overall, respondents viewed the rise of experiential education as an important opportunity to deepen academic integration, broaden support, and expand the reach and legitimacy of their work—noting that doing so effectively may require increased staffing, coordination, and institutional support.

Question: What benefits does your organization provide that could be given as selling points to the university? (for example: education, reputation, quality of life, communication, services)

This open-ended question generated a wide range of responses, with many respondents identifying multiple benefits their organization provides that could be leveraged to gain greater university support.

- 59.7% (40 respondents) identified experiential education as a major benefit—highlighting hands-on learning, practical skill development, and career preparation.

⁵⁰⁹ Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- 47.76% (32 respondents) emphasized the services their organization provides to both students and the broader campus community.
- 44.78% (30 respondents) noted sustainability-related benefits, including environmental education, eco-friendly operations, and support for campus sustainability goals.
- 38.81% (26 respondents) highlighted health-related contributions, including mental health supports, access to healthy food, and active living.
- 37.31% (25 respondents) cited student quality of life improvements, particularly in relation to food security, social connection, and making the university a more accessible place.
- 22.39% (15 respondents) pointed to reputation and visibility benefits for the university, suggesting that the institution's image is strengthened through association with their work.
- 19.4% (13 respondents) said their work helps make campus life more affordable, including free and low-cost services and goods.
- 17.91% (12 respondents) spoke of community service, leadership development, and student-led opportunities as key benefits.
- 16.42% (11 respondents) emphasized the social value of their work—building connections, friendships, and community.
- 11.94% (8 respondents) mentioned student employment as a benefit.

Highlighted responses include:

- A Regenesiis respondent said, *“The biggest benefit is reputation. York can say that it's a sustainable campus in large part due to Regenesiis. Another benefit is quality of life for the community—York is a healthier and more vibrant community because of Regenesiis. The last benefit is services—as a largely student-led organization Regenesiis has the capacity to offer students services that directly address their needs.”*⁵¹⁰
- A community garden respondent commented, *“Education; healthy/active living; sustainability; eco/social justice; food sovereignty.”*⁵¹¹
- A PIRG respondent noted, *“education, reputation, full time staff, consistency over*

⁵¹⁰ Raphael (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵¹¹ Shungo (pseudonym), survey respondent.

years, strong organizational structure, experiential learning, real life experience.”⁵¹²

• Another PIRG respondent offered a contrasting view, “*We are not interesting on that. We challenge the status-quo, obviously that won't be a good selling point for universities.*”⁵¹³

Overall, respondents identified a broad and compelling set of contributions that could be framed as aligned with institutional goals—though there remains the question whether the mission and advocacy work of some of these organizations would ever be fully embraced by university administrations, especially given the neo-liberal direction post-secondary education is heading.

Question: How does the organization frame issues and programs to gain administration support?

This was an open-ended question. Numerous strategies emerged in how organizations frame themselves to secure institutional support. The importance of the services provided was the leading response, with respondents highlighting benefits to the student experience, quality of life, affordability of goods and services, health improvements for students, and improving the cost of campus living. Educational benefits were tied with the greatest number of responses, with respondents highlighting things like experiential education and student work experience. Environmental sustainability benefits were frequently mentioned, as was improved public relations for the university. Other frames mentioned include: improved community-university relations, increased enrollment, research opportunities, fiscal responsibility, cost-effect way to deliver students services, and the collections of metrics to demonstrate impact. A couple of respondents said they either don’t need or don’t seek university support.

The most cited framing approaches were:

- Service provision: Many respondents emphasized how their work enhances the student experience through affordable goods and services, improving the quality

⁵¹² TJS (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵¹³ Lala (pseudonym), survey respondent.

of life for students, reducing the cost of campus living, and mental and physical health benefits.

- Educational value: Experiential learning, leadership development, job experience, and co-curricular benefits were all cited as key frames.
- Environmental sustainability: Respondents regularly referenced their contribution to sustainability goals and climate action, particularly in relation to food systems, active transportation and waste reduction.
- Institutional reputation: Several respondents said they position their initiatives as improving the public image of the university, especially in relation to social and environmental leadership.

A small number of respondents said they either do not seek university support or do not attempt to frame their work for that purpose.

Highlighted responses include:

- A Regenesiis respondent said: *“We tend to use more metrics and business terminology to frame the issues and programs.”*⁵¹⁴
- A PIRG respondent commended: *“Reputational, comparative advantages, and student engagement, fulfilling university mandate.”*⁵¹⁵

Overall, the most common approach to framing was aligning the organization’s work with the university’s priorities—whether that be educational, reputational, or operational. However, a few groups either bypass this framing entirely or approach the institution more critically.

Question: Who drives university sustainability?

This open-ended question generated varied responses, though a few consistent patterns emerged. The most commonly identified driver of sustainability on campus was students and student organizations, with 18 respondents specifically identifying student-

⁵¹⁴ Wade Wilson (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵¹⁵ B Green (pseudonym), survey respondent.

led groups, and another 11 citing students in general. Many respondents emphasized that student-led efforts have historically initiated or maintained sustainability work on campus. 10 respondents mentioned the university administration or staff, though some viewed this group as less proactive than students. 8 respondents said university sustainability offices, though many noted they have limited power or scope to make significant impacts. Some respondents emphasized tensions between grassroots and institutional approaches. Several noted that while students push for change, university structures or corporate partnerships (e.g. with food service providers) may act as barriers. Others described a dual dynamic—top-down leadership combined with bottom-up pressure.

Some selected responses:

- *“The administration. I think if the administration and particularly the private companies they employ (e.g. Aramark) aren't interested in sustainability than they will hold up the entire university no matter how much the students want a more sustainable campus.”*⁵¹⁶
- *“I don’t know anymore, but in my time there were several organizations—most student run, it certainly wasn’t the administration.”*⁵¹⁷
- *“The students themselves as administration is often slow to create change or does not wish to change.”*⁵¹⁸
- *“I think student organizations drive university sustainability. Most sustainability initiatives on campus were either initiated by students or were initiated and continue to be operated by students through different student organizations.”*⁵¹⁹
- *“It's both top-down with importance of the President's office; as well as grassroots-upwards, with developing culture and holding the President's office accountable.”*⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁶ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵¹⁷ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵¹⁸ Alice (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵¹⁹ Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵²⁰ B Green (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- *“Sustainability has arguably lost meaning and been depoliticized in favour of new capitalist associations and connotations. In this way, Campus Services and Business Operations drives this sustainability.”*⁵²¹

In summary, most respondents see students—both individually and collectively—as the primary drivers of campus sustainability, while institutional leadership was often viewed as reactive or inconsistent.

3.4.7 Relationships & Students – Staff and Core Members

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with community organizations? (charities, non-profits)

The majority of respondents (84.38%, or 54) reported having positive relationships with community organizations, including non-profits, charities, and cooperatives. Only 10.94% (7) said they had no relationships with external organizations, while 4.69% (3) were unsure.

Of those reporting connections:

- 21.88% (14) mentioned providing or receiving donations, often food or money.
- 10.94% (7) cited collaborative events or programming.
- 4.69% (3) mentioned shared promotional efforts.

Highlighted responses include:

- A community garden respondent said, *“We have good relationships with other non-profits and charities that fundraise/partner or raise money for our gardens. We also have relationships with organization like food banks to decrease food waste and increase food security.”*⁵²²
- A community bike shop respondent commented, *“We’re part of the Vancouver Community Bike Shop Network. We’ve partnered with the dump to recycle bikes.”*⁵²³
- A sustainable café respondent stated, *“We work with many other community*

⁵²¹ Darnell (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵²² Naimeless (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵²³ Dy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

organizations both on campus and beyond. We also work with other cooperatives in the province. Everything from running programming together, to supporting each other during challenging times.”⁵²⁴

In summary, most organizations reported strong and supportive ties with external non-profits and charities, often centered around shared values and collaborative goals.

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with the student unions on campus?

Most respondents (81.67%, or 49) reported having relations with their student union(s), while (7) reported no relations, and (9) were unsure. For respondents who also reported sentiment, (21) reported good relations between their organization and the student union(s) on campus. These respondents highlight the relationship between their organization and the student union as a source of funding, either through grants or student levies (as most student levies are issued through a student union rather than the post-secondary institution), or as a partner on initiatives or events. Others highlight progressive political solidarity through advocacy or policy work. Some respondents, however, described their relations as neutral (10), minimal (5), weak, tolerable, non-existent, or negative. Most respondents reported positive or supportive relationships with their campus student unions.

These relationships were most often described in the context of:

- Funding: Student unions were frequently noted as the administrator of student levies or as providers of grants.
- Partnerships: Collaborations on events or initiatives were commonly mentioned.
- Political alignment: Some organizations noted shared values, particularly around progressive or social justice work.

However, not all relationships were smooth:

⁵²⁴ Bonnie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- Some respondents described their relationship as weak, tolerable, minimal, or non-existent.
- A few noted challenges or tensions, especially when the student union's leadership or executive changed. One respondent described the relationship as "adversarial," while another said it was supportive "with the exception of a few libertarian execs."⁵²⁵
- A food organization network coalition member summarized the relationship as: *"It is complicated. Not sure how to qualify it."*⁵²⁶

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with labour unions on campus?

Most respondents (18) reported no connections to campus labour unions. One respondent mentioned there was no labour union presence at their university. For those with connections, all that reported having relations reported positive (16) or minimal (5) relations. Some respondents reported their members supporting the labour union during labour bargaining and strikes, including providing food during picket lines. A few respondents mentioned receiving financial support from campus unions. Eight respondents were unsure.

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with professors?

Most respondents (38) described having positive relationships with faculty, though the type and depth of involvement varied considerably. Eight respondents mentioned no relations existed, another eight mentioned they were unsure, and one mentioned neutral relations.

Common forms of engagement included:

- Professors speaking at events.
- Serving on boards or committees.
- Faculty supporting awareness and engagement by allowing class announcements or recommending involvement.

⁵²⁵ Matt (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵²⁶ Jessica (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- Professors using or promoting organizational services, such as eating at cafés, using bike repair services, or volunteering at gardens.
- Formal collaborations on research or course-integrated projects.
- Some organizations reported that professors were founders or co-founders of their initiatives.

Highlighted responses include:

- A PIRG working group respondent said, *“Individual professors were key in the development and continued success of the organization, from providing material resources, office space, and knowledge.”*⁵²⁷
- A community garden respondent noted, *“There are professors in the Environmental and Agriculture departments who promote the garden in their classes and/or partner with us to offer for-credit volunteer opportunities.”*⁵²⁸
- A sustainability organization respondent shared, *“Occasionally Embark is asked to speak about the organization to a class, or potentially collaborate (i.e.. a tour of Embark’s Learning Gardens in a Food Systems Class).”*⁵²⁹

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with other student groups?

Most respondents (53) described relationships that were positive but limited in their scope with other student organizations on campus. Four respondents reported no relations, three were unsure, and one reported mixed relations.

These relationships typically involved:

- Cross-promotion of events or campaigns.
- Co-hosting activities
- Collaborating through committees or coalitions.
- Donating surplus food to other campus groups or engaging in solidarity actions such as solidarity food servings.

⁵²⁷ B Green (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵²⁸ Billie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵²⁹ Chase (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- Larger organizations supporting smaller clubs through funding, staff or logistical support.

One respondent noted a rivalry with another group offering similar programming. One described a positive collaboration through a coalition formed to resist a perceived abuse of power by their student union when staff from a service group attempted to unionize.

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with the wider neighbourhood or city?

Most respondents (32) described positive and active relationships with the surrounding community, (16) reported minimal relations, (7) reported no relations, and one each reported either neutral, mixed or unsure.

These connections manifested in various ways:

- Community members using services provided by the organization (e.g. farmers' markets, bike centres and clinics, community gardens, CSA programs).
- Volunteering and participation from non-students—including recent alumni, older community members, and young families.
- Community members attending public events, making donations, or supporting programming.

Many initiatives also engaged directly with the community, through:

- Hosting off-campus events (e.g. in parks or neighbourhood spaces).
- Collaborations with local schools, neighbourhood associations, or elected officials.
- Participating in local coalitions (e.g. Sustainable Food Edmonton).
- Supporting local businesses, including ordering catering and purchasing from local vendors.

PIRGs appeared to report the strongest ties to broader community organizing, frequently participating in:

- Activist coalitions and city-wide social justice movements (e.g. Jane-Finch Action Against Poverty, No One Is Illegal).
- Hosting public forums or election debates for local candidates.
- Supporting labour-backed social movements (e.g. Ontario Coalition Against Poverty).

Some organizations noted limitations on broader community involvement due to their student-levy-based funding, which is intended to benefit students. The only negative experience mentioned was repeated theft by individuals from the local community.

Question: Who are the allies of the organization and how do you support each other/work together?

This was an open-ended question. Respondents named a wide range of allies, with mutual support often focused on resource-sharing, advocacy, and collaborative programming.

- Community organizations, NGOs, and charities were the most frequently named (19 mentions), followed closely by other student organizations (18).

Other commonly identified allies included:

- Student unions (7)
- Local community members (5)
- University administration or staff (4)
- Campus PIRGs (4)
- Committees or advisory groups (3)

Support and collaboration took many forms:

- Grant writing, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange.
- Cross-promotion and strategic support, especially in response to criticism or opposition.
- Event co-hosting, public advocacy, and coalition-building.

Highlighted responses:

- A community bike shop respondent said: *“cooperation on grant-writing, making smart use of collective resources, sharing information about campus bureaucracy, endorsing initiatives, circulating news.”*⁵³⁰
- A PIRG respondent mentioned, *“We have a list of those who are supportive of us for when we ask for community call outs, like for items needed, calls to action for justice, attendance at events, online support against trolls, or helping us spread our message. What we offer our allies is support for events they are hosting, promotion, and strategic support against criticism.”*⁵³¹

Question: How does the organization frame issues and programs to gain student support?

This was an open-ended question. The most common theme among responses was emphasizing the usefulness or necessity of the services provided to students. These included:

- Affordable or free goods and services, with some noting that giving away items drew attention and support.
- Health benefits, including access to nutritious food or physical activity (e.g. through cycling initiatives).
- Framing opportunities as student-led, and offering peer-driven experiences, resonated strongly with student audiences.

Some highlighted responses include:

- A respondent from a sustainability organization with multiple initiatives said, *“That depends on the issues or programs—however everything we do at [the organization] is student-led through our hired student coordinators and student board of directors. So inherently it already has student support.”*⁵³²
- A Regenesys respondent said, *“We use simple, straight to the point language. We utilize*

⁵³⁰ Joe (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵³¹ Kay (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵³² Chase (pseudonym), survey respondent. Organization name omitted for anonymity.

the mediums current students use to connect with them as easily as possible.”⁵³³

• A farmers’ market respondent commented, *“We frame our business as a student-run service for students and an environmental movement and this gets us support from students.”*⁵³⁴

3.4.8 Politics – Staff and Core Members

Question: How would you describe the political culture on campus?

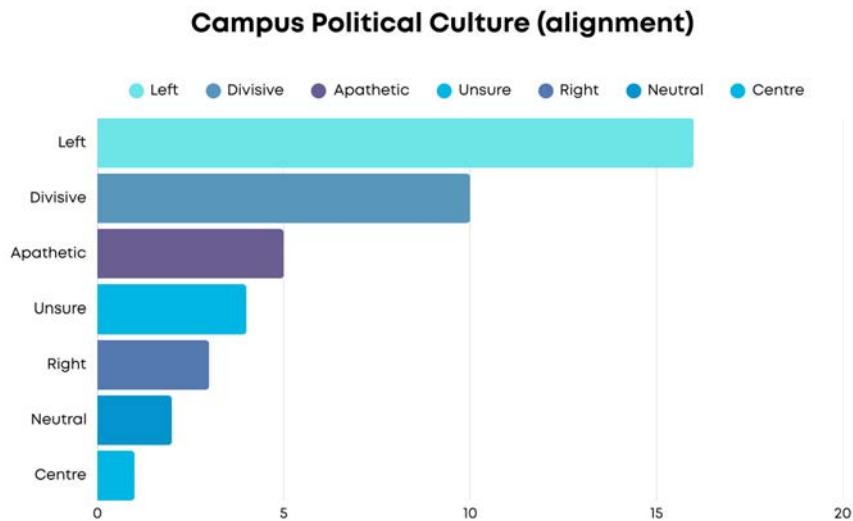
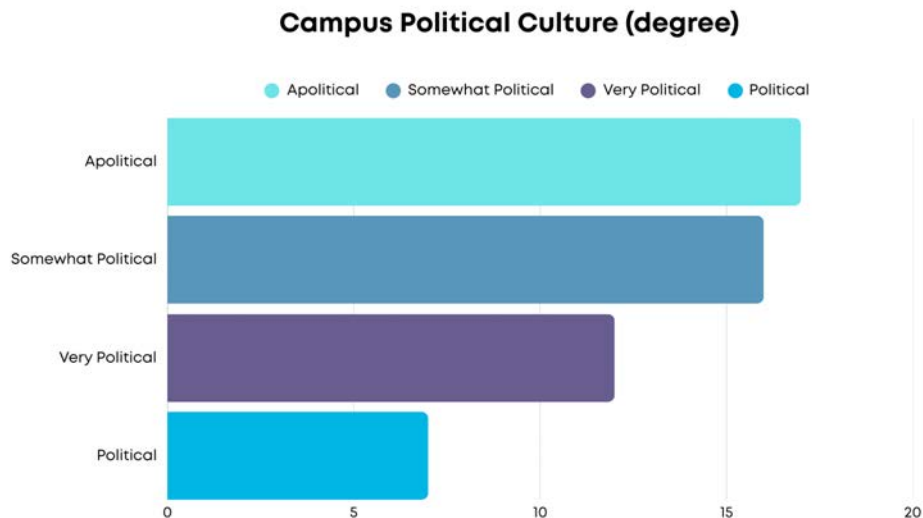


Figure 5: Campus Political Culture (Alignment)



⁵³³ Wade Wilson (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵³⁴ Jacqueline Nicole (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Figure 6: Campus Political Culture (Degree)

This open-ended question revealed a complex and varied picture of political life across different campuses. A significant number of respondents described the political culture as largely apathetic or apolitically disengaged. Several attributed this to students feeling too busy, overwhelmed, or uninterested in organizing or participating in political activities. One respondent put it bluntly: “*too busy to protest or organize.*”⁵³⁵ Another noted that students often find campus politics confusing or difficult to understand, while a different respondent described the political landscape as “*fragmented.*”⁵³⁶

Despite this, many respondents acknowledged that some level of political culture and activity does exist at their institutions. Among those who observed political engagement, the majority characterized their campus culture as left-leaning or progressive. A smaller number described their campus environments as more conservative or ideologically mixed. A few respondents commented on growing political polarization, with one calling the campus political culture “*a jungle,*”⁵³⁷ suggesting a chaotic or contentious environment.

Differences between campuses were also highlighted. One respondent involved in sustainability initiatives at two separate universities observed a clear contrast: at one campus, students were more focused on academics with little political engagement, while at the other, student political involvement was high and widespread. Another respondent from a campus sustainability organization remarked on tension between students and university administrators, describing “*a clash between the administration and the students.*”⁵³⁸ Overall, political activity and culture varied considerably across institutions, with organizational histories and relationships shaping this, alongside contextual factors likely playing a considerable role (e.g. commuter school, program mix at the university, etc.).

Question: How political would you describe the organization as being?

⁵³⁵ Bobby Briggs (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵³⁶ Dave (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵³⁷ Dan (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵³⁸ Mouille (pseudonym), survey respondent.

The political orientation of organizations varied significantly.
Based on coded responses (54):

- 37% of respondents (20) described their organization as political
- 25.9% (14) said their organization was somewhat political
- 7.4% (4) said it varied
- 33.3% (18) said their organization was apolitical

PIRGs were consistently reported as among the most political, while other organizations varied widely. For instance, one ecohouse respondent explained, *“It varies year to year. Each year the facilitators decide how political they want to be.”*⁵³⁹ A respondent from a free meal initiative in Montreal said, *“Not very. We advocate for eating locally, reducing waste, and eating a plant-based diet, but this is very reflective of the community we are a part of.”*⁵⁴⁰ A community bike shop respondent commented, *“Mediumly active. We have very politicized members but tend to be more just neutral and try to be a very welcoming space.”*⁵⁴¹ A community garden respondent put it, *“Not overly active, but anything you do has a political statement when you're speaking about gaps in social services or even capitalism as a whole.”*⁵⁴²

Question: Do you think the level of political activity should be more/less?

Most respondents supported either maintaining (22) or increasing (23) the level of political activity within their organization. Several expressed a desire to see greater engagement, though few offered concrete suggestions for what that might involve. Some reflected on the tension between political positioning and strategic pragmatism. A Regenesis respondent, for instance, said, *“Being TOO political runs the risk of jeopardizing our chances of receiving government grants, being not political enough may give off the message that we do not have a stance on certain issues.”*⁵⁴³ Another respondent commented, “We had to scale back our politics to be palatable to a broader

⁵³⁹ Francesca (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴⁰ Alex 1 (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴¹ Crevaision (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴² Jay (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴³ Dave (pseudonym), survey respondent.

range of people but in the end this allowed us to be more influential.”⁵⁴⁴ Other responses suggested that political activity needs to be intentional, contextual, or rooted in lived experience. Said one respondent, *“I think that political activity should be more focused on people’s lived realities and the inherent contradictions that can exist in those realities.”*⁵⁴⁵ While responses varied on the level of political activity, it’s clear that many are negotiating how to do values-based work in environments that often require negotiation, pragmatism, and compromise. Five respondents each reported less political activity or were unsure.

Question: How does your organization support broader social movements?

Most organizations reported some level of support for broader social movements, though the nature and depth of engagement varied. A total of 92% (46 respondents) indicated that they provide support, while 6% (3 respondents) were unsure and 2% (1 respondent) said they do not.

Among those that do support broader movements, approaches included:

- Embodied support through their core activities (16 respondents), such as offering services that align with broader sustainability and/or social justice goals.
- Active participation in social movements (12 respondents).
- Cross-promotions or sharing information (9 respondents).
- Providing resources (7 respondents), such as food, space, or funding.
- Co-hosting or joint events (3 respondents).

A few examples illustrate the range of engagement:

One PIRG working group respondent noted: *“We pushed the boundaries in the use of student space that helped normalize it and allowed other social movement campaigns to use it as well. For example, rallies in Vari Hall, sit-ins outside the President’s office.”*⁵⁴⁶

A Regenesys respondent mentioned a more subdued approach, *“We mostly support*

⁵⁴⁴ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴⁵ Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴⁶ B Green (pseudonym), survey respondent.

broader social movements by educating the community in an indirect manner.”⁵⁴⁷

Another respondent from a campus farmers’ market described values-based operational alignment: *“We support broader social movements by advocating for sustainability, environmental responsibility and attention to supporting local businesses and farmers. We make this clear and stand by it in the operation of our business.”*⁵⁴⁸

Overall, while few organizations take a lead role in social movements, many provide direct (logistical, material) or indirect (solidarity, education) support, especially when aligned with their core values and capacities.

Question: What does your organization do (or could it do) to cultivate an activist culture that contributes to turning members/volunteers into lifelong activists?

This open-ended question elicited a mix of critical reflections, cautionary feedback, and constructive suggestions. Some respondents challenged the premise of the question itself. For example, one community garden respondent stated, “That’s not the point. Why does an organization have to make its volunteers activists?”⁵⁴⁹ This criticism reflects broader discomfort with the term “activism,” which several respondents interpreted as alienating or prescriptive. In retrospect, I should have used different terminology—such as “engaged citizens” or “bildung”⁵⁵⁰—to avoid such a reaction.

A respondent from a food organization respondent expressed concerns about activist culture, saying, *“The whole org basically radicalized anyone who was involved because everyone was so into leftist politics. To “fit in” you had to be an activist. So on the one hand, I saw people becoming activists for the first time and feeling really supported and excited. But on the other hand I saw extreme activist burnout that resulted in people walking away from activism because they found the culture too toxic. I would count myself as one of those people.”*⁵⁵¹ A PIRG respondent noted the need for

⁵⁴⁷ Wade Wilson (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴⁸ Jacqueline Nicole (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁴⁹ Rose (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁵⁰ Bohlin, Henrik. “Bildung and Moral Self-Cultivation in Higher Education: What Does it Mean and How Can it be Achieved?” *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*, (2009): 1-10.

⁵⁵¹ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

“promoting a wide definition of activism so people can see a role for themselves in it.”⁵⁵²

A Regenesi respondent commented on the need for a culture that *“creates tangible solutions to social and environmental issues that truly resonate with people.”*⁵⁵³ Another Regenesi respondent expressed similar sentiments: *“By demonstrating forms in which individuals can make a difference.”*⁵⁵⁴

Concerns about burnout, sustainability and life stages emerged as a theme. One PIRG respondent commented, *“I think that we need to focus more on self and community care to sustain ourselves for the long term. In my experience, many students that get involved push themselves too hard and this is not sustainable in the long term because burn out becomes a very real issue. I also think we need to build an activist culture that respects people’s individual capacities to get involved. Right now, the culture valorizes those individuals that can maintain high levels of activism. This emphasis on quantity of time spent needs to shift towards an emphasis on quality of time spent to build more supportive networks that can be more welcoming for people regardless of their contributions.”*⁵⁵⁵ A Regenesi respondent said, *“I don’t know if it’s possible to turn members into lifelong activists. There are many factors that contribute to making a person into lifelong activist. Activism can be demonstrated in many different ways, and these ways evolve as people enter different life stages.”*⁵⁵⁶

Despite these challenges, several respondents identified education as a key pathway to building sustained civic or political engagement. Themes included popular education, critical thinking, mentorship and guidance, skills development, training in community organizing. One sustainability organization respondent said, *“By empowering students to be changemakers and providing opportunities to think critically while developing valuable skills for their career.”*⁵⁵⁷ A campus farm respondent described how immersion over time can cultivate deeper values: *“The culture of our organization involves a strong commitment to our core values of cooperative work, environmental stewardship, etc. Through immersion in the program, students that go through the two*

⁵⁵² Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁵³ Charlie (pseudonym), survey respondent

⁵⁵⁴ Lady (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁵⁵ SOY (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁵⁶ Wade Wilson (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁵⁷ Chase (pseudonym), survey respondent.

year involvement of MSEG develop strong beliefs about their ideals, and gain the skills they need to implement these beliefs throughout their future career, whether in agriculture or in other domains.”⁵⁵⁸

Creating and supporting “activist cultures” may prove itself challenging given the diversity of perspectives on the concept. Reframing activities as good citizenship may be necessary to secure broad support for social movement and political engagement.

Question: What does it mean to think of the organization as part of a broader social movement?

This open-ended question prompted a diverse set of reflections, but most responses emphasized the role of the organization in taking action—however small—in the context of broader structural change. Respondents expressed that being part of a social movement doesn’t necessarily mean overt political engagement or mass mobilization. Rather, it can mean providing needed services and supports, offering alternatives to dominant systems (especially capitalist or profit-driven models), taking action (whatever the scale), taking stances on issues, and learning from one another and through organizing.

Some respondents described their work as contributing in a small but meaningful way to something larger than themselves. A Regenesys respondent believes that: *“It means that an individual is presented with an opportunity to be part of something bigger than him/herself, and is given the support and tools to successfully make a difference.”*⁵⁵⁹ A market garden respondent said, *“It means that small actions have a larger impact on the community. It also means social activism starts at a small-scale/grassroots level.”*⁵⁶⁰

Other responses pointed to the importance of accessibility and gradual political engagement. A meal organization respondent says, *“not hitting people over the head with politics, meeting people where they are at and introducing them to the politics as they get more involved/interested.”*⁵⁶¹ A PIRG stressed the organization’s role as an enabler and connector: *“Since we have such a wide mandate, I wouldn’t say we are part of one*

⁵⁵⁸ Clementine (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁵⁹ Hick (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶⁰ Monkey (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶¹ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

particular social movement—rather we serve more as a connector and ways for people to build skills to be involved in social movements.”⁵⁶² Overall, there exists a broad spectrum of views on what it means to think about these organizations and initiatives role in social movements.

3.4.9 People – Staff and Core Members

Question: How does your organization recruit volunteers? What works best?

This was an open-ended question answered by 46 respondents. The most common method of recruitment was online outreach, mentioned by 24 respondents. This included platforms such as social media, organizational websites, email lists, and online listings. Direct recruitment from initiative users or customers was also common, cited by 11 respondents, followed by word of mouth, also with 11 mentions.

Other frequently mentioned strategies included:

- Tabling on campus (6 respondents)
- Hosting events, such as potlucks (6 respondents)
- Postering around campus (5 respondents)
- Orientation and frosh week engagement, including tabling, events and materials in frosh kits (5 respondents)
- Participation in volunteer or student club expos (4 respondents)

Question: How do you retain volunteers and how do you deal with volunteer turnover?

Answered by 46 respondents, this question revealed a wide variety of strategies related to volunteer retention and turnover. Creating a positive experience or environment was the most commonly mentioned approach, cited by 12 respondents. This included fostering a sense of community and belonging. Flexibility in scheduling and duties was also key (7 respondents), allowing volunteers to participate in ways that fit their needs. Social events such as potlucks or community gatherings were used by 6 respondents to maintain engagement and build relationships. Four organizations said that volunteers

⁵⁶² Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

returned naturally without much effort, while another four said they had no trouble retaining volunteers. Conversely, four respondents reported significant difficulties with retention and frequent turnover. Overall, established retention strategies centred around positive experiences and flexibility for students.

Question: What are the leadership roles in your organization? Please elaborate.

This question was answered by 46 respondents and revealed that leadership structures were mostly similar across organizations, mirroring leadership structures found in other non-profit organizations and student clubs. The most commonly identified leadership role was a board of directors, mentioned by 20 respondents. One noted their board was non-hierarchical. Various staff roles were the next most commonly mentioned, cited by 18 respondents. Volunteers were identified as holding leadership roles in 13 organizations, either formally or informally. Officer roles such as president, treasurer, or secretary were mentioned by 7 respondents. One organization reported having no formal leadership roles due to operating with a non-hierarchical leadership.

Question: How does your organization cultivate and prepare volunteers for leadership roles (e.g. board/executive, staff, program managers)?

This was an open-ended question answered by 46 respondents, which revealed a wide array of practices. Training was the most cited approach (7 respondents), including on-the-job learning and day-long training sessions. 5 respondents mentioned giving volunteers increasing responsibility and them gaining experience over time, and 5 others emphasized encouraging individuals to step up or apply for leadership roles. Mentorship and coaching were mentioned by 4 respondents.

A few respondents stated their organization did not have a process for cultivating leadership or were unsure how it occurred. Provided the overall difficulty and vulnerability that student organizations face with yearly transitions, additional efforts to recruit and cultivate leadership would be advisable.

3.4.10 Impact– Staff and Core Members

Question: Does your organization set goals or targets that help you measure success? If so, what are they and how are they evaluated?

The responses to this question were mixed. A slight majority of respondents (22) reported that their organization does set goals or targets and evaluates success in some form. However, the formality and structure of these practices varied considerably.

Common forms of evaluation included:

- Surveys (e.g. exit surveys, participant feedback)
- Engagement statistics (e.g. attendance counts, service usage, sales data)
- Annual strategic planning
- Financial planning and budgeting
- Tracking volunteer or work hours

On the other hand, 16 respondents stated that their organization does not set goals or track success, and 2 respondents were unsure. Given the often low-resource nature of student organizations, goal-setting and tracking data can become secondary if not made intentional and a priority.

Question: How does the organization contribute to improving campus life?

This open-ended question was answered by 57 respondents and generated a wide array of responses, which were categorized into the following major themes:

- Improving access to free and affordable goods and services (27 respondents): Examples included food programs, community bike centres, and free stores.
- Creating community and providing access to space (14): Many respondents described their initiatives as offering spaces for connection, collaboration, or reflection.
- Education and skills development (11). These contributions included workshops, training, and experiential learning opportunities.
- Campus sustainability (10)
- Health and well-being (6). This included both physical and mental health benefits tied to food, exercise, or social connection.
- Raising awareness of issues (6)

- Hosting events (4)
- Volunteer opportunities (4)
- Campus life (3)
- Enabling socially conscious lifestyles (3)

Highlighted responses include:

- A Regenesiis respondent said, *“Overall helps students with financial barriers and supports students that are environmentally conscious.”*⁵⁶³
- A community bike centre respondent commented, *“The [bike centre] can offered the following: affordable access to transportation, community building, exercise, services, skills.”*⁵⁶⁴

The benefits of student-involved environmental initiatives are numerous and undeniable, however, given the responses in other questions, they can be better monitored and communicated.

Question: Do you feel what you are doing has an impact?

This was a multiple-choice question. Most respondents expressed confidence that their organization's work was impactful. Specifically, 36.08% of respondents reported their work had a significant impact, and 40.21% described their impact as somewhat significant. A smaller portion, 22.68%, said they had some impact, while only 1.03% (one respondent) described their impact as minimal.

Question: What does the organization do to lead social and environmental change?

This open-ended question was answered by 47 respondents and produced a wide variety of responses reflecting both direct action and indirect influence. The most common theme, mentioned by 19 respondents, was various kinds of initiatives and the specific benefits they bring (e.g. access to bicycle transportation, ethical sourcing, local food, etc.).

⁵⁶³ Charlie (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶⁴ Dan (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Other themes included:

- Providing education and training (6 respondents).
- Hosting events (6 respondents)
- Raising awareness (5 respondents)
- Supporting other organizations on campus or in the community (5 respondents)

Highlighted responses include:

- A food organization respondent said, *“It was always really important to me to be friendly and personable with everyone even those we were adversarial with, I think call-out culture on the left has gone too far and we’ve really alienated a lot of potential allies.”*⁵⁶⁵
- A Regenesiis respondent commented, *“Regenesis empowers students to create and manage environmental initiatives and programming that provide free or low-cost services to the local community and leadership opportunities for students.”*⁵⁶⁶
- Another Regenesiis respondent explained, *“The organization provides benefits and education to students and community members who partake in our initiatives that ultimately reduce carbon emissions.”*⁵⁶⁷
- A third Regenesiis respondent said, *“Regenesis adds a palpable dimension of eco-activism to the campus which is felt by every student who is present. it goes against the typical york u culture and adds a new dimension to the campus experience.”*⁵⁶⁸
- A PIRG respondent stated, *“I see our role as training the next generation of social justice and environmental justice advocates so that our movements can grow.”*⁵⁶⁹
- Another PIRG respondent elaborates, *“Run campaigns on campus and off campus, internationally pass legislation, raise awareness, petitions, letter writing, individual lobbying of leaders to effect changes, teach students how to effect change and be change agents.”*⁵⁷⁰
- A community garden that runs farmers’ market respondent observed, *“The impact of the*

⁵⁶⁵ Cfaguy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶⁶ Fake Name (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶⁷ Alice (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶⁸ Hick (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁶⁹ Soy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷⁰ TJS (pseudonym), survey respondent.

organization is offering another opportunity and alternative activity for those interested in social and environmental activism. The organization creates benefits of allowing people to be in a safe, outdoor space (in nature) and to help grow vegetables so that they too, can eat and enjoy them in return for their service.”⁵⁷¹

Overall, this research reinforces the idea that students are leading drivers of environmental and social change, both on and off-campus.

Question: What is the impact of your organization? What benefits does the organization create?

This open-ended question, posed in a similar vein as the previous two questions to solicit benefit responses, was answered by 46 respondents. The question revealed a wide array of impacts, ranging from material benefits to community-building and personal development. Respondents often pointed to tangible services as well as the broader social and environmental themes.

Identified themes were:

- Food security (17 respondents), including increased access to food, affordability, greater food variety, and growing food locally. A grocery cooperative respondent said, “Allows access to healthy organic food at a lower cost and reduces the environmental impact of our food.”⁵⁷²
- Student engagement and volunteering (17).
- Environmental sustainability (15), broadly speaking.
- Learning, training, and experiential education (8).
- Bicycle access and bicycle-related services (6).
- Community creation (5).
- Awareness and outreach (4).

Question: How successful would you say the organization is at achieving its mission?

This was a multiple-choice question was answered by 46 respondents. The

⁵⁷¹ Monkey (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷² Calif (pseudonym), survey respondent.

majority indicated their organization was successful in fulfilling its mission, though some expressed limitations or room for growth:

- 21 respondents said their organization was very successful.
- 14 respondents described their organization as successful.
- 5 respondents indicated there is room for improvement.
- 5 respondents felt their organization was not very successful.
- 1 respondent said it was not successful at all.

Question: How does the organization impact university sustainability?

This open-ended question (answered by 47 respondents) revealed a broad-spectrum of impact that student-involved environmental organizations have on campus sustainability. The impact was described as both direct (e.g., through services and initiatives) and indirect (e.g., through education and policy pressure).

Key impact themes include:

- Foodways (19 respondents). Organizations impact sustainability through local growing, and improved access to affordable, local, and ethically sourced food.
- Environmental initiatives (18). This included gardens, bike centres, farmers' markets, free stores, repair cafés, and item libraries.
- Environmental education (6).
- Affordability (5). By offering low-cost or free alternatives, organizations helped reduce the environmental impact tied to financial inaccessibility.
- Active transportation (4). Promoting bicycles and bicycle repair helps reduce carbon footprints and supports healthier living.
- Policy and advocacy (4). This included lobbying university governance on sustainable investing, food contracts, and anti-sweatshop campaigns.
- Collaborations and partnerships (3).

Highlighted responses include:

- *“We offer an affordable and durable alternative to ready-to-eat or over-packaged*

grocery items.”⁵⁷³

- “Keeping the administration accountable, a watchdog voice.”⁵⁷⁴
- “It educates students about food waste and shows there are radical ways in which we can make big changes to our food systems.”⁵⁷⁵
- “We provide an easy way to live a little more sustainably for students who don’t have access to affordable clothing or food options.”⁵⁷⁶
- “Our educational philosophy is built around the idea of critical pedagogy, particularly eco pedagogy which aims to help individuals understand the big picture and historical context of an issue. It is the only major form of environmental education that recognizes and is willing to address the underlying causes of our modern environmental crisis. We empower youth as leaders, with critical thinking and organization skills. As leaders, our youth are equipped to identify causes of environmental problems and effective solutions that can help address these issues.”⁵⁷⁷
- “By putting pressure on the university to make more of a commitment to sustainability.”⁵⁷⁸

The responses reveal the undeniable impact student-involved environmental organizations have on campus sustainability.

Question: How does the organization impact university social justice?

This open-ended question was answered by 44 respondents. A clear majority—31 respondents—indicated that their organization had some degree of impact on social justice, even if limited. In contrast, 8 respondents said their organization did not impact social justice, and 2 more said their organization currently does not but has the potential to. 3 respondents were unsure.

Of those who reported a positive impact, several recurring themes emerged:

⁵⁷³ Calif (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷⁴ Opal (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷⁵ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷⁶ Alice (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷⁷ Fake Name (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁷⁸ Shark (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- Equity-focused initiatives (11 respondents): Many linked their work (especially food, affordability, and access initiatives) to equity and social justice outcomes.
- Advocacy (8): This included support for sustainable investing, Indigenous justice, labour union solidarity, and broader equity issues.
- Food access and insecurity (5): Several organizations emphasized that addressing hunger on campus is itself a form of social justice work.
- Safe spaces (4): Organizations were described as providing inclusive and supportive environments for marginalized groups.

Highlighted responses include:

- A PIRG respondent said, *“One of the few organizations in the university that solely focuses on this. Increasing visibility of issues that are often invisible (sic).”*⁵⁷⁹
- A food organization respondent commented, *“Not really at all, though there is so much potential there.”*⁵⁸⁰
- A sustainability organization respondent responded, *“One of our priorities is social sustainability, however there is another student society (PIRG) entirely focused on social justice issues so we don’t focus our efforts there.”*⁵⁸¹
- A student-run campus agricultural initiative respondent mentioned, *“We provide an outlet for students to work towards change that they want to see in our agricultural systems. We also provide students with opportunities to learn and develop their skills. As an organization, we are not too involved with outside activism and outreach.”*⁵⁸²
- A Regenesys respondent said, *“It is the biggest environmental organization on campus. it brings together the students who care about the environment and gives them a chance to get more involved in environmental as well as environmental activism.”*⁵⁸³

While not as strong as the impacts on environmental sustainability, there are still clear social and equity impacts that these organizations provide.

⁵⁷⁹ Opal (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁸⁰ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁸¹ Chase (pseudonym), survey respondent. NOTE: name of the specific PIRG removed.

⁵⁸² Clementine (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁸³ Hick (pseudonym), survey respondent.

3.5 Survey Results – Volunteer Members

This section summarizes the data collected from respondents who identified as volunteer members of their student environmental organization. Due to the limited response rate, quality of the data and lack of more detailed answers, I am limited in what findings I can present from the volunteer survey.

3.5.1 Involvement of Volunteer Members

Question: Average hours contributed per week/month⁵⁸⁴

On average, volunteers contributed 5.38 hours per week (mean), with both the median and mode falling at 5 hours per week. Reported weekly hours ranged from 1 to 20 hours, with a clear clustering around the 5-hour mark, as indicated in the distribution curve. The stepped pattern in the figure shows a steady increase in reported time commitments, with a noticeable jump in the upper ranges (15–20 hours), suggesting a smaller subset of highly committed volunteers.

⁵⁸⁴ NOTE: For volunteers that reported ranges in their survey response instead of a single number, both the low and high range were used and are shown on the chart, but they are not included in the mean average calculation—instead the in-between number between their low and high range response was used for the calculation.

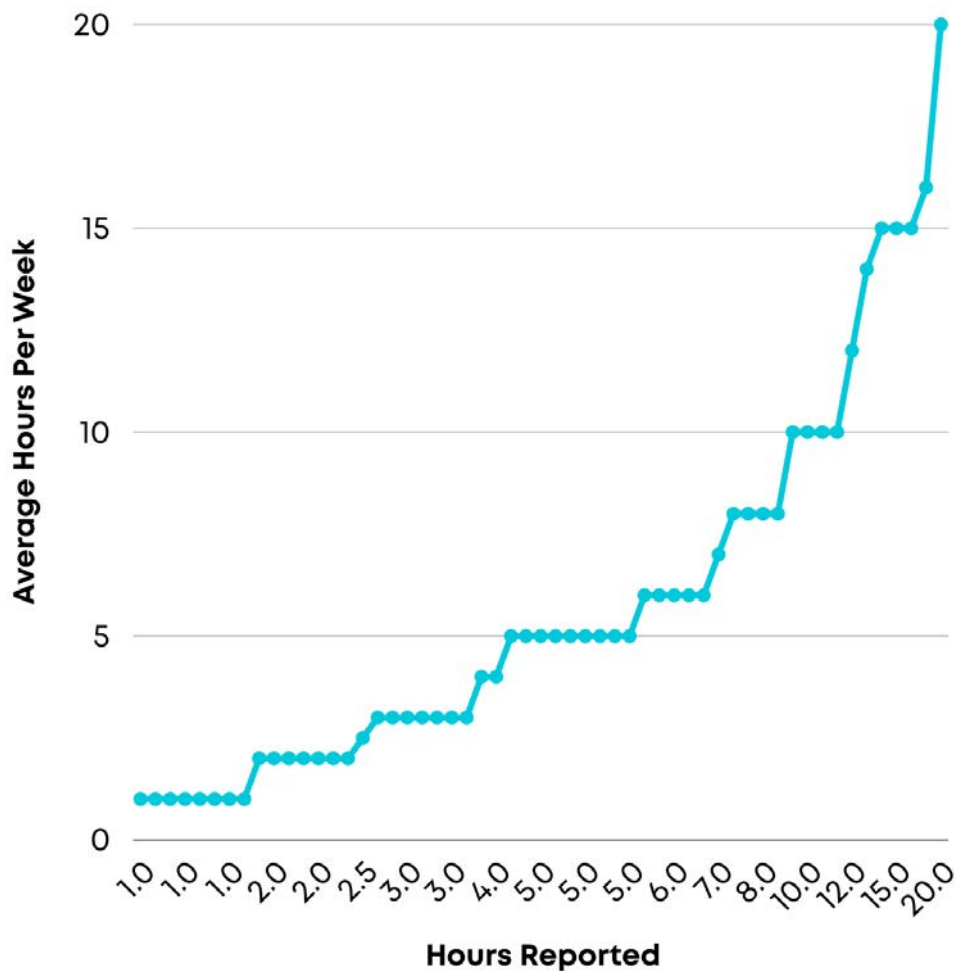


Figure 7: Volunteer hours per week

Question: Average number of months involved (at time of survey)

Volunteers had been involved with their respective organizations for an average of 19.39 months, with a median of 13 months. The most frequently reported length of involvement (mode) was 4 months, indicating a significant number of newer volunteers. A few outliers—long-term alumni volunteers—reported involvement durations of 72 months (6 years) and 108 months (9 years), both associated with a community bike centre. These cases significantly pull the mean above the median. This pattern reflects a mix of short-term engagement typical of student involvement and a smaller, yet important, group of long-term participants—often alumni—whose continued contributions may play a key role in these organizations.

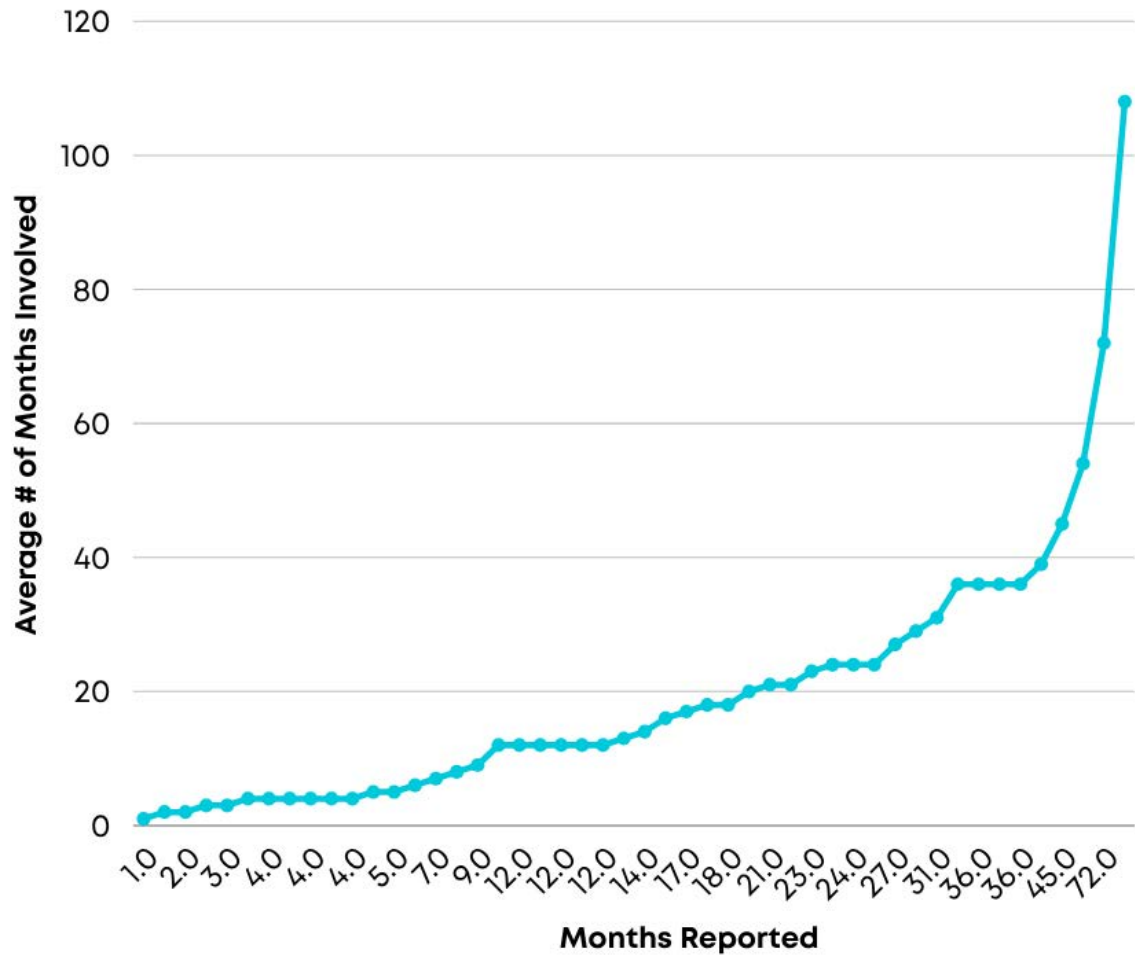


Figure 8: Length of involvement of respondents

Question: How did you hear about the organization?

This open-ended question was coded from 35 responses. The most common way respondents learned about their organization was through word of mouth (34.3%, 12 respondents), often via friends, classmates, or colleagues. The second most frequent method was encountering representatives tabling on campus, such as at a student clubs fair or orientation event (28.6%, 10 respondents). Other pathways included noticing posters or signage on campus (14.3%, 5 respondents) and discovering the organization online, whether through websites, social media, or digital ads (11.4%, 4 respondents). A smaller group (8.6%, 3 respondents) found the organization through a university career site. Less common, though notable, were mentions of class announcements (1 respondent) and a feature in a school publication (1 respondent). The range of discovery

methods highlights the importance of both in-person and digital visibility, with informal networks and physical presence on campus playing especially strong roles in initial engagement.

Question: Why did you decide to get involved with this organization? What made this organization more desirable to you than other groups?⁵⁸⁵

This open-ended question was coded from 35 responses, with multiple themes emerging. The most commonly cited motivation was support for environmental sustainability, mentioned by 42.86% (15 respondents). Food security and/or gardening was the second most frequent motivator, cited by 31.43% (11 respondents). In addition, 28.57% (10 respondents) were motivated by a desire to be part of a community, and the same proportion cited a wish to give back or help others. Skill development or learning opportunities were mentioned by 20% (7 respondents), while career or academic relevance was noted by 17.14% (6 respondents). More specific interests included learning bike repair and maintenance (14.29%, 5 respondents) and engaging with social or environmental justice issues (11.43%, 4 respondents). These results suggest that while environmental concerns are central to involvement, many respondents were equally drawn by personal growth, practical skills, and community-based values, indicating that these organizations appeal to a range of academic, activist, and interpersonal motivations.

Question: What motivates your involvement and why do you remain committed to the organization?⁵⁸⁶

This open-ended question was coded from 35 responses and revealed a range of overlapping personal, ideological, and practical motivations for continued involvement. The two most frequently cited reasons were a sense of making an impact and belonging to a community, each mentioned by 34.29% (12 respondents). Shared values and beliefs with the organization also emerged as a key motivator (28.57%, 10 respondents), followed by concern for the environment (25.71%, 9 respondents). A passion for the organization's activities was noted by 22.86% (8 respondents), while shared values with

⁵⁸⁵ NOTE: Some responses were assigned to more than one category due to overlapping themes.

⁵⁸⁶ NOTE: Some responses were assigned to more than one category due to overlapping themes.

other members were mentioned by 18.92% (7 respondents). Skill development, including opportunities to mentor or teach others, was cited by 17.14% (6 respondents). Fewer respondents mentioned practical benefits (e.g., access to resources, physical proximity, or other conveniences), reported by 11.43% (4 respondents), or a commitment to the organization's long-term sustainability, referenced by just 5.71% (2 respondents). These responses suggest that sustained involvement is driven by a mix of internal motivations (e.g., purpose, alignment of values), relational dynamics (e.g., community, peer influence), and practical considerations.

**Question: Do you understand how the organization is structured? Please explain.
(e.g. Who runs the organization, What is the legal structure of the organization, etc.)**

Out of 26 respondents, 61.54% (16 respondents) reported that they understood how their organization is structured. An additional 23.08% (6 respondents) said they somewhat understood, while 15.38% (4 respondents) indicated that they did not understand the structure at all. Among those who did describe the structure, a variety of models were mentioned, with formalized legal entities being more common (as also reflected in the responses from organizational leaders and staff).

- One respondent explained: *"It is a cooperative, administered by an elected board of directors. Services are coordinated by these administrators, supported by volunteers and some contract employees."*⁵⁸⁷
- Another noted: *"Regenesis is a federally listed not for profit organization with chapters at multiple locations."*⁵⁸⁸
- A respondent from a co-op shared: *"Yes. It is a cooperative with user and non-user members, and a board that makes decisions and guides actions."*⁵⁸⁹

Several participants described non-hierarchical structures:

- *"We are a volunteer-run, non-hierarchical collective affiliated with the student society of mcgill university. no one has specific roles, by design. there is a flat structure."*⁵⁹⁰
- *"Sustainable Trent is a non-hierarchical, student run, initiative that uses a consensus-*

⁵⁸⁷ Marco (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁸⁸ Janny (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁸⁹ Flav (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹⁰ Em (pseudonym), survey respondent.

based decision-making process. Members must have attended at least three meetings before being able to vote. All of us must be in favour of the vote in order for it to go through. One member is responsible for facilitating our meetings and discussions.”⁵⁹¹

Others had only a partial understanding of how their organization operated:

- *“I know the woman who is currently in charge of the gardens, and every year a few student staff also get hired. The rest are volunteers. I believe the garden gets some form of financial support from the university, but I'm not quite sure how that functions.”*⁵⁹²

Question: Do you understand how volunteers can become Board or Executive Members?

This open-ended question was answered by 28 respondents. Of these, 31.14% (9 respondents) indicated that the question was not applicable to their organization—most of these responses came from campus community gardens or bike collectives, where formal executive or board structures may not exist. Among the 19 applicable responses, 68.42% (13 respondents) said they understood the process for volunteers to become board or executive members. 5.26% (1 respondent) expressed uncertainty (“maybe”), and 26.32% (5 respondents) stated that they did not understand the process. These findings suggest most volunteers understand pathways to leadership—particularly among those with formalized governance structures—through some organizations may lack transparency or may not emphasize leadership opportunities. In some grassroots or collective models, leadership roles may either not exist or be deliberately fluid.

Question: Do you feel what you are doing has an impact?

⁵⁹¹ Jill (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹² Tilly (pseudonym), survey respondent.

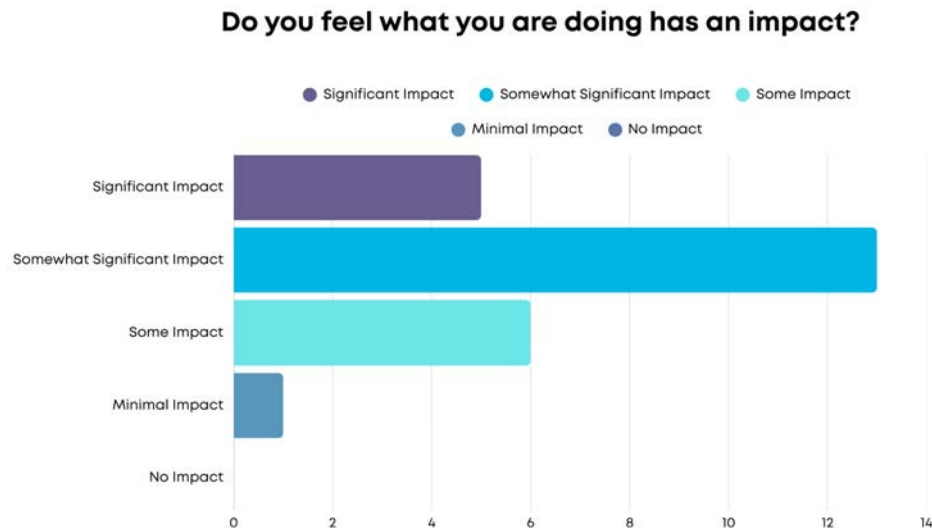


Figure 9: Impact of Student-Involved Sustainability Organizations (members and volunteers)

This multiple-choice question was answered by 29 respondents. A majority expressed a sense that their work had meaning, with 27.59% (8 respondents) believing the organization or initiative was making a significant impact, and 44.83% (13 respondents) saying it was making a somewhat significant impact. An additional 24.14% (7 respondents) felt their involvement had some impact, while 3.45% (1 respondent) felt it had only minimal impact. Importantly, no respondents indicated that the organization was making no impact at all. These responses reflect a generally strong sense of purpose and efficacy among volunteers, though perceptions of scale and significance vary. This may relate to the organization's visibility, the scope of its work, or the respondent's role within it.

Question: How do you hope to stay engaged with the organization after you graduate?

This open-ended question was coded from 23 responses, revealing a variety of intentions regarding post-graduation involvement. The most common response came from 11 respondents, who expressed a desire to continue volunteering with the organization beyond graduation. Three respondents said they hoped to stay connected more informally, such as by visiting occasionally or attending events. Another three

indicated that they were uncertain about how or whether they would remain involved. A few participants described more structured or long-term engagement.

Two respondents said they either already work with the organization or hope to work with it in a paid capacity. Two respondents mentioned plans to mentor future members. One respondent intended to donate, one to join the board, and another to volunteer with a different organization after graduation.

Highlighted responses include:

- *“I hope I can still get hired after I graduate since I’m work study right now.”*⁵⁹³
- *“I hope that I will have the opportunity to engage more with the organization after I finish my full-time studies. I am hoping that I will have the chance to run for an executive role.”*⁵⁹⁴
- *“I’d like to keep showing up to our garden workdays and provide a mentorship role to others who take on my position. I’m sure I’ll stay involved with my other organization through this.”*⁵⁹⁵
- *“Visit when I can, perhaps donate if I can. I’d certainly still like to volunteer if I will still be in the area.”*⁵⁹⁶

Question: After you graduate, how do you hope to stay engaged with environmental and social justice causes that are important to you?

This open-ended question was coded from 22 responses, with participants outlining a range of future pathways for sustained engagement with environmental and social justice causes. The most common theme was a continued commitment to volunteering, mentioned by 11 respondents. Six respondents expressed a desire to pursue meaningful employment in sectors aligned with their values. Another five respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining community connections, while five also planned to contribute through an eco-friendly lifestyle. In addition, four respondents intended to stay engaged by participating in social movements, and three mentioned a

⁵⁹³ Thefitty (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹⁴ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹⁵ SL (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹⁶ Tilly (pseudonym), survey respondent.

commitment to attending events as a way to remain active. Two respondents focused on awareness—both staying informed and spreading awareness to others. Another two were unsure of their future plans, and two expressed intent to stay involved without specifying how. One respondent mentioned offering mentorship as a form of ongoing contribution.

Highlighted responses include:

- *“Practicing environmentally friendly habits in my own life.”*⁵⁹⁷
- *“I will be engaging with organizations both on and off campus to ensure that they are actively involved in environmental and social justice causes.”*⁵⁹⁸
- *“Hopefully I will settle into an occupation where I get to support environmental and social justice causes. If not I will most likely find some organization with which I can volunteer from time to time.”*⁵⁹⁹

3.5.2 Education/Training of Volunteer Members

Question: What formal training and educational opportunities does the organization you volunteer with provide?

This open-ended question was coded from 31 responses. The most frequently mentioned opportunity was direct experiential learning, cited by 74.2% (23 respondents). Many volunteers described learning by doing, often in operational, leadership, or project-based roles. Co-learning—defined as learning from peers or more experienced members—was mentioned by 54.8% (17 respondents), underscoring the informal but collaborative learning environments present in many of these organizations. More structured forms of training were less common:

- Workshops or formal training sessions were cited by 22.6% (7 respondents).
- Conference attendance was mentioned by 9.7% (3 respondents).
- Other individual responses included access to online learning, school placements, and receiving course credit.

⁵⁹⁷ Em (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹⁸ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁵⁹⁹ Tilly (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Notably, 16.1% (5 respondents) said that no educational or training opportunities were provided through their organization

Question: What do you like about current training and educational opportunities?

This open-ended question was coded from 22 responses and focused on volunteers' perceptions of the value of training and educational offerings. The most frequently mentioned strength was the accessibility and inclusivity of the opportunities, noted by 20.9% (9 respondents). This included ease of participation, low or no cost, and being welcoming to diverse skill levels. Experiential and hands-on learning was also praised by 16.3% (7 respondents), followed by co-learning with fellow volunteers (9.3%, 4 respondents) and the opportunity to learn new skills (7%, 3 respondents).

Question: How would you improve on formal training and educational opportunities?

This open-ended question was coded from 26 responses and revealed a range of suggestions. The most common suggestion, made by 30.8% (8 respondents), was to offer more formal learning opportunities, such as structured classes or workshops. 15.4% (4 respondents) wanted official courses or certification options, while another 15.4% (4 respondents) expressed interest in learning about specific topics, though these varied by respondent. Two respondents indicated they were already satisfied with current offerings, while two others explicitly opposed more formalized training, preferring informal or experiential approaches. Another two respondents noted resource constraints, saying improvements were not feasible under current conditions. One respondent said they were unsure how training could be improved.

Question: Did you receive educational credit at any point for participating with the organization? Would you like to receive educational credit for participating with the organization?

None of the respondents reported having received educational credit for their volunteer involvement. When asked if they would like to receive credit, a majority—56.25% (18 respondents)—said yes, while 43.75% (12 respondents) said no. These

findings suggest moderate interest in formal academic recognition for volunteer work, though nearly half of respondents did not feel it was necessary. The divergence may reflect differing motivations for participation, with some seeking professional development and others prioritizing intrinsic or community-based outcomes, or different academic or life stages playing a role (e.g. alumni not being interested).

Question: How has the community created by the organization contributed to your learning?

This open-ended question, answered by 32 respondents, revealed that the community aspect of these organizations supports both educational and social learning, as well as personal development.

On the educational side, respondents highlighted:

- Knowledge exchange (8 mentions)
- Co-learning from peers (4)
- Increased awareness of issues (4)
- Real-world experience (4)

Respondents also reported important social benefits, such as:

- A sense of community (9 mentions)
- Exposure to diverse perspectives and backgrounds (4)

Highlighted comments include:

- *“It has made some connections between lecture material and real world issues. For example, local issues and environmental racism.”*⁶⁰⁰
- *“I’ve mentioned my learning in a previous answer. But I would like to express that being involved with Regenesi helped me see the possibilities of engaged sustainable living. A campus is like a mini city, especially the way Keele campus is set up. To see the work Regenesi has done, and continues to do, shows how sustainable resources and*

⁶⁰⁰ Jill (pseudonym), survey respondent.

facilities can be established in communities. It inspired me to get involved in my own city and learn about the work being done at a municipal level.”⁶⁰¹

- *“We help each other and I’ve learned by DOING and communicating with real people in a real life setting.*”⁶⁰²

- *“It makes a huge difference having a good community that is supportive, non-judgemental and inclusive. Having people from varied backgrounds also exposes you to different kinds of knowledges.*”⁶⁰³

- *“Learning about others careers, goals, aspirations, struggles, and successes. Has provided great inspiration and motivation.*”⁶⁰⁴

- *“I’m learning about things I wouldn’t otherwise in university, in a very different social environment and community.*”⁶⁰⁵

Question: Does the organization provide formal or informal mentoring? If so, what are the benefits? If not, how could it have helped?

Of the 34 respondents, 70.6% (24 respondents) reported some form of mentorship through their organization:

- 47.1% (16 respondents) described this mentorship as informal.
- 8.8% (3 respondents) reported access to formal mentoring programs.
- 14.7% (5 respondents) acknowledged mentoring but did not specify whether it was formal or informal.

In contrast, 20.6% (7 respondents) stated that no mentoring was provided. Several of these respondents expressed a desire for more structured mentorship, suggesting it could have enhanced their involvement and learning outcomes.

Reported benefits of mentorship included learning about:

- Organizational management

⁶⁰¹ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁰² Thefitty (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁰³ Trisha (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁰⁴ Dave AG (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁰⁵ Jerome Bos (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- Event or project organizing
- Technical writing
- Hands-on skills such as bike mechanics and growing food

3.5.3 Benefits for Volunteer Members

Question: How has the organization helped you grow?⁶⁰⁶

This open-ended question was answered by 34 respondents and explored self-perceived growth through organizational involvement. The most frequently cited area of growth was acquisition of new knowledge, mentioned by 55.88% (19 respondents). This was followed by learning new skills, reported by 44.11% (15 respondents).

Other common areas of growth included:

- Finding a sense of community and belonging (26.47%, 9 respondents)
- Deepening commitment to volunteering and environmental sustainability (23.52%, 8 respondents)
- Boosting social confidence (14.70%, 5 respondents)
- Improved leadership skills and confidence (11.76%, 4 respondents)

Question: Positive impacts of volunteer participation

Has your involvement improved your confidence?

How has the organization contributed to your personal growth?

Has your involvement improved your social life?

What beliefs and world-views have changed because of your volunteer experience?

Has your involvement improved your grades?

⁶⁰⁶ NOTE: Some responses were assigned to more than one category due to overlapping themes.

	Question Breakdown	Positive Responses	Negative Responses
0	Impact on Confidence	0.96	0.04
1	Impact on Personal Growth	0.96	0.04
2	Impact on Social Life	0.85	0.15
3	Impact on World View	0.68	0.32
4	Impact on Grades	0.20	0.80

Table 1: Positive Responses vs Negative Responses of Volunteer Benefits

The majority of respondents reported clear positive outcomes associated with their participation in campus environmental and social justice organizations. According to the yes/no survey data:

- 96% of respondents reported increased in both confidence and personal growth
- 85% reported an improved social life
- 68% reported changes in worldview or personal beliefs

However, only 20% reported that their involvement improved their academic grades, indicating a weak correlation between participation and academic performance. More in-depth study on specific programs might demonstrate a correlation of what aspects of a program might help students improve their academic performance.

Some highlighted responses to “Has your involvement improved your grades?”:

- *“My involvement has been irrelevant in terms of my grades, but I feel like it has caused me to learn better time management and become more ambitious (these things probably help with grades).”*⁶⁰⁷
- *“Yes, it has. By being more active at school, I had a desire to stay on campus longer. This helped me to manage my time better.”*⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁷ SL (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁰⁸ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Some highlighted responses to “How has the organization contributed to your personal growth?”:

- *“Development of my sense of competence, development of my autonomy in bicycle mechanics, allowing me to go on trips I wouldn’t have undertaken otherwise.”*⁶⁰⁹
- *“I became more confident in my skills and abilities to be a leader.”*⁶¹⁰
- *“Open my world to different realities and give me the tools and examples of how to make things in order to change them.”*⁶¹¹
- *“Yes. It gives me something to do and makes my heart feel fulfilled.”*⁶¹²
- *“I feel that I have gained a lot more insight and knowledge about the world than prior to being a part of this club.”*⁶¹³

Some highlighted responses to “What beliefs and world-views have changed because of your volunteer experience”:

- *“I have realized the potential of community solutions to socio-economic problems.”*⁶¹⁴
- *“I decided to become vegan and adopt a more environmentally-friendly lifestyle. For example, I no longer purchase new clothing. I only attend clothing swaps across the city, including Regenesys’ Free Store in which I always donate to.”*⁶¹⁵
- *“Our relationship to food: recognizing the necessity of a give-and-take system that is not so resource/material intensive. The amazing way a community can get work done (minga!).”*⁶¹⁶

I have not highlighted any responses for “Has your involvement improved your confidence” or “Has your involvement improved your social life,” as most answers were simply yes.

⁶⁰⁹ Marco (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹⁰ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹¹ Chivi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹² Thefitty (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹³ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹⁴ Chelsea (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹⁵ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹⁶ Trisha (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Question: How has your involvement improved your verbal and written communication skills and knowledge?

This was an open-ended question (answered by 30 respondents). 76.67% of (23) respondents reported improvements to their written and/or verbal communication, while 23.33% of (7) respondents did not report any improvements. Some highlighted responses include:

- *“I have definitely learned how to more effectively communicate technical information to people without technical knowledge.”*⁶¹⁷
- *“My involvement has improved my verbal skills and knowledge, as I am more comfortable discussing environmental and political issues with groups.”*⁶¹⁸
- *“I’ve learned how to communicate in a business setting with my peers through written and verbal dialogue.”*⁶¹⁹
- *“It has written my ability to draft statements concisely. It has also improved my verbal communication with fellow members of a team/board.”*⁶²⁰
- *“My involvement has definitely improved my facilitator skills. Public speaking and communicating to groups of strangers.”*⁶²¹
- *“I don’t really think it has. It’s maybe improved my collaboration and organization skills; but I had pretty good written communication skills when I first got involved.”*⁶²²

Question: How has your involvement improved your organizational skills and knowledge?

This was an open-ended question (answered by 25 respondents). 64% of (16) respondents reported improvements to their organizational skills, while 24% of (6) respondents did not report any improvements, and 12% of (3) respondents reported already having great organizational skills. Some highlighted responses include:

- *“Yes I have learned that organization is key to creating institutional memory which*

⁶¹⁷ 420dude (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹⁸ Jill (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶¹⁹ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²⁰ Chelsea (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²¹ Dave AG (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²² Nancy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

helps a small-scale collective like the FBC persist into the future.”⁶²³

- *“I learned how to manage my time by setting deadlines, priorities, and goals. Doing this helped me stay organized in my work.”*⁶²⁴

- *“I’ve definitely gotten better at time management and prioritization. When dealing with people and when trying to organize events, you can’t afford to not have good time management.”*⁶²⁵

Question: How has your involvement improved your leadership skills and knowledge?

This was an open-ended question (answered by 22 respondents). 68.2% of (15) respondents reported improvements to their leadership skills, while 13.6% of (3) respondents did not report any improvements. 9.1% of (2) respondents said not yet but expressed an eagerness to take on a leadership role. 4.5% of (1) respondent said they already had leadership skills, and 4.5% of (1) respondent said they were not interested in developing leadership skills. Some highlighted responses include:

- *“I learned to be more confident as a leader. I learned when to take lead but also when to take a step back so other volunteers could also have a chance at leading.”*⁶²⁶

- *“Being the coordinator improved my leadership skills because I had to convince other students to take over as coordinators since I was graduating. That required a lot of mentoring and conversation. I hope I was able to lead by example, in terms of showing what needed to be done for listserv communications, meetings with administration, event planning. I have a lot experience doing this sort of thing in my job, my union, my previous positions and life as a student (this was my second degree). So I’ve tried to pass some of that knowledge along.”*⁶²⁷

Question: How would you rate your level of work readiness prior to volunteering? **How would you rate your level of job readiness after volunteering?**

⁶²³ 420dude (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²⁴ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²⁵ SL (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²⁶ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶²⁷ Nancy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Based on 33 respondents, results indicate a noticeable positive shift in perceived job readiness following volunteer involvement, with an overall swing of 18.88% from “unprepared” categories to “prepared” categories. These findings support existing research that links student volunteerism and improvements in job readiness (see Astin et al. 1999⁶²⁸ and Astin & Sax 1998⁶²⁹).

Readiness Level	Before Volunteering	After Volunteering	Change
Prepared	18.18%	30.30%	+12.12%
Mostly Prepared	21.21%	27.27%	+6.06%
Somewhat Prepared	39.39%	39.39%	0.00%
Somewhat Unprepared	9.09%	3.03%	-6.06%
Mostly Unprepared	9.09%	0.00%	-9.09%
Unprepared	3.03%	0.00%	-3.03%

Table 2: Positive Responses vs Negative Responses of Volunteer Benefits

Question: What are the benefits you get from your involvement?

This open-ended question, answered by 30 respondents, revealed a wide array of benefits spanning social, educational, emotional, and practical domains. The most frequently cited benefits were social in nature, with 18 respondents mentioning community, friendship, or networking as core outcomes of their involvement. Educational benefits, such as gaining new knowledge or skills, were also widely reported (11 respondents), reinforcing the learning dimensions of volunteer participation. In addition, 7 respondents noted receiving free or discounted items or services, often in relation to food or equipment.

Other reported benefits included:

- Direct, hands-on experience (4 respondents)
- Responses that can be best captured by the Danish word *hygge*, which include a sense of contentment, satisfaction, or well-being (4)
- Being physically active (4)

⁶²⁸ Alexander W. Astin, Linda J. Sax and Juan Avalos. “Long-Term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years.” Higher Education, Paper 88 (1999).

⁶²⁹ Alexander W. Astin & Linda J. Sax. “How Undergraduates are Affected by Service Participation.” Journal of College Student Development, 39.3 (1998), 251-263.

- Access to food (3)

Highlighted responses illustrate the diversity of these experiences:

- *“Acquisition of skills, greater discount on new and ordered parts, social circle, opportunity to maintain my bikes.”*⁶³⁰
- *“I’ve gained professional skills, a sense of community, and inspiration for what is possible when it comes to sustainable living.”*⁶³¹
- *“Meeting new people and learning from them. Free food from the gardens.”*⁶³²
- *“A feeling of connectedness through being around peers who are interested in the same initiatives as I am.”*⁶³³
- *“Anxiety relief, free food, a good looking resume, and a chance to interact with like-minded individuals.”*⁶³⁴
- *“Active life, dirty hands, yummy snacks!”*⁶³⁵
- *“Social time, unwinding from routine, working with my body instead of my mind for a change.”*⁶³⁶

Question: Are there any drawbacks to your involvement?

This open-ended question, answered by 29 respondents, revealed a nearly even split between those who reported no drawbacks and those who identified specific challenges. 51.72% (15 respondents) stated that they did not experience any drawbacks from their involvement. In contrast, 48.28% (14 respondents) described various difficulties, which were coded into several key themes:

- Time constraints were the most common issue, mentioned by 5 respondents, often in relation to balancing volunteer work with other responsibilities.
- Conflicts with academic commitments were cited by 3 respondents.

⁶³⁰ Marco (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³¹ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³² Nancy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³³ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³⁴ SL (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³⁵ Trisha (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³⁶ Dave AG (pseudonym), survey respondent.

Highlighted responses include:

- *“Dealing with the Student Society is awful and is draining because they're often rude and assume you know everything they know.”*⁶³⁷
- *“I was unable to volunteer a lot in the past due to having two part-time jobs and taking a full course load.”*⁶³⁸

Question: How has the organization contributed to your university experience?

This open-ended question, answered by 23 respondents, revealed a range of ways in which involvement enhanced or transformed participants' time at university. The most commonly reported themes were:

- Sense of community (5 respondents)
- Friendship and social connection (4)
- Education and skill development (4)
- Having meaningful activities on campus (3)

Highlighted responses capture the range of impacts:

- *“It's given me the opportunity to be a part of a great community while doing work that I enjoy.”*⁶³⁹
- *“It makes me hate the place less.”*⁶⁴⁰
- *“It gives me something to do outside of classes that I care about.”*⁶⁴¹
- *“I felt more connected to my peers and felt a sense of community.”*⁶⁴²
- *“Most of my education has been outside the classroom.”*⁶⁴³
- *“The gardens have been a really positive experience for me. I enjoy it more than most things on campus.”*⁶⁴⁴

⁶³⁷ Em (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³⁸ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶³⁹ Alex 3 (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴⁰ Green Lynx (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴¹ Em (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴² Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴³ Nancy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴⁴ Tilly (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- *“It helped learn non-academic skills I could use, and offered services that helped save money and be more independent.”*⁶⁴⁵
- *“Made it more convenient to get to places and connected me with people I never thought would like bikes.”*⁶⁴⁶

3.5.4 Views on Activism, Environment & Social Justice of Volunteer Members

Question: How has your involvement helped you learn about the environment/social justice?

This open-ended question, answered by 33 respondents, revealed that the vast majority found their involvement to be educational in relation to environmental and/or social justice issues.

- 87.88% (29 respondents) reported gaining new knowledge or insights into environmental and/or social justice topics.
- 9.09% (3 respondents) said they had not learned anything new.
- 3.03% (1 respondent) noted they already had prior knowledge in these areas.

Some respondents described meaningful learning experiences that included both conceptual knowledge and applied understanding. For example:

- *“Regenesys provided lots of education about the environment/social justice issues. It has educated me on current issues and creative ways issues can be resolved.”*⁶⁴⁷
- *“It’s given me a more realistic and practical glimpse of what environmental advocacy is and entails.”*⁶⁴⁸

However, there were also critiques. One respondent from a community bike centre observed that while environmental themes were present, *“Unfortunately, in my opinion, social justice is not present (anywhere).”*⁶⁴⁹

Question: How has your commitment to environmental and social justice causes

⁶⁴⁵ Jerome Bos (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴⁶ Rollyoly (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴⁷ Janny (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴⁸ SL (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁴⁹ Flav (pseudonym), survey respondent.

increased? Have you gotten involved with broader social movements/environmental causes as a result of your organizational involvement?

Of the 27 respondents to this question:

- 48.15% (13 respondents) reported an increased commitment to environmental and/or social justice causes as a result of their involvement.
- 40.74% (11 respondents) did not report greater commitment, often indicating their involvement was limited to the organization itself.
- 3.70% (1 respondent) noted they were already committed prior to joining.
- 7.41% (2 respondents) expressed a desire to be more active in broader movements, but cited time constraints as a barrier.

Several respondents described meaningful changes in behavior, career direction, or activism:

- *“I'm starting to become more involved in my city. I've also worked for many non-profits since my involvement with Regenesis.”*⁶⁵⁰
- *“I have been involved in vegan activism since learning about veganism through Regenesis. I am also less inclined to purchase brand new items due to the impact that this has on the environment. I have learned to reuse and recycle and purchase second-hand items.”*⁶⁵¹

Others reported more moderate or indirect forms of engagement:

- *“Not directly. I shop at the farmers market and try to support local agriculture, but I realize this to be moderately passive support.”*⁶⁵²

Question: What is your view of activism?

The majority of respondents (82%) expressed positive views of activism, while 18% expressed negative or critical views. These responses were gathered between 2019 and 2020, and it is important to note that shifting cultural dynamics in the post-pandemic period, particularly the rise of right-leaning political discourse among younger demographics, may influence how this question would be answered today. Contemporary

⁶⁵⁰ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵¹ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵² Tilly (pseudonym), survey respondent.

attitudes toward activism could reflect more polarization or skepticism in some student populations.

Among those who viewed activism positively, responses emphasized activism as a vehicle for change, a way of life, and a means of leading by example:

- *“Everyone should believe in something and act on it.”*⁶⁵³
- *“I believe that change is greater when we set an example and offer people who can follow it the means to learn to do it at their own pace. I believe that the alternative we propose must be attractive, easy and pleasant, that people receive a benefit from changing their habits, that they have fun.”*⁶⁵⁴
- *“I think activism is great. I think extremists and fanatics give activism a bad reputation.”*⁶⁵⁵
- *“Essential. No one ever changed anything without activism.”*⁶⁵⁶
- *“As volunteer work and activism is something that needs to be part of our normal life, we need, as a society, be more involved with things that happen around us, for me, be an activist and volunteer is essential in my daily life.”*⁶⁵⁷

Others defined activism in nuanced or mindful terms, emphasizing small, localized actions, joyful participation, or the need to avoid burnout:

- *“I think activism is important for change. We need more of it especially now. I also think that mindful activism is really important so that activists don't burn out.”*⁶⁵⁸
- *“Making small changes for the better (more beautiful, more careful, fairer, more appreciated, more valued, more inclusive) in your immediate environment; along your paths; within your reach, without having to ask permission. Trusting in, and manifesting your vision of a better small patch of life.”*⁶⁵⁹

Among the 18% of respondents who held more critical views, skepticism focused less on activism's goals and more on its methods or tone:

- *“I'm not an activist. There are more effective ways to change attitudes.”*⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵³ Janny (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵⁴ Marco (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵⁵ Jill (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵⁶ Nancy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵⁷ Chivi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵⁸ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁵⁹ Green Lynx (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶⁰ Flav (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- *“Not a fan. I feel like its a bunch of angry people demanding change and I think there are loving ways to do it. I'm an advocate and pacifist, but I don't identify with activism.”*⁶⁶¹
- *“Not the right way to get your message hear and not always having all the right information need to fight the cause.”*⁶⁶²

These critiques reflect concerns about the effectiveness, tone, or inclusivity of activist approaches, distinguishing between activism and other forms of engagement such as advocacy or dialogue. Overall, while most respondents affirmed activism as necessary, transformative, and personally meaningful, the range of responses also highlights important distinctions in how activism is defined, practiced, and perceived—pointing to both support for causes, but also the need to adapt or tone-down approaches within activist cultures on campus.

Question: How do you view your involvement with the organization? As activism, volunteering or both? Please explain.

This open-ended question, answered by 27 respondents, explored how individuals conceptualize their roles within campus environmental and social justice organizations. The majority—55.56% (15 respondents)—identified their involvement as both activism and volunteering, suggesting a strong overlap between service and advocacy in these contexts.

37.04% (10 respondents) described their work solely as volunteering, often viewing it as task-oriented or service-based rather than explicitly political. Only one respondent (3.7%) framed their work as purely activism, and one additional respondent said their involvement was neither activism nor volunteering, offering no further explanation.

Several responses illustrate the diversity in how participants define these terms:

- *“Volunteer work. I repair bicycles for people, I'm not here to change the world.”*⁶⁶³

⁶⁶¹ Thefitty (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶² Megled (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶³ Flav (pseudonym), survey respondent.

- *“Both. To volunteer is to let yourself be uptaken by something else that you believe in but haven't got investment in (time, stakes, money). To be an activist is to give yourself over in some way to something you do believe in, but using your own time, money, stakes. I think one can help you do the other (and vice versa). They are complimentary like twinned electrons.”*⁶⁶⁴
- *“Both. A lot of the issues we address are political. For example, food desserts, government subsidies to monoculture industrial farmers, the health benefits of vegetarianism and organic food.”*⁶⁶⁵
- *“Volunteering. I'm not sure why I don't consider myself an activist. I guess because the word activist seems like a title other people give you and I feel as though I could be more involved.”*⁶⁶⁶

Question: How does the organization contribute to improving campus life?

This open-ended question, answered by 26 respondents, highlights the wide-ranging impact that environmental and social justice organizations have on student life. The most frequently cited contribution was the provision of vital free or low-cost services, mentioned by 22 respondents. These included access to affordable food, bike repair, and free stores—resources that support students’ basic needs and reduce financial pressure. Other frequently noted contributions included education and skills development (6 respondents), and betterment of the campus or campus experience (4 respondents)

Highlighted answers include:

- *“Many students are short on money. we let people fix their bike for free, and we sell parts for mega cheap. So we improve campus life by being accessible and teaching a skill.”*⁶⁶⁷
- *“It is comprehensive in what it can do to "improve" lives: spiritual, mental, physical, educational, social, nutritional, communal. I can't even imagine another site or organization with such capaciousness. Basically it can meet any needs any student brings*

⁶⁶⁴ Green Lynx (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶⁵ Nancy (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶⁶ SL (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶⁷ Em (pseudonym), survey respondent.

to it.”⁶⁶⁸

- “*Regenesi truly offers accessible ways to live sustainably on campus. The Free Store, YUM, and Cycle York are great examples that allow students to engage with sustainability while learning about social justice and environmental sustainability.*”⁶⁶⁹
- “*It educates students about their environmental contributions and builds their independence skills to deal with efforts that harm the environment and society.*”⁶⁷⁰

3.6 Summary of Interview Results

Twenty-two (22) student-involved environmental activists were interviewed from across Canada, coming from a broad-range of the group types identified. The interviews ran in length from around 30 minutes to over two hours, with the average being around one hour. While all interviews were conducted in Canadian English, four interview participants primary language was Quebecois French.

The types of initiatives and organizations represented include:

- Agriculture and Food organizations — 10
- Bike co-operatives – 2
- Sustainability organizations – 3
- PIRGs / PIRG working groups – 4
- Other – 3

3.7 Interview Results

Interview #1 – Madonna (Food Initiative Hub)

Madonna (pseudonym) is an undergraduate student at a small inner-suburban campus. Madonna is involved in an initiative to create an umbrella and network organization for food initiatives on campus. The organization serves as a hub for 10 separate student-run food initiatives, covering a wide array of areas, from gardening, to beekeeping, and cooking. Some of these initiatives duplicate the activities of other

⁶⁶⁸ Green Lynx (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁶⁹ Sabah (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁶⁷⁰ Mimi (pseudonym), survey respondent.

initiatives. For example, there are two student-run food initiatives on campus—however, because of ideological differences, one focuses on a “Food Not Bombs” model of collecting food waste and serving it as vegetarian meals, whereas the other group serves food that it grows and/or purchases and prepares into vegetarian meals.

The biggest challenge at this campus was student engagement and the continuation of each student-run food initiative on a year-to-year basis. Madonna says: “...it's basically do it all now and do your best to, there's no way of ensuring it will keep on going because there's a high turnover of students and I'll graduate in a year, and I'm the only one now who is interested in trying to keep this thing together, keep on going. So, I don't even know if the food hub will exist. The website will be there, and the clubs will be there, but actually talking to each other, and coordinating their efforts together might not last when I'm gone, if there's no other student who is interested in taking over my position, it's not an official position it's just I talk to everybody, I'm like the middle person. If no one is interested in what I'm doing, then it's just not going to exist anymore. That's why we need, we would highly benefit from a staff member, to like to coordinate all these different initiatives...” Madonna clearly recognizes the need for continuity. She continues: “...having one big org having multiple different projects, that could be good, however each, even though we're a hub and we're working together, we're still all independent projects, so it would be really hard to tell them you'll lose a bit of your independence to become under the umbrella thing. You'd still exist but, the reason why we're different clubs is that we kind of still have different views, not majorly different, but we still want different things. It would be hard to take away independence.” Madonna mentioned a similar initiative was tried a few years before her: “There was a guy a few years back who had kind of the same idea, but when he graduated it just died. He was the only one in his time who was interested in doing it. I just heard when I started doing this job this summer, I just heard that actually he did this, there's no record or anything. A professor told me that like 5 years ago this guy tried and it didn't work.”

The precarity of these student-run food initiatives was made more difficult due to the small student-population (approx. 2000) of the campus. The idea of the food hub was spearheaded by a professor and a former student, and with student help, it was able to secure funding to hire Madonna to work on the initiative. A major worry was that no

student was interested in taking over coordinating the network that following school year. The lack of funding for student jobs was noted as factor—given that if funding existed to hire students, it would make it easier to find students who could continue each of these food initiatives. Students are facing increasing costs and economic precarity, requiring them to spend more time working instead of engaging in extracurricular activities and volunteering. Summer engagement is another particular challenge, especially with agricultural-related initiatives. Madonna sees community volunteer engagement as one way of addressing this issue.

Interview #2 – Frankie (Bicycle Co-operative)

Frankie is a student at a school that is part public college, part Catholic high school. He volunteers at a community bike co-operative on-campus, that serves both the student population and the local neighbourhood. The co-op is a legally registered entity with the government. The co-operative receives free space from the school, and is funded through membership fees and selling bicycle parts, operating on a budget of about \$2000 per year. The co-operative is volunteer run, with many volunteers being students who are required to complete twenty volunteer hours per year with an organization of their choice in order to graduate. Volunteers receive a 30% discount on parts. The bike co-operative was founded by a student at the college who visited other bicycle co-operatives to learn from them and is continually supported by a staff member at the Student Life and Community Service office. The bike co-op has regular hours, but also allows students to access the space in the case of a bicycle repair emergency by talking to a security guard and showing their student identification. Every year the bike co-op holds a bike donation drive where they receive hundreds of donated bicycles. They participate in a program that repairs bicycles and sends them to the Global South. Overall, the bicycle co-operative is quite successful and well-run. Frankie mentioned that volunteering with the bicycle co-operative has helped him grow as a person and build more confidence.

Interview #3 – Celine (Food Co-operative)

Celine is an undergraduate student and a member of a grocery buying co-operative at a large Canadian university. The food co-operative was started two years

earlier by a student whose parents were members of a bulk food buying co-operative. The prices were so low that he had the idea to bring it to campus to help students. He approached the university, and was able to eventually secure a room, with it slowly growing more and more thanks to his hard work. The organization is a legally registered entity with the government, which has requirements for food handling and storage to ensure safety at the initiative. All the suppliers are regional, except one that is national. Almost everything sold by the co-operative is organic. Sourcing can be an issue at times, such as when the bulk whole wheat they would purchase was discontinued by one of their suppliers. Enough quantity must be purchased in order to meet minimum order requirements and receive free delivery. Most items are received in bulk containers, thus requiring co-op members to bring their own containers, which helps minimize waste from packaging. People also bring in extra containers for those who did not bring their own to take. Due to the university having an agreement with a food services company, the food co-operative is limited to selling raw items such as flour, honey, raw spreads, nuts, and dried fruit—with one exception being allowed for vegan, fair-trade chocolate chips. The co-operative did try to expand into other areas, such as cooking and nutrition workshops, but it was decided it would be better to just focus on their core mission and let other groups and students do those activities if they wished to. The co-operative is trying to bring together all the food initiatives on campus under a food coalition or network, so they can better work together and organize. The entire food co-operative is volunteer-run, with funding coming almost primarily from sales (around \$35,000-\$40,000 gross sales annually), with small amounts (\$2000 or less) coming from grants for student groups on campus. The food co-operative created a guide to help students at other universities create their own.

Interview #4 – Svetlana (Student-Run Agriculture)

Svetlana is an undergraduate student at a small satellite campus of a larger university. The initiative she is part of was started more than 10 years ago by two students who started a community garden on campus that has since expanded to a full-scale three-acre campus farm. The farm is organic, but is not certified as such. The initiative works by having students apply and selecting only a handful of students for a

full growing season apprenticeship. In the second season, the students become the managers (and teachers for the incoming apprentices that year). The produce grown is sold at local farmers' markets and a community-supported agriculture program supported by both the university community and the surrounding community. When asked about volunteers or expanding the program to include more students, there are concerns expressed about being financially self-sufficient and supporting the six students involved each year, and the difficulties with management and knowledge transfer with a larger group. They are proud of the unique experience that a two-year experience provides, emphasizing learning in the first year, and hands-on leadership experience in the second year. In some years, they have an intern or manager quit midway, which creates challenges, but they've always managed to find a way to make it work. The gross revenue is around \$60,000 each year. All the students involved are paid stipends, which is something they are proud of. Any surplus money is reinvested back into the farm, with occasional additional income for special projects coming from university grants. The farm owns their own truck, which they use to transport the produce to customers. Originally a student club, the initiative now operates as an autonomous, unregistered entity, receiving the support of the university's grounds department.

Interview #5 – Betty and Veronica (General Student Environmental Organization)

Betty and Veronica are executives at a student environmental organization at an engineering school affiliated with a larger Canadian university. The group does a variety of activities, including running second-hand store pop-ups (raising about \$3000 per year), a weekly pub social, free yoga classes, fair trade week (to promote fair-trade as a concept and fair-trade products), trash clean-ups, and an annual go vegan challenge involving other student clubs (400 students participated in the previous year). When I inquired about the relationships they had with environmental groups at the larger university, they said it had not occurred to them to partner with groups from the larger university. They feel a geographic barrier exists between the engineering school and the rest of the university. The group previously loaned out glasses and plates for events, but the student association for the school does that now. They are not legally registered, just existing as a student club recognized by the school and student association. There are other

environmental student clubs at the school, one is a community bike cooperative, one focuses solely on carbon and climate change, and another is a solar car racing team. The school has a sustainability committee that meets every few months that they attend. However, there is some tension between students and the university due to students pressuring the school to divest from fossil fuels and threatening to go on a climate strike at the school (which students overwhelmingly voted in favour of striking). There is an inherent tension between a more conservative administration (many of which come from resource industry backgrounds) and a minority of students focused primarily on making money, and the vast majority of students that want to see climate change addressed. The group sees things through the lens of sustainable development, which the three main pillars mentioned are the environment, the economy and social development. They don't see the group trying to do more permanent activities again, like a thrift store, due to the difficulty in obtaining space and that they feel students at the school are very busy and focused on their grades. The annual budget of the organization is up to \$5000 each year.

Interview #6 – Darren (Food Network and Student-Run Café)

Darren was previously an undergraduate student and served as president of his student union. Darren was inspired to keep up the momentum of anti-capitalist organizing that came out of the 2012 Quebec student protests by getting involved in food organizing on campus. He believes they were successful because of positioning (having members on the Board of Governors of the university and the student union), leveraging those relationships, and being a “forceful student lobby group.”

I asked Darren for specific advice he would give to other student groups trying to advocate for such projects. He says understanding the context is important, as every university and student union culture is different. They established a ‘well-oiled machine’ of student organizers and were able to secure majority votes on the university senate, which they used to leverage support from the administration and Board of Governors, where a majority would not be possible. They navigated a fine-line relationship with the administrators, building relationships with them, but knowing when and where to apply pressure. As Darren puts it, “you either play the game or you push.” After securing thousands of petition signatures, passing multiple referenda in favour, and being ignored,

they had to apply pressure. Darren says, “we obviously did the reasonable thing first, and then when the reasonable thing doesn't work out, because we're just dumb students... eventually we got their attention, by changing votes and spending money... and then all of a sudden they're like ‘wait a minute what's going on we have to be paying attention.” Even after securing funding through a referendum for a kitchen, the university still resisted. Darren and others had to lay out a case to the Board of Governors that demonstrated they had done their homework and secured funding for the project. Another barrier was the student union, which they had to take-over in elections as the previous student union executive was not supportive of the food initiatives being proposed by the student activists. After taking over the student union, they were able to “make it rain” on student food initiatives, as the student union had a budget of \$12 million fund. A food coalition on campus, set up by a professor, helped act as a glue and vehicle for further food organizing on campus. One of the food initiatives set up was a fair-trade cooperative café. I asked Darren what the most difficult thing was in launching these food initiatives, and he said, while they were all very good at politics and campaigning, that taking an abstract idea into an operational space with 30 staff people was difficult, with challenges to set up the HR and operational systems. Bad hires impacted this particular food initiative, creating a culture of distrust that took time to repair.

Darren mentioned to me he had read up on the history of student-run cafes locally, and how many of them often fail, get restarted or run deficits. He believes this pattern repeats itself because of the high turnover and lack of institutional memory because of the nature of working with students. He says, “you have to be quite a strong board to manage that personality who is more likely to manage you,” in reference to student board members leaving after a year or two, while staff might stay longer, emphasizing again the importance of hiring the right people. Darren sees an added challenge, in that it is a constant fight for student groups, as they can get pushed out of the market by conglomerates like Aramark that have university contracts. He doesn't feel Canadian student organizations are resourced enough to create massive entrepreneurial change yet alone be able to compete against the 3 big multinational campus food providers. Darren is a fan of Norwegian-style “student welfare organizations” that operate food services,

bookstores and other campus services, as they have monopolies at their universities and strike a balance between student-involvement, good management, longevity and ability to compete against the private sector. Quebec has similar co-operatives at each university, but he doesn't feel students are engaged enough through them, saying the General Manager typically must go out and recruit students and get student board members to participate. He believes the knowledge gap and power dynamics between students and managers requires a lot of work to bridge. There are a lot of challenges with engaging students, because you are basically running a business with a food initiative, and that can take away most of a student's time, leading to burn out. It also requires student activists to change their mentality from activism towards running a business. He has also noticed that those who are 'super high functioning' eventually just move onto other things, though while noting that "different institutional actors that have been around forever that are fixtures" are great people to rely on for support. Darren's personal theory on what works best for the longevity and success of student organizations: "I think you need one person to stick around forever, that's what I think... The most impressive co-op I've ever seen had one person there for the whole time and he's still there, and he's the founder," referring to Park Slope Food Cooperative in Brooklyn, New York, which has over 17,000 members and requires each to commit to volunteer hours each month to maintain the co-operative. Darren admires that Park Slope doesn't offer any shortcuts on required member labour, stating it is a slippery slope if such a policy disappears and "we don't understand the fragility of these models enough as a society." Reiterating to Park Slope and his belief in having someone stick around for a long-time, "...one guy, his name is Joe Holtz, he's been there the whole time, super super helpful, like I can only imagine that this guy's role is kinda like to teach everybody the million lessons that the organization has learned before they all got there, and also try to not be overbearing in the space you take, but like there's real learning that goes on in these micro societies, that's very particular to them." He relates it to the success of one of the food initiatives he helped start at his university, and how the coordinator has been around for a number of years, which has provided stability. Darren says, "people have this myth—student organizations—you just kind of come and go," which isn't necessarily the case.

Darren believes in multi-stakeholder model for organizations, as more people who

care can be involved and it is more democratic. He recognizes that the strength of direct democracy is also its weakness. Referencing Park Slope co-operative again, “The Park Slope Food Co-op for example invites all of its users to one of their board meetings, and votes, and they're successful. The lowest paid person makes \$25 an hour, groceries are 20-40% cheaper, they have a daycare on site that people send their kids to when they're volunteering.” Having users, workers, and supporters, all as stakeholders, helps bring many voices to the table who care. Darren says: “it involves the users, which is... the people that like, use the service, and that's why it exists so you need those voices. Then workers are the people who keep it going, but also it keeps them going because it pays them to live, so that's a super important stakeholder group obviously. And then the support members are [those] that creates spaces for the institutional actors to help out.” He sees the future of the food initiatives he was involved in as just giving it to the university to operate in a community-managed model, “I would say just relinquishing it, here takeover governance and run the food system.” He believes that universities, having the resources and institutional memory, should adopt this model for food systems, believing if “[the] university can run it, as a community” it will thrive, but if a student organization operates it, it may or may not continue to exist. He blames laziness, stating that: “Our management structure doesn't want to retrain its employees... to operate in a different way” as the reason for resistance and why this hasn’t happened yet at a university in Canada. Darren believes that one larger, community-run organization, involving students, professors and others, is better than multiple autonomous student food initiatives. He cites the Norwegian student welfare organization model (Norwegian: Studentsamskipnad) as an example, where they have 50% student membership, and the chair position must be a student.

Darren doesn’t believe the food network on campus should play the role of the larger organization, as once they took over the student union, he felt it was a bigger player with more resources—he basically sees that we should try to level up—the next logical sense being the university itself, but having these structures set up in a democratic way to involve students as the principle decision-makers, but having all stakeholders have a seat at the table. Darren believes it is difficult for even student unions to get larger projects off the ground, stating “it's hard cause you only have a one-year mandate...it’s

like every year it's like amnesia.” When asked why larger student federations haven’t taken a more active role in food activism, Darren says: “actual real power politics going on in the background that we can only speculate about.” He believes there are connections between student federations and political parties—FAQUM and PQ, CFS and the NDP, as examples—“They have this staggered system of bringing people up, and then like often they have at least one person that sticks around from the year before, and it kind of keeps going forward like that.” Darren believes that while having environmental and food activists take positions on student unions and board of governors is useful, ultimately what is more important is capital. “I think it's more important for environmentalists to start taking over capital, period. And like, coming to an understanding of how to re-engage capital in a way. Because capital is just our labour, our labour is literally the thing building this mess,” Darren says. He continues: “...so if environmental activists start to switch over into capital and pooling capital for projects like solar power or like tangible projects immediately, that can happen right here and now, and also can be happening everywhere.” Using housing co-operatives as an example, Darren advises, “take over all of their boards and leverage that capital to take out more loans and build more housing co-ops.”

Darren doesn’t feel that student fee levies in and of themselves are a solution if these initiatives can’t make money—he uses the example of a student bookstore that ran a levy to give their employees wage increases instead of doing things to boost sales. He states: “I think that that money should only be used for this extra stuff that we wouldn't otherwise be doing” and not for regular operations. He mentions an example again—that of employees at the student café wanting wage increases, but not understanding they’d be dipping into reserve for wage increases, and once it is gone, it is gone—there’d be nothing for emergencies.

In discussing the roles other actors play in campus activism, he credits a particular professor as being crucial for the success of food activism at their campus, such as channelling students into food activism, and providing course credit, access to resources, and credibility. One opportunity he sees for student food activists is through their involvement with the university and building relationships, they’ll be able to gain employment with the university, and thus better able to effect change.

I asked about if democracy is such an important factor, citing the cultural differences I have observed between progressive, urban centres, and universities located in poorer, moral suburban and rural communities. Darren says, “Ya, working poor people are never going to have more time. So, I mean if you want like the actual input of working poor people you probably need to pay them, because otherwise they gotta go home and do their dishes or take care of their kid or whatever.”

Asked about the educational and leadership aspects, Darren says that you have to be intentional about it and that the university should intertwine education with student-run food initiatives like the one he helped start. He mentioned a barista who went onto becoming the general manager of the student café: “We need to support the right young people, into these positions, and then they sort of invite the others to continue on the path.” He sees the university as a lab, that private companies are taking advantage of for profit, but that community-driven organizations can also utilize these relationships and create learning cultures. He believes the different aspects of the initiative could each be a lab for students to learn about things like group processes or sustainability.

Interview #7 – Karma (Student Food Initiative)

Karma is an undergraduate student who is president of a meal-serving student-run food initiative at a small, satellite campus of another university. The initiative had been operating eight years at the time of the interview. The group has access to use the serving space of a student-union owned campus pub. They previously had access to the kitchen of the pub as well, but due to the kitchen not being up to code, they must rent another kitchen space from the university for \$200/week. While they have space currently, it is a concern they might lose access to space due to the university having plans to renovate the kitchen they are using, and potentially bring in a cafeteria to campus.

The original idea for serving meals on campus came from a food access and security survey that students conducted. Recognizing that fact the campus is in a food desert, students wanted to create more food options. The group serves meals twice weekly. They try to source most of their items from the campus farm and an informal, student-run bulk-buying collective on campus. Everything is volunteer-run, with a team of 15 executives and around 35 other volunteers who help with food preparation and

clean-up. She believes the initial plan might have been to become more profitable so some students could be paid, which is a barrier for many students, especially those who are international or aren't bilingual, as they cannot work in a customer service job. They collaborate with another similar group who serves meals once a week on campus from collected food waste (e.g. items thrown out by grocery stores), similar to the Food Not Bombs model. Sales from weekly meals is about \$400 per week. They are members of a food network on campus, but aren't "very heavily involved in it."

Interview #8 – Thomas (Greenhouse)

Thomas is a former student who was involved in the creation of a student-run greenhouse. While he was an undergraduate student, Thomas was part of a general environmental organization on-campus that was trying to save the surplus greenhouse on campus and refurbish it. He saw a job posting for a 'greenhouse coordinator' which he applied to and received the job, which he did for two years. He later came back about a decade later to work as the coordinator. In that time the greenhouse underwent renovations to remove asbestos, separated from the campus environmental organization, registered as both a student association and a provincial non-profit organization, and secured a student-levy for its operation, currently around \$170,000 annually. The greenhouse offers numerous programs, including growing and selling microgreens, offering incubator space for agricultural initiatives and start-ups, offering study space, and running a very popular agricultural training program. The greenhouse is available for "very cheap" rent to the university community for events. Between all their programs, the manager and the financial coordinator, they had six staff people, and between 5-10 interns any given year. They do not pay any rent or utilities for the space, and there is no official space agreement in place. The study space in the greenhouse is very popular. However, due to location of the greenhouse, it is not possible to expand. Also, due to the lack of climate controls, the greenhouse closes in the summer. A crowdfunding campaign which sought to raise the estimated \$80,000-\$90,000 to put in a passive cooling system, failed. The board of directors and staff operate using a fully consensus-based model. Operating on a non-hierarchical model there is no President position. At least 30% of the board must be undergraduate students, the remaining seats can be anyone, including non-

student community members. One challenge they are having as an organization, and that many student organizations have, is student engagement in governance. Many student organizations are more staff controlled, due to the turn-over of students on an annual basis, and inexperience. The organization is putting an emphasis on institutional memory, training and mentorship as ways to address this. Thomas offered the following advice for those seeking to start a campus greenhouse. He said not to try to jam too many uses into the greenhouse, build a good structure and by-laws for the organization, get the necessary funding, and hire a really good manager.

Interview #9 – Flora (Eco-focused Student Housing)

Flora is an undergraduate student and a resident member of an independently operated, eco-focused student housing project. The project is incorporated as a non-profit, and rents one of a number of houses owned by the university and used as student housing. The organization also receives a student levy (around \$70,000 annually) and is a recognized student organization. The project started five years previously thanks to a sustainability grant proposal that was accepted by the university and their residence life department. The idea for the space is to create a hub or community centre for sustainability. Resident members (called ‘facilitators’) are mandated to participate in organizing (10 hours per week). In addition, there are two lead coordinators, and a board of directors comprised of students, professors, and others. Only students at the university can live in the house. Rent varies slightly by room size. All facilitators receive a rent subsidy thanks to the student levy. Flora says: “...we pay the full rent, and then we receive a cheque as a subsidy from the organization.” Flora admits they avoid advertising this because they don’t want people joining just because of cheaper rent, but actually want people who genuinely want to participate. Flora says, “We wanted people coming because they wanted to be part of the project. And then, once they get to the interview stage, they’re told ‘this is how you’re compensated.’” Coordinators receive a salary, don’t live in the house, and don’t necessarily have to be current students. The facilitators and coordinators meet for two hours each week. Examples of projects include applied student research, gardening, a free book library and workshops (on topics such as zero waste). Other student groups also use their space. One group grows produce in the front yard, and

another group sells waste produce bi-weekly at the house.

Flora discussed some of the challenges the organization has faced. One issue is financial predictability, as Flora mentions: “because we get our funding through the feel levy, it's very difficult to predict what we're going to get for an academic year. So I know, our budget changed quite a bit from last year to this year, and it's not something we can really control.” Another challenge is turnover and institutional memory. Flora states: “Another thing that we have to deal with is, we have a very high turnover, so there's very low institutional memory, because the people living in the house are students... it's a little frustrating feeling like you're starting over every year... I wish we could focus a little more on these projects that I really want to do, rather than spending so much time training people, who are starting in a different place.” Flora through firmly recognizes that education is central to their mission. She states: “We want people to come here and learn about sustainability. We want this to be a place where people feel like, they can come and just learn something that they never knew before. Whether it's by attending a workshop that a different group has, or just learning about the different resources that are at [the University] by coming here.” She continues, “what we try to do is take education less of an academic sense, and make it more of a practical and engaging thing.” I asked Flora if they ever considered expansion, and while she thinks having the idea establishing a house at another campus of the university would be a great, she states: “I think that this type of organization is best kept smaller,” adding that if you had more people it wouldn't function.

Interview #10 – Malcolm (Community Bike Centre)

Malcolm is a graduate student and a member of an all-volunteer run, unincorporated bicycle co-operative, founded in 2010. The bicycle co-operative receives free space from the student union. However, the space is not ideal as it is located in a basement that requires carrying your bicycle up and down stairs. The co-operative does not receive a student levy. All funds are through the sales of used parts and bicycles, so they are financially self-sufficient. The bicycle co-operative was created and is run by students, but volunteers (and users) also come from the general public. All decisions are made by consensus, and there are no defined roles. The volunteer base is about 10-15

people, with 6-8 core people. In terms of recruitment, Malcolm says, "...at the frosh event where we had the table, they would leave their email address, and we'd end up with like 30 people who left their email address because they were interested. We would email all of those, and you know 6 people would show up to an orientation, and one would wind up being a regular volunteer." The university provides abandoned bicycles to the co-operative three times a year. Malcolm says the sales of used bicycles generates "several thousand" in revenue each year. The bike co-operative is a member of a network of bike co-operatives in their city. Malcolm notes that they are the "only bike co-op with no membership fee and no stand fee" in their city. The bicycle co-operative hosts a women, trans, queer and non-binary night, as bicycle spaces are typically dominated by cis presenting men. One challenge that their and other bicycle co-operatives face is that many bike suppliers will not sell to them, requiring large minimum orders and to be a registered business. The advice he gives to those wishing to establish a similar initiative is: "the main thing would be the message is that it's not scary. Like a lot of people are kind of very intimidated by bike mechanics... The more you do it the easier it gets, and it provides skills that transcend bikes, that can be applied to daily life."

Interview #11 – Owenetta (Student Food Initiative)

Owenetta is part of a student food collective that serves vegan meals to students. The organization developed out of a local Food Not Bombs group in the city. The food collective transitioned from an informal group in order to secure recognition from the university's food services division in order to serve food on campus. The collective went on to secure a student levy with both the undergraduate and graduate student unions at their university, become a non-profit, and rent a commercial kitchen where they prepare meals for students. Owenetta got involved by showing up to a meeting. She says, "I showed up and the two guys who were basically running the whole show, they didn't really have any help at that point, kind of stood up in front of the maybe twenty people in the room and said, unless someone in this room wants to completely take over this... we're gonna end this organization." There was also drama in the background, with Owenetta describing it as others wanting to "forcefully trying to push these guys out." The collective has faced a lot of challenges, both externally and internally. Internally,

there has been a lot of burn-out, with Owenetta commenting on "...leadership kind of getting burnt out and then abandoning their posts without necessarily teaching a new set of people." This situation jeopardized the organization, which is required to submit an annual audit to the university. Owenetta explains, "...the audit hadn't been done in three years... I tried to gather together the records to do an audit, and realized that we would have failed that audit." She continues, "I think it was really just people walking away with valuable information and then that information getting lost, but the thing was that the University had completely abandoned oversight of the food collective." Owenetta notes, when asked what could have prevented this situation, "...creating documents that outline how things work" and making sure these documents are kept on digital databases and a binder.

Owenetta feared that if an unfriendly student government came into power, they would use the situation as an excuse to close down the food collective. There was a lot of internal conflict according to Owenetta: "I'd have these meetings and people would show up who were very angry about things that had occurred you know three years ago, a year ago, like long before I was involved in the organization, and a lot of really serious accusations of like the organization having hugely systematic racism in it." One of the biggest criticisms leveled against the organization was that it was a "place for white vegans," which Owenetta herself strongly agreed with. Owenetta felt with other members there was "a lot of gatekeeping" in terms of political viewpoints, stating some suggested "they should have to complete a political survey that proves that they share the same values as us before they can become a volunteer, or... if someone you know really doesn't hold the same beliefs as everyone else that they shouldn't be allowed to come." She describes an interaction with someone who attended a meeting and was interested in vegan activism, where someone told them essentially "I hope you understand that veganism, um, you know it's not compatible with decolonization because indigenous people rely on meat for food and so what you're saying is an example of white supremacy and I don't think you should be involved in this organization because you're a white supremacist." Owenetta says "I was too afraid to speak out, I was too afraid to be ostracized by the group." That person became extremely emotional and never came back. Owenetta describes their politics as "radical social justice" and "communist." Owenetta

felt there were “a lot of individuals who were quite interested in having power.” She describes the culture as a “call-out culture and cancel culture taken to a really unhealthy extreme... exclusionary leftist politics,” with “not a lot of like forgiveness or kindness for people who hadn't uh you know spent tons of time being... feminism and anti-racism and anti-fascism... I just don't think everybody is totally knowledgeable on those things.” Owenetta strongly feels this exclusionary approach is wrong, saying “I just think that people should be given the space to grow and learn. They shouldn't have to come into an organization already totally educated and woke and completely on the same page as everyone else.” She believes that “food like brings people of different political backgrounds together” and that describing the organization as communism or using hammer and sickle imagery would be off-putting to many. She states, “I don't consider myself a communist so I didn't want to put my name on that.” She describes the culture negatively impacting the organization, saying “it really chipped away at our volunteer base,” and that people would come enthusiastically, but never return after experiencing a meeting. The meetings would be too long and drawn out by various discussions. The politics of the organization also impacted the structure of the organization. Owenetta says that she is “pretty skeptical” of the non-hierarchical leadership of the organization, believing that if you are trying to accomplish something, you need titles, and that “when you have a title you have identified yourself as a leader... so why not formalize that in a healthy way.”

Owenetta found it difficult to manage the organization because she didn't have any training. In meetings, she would try to get people to focus on items relevant to their mission, describing her facilitation approach as “we can't talk about that right now, we have to talk about the gas leak, we have to talk about the faulty oven.” Owenetta received complaints from women who said “I don't want to be part of the organizing for this anymore, I feel like you guys are really sexist.” She notes that “I did not face sexism” and “I felt like people there were very committed to treating women respectfully.” Owenetta had to remove her co-leader from the organization after an alleged sexual assault. She managed to get him out of the organization, but he worked online and by word of mouth to really discredit the organization and those involved. Owenetta brought a code of

conduct and structure to the organization and got the finances of the organization in order. She also created a new free store which the collective ran.

Owenetta tried to bring a different approach to working with the university. There was a lot of suspicion towards the university. She says, “I did like push for just working with the organization like with the University”, but “...a lot of people at the organization saw the University as like an antagonist and the University was something that was holding us back.” She said the responses she’d receive would include “well, we don't want them knowing what we're doing” or “we don't want them to be coming in here and telling us how to run our organization.” Owenetta says, “I actually think the University was hugely supportive.” Owenetta, however, doesn’t feel the same way about the campus food provider, Aramark, who she also worked for, stating “they don't care about anything, they don't compost, or recycle... there's zero consideration for food waste.” Going through the records of the food collective, Owenetta also found out that Aramark tried to block the activities of the food collective back around 2007/8. In terms of student union support, she found the undergraduate student union unresponsive, but graduate student union very supportive.

The food collective is open to both students and the wider community. They rent a space off-campus with a commercial kitchen, that doubles as an organizing space for local activism. They have a relationship with the local neighbourhood association which has used the space for community nights. They provide food to homeless individuals in a local park. In terms of her time with the food collective and activism, “I walked away from this like totally convinced that food is the key,” noting that “people were the happiest” when involved in food events, like food servings, potlucks and dumpster diving. She noted that when she left, “I'm just gonna call them bullies, the two or three bullies had completely taken over.” Owenetta feels that: “Those two guys who passed on the organization, like I think if they had been more responsible they would have shut it down... the fact that they just passed it off to whoever kinda stepped up like resulted in a lot of people being like really hurt and really like lives changed for the worse.” Her advice to those wanting to start a similar initiative was: “I would say visioning and structuring needs to be prioritized like if you have a group of people who want to do something together.”

Interview #12 – Jing (PIRG)

Jing is a staff person at a PIRG, who was previously a volunteer and board member with them. Most PIRGs use an ‘action group’ or ‘working group’ model. Jing says “most working groups tend to be very independent...we don't actually ask a lot in turn from working groups, but if we are providing support to them they have to do things like, let us provide a report at our AGM, check in regularly to let us know what like programming they're running, and I mean that's not just for us but also for them because... we're interested in promoting the programming of our working groups, obviously, cause they're our working groups.” Jing believes “...the working group model was like meant to allow students to organize independently... a place where students get their first experiences with how to organize, how to run their own campaigns, how to do their political work.” She mentions that some PIRGs have had issues with the structure. She describes her PIRG relationship with working groups: “I know in the past like we've also had issues... we've had some working groups where we've had relationships and are able to work together a lot, and other working groups pretty much just apply to get their funding and we don't hear from them at all during the year.” She said, “ideally we would have more of a relationship in that sense where these would become like the campaigns that OPIRG York is working on throughout the year and that we would work more closely with the people that are interested in these types of campaigns.” I asked Jing if she felt those involved with working groups understood the model and structure of PIRGs, she said, “I think it really depends on the working groups” and that many just see them as a source of funding and support. She says, “the groups themselves are always shifting. For a while they could be focussed on really important political work and then it could become more of a cultural based group... [in order to] practice their own cultures in a safer space.”

When selecting which working groups, Jing says: “Obviously if they're right-wing groups they don't even try and apply to OPIRG and we wouldn't accept them, but then even within certain more lefty focussed groups there are obviously differences of opinion differences in political outlooks, and we always try and navigate those as best as we can. We have had in the past almost said no to groups that we feel are partisan in any way

because, as an organization we try and remain non-partisan in our politics.” By this she means political parties. However, far-left working groups that have a Marxist, anarchist or socialist ideologies, have been allowed in the past, which has caused some conflict—one example she gives is between a Marxist working group and a Free Tibet working group. Jing has noticed less groups being started, saying “...not many students are willing to start their own thing, they want to get involved in something that already exists.” Applications for new groups are taken once a year. Each working group receives a set amount of funding.

This PIRG has had many working groups, including climate change divestment, increasing the minimum wage, documentary film screenings, and community solidarity work. Past initiatives have included both a radio show, and a school newspaper. Both media initiatives were cancelled—newspaper due to lack of interest from PIRG members, and the radio show because of the general move away from politics by most campus radio stations.

Their PIRG is a registered non-profit organization, governed by a student board. They provide board training, bringing in an employee from another employer who is a member of the same labour union. Training is provided on finances, employee relations in a unionized environment, and consensus facilitation. I asked about other educational offerings, and they noted that some other PIRGs to their knowledge have more regular education programs, such as symposiums. Their PIRG is part of a larger, provincial network of PIRGs—Jing notes, “there's always been conflict within the network around the role it should play...between like having more decentralized network versus having something more centralized.” She feels the network has a couple of key functions. First is defending the PIRG from outside attacks, or as Jing puts it, “...to keep whatever PIRG is being attacked functioning.” Second is dealing with internal issues—Jing states, “I feel like in that sense, the network has been... trying to put out fires within the different PIRGS.” Examples she gives is boards that aren't functioning, and a local PIRG staff person causing various issues. She notes that in the past that the network would on occasion run provincial-wide campaigns.

This PIRG has butted heads many times with their host university. Violations contravening university policy include protesting without use of space permission, using

sound amplifying devices, and occupying university space as part of protests. With regards to the student union, there have been challenges as well. Jing says the student union is most of the time “left leaning politically,” and that “we're both kind of on the same side on certain issues, but we don't always work together on things,” adding that, “because we have been critical of the [student union] in the past.” Jing believes the PIRG should become more political, especially given the proximity of the university to high-needs neighbourhoods. Their PIRG has lots of relationships with community groups and labour unions. Jing states, “we don't go in with like our own agendas... it's more of like, what do you need from us and then seeing what kind of resources we can provide for them to be able to do the work.” Jing notes that their PIRG has had a relationship with the community that is “decades long” and that “...it takes a lot of time and effort to create those bonds of trust.” In one area, however, Jing believes the universities are better with administering student levies.

Jing notes the differences between local PIRGs who are subject to university administration administering levies versus student unions administering student levies, stating, “those PIRGs are very much at the mercy of like the friendliness that they have with the student unions.” All of the PIRGs that have faced defunding campaigns, both successful and unsuccessful, came from hostile student unions. She also notes that PIRGs have faced take-over attempts, both from the far-left (Marxist) and the right. She states, “there have been instances where we've had conservatives try and run for the board... with groups of conservatives that try and take over the board.” She notes that none have been completely successful and “...might be successful for a little while. But none that have been totally able to do it, completely.” They blame the high level of both external and internal conflict for “a high burnout rate within staff and the PIRG network.” She notes that it is rare for a PIRG to be able to solely focus on supporting social and environmental justice work, stating, “a lot of times it's us devoting a lot of time to putting out internal fires or external threats.” She notes that staff are “the ones that are dealing with a lot of these crises on a day-to-day basis in our workplaces.” Because of the high burnout, she noted that “most staff are only there three to four years at most.” I asked them about self-care, and she notes that “our collective agreement actually gives us two sick days a month which is, I mean, it's a lot compared to like many other workplaces...

we need to encourage is actually not just having them be sick days but actually having them be self-care days... because they've worked themselves to the point of being sick.” She believes activists in general should get use to the idea of “actually being ok with people taking some time away.” She believes staff are essential, stating “...it keeps the organization functioning” and “I think if you're running fully volunteer base you have to have a solid volunteer base, of people who have time to commit.” She continues, “It's getting harder and harder to find those people who can do that on a volunteer basis...I think that that speaks to like what's going on in wider society where tuition's going up, more students are having to work one or two part time jobs to be able to continue paying for their education; that more demands are being made on students' time.” Her passion for PIRGs led to her becoming a staff person, stating “one of the reasons I actually wanted to be a staff person at a PIRG was to actually give back to the organization because I felt like it actually did have a huge impact on me personally in terms of my own political outlook.” Looking to the future, Jing sees the PIRG as the potential for “diversifying where the funding comes.” This comes after provincial government attacks on student-organizations and levy fees.

Interview #13 – Matt (Student Food Initiative)

Matt was an undergraduate student at the time of his involvement in a food initiative. The food initiative was originally created out of the working group of the local PIRG that sought to remove the multi-national food service provider from campus. The PIRG provided meeting space, storage and start-up funding. The group originally started cooking out of a non-commercial kitchen it shared with another student organization, the campus women’s centre, that the latter group had access to. However, folks involved with the women’s centre became scared of losing their status, so that arrangement ceased. They found another kitchen controlled by a student organization at a nearby college affiliated with their university. Whenever they had kitchen issues or required more kitchen capacity, they used a commercial kitchen belong to the family of one of their members. However, that location was off campus and required bike carts for transportation. They later operated out of a kitchen in a nearby United Church congregation. The student union, who had an exclusive contract with a multi-national

food service company, was resistant to the idea of the initiative serving food, citing health and safety concerns such as needing food handlers certificates. Matt says the students involved felt this was hypocritical, stating, “I think that's with the Student Union Building, it's called the Student Union Building, and we felt like well we're students, we're providing a service for students, why can't we do that in the Student Union Building.” There was also a political dimension, with a campus libertarian group being “our biggest opposition outside of any admin people.” There were also difficulties with the university administration, including a dispute over a garden—the location they wanted was denied, and they were given a very distant location. Matt says of the relationship, it was “purely oppositional” and that their approach of “always asking for forgiveness instead of permission, that wasn't working super well.” When the garden space was taken away from them, Matt says that they held a theatrical protest—“we held a funeral for the garden... we took all the containers, kind of like we were pallbearers, and walked it... I like acted like I was reading a eulogy for the garden.” Matt notes how the absurdity and humour of it provided them closure and made it easier to move onto the next step.

They realized the needed to secure a student levy to do the things they wanted to achieve, such as “...to support farmers, do more, hire staff,” they decided that they had to become a student club. They developed a business plan, noting “we really had no idea what we were doing,” and they got their parents to review the plan. During campaign, a group of students ran a campaign against them, putting posters and social media posts up, and making buttons. Matt laughs, “they were pretty unsuccessful,” as students saw the “crazy good value” of paying \$2 dollars a year for receiving a free meal once a week. Matt noted of the group, “they would campaign against [our PIRG]⁶⁷¹ every year when the levy opt out period, and one of their campaigns was get your beer money back.” Matt notes the referendum passed, with around 75% in favour and 25% opposed. Matt says that there is a general move in Canadian universities towards making opting out easier, such as having it done online versus going in person.

Matt created the current operational name of the food initiative, noting the previous name was “functional but not fun.” He noted that he was inspired by other

⁶⁷¹ Name of PIRG omitted.

campus food initiatives that all had fun and catchy names. The student union eventually relented and provided space for the initiative. Matt started building a relationship with the multi-national food service provider, Sodexo, that the student union had a contract with. He notes "...it was really weird. Before I mean they were very much like trying to enforce their contract... they were putting pressure on the student union to not let us serve food there." He continues, "once we started building momentum and started working with the student union... they just saw the writing on the wall and they realized that if they didn't work with us they might lose the contract entirely." They started letting the food initiative use an industrial dishwasher they had and paid for students to get their food handlers certificates. Things were not always entirely smooth with the student union. The group was de-ratified for a period for an 'illegal' serving (before they got their space with the student union) and making alcoholic cider, with Matt noting that "...[we were] doing it outside without any permits or anything. Was maybe not the smartest." They appealed and eventually received their levy. He feels this situation resulted from a person with a strong personality, saying "he would do some things without really discussing it with the group which didn't have long term negative consequences but certainly raised tensions between us and the student union." He notes that the group had to tone down the politics and the "very negative tone" to make it more palatable to the student body, balking at the potential accusation he postulated that "we totally watered down our political message to get funding and serve a broader audience." Matt believes in meeting people where they are at, saying "I think one of the great things about serving food is that people like to eat food, and everyone likes to eat food no matter what political identity you have and we can start conversations over food that could lead places." I asked Matt how about how food is changing on campus, and he says, "I think Universities have realized that students really care about food and if they want to attract students, they need to have a good food service program."

Matt also worked with a student food initiative at another university that later closed. He noted a manager who was difficult to work with and health and safety issues with their kitchen space. His advice to those wishing to start a similar initiative was: "I think have fun, like it should be a fun thing that people enjoy doing, not just because life should be fun but because that's going to attract more people, and I think having a really

good atmosphere and creating inclusive spaces that people want to be in, that's a really good way to get people on your side, whether it's politically on your side or they want to donate their time or even money.” He notes of his involvement, “I really think it was a better education than any of my class learning.”

Interview #14 – Joan (Student Food Cooperative)

Joan is a recent alumnus who serves on the board of a student food cooperative at the small satellite campus of a university. She previously worked for them during her undergraduate program. The food cooperative started about ten years previously in a space that had previously been a student-run pub. A student levy was passed and after a couple of years they were allowed to use the old pub space. However, due to issues with a multi-national food service provider having an exclusive contract, they were unable to run the space as originally envisioned, as “some sort of bar that served hot food.” The model then changed to “space that is still run by students for students. We offer subsidized food which is at cost,” in addition to hosting a bi-weekly pub night. Unable to serve hot food, all the food is either packaged (dry and frozen), beverages or fresh produce. Joan says, “...all of the food is ethically sourced, and we try to work with smaller organizations or co-operatives.” The space operates on a trust payment system, with usually at least one coordinator in the space at all times. Joan states, “if we had a strict... traditional cashier kind of system where we prepare hot meals and then someone pays a set price then we would come into a lot more challenges with Aramark.”

Joan says “...there is definitely a desire to bring more food options ... for students that live on campus,” however, “to become a full-fledged like restaurant, or bar, I don't think [that] is the vision for the next few years at least.” She continues, “I think it would take a lot of administrative support because of the complexity of working around permits, a lot of our physical space isn't up to code so we would need to do major renovations in order to respect all the regulations.” As Joan says, the cooperative is “trying to focus more on its social mission.” Joan notes that the pub-nights are losing money due to a decline in attendance. She cited a decline in enrollment and cuts in student loans (resulting in students having to work more) as reasons for this. She also comments this when I asked about the environmental and social advocacy aspects of the organizing,

noting, "...a lot of people are willing to make small changes for example, be more sustainable individually so they're bringing reusable cups and straws and things like that. But at the same time they may be not willing or don't have the time or the energy to engage in more large-scale action. People, we post something maybe on social media, but if they have to come to something every single week then it's too much of a commitment. Like I said I think people are so busy now and so stressed out constantly." She says the cooperative "is very much left leaning," noting however, "we definitely do hold our social and environmental values to heart. But in terms of politics this is a space for everyone and we don't want to make people feel as though they don't belong."

The organization is legally registered as a cooperative, with a board of directors made up of students, university staff, alumni and professors. There are 7 paid student coordinators who are hired and trained each year, allowing the previous coordinators to voluntarily train the incoming ones. There is also a manual of tasks for each position. They are paid an honourarium set at an hourly rate for the hours they work. They all work 6-8 hours per week. She describes volunteer involvement as "sporadic," noting it gets worse over the exam period and the holiday break. Joan said that "not having paid staff has been sort of an issue... as a whole just been a challenge over time." She notes that having the coordinator positions "we kind of ensure that there's always a team that's held accountable and up to a certain standard." On occasion a coordinator has had to be fired. Joan remarks, "In the past we've had to let some people go because they weren't doing the work that was expected of them. Or they might like the attitude or values that went against the teams or the organization... We have biweekly meetings so that would be brought up there first, try and solve the issues, eventually the problem persists it's brought to the board, we send an official warning I guess to the coordinator. If there's still no chance then the coordinator is fired."

Joan notes of her educational experience with the cooperative: "It's probably been one of the most helpful, if I can say so, experiences I've had in University, because most of my learning at least in my program is very, very theoretical based, there's not much hands-on stuff... I learned how to make a budget and make sure we stick to it... [I've] gotten familiar with the workings of most organizations by having a board of directors and a team of coordinators."

“As a whole I don't think the University truly supports these organizations,” says Joan. She continues, “...we've always had an issue getting the support that we need when we want to implement large scale change... it's sort of frustrating dialogue where we try to put in changes that would benefit a lot of students and we're told no... it just feels like students aren't necessarily being prioritized.” The space requires extensive renovations according to Joan, “...renovations to the space are extremely expensive because the historical building because it's been poorly, like, there hasn't really been much upkeep, so now things are just in such a bad state that it would be extremely costly to renovate everything that needs to be done.” She notes, “...[we] will be forced to shut down because it's going to be impossible to operate in those conditions.” I asked what she thinks could be done to change this, and she said “I think by showing how our work has value and how it benefits the University and how it could be used for example for promotion like to increase enrollment.” She feels the space is really important, saying “I think the smaller campus, the more important it is to have those spaces,” and, “[it] creates a lot of opportunities for students to build relationships.” Joan believes there is no other space like it on campus, noting other students have told her after a flood resulted in the temporary closure of the space, “I don't know where to go on campus now, there's no space where I can just hang out and feel comfortable because it's either a studying environment, such as the library, or you're just hanging out in the hallways.” Of the student union, she notes, in the past “there was no support.” But now, the student union president implemented a roundtable of all student levy groups, which has helped create a dialogue.

Advice she would give to others aiming to start a similar initiative was, “I'd suggest patience, but more importantly with a group of really passionate people. I think a lot of young people nowadays are willing to work particularly hard to have certain things put into place.” She continues, “I would suggest also working with other organizations that might have a similar like governing structure or just other student organizations, non-governmental organizations, not for profits, charities etc. Because often they have a lot of knowledge and resources that might save you so much time and effort, you don't need to figure out everything on your own, you can always learn from others.”

Interview #15 – Michelle (Community Garden)

Michelle is a graduate student involved at a community garden at small Canadian university. She and another member secured practicums and jobs (though a research assistant position) with the garden, whereas in previous years they did not have such support. Michelle would work on average 4 hours a week, with up to 20 hours when there was a large event. There was one co-coordinator, and 4-6 regular volunteers. The season starts each September with recruitment, with planting winter greens and bulbs, and garden renovations occurring each fall. The biggest challenge is that the school semesters don't align with the gardening season. Michelle says, "...everybody's gone in the summer and the summer is the time when you want to do all of your gardening work, and the summer is the time when you get to see the fruits of your labour, it would be the time when there would be the most learning opportunities and the most really positive experiences for students engaging with gardening in the summer." She notes that April is a crucial month for gardening, but that students are busy with exams—she provides an anecdote, "our last event of the year it was freezing cold rain for four hours while we were trying to just get everything done, but that was the only time that all the students could meet, when they were actually done exams but they hadn't left yet for the summer; it's everything actually, the timing is a huge impact in the growing season." There are a lot fewer classes in the summer.

Michelle believes the garden is a source of experiential learning, stating that "it can be a hands-on learning opportunity. I think it can be a place of really creative potential for students... connecting with nature ... A place to connect with, you can grow your own food from good soil and this is how it works and other very hands on, active ways of learning." She said, "we're not like a farm, or even like another conventional allotment garden... we've never actually harvested vegetables from the garden, we grow them and we don't, and then everyone goes away for the summer and they kind of just stay there on the vine or maybe the odd person picks them... we're really a garden for, um, experimenting and demonstrating." She continues, "We'd like to one day maybe get there where we're demonstrating and then harvesting and then maybe even giving you know everyone who's in the garden club gets a share of whatever we produce. We all, we always like to keep a mix of things though, of vegetables and fruits and flowers and

ornamental.” Michelle says, “we're pretty much about low maintenance actually, one of the I think main facets of permaculture is that once you've set it up it's pretty low maintenance,” with the goal not being labour intensive way of gardening. She continues, “we're not an allotment model of community garden so there are different types of community gardens I think out there and allotments are something that you pay into every year and then you get your little patch and you can do whatever you want in that patch you can grow whatever you want and it's yours and nobody else can take from it. And then there are other models of community gardens where maybe everybody grows things together and then shares whatever's grown amongst themselves. And then this demonstration is, really the purpose of the garden is to teach people about gardening. And about, permaculture and biodiversity and soil health and so many other things.” There is no official harvest, and volunteers can pick what they like, and Michelle comments, “I'll take some home or make a stir fry or something but it's really just whoever is there working... has the opportunity to take something with them, and we kind of discourage people, unless they're going to help contribute to the garden, you don't get to take anything.” The garden is comprised of seven garden beds equal to about two backyards, and an edible forest (originally planted in 2008).

The garden was originally set up by students from horticultural program who received grant funding to start the garden and edible forest. According to Michelle, “a group of students championed this project and then brought it to facilities and brought it to the school and said we want to create a garden completely run by students.” The garden is a student club and receives a small budget from the student union, along with in-kind donations, and the occasional small grant (the largest of which in her tenure came from the university's sustainability committee). She notes that they “leveraged a lot from the community,” given the example of a local tree cutting service providing free assistance in removing some trees and chipping them into mulch for the garden. The group meets every 2-4 weeks. Michelle notes, “with the combination of all of our members being incredibly busy and burdened with all of their coursework, and people having jobs it was really hard to decide on a time to meet. And it was really difficult to actually get people to come out to work parties.”

As a site for education, Michelle sees it as “everybody's part of nature. And, I think it's like, whatever you are studying it's really important to learn about your place in nature and, and how your food is grown, learn about the importance of soil and learn about how to support pollinators and learn about the importance of biodiversity and learn about, like I think that it's like a human [thing]... every human should learn about this because we're part of it.” She believes that teaching permaculture is vitally important, as “it teaches the importance of creating healthy, healthy soil and then creating biodiversity... monoculture is part of the reason why climate change is happening, part of the reason why there's widespread use of pesticide and herbicide. All those really bad things.”

Michelle says, “[we] have a lot of problems with bunny rabbits on campus and deer, and other wildlife.” With ongoing projects like having to install a fence to solve this issue, she notes, “it’s a very small budget for a very big project.” The university is not involved in the garden, with Michelle commenting, “even though we're technically, a part of campus, and campus facilities, they don't have anything to do, like they're instructed, everybody who works for facilities is instructed to not even touch anything to do with the garden.” Michelle says, “we are championed by different people and different groups on campus at different times...and when that champion isn't present, the garden immediately falls into disarray.” She says that when she started the program in August of one year and noticed the garden, “it was completely disheveled, and it looked like maybe somebody had weeded it and they did what they could. For the most part it was like overgrown and kind of ugly...it looked like nobody was paying attention to it and no one was watering it.” And so that happens every couple years, it falls into disarray because there isn't a champion student,” so Michelle decided to champion the garden. She says, “it's really student led and, like, generally there aren't very many members or students willing to take it on cause it's a huge task for one student, and it generally has trouble maintaining membership because of the turnover every year, and because of the growing season.”

When asked about the future of the garden, Michelle says, “everybody has a different idea of what the garden needs,” and while they received a couple of grants, the research assistant position for the garden would be ending, with the faculty noting “it's probably coming to an end because we can't sustain that level of funding to it every single

year, going forward.” Michelle was concerned about “figuring out a way to make it more sustainable over time, like the structure, to structure it in a way, and to advocate for that restructuring.” She notes they don’t have time to participate in larger social change movements such as climate change divestment, stating, “we’re just trying to keep afloat ourselves, so we’re not pushing for larger scale political or policy change at the larger University level, yet.” She continues, “I think it’s like an unspoken part of what we do because we’re saying there’s an alternative way of being and behaving and we’re trying to teach that.” She brings it back to what she is learning in her class, noting, “we talk a lot about it in my classes... what is sustainable urban design, or what is a sustainable system? And you know we’re, like we are in a capitalistic system, like all of the actions of our society, almost all of them, contribute negatively to, like all of the most common and widespread actions of our day to day lives, are causing destruction and they have negative impacts.” She continues, “It feels like, I think it’s probably sustainability, any kind of environmental sustainability discussion, isn’t complete without acknowledging that like that capitalism is the antithesis to sustainability. And that, we’re, we’re still operating in a capitalistic way...it doesn’t feel like a closed loop system.” Continuing further, “What I’m getting at for real is that even the actions of the garden, that, even the actions that we do are meant to be outside of the system of capitalism, because we’re growing our own food from seeds that we got ourselves, harvested ourselves, making soil by capturing carbon from other dead things... we’re trying to close the loop of agriculture, of the agricultural production process, and so everything kind of feeds into itself, nothing is wasted, everything is used.” When asked what advice she’d give to others aiming to start a similar initiative, she replied, “I guess probably get a levy (laughs)... anything in the built environment that you’re making, think about how long you want it to last and how you want it to maintain itself over time. Cause you could act really quickly and create a community garden as soon as you secure a space. But, then, knowing how to maintain that over time and how to increase and also being aware of the constraints, like the growing season.” She continues, “if I could go back in time to 2008 and help on the initial building of the community garden here on campus there are quite a few things that I would have said like, “hey, 10, 12 years in the future... who do you think will be part of this and do you think the Horticulture program will still even be part of it, do you think,

how do you think it's gonna be funded, how will the capital, how will the infrastructure be maintained, will there be a capital budget? Are you going to have some money set aside for emergency infrastructure (laughs) damage, or and also really basic things like how much sunlight do you get in this area cause that's actually something we struggle with. We don't get enough sunlight.” She concludes, “leverage all of the knowledge in your university. Of all the people in any given university, someone would be knowledgeable about that and could maybe offer their expertise.”

Interview #16 – Alexandra (Student Food Organization)

Alexandra is part of a student food organization that operates multiple initiatives, with 25 board members and between 150-200 volunteers. Everyone is a volunteer. Users of the space pay a membership fee. Alexandra says, “Since we're going on a co-op model, anyone is allowed in the space, but if you want the discount or perks, then you just volunteer your time, so most of our volunteers get put on to our official list but our constitution, just because of how many people we have to run, our constitution says that an active member is someone who has volunteered for 4 terms, and that's only because otherwise it would be like nearly impossible for us to make quorum because... some people will volunteer for a couple weeks and then they don't show up again, and so when it comes to our elections, our elections are held around exam time and we can't get like 200 people out for that. So we have the people who have been with the organization like in a dedicated sense, and that's still a solid number of people, but since our members aren't registered in the same way as other organizations and the people who come and don't volunteer and just use our services aren't registered, sometimes they think that “oh well there are only 20 people on the board and so [the organization]⁶⁷² is only for those, only serves those 20 people. Anyone can volunteer.” Alexandra notes a retired professor as one of their longest volunteers. She notes that only students should be on the executive, stating “I think if the [student union] found out that say half of our board weren't students or however many, they would be really upset because it's supposed to be a student club.”

Besides the normal board roles, each food initiative has two or more directors.

⁶⁷² Organization name omitted.

Initiatives include two cafes (each with a kitchen, café and operations manager respectively), a PWYC (pay-what-you-can) meal program, a bulk-buying program (including a products and distribution manager), a weekly CSA (community supported agriculture) program that sources primarily from a university teaching farm. The programs are complex, having to schedule weekly shifts, meal preparation, managing the finances of multiple initiatives, arranging deliveries, packing, organizing and dividing. All board members are required to participate in shifts at both cafes. They operate all their initiatives out of their two café spaces, with most operating out of the larger of the two spaces. Alexandra notes that moving items can sometimes be a hassle, “it's still like a 10-15 minute walk from one side to the other...so we're kinda lugging stuff across campus every so often.” The organization is registered as a student organization under the student union. The organization started in the mid-1990s, got permanent space in 2004, and secured a student levy in 2018. The levy was secured alongside three other food initiatives on campus that ran a collective levy referendum. They noted the student union did not endorse their levy, stating “It's not that they didn't support it, it's that they didn't... in the student newspaper there was this article where they were talking about all the ones they were promoting, and they were directly in favour of all of them except for that one. I can't really speculate as to why. We all had our, we all had our opinions, we thought maybe it was because we're under-cutting some of their bigger food services? Because you know the Student Union Building has all of the fast-food joints, owned and operated by the [student union].” The organization has had other issues with the student union, such as equipment and renovations that were promised but never delivered. The student union also delayed in providing them space for over a year. She says, “...the [student union] opened a vegetarian vegan place and they were marketing it in the exact same way that [the organization] was, but it was a bit disingenuous because it's a for-profit business to make money for the [student union] to offset some of their other costs. The foods weren't as good, and it wasn't having a student impact, and so to say that you're delaying our space but you're going to essentially build what we were trying to do, and make money off of it, had people pretty angry.” She comments, “It gets tricky and then since there's such turnover between the student positions in the [student union], one year you can have someone who's really supportive, and then the next year someone comes in who

has never even heard of you, and it's hard to get on their radar..." The levy amount is about \$6000 per year. Some initiatives generate income, while others require a subsidy. The meals by donation program generates the most income, while the community-supported agriculture generates the least. The organization must fundraise for equipment in their new space. The organization has also donated to First Nations environmental causes. One of their café spaces loses money because they must pay rent for the space. However, their other space is free and located in the student union building.

Space has been a reoccurring issue for the organization, as they have both lost spaces, and had to temporarily vacate space due to renovations—renovations which often take more than a year. This led to operational difficulties, and having to temporarily share facilities with others, such as the kitchen of a campus pub. Alexandra says, the student union "...didn't want us to allow people under 19 into the space, which was quite an issue for us because our issue was we don't want to turn anyone away, we want to have the most inclusive community as possible and it's hard if you're serving a by-donation meal and then you're telling people that they have to be 19 plus to come to it. It's a little weird." The reduction of program spaces led to a reduction in programs, which resulted in the need for less volunteers, according to Alexandra, "so to go one year from turning people away to the next year opening up a new space and needing almost double the amount of people, it was quite a recruitment effort."

I asked her if the organization ever thought about moving towards a paid-staffing model. Alexandra notes, "The one that we've always talked about is bringing in either, like an accountant or bookkeeper... on the one hand it would bring a lot of stability to the organization, but the fear was that it would change the culture of it a bit, because people involved with [the organization] are so proud that it's entirely student driven, it's entirely grassroots, and that if you bring in like a single paid position without paying everybody, then it almost, the fear is that it would bring in a bit of unbalance..." She continues, "I think the main conversation starts is that everyone wants everyone to be adequately compensated. But, the fear is that how do we compensate people without changing the delivery of our services, because it's, we don't want to raise our prices... we want to work to get a levy to lower our prices, and I think that would probably be the thing if we got more money, we would want to lower, we would want to offer our food

below cost.” She notes that, “it’s a constant struggle, because I know last year, it was my final year of University, I had my practicum, and I was working, but I was doing like typically 40 hours a week at [the organization], completely unpaid, and I was not the only person who was putting in that much time. So of course I want it to be paid and if I mean, I was working 40 hours anywhere else doing like managing essentially a franchise, I would be probably paid fairly well, but it, I would never have chosen to do something like that over [the organization] because I’ve found that [the organization’s] impact is higher.” She also notes that “we would want to pay people living wage, but a living wage in [the city] is over 20 dollars an hour, and if we have 20 board members and 200 volunteers, we would need so much money to compensate people fairly.” Given the organization has had issues with the student union, I asked about separation. Alexandra says, “People have talked about it, but I think if we separated from the [student union] we would probably lose the [student union] space, or that would be the fear at the very least.” She continues, “...we’ve talked about non-profit status in the past, and the only reason that we haven’t done it is, the book keeping that you need to do to maintain non-profit status would be impossible to maintain with such turnover... we’ve talked about bringing someone in as a permanent position, like if we had someone who was in charge of the accounting and the administration and that kind of thing, or just the bookkeeping, then they could be, their mandate could be to oversee the non-profit status. But, ya, it would be great because there’s so many grants, and there’s often times that we get contacted for a grant, and they’re like ‘we think you’d be the perfect fit for this’ and then we looked at it and it’s only for people with officially non-profit status.”

I asked about the organization’s approach to food safety. Alexandra says, “all board members are required to have food safe level 1.” She notes, “It’s also a little bit easier for us to comply with food regulations because after extensive conversations over the last few years we’ve shifted to pretty much an entirely vegan menu... the only animal product that we offer is honey.” She adds, “[We have] posters all over the kitchens with all of the food safety regulations.” They have had issues with the health inspectors, noting “the health inspector came in and he just kept saying, you’re not allowed to have people bring in their own containers for coffee, you’re not allowed to have people bring in their own containers for food.” She notes another example of kombucha requiring a 15-

page food safety plan being created. Alexandra says, “You can't of course accept a container that's dirty you can't accept a container that's cracked, you can't, if something looks dirty, we put it through our dishwasher. Like we're not gonna, cause all these food safety regulations are essentially liability regulations cause they just don't want to be sued and the [student union] doesn't want to be sued. Since we're a subsidiary of them it would probably fall on them.” With health inspectors, she noted, “our response to most of those have just been to tell them why we're going to do it anyways.”

I asked Alexandra about the social and environmental commitments of the organization. She says, “Well that's just like the basic mandate of the organization, right, and so it's, that's been the conversation in the past two [years], when people have thought of us as a vegan club, but we're not a vegan club we're a sustainability club, but our sustainability is as inclusive as possible, so we're looking at all factors whether it's like social sustainability and social cohesion, whether it's just caring for the environment and everything that's living on it, and both the workers who are growing your food and then making, seeing food as a human right and something that shouldn't be profit-driven, for us like we see, and even [if] you look at throughout history, so much learning happens around food, so much culture is based around food. This is like the oft cited example, but the Black Panthers weren't a real threat until they started serving free food cause, you can't think about a revolution if you're going hungry. We were trying to ground our things in making sure people have the foundation to push for the future that they want, and you can't think about anything but survival if you're going hungry.” She continues, “...people have criticized us for thinking we're a vegan club and not being strong enough to animal rights activists, but that's not our goal, our goal is to respect Indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction over their foods and their food practices... who are we to tell indigenous people that they don't have a right to their food when it's not indigenous hunting practices that have depleted fish stocks or have killed the bison, it's settlers who have come in and fundamentally altered the food system and brought profit into it and then excluded people from it...”

Interview #17 – Taha (PIRG)

Taha is a long-term participant in PIRGs, serving on the board of directors for one PIRG and working for another PIRG. The PIRG he worked for had a levy at the time of around \$300,000 per year. The PIRG Taha worked for was constantly under attack. He describes a situation where a working group held an event with the word 'cunt' in the title, and this offended people in the university and student union. Believing this to be a free speech issue, the PIRG refused to back down. This made enemies in the student union who would then use their power to evict the PIRG from the student union building and run a defunding referendum against the PIRG. Taha said "...the University Administration had sort of devolved administrative control of the student centre to the union, and one of their first decisions was to evict [the PIRG] and it was sort of a revenge type thing, where they had an axe to grind, and they had control of the building and they could..." I asked Taha if he thought it might have been more than just that. Taha says, "my understanding of the way that campus politics plays out is that most student unions on Ontario campuses have a sort of informal relationship to a political party, whether it's the New Democrats, the Liberal or the Conservative party, where students that are elected into student government or student leadership positions, sort of have a career trajectory if they want to go into politics through that process... there's an understanding that the student union [at this university] is connected with the Liberal party. So fairly mainstream, fairly center-right... long term career staff [of the student union] really made a lot of decisions about what was acceptable and what wasn't in terms of the programming, and I think they felt that we were redundant..."

Taha says of the staff people, "...they had a staff situation where, we're talking about staff that have been working for like 25 years, who are in their 50s maybe, who are essentially running, so these are the staff that are training the executives and training the board, that are making, that are calling a lot of the shots and making the decisions for the student union, and saw the role of the student union as essentially a service provider..." He continues, "...they very clearly have disdain for the idea of student political engagement on campus or otherwise... felt like we made their jobs harder, you know we promoted this idea of student political engagement in a way that they did not believe in, from what I could gather, and also that we encouraged students to be politically engaged within their union and to be active members and to demand more from their student

union, which was at odds with how they saw their role.” After they were evicted from the student centre, the PIRG had to pay more in rent elsewhere on campus.

Taha says after he left, the PIRG was defunded. He describes the events this way: “one of [the PIRG’s] action groups was a Palestinian solidarity group, and they had organized, you know, done a ton of outreach, petitioning, and they collected like 2500 signatures, or 3000 signatures, to hold a referendum on the question of whether the University should be partnering with Israeli Universities who were themselves involved in military research, and they had identified 5 universities, and so they were having this BDS conversation on campus. And they narrowly lost that referendum that they organized. And, it was kind of the first time in a long long time that there had been an issue-based referendum that was polling the student body on this question, and I think that my understanding is that there were certain like large and well-funded Israel lobby organizations like CIJA, the Center for Israel and Jewish Affairs, which sent organizers to the campus to participate in that, to campaign against it, and that after that referendum they organized with pre-existing sort of conservative students on campus to try to defund the PIRG itself.” He continues, “the conservative base at [the university], the alt-right, student sentiment, was all located online. On Reddit, on forums, and they were able to organize very strongly online. And the referendum campaign, like the voting, happens online. They used social media very strongly... [our PIRG] was sort of blindsided by sort of having this entire new wave of reactionary politics that was popping up everywhere in the world, and popping up on campuses...”. The right-leaning students successfully defunded the PIRG with over 80% voting in favour of removing the levy. Taha stated: “My understanding is that they went to the student union’s AGM and they called for a referendum at the AGM, won a vote there, and conducted a successful referendum to eliminate the levy.” Taha states, “There is very likely, I don’t have any evidence but I suspect there was the involvement of external organizations, possibly funding and definitely training students to campaign.” He continues, “it’s been sort of a multi-generational sort of goal for conservative, I mean capital C conservative party-oriented partisan students to sort of earn their way in their political circles by trying to defund progressive or radical student organizations, and so in 2005 they tried with [our PIRG], and in 2009 they tried with the radio station and succeeded with that one, and they try,

successive generations try, on different campuses across the province. They did have training dedicated to it. Many of the students involved in those efforts go on to become party staffers, so the party does have a vested interest in eliminating organizations like this, and they frame it as a cost-saving measure...”

I asked Taha to elaborate on if he thought the PIRG was perceived as too radical. Taha states “[Our PIRG] was radical. And for people who are not radical, radicalism is too far. And, it is common for PIRGs I think because for people who are not on the left the issues are seen as partisan issues, even though the issues actually tend to be pretty blanket critical of all political parties, and focus on sort of grassroots and community activism as opposed to electoral or parliamentary engagement, and I think that it's valuable to have organizations and spaces on campus that are pushing a radical analysis. I also think that there is a valid question about whether or not there should be a levy that every student pays into for an organization that's promoting a set of values that not every student holds. Even if I think that those values are important myself.”

He believes PIRG educational philosophy is “...people, students, or young activists learn to do activism by actively participating it, and then, participating in it, and then reflecting on the processes and the actions that they're doing... whether it's, you know, organizing a protest or a campaign, or whether it's being part of meetings or board of directors... the work was complex, involved social skills, involved decision making, so learning by doing in that sense is getting in the muck of it, making mistakes, learning lessons, having feedback, getting feedback, debriefing, and having support from the organization through that process.” Taha believes the experiential education that PIRGs do is not ‘marketable’ to the post-secondary institution: “we were offering experiential education, experiential learning processes that focussed on community engagement or non-professionalized activism, in a way that just completely missed, or disconnected from the ways that the University itself conceptualized experiential education as being part of its curriculum... their version of experiential education is getting students jobs, and connecting them with potential employers that are related to their fields of study...” The PIRG Taha worked for provided board training on consensus decision making, meeting facilitation, and legal obligations of being an organization and a unionized workplace. I asked Taha about if PIRG members continue in activism after they

graduate. Taha says, “I do think that most of those involved in PIRGs tend to be politically committed individuals after their time on campus.”

Taha states, “Volunteer students running the board of directors... good idea on paper but a nightmare in practice, so your question is ‘a lot of student organizations are having similar issues with board participation why do you think this is?’ So, I mentioned the nature of the 21st century neo-liberal campus, one that puts students in very stressful financial and workload situations, and I think that those two aspects really prevent sustained in-depth community engagement for a lot of students. Whether that's on-campus or in the community in general. And the board of directors for small organizations requires quite a level of commitment. PIRGs in specific have, tend to have what they think of as activist boards instead of administrative boards, where they want the board of directors volunteers engaged in running the organization but also engaged in doing the actual activism, supporting staff with events, reaching out to students, maybe organizing campaigns, and so there's a lot of overlap there, between what the expectations are for board members as administration vs as activists. And it can be quite over ambitious to expect some student volunteers are going to have that kind of time and space in their lives to dedicate, but I also think that it's a structural issue that students that are coming into this position, whether they're 19 years old, 24 years old, and it's their first time being part of an organization like this, it's their first time being on a board, they have no idea what they're doing.” Taha continues, “...very frequently staff would have an unwritten set of expectations that they would be responsible for mentoring and training the board in how to do their job which creates a very strange dynamic because technically the board are supposed to be overseeing staff and staff are supposed to be accountable to the board for their work performance. And, and in practice that relationship just doesn't work if staff are responsible for mentoring and training the board in how to be an employer, it creates opportunities for abuse, unaccountability, and it creates organizations that are sort of vulnerable to clique politics, and my sense is that something that these organizations could benefit from is having alumni or experienced non-profit directors be participants on these boards, instead of having completely new unexperienced, unpracticed students kind of stepping into these roles as learning opportunities, because there's an argument to be made that the board of directors should be a leadership position

not a learning position...” He continues, “...the expectations of new board members and new staff members are different, but they also, what I have found is these organizations tend to have on paper sets of responsibilities, delineated board roles and staff roles, but underneath what's on paper, there's a whole other set of unspoken or informal expectations about what board can or should be doing and what staff can or should be doing,”

He describes the working environment as “...the structural dysfunctionality of the PIRGs with respect to having a volunteer student board, inexperienced leaders, and what it creates is an environment, it creates a work environment that is unstable, unsupportive, very stressful, and unpredictable, and prone to conflict, prone to internal conflict... the conflict isn't healthy conflict, it's personal interpersonal, it's gossiping back-talk...” He continues “...it can lead to being over-ambitious, it can lead to feeling the sense of overwhelm, with what needs to happen vs what the actual resources of these small non-profit or levy organizations are. You know like an organization with 2 or 3 staff people cannot engage or organize its campus, let alone a city community or anything like that... staff, they were consistently expected to be doing a hell of a lot more than the volunteers. But even the volunteers were over committed, and they were stressed out about their studies, they were stressed out about finances, and about the fact they were putting so much time into unpaid work, unpaid community work, that like doesn't necessarily fit on a resume. And, I mean the idea of burnout, the relationship between this on-campus activist culture and burnout, the sustainability of political engagement is like, really complicated.” He describes the neo-liberalization of education as a big problem, stating, “...the commodification of education is such a large phenomenon across North America that it is very difficult to resist and push back against this from a local, one-campus-in-isolation vantage point.” He sees the Maple Spring Quebec student protest movement as a source of hope. He says, “I'm not saying that PIRGs should be doing that because they're not resourced and positioned to do it. But, [I'm] thinking about the way that we can restructure what participation in student unions look like in Ontario, so that large percentages of students are engaged and participating, and demanding changes. In a way, that the social fabric of Quebec has been based on this sense of active citizen engagement and participation over several successive generations, and which has led to a stronger

ability to resist the commodification of education. And the idea that it's a user pay system instead of a social fabric, a social net of the public good." He continues, "...the current ecosystem in terms of the Canadian Federation of Students, for example, or the other, you know student union network bodies, are very hostile to that, and are preventing meaningful development of participatory democracy among student organizations." I asked Taha about neo-liberalism as it relates to STEM. He says, "I remember a conversation with one of our members, a student member who was a PhD student in engineering, who was an international student from Iran, and was saying that in certain countries like his country, the STEM fields are some of the most politically active in the country. And, that is just weird and not the same in Ontario, or in Canada or in North America that these fields are a-political or de-politicized or reactionary and conservative, and I do [think], you know who they are, it is very male dominated. Across the board, across all Universities... I think the University is trying to achieve 17% or 19% female enrollment ratio. And like, you know, they're like patting themselves on the back for an increase of 1 or 2% at this rate."

I asked Taha about working groups. He says, "It really really depends, from campus to campus. And from working group to working group." He said of the PIRG he was involved with, "...working groups were really very independent from the PIRG, and the relation was essentially one of funding... they would get access to like room booking on campus and maybe 500 dollars in funding for the year." Taha describes some working groups as community and social movement organizations that had a relationship with the PIRG so they could book free space on campus. Taha says, "staff at the PIRGs are always overworked, so one of the areas that historically I notice that they would let run independently is working groups. Which meant often that the working groups were not necessarily supported enough or effective enough to accomplish their goals, especially with high turnover...". I asked Taha if he felt those involved with working groups understand the PIRG model. He says, "Often no. Again, this is something we tried to develop when I was a staff person, where... me personally having a stronger relationship with working groups, I would more often have opportunities to explain the working of the PIRG and what the organization was. Often there was a huge disconnect between the people working in the working groups and the staff of the organization and the board."

He describes efforts to educate other working groups about what each other did and invite them to the events of each other to create “a shared sense of community,” but he describes it as an “uphill battle” and that it poses “very real risk of oversaturating schedules” if folks are encouraged to support the events of other working groups. Taha says, “[What] I really believed in was that the working group model I think works best when it has a very clear smart goal, you know the acronym ‘SMART’, where it has a concrete task.” He describes university climate change divestment campaigns as an example with a clear goal, that is local and achievable. He also says university timelines create added difficulty, with students busy during exam periods, gone for the summer, and leaving the university after 3-4 years. He says, “You know you're looking at 10-12 weeks of actual engaged time... the idea of having a very focused campaign goal or project that is consistent from semester to semester or academic year to academic year, is very, very difficult to actually implement.”

I asked about the relationship PIRGs have with community organizations. Taha says, “PIRGs often would hire staff who have pre-existing relationships with community organizations, or pre-existing experience working in social movements, and so, the staff would bring their networks into the PIRG.” He continues, “I know that another dynamic, another aspect of it is that PIRGs have often positioned themselves, or been positioned by community organizations as funding bodies... [and] often gateways to community organizations for campus space access to host events or talks.” Like other PIRGs, former working groups have gone onto become organizations in the community, such as the local community DIY bike centre.

Taha had comments about the Ontario PIRG network. He describes the difference between the American and Canadian PIRG models: “...at some point in the mid-70s the OPIRG, the Ontario PIRG chapters that had formed into a network, had an internal debate where they moved away from the model that the American PIRGs went in, which was that public policy, electoral politics lobbying sort of approach to engagement, and the Ontario network focussed fairly intentionally on grassroots—support for grassroots community organizing. And activism. As you know, focus more on protests, and on building alternatives and that sort of thing. I do think that the OPIRG network has struggled over its history to be effective.” OPIRG provides equalization payments to

PIRGs that are defunded or have a lower operating budget. This has helped some PIRGs continue, allowing them time to find new sources of funding or pass a levy funding referendum. Taha describes the struggle between the original vision and reality: “Part of the vision of the OPIRG network was to take the kind of very localized activism and project work that each chapter did on its own campus and create a network of scale so they could focus on provincial issues or, you know, provincial campaigns, coordinate speaking tours and things like that across the province, and none of that really ever materialized. Partly because the OPIRG network body itself never had the resources and was sort of limited to administrative tasks, and there were never people dedicated to building that network capacity.”

I asked Taha if he felt there was a model that could work for the PIRG. He says, “an ideal one would have staff who were able to dedicate their time to really, really doing in depth training and really focussing on the experiential education of participating in working groups and activism, of building meaningful campaigns and projects that have tangible outcomes, and that are like building a culture and a climate where sustained and active politicized participation in campus life was being fostered and was being promoted in ways that are healthy and that essentially attracts a vibrant community and is able to not necessarily direct, you know, the culture of campus, but really shape the campus and be a powerful gateway for students to interact with and join social movements. I do feel like social movements need to be stronger, like the actual ecosystem that PIRGs would exist in, both on campus and off, itself needs to be stronger for a PIRG to have a functional role in that way. But, definitely I think that PIRGs are stronger, or student organizations are stronger when students are not broke, and in debt and completely up to their eyes and ears in academics. Where there is space for them to be participating in campus life outside of the classroom.” I asked Taha if he had any advice for others. He says, “I don't think that it's necessarily the best model to be starting a levy group... I think that we need to be looking at how do we create larger participatory democratic institutions, which means revitalizing student unions perhaps, or revitalizing existing mechanisms, or creating new ones that are based on mass participation, and not on an overworked set of staff or an overworked set of board volunteers who are operating in a bubble.”

Interview #18 – Kate (Student Environmental Organization)

Kate is an alumnus who currently works as staff person with a student environmental organization. Kate was previously involved in the organization as a board member during her undergraduate program. Kate is one of three full-time staff members. Eight students are also hired for part-time positions each year from September to April, and receive job training in public engagement, public speaking, and facilitation. They also have one part-time coordinator that is a community-member due to their expertise. They have about 150 volunteers a year. They are governed by an all-student board of directors that meets once a month. The organization is a registered non-profit organization and is primarily funded through undergraduate and graduate student levies facilitated through the respective student unions. Students can opt-out of the levies in-person. Kate remarked, "... [it] hasn't happened for a while, but a year ago someone opted out, and they had to submit paperwork, and I wrote them a cheque for three dollars." They have a couple offices and storage at the main campus, which is provided rent free, along with community gardens on campus. The organization has multiple initiatives across three campuses, including community gardens, food rescue (distributing imperfect and discarded produce), cooking classes, a sustainability career fair, and funding for green projects, in addition to hosting events and workshops. Unlike a lot of other student organizations that allow community members and alumni to access programs, most programs and events are limited to current students of the university.

When I asked about the complexity of the organization, Kate says, "There's definitely (laughs), definite complexity, sometimes I think we do too much (laughs) because there's so much opportunity, so we're excited about so many things... something I'm reflecting on a lot this year is we can't just continue to grow without being like really strategic and thoughtful about it." She continues, "I mean the organization has always done multiple things, so I can't really compare it with an organization that just runs a garden, for example, I can't imagine, I don't know what we would do all day." Kate went into details about the different initiatives. The cooking classes are held monthly at the main campus, and occasionally at the satellite campuses. One issue is one of the satellite campuses does not have kitchen facilities they can access. The community gardens hosts

work sessions once weekly, respectively at the main and one of the satellite campuses. The food rescue program is the result of a partnership with an on-campus grocery store they had a pre-existing relationship with (purchasing discounted food from them for their cooking classes). She says of the initiative, “we have volunteers that drop off 2 large Rubbermaid bins, to the produce section, and they know where to drop it off in the doors, and the [grocery store’s] staff knows to fill it up with produce that they’re taking off the shelves. Sometimes it’s just that they have too much of something, say apples in the fall when they’re seasonal, so they’re perfectly good. Sometimes they’re taking them off the shelves cause they’re getting like a little bit soft or close to their expiration date, so it’s usually a range of fruit and veg at different stages of getting old. But nothing, you know, gross...” She continues, “volunteers go over with a cart, put the bins on the cart, they also have a table and stuff with them, and then wheel it over to one spot on the campus where we set up a table and basically just hand out produce. We always weigh it before we hand it out so we’re keeping track of how much we’re giving out over the year and over several years. And then ya, it’s just free. We have a donation jar but usually, people just donate if they’re kind of purchasing a tote, we have some [organization] tote bags, we just say 5\$ donation so that’s usually what the donations are for.” They table twice a week during the school year and once a week in the summer. Leftover items are left in the campus women’s centre fridge for people to take. Career fairs occur each semester.

Kate describes their mission as: “to empower students to become sustainability leaders, to become changemakers...” Kate continues, “Through attending and volunteering and participating in our programming and events, they’re learning about different facets of sustainability.” The organization was founded by the current director of sustainability at the campus. The organization is supported by the university and the sustainability office, with whom they hold monthly meetings with; Kate describes the meetings as “...to touch base on what each office is doing and where we might support each other. In the past we’ve run a program together...” Kate describes the relationship “...it is kind of a unique special relationship, I think because [the organization founder], who was kind of the originator of everything, is still around.” The advice Kate gives for those trying to build a stronger relationship with their university is to “...try and be familiar with [the university’s] strategic plan and their sustainability side of their strategic

plan, and knowing what their priorities are, so when you're, you know, setting up a meeting with the president of the University or someone else that you want to build a relationship with, you can make a case for why the work that you're doing is in alignment with the University's goals...". She continues, "...the University admin always isn't too fond of groups that are super advocacy-based and like ra-ra-ra, [we're] anti-admin because you're doing this wrong, so we just, like even with divestment, we chose to use the framing "responsible investment" or frame it in a more positive way, and some people wouldn't necessarily agree with that approach, but we try and, ya, we try and approach things from a pretty non-adversary way, and do change-making in a way that aligns with the University..." She concludes, "I think [it is important] to take the time just to build relationships with other individuals and groups on campus, and take the time to do an environmental scan of what already exists, so rather than trying to repeat something that perhaps already exists on campus, maybe potentially collaborate or grow what already exists, or finding what the niche is, because even at [the university] there are so many different Sustainability related things going on, that aren't necessarily all connected to [the organization]..."

Interview #19 – Ernestine (Student-Run Café)

Ernestine is a staff person with a popular student-owned café at a medium-sized university. The café is weekdays, but only open when classes and exams are in session between September and April. The café has four (non-student) full time staff and twelve part-time student staff, with between 30-60 people volunteering in a given year. They occasionally also take on student academic placements. The café serves about 200 people per day. The café was impacted by the student-choice initiative, which reduced the levy fee they received by 26% during that period. Their levy is \$6.60 per student and they receive about \$60,000 annually, in addition to approximately \$75,000 in income from the café and \$12,000 from catering. The café has a main space, with a secondary kitchen elsewhere in the same building. Both spaces are rent-free and utility-free, saving the café money. Student levies at their university are the responsibility of the university. However, to obtain a levy goes through the student union, to hold a referendum and requires the collection of signatures. Ernestine notes, "Our student union, is able, and has in the past,

cancelled scheduled referendums.” I asked Ernestine why so many student organizations at their school have student levies, and she says: “I think as a liberal arts institution, and a fairly small one, I think that we are able to maintain a community mindedness... there does seem to be an overwhelming support for levy groups. It's really great.”

Ernestine describes the onboarding process as follows: “Orientations are about an hour, and they happen collectively so you're in a group of maybe five or more volunteers who are interested. You would get a full explanation of the mandate of the [the organization]⁶⁷³ by our outreach coordinator, and she would take you on a tour of our kitchen spaces and our cafe spaces and talk about, sort of, the expectations and daily duties that are involved in keeping those spaces tidy. You would be introduced to our head cooks, who are both non-student full time staff members, and then sort of thrown into the thick of it after that one, one and a half hour orientation, you would show up for a shift, and ya, from there you would be instructed by typically one of our non-student staff members but we do have a couple of student staff that are real shining stars that we do trust to train new volunteers.”

The café is more than just a café, Ernestine says: “...our educational programming, and certainly the volunteer programming that we have, that's beyond what a typical cafe would offer. So we see ourselves as an educational group, so we provide opportunities for folks to learn how kitchens work, learn more about food production and food preparation, more about vegetarian cooking, we host at least one workshop every single week of the school year, and that, it's quite popular, among students and community members to attend, and topics range from anything related to DIY, making your own stuff, to cooking, to social justice, to environmentalism, so in that way we're more than just a food provider.” The café host workshops once a week, and occasionally twice a week. The café also provides opportunities for skillsharing. Ernestine says, “Through our workshop programming we invite all sorts of members of the community to share skills, whether that's how to make soap, how to sew, how to knit, how to mend clothing. We try to attract workshop presenters who have a skill that is fairly unique or not necessarily common among the student age range so we try to educate and skillshare in that way. There's a certain amount of skill sharing just in the everyday workings of the

⁶⁷³ Organization name omitted.

café. By inviting volunteers without any cooking experience into the café, we're sharing some basic cooking experience with them.”

I asked Ernestine about the importance of food education in today's society; she said, “I think that as a society we are moving further and further away from being aware of where our food comes from, who grows it, how much it costs to grow, how to prepare it. Especially among young people, cooking skills are declining, our knowledge around our food systems is declining, we're not connected in the same way as when more of our community members were farmers and we got food locally, so we want to make an effort to speak for our local farmers that are still in operation, and keep those local systems alive.” She continues, “...climate change has ramifications for every aspect of how we live, so it changes the way we grow food, it changes how much money it costs to grow food. Food production in general is reliant heavily on fossil fuels which of course are tied to our climate.”

The café is a source of experiential education for students, with many service learning and courses taking place in collaboration with the café. The café is assisted by a community-based research centre at the university that helps to facilitate such projects. The café tries to source ethically and locally where possible. Ernestine says, “We do spend more than a typical commercial establishment on our food, we do source primarily organic, primarily local, when we can, so we buy from the farmers' market every week and from local producers which does end up being more expensive. Buying prepared products like oil and vinegar and flour at organic rates is pretty pricy, so it's challenging financially, it's challenging to find folks who are offering those products. But we have found really reliable producers that work for us so it seems to be working so far.” The café has a partnership with a community garden on-campus that is also a registered student levy group that receives funding. The community garden donates $\frac{3}{4}$ of the produce grown to the café.

Interview #20 – Vlad (PIRG)

Vlad is a working professional who was involved with the Ontario PIRG movement in the 1980s and 1990s. I met with Vlad to get a better understanding of how the Canadian PIRG movement has changed between that time and now. The PIRG Vlad

was involved with was first initiated through a graduate student levy referendum. Vlad mentions when they sought an undergraduate referendum, it did not pass initially due to irregularities. Vlad states, "There was an irregularity in the scrutineering, reviewing the ballots, there were some things that went wrong in the student council election, so they had to redo it. I don't know if it was that much of a scandal, but some big mistake was made which nullified or made any kind of referendums or votes that were had, made them null and void basically, so they had to redo it. And so, what happened was, we had spent a long time, about a year and a half, brought Ralph Nader up to speak in Convocation Hall, had a lot of big high visibility campaigns that were going on for the previous two years, so we were like well-known on campus. And we went to the [name omitted] campus and [name omitted] campus, we did a lot of work. We were very organized." He continues, "...we were like a machine, we visited all the student unions, presented to them, got endorsements from a lot of them... all the big student unions, the various colleges..." Vlad mentions that a bunch of them got funding for youth summer jobs which allowed them to run high-profile campaigns, such as pedestrianizing the major street through campus, making on-campus cafeterias more environmentally friendly, banning pesticide use from campus, and hosting an environmental debate for all the mayoral candidates in the local municipal election.

Vlad says of the levy campaign, "Yeah, we kind of described ourselves as a social change organization. When we were putting a referendum, I think our poster said 'small change for big change.'" Vlad says of the levy, "...one of the strengths of OPIRG was obviously having a levy, and by having a levy you didn't have to raise money to do things every year. It meant that you had steady flow of income for the organization, it meant that you could hire staff and have those staff employed for long periods of time, so that you could then have memory, organizational memory that a lot of the other campus groups wouldn't have, because what happens with campus groups, and cynical University leaders would know this, if you waited long enough, the student activists would basically just leave. All you need to do is wait 2 or 3 years and whoever is the thorn in your side graduates and disappears. Or there's the annual cycle, if you wait long enough, the summer comes, and the other thorn in your side is gone. But if you have an organization that is funded year round and you have staff year-round, you can then have presence

year-round and you can have presence year to year that extends beyond the student cycle, the annual student cycle and the graduating student cycle. I was there 3 years, but you know, the things that I worked on preceded me and continued after me. So in that sense it was stronger.” Vlad also mentions “...having an office, a physical presence that's one aspect...” and “that it's connected to a broader network of PIRGS, nationally and internationally, that also have wisdom that you can draw from” as other aspects that makes PIRGs stronger.

Vlad’s PIRG had two full-time staff, one or two contract staff (on average), and between fifty and eighty volunteers involved. According to Vlad, the staff would stay on average for five years, stating “[It] wasn't super well-paying I don't think. You had to be passionate about the work to do it.” They would use phone trees to reach people. They had a large office space and resource centre at a major intersection in the city on the 2nd floor. Many of the OPIRG staff during his time were or went on to become prominent Canadian activists on social and/or environmental issues. Back in those days the Canadian PIRGs were still connected to the American PIRGs and Vlad got to go to Washington and Boston to visit other PIRGs. Vlad says, “...we saw really organized, well-constructed campaigns by some of the PIRGS in the States... I don't know if they are still powerful now but they were certainly powerful back then. You know they were passing legislation, statewide legislation, like in Massachusetts and New York, you know the system is a little bit different down there because you can run a statewide referendum to pass pop bottle legislation, for instance, requiring reusable bottles for instance... in the States they would hire lawyers and scientists and you know write reports and do things that were actually way better organized than anything we had ever done.” Vlad continues, “... [I] learned how to work out the media, learned media skills, I learned how to organize campaigns, you know PIRGS have manuals, so there are these manuals that tell you how to run a campaign. And so, you know, there are manuals on how to start a PIRG, and in that way it was like a school because there's a lot of information, wisdom there that was passed on from generation to generation...” Vlad says, “[It was an] important part of my personal development.... I came out seeing how all of these things are interconnected... it left a strong mark on me, like it was really part of my training. Becoming a social change agent, or wanting to be a social change agent, it was a

very pivotal 3 years, or whatever it was.” Vlad says of the US PIRGs, “...it's an activist school, it has a lot of history, it has a lot of wisdom, a lot of well-trained, you know, activists who are working there, kind of cut their teeth there, and a lot of history there, so it kind of goes back to the connection, manuals, the strategies that worked and didn't work, a lot of stories, various campaigns that were done, a lot of lore there, that you'd hear about.”

Vlad says of OPIRG, “The provincial network was... never fully actualized. All the Ontario PIRGs basically acted like separate little activist groups and you know they would meet on an annual or something basis and there would be some big powwow and get together, and we had a provincial coordinator, staff person, that person was housed at U of T, so that was one of the staff people there, but we never did anything province-wide. We had the potential to do things province-wide the way they do in the states, but it never got realized, we were never quite organized at the provincial level, and that was kind of unfortunate, like lost opportunity in some ways...”

Vlad talked about his first encounter with OPIRG: “I wanted to get involved in campus, and activism around environmental stuff, and I remember hearing about OPIRG and I didn't know what it was. ‘Public interest research group’ sounds irrelevant, didn't know what it was...” Vlad goes on to say he finally got involved after a friend brought him to an event where a First Nations Chief was speaking at. Vlad says, “I think that was my first exposure to OPIRG as being something of interest to me, and so I joined OPIRG that year, and I joined the environmental working group, and started getting engaged...” Vlad says, “...it's not a single issue organization... a strength of OPIRG, for being relevant regardless of what issues were around because there were always issues that were important. That flexibility made it strong as well. And, yeah, it's public interest, is a very broad thing when you think about it, it can be anything...”

Vlad mentions a group “competing” with this OPIRG’s environmental working group. Vlad describes that he “mentioned this idea of duplication, pros and cons, [of] only one organization, right, so, so my biggest experience with duplication was there was a group called the [name of university removed] environmental coalition... I mean we were duplicating some things. They started doing a lug a mug campaign.” He continues, “I was quite distressed about this whole [duplication] thing, because it felt like we were

in some ways duplicating, competing for common resources, we were competing for presence on campus, around the same issues. And so yeah so it felt a little bit kind of stressful and in a way you know it became kind of a bit of a popularity contest or yeah like a division or a split. That's how I saw it kind of in a negative light, those are some of the cons, because there is limited volunteer base on campus, people who want to get active, there is limitation in terms of, you know there's a certain space that you occupy in terms of media or in terms of presence, your campaigns and stuff, and so when you have two folks occupying the same space there's a little bit of a loss, perhaps, of resources. But then on the plus side there's more diversity, there's more diversity of ideas or of approaches or of tactics. More diversity of organizational structure or ways that students might feel kind of engaged in different ways, so I think there's benefits to that. But again, I feel like the cons outweigh the pros... Conceptually and theoretically I think diversity is a good thing, but for some reason on campus... I feel that the student resource is limited.”

This led myself and Vlad to have a larger discussion on the issue. I shared my experience when I was younger with the OPIRG. I said, “I asked this question in part because of our own experiences like when we started Regensis. So, like at the time, the PIRGS had been moving, at least the more urban PIRGs, towards more equity based social justice campaigns. So, when I started at York, I don't think they had anything environmental, they had one group environmental, more like promoting fair trade, and I don't think we meant to duplicate anything, I think students are young and naive and don't know any better. I mean I did, before I started at University I found out about OPIRG. I was excited, I went in, [I asked] how can I join, how can I start something, and you come with all this energy, and then you're told ‘oh, are you a student, you're not a student, you have to pay money.’ I was low income, my mom at the time was on welfare, I didn't have money to join. And how do you start a group? No, you can only start a working group in September. You can't start it during the middle of the year because they make up a budget. So, it's like these bureaucratic things [emerge] that as an organization evolves... that I think where it doesn't recognize the nature of how students are.” Vlad replies, “Those are really good criticisms, I think. If, yeah, like those would be examples of inflexibility, organizationally, when it's big, perhaps bureaucratic. I remember when I joined, OPIRG was fairly small, like OPIRG [chapter name removed], you could just join

if you were, and sometimes it also depends on the staff person. I think the staff person at the time was very flexible, he didn't feel like he needed to have rules like that.” I said, “It's ironic though in the sense when we got started, like here at York the OPIRG they didn't like the idea, they said we're duplicating what they're doing, [asking] how are we different, whereas the OPIRG at UofT was very helpful. They'd be booking space for us, loaning us equipment, so complete different attitude. And I mean I think both U of T and York are unique in that they're only a handful of universities with over 50,000 students. At least at the time, like now and when I started, which is very rare in the world [to have a university that large]... So there's like a bigger environment versus starting at a campus with like 10,000 students.” Vlad replied, “...if you don't see yourself as competing against each other but you can kind of cooperate then you've actually increased the space in some ways...” I replied, “[Ironically] now we are basically, we're the ones trying to save OPIRG [at York].” Vlad continued, “I think that would be an example of working well together. When I was there and it was [the other environmental group] we weren't working well together, we were competing against each other. And I think it was because we were trying to occupy the exact same space. I remember being very stressed about it. I can recall the physical feeling around it, but, I can see how you can work really really well. In the way you just described. So I think that's beautiful. It's a problem when you have a group like OPIRG that kind of, you know one of the strengths that I described is basically public interest, so you can do anything, so one of the strengths is you can do anything with that funding, but the weakness is, you can't do everything, because you've got limited resources. You've got one staff person, you've got so much money, you can't have twenty working groups. You have like five, six, or eight well-functioning working groups and that's about it. So, some other groups that come in, come in for a reason. Because you're not occupying the entire space. So other groups do pop up, you're in essence increasing [the] capacity of the student community. So, I think if it works well that way, not repeating, then it's a really good thing.”

I replied, “Yeah, I know it's the people, it's whether you're willing to communicate and the people's openness. I can't remember what the exact term is called. I was having a similar discussion about University Admin; I think it's called the bureaucratic problem. You have some people who understand the goal, or the mission.

And like, they're willing to break or bend the rules. And you have other people who are very adherent to these arbitrary things because they're either afraid they'll lose their job, or that's how they were trained, they don't understand why those rules were created in the first place. Which I think is needed to understand, if you know why the rule is there, and you know why someone needs the rule bent, but it's not for the reason the rule is there, like... education is a big barrier in terms of getting groups to work together but also having the right actors in the right places. Whether we have innovative politicians or University presidents or whatever, ones that are backwards.” Vlad replies, “And it can happen the same way in authority. You have a very risk averse staff person, risk averse board. You have a key person who is risk averse, it's more difficult to get things done. Or similarly if you have someone who just takes too many risks, is constantly shifting, too creative, then... we might not get things done.”

Vlad shared with me a story of internal conflict within his OPIRG chapter. The dispute was between a recently hired staff person and the board of the OPIRG chapter. Because of the dispute, the staff person went to the school newspaper, which ran a negative story about OPIRG. Vlad said that the situation “...basically shone a bad light on OPIRG as an organization, because it sounded like they were mean or something, the board. And that was really unfortunate because that was like \$100,000 of funding annually that got killed by a silly thing. Like instead of seeing the bigger picture, seeing ok this is a dispute that is temporary in nature, that will eventually get resolved, it was portrayed as some sort of fundamental defect, that needed to be exposed. And that was really unfortunate, and you know a lot of us [were] really crushed by that.” The resulting story impacted the referendum result, that Vlad earlier had shared, resulting in them having to re-run the referendum again. The editor-in-chief of the student newspaper is now a prominent Canadian activist and author, Vlad continues, “And still, to this day, [people] are angry at [the editor-in-chief] for that. And, you know, I think [people] wrongfully...hold grudges, but ya, like it was like a short-sighted kind of thing.... [it] failed to look at the bigger picture I would say. And, cause even if there was some sort of fundamental thing, like that could also be kind of corrected or fixed, from the inside out, as opposed to, kind of, crushing it altogether. I think, [we] had a better chance to fix OPIRG than to put another referendum. You know, whatever imperfection, had been

highlighted, I think [fixing would have been] a better choice than jeopardizing...so it was really unfortunate. For many years after that we continued to have just graduate student funding.” Vlad continues, “...it was the second referendum on that same year... they were basically just weeks apart, we had no time to respond to any of [the editor-in-chief] stuff, it was terrible. You know it was run in the [school newspaper]. The [school newspaper] you know, it's wide circulation, and I think there was probably a little fatigue, so I think not as many people voted, and I think the people that did vote probably were people that were, in some way, maybe upset by what they read in the [school newspaper] would have voted, maybe more likely than those that didn't. So, I think that's why we lost.”

We discussed the issue of internal conflict and possible ways to prevent it. We discussed solidarity models, where multiple constituencies shared power—such as having clients and staff members on the board, along with members of the wider community that have expertise. Vlad says, “I think that's an excellent model.” He shared his experiences with boards of organizations he was a part of. Vlad explains, “We call it a “working board”, that's another way of calling it. It's usually at the beginning of an organization, the staff people that are hired, are also the board. In general, yeah I think it's a legitimate model. You know, and I think any of the issues, problems with it, are easily resolved. Obviously if you have to make decisions that involve the staff, the staff board member would recuse themselves. It's an excellent model.” Vlad continues, “I think a staff person that brings a lot of the experience, a lot of the institutional memory to the board... I think has an important voice, and I think [they] should be kind of represented as a voting voice, a voting member. I don't think that would be a big loss, if you had a terrible staff person that you wanted to get rid of, whatever that's just one voice really. And then, you know the staff could have a separate... kind of caucus or whatever, what's the term when you meet separately? You could do that if you needed to. So, the pros are institutional memory, expertise, experience. And the cons are that that staff person might control things or you know, push agendas, that you know, maybe experienced board members might buckle under that pressure or be easily swayed.”

We delved into the issue of student activist burnout, which seems to be a common problem. Vlad completed his undergraduate, graduate and professional degree at the same

university. He recounted having to leave OPIRG after 3.5 years of involvement because of burnout and being a full-time student. He said, "I barely passed my second year [of his professional degree]." Vlad continues, "...that's a sort of burnout I guess, I wasn't able to do both well. And so that's part of it, workload, student workload, and then the other thing that contributes to burnout is that the issues are frequently way bigger than anyone can possibly solve or fix. So if you're bright eyed and bushy tailed and you want to make a difference, and you're very passionate about it, you can just emotionally burn out, because you're firing all engines and then you know, like you're not seeing the change that you're hoping to see, so that's demoralizing... some of your losses may be due to conflict, organizational conflict, or conflict in the community, or opposition by the government, that could be traumatic, so that leads to some sort of burnout. Some people liken burnout to PTSD, it's just that burnout is PTSD, and you can see that in how various kinds of traumas like that, political traumas, could burn somebody out. I've certainly experienced that in my [professional] work. So, yeah, I'd say those things, political conflict, issues being very big, hard to affect change in, and competing workloads of students... those can be the big contributors to student burnout." He continues, "And then there's just the burnout that's not at the individual level, but the student cycle that I kind of described before, the passion in the student body might be run by a particular person and when that person leaves, that's a kind of burnout as well, you don't have ongoing continuity, students kind of come and go eventually... many student communities have had trouble maintaining positive culture, becoming activist ghettos. What about OPIRG [chapter] culture at the time made it positive? Umm, well I guess I can speak to my own personal experience and that was that yeah, I just remember like all of us really engaging volunteers and we felt like our volunteers were like our most important resource and so we were always trying to engage and attract volunteers. So we weren't kind of like, an elite clique or an in-group, we were always reaching out to people and trying to engage people, and the staff people at the time were like that, they, their job description was to attract and engage students, so by design outward facing and trying to attract people rather than ghettoize themselves. You know I think maybe the issues that we took were issues that were important to the students at the time, you know, it wasn't like what we were doing was so super radical that the average student would be opposed to us and I

mean that might be one way that you might be ghettoized, a very unusual position that nobody else held, that might contribute to ghettoization.” Vlad cites an example of a counter-protest of a right-wing, homophobic figure that came to speak at campus. Vlad says, “...they were like preparing to go and protest at his talk, and you know they were making signs like ‘We fuck for pleasure not to breed,’ I was a little bit like ‘wait, that sounds a bit mean... it felt alienating, to me at the time.’”

Vlad feels OPIRG has helped influence his career. According to Vlad, “I kind of came into activism with an environmentalist bent, and I was more open and interested in other social issues...” He continued, “...that's all stuff that I learned about in OPIRG, so yeah I remember when I was doing media training I already had a lot of media experience. I had done interviews, I knew how to put together a press package, I knew how to send out press advisories, all that kind of stuff... OPIRG certainly gave me experience in doing campaigns, and project management... when I was in OPIRG, I had lots of talks, presentations, I got a lot of practice doing that stuff, making pitches, persuading people to join... particular positions or campaigns.”

When asked for advice for others looking to start or get involved with similar initiatives, Vlad says, “...definitely to build on the experience and knowledge of other organizations, either other PIRGS or you know other organizations... I think it's really important to learn from others.” He continued, “[we all] have that kind of energy to start things and create things and, have had moments when I had did things more my [on] own than with others... when I'm learning from others, people with more experience, my work is better. Having a mentor, somebody who has done this kind of work before, I think that's really important.” Continuing further, he adds, “...you want to have allies in senior positions—senior student leaders, senior staff. Yeah I forgot to mention the relation between PIRGs and faculty, that's something that's always been important in PIRGs, is have relationships with faculty, with professors, and to do stuff with them, from like being able to do a classroom rap before a lecture, right down to working on issues together. So if you're starting an organization like that I think having some professors or having some senior administrators who support you is important.” He concludes, “PIRGs follow a model of, an activist model, which is to affect, to sway and change the community leadership and machinery in a community to act or behave differently, and I

remember that being my analysis of activism at the time when I was in the environment working group. But since then, since I graduated, my main approach to activism and social change has actually been to build infrastructure and organizations that actually build the community that I want to see, or build the society that I want to see. Which is, I feel, a sense of what you describe Regenesi as being. I think that's a form of social change that I wasn't as appreciative of at the time. And that, that's an important approach that should be thought about as, maybe PIRGs can do that, think about that a little more, how they can actually build, create things... Like starting a co-op, or things like that, that's the kind of social change, the effective one, the important one. It's actually how most of our society is created. It's an entrepreneurial kind of social change... a positivist kind of approach instead of being anti-something, being pro something, and that's something that I learned in my later days at OPIRG by interacting with some more senior leaders in the community, who kind of told me not to be anti-car but to be pro-pedestrian. and that was a really powerful learning for me, and I've taken that very deeply to heart, to heartbreak, to my heart deeply, being pro-something rather than anti-something, creating a society rather than dismantling."

Interview #21 – Tania (Student Environmental and Social Justice Organization)

Tania is a staff member at one of the last remaining learner centres in Canada. Tania states that they are going through a rebranding, and have been looking at calling themselves a "global education and resource centre," "youth leadership hub, and resource centre," and "social and environmental justice youth leadership hub." They are also considering how they look at membership and engagement. Tania says, "...one of the things that we're still kind of straddling, this place of being membership based versus like donor based or community engagement based." Tania believes they survived so long because of their relationship with their university and having a student levy. They were invited by the environmental studies department to become their resource centre.

The centre is a hub for educational placements and experiential learning. According to Tania, "...we take students who are... working on research projects, we have a formal social justice research program, an alternative placement for educators, or candidates within the school of education." The centre helps new and smaller groups,

managing things like finances for them. Tania explains, "...we have in supporting small and emerging community projects... supporting and incubating emerging programs, either officially through our charitable status, or we have a couple of groups that we support with mentorship and financial administration and stuff like that." Tania continues, "...the fact that we are with such a broad mandate allows us to be responsive, and, yeah there's pros and cons to that, right, we're a really small organization..." Tania says, "...it can make it difficult to sort of [determine] where to focus... where we land on that is looking at the intersections of issues as opposed to the single issues but trying to bring in different perspectives and different ways of looking at issues. The pros of course means we do have a lot of flexibility to respond to community interest and requests, for partnership and support, for those invitations." This organization and many PIRGs have helped create many projects that have now gone on to become their own organizations, many of which are much larger, and all of which in my research are disconnected from their founding organization. When I asked how Tania felt about this, she says: "We did have some significant conversations with the board and our board communication committee, a few years ago, about how to make the connection between these initiatives and [the organization], historically... we support until they're kind of big enough to go out on their own. So, it's been more around how do we articulate and keep the history of that work? So that it doesn't get lost. Because there's a trade-off right, in doing that support it means that maybe, talk about pros and cons, on the other side it may mean that there aren't the staff resources to be developing or growing something that's [organization] specific, you know, core work?" I replied, "I think if we forget where stuff came from and the resources and how it got built, like, then you lose something there." Tania replied, "Yeah, exactly... because you know it is precarious, not for profit work is pretty precarious so, if you don't have a sense of that history and who you are and what you bring to the community and the value, it can be really hard to articulate that when there's staff turnover. And to get the funding that you need to continue, to support you know the work that needs to be done... it is not having those resources right to do that communication work. In the same way that maybe a corporation or, you know, bigger organizations have dedicated staff time to that, so smaller NGOs are usually scrambling, and can't always effectively communicate out the work that they're doing at

any given moment. In my experience, it's a challenge.” When I asked Tania how they decide on who to help, she said, “I would say that it's often at my capacity and discretion. As the executive director and key program convener. So, I have a program committee that I confer with. If it's around umbrella support, where the board could be liable in terms of accepting funds for a project, then I take that to the board of directors, you know, with a recommendation for their approval.”

I asked Tania about the Student Choice Initiative impact. She said, “Yeah, so that was the biggest defunding that we've had. I'm trying to think if it was around 30% in the first semester... it's not a big levy (laughs). That doesn't always matter, people are looking for pocket change also in the spring. Parents are now contacting levy groups. It's interesting.” About 1/3rd of their funding comes from their student levy, with the rest from grants, fee-for-service, sponsorships, and program revenue. She recounts that the student centre on campus was in jeopardy because of the policy and that the faculty union had to come in to take on the mortgage. She also mentions that a few years ago, a group of students showed up to the local OPIRG chapter's Annual General Meeting, demanding that the staff resign and offering to do their jobs for free.

I asked Tania about how their organization has come to focus more on the environment. Tania says, “...it's always been important and maybe more important in that there's probably a greater collective recognition of how important that work is... I feel that the resurgence of indigenous culture and knowledge, not just in [our city], but across the country, has also at the same time impacted how we think about sustainability. So, in that sense, that relationship right between global warming, capitalism and then on the other side... [the] emergence of indigenous culture and knowledge maybe made it more relevant and possible and with new ways of thinking about that.”

I asked Tania about the relationship with the university. She says, “We've been really fortunate, right, because we had this close relationship... several years ago there were maybe more [of] what would be considered community groups or services that would be located right on campuses, and those were moved off as there was a shortage of space.” Tania blames the neo-liberal funding model that universities have moved towards.

Tania says of the organization, “We're like a bridge, you know, between the

University and the broader community.” In terms of the politics of the organization, “...as a registered charity, we have historically been tempered by, you know, restrictions on advocacy, for example, or how that can be perceived. And I would say it was one of the ways that we differentiate ourselves from the OPIRG, for example, that could be very, you know, highly political and do strong advocacy work, we tended to do it through education.”

I discussed with Tania about the organization’s culture and rituals. She says, “...it seems to be really positive...we attract people who care, like they care about the issues, they want to make a difference. Sometimes we can attract people who are already stretched in terms of capacity because they’re already involved in their community, but then what they bring too can be connections, relationships to other groups, opportunities.” One ritual she mentioned is a large annual Christmas fundraising dinner for an affiliate group of the organization, “... this big community potluck of over 200 people spilling in and bringing food, and there was some kind of speaker and usually a square dance or something. And so, I think there’s still, yeah, a lot of value around gathering around food. And also trying to gather around fun, and I think that’s something that I’m thinking about more even these days, is how do we do the work and do it in a way that we find joy, so that we don’t burn out. Yeah, and with kindness and compassion because we all move, we have different rhythms in our lives, and we do have more capacity at some times than other times and it can be really easy to get caught up in the to do list and what needs to be done when, and so really trying to be mindful of, yeah, being supportive and recognizing that we all have different things that we offer and also we can offer more at different times of our lives.”

I asked Tania about what the ideal scenario would be for the future of the organization. She mentions more staff in specific areas, and funding for staff. Tania mentioned an example of how losing a person after funding has ended impacts the organization. “[The previous employee] focused on like workshops in schools, that would be a huge piece because that work has, I would say fallen off, it has, it’s fallen off, because I don’t have capacity to do that, I’m running the community program, and yeah we still have some volunteers in schools, but not in the same way that we could have, like we might.” Tania also recommends “... to hire someone who’s highly kind of skilled.”

A for other groups, Tania says, “valuing and integrating youth leadership throughout the whole organization is important, for lots of reasons.” She continues, “The other thing I would say about recommendations is that really creative partnerships and collaborations because that allows... you know share the work, not feel like you're working in isolation, and it increases getting the messaging out or the communication out, because you've got a number of partners, right, you're all doing that work. And, also, sharing the cost, so you can have a bigger impact with fewer resources.”

Interview #22 – Ravi (PIRG)

Ravi was a member of a PIRG working group and a board member of their local PIRG. Ravi was involved in no-sweatshop activism in high school, and saw his local PIRG tabling on the issue, so he joined. The working group was centred around bringing a fair-trade policy to the university and promoting fair-trade on-campus. Ravi was introduced to the group when he connected with a graduate student who was conducting research on sweatshops and fair trade. Ravi was already doing activism on no-sweatshops, so they connected and formed a club (which was also registered and functioning as a PIRG working group). The group had varied participation, with between 10-30 people in a given year, and a core group of 6-8 people. The group also had a graduate assistant provided by a supportive professor.

I asked Ravi about the educational and career benefits of volunteer participation. He states that, “...[in] the coalition you took on many tasks that I guess more younger students, students without experience would find challenging, such as drafting policy, lobbying.” When I asked how he believed this experience helped your members with their own education and in their future careers, Ravi replies, “I think it helped both our members and our partners.... I think as far as the experience of policy drafting. I think a lot of our members, really saw that as, you know, experiencing and developing skills and certainly put that on their resume going forward.... [Speaking] for myself, I think sort of taking a look at those policies sort of gives you the blueprint of... how the University works... that gave me a much better understanding of what this massive institution is, and how changes can be made and the institution. So, I think, certainly on my end that was beneficial.” Ravi continues, “I think one of the key elements that really helped both

ourselves and our partners is winning. You know, I think a lot of people... when they see it, they see it being successful, they sort of see that it can be done, that students can make change... So I sort of see the institution being a bit more, um, being more malleable to change... particularly in policy like, in being able to identify particular policy and seeing change process happen within that, it was important for both ourselves, like I know, in the end we did a lot of these lobbying and policy writing, and I think a lot of people who participated in this sit-in at the end sort of also respected the groundwork that was done leading up to it. So, yeah, I think in both practical experience it was great, but also in sort of showing what a win on campus can look like. I think was really motivating and, a morale boost for a lot of us, for a lot of people that we were working with.”

Ravi believes they were victorious in their mission. He says, “...we sort of had a big victory of doing a sit-in outside the President's office, and getting them to commit to the Presidential sustainability council and the no-sweatshop policy, both of which were key planks of that sit in. And coming out of that, we sort of had the ability to look at the model that we had, and sort of export it to other campuses, for which we already had that early communication and contacts with. What we thought was going to take a lot more capacity than we had... we would sort of sacrifice a lot of the work that we were doing at the [university] campus, and continuing, so for example, continuing pushing for the responsible investment campaign goals we wanted, or, to ban water bottle sales. Some of the other things that we continued to push for, and [we] sort of tried to make sure that the present sustainability council was successful in its operation the first couple of years.”

Ravi continues, “I think one of the successes that we had was that we really built that community at [the university], and we weren't sure we could replicate that on other campuses, with the capacity that we had. So, we decided to, I mean we even decided to let the [club] fold, we consciously said ‘you know what, at this point we're going to put more of our focus on the sustainability council, and rather than leave this as a legacy club. Let's continue to... push for what was initially started and seeing that institutional change, as opposed to putting our focus on the club.’” Ravi says, “...there is a bit of a regret not being able to export that model because I do think other campuses would have benefited from this model.”

Ravi notes that educating others (students, professors, administrators) was a key component of achieving victory. Ravi spoke about a very different component of this. He spoke about programming events as one means of education and outreach but mentioned that this fluctuated based on volunteer capacity and “our ability to sort of advertise.” Ravi then spoke about petition, saying “one of our key outreach strategies was petitioning.” This included petitions to establish a sustainability council, a no-sweatshop policy and to secure fair trade designation for the university (which, if done at the time, would have made them only the second university in Canada to have it). Ravi continues, “...effectively petitioning was a really important way to reach out to students and explain to them what it is we're looking to do. To be able to show them [that], look, we've done this research, this is what the University actually operates like currently. We've developed policy proposals, so a lot of that research and, experience that we were doing... was presented directly to students. And [we] gave them a sort of concrete way to, to get involved, and we gave them particular layers of getting involved. There's a petition to get your name signed on if you want to let the University know. You could also volunteer with us, this is when our meetings are, you can also attend our next event, this is when our next event is. So that was a key way for us to both reach out to students [to] let them know what we were doing, [and] to doing to get them plugged into the work that we were doing, [it] was also a key way to reach out to professors, let them know what we were doing, and request that they give us some time at the beginning of their classes, so that was a great way to both reach out to professors and their students, in doing those class talks. So, I think, the key really was just to present, and a lot was sitting at the table, trying to get people to sign petitions... to use tabling and class talks to educate them about the campaigns and the coalition as a whole.”

Ravi went into the process of the meeting with the administrators and the process of embedding the new sustainability council in the university. He said of the context and their attitude, “I think certainly every student group had dealt with [the university] being a commuter campus. I think there were some administrators that realized that [commuting] reduced the capacity of student organizing, that reduced the ability of students to continue to push. And there were some administrators whose strategy was to wait for students to graduate and there wouldn't be that continuity, there wouldn't be

those levels of engagement needed in order to hold their feet to the fire. So, I think the nature of a commuter campus.” Ravi says, “That was actually a surprise for us, we ended up presenting, we ended up somehow getting a meeting with some senior administrators.” By that time, Ravi explains, they already had a strong campaign, with support from the student union, and around 1800 petition signatures. Ravi continues, “one of the key requests was to set up an institutional body that can look at sustainability as a more wholistic approach, right. And at that point we were very clear, we wanted it at the presidential level, we wanted it at a senior position... that had the authority to look into every sphere of the administration. And at that time, what we also saw was that the University was very siloing. So, when we were out there talking with Campus Operations, they had no idea what was happening with food, or didn't have that level of communication or ability to influence each other's work as well. So, we go into this meeting with these three very senior members, and our asks are, again, to get some institutional change, as well as these policy changes. And very quickly we were shut down pretty hard by the University lawyer [and others]. They were very conservative... So, at that point, we knew that was going to be a huge uphill battle.” At this point, the VP Students of the university offered to set up a student sustainability council under their office. Ravi says, “It was a student sustainability council that then would be able to call upon other members of the administration to come in to talk to students, that are pushing for particular areas, right. And so for example, if we wanted to talk about green procurement, we could talk with someone from the Procurement Department. They would invite them to come speak with us as to what currently exists, and sort of help us derive some policy changes by talking to the people on the ground... At that point, we were excited that they'd set up this new institutional body, and were willing to give them the benefit of the doubt and work with them to try and make it work.”

During this time, one issue that arose was booking space for a fair-trade fair. Ravi says, “...the administration was trying to reduce the amount of space that students had in organizing.” Specifically, access to a central building on campus became an issue. He continued, “[They were] reducing the ability for students to be able to use [the building], to reach out to other students. So at that time there had been some rallies in [the building] and students were using that for tabling and for other opportunities to engage with other

students, which we took as very central purpose for [the building]... They ended up wanting a policy where students were not able to use [the building].” Ravi says, [The building] is still bookable, so we were able to continue to win against them, consistently... this was student organizing, pushing back, in order to continue to have access to our space.”

Ravi says it took three years before the student sustainability council was transformed into the university sustainability council, embedded in the office of the president of the university. Continuing, he says, “Unfortunately after two and a half years, we had gotten nowhere... we made very reasonable propositions to them in the no-sweatshop policy, and after their research into it, they weren't willing to make even the slightest steps forward.” To Ravi and his fellow student activists, they felt as if the university was stonewalling and the student sustainability committee embedded in the Vice-President of Students Office did not have any authority to push other offices, like Vice-President Finance, into action. Ravi says, “...it just didn't make any sense for it to continue to stay here other than to exhaust student capacity. We'd be having these meetings but nothing was coming out of it...” They decided to hold a rally and sit-in outside the office of the president. Ravi says they continued to push “...for the sustainability council to have greater powers and to be under the presidential level, and we got that commitment at the meeting that we had following that sit in. So, we had both the commitment from the president for the no-sweatshop policy to be at least as good as what U of T had.”

I discussed with Ravi how certain administrators acted as champions or barriers to change. Ravi mentions a few he believed were influential. The VP Students, was supportive, and according to Ravi, “was suggesting or recommending that the sustainability council be put on a presidential level... [However,] as VP Students had a lot of authority, but there was also things that he couldn't overstep. He couldn't step into other people's departments, he had to focus on what his jurisdiction was.” Ravi notes that the chief of staff of the university president “was huge in sort of instituting and making the sustainability council a success. I think she really saw the importance of it.” Ravi continues, “...we had a senior buyer who was there who was also very supportive of sustainability issues... and so ended up himself drafting policy [on procurement]...” Ravi

also mentions the head of food services, saying that “[he] was amazing, very open and candid as to what could and couldn't happen, what was going on, sort of what was the thinking around what was going on.” Ravi also mentions some professors as key supporters, especially in sharing knowledge and securing a graduate assistant for the group. In opposition to the changes, Ravi mentions a few folks. Ravi says, “...the Director of Procurement was hesitant to see any changes and I don't think had a commitment to sustainability at all.” Ravi says of an Associate Vice-President of Finance, “She wasn't open to any change at all, very very conservative in her policy around social responsible investment. Effectively wanted the market to, to work itself out.” Ravi talked about some of the lessons learned. He says, about the experience of a fellow activist who got similar changes adopted by Vancouver City Council, “... activist groups can get policy changes or practice changes in paper, but really you need that commitment within the administration in order to sort of see some of these things go through.” Ravi says, “...it was very key to identify our champions and work with those champions to put forward something that they would be able to present within those departments, and be willing to follow through with it... everyone has sort of a limit, so they're still employed and are responsible to superiors. And so, as much as they might want to support us, they're also limitations there. Ravi concludes, “I think what taught me and a lot of the people who were involved is, you'll find champions but you also find conservatives who are in general people who are very hesitant for change... it's key to be able to work with the people that you have, and to the degree that you're willing to help out. So sometimes we would want more than what people could commit to, even if we considered them champions in other elements, in other fields.”

In regards to the advantages of being a PIRG working group, Ravi says, “... [we were] able to access all of the resources that the PIRG had offered... [it] gave us also a degree of knowledge and interconnection within social justice organizing. That also gave us a step into student space organizing...” Ravi mentions it helped with student turnover, and “... [it] allowed us to expand when we needed... [we] had the OPIRG, office, and the core and I think OPIRG sort of was that bedrock.”

Ravi provided the following advice: “I think with student organizing, the difficulty, and you've probably, we talked about this earlier, is student turnover, and the

ability to put forward a model that is sustainable and successful, is really beneficial for students coming in....” He also mentions friendship amongst the members as a factor for both success, and potentially limiting the growth or expansion, as Ravi says, “...beyond 10 to 30 it becomes really hard to continue to have that depth of informal relations... We were doing it as volunteers, but that also created that sort of bond that we had, with each other, and that appreciation for the work that each of us were willing to put in. But it also contributed to a lot of burnout.” Ravi says, “I do regret not engaging more students in sort of coursework that they were doing, and getting them sort of the experience that we were receiving and passing on that knowledge... I think [we] could have done a better job, with the intent of sort of showing students what's possible and how, you know giving them the experiential, education as to how you see and you enact change both at the campus level but also on a broader scale. How do you read policy, how do you identify you know potential champions on administrations. How do you... develop strategic directions and plans and potentially even make pivots or shifts, when the environment changes... how do you take advantage of a potential news cycle that now has climate change in the news cycle, how do you take advantage of that in what you're working on? So, there was a lot that we learnt and there was a lot that we could have done a better job of bringing in more people.” On reflection in activism, Ravi says they would make annual reports and agendas for each year as a “reflection piece... To then use that period of reflection, ok so what have we done in the last year, what is it that we're aiming to do, what are our goals, and using that annual report in order to sort of amalgamate the goals of different organizations, and potential overlaps and identify potential opportunities that exist to continue to collaborate within each of the groups.” He continues, “But it was difficult especially on a campus that, you know, students at the end of the year are dealing with projects and exams... many students aren't around in the summer in order to participate. And I think we experimented doing that in the summer as well and had sort of online correspondence in order to do that reflection. But, yeah, it's difficult, I think particularly within the student cycle, you know from September to March is sort of when you have that window, and to sort of be reflecting in March is difficult.” Ravi concludes, “...there's a lot of people who are very young and very, and by its very nature wanting to learn. And so, these are potential leaders that are going out into the world, and it's

important to be able to teach them to be sustainability and social change leaders...”

4.0 Discussion

4.1 Introduction

"When education is not liberating, the dream of the oppressed is to become the oppressor" - Paulo Freire⁶⁷⁴

My personal experience is a central part of my dissertation, so I will share my perspective and thought process throughout this discussion. I want to start with a preamble to qualify the limitations of my perspective in my research. I have increasingly realized throughout this research process that any sociological topic is enormously complex – and to minimize such a topic to a narrow band of causes and effects would be intellectually dishonest. Something that may at first seem simple to answer, for example, understanding why people have certain views towards the environment, would have to look at many things to begin to understand why: the prevailing cultural zeitgeist, past historical attitudes and their legacy influence, economic conditions, personal religious views, views held by their parents and extended family that they were exposed to, etc. Experience cannot be understated in influencing one's perspective — nor can it be emphasized enough that experiences and perspectives are as vast, and no two may be the same. At most, we can use language and find common ground; however, at the root, our experiences shape how we reach certain conclusions, which can shape the foundational 'myths' of which our beliefs are rooted. In life, this process shapes our ever shifting and changing beliefs. I might one day look back at this dissertation in the future and have different conclusions from those I am presenting today.

Liberation education, as I reference above the quote from Paulo Freire, is not about 'left-wing' indoctrination as some on the right of the political spectrum would accuse — instead, it is about individuals peeling away and revealing truths beyond societal myths, propaganda and mass media and coming to their own conclusions.⁶⁷⁵ My

⁶⁷⁴ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogia do Oprimido*. Rio De Janeiro, BR: Paz e Terra, 2014 (1969). Pp. 66. Translated from the original Portuguese "Quando a educação não é libertadora, o sonho do oprimido é se tornar o opressor."

⁶⁷⁵ While many people across the political spectrum would agree that uncovering hidden truths is ultimately beneficial to society, and that they can lead to better laws, policies, and innovation—there are some who disagree. A subset of voices on the political right argues that exposing certain truths could destabilize

experiences have shifted my views considerably since I first got involved with student-involved environmental organizations. My perspective has shaped how I write this paper. I am not merely interested in presenting my research, but in persuading you. I want you to consider my experiences, the experiences I share of those who participated in the research, and the secondary sources I present so that it will change your views on how you approach student-involved environmental organizations. I want student-involved environmental organizations to be better as I see their potential to help others, and more generally, for society to improve for the benefit of all. So much of one's belief systems is about what one feels is important and where the focus is given—it is not that, for example, a conservative doesn't care about the environment, but that they prioritize the economy first. It is said wisdom comes with age. Whether true or not, I think a larger part of developing wisdom comes from a depth of experience and the ability to see and empathize with different perspectives. I think too many elites in society have never experienced or can even comprehend the kinds of struggles that poor people go through. On the other side, many young environmentalists are idealistic and may have never participated in or run a company, organization, or participating in government, and thus cannot appreciate the difficulty in creating, running and preserving the systems that societies rely on (i.e. government, supply chains, organizations, etc.), while having to balance many competing priorities (political environment, financial, order, etc.), all the while training, organizing and coordinating people to meet these ends. My analysis and discussion look at the research results, and where applicable, delves into a meta-analysis of the broader picture and currents. I draw from all the data sources (surveys, interviews, site visits, my personal experience, and analysis and comparison to other research in the field). Each of the 14 discussion sections were influenced by the original research design

existing social norms and potentially cause societal regression. For example, they may attribute cultural shifts—such as declining birth rates or weakening family structures—to excessive individualism or declining religiosity. However, this viewpoint often overlooks the significant role of capitalist forces in driving and shaping individualism and consumerism, in addition to generating economic inequality, which is frequently cited as the main precipitating cause of young people delaying or choosing not to start families. Rather than considering these structural factors, right-wing critics may focus solely on progressive social changes—such as legal and societal changes that have advanced women's rights and bodily autonomy—as the primary cause, ignoring the complex interplay of economic, cultural, and social dynamics.

and derived from the research data collected.

4.2 Discussion - People

Identifying why students get involved with a cause or organization

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: **[1] Why did you decide to get involved with this organization? [2] What made this organization more desirable to you than other groups?** These questions were asked to both survey groups. In addition, many interviewees shared their motivations. All provided with similar answers. Students often engage with causes due to a combination of personal values, societal influences, and exposure to compelling narratives. Many are motivated by a desire to address perceived injustices or inequities they witness in their communities or the broader world, including those related to environmental sustainability and climate change. Others are inspired by seeking community and friendship; still others are motivated by career and education reasons, including skills development, resume building, or career relevance. For every student the combination of these motives is different.

Student perceptions of who they are volunteering for and how much autonomy they have are important. They are more likely to get involved with student-involved organizations than ‘volunteering for the administration,’ as students want to be involved with their peers—this is supported by Handy & Keil (2001),⁶⁷⁶ IRIS (2011).⁶⁷⁷ A similar volunteer dissatisfaction motivated the founding of Regenesi (multiple of us had volunteered for large environmental organizations like Greenpeace) who were fed up with menial tasks like stuffing fundraising envelopes.

Identifying why students stay involved with an organization

⁶⁷⁶ Femida Handy. & Keil, Kirsten. “A Study of Peer Management of Youth Volunteers at the Canadian Red Cross.” *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, 19.4 (2001), 20–28. Study showed peer-led volunteer management improved youth (15-24) volunteer retention and satisfaction.

⁶⁷⁷ Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability. *2011 Report on Volunteerism and Engagement at York University*. Toronto, ON: Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability, 2011. Survey of 1,101 student and community members at York University representing 1.68% of the total population of York University. The survey showed 68.75% of students showed a preference for peer volunteering with student organizations, over all other kinds of volunteer opportunities.

One survey question aimed to answer this question: **What motivates your involvement and why do you remain committed to the organization?** This question was asked to both survey groups, with slightly varying results. Sustained involvement in an organization often stems from a sense of belonging, purpose, and impact. Students tend to remain engaged when they perceive that their efforts lead to tangible outcomes. Positive experiences within the group, including supportive relationships, shared goals, and recognition of contributions, further encourage ongoing participation. The alignment of the organization's mission with the student's evolving personal or professional goals also plays a critical role in long-term engagement. For those who were in leadership roles, many of them cited commitment to the organization as a core reason for their continued involvement. My own observations reflect these results—I'd emphasize the keys for retention as friendship formation, annual rituals, time availability, and opportunities for meaningful and impactful engagement.

The reasons provided for those no longer involved were circumstantial (lack of time, graduating, moving), or deeply personal (conflict, stress). A literature review on student-led environmental action at post-secondary institutions found that multiple studies show that low student engagement was a result of minimal free time⁶⁷⁸—which I believe is a growing result of late-stage capitalism, which results in people having to work more to get by financially than previous generations, alongside technological distractions. This increasing lack of time (especially in larger cities) and resulting decline in volunteer participation in organizations and social movements is a threat to organizations that rely on volunteers and our ability as a society to keep those with greater power accountable through political activism and social movements. I am not sure there is any silver bullet solutions here to this problem, though lower or free tuition could help. Additionally, more collective living options, such as Ecole at McGill University, that have a structure and culture committed to environmental involvement, or generally increasing the supply of cooperative housing, which can provide affordable rents and are communities that are more likely to engage in community volunteering and social

⁶⁷⁸ Jaylene Murray. "Student-Led Action for Sustainability in Higher Education: A Literature Review." International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 19(6), 2018, Pp. 1095–1110. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-09-2017-0164>.

movement participation, could significantly help in providing people more free time.

Understanding organizational structure and governance

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **Do you understand how the organization is structured? Please explain. (e.g. Who runs the organization, What is the legal structure of the organization, etc.)** [2] **Do you understand how volunteers can become Board or Executive Members?** These questions were asked to the general members and volunteers. The question **“How well do you feel you understand university politics and the structure of the university?”** was asked to the leadership and staff.

While both groups identified having some understanding, there was still a significant gap in understanding – both in the level of understanding, and the number of participants that understood. 38.46% of general members and volunteers had little to no understanding of how the organization they were involved with works. 39.1% of leaders and staff had little or no understanding of the university structure and politics. There is room for significant improvement in both these areas. My own initial experience with OPIRG, as discussed in my interview with Vlad, demonstrates the importance of creating and communicating avenues for involvement and organizational structures. I believe the solution is a straight-forward and simple one—offering training on this—either in-house or bringing in an outside facilitator (perhaps from a labour union, PIRG or Regenesi) to run sessions on this at least once per term. The training session could also be made available online.

Identifying personal benefits and drawbacks from participation

Multiple survey questions answered by the members aimed to answer this question:

- **How has the organization helped you grow?**
- **How has your involvement improved your verbal and written communication skills and knowledge?**
- **How has your involvement improved your organizational skills and knowledge?**
- **How has your involvement improved your leadership skills and knowledge?**

- **How would you rate your level of work readiness prior to volunteering? How would you rate your level of job readiness after volunteering?**
- **What are the benefits you get from your involvement?**
- **Are there any drawbacks to your involvement?**
- **Has your involvement improved your confidence?**
- **Has your involvement improved your social life?**
- **Has your involvement improved your grades?**
- **How has the organization contributed to your personal growth?**
- **What beliefs and worldviews have changed because of your volunteer experience?**

These questions were asked to the general members and volunteers. Participation offers numerous identified benefits, including improved confidence, personal growth, new knowledge and skills, and a heightened sense of community and sense of belonging. Additional benefits include leadership development, job readiness, free and discounted services and health and well-being benefits. Many of these benefits have been reported in other studies, including Smith et al (2010) and Astin & Sax (1998).^{679,680}

Change in beliefs and worldview warrant more in-depth research to identify the circumstances under which belief change occurs, what specific beliefs change, and how specific programs or activities influence those changes. One benefit that remains unclear is improvement in academic performance, with only 20% of respondents reporting improvements. Further research is needed to explore whether academic improvements are greater when volunteering activities are closely connected to the participant's field of study.

Participation can also present challenges, mostly related time management difficulties, but also the cost of participation (e.g. transit fare), and potential for stress and conflict (interpersonal or intergroup). One increasingly concerning chilling effect is that some student activists are now facing legal and professional repercussions in the United

⁶⁷⁹ Karen Smith, Kirsten Holmes, Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Ram A. Cnaan, Femida Handy, and Jeffrey L. Brudney. "Motivations and Benefits of Student Volunteering: Comparing Regular, Occasional, and Non-Volunteers in Five Countries." *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 1.1 (Fall 2010), 65–81. DOI: 10.22230/cjnser.2010v1n1a2

⁶⁸⁰ Alexander W. Astin, & Linda J. Sax. "How Undergraduates are Affected by Service Participation." *Journal of College Student Development*, 39.3 (1998), 251-263.

States, in particular involvement in social movements that have been branded by a portion of society as seditious—this might cause hesitation amongst students when considering extracurriculars that might have political dimensions to their activities.

Identifying the role of leaders in student-involved environmental organizations

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What are the leadership roles in your organization? Please elaborate.** [2] **How does your organization cultivate and prepare volunteers for leadership roles (e.g. board/executive, staff, program managers)?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Responses revealed that student-involved environmental organizations tend to mirror the governance structures of other non-profit organizations and student clubs—with boards, executive roles, and, most often, staff. A few respondents reported informal or flat structures. This highlights a key tension: while most student organizations use formal structures, non-hierarchical structures are slowly becoming more common. This reflects the enacting of the values of inclusivity and participatory democracy that are valued in far-left student movements. The need for leaders and hierarchies remains an ongoing debate on the left, most famously challenged in *The Tyranny of Structurelessness*.⁶⁸¹ I discuss the challenges of ‘flat’ structures in later sections.

While most member-volunteers reported improvements in leadership skills (68.2%), there is room for improvement in leadership development. The processes for cultivating and transitioning leaders are inconsistent, with some organizations reporting strong processes, while other similar organizations reporting weak or non-existent ones. Many student-involved environmental organizations are vulnerable when turnover occurs. Intentional investment in leadership development—whether through structured mentorship, in-depth and accessible training, or codified transition processes—would help strengthen continuity and organizational effectiveness. The experiences and reflections of the interview respondents reveal the importance of staffing and leadership roles in preserving institutional memory, addressing university concerns regarding risk

⁶⁸¹ Freeman, Jo. “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.” *The Second Wave: A Magazine of the New Feminism*, 2.1 (1972), pp. 20–25. <www.jofreeman.com/joreen/tyranny.htm>.

aversion, and maintaining the systems necessary for continuation. Institutional memory has been shown to be critical aspect for success for organizations and social movements.⁶⁸² Another important consideration is the founder(s). Respondents Darren and Kate emphasize passionate founder(s) sticking around has helping to provide stability and support growth. I have noticed this factor again and again in non-profit organizations—passionate founder(s) put in countless volunteer hours (and if paid, work long hours for low pay), but when they leave, organizations can slowly drift if they don't have strong cultures and structures and people who are near equally committed and passionate. This drift could include new staff who care less (and work less hours), volunteers getting burned out as they cannot keep up with the amount of tasks the founder(s) completed, or having to pay competent staff more in order to retain them (but risking reducing the ability to able to hire more staff, especially student staff)—potentially even risking entrenching staff, be they qualified or incompetent, due to having an inexperienced student boards of directors.

Identifying how organizations recruit and retain people

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How does your organization recruit volunteers? What works best?** [2] **How do you retain volunteers and how do you deal with volunteer turnover?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff. Respondents (both survey and interviewees) reported a wide variety of outreach methods, including in-person, online, and visual materials all being heavily related upon. Using a variety of outreach methods is the best approach, emphasizing the importance of personal relationships, especially with gatekeepers (student unions, other student clubs, departmental secretaries, etc.) that have direct communication avenues with students.

Retention depends heavily on organizational culture. Respondents emphasized creating positive experiences, fostering community, and offering flexibility as the most reliable ways to keep students engaged. Social events, recognition, and opportunities for

⁶⁸² Donatella Della Porta and Diani, Mario. Social Movements: An Introduction. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999.

responsibility, advancement and leadership also play an important role. That said, challenges with turnover were common. Some organizations reported little trouble retaining volunteers, but others faced ongoing difficulties. The data suggest that stability comes from blending flexible, welcoming environments with more intentional retention practices. This could include formal onboarding that clearly explains pathways for advancement, one-on-one meetings with volunteers, regular social and recognition opportunities, and structured educational opportunities (e.g. training retreats, mentorship and job shadowing). Organizations that provide structures like mentorship, retreats, and student jobs are better able to retain people, while those that neglect succession planning or over-rely on a handful of highly committed volunteers risk burnout and collapse.

Identify how participants hear about student-involved environmental organizations

One member question aimed to answer this question: **How did you hear about the organization?** Most people first hear about student environmental organizations through personal networks and visible campus presence. Word-of-mouth, clubs fairs, and tabling remain the most effective, with digital channels playing a supplementary role. This suggests that recruitment cannot rely too heavily on one strategy: organizations need both informal peer-to-peer outreach and more structured visibility through events, posters, and online platforms. Visible, repeated in-person touchpoints that spark curiosity, reinforced by easy digital follow-through (clear website, simple signup, fast reply). Practically, that means budgeting time for regular tabling, seeding peer referrals (e.g. bring-a-friend events), and coordinating with career centres and courses where mission fit is high. I would again emphasize from my own experiences about the importance of utilizing multiple outreach strategies for recruitment.

Identify how participants view activism and volunteering

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What is your view of activism?** [2] **How do you view your involvement with the organization? As activism, volunteering or both?** These questions were asked to the members and volunteers.

Survey responses show that most participants see their work as both volunteering and activism, though some consciously avoid the “activist” label due to its negative connotations. Related terms, such as ‘woke’ and ‘social justice’ have also developed negative perceptions with a large portions of the population—even internationally, terms such as *bái zuǒ* (trans. white left), have become popular slurs against liberalism in the west.⁶⁸³ This reflects a broader cultural tension: while activism is widely viewed as essential and transformative, it can also be framed as angry, ineffective, irrational or exclusionary. Organizations can provide multiple identities students can inhabit—volunteer, organizer, researcher, advocate—so people can opt in without accepting a label they find alienating. Additionally, social movement theorists have identified three activist orientations that might help explain internal differences or conflict: success (action, power) oriented, values oriented, and relationship (participant, people) oriented.⁶⁸⁴ Acknowledgement of these within organizations can help address these differences in perspectives—including being explicit in promotional materials. Organizations that reframe activism as good citizenship, and approach social change with more joyful, solution-oriented, and educational approaches are more likely to engage students broadly and avoid alienating potential participants. This reinforces the importance of building an uplifting culture that resists cynicism and grievance-driven approaches.

Identify long-term commitments to activism and volunteering

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How do you hope to stay engaged with the organization after you graduate?** [2] **After you graduate, how do you hope to stay engaged with environmental and social justice causes that are important to you?** These questions were asked to the members and volunteers.

After graduation, most plan to stay engaged in practical ways: many intend to keep volunteering with the organization; others hope to work in aligned jobs, mentor, donate, or stay connected informally through events. Looking beyond a single group,

⁶⁸³ Chenchen Zhang. “The Curious Rise of the ‘White Left’ as a Chinese Internet Insult.” *openDemocracy*, 11 May 2017, <www.opendemocracy.net/en/digitaliberties/curious-rise-of-white-left-as-chinese-internet-insult/>

⁶⁸⁴ Bert Klandermans. “A Theoretical Framework for Comparisons of Social Movement Participation.” *Sociological Forum*, 8.3 (1993): 383-402.

graduates expect to sustain their commitments via ongoing volunteering, value-aligned careers, everyday eco-habits, community ties, and occasional participation in social movements.

The opportunity is to formalize an alumni lane for involvement: lightweight mentoring (office hours, skills clinics), seasonal workdays (gardens/bike shops), “alumni shift” rosters during peak periods, and an annual teach-in where grads share career pathways. Low-friction giving and an alumni newsletter can keep relationships warm; defined board or advisory seats can channel experienced voices without crowding out student leadership. Treat graduation as a handoff, not an exit. Clear alumni roles convert student energy into durable capacity—smoothing succession, preserving institutional memory, and extending impact into the community and workforce.

Identify how community is formed and maintained

One staff question aimed to answer this question: **What shared activities/practices/rituals/gatherings contribute to creating a community and a positive environment?** Across interviews, observations, and survey responses, the strongest community cultures come from a layered ritual calendar: low-lift, repeating socials (potlucks, picnics, work bees) that create frequent touchpoints; signature annual traditions (disorientation weeks, showcases, holiday or volunteer-appreciation events) that generate shared memory; and periodic retreats—even informal camping weekends—that deepen trust and allow reflection. Groups that added alumni touchpoints (e.g. interviewee Tania’s annual Christmas fundraiser) benefited from continuity, mentorship, and alumni financial support.

Equally important is *how* these rituals run. Practices that are welcoming, food-centred, and participatory tend to knit together newcomers and veterans while reinforcing the mission. When “work” and “social” are intentionally blended—e.g., a work bee followed by a communal meal—organizations report better morale and follow-through.

4.3 Discussion - Education

Identify how learning occurs (formally and informally) within student-involved environmental organizations

Multiple survey questions aimed to answer this question. Questions for leadership and staff include: **What educational, leadership and personal development opportunities does your organization give? How does the organization contribute to educating your members and volunteers? How does the organization train new members/volunteers? How do you feel about the process?**

Questions for members and volunteers include: **What formal training and educational opportunities does the organization you volunteer with provide? Did you receive educational credit at any point for participating with the organization? Would you like to receive educational credit for participating with the organization? How has the community created by the organization contributed to your learning? Does the organization provide formal or informal mentoring? If so, what are the benefits? If not, how could it have helped?**

Across both leader and member perspectives, the most common theme is the dominance of primarily informal, experiential learning. Volunteers consistently described the hands-on opportunities provided by student-involved environmental organizations; sometimes as more meaningful and practical than much of their formal coursework. One interviewee, Matt, reflected: “I really think it was a better education than any of my class learning.”⁶⁸⁵ Another echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the contrast with theory-heavy university programs: “It's probably been one of the most helpful if I can say so, experiences I've had in University, because most of my learning at least in my program is very, very theoretical based, there's not much hands-on stuff.”⁶⁸⁶ While learning by doing was most common, other informal methods were also common, such as co-learning from peers and more experienced members. Members spoke of knowledge exchange, exposure to diverse perspectives, and the social support that made involvement more enjoyable.

Formal opportunities, while less common, were nevertheless recognized as important and needed. Staff and leaders pointed out potential opportunities, including formalized and in-depth training, partnerships with academic programs, offering course credit, manuals, and bringing in external facilitators. These more formal approaches are made easier once established and done on a regular basis, but they require staff time,

⁶⁸⁵ Matt (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁶⁸⁶ Joan (pseudonym), interview respondent.

stable funding, and clear organizational goals, which not all organizations have the capacity or resources for.

Mentorship—largely informal—was another important element. Over 70% of surveyed members reported some form of mentorship, typically from older peers or leaders passing on skills. Members identified benefits ranging from technical learning (bike mechanics, gardening, technical writing) to organizational development (how to manage a board, run events, or coordinate campaigns). Leaders also valued mentoring but acknowledged it was rarely structured. Several respondents suggested that formalizing mentorship would improve transitions and expand learning outcomes. This, however, is heavily dependent on who happens to be available to mentor new members.

Retention and transition moments—especially the turnover of executive teams each school year—were described as particularly fragile points. In those moments, organizations that had built consistent structures (like regular retreats or annual onboarding workshops) were better able to ensure continuity of knowledge and leadership skills. Even with resources, this remains a challenge in the age of fast capitalism.

Taken together, these findings suggest that these organizations function as educational incubators, even when education is not formally embedded in their mission statements. They provide experiential learning, peer-to-peer mentorship, and opportunities for leadership development, while also inspiring personal transformation and broader social commitments. These student-involved environmental organizations, along with other student levied organizations (unions, media, legal, social supports, etc.), and more broadly all student clubs, are critical to the university experience and provide value-added education opportunities. They provide responsibility and leadership one typically cannot find with entry level jobs—says one interviewee: “I learned how to make a budget and make sure we stick to it... [I’ve] gotten familiar with the workings of most organizations by having a board of directors and a team of coordinators.”⁶⁸⁷

However, the evidence also highlights gaps for improvement: inconsistent training for new members, underdeveloped formal structures, and limited partnerships with academic institutions. To maximize their potential, many leaders agreed, these

⁶⁸⁷ Joan (pseudonym), interview respondent.

organizations should explicitly embrace education as a dual core mission—alongside service delivery and sustainability—and embed reflection, structured training, and mentorship as standard practice.

Identify the successes and/or failures of formal educational training and programs

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question, one asked to the leadership, and one to the membership: [1] **How would you improve on formal training and educational opportunities?** [2] **What do you like about current training and educational opportunities?**

Formal training within student-involved environmental organizations is limited but valued. Regenesi's Environmental Leaders training⁶⁸⁸ and the Tools for Change workshop series⁶⁸⁹ offered by some OPIRG chapters are the two most successful formal education program examples open to all students, while MSEG is a great example of a selective, long-term formal training program. While what is offered is valued, many members expressed a desire for more formal opportunities—ranging from workshops and skill-specific training to certifications and mentorship. Flexibility was a key desire from members in being able to participate in formal training—this includes various delivery modes and more frequency in formal educational offerings.

For existing formal opportunities, members highlighted accessibility (e.g. self-paced or flexible formats), free and low-cost, hands-on learning, and the opportunity to learn new skills as strengths. In short, formal educational programs within these organizations are both appreciated and underdeveloped. Leaders recognized the resource barrier in further developing formal opportunities: expanding training requires staff and funding that some groups lack.

Identify how environmental and social justice education is enacted within student-involved environmental organizations

⁶⁸⁸ A 13 lesson program developed internally that examines current environmental and social issues and different means of action (utilizing research on what actions are most effective and under what circumstances).

⁶⁸⁹ An activist skill workshop series offered by different OPIRG chapters. Topics vary widely, from organizing protests to bookkeeping and accounting for organizations.

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question, one asked to the leadership, and two to the membership: [1] **What does the organization do to educate its volunteers/members on social and environmental justice?** [2] **How has your involvement helped you learn about the environment/social justice?**

88% of members reported gaining knowledge about environmental and social justice issues through their involvement. They described new learning, ranging from advocacy skills to broader awareness of systemic issues. For many, this blending of theory and practice made activism a more powerful form of education than classroom learning alone. However, the depth of knowledge gains was unclear. Additionally, only some organizations emphasized both environmental and social justice, others leaned only toward environmental themes, with some reporting noting that social justice was minimal or not present. This unevenness suggests that while student organizations are strong vehicles for experiential and applied education, there is room to more intentionally embed popular education alongside environmental work to ensure holistic learning. Overall, larger and better resourced organizations are better able to provide educational opportunities.

Identify if greater commitments to environmental sustainability and/or social justice have been achieved

Two members survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How has your commitment to environmental and social justice causes increased?** [2] **Have you gotten involved with broader social movements/environmental causes as a result of your organizational involvement?**

Many respondents described how involvement deepened their commitment to environmental and social justice. Nearly half reported stronger dedication, with some citing tangible lifestyle changes—such as adopting veganism, reducing consumption, or supporting local agriculture. Others noted that organizational experience influenced their career paths, leading them into mission-driven and social impact careers. For several, these organizations served as an entry point into broader social movements, providing both knowledge and motivation to extend activism beyond campus. This positively correlates with research on volunteering that demonstrates increased pro-environmental

behaviors^{690,691} and volunteering more overtime than the general population.^{692,693}

At the same time, commitment was not universal. About 40% said their engagement remained confined to the organization itself, while others expressed interest in further volunteer or social movement involvement but were constrained by time. A few felt they were already committed before joining. These findings highlight that while student environmental organizations are powerful incubators of social and environmental justice commitments, the depth of impact varies depending on individual context, organizational emphasis, and available capacity. It also shows the negative implications of fast capitalism and the lack of time on civic involvement, further compounded by the risk of activist burnout.

Identify the role of education within these student-involved environmental organizations

One survey question asked the staff and leadership aimed to answer this: **What does it mean to think of the organization as an education organization?** When asked what it means to think of these organizations as educational, most leaders emphasized that their role extends beyond program and service delivery. Many emphasized experiential and informal learning: gaining skills through participation, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and the leadership empowerment that comes from running initiatives. Some went further describing holistic education outcomes that took on power, including the development of good citizenship and learning to challenge dominant narratives. In this sense, these organizations function as communities of practice—shared spaces where students can learn with and from one another, while uniting around common goals.

⁶⁹⁰ V. Seymour, M. King, and R. Antonaci. “Understanding the Impact of Volunteering on Pro-Environmental Behavioural Change.” *Voluntary Sector Review*, 9.1 (2018), pp. 73–91
<<https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/vsr/9/1/article-p73.xml>>

⁶⁹¹ Rachael Green, Ashley Dayer & Amy M. Johnson. “Citizen Scientist Participation in Research on Private Lands.” *Citizen Science: Theory and Practice*, 8.1 (2023).
<<https://theoryandpractice.citizenscienceassociation.org/articles/507/files/64f1b9ed89fed.pdf>>

⁶⁹² Daniel Hart, Thomas M. Donnelly, James Youniss, and Robert Atkins. “High School Community Service as a Predictor of Adult Voting and Volunteering.” *American Educational Research Journal*, 44.1 (2007), pp. 197–219. <<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0002831206298173>>

⁶⁹³ Hudson-Flege, Matthew D. *Getting Things Done for Life: Long-Term Impact of AmeriCorps Service for Diverse Groups of Members*. 2018. Clemson University, PhD dissertation.
https://open.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/2139/

However, not all respondents agreed with this framing. Some were more reserved, positioning their groups primarily as service or support organizations with education as a secondary outcome. Further, few have embedded education into their formal missions or policies, creating a missed opportunity. By more deliberately integrating education in the mission and activities of the organization—through structured workshops, retreats, partnerships with academic programs, and similar actions—student environmental organizations could strengthen their impact, ensuring that learning remains as central as service provision or advocacy. It is important to remember we are at an education institution and working with students—education should be dual core mission along with service delivery and sustainability.

Identify how reflection takes place within these organizations and with their leadership

Three survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How is reflection part of your activism?** [2] **How does the organization create space and time for reflection and discussion to occur?** [3] **How does the organization facilitate action based upon those reflections and discussions?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Reflection is vitally part of education—comprehension and application of knowledge, critical thinking and truth finding, and the improvement of things in our daily lives and workplaces. However, given the speed imperative of capitalism, taking time for reflection is often seen as a luxury; this is also true for those involved in creating social change who would prefer to focus their time on action. A respondent from a Christian social justice organization (that was also a PIRG working group) explained, “Capitalism has been annoyingly persistent. Anything that forces students to focus their time on making money and surviving takes energy and capacity away from what people can spend on organizing with us.”⁶⁹⁴ Professor and activist Kamilla Pietrzyk (Petrick) cautions us, “There is thus a tension at work here: on the one hand, self-reflexivity can undermine whatever confidence activists bring to their work. On the other, reflexive

⁶⁹⁴ Harry Elliott (pseudonym), survey respondent.

capacities are needed to recognize and possibly counteract the biases that are potentially influencing goals and strategies in deleterious ways.”⁶⁹⁵

Activism can also lead to burnout. Multiple respondents, including Jing and Vlad, spoke directly about activist burnout and the need for self-care. The literature on activist burn-out identifies common causes for burnout such as slow progress on goals, tense relationships, a lack of resources, infighting, deep sensitivity to injustice, and apathy amongst the general public.⁶⁹⁶ Most respondents reported engaging only in informal or personal reflection—if at all. Of the survey responses, 16 participants emphasized the importance of reflection, but many either expressed uncertainty about its role or did not respond at all. This lack of deliberate reflection raises important questions: Could insufficient opportunities for intentional reflection be contributing to the cycles of burnout within student environmental organizations? Evidence suggests this is a weak point that could be strengthened by formal structured and accessible practices, such as regular check-ins, feedback surveys, debriefs and strategic planning retreats. For example, Regenesi organizes a semesterly reflection with its leadership team in a relaxed, enjoyable setting—with food, games, and activities—that allows for collective visioning and strategic planning. Holding these sessions in welcoming environments such as parks in the summer or cozy indoor spaces in the winter fosters both connection and focus, demonstrating that reflection does not have to be burdensome but can instead be an energizing and community-building experience.

The main barrier to such practices is capacity. Groups that are most successful at embedding reflection—through debriefs, retreats, facilitated discussions, or strategic planning—are often those with staff to organize them. Smaller organizations, or those struggling with volunteer turnover, tend to rely on informal or ad hoc discussions, if reflection happens at all. This gap matters because reflection is not just about processing experiences; it is also about ensuring accountability, evaluating effectiveness, and aligning strategies with evolving student needs. Without structured processes, organizations risk repeating mistakes, losing institutional memory, and overlooking

⁶⁹⁵ Kamilla Pietrzyk. “Activism in the Fast Lane: Social Movements and the Neglect of Time.” *Fast Capitalism*, 7.1 (2010): http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/7_1/pietrzyk7_1.html

⁶⁹⁶ Cher Weixia Chen and Paul C. Gorski. “Burnout in Social Justice and Human Rights Activists: Symptoms, Causes and Implications.” *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 7.3 (2015): 366-390.

opportunities for growth.

Finally, while some organizations were able to link reflection to concrete action—through follow-through on decisions, adjusting programming, or using meeting notes to guide priorities—many respondents admitted this connection was weak or nonexistent. Too often, reflection occurred without clear pathways to implementation. The findings suggest that while reflection is valued in principle, its integration into decision-making and action is uneven. Strengthening these links—ensuring that reflective insights are systematically translated into organizational change—would not only help prevent burnout but also increase the resilience and effectiveness of student environmental organizations.

4.4 Discussion - Organizations

Identify the factors unique to student-involved environmental organizations

From my survey results, interviews, case studies, and personal experience, I believe the evidence is clear: student-levy funded organizations consistently outperform volunteer-run student clubs in every measurable area—service delivery, educational impact, community building, and environmental outcomes. For example, in interviews, respondents Betty and Veronica described the collapse of their thrift store due to a shortage of people and resources. A levy could have sustained the initiative by enabling a hybrid staffing model—combining paid student positions with volunteers—ensuring reliability and continuity in delivering a valuable service that a club model most often cannot maintain.

There are three main types of sustainable levy organizations:

1. **Single-focus** – one primary initiative (e.g., a bike centre, community garden, or café).
2. **Multi-initiative** – several programs under one organization (e.g., Embark Sustainability at Simon Fraser University).
3. **Network** – multi-campus and multi-initiative, like Regenesiis

While any of these is an improvement over a minimally funded student club, I argue that a network model offers the greatest resilience and impact. I believe this is strongly supported by all my data sources. My reasoning rests on five points:

1. **Resilience** – Networks are less likely to disappear during austerity because they can share resources and capacity across multiple chapters, achieving economics of scale and efficiency.
2. **Institutional Memory** – Multi-chapter organizations have more staff, and thus staggered leadership turnover, thereby preserving knowledge that would otherwise be lost when a single key staff person or executive member leaves.
3. **Mutual Support** – Chapters can step in to help others during difficulties, reducing the risk of closure.
4. **Effectiveness** – Networks enable knowledge-sharing (e.g., shared Slack channels, manuals, shared services, regular initiative-specific meetings) that improves service delivery and educational programming—something smaller organizations often deprioritize due to limited capacity.
5. **Funding Leverage** – Larger organizations can secure more and bigger grants. Funders won't provide grants more than the current operating budget of an organization. A network allows for a larger organization needed to win six-figure government or foundation funding that a smaller organization couldn't access. The work of an organization can be amplified further this way.

While I believe eco-student clubs joining Regenesiis is the strongest option, I acknowledge my bias. Knowing what I know now—and the stress and effort required to build Regenesiis over many years—I might have instead joined OPIRG and tried to shape it towards the direction I would have like to see (though that to would not be without challenges, as all organizations have established cultures and a vision that might have proven difficult to shift). Regenesiis itself faces mixed perceptions. Some critics say we're too mainstream; others say we're too radical. Some call us too top-down; others, too grassroots (for example, if a student-proposed initiative is aligned with our mandate, we immediately start providing support before it goes to the board for approval—a sort of reverse approval process that prioritizes agency and support over bureaucratic process). I

believe the environmental movement needs more open dialogue to bridge these divides. It's okay if some dislike our approach; different strategies can coexist. That doesn't mean organizations taking different approaches still can't find common ground and work together where they see fit.

My own approach at Regenesi reflects lessons learned from years of witnessing how neoliberal austerity has eroded third spaces, unions, student associations, and funding availability. I once explained to someone that I see one role of Regenesi as a seed vault—like the Svalbard Global Seed Vault—here to ensure the seeds survive, seeding the next generation with the imaginary of alter-capitalist and non-capitalist alternatives of how we could organize our future societies and economies, promoting capacity for critical thinking, and teaching effective and practical realpolitik means of change over the naïve, overly idealistic ineffective methods. We're not trying to be a 'revolutionary vanguard'—others who see fit can fill that role. History shows movements need varied approaches—reformist, tempered and radical—to achieve social and political change. More radical approaches generally produce cultural change (e.g. shifts in public opinion, generating greater awareness), while those with formalized structures impact policy and structural change.⁶⁹⁷

Too often, activists on the fringe left shame moderates for not joining revolutionary projects—but most revolutions fail. One can argue from a Marxist historical-materialist perspective, change comes in due time through in predictable stages of history, and we are still in one of capitalist dominance. Economic insecurity and poverty mean most people will resist drastic systemic change until crises deepen. Pushing for a 'revolution' is deeply delusory—those come when the right circumstances line up and are most often fraught with tragedy and hardship. Change can come other ways, including gradually. My dual embrace of eastern religious traditions taught me the importance of accepting reality for what it is, while my Christian upbringing continues to drive my motivation for bettering the living conditions of all. Change will occur in time and the right confluences of cultural change, technological advances, and political

⁶⁹⁷ Suzanne Staggenborg. "Can Feminists Organizations Be Effective?" Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement. Ed. M.M. Ferree and P.Y. Martin. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995. 339-355.

pressure.

Setting the seeds for that change to occur effectively when the moment is ready is what is most important. That's why I believe our work must focus on seeding ideas with upcoming generations—critical thinking, honest education about systems and power, and engaging in dialogue that reduces polarization. This is not just a progressive agenda; it's a survival imperative. To shift power towards acting on the environmental crisis and growing social inequality, power must be eroded on multiple fronts. We must also bring some of those with power to our side and address reasonable concerns through compromise, while standing firm on the most critical issues. Only then can we reduce inequity, increase agency, and make it possible to survive and thrive in the face of environmental and social crises. Any study of history and power will show that bringing elites over to the cause is the most likely path that change occurs.⁶⁹⁸

Looking at a similar organization to Regenesi, Embark Sustainability at Simon Fraser University, which has taken a moderate, depoliticized approach to ensure organizational success. For instance, when addressing fossil fuel investments, Embark frames its advocacy around promoting “sustainable investments” rather than explicitly calling for fossil fuel divestment. Part of Embark's success likely stems from the fact that its founder went on to work in SFU's sustainability office and now serves as its director—illustrating the importance of institutional trust and strong internal relationships for securing long-term support.

Another model to look at lies outside the environmental sector altogether: Norway's *Studentsamskipnad* and Germany's *Studierendenwerk* systems. These regional student welfare organizations that provide services like food and housing, while not specifically focused on sustainability, provide strong social proof for the benefits of large, networked models, often serving multiple post-secondary institutions in a single region.

I would believe it warrants further examining volunteer-run or alternative organizational structures work well—both to understand their limits and to see whether they can be scaled under the right conditions. Three organizations in particular stand out:

⁶⁹⁸ Various social movement theories support this notion, including Cooptation, Social Movement Impact Theory, and Elite Theory.

- **Ecole** – A unique co-living and third-space model that combines reduced rents and student jobs in environmental organizing. This approach is one we are exploring at Regensis.
- **Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Gardens (MSEG)** – Demonstrates a sustainable, year-over-year model for funding student jobs without relying on a levy, offering valuable lessons in financial and personnel viability.
- **Sprouts** – Operated successfully for many years as a volunteer-run food organization at UBC. However, growing time pressures on students have begun to strain this model. Sprouts' longevity may also be linked to the relatively privileged backgrounds of many UBC students. This raises doubts about replicating such a volunteer-intensive model at commuter universities or institutions where more students come from working-class or lower-income backgrounds.

Specific Organizations – Campus Agriculture

Campus agricultural organizations often face persistent challenges with funding and maintaining university support. Interviewee Michelle, from a small west-coast university, described in detail the ongoing struggle of operating a community garden on limited resources and the constant need to have people championing the garden with the administration advocating for its continuation and resource support. One area where established campus agricultural organizations tend to excel, however, is volunteer recruitment. With a steady supply of volunteer labour, some gardens are able to operate sustainably through produce sales. A notable example is the Green and Gold Garden at the University of Alberta—an entirely volunteer-run campus farm that sells produce and donates between \$30,000 and \$40,000 annually to the Tubahumurize Women's Association, a Rwandan NGO supporting female victims of violence. This model demonstrates that campus farms can not only cover their own costs but also generate significant surplus.

As discussed earlier, the MSEG model is particularly innovative and could be worth replicating elsewhere. An organization like SEIZE could play an important role in funding research and supporting other campus agricultural initiatives interested in

adapting this approach. Another example, though funded through a student levy rather than being self-sustaining, is the Concordia Greenhouse. This project is uniquely designed to combine utilitarian function with inviting aesthetics, featuring educational programming, a small-scale community garden (including free plant and seed giveaways), an agricultural incubator, and a warm, cozy study space. While student-levy funding is less common for gardens and campus farms, it remains a viable option in certain contexts.

In terms of political engagement, campus agricultural and community bike shop initiatives were generally the least politically active and least involved in broader social movements, with many not identifying as activist-oriented. While it is important to respect that not everyone wishes to engage in the complex and often stressful world of politics, there remains room for deeper connections. Opportunities could include collaborating with other campus organizations, student unions, or labour unions; linking their work to broader issues (for example, using the Green and Gold Garden as a platform to discuss global south equity issues); offering education on food justice, migrant labour, or comparisons between pesticide-driven agriculture and permaculture; and participating in campus coalitions when key issues arise, such as threats to levy funding or tuition increases.

Specific Organizations – Bike Centres

Similar to campus agricultural initiatives, campus bike centres tend to be significantly less engaged in politics and social movements. Interestingly, however, the gender dynamics are almost the opposite: campus agriculture sees far greater involvement from women, while campus bike centres tend to be dominated by men. The roots of political apathy also appear to differ between the two. I would argue that for many men disengagement stems from cynicism or unorthodox beliefs they may be reluctant to share, viewing politics as ineffective or inherently corrupt.⁶⁹⁹ For women, apathy more often arises from a desire to focus on community, reduce stress, and seek aesthetic or

⁶⁹⁹ I reference this report to support my argument (see sections on Lone Wolves and Critical Counterculturalists): Environics Institute for Survey Research. Canadian Millennials: Social Values Study. Environics Institute for Survey Research, Feb. 2017.

pleasurable experiences.⁷⁰⁰

This difference matters: male apathy is often adversarial to politics, whereas female apathy is not antagonistic and may therefore be more open to political engagement. As a result, bike centres—being male-dominated—may face stronger resistance to politicization. That said, many have made commendable efforts to foster inclusivity, such as hosting women- and trans-only hours to create a more accessible space in a traditionally male-dominated environment. There are, however, opportunities for bike centres to engage politically in ways that are unlikely to alienate participants with widely differing political views. Local advocacy for cycling infrastructure and public transit, for example, is a natural extension of their mission and can resonate across the political spectrum.

Survey respondents and interviewees also identified common operational challenges for campus bike centres. Chief among these are difficulties in securing and retaining suitable campus space and maintaining a consistent volunteer base—particularly given the training, time, and technical skill required for a volunteer to effectively work in bike mechanics. This makes bike centres among the more vulnerable campus initiatives. In my view, long-term success depends on having both permanent, suitable space and staffing support funded through a student levy.

One model worth exploring further is Coop Bécik, located at Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, which operates as both a CÉGEP and a high school. By drawing from a wider pool of potential volunteers, including younger students, this model engages people in cycling earlier—helping address one of the biggest barriers to long-term cycling adoption.

Specific Organizations – Food Initiatives

Multiple survey and interview respondents—including Owenetta, Karma, Matt, and Joan—spoke at length about the many challenges facing campus food initiatives. These range from health and safety regulations and compliance with university or student

⁷⁰⁰ See discussions in: H. Coffé, and C. Bolzendahl. “Same Game, Different Rules? Gender Differences in Political Participation.” *Sex Roles*, 62.5-6 (Mar. 2010), pp. 318–330. and S. Stefani, G. Prati, I. Tzankova, E. Ricci, C. Albanesi, and E. Cicognani. “Gender Differences in Civic and Political Engagement and Participation Among Italian Young People.” *Social Psychological Bulletin*, 16.1 (2021), Article e3887.

union rules, to navigating restrictive university food service contracts, and accessing suitable kitchen or food preparation and storage space. These difficulties cut across all types of initiatives—cafés, meal programs, farmers’ markets, and grocery projects alike.

Most universities, and some student unions or student centres, tend to be risk-averse when it comes to food. The University of Toronto Graduate Students’ Union (UTGSU), for example, once faced the threat of losing its building due to non-hierarchical food initiative’s failure to meet health and safety regulations. Two of the most common problems—regulatory compliance and institutional risk-aversion—can be addressed through strategic partnerships. Large food non-profits such as Food Secure Canada, Équiterre, and FoodShare Toronto can assist campus groups in setting up systems to ensure compliance. Quebec’s large student cooperatives and student unions, many of which successfully operate multiple food service ventures, have the resources and stability necessary to ensure regulatory compliance. Their democratic structures and political mandates also ensure pathways for student-agency over such food initiatives, and ensuring a commitment to the values and foodways that are important to students: affordability, fair-trade, locally grown, chemical-free and diverse food options.

Grocery Cooperatives & Bulk Buying Collectives

Grocery co-ops and bulk buying groups often face two primary challenges:

- Finding suppliers—especially for fair-trade or specialty items—or persuading suppliers to sell in smaller quantities.
- Economies of scale—without sufficient volume and efficiencies in operations, it’s difficult to keep prices as affordable as desired.

Le Frigo Vert recently decided to scale back their grocery offerings due to inability to compete on some items.⁷⁰¹ Regenesys has faced these issues directly with our food initiatives, typically only being able to provide reductions in prices of 10-30% to that of a grocery store given their purchasing power. Scale is essential to achieve meaningful bulk discounts and pass those savings on to members. One of the main

⁷⁰¹ Le Frigo Vert. Le Frigo Vert, n.d., <<https://lefrigovert.org/>>. 2024/2025 Annual Report.

failures of the grocery cooperative movement has been the reluctance to scale, prioritizing a vague sense of localism over the tangible benefits of large-scale cooperative buying power. Notable exceptions include Mondragon in Spain and Calgary Co-op in Canada. In Ontario, the Ontario Natural Food Co-operative—once a key wholesaler—was forced to sell to a larger private wholesaler from British Columbia due to sector consolidation. Efforts to scale the sector would be needed to make deeper impacts on price, sustainability and fair-trade. That said, there are still things campus grocery initiative can do. Where an existing grocery cooperative already exists in the area, campus grocery initiatives may benefit from partnering or collaborating with them. Given the complexity of this type of initiative, reach out to campus grocery cooperatives at other universities to learn from them.

Food Coalitions

Food coalitions often struggle with participation and uptake. Interviewee Madonna noted such challenges at their university. Regenesis has encountered similar difficulties when trying to build a network of environmental student organizations across the country, and recently, had UTERN (University of Toronto Environmental Network) joined due to ongoing challenges. While many people desire connection and knowledge-sharing that a network can provide, limited personal capacity in the era of “fast capitalism” makes sustained participation rare. Buy-in is essential, and without participation being required (part of the same organization) or offering significant rewards (e.g. additional funding), attendance and participation will be limited.

Successful examples, such as the Concordia Food Coalition, are often context-specific—shaped by Montreal’s far-left political culture, urban setting, and academic programs aligned with food studies—while additionally providing resources and support. In practice, only established organizations like Regenesis and OPIRG maintain regular, functional networks, often because participation is an expected social norm, and because there are shared coordinated programs (e.g. online workshops, retreats) that provide concrete reasons to attend. Where coalitions can fall short, targeted gatherings like the DevOur Annual Food Conference—held in partnership with the Canadian Association of Food Studies—offer a more effective model of a focused, once annual commitment. This

ask is less burdensome in the age of ‘fast capitalism’ and can offer the most benefits in a short amount of time—these events connect campus food activists, enable knowledge exchange, and strengthen the movement.

Cafés

Campus café models vary widely, from for-profit student-run businesses like The Tea Room at Queen’s University, to volunteer-run spaces like Sprouts’ Café, to levy-supported models like The Seasoned Spoon at Trent University. Of these, cafés with both levy support and revenue-generating capacity are in the strongest position. Even a modest levy can provide the breathing room to develop the systems necessary for long-term success. Models that combine levy support with earned income deliver the greatest benefit to campus communities—offering more student jobs, richer programming, and longer hours of operation. Levy-backed food initiatives tend to be more effective in their educational work and more resilient over the long term.

Specific Organizations – PIRGs

Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) have played a prominent role in Canadian campus activism for decades, but their histories are often complex and contested. While many have made significant contributions to student organizing, incubation, and social change, they have also faced recurring challenges. Indeed, most Canadian PIRGs have faced significant challenges over the years. While not every PIRG has experienced every issue, my research indicates that most have encountered some combination of them. In particular, the Ontario PIRGs (OPIRGs) chapters have faced considerable contention and controversy. Drawing from my research, interviews, and observations, I explore the common issues PIRGs encounter, as well as the structural and cultural factors that influence their effectiveness.

The following sections examine four recurring areas of difficulty—internal disputes, external attacks, staff and board issues, and organizational structure—before comparing the Canadian PIRG model to its U.S. counterpart and highlighting the unique benefits PIRGs can offer when they are functioning well. This context sets the stage for a balanced consideration of both their limitations and their possible futures in a concluding

section.

- Internal disputes

While internal disputes are not uncommon in student organizations—often because many young people have not yet developed the skills to work effectively in groups—I would not say it is the norm. That said, research suggests that conflict is more likely to arise within social movement organizations.⁷⁰² Jerry Rubin, a famed sixties activist, said of social movement conflict: “When we in the movement realized we weren’t going to dismantle the system, we turned out hostility towards each other.”⁷⁰³

In the accounts of others, online research, and my own observations, some Canadian PIRGs have faced internal conflicts ranging from factionalism, to disputes between individual chapters and the provincial PIRG, to disagreements between boards and staff, and even accusations of workplace harassment. Over the years, these tensions have led some PIRG chapters to either leave OPIRG or decide not to join in the first place;⁷⁰⁴ additionally many PIRGs have come into conflict with the student union, including VIPIRG, WPIRG and OPIRG Brock.⁷⁰⁵ Conflicts can even arise between working groups, with one respondent recalling a Marxist working group coming into conflict with a Free Tibet working group within their own PIRG.⁷⁰⁶

I see three main concepts that contribute to these kinds of disputes:

- Activist ghettoization – a term whose originator describes as: “There is potential for a hegemonic politics to evolve, where the space becomes a ‘ghetto’ or ‘pure’ space in which participants project their moral lifestyle choices out upon others in the wider society.”⁷⁰⁷ Taha, a PIRG respondent who served as both staff and board

⁷⁰² Amin Ghaziani and Kelsy Kretschmer. “Infighting and Insurrection.” *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon. 2nd ed., Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018, pp. 220–235.

⁷⁰³ Jerry Rubin. *Growing (Up) at 37*. New York, NY: M. Evans, 1976. Pg. 8-9.

⁷⁰⁴ Most would later join or rejoin.

⁷⁰⁵ See sections on VIPIRG, WPIRG and OPIRG Brock for the background on these conflicts and sources.

⁷⁰⁶ Jing (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁷⁰⁷ Andre Pusey. “Social Centres and the New Cooperativism of the Common.” *Affinities*, 4.1 (2010): 176-198.

member, noted that PIRGs are “operating in a bubble.”⁷⁰⁸ This dynamic can lead to a “morality spiral” that fuels further isolation and radicalization, and destroys trust within an organization.

- Wreckerism – defined by activist Clementine Morrigan as “the process of using cancel culture, identitarian and personal grievances to undermine the political work of an organization.”⁷⁰⁹ This tendency has also been observed in some PIRGs and other radically left-aligned student organizations.
- Difficult personalities – Situations where individuals on the political fringes are more dogmatic and intolerant of different views,⁷¹⁰ resulting in inner-group conflict. This can make collaborative group work more challenging.

Internal factionalism can significantly negatively impact success.^{711,712}

Interviewee Jing noted that one of the primary purposes of the OPIRG provincial body is to deal with both external attacks and internal conflict—a description that, to me, feels like a deflating reason to motivate engagement with the provincial PIRG. Perhaps it is simply the inherent nature of political work to be in a constant state of defending and challenging in order to uphold the rights of those without power or resources. Still, when an organization lacks meaningful and positive purposes beyond conflict management, OPIRG chapters will likely continue to decline or disaffiliate—especially when these disputes are compounded by other systemic challenges PIRGs face. My own experiences with serving on the OPIRG provincial board, where my suggestions were routinely shut down by a small handful of long-time staff members—who also served on the board creating a unique conflict of interest—left me feeling disillusioned with wanting to take initiative or further help. This handful of staff-board members, with a non-staff board members (who were former staff), were almost all white, while I am a racialized, mixed-

⁷⁰⁸ Taha (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁷⁰⁹ Clementine Morrigan. “Wreckerism.” Instagram, 26 June 2022.
<<https://www.instagram.com/p/ChuSgWWgkEL/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>>.

⁷¹⁰ Jan-Willem van Prooijen, and André P. M. Krouwel. “Extreme Political Beliefs Predict Dogmatic Intolerance.” *Social Psychological & Personality Science*, 8.3, Apr. 2017, pp. 292–300. Sage Journals, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616671403>

⁷¹¹ William Gamson. *Strategy of Social Protest*, 2nd Edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1990.

⁷¹² Jack A. Goldstone. “The Weakness of Organization: A New Look at Gamson’s The Strategy of Social Protest.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 85.5 (1980): 1017-1042.

race individual and most of those seeking changes were racialized. I don't want to call my experience racism; however, I cannot deny the power dynamics at play, especially considering other OPIRGs like Carleton have accused OPIRG provincial network of racism.⁷¹³ While other board members directly expressing their support to me for change to occur within OPIRG, due to their organizational culture where people were afraid to speak up and challenge, any suggestions would get shot down by these powerful long-time dual staff-board members. I am not surprised that Carleton PIRG recently left the OPIRG provincial network and wouldn't be surprised if more left in the future.

- External attacks and conflicts

No student organization has come under as much scrutiny or attack as the PIRG. This is tragic, as I discussed in section outlining the PIRG, many great community initiatives and organizations were created out of local and provincial PIRGs across Canada. As far back as the 1970s, right-wing students were organizing to oppose progressive student unions (such as the Ontario Federation of Students) and to prevent the establishment of student levies.⁷¹⁴ These efforts have not always been direct; they often work through student unions and clubs that attempt to remove space or cut funding. In recent years, this has been compounded by an increasing international dimension: as we shift from a unipolar to a multipolar political world, international state actors, their proxies, and allies have become more active in engaging in domestic interference in Canada. I review these developments in more detail in the *Politics* section.

The political and cultural landscape PIRGs operate in has also changed dramatically. In the 1980s and 1990s, PIRGs were often seen as principled and necessary—addressing issues like the gender pay gap, the AIDS crisis, and environmental problems such as recycling and CFCs. Today, terms like *social justice* and *woke* are often used as slurs, activists are frequently portrayed as people with too much free time who “don't want to work,” and issues that in the recent past had broad agreement—such as

⁷¹³ I think my experience is an unconscious dynamic of power and privilege by otherwise well-meaning people, with this dynamic greatly reenforced in leftist spaces that are dominated by demands for ideological purity. Consensus decision making, in such cases, can be used as a weapon to shut down discourse and halt any changes.

⁷¹⁴ Western News. “Campus PC club is not “the conscience of OFS”.” Western News. 17 March 1977. <<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11805/9478>>.

environmental protection or gender equity—now face fierce backlash. Compounding this, PIRGs have become less visible on many campuses, known mainly to the only the most active and engaged students. Numerous PIRGs have been defunded, and countless more have faced repeated attempts to defund them such as the PIRGs at McMaster and Queen's.

I am not convinced that external attacks would stop if Canadian PIRGs changed their political positions or direction. Nor am I sure how much they can do to defend themselves beyond ensuring they meet all audit and reporting requirements for their student unions—financial vulnerabilities are often easier for opponents to exploit than political disagreements. The political right on campus has proven adept at both student union elections, and with underhanded tactics, such as fabricating allegations, selectively applying scrutiny, and misrepresenting facts. PIRGs have faced take-over attempts not only from the political right, but also from the far-left. In the latter case, some actors have sought to leverage the PIRG's resources and legitimacy as a front organization for their specific brand of Trotskyist Marxism, seeking to redirect its mandate toward their own ideological goals.

Particular vulnerability arises when PIRGs take positions on certain international issues (e.g., Palestine, Tibet) or host working groups on them. The irony is that universities are supposed to be pluralistic spaces, where student clubs representing a wide variety of perspectives can coexist. So why would a PIRG make itself politically vulnerable in this way, when students interested in these topics could organize through other venues? I believe there is something deeply ingrained in many on the political left—a strong empathy and moral drive—that makes compromise, or even nuanced positioning, feel morally bankrupt. To those who do not share these views, however, it can appear as moral grandstanding or virtue signalling. In some cases, these stances may also be about seeking meaning, exercising moral agency, or finding community through ideological purity.

These factors all add weight to the argument that PIRG's challenges are complex and difficult to resolve. At best, they can build a strong defence if they continue on their current path—but that raises a difficult question: how can an organization operate effectively if it is constantly under attack? One possible approach would be to change the

structure and perception of how politically charged activities are housed. If such initiatives were not seen as official PIRG working groups but instead as independent clubs receiving funding and equipment loans from PIRG—similar to the role played by a university’s student life department or student union—then PIRGs might avoid some of the criticism they currently face.

In my view, many of these external conflicts are unnecessary fights driven largely by perception. What frustrates me most is seeing PIRG activists willing to let their organizations be continually attacked—and, in some cases, closed—because they are unwilling to compromise. This unwillingness to adapt ignores the broader consequences: when PIRGs disappear, countless other causes lose access to the organizing resources PIRGs provide. To them it is about the righteousness of their causes and moral purity. However, this rigid thinking and positioning is not helpful. This is not about betraying a cause or withdrawing support. It is about accepting the reality of the situation and recognizing that survival sometimes requires strategic adaptation—so that future generations still have these communities, resources, and tools to fight the battles they will inevitably face.

- Staff and Board issues

Many PIRGs also face issues involving staff, boards, or the relationship between the two. On the board side, interviewee Taha spoke candidly about the challenges of volunteer boards, calling them a “nightmare in practice”⁷¹⁵ and discussing the complex dynamics between a student-run board and experienced staff. The difficulties include the inexperience of students, the significant time commitment required from a volunteer board, and the need for board members to develop the confidence and knowledge to set direction when working alongside more seasoned staff.

Labour contracts add another layer of complexity. Most PIRGs operate as unionized workplaces, meaning volunteer boards often find themselves responsible for handling contract negotiations, grievances, and violations—tasks that require substantial time and expertise. Without delving into the philosophy or politics of non-profit management, the reality remains that most NGOs operate with limited capacity and

⁷¹⁵ Taha (pseudonym), interview respondent.

funding while tackling important social issues. Working for an NGO is, in many ways, a “sacrifice” in terms of income—but it offers the rare privilege of doing meaningful work, a luxury not everyone can afford. It is further complicated by most NGOs donors and volunteers having a mission-first mentality—often seeing having staff, especially well-paid ones, as unnecessary or even immoral. An alternative model, such as setting up and contracting a worker co-operative, or reestablishing PIRGs as solidarity co-operatives, might be better alternatives to having non-profit workplaces unionized.

Burnout is another recurring problem. Multiple PIRG respondents reported staff burnout, sometimes at alarming levels. At OPIRG York, burnout among members and staff had become so severe that, if not for my insistence and assistance in calling meetings and recruiting new board members, the organization likely would have ceased to exist due to inactivity after a period of internal conflict.

Incumbency also presents challenges. Some PIRGs have staff who have been in their positions for decades, and it shows in their reduced energy levels, diminished innovation, and lack of drive. As PIRGs have become increasingly irrelevant and invisible on many campuses, these long-serving staff members—some in their 40s, 50s, or 60s—have effectively made PIRG their entire career. To be clear, this is not an ageist critique; I have no objection to mature students or recent graduates of any age being hired. However, I believe a major factor in PIRG’s decline is that these positions are not being opened to the next generation. Student organizations should be learning grounds—balancing service delivery (ensuring reliability and legal compliance) with the training and education of students. While retaining some experienced staff and institutional memory is essential, these roles should primarily serve as career-starter positions for students and recent alumni to gain initial work experience, not as lifetime posts. The challenge is often finding a suitable replacement (either by training volunteers internally or finding someone external) who has the appropriate set of administrative skills and is willing to accept low pay.

This combination of factors can create situations where PIRGs take advantage of inexperienced student board members, while unionized environments protect underperforming staff. In my research, I encountered multiple cases where PIRG chapter staff were being paid but were not fulfilling their duties. In some instances, PIRG offices

were rarely open—sometimes only for a few hours one day a week—which raises questions about what exactly staff are being paid to do. A particularly frustrating finding was that many PIRGs had not even kept their websites updated, a basic and low-cost task. This lack of accountability needs to be addressed if PIRGs are to remain relevant, effective, and worthy of the student levies that sustain them.

- Structure

The Canadian PIRG model is both its greatest strength and a key vulnerability. Its hallmark feature is the working group (or action group) model, which relies on committed student activists to register or renew annually. This allows PIRGs to quickly adapt to shifting interests, demographics, and community needs. However, the independent, self-directed nature of the model can also undermine effectiveness, lead to mission drift, and lack overall cohesion—with working group in areas as broad as cultural, social, political, or environmental. As one respondent noted, some working groups “just apply to get their funding and we don't hear from them at all during the year,”⁷¹⁶ functioning little differently from ordinary student clubs.

Interviewee Taha highlighted another challenge: many working groups don't fully understand the model itself, leading to a “a huge disconnect between the people working in the working groups and the staff of the organization and the board.”⁷¹⁷ Despite these issues, Taha and others still value the model. The greater challenge is sustainability—projects often cease when key organizers graduate. This might be fine for policy-based campaigns that end once their objectives are met, but problematic for ongoing projects such as community gardens, or campaigns that have not yet met their objective. Some PIRGs have tried to address this. LPIRG, for example, has set working groups that provide stability from year to year. OPIRG York has built long-term ties with local organizations and focused on hyper-local issues. A restructured approach could allow action groups to remain for 3–5 years instead of renewing annually, giving them time to develop while still allowing new initiatives to emerge.

Ultimately, PIRG effectiveness often comes down to the commitment and skill of

⁷¹⁶ Jing (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁷¹⁷ Taha (pseudonym), interview respondent.

staff and key volunteers, with success ebbing and flowing based on leadership, which goes back to the staffing issues. While a provincial or national body could theoretically strengthen capacity, one interviewee described the OPIRG provincial body as “never fully actualized.”⁷¹⁸ Strained or lack of capacity remains a recurring theme in PIRG feedback.

The U.S. PIRG model offers one possible lesson: a larger national structure can pool resources for services such as accounting and web support, and seek external funding. However, this would likely require changes in mandate and image to appeal to funders. OPIRG’s provincial “equalization payment” system—transferring levy funds from wealthier PIRGs to smaller or defunded ones—addresses capacity disparities, but also risks scrutiny from student unions and universities that object to levy money leaving campus or being spent on non-student purposes.

Both Taha and Vlad reflected on the different path Canadian PIRGs have taken compared to their U.S. counterparts. Taha questioned whether this divergence has ultimately been beneficial, observing, “I do think that the OPIRG network has struggled over its history to be effective.”⁷¹⁹ While U.S. PIRGs are not without controversy, their challenges have been markedly different. In the U.S., disputes have typically centered on student levy funds being redirected to state PIRGs instead of remaining on campus, and on concerns about overwork and low pay for staff.

One of the most significant differences is the role of research. Canadian PIRGs generally do not engage in research to the same degree as U.S. PIRGs—in fact, many avoid it entirely. By contrast, U.S. PIRGs have built a reputation around producing research reports, mobilizing knowledge, and engaging in policy lobbying. Adopting elements of this approach—whether through a rebrand, name change, or strategic shift—could open new opportunities for Canadian PIRGs to contribute to the growing field of knowledge mobilization while building credibility in advocacy work.

- Rebranding, Future and Conclusion

Canadian PIRGs are the “mother” progressive student organization left

⁷¹⁸ Vlad (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁷¹⁹ Taha (pseudonym), interview respondent.

vulnerable. They have nurtured and supported the creation of countless community initiatives—acting as incubators for social change.⁷²⁰ It is sad to consider that so many PIRGs have closed after losing funding due to coordinated attacks by right-wing students, compounded by the many internal challenges PIRGs themselves face. However, over the decades, Canadian PIRGs have drifted away from causes with broad public benefit and support, and towards more marginalized politics (e.g. funding and supporting Revolutionary communists groups, advocating and supporting political positions rooted in extreme identity politics such as “making monogamy obsolete.”⁷²¹

Additionally, the cultural zeitgeist has shifted—anti-activism sentiment is widespread, and terms like *woke* and *social justice* have become slurs. The influence and effectiveness of adversarial activism has dwindled, and I am not convinced it was ever particularly effective unless the issue directly impacted a large portion of the domestic population (e.g., gender, race or Indigeneity, domestic involvement in war, or sexual and romantic orientations). As one reflection on the closure of the OPIRG chapter at the University of Waterloo put it—aptly applicable to all Canadian PIRGs: “If this challenge to WPIRG's existence does not succeed then there will be another one in a few years, and if that fails then there will be another one a few years after that. WPIRG's time on this earth is extremely limited, and I have mixed feelings about that.”⁷²²

Interviewee Taha questioned whether levy groups remain the best model, suggesting that mass participation in student unions and other democratic institutions might be a more sustainable approach. One option is to shift toward the U.S. PIRG model, which some respondents mused about. Another couple be to undertake a strategic rebrand or refocus. A rebrand could focus on national, regional, and local issues—such as exposing bad landlords in Ontario who hide behind anonymous numbered companies or advocating to address environmental harms to First Nations communities. PIRG model's value as an incubator for community action cannot be overstated.⁷²³ If business

⁷²⁰ Initiatives and organizations started by PIRGs are listed in each PIRG's individual entry.

⁷²¹ OPIRG Toronto [@opirgtoronto]. “Free Love Until Love Is Free.” Instagram, 2024, <https://www.instagram.com/opirgtoronto/p/DUuCW_pCZoM/>.

⁷²² Paul Nijjar. “End of the Road for WPIRG.” Paul's Internet Landfill. 23 March 2016. <<http://pnijjar.freeshell.org/2016/wp-irg-threat/>>.

⁷²³ The section featuring the various PIRGs lists the many non-profit organizations, social movements and cooperatives started because of PIRG support or incubation.

incubators now have broad acceptance in universities, why not a parallel model for empowering people to take social justice and equity-based action? Over the decades, Canadian PIRGs have helped launch numerous activist organizations, non-profit organizations and co-operatives—whose actions and services have helped or served thousands of people—that simply would not have existed without PIRG support. I look at the Concordia-based organization SEIZE as an example of what the future of PIRGs could potentially be.

Another path could be to embed PIRG-type work within student unions or universities themselves, which could provide better protection from political attacks, state actors, and their allies. Examples already exist, such as the Community Action Centre within the student union at George Brown College, or Brock University's Social Justice Centre. Even operating as a well-funded student club—backed by additional student union or university resources earmarked for social justice work—could shield such efforts from some of the political vulnerabilities that have plagued Canadian PIRGs.

I believe activism of all kinds remain relevant and necessary—students have always been crucial to the development and growth of social movements. However, much of the activism Canadian PIRGs currently fuel is not only divisive but often further marginalizes the very causes it seeks to advance—and only serves their opponents to weaponize backlash against them. I would even say the name itself, PIRG, is a mouthful and uninspiring—a new name, such as CAT (Community, Action, Transformation) or PILAR (Public Interest Law, Advocacy, Research) would be better suited. Change is not easy, but a refocus and rebrand is necessary if PIRGs are to survive as a resource for advancing social good, in whatever future form(s) that may be.

4.5 Structures, Policies, Decision-making and Culture

Identify structural, procedural or cultural issues that benefit or hinder participation, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of organizations and their initiatives.

Three survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What structures and policies have benefited the organization?** [2] **What structures and policies hindered the organization?** [3] **How would you describe the culture of the organization? Is**

there anything you think would improve the culture of the organization? These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Before discussing the micro-issues unique to student-led organizations, it's important to look at the macro-factors that shape their capacity to create social change. Many organizational challenges are tied to the ideological orientation of the group—whether explicit or implicit—which influences how it operates, the risks it faces, and the culture it fosters.

These factors can be grouped into the following categories:

- **Structure and scale** – Large, multi-campus organizations face different coordination and communication challenges compared to small, localized groups. Additional, larger organizations require legal status, role definitions and structures for operational success and efficiency.
- **Openness vs. Closedness** – Open structures encourage participation but increase scrutiny and political vulnerability, while closed structures may protect purity of vision but can alienate potential allies.
- **Difficult Personalities** – Organizations rooted in fringe or extreme political views often attract individuals whose interpersonal dynamics can hinder collaboration.
- **Perceived Causes and Solutions** – Whether an organization approaches issues from a reformist or revolutionary lens shapes its strategies and the coalitions it can form.
- **Political Belief Systems** – Groups that embrace nuance tend to adapt more effectively than those caught in purity spirals or ideological rigidity.
- **Realism vs. Possibility** – Balancing practical, achievable goals with aspirational visions (the imaginary) is a persistent tension in activist work.

All of these factors directly affect participation, transparency, efficiency, and the overall effectiveness of student organizations and their initiatives. On top of these factors, we need to remember that all of this is further shaped by the limited life experiences of young people in organizing, management and interpersonal relationships in an objective and service delivery-based environment.

The scale and structure of an organization determine much of its capacity: large,

multi-campus groups require legal status, clear roles, and formal governance, while smaller, localized initiatives may function informally but struggle with coordination and continuity. Survey responses show that structures and policies most beneficial to student-involved organizations were those that provided stability and continuity in the face of high student turnover. Reliable funding streams, particularly student levies and recurring grants, were critical to organizational survival, while permanent full-time staff and well-documented policies helped preserve institutional memory and maintain operational efficiency. Respondents also emphasized the value of university support, space allocation, and clear governance models. Respondent Darren emphasized the importance of having staff stick around ‘forever’⁷²⁴—however, I also caution that given my observations of PIRGs and student unions. Forever might be fine if you have someone who remains strongly committed and supportive of uplifting others to leadership, but can also hold back an organization if the person is burnt out, purely self-interested, or antithetical to the values of the organization.

Conversely, organizations identified a wide range of hindrances tied both to institutional structures and internal dynamics. University policies and third-party contracts (notably with food service corporations like Aramark) often limited organizations’ scope, particularly for food initiatives. Turnover cycles, lack of staffing, and cuts to work-study programs reduced organizational capacity, while insufficient space or administrative delays in providing facilities disrupted continuity. Alexandra, a food organization respondent, noted that herself and multiple others were volunteering “40 hours per week,” but there was organizational hesitancy with bringing about changes that might improve things (e.g. non-profit incorporation, student levy, paid staff).⁷²⁵ The absence of clear policies and procedures created inefficiencies. Inadequate or disrupted physical space, administrative indifference, and shifting university policies (e.g. cuts to work-study programs) were also recurrent themes that undermined both participation and effectiveness. A number of respondents also described ideological gatekeeping and political rigidity as cultural barriers, deterring participation and producing internal conflict.

⁷²⁴ Darren (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁷²⁵ Alexandra (pseudonym), interview respondent.

Cultural dynamics within organizations emerged as another key factor shaping participation and transparency. Most respondents described their culture positively—as supportive, inclusive, and socially engaging. For many, the opportunity to express themselves authentically, make friends, and connect with like-minded peers was central to the appeal of involvement. The presence of fun, food, and social rituals fostered welcoming environments, while a shared sense of mission created solidarity. However, these cultures were not uniformly positive. Some respondents criticized overly relaxed environments that hindered task completion, while others described toxic dynamics tied to call-out culture, power struggles, and ideological rigidity. One account stressed how call-out culture and purity spirals drove students away, underscoring how cultural climates can make or break organizational engagement. Eric Hoffer, in his seminal work *The True Believer* argues that extremist thinking and purity spirals leads to ideological absolutism – buying into the entire set of ideas held by the in-group.⁷²⁶ While this groupthink subsequently leads to identity fusion, which holds the group together, it also leads to in-group/out-group dynamic with the larger society—akin to a religious cult.

Overall, the survey results confirm that structures, policies, and culture are deeply intertwined. Reliable funding and permanent staff strengthen efficiency, while inclusive and transparent policies foster participation. Conversely, institutional opposition, internal rigidity, and poor communication practices erode trust and effectiveness. What emerges is a picture of organizations that are both powerful drivers of social change and vulnerable to fragility, dependent on how they balance their ideals with the practical realities of campus politics, student life cycles, and organizational design.

Identify organizational legal structures and how decisions are made

Three survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How is the organization/initiative structured?** [2] **Is the organization legally registered? If so, as what?** [3] **How does the organization go about deciding which activities to pursue or not to pursue?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

The research finding show that no one structure is necessarily better than the

⁷²⁶ Eric Hoffer. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1951.

other. Rather, the most important question to consider when deciding whether to register as non-profit or not is to consider your mission and objectives. A community garden, for example, just needs permission from a landowner to grow food. The level of added bureaucracy to register legally with the hopes of securing additional grants is often not worth it, especially when many grants for community gardens are already geared towards unregistered entities; and for those grants that are only for non-profits or charities, one can partner with larger entity such as the university fundraising department or a local food organization to secure such grants. Some unregistered student-involved food initiative garner significant income, which if unregistered and unreported as taxable income, is illegal. Ask: If you were to register as a non-profit or charity, do you have the capacity to do so? Also consider charitable status has additional reporting requirements, including paying a public account to conduct a review engagement or audit, depending on your income levels. Scale requires structure, leadership, systems of delegation, institutional memory, ensuring compliance with health, safety and laws, systems of financial accounting, staffing (or in lieu of staffing, a core group of volunteers willing to dedicate time equivalent to a full-time staff person). etc.

Many left-leaning youth are drawn to non-hierarchical organization structures—I believe this is driven by a desire to have agency (within times and a system that limits opportunities for it). At the same time, these youth desire political, economic and social change. The paradox is that scale requires structure and hierarchy to function effectively. Further, non-hierarchical or flat structures is a vague term. It is often used to denote ‘democratic or moral superiority’ over other ways we as human structure our shared activities. Those who tout flat structure often overlook the all too real drawbacks they bring, including inefficiency, role ambiguity, slow decision-making, coordination challenges, unclear responsibilities, interpersonal and ideological conflict, holding accountability, duplication of efforts, and ultimately, slow overall progress. Many respondents indicated challenges with this model, particularly those organizations with more ideological purism. Informal hierarchies still appear in such organizations. One respondent, Darren, who participated in a flat structured café cooperative discussed how staff members voted pay raises who themselves while the café was running a deficit. Another respondent, Owenetta, spoke of a male co-leader in a non-hierarchical anarchist

food organization who used his position to sexually assault a new student member. My own observation of this model reflects similar experiences—some friends of mine were involved in the Occupy Toronto movement. Two people we know were drugged and sexually assaulted by male members. Donations were solicited by multiple people or informal groups within the Occupy Toronto movement, much of which people suspected were stolen. Informal hierarchies and in-group/out-groups formed and halted accountability from occurring. All these examples show the vulnerability these models have to non-civic minded people.

John Mackey, founder of Whole Foods, explains his frustration with the flat model after living in collective-living cooperative housing: “We just got tired of the interminable meetings, which were often spent debating relatively trivial things such as whose turn it was to clean the bathroom and which companies we should boycott.”⁷²⁷ He elaborates further, “I knew that unrestrained competition—without any rules or ethics constraining lying, cheating, and violence—could be highly destructive and would undermine the foundation of capitalism and our collective prosperity... But I also saw the positive power of competition. And I saw the downsides to cooperation. Taken too far, it could lead to a kind of stultifying bureaucratic collectivism that made it hard to get anything done and would stifle creativity and innovation. I thought of my experience at Prana House—I had loved the community, but discussing all community decisions exhaustively as a group was very time consuming. I didn’t ever want to imagine a larger society based around such impractical ideals. And so, around and around I went in my mind. Competition, cooperation—both seemed necessary; both were powerfully creative; both had dangers if pushed too far.”⁷²⁸ These comments resonate with me and reflect my own observations as I have gotten older—of the importance of balanced, tempered approaches as necessary prerequisites for successful impact and social change.

There is a natural inclination with the young people, especially those who are fairness and justice inclined, and who have not previously held any responsibility or power to gravitate towards flat structures. This combination of a vulnerable flat structure with inexperience in management—shift scheduling, people not showing up for shifts,

⁷²⁷ John Mackey. *The Whole Story: Adventures in Love, Life, and Capitalism*. Dallas, TX: Matt Holt Books, 2024.

⁷²⁸ John Mackey, *op. cit.*

calling in to cancel shifts last minute, idling on the job, not following financial procedures such as keeping receipts, failure to follow health and safety laws, etc.—puts a burden on a few highly-competent volunteers who dedicated countless hours to keeping the organization or initiative functionally running.

What is the solution here? A balanced approach. Given we exist within educational institution, it is very important to see our roles here as educational organizations. Aim for consensus, and where not achieved, move to a simple majority. Holocracy,^{729,730} decentralizing decision-making and authority into smaller teams, balances transparency and agility, with effectiveness and clear roles and lines of accountability. Mentoring, delegation of responsibility, diffuse decision-making to those directly involved in the tasks – while still maintaining the necessary role definitions, structures, procedures and leadership functions necessary when situations arise that require such to be in place. I think clarity in language can help—not framing things as either/or, but recognition of the need to be both goal and process oriented, both structured and democratic. It is also why staffing is so crucial to student environmental organizations to ensure these systems continue and ensure have the time and resources to develop educational components to pass on knowledge to the next cohort of students coming up.

4.6 Starting and Growing

Identify how student-involved environmental organizations start and grow

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How did the organization start?** [2] **How did the organization grow?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Student environmental organizations begin in many ways, from informal gatherings of motivated students to more structured campaigns for student levies or university partnerships. While survey results show most groups start collectively rather than individually, interviews and organizational histories highlight that the “model” chosen—whether levy-based, grant-supported, or volunteer-driven—carries its own

⁷²⁹ Derived from the Greek word Holon, meaning both whole in and of itself, as well part of a larger whole.

⁷³⁰ Jaclyne Badal. “Can a Company Be Run as a Democracy?” The Wall Street Journal, 23 Apr. 2007.

strengths and challenges. There is no single best approach. Instead, the starting point should be matched to the intended outcomes. For instance, levy-based models provide stable funding but require immense political organizing, skill and persistence, while grassroots “prove the concept” models allow initiatives to grow gradually and secure institutional support before pursuing larger commitments.

Growth tends to follow a combination of persistence, visibility, and institutional traction. Successful organizations move from informal beginnings to more structured operations by cultivating relationships, securing space, attracting funding, and developing consistent management practices. This formalization (space, funding, staff) follows the typical stages for social movement organization growth.⁷³¹ Interviews emphasized that organizational culture—particularly education-focused, empowering, and uplifting cultures—can be as important as funding for long-term sustainability. At the same time, leaders cautioned that growth is not always linear: groups often cycle through phases of expansion and contraction, especially with leadership turnover or shifts in student interest. External shocks, such as political disputes, university interference or funding cuts, can also stall progress.

In practice, starting and growing an organization is both strategic and contextual. Smaller campuses may be more receptive to supporting student-led services because of their role in student retention, while larger institutions may provide more political and financial opportunities but also greater barriers to entry. Models like Regensis demonstrate that scaling is possible, especially when initiatives embed education alongside sustainability at their core while remaining adaptable to local conditions.

The experience of these organizations suggests that long-term success depends on aligning the founding model with goals, investing in supportive culture and structures, and building resilience against the inevitable cycles of change. Growth is not just about expanding services or funding streams but about sustaining communities of learning and practice that can weather turnover and external pressures.

4.7 Closures

Identify reason(s) for closure of organizations and initiatives

⁷³¹ Jonathan Christiansen. Four Stages of Social Movements. EBSCO Research Starters, 2009, pp. 1–7.

One survey question aimed to answer this question: [1] **Are there any programs or initiatives that no longer exist?** This question was asked to the leadership and staff. Closures mostly occur for one of three reasons: [1] Not enough interest or support for the program; [2] Loss of space; [3] Loss of funding source (primary levy funding). Strategic planning and gathering student input and feedback can better help ensure any new programs or services will be supported. Preventing the loss of space or a student levy requires maintaining positive relations with the university and/or student union, and ensuring your programs and services remain relevant to student needs and desires.

4.8 Challenges

Identify the challenges these organizations and initiatives face

One survey question aimed to answer this question: **What (if any) are the ongoing challenges facing the organization?** This question was asked to the leadership and staff.

Many student-involved environmental organizations face persistent structural and cultural challenges that limit their stability and effectiveness—this is in addition to some facing external pressures. The survey highlights that financial insecurity and limited people power are the most pressing obstacles, with respondents consistently citing insufficient funding, inadequate staffing levels, and difficulties attracting and retaining adequate levels of members and/or volunteers. The absence of stable revenue—especially when groups lack a levy or face threats to levy continuity—leaves many operating on fragile ground. Volunteer and staffing constraints are compounded by student turnover cycles, which risks creating organizational amnesia or dependence on a few individuals for successful continuity. While some models, like the multi-chapter structure of *Regenesis*, attempt to build resilience, most organizations remain highly vulnerable to fluctuations in membership and resources.

Space insecurity further compounds these issues. Respondents noted the absence of designated space, poor-quality or inaccessible facilities, and recurring disruptions caused by renovations or administrative delays. These physical constraints not only hinder visibility and day-to-day operations but also limit the capacity to expand programming or establish permanence on campus. Leaders often described the need to be

persistent and creative in solving space challenges. As one bike shop respondent noted, operating in a non-optimal space was a constant challenge that reduced the organization's effectiveness.

Cultural and political dynamics present another layer of complexity. Several organizations struggle with in-group/out-group tensions, cliquishness, or ideological rigidity, which alienates potential members and fosters unhealthy internal environments. Some described toxic cultures shaped by political purity tests, interpersonal conflicts, or overly process-driven approaches that stalled action. Much of the conflict within groups, between groups, and with external parties with power over them (student unions, universities), can be explained by theories relating to resource scarcity,⁷³² in/out group dynamics and scapegoating,⁷³³ or ideological conflicts.⁷³⁴ I believe that education can play a role here in diffusing conflict, such as awareness and training in subjects like emotional regulation and healthy communication.

Finally, respondents emphasized the broader systemic barriers that shape their work. These include restrictive university policies, food service contracts that limit student-run food initiatives, and university austerity to reduce funding or support programs like work-study jobs. Others pointed to broader political threats, such as right-wing initiatives like the Student Choice Initiative or austerity-driven politics, which weakened their financial security and undermined their autonomy. Alternative models of financing and governance—whether through social enterprises, networks like Regenesys, or more formalized non-profit structures—can provide resilience, but they require time, local conditions, and stable leadership to succeed. Even where organizations make critical contributions to affordability, experiential education, and sustainability, many do so in a climate of precariousness.

Overall, the challenges facing these organizations are not isolated obstacles but overlapping and reinforcing vulnerabilities that are largely systemic. Resource shortages

⁷³² Realistic conflict theory posits that conflicts occurs when there is a perception of scarce resources.

⁷³³ Inter- and Intra- group conflicts, as posited by social identity theory and René Girard's memetic rivalry, that conflict arises due to the creation of in/out group dynamics, and the need to blame someone or something else as the scapegoat, creating rivalries. Unable to assume responsibility or engage in self-reflection to recognize their own part in the conflict, humans individually and cross-tribally unite, to defuse conflict.

⁷³⁴ Ethical impasses due to ideology or values differences that are irreconcilable.

intersect with weak institutional support, toxic cultures, and unstable physical space, leaving many groups dependent on extraordinary volunteer/staff dedication and the whims of the university and student union. These very struggles highlight the importance of broader recognition of the benefits of student-involved environmental organizations, stronger internal policies, changes in attitudes and policies of some universities and student unions, and securing sustainable levy funding.

4.9 Ideal circumstances

Identify the ideal circumstances for student-involved environmental organizations

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **Ideally, what level of resources would be needed?** [2] **Imagine the organization in ideal circumstances, what would those circumstances be and how might the organization's practices/impacts differ?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Across interviews and survey responses, the “ideal circumstances” for student environmental organizations cluster around sustainable infrastructure, stable staffing, financial security, and institutional legitimacy. Leaders consistently linked stability to recognition by the university: formal acknowledgement of the benefits these groups provide, supportive policy environments, and levy systems that secure long-term funding while reducing political vulnerability. This legitimacy not only unlocks resources but also builds resilience—making it easier for organizations to withstand challenges or attempts to undermine their work.

At the operational level, respondents envisioned more dedicated space and infrastructure, ranging from accessible and visible program spaces to kitchens that allow food initiatives to expand. Human resources were equally critical: stable full-time staff positions, student jobs with better training, and incentives for board members to stay beyond a single year would reduce the churn that undermines continuity. Leaders also emphasized the dual role of these organizations as service providers and educational spaces. Under ideal conditions, they would not only run programs but also strengthen their function as learning environments—integrated with coursework, offering credit, and upskilling members through workshops, retreats, and structured mentorship.

In terms of resources, three pillars dominated the responses: funding, people, and space. Reliable financial streams (e.g. inflation-indexed levies and steady grants) were the most widely cited need, alongside a larger and more dependable volunteer base and appropriate facilities. Many also imagined expanded impacts under ideal conditions: broader visibility on campus, deeper connections to academic programs, improved governance, and stronger alumni engagement. A few articulated systemic shifts—such as free tuition or institutionalizing their initiative within the university—as ways to remove structural barriers to student participation. Meeting these needs would allow them to shift energy away from constant survival work toward more ambitious projects, stronger education quality, and lasting community impact.

4.10 Financial

For organizations with levies, determine what led to a successful levy campaign.

One survey question aimed to answer this question: **If levied, how did your organization successfully obtain a levy?** This question was asked to the leadership and staff. Organizations that successfully obtained student levies described the process as both multi-step and institutionally dependent. The first hurdle was usually procedural: securing permission to hold a vote, either through the student union, university administration, or by demonstrating broad student interest via a petition. In most cases, approval from a student union or general assembly was required before a levy referendum could move forward. Some organizations noted additional oversight, with final approval needed from a university's board of governors after a student referendum passed.

The full process is one that takes anywhere from 4 month to a full year, usually starting with collecting petitions for each constituency (undergraduate, graduate, part-time, or separate petitions for each campus)—typically 10% of the student body. Once permission was granted, groups had to engage in intensive awareness drives and mobilizing allies to build student support in advance of the campaigning period and referendum. Referenda most often coincided with busy period of the school year in March, creating additional challenge to have enough available people to support get out the vote efforts.

Political context played a major role. Most universities delegate student levy

powers to campus student unions, but some universities retain oversight of the process. Student union backing was frequently identified as crucial to success. While universities generally remained neutral in the process, in some instances there have been administrative resistance or additional scrutiny. Even after success, levies were not always permanent. Some organizations faced mandatory re-approval cycles, such as every three to five years, forcing them to remobilize support and demonstrate ongoing relevance. Such automatic reapproval cycles are a poor solution—(1) when new groups are founded and they seek a referendum, those founders put significant energy into passing the referendum; whereas those involved in the future may only have the energy at operating the organization and their programming; (2) Frequent referenda takes away focus from the mission and activities of the organization for months, as they are forced to refocus on survival (keeping their levy and space). There is also a levy of irony that student unions who apply these rules to other student groups, also don't apply it to themselves. A better solution is to make it easier to students to bring forward upon concerns a de-funding referendum if they feel it is needed, or for student unions to evaluate and determine in a non-biased way if a levy group has not fulfilled their mission—and whether to bring it to referendum for students to decide to cancel the fee.

Identify the financial dimensions of student-involved environmental organizations

Four survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **Describe your sources of income** [2] **Do any of your activities generate income? If so, how would you describe the success or challenges of the income-generating activities you have?** [3] **If levied, how does a student levy support the work of the organization? If you did not have a levy, how would it impact the organization and its activities?** [4] **What strategies would you recommend to other student organizations to help them acquire the resources they need to operate?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Student environmental organizations rely heavily on student levies, with most not engaging in traditional fundraising or social enterprises. Levies provide stable, predictable funding that enables hiring staff, retaining institutional memory, and sustaining projects. However, obtaining a levy is labour-intensive and not guaranteed.

Once established, levies are sometimes subject to periodic review or deliberate political attacks, creating vulnerability if political support shifts. It is important to train members and staff on how to navigate campus politics and build support; as well, retaining those most talented at doing so. Some respondents noted that while universities claim neutrality, administrations can sometimes be oppositional, even as they reserve the right to impose new fees without consultation—something students find hypocritical. Council of Alberta University Students calls for all fee increases, including those imposed by universities, to be determined by student referenda.⁷³⁵

Where levies exist, organizations can benefit from adapting from successful models. Tying levies to inflation (CPI) can preserve value over time. Many campuses allow multiple avenues to secure a levy. Looking beyond the large undergraduate student unions, one can also seek levies from graduate or part-time student unions, federated universities, college councils, or even labour unions. Beyond levies, a handful of organizations generate revenue through social enterprises such as cafés, bike centres, and gardens. Grants and fundraising are also good secondary income sources, albeit inconsistent. Securing grants can aid with greater organizational legitimacy.⁷³⁶ While rarely sufficient as the sole income stream, these ventures can provide meaningful contributions.

Opposition to levies persists in some student circles, often framed by libertarian-minded students as unfair taxation, and more generally about fiscal responsibility and student poverty. Those who recognize the benefits of levies will emphasize the social return on investment: levies fund services that benefit all students—such as bike centres, free stores, food initiatives, and student jobs—at much cheaper rates thanks to economies of scale and operating on a non-profit basis. Unlike optional fees, which can undermine accessibility and stability, universal levies ensure that core services remain available to everyone, particularly those with the fewest resources. Services like free stores or bike centres that are universal accessible services should be mandatory, and once established,

⁷³⁵ Council of Alberta University Students. Responsible, Accountable, Predictable: Why the use of referenda for increasing mandatory fees balances the needs of stakeholders. Policy brief. September 2010.

⁷³⁶ Yeheskel Hasenfeld and Benjamin Gidron. “Understanding Multi-purpose Hybrid Voluntary Organizations: The Contributions of Theories on Civil Society, Social Movements and Non-profit Organizations.” Journal of Civil Society, 1.2 (2005): 97-112.

they are hard to remove. Respondent Darren argued that we should go further, suggesting student activists taking over university committees and student union boards to leverage levies to advance the social good.

The best argument rests on these initiatives achieving a triple bottom line: sustainability, affordability, and equity. This is not to say that all levies should be mandatory; those that won't be universally accessible as services or are restricted to niche interests, such as debate clubs or outdoor clubs, should remain optional. Any attempts at volunteer student unionism or optional fees should be fought so as to not end up in a situation like students in Australia.⁷³⁷ If the political tides turn further to the political right, I believe a good compromise would be letting individual institutions or student unions determining which fees are mandatory and optional, as this would better reflect the local needs and values rather than top-down dictation on a national or provincial/state level.

4.11 Geography and Space

Identify contextual factors (e.g. geographic location, institution population, etc.) that may have an impact on the success of student-involved environmental organizations.

One survey question sought answers on this: **What contextual factors (e.g. geographic location, campus political culture, local community) have impacted the organization positively or negatively?** From my analysis of the responses, interviews and secondary sources, one important contextual factor stands out—post-secondary institutions in Montreal and the student-involved environmental organizations at those campuses are far more radical than elsewhere in Canada. More broadly, significant portions of the Island of Montreal are also far more left-leaning than the rest of Canada. This is in line with the conclusions of van Dyke's study of protest movements at post-secondary campuses—campuses with existing activist cultures are more likely to maintain such a culture.⁷³⁸ University of Toronto History Professor Sean Mills argues in his book *"The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in*

⁷³⁷ See discussions in the Politics section

⁷³⁸ Nella van Dyke. "Hotbeds of Activism: Locations of Student Protest." *Social Problems*, 45.2 (1998): 205-220.

Sixties Montreal,” that Montreal’s radical roots stem from a variety of reasons, including Quebec’s Quiet Revolution, post-colonial movements and thought, organized labour, Quebec nationalism and the role of language and identity, feminist and anti-racist movements, urbanism and student activism.⁷³⁹ Additionally, Quarter and Mook argue that Quebec’s strong social economy sector is due to a strong social movement and network that has been able to secure strong government support.⁷⁴⁰ Says research participant Malcolm on Montreal: “The kind of historical protesting nature of the French might also lend itself more to activism than in other places.” Thomas, another interview participant, says: “Montreal is a cheap place to live, it attracts a lot of really interesting people, with a lot of really interesting projects. There’s a lot more freedom here to pursue, you know, passions outside of your 9-5 right or your student life, because you’re not so strapped paying \$3000 a month in rent. So, I think that probably has something to do with it. The city and the province culturally have something to do with that, but I can’t be absolutely certain.” Taha, a respondent from Ontario, said that while he was inspired by the Maple Spring Quebec student protest movement of 2012, he recognized the limitations of a similar movement happening elsewhere, noting “the social fabric of Quebec has been based on this sense of active citizen engagement and participation over several successive generations.”⁷⁴¹

Another important contextual factor is the size and location of the university. Small to mid-sized universities in towns or small-mid sized cities more likely to support student-involved environmental organizations and their initiatives. I believe this is because these institutions are deeply valued by their communities. They create a place for community to come together, and they (and the actors they support like student-involved environmental organizations) provide various programs, services, and educational opportunities—all of which are often lacking outside big cities. However, these small-mid sized universities are facing challenges such as declining enrollment and financial difficulties, resulting in the closure of programs, departments or even campuses. It is also more burdensome on students for a levy, as on a per student basis levy a smaller campus,

⁷³⁹ Sean Mills. *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010.

⁷⁴⁰ Quarter and Mook, 2010, 10.

⁷⁴¹ Taha (pseudonym), interview respondent.

might pay \$10- \$30 for an ancillary fee, for a service to be provided by the student union or a student-involved environmental organization, while due to economies of scale, at a larger campus a student might only pay \$1-\$5 to have the same service available. Building deeper relationships with the local community might provide opportunities for revenue diversification, community usage of services (on a pay-per-use basis) and additional volunteer support.

One other theme of note was visibility on campus, with any initiatives like bike centres, free stores and community gardens often being relegated to basements, garages, or the edges of campus—in space provided by the university. This is why student centres that are owned and maintained by the student union (or another student-owned entity, such as the Sadlier House model at Trent University, or the York University Student Centre, which is owned by two student unions, an additionally has representatives from student clubs and the university on their board) might be a better solution to ensure adequate space is provided to such initiatives. That said, Regenesys's chapter at York University as not had any success getting space in the York University Student Centre for fifteen years, which is highly suspect and undemocratic considering we are one of the largest and most active levy-funded student organizations on campus.

Identify how space was obtained for initiatives

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **How did your organization obtain its space(s)?** [2] **Is the organization provided space rent-free? Now or previously?**

These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

A critical factor for student-involved environmental organizations is having space—for operations and programming, office workspace, storage, etc. The most evident result of my site visits was the impact of space on the success of an organization or initiative. Not having space creates additional challenges for running an environmental initiative. Organizations without space have navigated this challenge in a variety of ways. The Carleton Food Collective rented space off-campus using their student levy. The space was used for food preparation, storage, working and as a social space, while most of the actual programming is done through on-campus temporary space usage (i.e. tabling

pop-ups) to serve food. Other student-involved environmental organizations have received the use of storage space belonging to a faculty, department, student union or another student organization (though not having exclusive use of the storage—which most often means borrowing the key or being let in to have access to the space). Still other groups utilize their own room—be it an on-campus dorm, off-campus housing, or space in their parent’s home.

You can see a clear difference between similar initiatives being provided with space, the quality of the space, and the centrality of the space on campus. Student spaces for sustainability initiatives are often placed on the periphery of campuses. Le Frigo Vert (Concordia University) and En Vrac (Université de Montréal) both aim to provide students with reduced-priced groceries, however, Le Frigo Vert can better fulfill this mission in large part to having a better location provided by the university. Le Frigo Vert is in a storefront on a busy street in the area of the city where Concordia University is located, and the size of the space is quite large. En Vrac, on the other hand, is in the basement of a building that is only frequented by students of the nutrition studies program and in the space of a small classroom. Similarly, with cycling initiatives, a clear difference can be made between those with larger spaces. While both BikeChain (UofT) and BikeShare (UTM) have visible centrally located space and both serve a more suburban environment, the larger space that BikeChain has allows for more programming and hours of operation, allowing it to be more than just a service, but a community hub for cyclists—which in turn increases the support and volunteer base, allowing for more hours and programming. Similarly with Regenesys, our Cycle York Community Bike Centre (at York University) is much larger and serves as a community hub for cycling even beyond the university into the neighbouring communities, while our Cycle TMU Community Bike Centre (at Toronto Metropolitan University) has a much smaller space, hidden on the 4th floor of a campus building, which makes it more difficult to access or promote the services more so. It is clear that securing long-term space allows for an initiative to improve the service(s) being offered. This can be evident in how spaces are laid out (for efficient operations), between communication of the mission and services (through displays, posters and wall-art) and allowing for a functioning community (space to socialize, sit down or eat, warm or store food and beverages).

Still there are risks. Universities prioritize academics and research, and student spaces are at the bottom of space priority ladder. Interviewee Alexandra noted the numerous space issues her food organization faced, including losing their space on short notice, being moved to a less-than-ideal space, and having to deal with numerous repair issues and renovation delays. Increasing neo-liberalization means post-secondary institutions are moving towards pay-based models for space management, resulting in the elimination of student spaces. Students need to fight for space, including on university committees and their board of governors. The ideal solution is the formation and control of student-owned and operated student centres. One great example is Sadleir House at Trent University, which is an off-campus student centre established through a student levy and democratically controlled by the various student groups that are occupants. I would also encourage being persistent and thinking outside the box (e.g. local churches, space from the local municipality, or saving to purchase a campus adjacent property).

In my own experience, I am starting to see a new wave of community development initiatives, including community land trusts, student cooperative housing, ethno-cultural groups, and many others seeking to secure assets. However, I am weary given the larger structural conditions of late-stage capitalism in acquiring, holding or benefiting from assets. Efforts to build and accumulate assets for the benefit of the community can often with time can get mismanaged, suffer due to broader economic conditions, or a decline in community support—one often sees last minute efforts to save facilities that benefit a community and support their continued operation, such as a theatre, cooperative store, etc. Many Canadian cooperatives have faced issues related to economic conditions beyond their control, mismanagement, and I would even dare to speculate collusion with private corporate actors to dissolve in order to secure their assets and customer base. Large co-operatives that have been lost in Canada include Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), Co-op Atlantic, and the Ontario Natural Food Cooperative. We have also lost co-operatives and mutuals to increasing economic globalization and resulting neo-liberal policies, which was resulting in the demutualization⁷⁴² of insurance

⁷⁴² Demutualization refers to the process by which a member-owned cooperative or mutual organization transitions into a privately-held shareholder-owned company. This, combined with the broader conditions of globalized capitalism, ultimately results in higher prices for consumers/renters/insurance holders, etc.; less profit going to the producers (as greater shares are taken by shareholders and middlemen); poorer

companies like Manulife and Sun Life, and the privatization of agricultural cooperatives, including the Canadian Wheat Board, Agricore Cooperative Ltd, and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. Demutualization (the privatization of housing cooperatives) has been a major problem in State of New York, where resident members can vote to privatize the housing cooperative into condominium units, resulting in massive increases in rent and maintenance fees.⁷⁴³ Without the broader economic, cultural and political conditions changing,⁷⁴⁴ all collectively owned assets—be it cooperatives, non-profits, mutuals, unions or government—are vulnerable. I think it is important for those of us who recognize and care for solidarity economic models to support them through (1) purchasing goods and services, (2) Involvement (boards, committees, volunteering), (3) Helping to ensure they have secure economic models (e.g. sources of funding like levies or membership fees, consolidation with other NGOs and cooperatives where needed, etc.).

4.12 University Relations

Identify institutional factors (e.g. attitudes, policies, connections, supportive administrators, etc.) that impact student-involved environmental organizations.

Six survey questions, asked to the leadership and staff, aimed to answer this question:

- [1] Do you feel the university values and prioritizes the work you do?**
- [2] What departments support you or do you work with? Describe the relationship**
- [3] Have university institutional factors (attitudes of administrators, policies, supportive administrators, etc.) impacted the organization (positively or negatively)?**

relations and customer service (as the profit-motivate trumps all else); the creation of multi-national globalized monopolies ; the wealthy (the shareholders, owners and management) trying to squeeze more and more out of everyone else; increased speculation of assets (as there is less and less actual workers and producers that can afford to consumer, creating a bubble); toothless governments that primarily exist to serve the needs of corporations.

⁷⁴³ This demutualization was even allowed in housing cooperatives that were subsidized with New York State tax dollars. Thankfully this is not a problem in Canada—non-profit housing cooperatives must provide their assets to one or more non-profit housing providers should they dissolve.

⁷⁴⁴ The conditions that would need to change would either be [A] A re-nationalization/re-regionalization/re-localization of economies, coupled with a respect for national sovereignty ; or [B] A completely new global economic order willing to address (1) wealth inequality through higher global taxation of the super wealthy, (2) geographic wage disparities, (3) capital flight between jurisdictions, and (4) shifting of wealth from the many in the periphery to the few in western centres of capital.

[4] Universities are prioritizing experiential education. How could the organization take advantage?

[5] What benefits does your organization provide that could be given as selling points to the university?

[6] How does the organization frame issues and programs to gain administration support?

The relationship between universities and student environmental organizations is shaped by a mix of support, misunderstanding, and politics. Survey responses suggest a mixed picture: while some groups feel valued, many indicated that universities view them as peripheral. Many universities undervalue these groups, viewing them as minor “clubs” rather than educational sites that build leadership, organizational, and soft skills.

Priorities often skew toward scale—large institutions may dismiss student-led projects as too small to matter or as legal liability risks, while smaller institutions recognize the value they bring to student services, recruitment and retention. History shows that many core campus services, from recycling to food initiatives, were pioneered by students before being adopted more broadly by university administrations. The challenge is ensuring that these contributions are recognized and supported rather than absorbed (in ways that remove student democracy and ownership) or displaced. This attitude can be demonstrated in the relationship between universities, monopolistic food service contract providers, and student-involved food initiatives, who numerous respondents commented negatively on (CFAguy, Darnell, Darren, Matt, Joan), in addition to numerous negative accounts I came across in my research (Midnight Kitchen, Carleton Food Collective, People’s Potato), and my own negative experiences with the issue. However, there are examples that demonstrate hope. The Seasoned Spoon existence at Trent demonstrates the power of lobbying and negotiations when food service contracts come up for renewal. The Quebec student-owned cooperative movement, which operates food services at most Quebec post-secondary institutions, and the move away from monopolistic third-party food service providers and towards in-house solutions, at institutions like the University of Toronto (St. George) and University of British Columbia (Okanagan), gives proof of

successful alternatives.^{745,746,747}

Institutions vary widely in their governance models and political cultures. At one end of the spectrum, universities and centralized student unions directly manage services, as at Brock University, where the university and the student union restricted independent student groups from receiving a student levy in an updated version of their memorandum of understanding with the university, restricting funding to groups directly under the governance umbrella of the student union.⁷⁴⁸ At the other, decentralized systems allow independent student organizations to operate with more autonomy and apolitical oversight. This more depends on the political culture of the university and the student union, rather than if the university or the student union oversees the levy referendum process and levied organizations. York University, where the university oversees student organizations and elections rather than the student union, allows independent organizations that are empowered without having to deal with often the stifling politics, interference and the instability of new executives each year that one can get with student unions. Additionally, small and mid-sized institutions seem to be more supportive of student initiatives, as they see value in them in attracting students and improving the student experience, whereas larger institutions tend to see students initiatives more through a risk-aversion lens.

One of the biggest issues seems to be misunderstanding and miscommunication between university administrators and students. One study noted: “Students are often frustrated at the seemingly slow rate of progress from University operations, and University staff frustrated by what is seen as unreliable communication.”⁷⁴⁹ The authors

⁷⁴⁵ Sonja Carrière. Business Entrepreneurship through Student & School Co-ops in Ontario & Quebec and the Potential for New Student Co-operative Development in Ontario. Ontario Co-operative Association, June 2010.

⁷⁴⁶ Michael Rodriguez. “Big Changes to Food Services at UBC Okanagan.” Revelstoke Review, 25 June 2019. <<https://www.revelstokereview.com/news/big-changes-to-food-services-at-ubc-okanagan-4267784>>.

⁷⁴⁷ Aleksandra Sagan. “U of T to Cut Ties with Campus Food Service.” CityNews Toronto, The Canadian Press, 7 June 2016. <<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2016/06/07/u-of-t-to-cut-ties-with-campus-food-service/>>.

⁷⁴⁸ Sandor Ligetfalvy. “Post-mortem of BUSU Democracy: Democracy Died in Darkness.” Medium, 22 Nov. 2019. <medium.com/%40sandorligetfalvy/post-mortem-of-busu-democracy-democracy-died-in-darkness-fd5723262a1d>.

⁷⁴⁹ S.J. Briggs, Robinson, Z. P., Hadley, R. L., & Laycock Pedersen, R. “The Importance of University, Students and Students’ Union Partnerships in Student-Led Projects: A Case Study.” International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 20(8), 2019, pp. 1409–1427. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-01-2019-0050>. Pp. 1421.

of a case study from the United Kingdom recommend students leading projects but receiving support from university staff. “There is also a tendency for students to want to drive their own new projects, rather than “fit into” an existing initiative set up by others. Some projects will have a naturally short life span, ending when the interested students either run out of time or commitment, or leave the institution. These need not be seen as failures if they have provided benefit and learning during their lifespan, especially where they have catalysed new projects or challenged the status quo.”⁷⁵⁰ Student activist success depends on their ability to bring a ‘tempered’ approach to their activism,^{751,752,753} their ability to navigate the decision-making and bureaucratic structures of the institution,⁷⁵⁴ on their ability to build partnerships and involve university staff and professors.^{755,756,757}

University support—or lack thereof—often determines organizational survival. For example, one interviewee (Tania) credited an administrator’s backing for their ability to continue after losing a core funding source. Survey responses confirm that supportive administrators and faculty allies can be decisive in securing space and funding. Partnerships with departments (academic, sustainability, food services, university operations) and professor allies can strengthen legitimacy, while antagonistic approaches risk isolating organizations. Survey responses also pointed to concrete strategies for engaging administrations: aligning with experiential education priorities, partnering with academic programs, and framing their work around affordability, student jobs, and improved retention and campus experience. Building this case requires evidence. Usage statistics, testimonials, and financial comparisons show that student-run services are

⁷⁵⁰ Briggs et al., *op cit.*, Pp. 1422.

⁷⁵¹ Adrianna Kezar, T.B. Gallant and Jamie Lester. “Everyday people making a difference on college campuses: the tempered grassroots leadership tactics of faculty and staff.” Studies in Higher Education, 36.2 (2011): 129-151.

⁷⁵² Debra Meyerson & Megan Tomkins. “Tempered Radicals as Institutional Change Agents: The Case of Advancing Gender Equity at the University of Michigan.” Harvard Journal of Law and Gender, 30 (2007): 303-322.

⁷⁵³ Debra Meyerson. Tempered Radicals: How People Use Difference to Inspire Change at Work. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2003.

⁷⁵⁴ S.H. Creighton. Greening the Ivory Tower: Improving the Environmental Track Record of Universities, Colleges, and Other Institutions. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1998.

⁷⁵⁵ Adrianna Kezar. “Faculty and Staff Partnering With Student Activists: Unexplored Terrains of Interaction and Development.” Journal of College Student Development, 51.5 (2010): 451-480.

⁷⁵⁶ Aurali Ella Dade. The Impact of individual decision making on campus sustainability initiatives. Dissertation. Las Vegas, NV: University of Nevada, 2010.

⁷⁵⁷ Marena Brinkhurst, P. Rose, G. Maurice, J.D. Ackerman. “Achieving campus sustainability: top-down, bottom-up, or neither?” International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 12.4 (2011): 338-354.

cheaper, more responsive, and more effective than bureaucratic alternatives. Participating in committees, securing faculty advisors, and embedding work in sustainability policies further integrate organizations into institutional priorities. The expansion of experiential education presents a major opportunity: student environmental organizations already provide real-world, hands-on learning and can position themselves as vital partners in delivering on this mandate.

Taken together, the data suggest that institutional factors shape not only organizational survival but also the form student involvement takes. Student-involved initiatives thrive when they adopt a tempered activist stance: learning to navigate bureaucracy, involving faculty and staff as allies, and embedding themselves in governance structures such as sustainability committees. At the same time, universities must recognize that student desire for agency in shaping their material conditions— independent student environmental organizations are a good thing delivering “triple-bottom-line” value—sustainability, affordability (cheaper goods and services for students, and more efficient and responsive delivery than if done by the university), and education (experiential, leadership, social entrepreneurship). Antagonistic models, such as the Canadian model of the Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs), who most often take confrontational approaches that emphasize protest and critique, risk losing university legitimacy and status. Framing is important—Kate, a sustainability organization interviewee, noted how universities don’t like student groups who take an adversarial advocacy approach, stating, “with divestment, we chose to use the framing ‘responsible investment’...frame it in a more positive way... we try and approach things from a pretty non-adversary way, and do change-making in a way that aligns with the University.”⁷⁵⁸ It is important to acknowledge that even when student organizations are friendly, university administrators can still arbitrarily take adversarial positions towards them. University administrators’ cynicism towards the transient nature of student groups can play a role in such attitudes. With Regenesys, a former sustainability coordinator at York University had our student levy referendum proposal blocked one year as he aimed to seek student levy funding for the university sustainability office. The whims and tides of administrators can even change year-to-year. At Toronto Metropolitan University

⁷⁵⁸ Kate (pseudonym), interview respondent.

(formerly Ryerson), the university reached out to provide our chapter space—only to have a new sustainability coordinator the very next year steal our free store initiative and make it a university-run one.⁷⁵⁹

International models (Norway's *Studentsamskipnad* and Germany's *Studierendenwerk*), as well as Canadian precedents (Quebec Student Co-operatives), demonstrate that student-involved organizations can scale without being absorbed into university bureaucracies. The challenge is to ensure that universities act as enablers rather than absorbers or deniers: providing legitimacy, resources, and oversight without erasing the independence and democratic character that make student environmental organizations both resilient and educational.

4.13 Other Relations

Identify how and why students support student-involved environmental organizations

One survey question aimed to answer this question: **How does the organization frame issues and programs to gain student support?** This question was asked to the leadership and staff.

Organizations found that the most reliable way to gain student support was to emphasize affordability and accessibility. Free or low-cost services—whether food, bikes, or other resources—were described as the clearest way to demonstrate value to peers. This framing works especially well in a campus environment where many students are financially strained and less willing to support initiatives, such as PIRGs or radio stations, that do not provide direct benefits to the wider student body. Framing programs as student-led was another consistent strategy, with several respondents stressing that being run by and for students inherently builds trust and credibility. Some also positioned their work as offering leadership development and experiential learning, presenting their organizations not only as service providers but as platforms for skill-building and résumé

⁷⁵⁹ I would further add that the TMU free store is poorly run – only open two weeks each term; compared to Regenesys run free stores at other universities, which are open four or five days each week and restocked weekly with new items. This is similar to my neglect, underprioritized and under resourced concerns with student unions running sustainability initiatives, with many initiatives closing down or operating in a limited manner. I believe student-involved environmental organizations are proven to be the best approach all things considered—empowering students, service delivery quality, and educational benefits.

development. Environmental sustainability and health outcomes are also important, but it is often most effective when paired with these immediate, student-centered benefits. In practice, this meant that successful organizations presented themselves as both practical and aspirational—offering tangible goods or services while also framing involvement as a chance to learn, lead, and contribute to environmental change. As one respondent put it, their work was understood simultaneously as “a student-run service for students and an environmental movement.”⁷⁶⁰ The combination of usefulness, affordability, and student ownership proved to be the most compelling way to mobilize support.

Identify the relationships between these organizations, faculty and labour unions

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What is the relationship the organization has with labour unions on campus?** [2] **What is the relationship the organization has with professors?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Connections with professors are important for guidance, legitimacy and lobbying. Many groups benefited from faculty speaking at events, serving as advisors or on boards, and promoting involvement in their classes. Some professors integrated organizations directly into coursework or research projects, while others simply modeled support by using services like cafés, bike centres or community gardens. In some cases, faculty were even founders of initiatives, providing material resources, office space, and legitimacy at critical moments. These relationships show how faculty involvement can lend continuity, credibility, and institutional connection to student-involved projects, helping organizations persist despite the turnover inherent in student membership. One study argues that university faculty and staff involvement is necessary to support the transitions of campus community gardens, in that they exist as both temporary (seasonal) and permanent organizations, and student involvement is transitory with gardens.⁷⁶¹

Most student environmental organizations reported little to no connection with labour unions on campus, with some noting the absence of a union presence altogether.

⁷⁶⁰ Jacqueline Nicole (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁷⁶¹ Rebecca Laycock Pedersen, Zoe P. Robinson and Emma Surman. “Understanding Transience and Participation in University Student-Led Food Gardens.” *Sustainability*, 11.10 (2019), 2788. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11102788>

Where ties did exist, they were consistently positive: a handful of groups supported faculty unions during strikes by providing food at picket lines, while others received small amounts of financial backing. Yet, overall, the labour movement remains a largely untapped ally. Given examples like OPIRG Brock, where a labour union provided a portion of their dues for a period of time, these relationships hold potential for both political solidarity and practical support if more systematically cultivated.

Identify the relationships between these organizations, student unions and student clubs

Two survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What is the relationship the organization has with the student unions on campus?** [2] **What is the relationship the organization has with other student groups?** These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Relationships between student environmental organizations and student unions are often shaped by the central role student unions play in financing and governance at most universities. Most organizations described positive or supportive relationships, especially where student unions administered levies, gave grants, or provided space. These financial links often enabled programming, staffing, and advocacy, while partnerships on events and campaigns strengthened ties. Some groups also noted shared progressive political commitments that created opportunities for collective policy work or pressure on administration. However, these relationships were not always smooth—some were described as minimal, strained, or even adversarial, often shifting with changes in student union leadership. As interviewees Alexandra’s and Taha’s experiences highlight, student unions could also act punitively, evicting groups or withholding support, reflecting how power dynamics and personal politics influence these relationships. Dan, a respondent from a bike centre operated by a student union, described in his survey responses the challenges of operating under a student union, stating: “I quit because of the politics.”⁷⁶² Additionally, occasionally student unions get themselves into

⁷⁶² Dan (pseudonym), survey respondent. The student union no longer operates a bike centre, and none exist anymore at this university.

controversies.⁷⁶³ This can result a lack of support for student-involved environmental organizations, including delays in holding a levy-fee referendum or in obtaining space.

Experiences with student unions also revealed the challenges of working with young and sometimes inexperienced leaders. Several interviewees described how power imbalances, petty conflicts, or domineering behavior could damage relationships. These factors leave student organizations vulnerable to the whims of the student union. Yet others, like Darren, emphasized how student unions could be strategically leveraged—through levy referenda, advocacy, and coalition-building—to advance progressive causes, cooperatives, and social enterprises. From this perspective, building alliances within unions offered both access to resources and a platform to apply pressure on administrators. Conversely, when actively opposed by union leadership, respondents advised organizing collectively to contest elections or build new alliances, turning conflict into an opportunity to shift campus power dynamics.

Relationships with other student groups were generally positive, though often limited in scope. Survey respondents described collaborations such as co-hosting events, cross-promoting initiatives, or joining coalitions. Some groups provided material support, such as donating food or staff time, while larger organizations often helped smaller clubs build capacity. Yet, tensions were also occasionally noted: rivalries emerged where groups duplicated efforts or competed for visibility, a concern echoed by Vlad, who warned against unnecessary competition between students groups. Overall, student organizations recognized the importance of cooperation, particularly with allies who had staffing, reach, or resources, seeing these ties as essential for sustaining broader student movements and resisting abuses of power from student unions or administrators.

Identify the relationships between these organizations, other organizations and the community

Three survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What is the relationship the organization has with community organizations?** [2] **What is the**

⁷⁶³ Justin Patrick. “Student Unions: Warnings of Toxic Problems Fuelling Disillusionment Need to Be Dealt With.” *The Conversation*. 16 Jan. 2025. <www.theconversation.com/student-unions-warnings-of-toxic-problems-fuelling-disillusionment-need-to-be-dealt-with-241643>.

relationship the organization has with the wider neighbourhood or city? [3] Who are the allies of the organization and how do you support each other/work together?

These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Most student-involved environmental organizations reported existing and mutually supportive ties with community organizations, charities, and cooperatives. These relationships were often rooted in shared values and practical collaboration, including donations of food or money, joint events, shared space, and participation in networks. Examples ranged from bike shops working with recycling initiatives to gardens partnering with food banks, showing how student initiatives often plug into broader community systems of care and sustainability. Although a small minority reported no external links, the vast majority saw these connections as fruitful, particularly when coalition-building allowed them to amplify advocacy and policy change.

Organizations also cultivated strong ties with the wider neighbourhood and city, often through community members using their services, volunteering, or attending events. PIRGs, in particular, built deep connections with activist coalitions, local social justice movements, and labour-backed campaigns, while others collaborated with schools, associations, and local businesses. When asked about allies, respondents most frequently named community organizations and other student groups, followed by student unions, faculty, and local residents. These alliances often centered on resource-sharing, joint programming, and advocacy, with some groups describing highly coordinated mutual support during moments of crisis or criticism. Taken together, these relationships demonstrate how student organizations not only serve campus communities but also integrate into the civic fabric, positioning themselves as credible actors in wider movements for social and environmental change.

4.14 Politics

Identify how activism, politics and social movements is seen and enacted within these organizations

Five survey questions, asked to the leadership and staff, aimed to answer this question:

[1] How political would you describe the organization as being?

- [2] **Do you think the level of political activity should be more/less?**
- [3] **How does your organization support broader social movements?**
- [4] **What does your organization do (or could it do) to cultivate an activist culture that contributes to turning members/volunteers into lifelong activists?**
- [5] **What does it mean to think of the organization as part of a broader social movement?**

The political character of student-involved environmental organizations varies widely. While PIRGs were consistently described as the most overtly political, other initiatives such as bike centres, community gardens, and food programs showed much greater variation. Survey data revealed that about a third of organizations described themselves as political, another third as apolitical, and the rest as somewhat or variably political. Respondents often emphasized that “everything is political” when providing services that expose systemic gaps, but they also widely acknowledged the risks of being seen as too partisan. For some, this concern was primarily about not being seen as politically partisan—associated with a particular political party or ideology. For others, this tension created a strategic dilemma: being overtly political (e.g. advocacy and lobbying, social movement activity participation like rallies or marches) could jeopardize grant opportunities or alienate students, while scaling back political expression could water down their message, organizational image or mission. Multiple respondents indicated it requires a balancing act. This might mean being political when necessary or expedient (e.g. lobbying for initiative space on campus, participating on university or municipal committees tackling specific issues, taking a political stance on issue such as bike lanes that will have direct impacts on students), but not in other instances (e.g. taking a political stance on international geopolitical issue, encouraging participation in on-campus protests). Darren, a respondent whose activism led his and like-minded sustainability and food activists to them to taking over their student union, turning it into a “well-oiled machine” and a “forceful student lobby group,” who was able to “make it rain” funding⁷⁶⁴—demonstrating a type of political engagement that adopted a professional and principled approach, was widely supported by the student body, and that has had broad and long-lasting impacts. Similarly, Ravi, a respondent from a PIRG

⁷⁶⁴ Darren (pseudonym), interview respondent.

working group that was effective in securing university policy change commitments, took a similar approach that balanced professionalism (e.g. utilizing university committees, professors advising and participating) and principled action (e.g. occupation of university president's office, petition collection) to achieve their goals.

Most respondents agreed that organizations should maintain or even increase their level of political engagement, though they often differed on what that meant in practice. Many pointed to supporting broader social movements—whether through advocacy, solidarity actions, resource-sharing, or aligning core operations with social justice and sustainability values—as their way of being “political.” Nearly all organizations reported some form of support for wider movements, ranging from co-hosting events to providing food or space for activists. Yet, while some groups leaned into mobilization, others took a quieter approach—contributing indirectly through education, modelling alternatives, or embodying sustainable practices. Even many respondents from some of the most political organizations (e.g. Taha, Jing, Owenetta) expressed concerns about being too political in some areas, while still expressing a desire for political engagement, albeit often in different, less confrontational and ideological, such as through education, mutual aid and promotion of self-care. These differences underscore the broad spectrum of political engagement, shaped by capacity, leadership, and the organization's culture.

A recurring theme was the challenge of cultivating activist cultures that support long-term engagement. Some respondents described positive experiences of empowerment, mentorship, and skill-building that helped students imagine themselves as future changemakers. Others, however, raised cautionary notes about burnout, ideological rigidity, and exclusionary “purity politics” that alienated members. One food organization respondent noted that their group “radicalized anyone who was involved,”⁷⁶⁵ but that this same intensity drove many away when the culture became toxic. Suggestions for improvement included promoting more inclusive definitions of activism, emphasizing quality over quantity of involvement, encouraging self-care, and reframing activism as engaged citizenship. As a PIRG respondent put it, “I also think we need to build an activist culture that respects people's individual capacities to get involved.”⁷⁶⁶ Another

⁷⁶⁵ Owenetta (pseudonym), interview respondent.

⁷⁶⁶ SOY (pseudonym), survey respondent.

PIRG respondent encouraged

“promoting a wide definition of activism so people can see a role for themselves in it.”⁷⁶⁷

When asked about their place within broader social movements, most organizations saw themselves as contributing small or symbolic actions to a larger struggle. This ranged from providing grassroots services like food access or bike repair that help address sustainability and poverty, to fostering cooperative alternatives to capitalist exchange (free stores, borrowing centres, bike centres DIY education ethos). Some respondents emphasized the importance of accessibility—meeting students where they are, rather than demanding ideological alignment from the outset. PIRGs, with their broad mandates, often positioned themselves as connectors, providing entry points into different kinds of social movement work. In this way, student environmental organizations occupy a liminal space: not always leading large-scale mobilizations, but providing the infrastructure, education, and cultures that indirectly can foster them.

The potential political aspects of some student organizations, or broader student-driven social movements, create complexities for their funding, and even existence. On one hand we must acknowledge that everything has political aspects to one’s activities and existence, and on other, one must deal with the realpolitik of university, provincial, national and international politics. We should be asking instead: What activities, considering their political aspects, should be encouraged or discouraged and why? Taha, a PIRG participant, reflected on PIRGs’ politics as alienating to many students, stating: “There is a valid question about whether or not there should be a levy that every student pays into for an organization that’s promoting a set of values that not every student holds. Even if I think that those values are important myself.”⁷⁶⁸ His point captures a recurring tension: while many see these organizations as vital spaces for radical analysis and grassroots activism, others question whether their political orientation or the issues they choose to focus on justifies funding. This speaks to the broader challenge of legitimacy that student-involved organizations with more political aspects face—caught between their mission to push boundaries and the need to remain inclusive and accountable to the diverse student body that sustains them. I don’t think it is a question of being political or

⁷⁶⁷ Jen (pseudonym), survey respondent.

⁷⁶⁸ Taha (pseudonym), interview respondent.

apolitical, but what justifies mandatory funding or not. This question should be reflected through the larger educational mission of post-secondary institutions, which includes the development of engaged and aware citizens. Without question, most of the services (free items, free services, education) provided by student-involved environmental organizations would be considered by most students as necessary. However, the more radical and divisive aspects of Canadian PIRGs, have created broad scrutiny and warrant reflection and reconsideration. What might a Canadian PIRG-model that receives broader student support look like? Perhaps it look like the American PIRG model focused on public interest research and lobbying. Activities that encourage debate and critical thinking, or that educate on how to participate politically (broadly speaking), such as some PIRGs Tools for Change workshop series, might be worthy to a wide audience. PIRGs have historically only supported progressive change movements, and not conservative movements that generally oppose change—progressives might argue that these movements should be supported with funding given they are historically disenfranchised. However, beyond providing support services to marginalized groups (e.g. women's centre, LGBTQ+ centre, accessibility centre, first nations centre, etc.), funding for specific movements pushing for specific social change, might be a bridge too far for many students and risks alienating large portions of the student body from even supporting the idea of mandatory student unionism and levy funding for shared services.

Identify the political contexts (local, national and international) that may have an impact on the success of student-involved environmental organizations.

This discussion will be separated into four separate parts:

- (A) Right-wing politics
- (B) Israel/Palestine
- (C) Student Unionism
- (D) Cycles of Environmental Concern

Right-wing politics

Largely invisible to the average student, an ideological struggle runs beneath the surface of campus life. It is a battle hidden to most students, occurring behind the scenes

of most student unions, student government, university boards and committees, student elections, within student clubs and on social media. It is a battle between the left and the right over the control of student unions and other levied student organizations, student positions on university boards, over student levy fees, and the political stances taken by each of these student groups. While these battles are not always active at every university, they often arise when there are broader political issues that influence or inspire students to act. These conflicts often have impacts on efforts to enact campus sustainability, when it comes to the usage of student fees on sustainability and on fossil fuel divestment.

Conservatism has changed drastically over the last century. While the right-wing has always been a reactionary movement against change, be it social, cultural or economic, it was previously for a time in the 20th century more tempered with a cautious realism. Previously, earlier Conservative movements were leaders in environmental protection—from U.S. Republican President Theodore Roosevelt, who while believing in limited government, conserved approximately 230 million areas of public land, far more than any other president before or since;⁷⁶⁹ or Canadian Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney who is considered Canada’s Greenest Prime Minister for taking a lead global role on issues like acid rain and the ozone layer.⁷⁷⁰ Increasingly, however, global conservatism has morphed into oligarchal movement centred on the interested of the ultra-wealthy, back by a coalition of the petty bourgeois, ethno-nationalists, and the religious right.⁷⁷¹ Many attribute this shift with the 1971 “Attack on the American Free Enterprise System” Powell Memorandum, a confidential memo written for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce written by corporate lawyer (and future Supreme Court Justice)

⁷⁶⁹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919): Conservation President." U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, <https://www.fws.gov/staff-profile/theodore-roosevelt-1858-1919-conservation-president>.

⁷⁷⁰ Daniel Macfarlane. "Brian Mulroney: Canada’s Greenest Prime Minister?" NiCHE, 8 Mar. 2024, <https://niche-canada.org/2024/03/08/brian-mulroney-canadas-greenest-prime-minister/>.

⁷⁷¹ The term “petty bourgeois” refers to small business owners and the self-employed that only own small amounts of capital or property. The aspiration of this group to gain more power and becoming wealthy is a phenomenon many have commented on as a factor limited the potential of the west. Novelist John Steinbeck says “I guess the trouble was that we didn’t have any self-admitted proletarians. Everyone was a temporarily embarrassed capitalist” (Esquire, 1960, pp. 85-93). Author Ronald Wright in his book, *A Short History of Progress*, calls them “A people who think they are one step away from being rich” (2004, pg. 124).

Lewis F. Powell Jr, which was largely written as a reaction of the consumer activism of Ralph Nader, who started organizing Public Interest Research Groups at universities earlier in 1971, and more broadly, the growing influence of the left on post-secondary campuses.^{772,773} These attacks grew to include environmental sustainability—organizations such as the National Association of Scholars (formerly Campus Coalition for Democracy), a conservative advocacy group, advocate for, amongst other things, ceasing sustainability hires at universities, withdrawing from the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment and claiming that universities must create “neutral ground” for debate as global warming is not one of those things “settled in history.”⁷⁷⁴

The origins of these attacks by Conservatives on academia are rooted in the shift that universities and students played in opposing colonialism, war, racism and sexism. While universities historically had been bastions for the children of the wealthy and powerful of western nations, this began to shift as more people from working class backgrounds, women, non-westerners and persons of colour began attending universities largely between the 1890s and 1960s. Mount Allison University was the first university in Canada to accept female students in 1872, and Mount Saint Vincent University was the first women’s college to open in Canada in 1875.⁷⁷⁵ Female students would play a critical role in the suffrage movement, and later women’s rights and feminist movements. From the early 1900s, students coming from foreign nations started attending western universities to attain an education, which influenced anti-colonial and independence movements in the global south.⁷⁷⁶ Increasing numbers of those from working class backgrounds began attaining post-secondary education, especially after World War Two. This increase in diversity helped challenge the narratives those with power espoused and

⁷⁷² Wisecrack. *Democracy Is Collapsing: This 1971 Playbook Started It All*. YouTube, 8 Mar. 2025, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgYkde3o2Xw.

⁷⁷³ Lewis Powell. "Confidential Memorandum: Attack on American Free Enterprise System." www.virginiabusiness.com/confidential-memorandum-attack-on-american-free-enterprise-system/.

⁷⁷⁴ Rachelle Peterson and Peter W. Wood. *Sustainability: Higher Education's New Fundamentalism*. National Association of Scholars, 2015, www.nas.org/storage/app/media/Reports/Sustainability/NAS-Sustainability-Digital.pdf.

⁷⁷⁵ Marilla McCargar. *Femininity and Higher Education: Women at Ontario Universities, 1890 to 1920*. Dissertation. The University of Western Ontario, April 2016.

⁷⁷⁶ A. I. Sow. *The Role of African Student Movements in the Political and Social Evolution of Africa from 1900 to 1975*. Paris, FR: UNESCO, 1994.

used justified inherent inequality and injustice in the system—which inevitably changed higher education, as it seems the trajectory of history is that when you put intelligent people from a diversity of backgrounds together, they will eventually see through any bullshit and lies of a system.

A favourite target of young conservative activists is students' activity fees (aka ancillary fees, supplementary fees) which fund student unions and other campus groups. Conservatives attack the idea of student fees from both an anti-tax lens and a free association lens, arguing that student unions and other student groups take up political positions amounts to forced association. Jonathan Wensveen of the Canadian free market think tank Frontier Institute argues that under the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association,” and “no one may be compelled to belong to an association.”⁷⁷⁷ This position is ironic as when we elect governments at the federal, provincial, regional and municipal levels, they take up political positions and choose what to fund with our tax dollars. Mr. Wensveen tries to argue against this claiming that student unions aren't government and that they don't provide public goods.⁷⁷⁸ Sam Routley, a young conservative, wrote an opinion piece in *The Varsity*, University of Toronto's student newspaper—he speaks in favour of voluntary student unionism, arguing that voluntary membership will make student unions and organizations more accountable, especially given student apathy towards student politics—he uses a few examples of student union and college council financial scandals to make his argument.⁷⁷⁹ In a *National Post* piece, Ryerson student and Campus Conservative President Eitan Gilboord, says that students shouldn't be forced to pay to support causes they don't support, citing foreign policy issues such as Israel/Palestine, support for specific political ideologies (anti-capitalist, anarchist) and a 'sex party' being funded with student fees.⁷⁸⁰ Eliminating mandatory

⁷⁷⁷ Jonathan Wensveen. *The Case for Voluntary Student Unionism (Backgrounder No. 96)*. Frontier Centre for Public Policy. November 2011. Pdf file.

<<https://studentunion.ca/docs3/The%20Case%20for%20Voluntary%20Student%20Unionism%20-%20Backgrounder%20-%20Jonathan%20Wensveen%20-%20November%202011.pdf>>

⁷⁷⁸ Wensveen, *op cit*.

⁷⁷⁹ Sam Routley. “A Principled Defence of Voluntary Student Unionism.” *The Varsity*, 3 February 2019. <<https://www.thevarsity.ca/2019/02/03/a-principled-defence-of-voluntary-student-unionism/>>.

⁷⁸⁰ Samuel Greenfield. “Sanctioned Sex Club Events and Israeli Apartheid Week Have Some University Students Angry over What Their Money Funds.” *National Post*. 2 March 2013.

student fees have long been a target for Conservative youth activists around the world. I discuss the history of voluntary student unionism in detail in my discussion on student unions later in this section.

In my observation, Conservatives are best tolerant of student activity fees under the condition that the student union (or other groups receive fees) are from a service-based model, remain apolitical, and run efficiently. If this is the limit of their position on the issue, this would be reasonable; however, for many it is not. Some young Conservatives see involvement in student union politics as a way of furthering their political ambitions—often campaigning on finding efficiencies or providing small reductions in student fees, albeit not attacking all student fees from a conservative ideological lens. In the worst cases, these young conservatives aim to make some or all student fees voluntary, or to eliminate some fees altogether—which the Canadian Federation of Students and Canadian PIRGs have often faced the brunt of due to their explicit left-leaning political activism being at odds with the apolitical stance most Conservatives (and many Liberals) would prefer student unions and other student groups receiving tuition fee funding take. A WikiLeaks exposed a Ontario Progressive Conservative Campus Association conference focused on taking over student unions and defunding PIRGs.⁷⁸¹ They have also been accused of encouraged their members to create ‘front groups’—fake student clubs in order to win student elections, defund student groups (such as PIRGs, campus radio stations and the Canadian Federation of Students) and promote a conservative agenda.⁷⁸² This prompted the Carleton University Students’ Association to investigate several allegedly fake clubs, such as the Friedrich Nietzsche Club, Philosophy Club, Star Trek Club, Soviet Studies Club and others.⁷⁸³ Additionally, two respondents, Darren and Taha, highlighted how national student union federations are linked to political parties with different ideologies. Taking an apolitical stance is not an act of neutrality—it is a conservative posture that legitimizes and preserves existing

<<https://nationalpost.com/news/toronto/sanctioned-sex-club-events-and-israeli-apartheid-week-have-some-university-students-angry-over-what-their-money-funds>>.

⁷⁸¹ Clare O’Connor & Kalin Stacey. “Defunding the public interest: Conservative strategy and the fight for the PIRGs.” *Briarpatch Magazine*. 1 September 2012.

<<http://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/defunding-the-public-interest>>.

⁷⁸² Daniel Pagan. “Conservatives accused of setting up campus front groups.” *Gauntlet*. 30 August 2009.

<<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/conservatives-accused-setting-campus-front-groups>>.

⁷⁸³ Pagan, *op cit*.

power, wealth, hierarchies and systems of privilege. While the idea of charging additional fees from students, who are generally lower-income than the rest of the general population, is at the surface seemingly a tax on the poor, the additional fees enable services and programs that create a more equal and level field for all students attending school—campus food banks, low-cost printing, funding for social activities, emergency funding for students in need, and many other services help improve the student experience. The collective power of the fees—be it enable things like bulk purchasing and discounts, or organizing the systems and venues needed to support these programs and services—make it much cheaper for students if we were to reach access such services individually. These student ancillary fees typically make up less than 2% of overall tuition but receive far more attention as one can more easily challenge such a fee, but it is much harder to challenge the overall budget of a post-secondary institution, or provincial funding of post-secondary education.

The difficulty in defending these fees is that many students, especially those facing financial hardships, don't see the big picture here, but just an immediate injustice that they are being taxed to pay an additional fee, no matter how small it is, and often not even caring about the purpose. These discussions raise broader philosophical points on false consciousness, notions of common sense and fairness. Why do even those who would benefit from higher taxes often support lower taxes? Research provides several answers, including, but not limited to:

- Prospect theory (people see and experience losses far more than gains)
- Broader distrust of institutions and government
- Late-stage capitalism and neo-liberal policies (and the resulting poverty and inequality) creates a sense of the world that everyone is out for themselves (i.e. conflict theories).
- Us versus them mentalities (i.e. tribalism)
- Just-world hypothesis (people who succeed or fail deserve it, or it is fated by God)
- Framing by political and media elites (e.g. welfare queens' stereotype)
- Aspirational identification (one day might also be rich)
- Sense of fairness (see their parent's worked hard and feel—any or high—taxation is unfair, while simultaneously not being exposed to a diversity of classes, experiences and viewpoints resulting in the stereotypes).

These attitudes parlay themselves into student politics. As research participant Taha said, many conservative students use student politics and the reduction of student fees as a way to enhance their political careers. This is true not just in Canada, but in other countries like Australia, New Zealand, Sweden and The United States (see section on Student Unionism). The preeminent example of this activism in Canada has been the Student Choice Initiative in Ontario. This policy has been a failure in every sense of the word. First proposed by the Conservative Doug Ford Government in January 2019 in the Province of Ontario, it aimed to make some student fees voluntary at Ontario post-secondary institutions. The Ford government pursued the Student Choice Initiative because of pressure from young conservative activists, many of whom have rose to positions of power within the Ontario Conservative party. Student unions and student levy-supported groups are commonly seen by conservatives as unfairly taxing students who don't share the same left-wing politics—further, they see these organizations as being used as training grounds for left-wing activists who go onto get jobs with labour unions. Some go so far as to label such student organizations as the Canadian Federation of Students and their local affiliates as essentially morally and financially corrupt. Premier Ford said to the media, “I think we all know what kind of crazy Marxist nonsense student unions get up to.”⁷⁸⁴ Student unions, student levied-support organizations and others pushed back.⁷⁸⁵ Said one school newspaper in a commentary on the Student Choice Initiative, “By appealing to students’ wallets, Ford is trying to separate students from the organizations that defend their interests.”⁷⁸⁶ Alex Usher, President of the Higher Education Strategy Associates, said “This is ideologically motivated... The government is being quite deliberate in what kinds of services they consider unimportant, and they are setting up a mechanism to defund those services.”⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸⁴ The Canadian Press. “Doug Ford accuses student unions of 'crazy Marxist nonsense' in fundraising email.” *CBC*, February 11, 2019. <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/doug-ford-accuses-student-unions-of-crazy-marxist-nonsense-in-fundraising-email-1.5015042>>.

⁷⁸⁵ Nasr Ahmed. “Ontario Post-Secondary Students Leading Charge Against Ford’s Funding Cuts.” *CWA Canada*, 20 Mar. 2019, <https://cwacanada.ca/2019/03/20/ontario-post-secondary-students-leading-charge-against-fords-funding-cuts/>.

⁷⁸⁶ Andy Crosby and Tim Kitz. “10 Years of The Leveller: Will this year be our last?” *The Leveller*. 22 February 2019. <<https://leveller.ca/2019/02/10-years-of-the-leveller/>>.

⁷⁸⁷ Salma Mahgoub. “Ontario Student Groups Fear Fees Opt-Out Policy Will Reduce Quality of Campus Life.” *University Affairs*, 13 Feb. 2019.

For example, athletics were excepted, but anything related to civic engagement was made voluntary. Many saw what the Ford government was doing as a form of red baiting, a political tactic used to delegitimize those with left-wing views.⁷⁸⁸ Opt-out rates varied, on average being around 20-25%, but some such as Ryerson University (later renamed Toronto Metropolitan University) being around as high as 50%—still way below the 80-90% opt-out levels that occurred in Australia when voluntary student unionism was introduced.⁷⁸⁹

The government ultimately lost a court challenge put forward by the Canadian Federation of Students and the York Federation of Students (the undergraduate student union at York University). However, the Ford Government appealed the decision. The position of the government was that because they provide funding to universities and colleges, they should have a right to set policies on non-academic fees. The position of universities, student unions and student groups are that as independent organizations they have a right to set their own fees. The government lost their appeal in August 2021. Despite the lost, the Student Choice Initiative resulted in many services that students rely on scaling back or closing—many of which have not returned, such as Purple Bikes, a community bike centre and bike rental program formerly at Western University.

More recently, the Ford government has passed Bill 33 in November 2025, an omnibus bill that attempts to exert more control over all levels of education in the Province of Ontario. With the popularity of conservatism rising amongst young people globally—with polls in Canada finding the Conservatives having the support of a plurality of young people aged 18-29, and that young people 18-29 are most likely age group to support U.S. President Trump⁷⁹⁰—this issue will not go away. This growth has also seen the expansion of conservative student movement organizations, with groups like Turning Point USA and Students for Liberty, the later now having chapters at

<<https://www.universityaffairs.ca/news/ontario-student-groups-fear-fees-opt-out-policy-will-reduce-quality-of-campus-life>>

⁷⁸⁸ Martin Regg Cohn. “Doug Ford’s Tories overreached. The courts overruled them. But students are still paying the price.” *Toronto Star*, January 22, 2020. <<https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2020/01/22/doug-fords-tories-overreached-the-courts-overruled-them-but-students-are-still-paying-the-price.html>>.

⁷⁸⁹ Alex Usher. “Beyond the Student Choice Initiative.” *Higher Ed Strategy Associates*. 27 November 2019. <www.higheredstrategy.com/beyond-the-student-choice-initiative/>.

⁷⁹⁰ Philip Cross. “Young People Increasingly Embrace Conservatism.” *The Financial Post*, 30 October 2024. <fraserinstitute.org/commentary/young-people-increasingly-embrace-conservatism>.

Canadian post-secondary institutions. Worse, however, is this is not our parents' conservatism. As we are witnessing a resurgent conservative movement edging towards fascism, they are using similar underlying assumptions to justify unethical political tactics and their seizure and abuses of power. These underlying assumptions include: police and military force to ensure the preservation of societal stability, lack of meaning in society without nationalism or religion, superiority of culture and values ('western enlightenment' or 'classical liberalism'), motivation and competition under capitalism leads to prosperity and hard work—these and other related beliefs are at the core of their motivation. While there are grains of truth in each of these, progressives must work to challenge modern conservatives on the roots of their beliefs. Exposure to the lived experiences of others, hearing different perspectives, and revealing and challenging the underlying assumptions of the right I believe are our best tools to address the root cause of the problem. Find a reasonable truth, that can address the concerns of all in an honest way, is the best outcome. This must be done in tandem with challenging right-wing attacks against student organization autonomy and funding both at the campus level, and at the provincial level (or equivalent if you live in another country).

Israel/Palestine⁷⁹¹

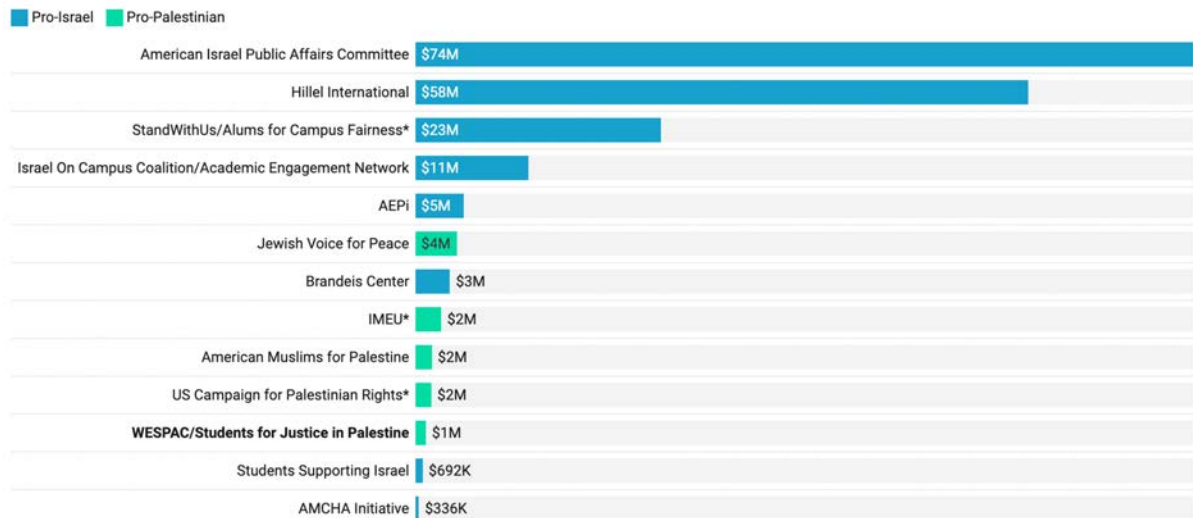
University campuses have a long-held tradition of international solidarity activism, from protests and organizing against the Vietnam War, the apartheid regime in South Africa, or Students for A Free Tibet (established in 1994) advocating for Tibetan self-determination. Activism related to Israel and Palestine is not something new, however, the issue has come to dominate student politics, often foreshadowing other important issues. Student activism relating to Palestine started to become prominent after the First Intifada started in December 1987 at campuses such as Harvard University and

⁷⁹¹ I have used sources from mainstream media, campus media, alternative media, and from both sides of the debate. There is considerable difficulty discerning truth with regards to this issue, so I make no claims as to the accuracy of these sources.

the University of Berkeley.^{792,793,794} It started to become more pronounced again after the Second Intifada started in September 2000 and the subsequent push for BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) by Palestinian activists. Famous incidents occurred at this time at Columbia University in New York (a 2002 incident that became known as the *Columbia Unbecoming Incident* where three professors of Middle Eastern origin were accused of anti-Israel bias in their teaching) and at Concordia University in Montreal (2002 student protest against a visit by then former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to campus that ended in arrests and property damage).^{795,796}

Budgets of major organizations involved in campus Israel activism

Students for Justice in Palestine operates as a decentralized network with little money, according to current and past leaders. That reflects the overall disparity between pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian groups active in campus politics.



*Denotes finances from 2021. All other data is from 2022. Alums for Campus Fairness and National Students for Justice in Palestine are sponsored by the other listed nonprofit, and receive an unknown fraction of the total budget listed.

Chart: Arno Rosenfeld/The Forward • Source: Internal Revenue Service • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

⁷⁹² No Writer Attributed. "Palestinian Group's Rights Violated." *Harvard Crimson*. 17 December 1990. <<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1990/12/17/palestinian-groups-rights-violated-pbto-the/>>.

⁷⁹³ Seth A. Gitell. "Searching for an Identity and a Homeland." *Harvard Crimson*. 6 June 1991. <<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1991/6/6/searching-for-an-identity-and-a/>>.

⁷⁹⁴ Students for Justice in Palestine was established in 1993 at University of California Berkeley. See Arno Rosenfeld. "The secret history and uncertain future of Students for Justice in Palestine." *The Forward*. 20 December 2023. <<https://forward.com/news/574014/students-for-justice-in-palestine-history-operations-network-national-sjp/>>.

⁷⁹⁵ Pierre Chauvin, "A Decade After: A Look Back at the 2002 Netanyahu Riot," *The Link*, September 11, 2012, <https://thelinknewspaper.ca/article/a-decade-after>.

⁷⁹⁶ Corinne Berzon. "Anti-Israeli Activity at Concordia University 2000-2003." *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, 21 September 2008. <jcpa.org/article/anti-israeli-activity-at-concordia-university-2000-2003/>.

Figure 10: Budgets of U.S. based organizations involved in campus Israel or Palestinian activism^{797,798}

Groups involved in campus activism such as the Pro-Palestinian Solidarity Movement and Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights, along with Pro-Israel groups such as the Israel on Campus Coalition, Stand With Us, Hasbara Fellowships, and The David Project all being started between 2000 and 2002. Millions of dollars now go into influencing student opinion, student elections and university policy relating to this issue.⁷⁹⁹ This opens broader issues, including antisemitism and islamophobia on university campuses, free speech on campus, the targeting of student activists and outside influence into student union politics and university affairs. This is exacerbated by that fact that this issue has been further divided on political lines—left (Pro-Palestinian) and right (Pro-Israel). The covert nature of these organizations and their activities I would characterize as sharp power politics.

Related to the Israel/Palestine issue is increasing racism on campus, in particular antisemitism, islamophobia, and anti-Arab racism.^{800,801,802} Some critics on the left say most claims of antisemitism are exaggerated.^{803,804} A study from Brandeis University on antisemitism on American college campuses challenges this, showing that while the far left generally does not harbour hostility toward Jews in the same way as the far right, antisemitism—measured using definitions such as the Nexus Document or the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism that don't equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism⁸⁰⁵—is still

⁷⁹⁷ Rosenfeld, *op cit*.

⁷⁹⁸ Figures for Canada are unknown.

⁷⁹⁹ Rosenfeld, *op cit*.

⁸⁰⁰ Berzon, *op cit*.

⁸⁰¹ Dave Gordon. "York University Students Disappointed, but 'Kind of Used to' Jew-Hatred on Campus." *Jewish News Syndicate*, 8 February 2024. <jns.org/york-university-students-disappointed-but-kind-of-used-to-jew-hatred-on-campus/>.

⁸⁰² Nadia Hasan. Documenting the "Palestine Exception": An Overview of Trends in Islamophobia, Anti-Palestinian, and Anti-Arab Racism in Canada in the Aftermath of October 7, 2023. York University, Islamophobia Research Hub, 2025, <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/research/islamophobia/wp-content/uploads/sites/874/2025/09/documenting-the-palestine-exception-2025.pdf>

⁸⁰³ Larry Haiven. "The Cry Gevalt Syndrome: Are Jewish Students Really 'Terrified' on Campus?" *Canadian Dimension*. 6 Nov. 2022. <www.canadiandimension.com/articles/view/the-cry-gevalt-syndrome-are-jewish-students-really-terrified-on-campus>.

⁸⁰⁴ Arno Rosenfeld. "Dark Money, Questionable Partners Behind New Group Fighting Antisemitism." *The Forward*. 22 May 2021. <forward.com/news/467981/dark-money-questionable-partners-behind-new-group-fighting-antisemitism/>.

⁸⁰⁵ There are multiple definitions of antisemitism, most of which are contested as to what is or isn't considered antisemitism. Many student unions, such as CUSA, are adopting the Independent Jewish Voices

present and increasing.⁸⁰⁶ Numerous lawsuits against universities and student unions in Canada and The United States alleging rampant antisemitism have been issued, including Harvard in the US, Concordia, McMaster, Queen's, TMU, UBC and York in Canada.^{807,808} Beyond the criticisms against student unions, student fee levies themselves are being targeted as crossfire in this fight. The Jewish organization B'nai Brith filed an amicus brief and having intervener status in court cases involving the Student Choice Initiative in Ontario, arguing in favour of having voluntary student-fees.^{809,810,811} This could be considered a chilling development to have a non-student organization attempt to influence student self-governance in this manner—it could be viewed as an attack on the collective organizing tool that is student levies, and which are essential to funding student life and vital campus services for students-in-need. Additionally, the potential linkages between broad campus fossil fuel and weapons manufacturer divestment campaigns, with BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) campaigns aimed at Israel, may continue to put at risk the funding and existence of student-involved environmental organizations who chose to commit to supporting any divestment campaigns—in particular, from campus right-wing de-funding efforts. I believe it is important to acknowledge the Israel/Palestinian issue having spillover effects on campus politics, in particular when environmentalism is increasingly coded as a left-wing partisan issue.

Student Unionism

definition of antisemitism. Independent Jewish Voices is an advocacy group of Jewish-Canadians critical of Israel's actions and policies towards Palestinians.

⁸⁰⁶ Graham Wright, Shahar Hecht, and Leonard Saxe. "Antisemitism, Israel, and Political Ideology on the American College Campus." *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2025.2575435>

⁸⁰⁷ Stephanie Saul. "Students Sue Harvard, Calling It a Bastion of Antisemitism." *The New York Times*, 11 January 2024. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/11/us/harvard-antisemitism-lawsuit.html>>.

⁸⁰⁸ Adrian Ghobrial. "Multiple Canadian Universities Facing Class-Action Lawsuit, Claiming Antisemitism." *CTV News*. 11 January 2024. <[ctvnews.ca/canada/article/multiple-canadian-universities-facing-class-action-lawsuit-claiming-antisemitism/](https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/multiple-canadian-universities-facing-class-action-lawsuit-claiming-antisemitism/)>.

⁸⁰⁹ Ontario Superior Court of Justice. 2019 ONSC 6658. 2019. CanLII, <<https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onscdc/doc/2019/2019onsc6658/2019onsc6658.html>>.

⁸¹⁰ Ontario Court of Appeal. 2021 ONCA 553. 2021. CanLII, <<https://www.canlii.org/en/on/onca/doc/2021/2021onca553/2021onca553.html>>.

⁸¹¹ B'nai Brith Canada. B'nai Brith to Intervene in Canadian Federation of Students Court Case. B'nai Brith Canada, 8 Oct. 2019. <https://www.bnaibrith.ca/b_nai_brith_to_intervene_in_canadian_federation_of_students_court_case/>.

Student unionism first came to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—originally their purposes involved organizing social activities, regulating clubs, and advocating on behalf of students with university administrators.⁸¹² They were generally unincorporated and part of the university, and often called literary societies.⁸¹³ Overtime student unions grew to take on a number of different roles. These roles include: student government (governing intra-student affairs), cooperatives (collectively organizing discounted goods and services such as textbooks, food services, health insurance, etc.), student union (representing students interests with the post-secondary institution) and student movement (lobbying and representing students interests with different levels of government).⁸¹⁴

The National Federation of Canadian University Students (NFCUS) formed in 1926 to represent students' interests. Student unionism in Canada gradually moved towards the left as institutions diversified and more students from middle class and poor backgrounds began attending university. The NFCUS later renamed themselves The Canadian Union of Students (CUS) in 1963, however, ongoing tensions between the campus left (wanting a more activist approach) and the right (wanting an apolitical approach) caused many student union locals to leave the federation, including many Quebec student union locals leaving to join a new Quebec-only student union federation (Union générale des étudiants du Québec). Both the CUS and Union générale des étudiants du Québec would dissolve in 1969.

A new national federation, National Union of Students (NUS), was established in 1972 with a pragmatic lobbying and service-oriented approach. Ongoing political tensions between locals and the national federation, and between the more radical left wanting the student union movement to address broader issues in society, versus the more moderate centre-right wanting a less political, more lobbyist and service-centred approach, eventually led to NUS and the Association of Student Councils (AOSC)

⁸¹² Titus Gregory. Solidarity For Their Own Good: Self-Determination and the Canadian Federation of Students. March 2010. Report.

⁸¹³ Examples of this in Canada include UofT's University College University College Literary and Athletic Society, and Osgoode Law School's Legal and Literacy Society—both still existing student unions.

⁸¹⁴ Finn Makela and Sophie Audette-Chapdelaine. "The Legal Regulation of University Student Associations in Canada." Education & Law Journal, 22.3 (2013), pp. 267-301. SSRN, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2375375>.

merging to establish the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) in 1981. CFS was established with a more solid dues-based structure with local student unions, with a strong focus on campaigns and lobbying (free tuition, living wages, etc.). Canadian Federation of Students has faced many controversies, the foremost of which is the lack of democratic nature of the organization—Many student union locals have subsequently left the Canadian Federation of Students, while others that have attempted to leave faced lawsuits or had their requests denied.⁸¹⁵ Others will argue that the more political nature of the Canadian Federation of Students and their provincial affiliates have been better able to defend student interests (such as winning the lawsuit against the Student Choice Initiative).

Student unions relationship with independent student organizations varies widely, with student unions frequently coming into conflict with other student organizations. Multiple research participants, including Dan and Taha, spoke of conflict between their organization and student unions. Multiple independent student organizations have been defunded by their student union, including Vancouver Island PIRG (VIPIRG) at the University of Victoria, WPIRG at the University of Waterloo, OPIRG Brock, BikeShack at Lakehead University, and the Fed Up Affordable Food Initiative at Brock University. Others have had their space taken away by space controlled by the student union. Interviewee Jing noted a difference between university administration administering levies versus student unions, with her noting, “those PIRGs are very much at the mercy of like the friendliness that they have with the student unions.”⁸¹⁶ All organizations that have been defunded (or faced attempts) were at schools with student union oversight—the only organizations defunded at universities are those that fail to comply with financial reporting and governance requirements (e.g. Carleton Food Collective).

The relationship can be further complicated as many student unions operate sustainability initiatives and have often internally replaced the service they played a role in closing. For example, a couple of PIRGs that closed had their functions replaced by a student union run social justice centre. I would argue against this for numerous reasons,

⁸¹⁵ Titus Gregory. *Solidarity For Their Own Good: Self-Determination and the Canadian Federation of Students*. March 2010. Report.

⁸¹⁶ Jing (pseudonym), interview respondent.

the foremost of which being that student unions broad focus makes it difficult to successfully focus, prioritize and operate such initiatives—this is evident from respondents Shark and Dan both had their student union operated sustainability initiatives closed (a community bike centre and a sustainability office respectively).

Another argument would be their ability to serve a diverse student population. In my research I came across the blog of Paul Nijjar, a former student who was involved with OPIRG Waterloo. He summarizes some of the problems of student unions taking on the same roles of a Canadian PIRG and the unnecessary conflict between the two.

On the community connection that PIRGs provide (and student unions don't):

“Unlike the Federation of Students, WPIRG activities are not limited to campus. Sometimes this matters a lot. Students tend to live in a campus bubble, and holding activities that get these students involved in the broader community increases the chances that they will settle down here after graduation.”⁸¹⁷

On the relevant activism PIRGs engage in (and student unions don't):

“Getting involved with on-campus activism relevant to students: in particular Federation of Student fee increases, and the way students were ripped off by Schembri Apartments. In the past they have also attempted to set up rental review websites. Note that something like the Schembri situation illustrates that WPIRG does not have to be valuable to all students at all times: the fact that the organization was there to advocate for the specific students affected by the unfinished apartments is insurance to others.”⁸¹⁸

On the student union's continual attacks on the PIRG:

“I am mad at the Federation of Students for ripping off WPIRG again and again. There has been bad blood between the organizations since I have been on campus, and the Federation of Students almost always gets its way. The fact that the Federation of Students gets to decide whether WPIRG goes

⁸¹⁷ Paul Nijjar. “End of the Road for WPIRG.” Paul's Internet Landfill. 23 March 2016. <<http://pnijjar.freeshell.org/2016/wp-irg-threat/>>.

⁸¹⁸ Nijjar, *op cit*.

under referendum is itself troubling, given the conflict of interest between the organizations.”⁸¹⁹

On the idea that the student union can operate the programs and initiatives of a fully independent PIRG:

“This argument that the Federation of Students will take over WPIRG's core functionalities is nonsense. Look at the University of Waterloo Sustainability Project (UWSP), which has its own office (in the SLC, natch) and is a Federation of Students project. Other than soliciting a bunch of student end-of-term reports that sit on a shelf, has it accomplished anything practical ever? WPIRG is not that effective either, but it is more effective than that.”⁸²⁰

This example shows the perpetual power imbalance and continual risk posed to independent student organizations from overzealous student union executives.

One respondent Darren, on the other hand, contemplated if student unions should play a more central role—looking to some European models that separate the functions of student unions into two separate entities—one focused on advocacy, and one focused on service provision. Former chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students (British Columbia) Zachary Crispin argues that the ultimate purpose and goals of the student union movement are to attain free education for all and to ally themselves with the broader labour movement to dismantle capitalist structures.⁸²¹

A broader challenge faces both student unions and independent student-involved environmental organizations (and other independent student organizations)—the debate over mandatory student fees. Universities began charging additional mandatory fees for specific services or programs as far back as the late 1800s.⁸²² Historically those on the right-wing bought into the consensus on mandatory student union membership and fees.⁸²³ Before the 1960s, student unions were seen as more impartial, and whilst

⁸¹⁹ Nijjar, *op cit*.

⁸²⁰ Nijjar, *op cit*.

⁸²¹ Zachary E. Crispin. The Fundamentals of Students' Unionism. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017.

⁸²² Lorence, Jordan. FIRE's Guide to Student Fees, Funding, and Legal Equality on Campus. Philadelphia, PA: Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, 2003. Pp 3-4.

⁸²³ Sean Healy. “A History of Liberal Attacks on Student Unions.” Green Left, 17 March 1999. Web <www.greenleft.org.au/content/history-liberal-attacks-student-unions>.

political, generally did not align politically; in many ways student unions were seen like co-operative organizations as organized efforts meant to serve their membership, and which is still generally supported by all sides politically, including the right-wing. As student unions increasingly became seen as left-wing for their opposition to the Vietnam War, conservative students began to begrudge the student unions that represented them. The U.S. Foundation for Individual Rights in Education says mandatory fees first become controversial in this same period as left-wing student union activists began using student fees to fund “political and ideological causes.” While legal and legislative challenges to mandatory student fees came to the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, and to Canada in the 2010s and 2020s, voluntary student unionism is an idea that originated in Australia with the Australian Liberal Student Federation, the student arm of the Liberal Party of Australia, which was founded in 1976.⁸²⁴ They adopted a resolution against compulsory student unionism in 1977.⁸²⁵ Their efforts were successful when the Government of Western Australia adopted legislation that restricted what compulsory fees could be spent on.⁸²⁶ Along with challenges to the consensus on mandatory labour union membership (i.e. closed shop and union shop), the idea to challenge mandatory student union membership is rooted in the political realignment of the United States and whose cultural hegemony, especially in the English-speaking world, influence the politics of countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In the United States, the 1947 Taft–Hartley Act, pushed through by a Republican controlled congress at the time, allowed states the right whether to allow mandatory (closed shop or union shop) labour union membership, and almost immediately many southern states implemented laws banning mandatory labour union membership.

Before I continue, it is important to note the distinctions between student unions in various countries and regions. Student unions in English Canada and the United Kingdom are the most similar. They are independent registered non-profits (Canada) or charities (UK), that act both as political representation for students and providing student services (e.g. student clubs, student centres, health/dental plans, food service operations,

⁸²⁴ Healy, *op cit.*

⁸²⁵ Healy, *op cit.*

⁸²⁶ Healy, *op cit.*

etc.). Each student union local has a negotiated agreement in place with the university collecting and remitting fees to the respective student union(s). Quebec is similar, however certain services are operated by the student union (e.g. health/dental plan, women's centre, LGBTQ+ centre, legal aid), while independent student cooperative organizations at each university or campus operates other services (e.g. bookstores, food services, printing, housing, etc.). Quebec student unions are also considerably more political in terms of lobbying, mobilizing and organizing than in the rest of Canada.

Student unions in The United States are also similar to those in English Canada and The United Kingdom, but they tend to offer considerably less student services as they are either offered by the university itself or not offered at all; further, many are not legally registered and only exist as an entity within the post-secondary institution. Germany has two separate entities: Verfasste Studierendenschaft (trans. "legal student body"), which is the political representation for students and advocates on behalf of student interests, and the Studierendenwerk (trans. "student administration") which has a legally distinct status equivalent to an arms-length government agency with student representation that oversees student services like housing, food, childcare, etc. In Australia and New Zealand, they are similarly separated into a student representative political entity, and a student guild that oversees clubs, services and athletics.⁸²⁷

The implementation of Voluntary Student Unionism in Australia and New Zealand has led post-secondary institutions to raise tuition fees and to enter into operating contracts with their student organizations to offer services to students, thereby by-passing the entire VSU policy.⁸²⁸ In Sweden, membership in the Studentkår (which acted as a hybrid between a student union and student social service organization) was made voluntary by a right-wing government in 2010, which devastated their student union movement and resulted in cuts and closures in services. Voluntary student unionism in New Zealand initially took a different form than that seen in Australia and Canada, in that students could vote on whether or not to make student union membership mandatory

⁸²⁷ Alex Usher. "Antipodean Student Organization Struggles." Higher Ed Strategy Associates. 23 January 2019. <www.higheredstrategy.com/antipodean-student-organization-struggles/>.

⁸²⁸ Usher, *op cit*. January 2019.

or voluntary at their university—only a couple initially did—with New Zealand later adopting the Australia model in 2011.⁸²⁹

In Ontario, while the Student Choice Initiative did not outright make all fees voluntary as with voluntary student unionism, we have yet to see how Ontario Bill 33 will impact student organizations and fees. Call for voluntary student unionism is not unheard of in the rest of Canada. The right-wing Wildrose Party proposed voluntary student unionism in Alberta⁸³⁰—later merging into the United Conservative Party which now governs Alberta, which also adopted it party policy.⁸³¹ The loss of political consensus on student unionism and mandatory student fees between the right and left is not something that I see changing anytime soon. Too many young people feel a lack of agency and student unions are one of the few entities with any kind of power or resources that can challenge the status quo system. I would argue in favour of adoption of a European or Quebec-style model that separates advocacy and student services of student unions, to both protect student services from attacks against student levies, while still allowing optional fee levies to support student advocacy. I think the best middle ground is to make it easier to initiate a defund referendum when compared to launching a new levy referendum (e.g. concern-based system to the university, rather than a petition-based system used to initiate a referendum), in order to avoid running punitive referenda from right-wing student union executives (most often targeted at PIRGs), or avoid automatic referenda every 3-5 years, which hurts programming and operations for already resourced-limited and volunteer-stretched student-run initiatives.

Cycles of Environmental Concern

Shifting levels of public concern about the environment and climate change, especially in response to changing economic conditions, have direct consequences for civic engagement in environmental activism and enrollment in post-secondary environmental programs. Research has shown that economic downturns—marked by

⁸²⁹ Usher, *op cit.* January 2019.

⁸³⁰ Kate Jacobson. “Wildrose policy stirs up debate over students’ union membership.” *The Gauntlet*, 17 November 2015. <<https://thegauntlet.ca/2015/11/17/wildrose-policy-stirs-up-debate-over-students-union-membership/>>.

⁸³¹ Usher, *op cit.* January 2019.

rising unemployment and recession—consistently correlate with decreased public concern for environmental issues and diminished support for environmental policy.^{832,833} These effects are not limited to changes in priority but reflect deeper cognitive shifts, where individuals use motivated reasoning to downplay environmental risks in favor of economic concerns, aligning beliefs with perceived economic self-interest.⁸³⁴ This cyclical ebb in concern results in reduced engagement in environmental activities and a weaker social mandate for environmental movements—especially during economic recession periods. There also seems to be a decline in enrollment in environmental studies programs during economic downturns.⁸³⁵ I have also noticed this each time I have scanned for campus environmental organizations, with less groups existing when economic conditions are worse.

As concern about the environment declines with worsening macroeconomic conditions, students may opt for fields perceived as offering greater financial security. When environmental concern and belief in climate change are vulnerable to short-term economic shifts, society struggles to maintain a consistent pipeline of public support and professional expertise required to address long-term environmental crises. As Benegal and Scruggs suggest, framing environmental policies with economic benefits, especially during economic downturns, may be necessary to maintain public support.⁸³⁶ In my own experience I have noticed waves of interest in volunteering coinciding with these cycles.

4.15 Impact

Identify environmental and social justice impacts

Four survey questions aimed to answer this question: [1] **What does the organization do to lead social and environmental change?** [2] **Who drives university**

⁸³² Lyle Scruggs & Salil Benegal. “Declining Public Concern about Climate Change: Can We Blame the Great Recession?” *Global Environmental Change*, 22(2), May 2012, pp. 505–515.

⁸³³ Euel Elliott, James L. Regens & Barry J. Seldon. “Exploring Variation in Public Support for Environmental Protection.” *Social Science Quarterly*, 76(1), 1995, pp. 41–52.

⁸³⁴ Salil Benegal & Lyle Scruggs. “Economic Conditions and Public Opinion on Climate Change.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, 22 November 2016.

⁸³⁵ Sarah Wolfe & Steve Grundy. “Fewer Students Are Enrolling in Environmental Studies – How Do We Stop This Trend?” *The Globe and Mail*, 17 July 2023. <www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-environmental-studies-are-on-the-decline-how-do-we-stop-this-trend/>.

⁸³⁶ Salil Benegal & Lyle Scruggs. “Economic Conditions and Public Opinion on Climate Change.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*, 22 November 2016.

sustainability? [3] How does the organization impact university sustainability? [4] How does the organization impact university social justice? These questions were asked to the leadership and staff.

Students and student organizations are consistently described as the primary drivers of both environmental and social justice change on campus. They initiate new ideas—recycling, bike centres, free stores, and food programs—well before these approaches are taken up by administrations or more broadly in society. Their leadership role extends beyond services: they shape political culture, provide training and advocacy, and build capacity for future movements. This centrality is reinforced by respondents' accounts of how students, not administrations, have historically pushed sustainability forward.

At the same time, these organizations' impact is unevenly supported. While some initiatives gain traction and visibility, many confront structural barriers, including university-corporate agreements and administrative inertia. Respondents often highlighted a tension between grassroots energy and institutional approaches: student groups create bottom-up momentum, but their work can be stalled or diluted by top-down decisions. The result is a dynamic in which sustainability on campus is sustained largely through continuous student pressure, occasionally complemented but rarely led by administrative offices.

The social justice impacts of these organizations, though less prominent than their environmental contributions, remain significant. Food access, affordability, and alternative spaces are the clearest areas where equity goals intersect with environmental sustainability. Groups framed their work as advancing both ecological and social well-being, though some acknowledged limitations when compared to dedicated social justice organizations. Overall, the evidence suggests these student organizations serve as catalysts for change: they expand the political imagination on campus, keep sustainability linked to equity, and continually reassert student agency in shaping university priorities.

Identify other impacts of student-involved environmental organizations

Five survey questions aimed to answer this question. One was asked to the members and volunteers: [1] **How has the organization contributed to your university**

experience? Two were asked to the leadership and staff: [2] **What is the impact of your organization? What benefits does the organization create?** [3] **How successful would you say the organization is at achieving its mission?** Two questions were asked to both groups: [4] **Do you feel what you are doing has an impact?** [5] **How does the organization contribute to improving campus life?**

Student environmental and social justice organizations have wide-ranging impacts that extend well beyond their immediate services. For members and volunteers, involvement contributes significantly to their university experience—building confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging, while also providing skills and knowledge not typically found in formal coursework. Respondents emphasized that these organizations offer meaningful, enjoyable activities that make campus life more engaging and, in some cases, more bearable. Gardens, bike centres, and food programs in particular were described as transformative spaces where students found both community and purpose.

At the organizational level, leaders identified an array of tangible benefits: food security, affordable access to goods and services, and opportunities for volunteering and experiential education. Many pointed to environmental sustainability efforts and the creation of community spaces as central achievements. Others highlighted advocacy, policy influence, and the ability to pressure universities to take sustainability and social justice more seriously. Respondents noted that the value of these initiatives lies not only in material supports like cheap food or free clothing, but also in the collective culture they foster—encouraging critical thinking, activism, and alternative ways of living and learning.

Across both groups, there was broad agreement that the organizations are largely successful at achieving their missions. Leaders and volunteers expressed confidence that their work had meaningful impact, with strong majorities describing it as significant or somewhat significant. While some acknowledged limitations in scope or visibility, very few felt the organizations were unsuccessful. This sense of efficacy reflects the clear link between the work of student organizations and pressing student needs, as well as their ability to consistently provide alternatives where universities fall short.

Finally, when asked directly about contributions to campus life, respondents emphasized affordability and accessibility as the most critical benefits—services like food co-ops, free stores, and bike centres reduce financial pressures and increase students’ independence. Beyond these essentials, organizations contribute through education, sustainability initiatives, health and well-being, and the cultivation of vibrant community spaces. Taken together, these impacts illustrate that student organizations do more than supplement university services: they reshape campus culture, making it more equitable, sustainable, and connected.

5.0 Conclusion

Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it understands that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.”⁸³⁷ Young people today not only sense that something is broken in the system, but—through the free flow of information on social media and their lived experience—they are also acutely aware of its hypocrisies and injustices. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, student environmental organizations represent one way that young people contest these realities and experiment with alternatives. They can either succumb to cynicism or, as earlier generations did through unions, service clubs, progressive politics, churches, and social movements, they can organize to build new forms of collective life and systems that benefit the many instead of the few. American socialist Clara Fraser reminds us: “I don't expect any reform to last longer than the willingness of people to fight to retain it and longer than a progressive period in history will last. Periods change and once you go into a regressive period as you always do after a progressive period under capitalism all your reforms are swept under the rug they're decimated.”⁸³⁸ At a time of austerity and deep inequality, we are witnessing government budget cuts and many progressive policies erode. The student-involved projects studied here embody both resilience and vulnerability.

The fractured nature of political dialogue today reflects what Mark Fisher describes as a failure of imagination under late-stage capitalism. We are constrained not only by institutional structures but also by our inability to picture viable alternatives to neoliberal capitalism. Yet, as my introduction emphasized, student initiatives offer glimpses of a “future in the present”—what C.L.R. James described as the seeds of a new society already visible within the old.

This research demonstrates that students want to be good citizens and active participants in shaping their communities, but they face barriers of space, resources, and recognition. Universities often view these groups as peripheral clubs rather than essential actors in sustainability and social justice. Yet, as my findings showed, such organizations

⁸³⁷ Martin Luther King Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967.

⁸³⁸ Clara Fraser. *Clara Fraser on being a revolutionary*. Interview by Annie Grosshaus and Heather D. Oakson, 1989. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UezjXVqFFAQ>.

deliver affordable services, education, and community support that universities themselves struggle to provide. They offer an alternative mode of education: learning through action, cooperation, and service. Extending these opportunities beyond the university setting—into communities and across demographics—could help address broader crises of agency and belonging in society. Imagine free stores in every community, operated by youth and senior volunteers, helping with both waste diversion and those in need in the community. Imagine more people cycling in cities with the help of community bike centres and supported through a network of bike paths and separated bike lanes. Imagine if we had non-profit grocery stores, helping to reduce grocery costs, promote healthier non-processed or minimally processed foods, and saving money for both individuals and for taxpayers through improved health and healthcare savings. Imagine if public libraries loaned out special-use items like tools or event equipment, which help reduce waste, clutter at home, and saves us money. Imagine if we had community farms and greenhouses in every neighbourhood, helping to reduce food insecurity, social isolation amongst youth and seniors, and translating to improvement in food skilling and health. I think these are visions that almost all would support.

Where disagreement does occur—whether within student organizations or between these organizations and external bodies such as universities or the broader political sphere—it often reflects the tension between the *ethic of moral conviction* and the *ethic of responsibility*.⁸³⁹ As I have argued, there is room for both more tempered and more radical approaches to student activism, and this diversity aligns with the broader mission of post-secondary education: to enable critical engagement and active citizenship. The debate, therefore, is not whether such activism should exist, but rather how it should be enabled, funded, and supported—a determination that, in my view, should rest with local students, reflecting their own values and priorities.

Universities themselves face competing priorities and challenges that present obstacles to their educational mission. These include fiscal austerity resulting from reduced government funding and declining enrollment, government scrutiny over campus

⁸³⁹ Weber, Max. *Politik als Beruf. Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, Munich, Duncker & Humblot, 1919, pp. 396–450. Originally delivered as a lecture at the University of Munich, 1918.—. *Politics as a Vocation*. Translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, reprinted from *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Oxford University Press, 1946.

free speech and protests, and the politicalization of post-secondary education as a left/right issue. Our modern politics remind us that we live in a world driven by realpolitik and power politics, in such that educational institutions are increasingly being pressured to capitulate to the demands of the political right or face defunding. This has been part of a broader struggle and transition over time over the purpose of higher education under late-stage capitalism, from a purpose of educating students for lives of public service towards one seeking to meet the educational needs of workforce demand.⁸⁴⁰ Individual actors (professors, university staff, unions) will be crucial to supporting, advancing and defending the work of student-involved environmental organizations in the face of advancing neo-liberalism in post-secondary education.

At its heart, the work of these student organizations points us toward a necessary cultural shift: away from capitalist-driven individualism and toward a collective vision of *bildung*⁸⁴¹—good citizenship grounded in cooperation, agency, and shared responsibility. The cyclical nature of economics and politics requires education and vigilance to avoid the extreme and impulsive. One could argue that is a return to the prior purpose of higher education of creating good citizenry, which is partially true; however, in the past education was exclusive to the elite of society, whereas now it is widely available to the masses. Therefore, I would argue that we need a new vision of higher education’s highest purpose being education promoting good citizenship. This aligns with the critiques raised in my introduction about the unsustainability of endless growth and the dominance of neoliberal thought. This is also something where I think we can have agreement with all but the most free-market, libertarian minded conservatives—on the necessity of agency and its relationship to good citizenship and shared responsibility.⁸⁴²

⁸⁴⁰ Roy Y. Chan. “Understanding the Purpose, Aim, Function of Higher Education.” *Journal of Education Policy, Planning and Administration*, 6.5 (2016), pp. 1–40.

<https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/roychan/files/chan_r._y._2016._understanding_the_purpose_aim_function_of_higher_education._jeppa_65_1-40.pdf>

⁸⁴¹ Henrik Bohlin. “Bildung and Moral Self-Cultivation in Higher Education: What Does it Mean and How Can it be Achieved?” *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*, (2009): 1-10.

⁸⁴² Marx’s Theory of Alienation is very à propos here. Marx’s supposes that we are (1) alienated from what we produce – other people own our time and the ‘brand’; (2) alienated from nature and our interdependent relationship with nature; nature merely seen as a resource which to extract resources; (3) alienated from others as our relationships become market relationships – of consumers and competition, and (4) alienated from self because merely a replaceable cog in the capitalist machine where we have little agency or input. The struggle is then to ‘liberate’ individuals from exploitative relationships that result from capitalism and its resulting institutions.

Student organizations show, in microcosm, the possibility of building social economies that value sustainability, equity, and democratic participation. Their impact may be modest compared to global crises, but they provide laboratories for social imagination and cultivate the future citizen-activists capable of challenging entrenched power.

In this sense, the micropolitics of campus organizing mirror the broader political struggles of our time. How power is accumulated, distributed, and contested will determine whether society remains trapped within the confines of capitalist realism or can move toward more just and sustainable futures. Cooperation—not competition—has been the deeper engine of human progress,⁸⁴³ and student organizations remind us of this truth. If we take them seriously as sites of both learning and social innovation, they can help us reimagine what is possible and provide the skills and experiences necessary to bring those futures into being.

⁸⁴³ Peter Kropotkin. Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution. 1902. Project Gutenberg, 2003. Web. <<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/4341>>.

6.0 Limitations of this Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, while the survey captured a wide range of organizations, the sample size was modest relative to the number of student-involved environmental initiatives across Canada. As such, the findings should be read as suggestive rather than comprehensive. A related limitation is that the survey design relied heavily on open-ended questions. While this yielded rich qualitative insights, the lack of standardized scales limited the ability to compare responses systematically across groups.

Second, the perspectives gathered were uneven across regions and initiative types, with stronger representation from some regions and models than others. While efforts were made to translate and distribute the survey in French to student-involved environmental organizations at Francophone post-secondary institutions, given my limited French language skills, I may have missed identifying some organizations. Certain types of organizations, especially those without a student levy and staffing, may therefore be underrepresented. Similarly, responses were shaped primarily by current staff and leadership. These risks overlooking the perspectives of student volunteer-members, whose experiences might shed further light on organizational development and challenges.

Finally, while the inclusion of interviews and notes helped triangulate findings, the study was limited to a national context and did not systematically compare Canadian student-involved environmental organizations to international models where the environment differs—more difficult conditions (United States, Australia), or more supportive ones (United Kingdom). Given the significant influence of institutional context, funding models, political discourses, and cultural differences, this restricts the generalizability of the findings.

7.0 Recommendations for Future Research

There is considerable scope for expanding scholarship on student-involved environmental organizations, and more broadly on related organizations, including student unions, PIRGs, and independent student initiatives of all types. Future work could take several directions.

Survey Design: Larger-scale surveys with more representative sampling would help establish clearer patterns. Future surveys could incorporate mixed methods, combining structured multiple-choice or scale-based questions (to allow for quantitative comparison) with open-ended responses (to capture nuance). Separate survey instruments could also be designed for different initiative types (e.g., food security projects, PIRGs, ecological gardens, bike centres), ensuring findings reflect the diversity of organizational models.

Qualitative Depth: Follow-up interviews and focus groups with survey participants would allow researchers to probe more deeply into emerging themes and clarify ambiguities in the survey data. Special attention should be given to interviewing founders and long-term staff, whose insights on organizational resilience, institutional relationships, and long-term vision can help illuminate success factors not visible to current leadership alone.

Comparative Models: Unique programs like the Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Gardens (MSEG), Sprouts, and École offer valuable case studies in alternative structures and practices. Examining these models more closely could reveal what conditions—financial, institutional, or cultural—enable their success, and whether such approaches could be replicated elsewhere. Comparative research across regions or internationally (e.g., Quebec student cooperative movements, European campus initiatives) could also help situate Canadian organizations within a broader field of student-involved sustainability.

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Appendix A – Omitted organization descriptions

Descriptions of several organizations have been omitted in order to maintain conciseness. These organizations are referenced only peripherally (if at all) in the dissertation and do not contribute substantively to the core analysis.

Levied Environmental Organizations

Guelph Students for Environmental Change (GSEC)

This student club has existed since the early 2000s. The group receives a .15/cent per term student levy (or approximately \$10,000 annually). Their activities have varied over the years. Examples of activities include: on-campus bottled water ban campaign, participating in campus sustainability fairs, litter clean-ups, an eco-themed campus radio show and climate change awareness activities. GSEC has helped campaign for green fund student levies to help green building projects, energy retrofits and renewal energy projects on campus.^{844,845}

Environmental Centres – Non-direct levy (financial support via Student Union)

SustainSU: The Student Sustainability Service (University of Alberta)

Established in 2003. The website is unclear about their staffing and governance, other than it is operated by the student union. SustainSU relies on volunteers to run their initiatives, requiring a commitment of 5 hours per week for those in leadership roles. Projects include a community bike shop and bike lending, a farmers' market, a community garden, and a dish rental service.

UBC Student Environment Centre

The UBC Student Environment Centre, operated by the UBC Alma Mater Society (student union) is an arms-length organization with its own constitution and membership. They are funded by the student union, but do not have a specific levy. They do not have

⁸⁴⁴ Robert Corry. "From Grey to Green: Environmental Sustainability at the University of Guelph." *Academic Matters*. April-May 2008. <<https://academicmatters.ca/from-grey-to-green-environmental-sustainability-at-the-university-of-guelph/>>.

⁸⁴⁵ Renewable Energy World. "University of Guelph's First Wind-Powered Building." *Renewable Energy World*. 13 October 2005. <<https://www.renewableenergyworld.com/2005/10/13/university-of-guelphs-first-wind-powered-building-37864/>>.

any staff. Their activities include operating a free store and providing funding for environmental events and initiatives to other campus groups.

Environmental Student Clubs

Common Energy (University of British Columbia)^{846,847}

Common Energy is an environmental student club at UBC—they claim to be the largest such club. The group established a ‘mugshare’ at UBC food outlets and throughout the City of Vancouver. They have their members grouped into teams, such as a green building research group, a zero-waste team that conducts an annual waste audit on behalf of the university, and a food group that promotes sustainable food choices through activities such as a vegan restaurant crawl, film screenings and cooking workshops. The group hosts numerous events—these include a sustainable food tour, clothing swaps, eco-themed workshops, and a sustainable careers night (co-hosted with Embark Sustainability from Simon Fraser University).

Students for a Green University (University of Northern British Columbia)⁸⁴⁸

Students for a Green University (SGU) was established in 2008 as a student group. They have about 25 active members who attend weekly planning meetings and organize club events and actions. The group is organized into working groups that focus on a specific activity or event, such as bike-blended smoothie sales, campus green tours, or campaigns (such as banning bottled water on campus). The group raised \$20,000 to build a geodesic dome greenhouse at UNBC to grow produce year-round.

Gardens – Non-direct levy (financial support via large environmental group, PIRG, Regensis, College Council or Student Union)

Dig In! Campus Agriculture (Regensis – University of Toronto St. George)

Dig In! Campus Agriculture is a unique campus food initiative at the University of Toronto St. George Campus. Dig In! Campus Agriculture was started in 2009 by the

⁸⁴⁶ Common Energy. “Common Energy.” *Common Energy*. N.d. <<https://commonenergyubc.com/>>.

⁸⁴⁷ Mugshare. “Mugshare.” N.d. <<https://www.mugshare.ca/>>.

⁸⁴⁸ Students for a Green University. *Students for a Green University* [Facebook page], Facebook, n.d., <www.facebook.com/StudentsforaGreenUniversity/>.

sustainability coordinator of Hart House, an independent student activity centre at the University of Toronto. After losing funding and support from Hart House, the initiative was adopted by Regenesi in 2018, supporting Dig In! through communications, recruitment and materials support, and securing grant funding. Dig In! is unique in that it both runs its own urban agriculture projects and supports independent urban agriculture projects on campus. Dig In! operates as a community garden, with volunteer-gardeners sharing in the harvest, with extra produce distributed to food banks and community kitchens. Dig In! has an old balcony greenhouse in the Anthropology Building which allows them to sprout seeds in advance of the growing season.

RPIRG Green Patch

RPIRG Green Patch, founded in 2012, is a 5400 sq ft vegetable garden behind the Dr. John Archer Library at the University of Regina. The garden serves as a site for education and grows produce that is distributed for free to students, community members, and community groups such as Carmichael Outreach, a local charity that provides support services to the homeless. Over 2000 pounds of produce is donated annually.

Non-levied gardens

Big Gay Garden^{849,850}

The Big Gay Garden was a 525 sq ft guerilla garden created during the 2018 York University Strike by contract faculty and graduate students. The strike, which was the longest in Canadian history at an academic institution, lasted 143 days from March 5th until July 25th when the provincial government passed back-to-work legislation. The idea of a guerilla garden arose in early May due to CUPE3903 members feeling exhausted. In the middle of the night union members and undergraduate student allies rototilled and removed grass to establish the garden—with flowers and vegetables being planted the next day. One CUPE3903 ascribed the term ‘joyful militancy’, which is a term coined by activists Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery to contrast rigid, self-righteous radicalism

⁸⁴⁹ Hans Rollman. 23 December 2019. “The implicit militancy of gardening.” Briarpatch Magazine. <<https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/the-implicit-militancy-of-gardening>>.

⁸⁵⁰ David Ravensbergen. “CUPE 3903 in the BoG: Two Logics of Collective Action.” 6th International Degrowth Conference, Malmo, Sweden, 21-25 August 2018. Conference Presentation.

often found of the left, with one of joyfulness, community and celebration.⁸⁵¹ Graduate student Suzanne Mulvale says, “Whose university is this? [...] It’s not the board of governors’ university; it’s not the president’s university; it’s our university. What do we want to do with it? Well, one idea is to build a garden. For us.”⁸⁵²

Green and Gold Community Garden⁸⁵³

In 2008, Dr. Sarah Bowen, a newly arrived Public Health School professor, and her husband requested space from the University of Alberta to establish an organic community garden. They had previously raised funds for Tubahumurize, a Rwandan non-profit organization that supports women’s empowerment, through a community garden that would sell the produce grown. They have raised over \$500,000 since opening through two weekly-produce stands.

Green Future Brandon University Community Garden^{854,855,856}

Green Futures Community Garden was started in 2014 by a student involved with Healthy Brandon and Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation’s Community Garden Network, a network of 12 community gardens and 1 urban farm in the City of Brandon. Enactus’s Brandon chapter assisted in raising funds and recruiting volunteers for the garden. Green Futures Community Garden currently has two sites on campus. Produce is donated to Samaritan House Ministries, BUSU food bank and Brandon’s Good Food Box program.

⁸⁵¹ Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery. Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times. Chico, CA: AK Press, 2017.

⁸⁵² Rollman, *op cit*.

⁸⁵³ Green and Gold Community Garden. Green and Gold Community Garden. N.d. <<https://www.greengoldgarden.com/about/>>.

⁸⁵⁴ Brandon University Students’ Union. “Green Futures BU Community Garden.” Brandon University Students’ Union. N.d. <<http://www.busu.ca/garden>>.

⁸⁵⁵ Brandon University. “Garden project at Brandon University will provide healthy food for students, community.” Brandon University. 18 May 2016. <<https://www.brandonu.ca/news/2016/05/18/garden-project-at-brandon-university-will-provide-healthy-food-for-students-community/>>.

⁸⁵⁶ Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation. “COMMUNITY GARDENS: IT’S NOT ALL ABOUT THE CARROTS!” PROFILES OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD RENEWAL CORPORATIONS. Brandon Neighbourhood Renewal Corporation. N.d. <https://ccednet-rdec.ca/sites/ccednet-rdec.ca/files/final_growingcommunities_bnrc_communitygardennetwork.pdf>.

Maloca Garden^{857,858,859}

Maloca Community Garden at York University was founded in 1999 by two students from an environmental studies program. The name maloca comes from an Amazonian people's name for multi-family long-houses. Maloca uses the allotment garden structure, renting plots to students and members of the community. Maloca moved locations in the mid-2000's after the construction of a new graduate student residence to its current location besides Black Creek. The new location is less accessible and is surrounded by forests and a sports field. There have been issues regarding sexual harassment by male community (non-student) garden members towards female bipo students due to Maloca's isolation.

The garden almost closed down due to lack of student involvement in 2013. This led to a transition from student-run garden, to university-department run garden—Faculty of Environment and Urban Change. In 2015, Maloca Garden students and a contract faculty member attempted to expand the garden from 2000 sq ft to 1 acre by clearing a large adjacent area covered in weeds, however, this 'guerilla gardening' tactic was not well received by York University and the Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority, and the garden was forced revert to its original size and let the newly farmed area re-naturalize the next year. Post-pandemic the garden has been revitalized by the department thanks to hiring a garden manager and grant funding to expand facilities and programming, such as permaculture, composting, and indigenous agricultural practices.

Orchard Garden^{860,861}

UBC Orchard Garden is a “student-initiated and student-led, inter-faculty garden project providing collaborative, hands-on, immersive, and experimental learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, staff, and pre- and in-service teachers.”⁸⁶² Established in 2005, this unique garden education project has

⁸⁵⁷ Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change. “Maloca Community Garden.” Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change. N.d. <<https://euc.yorku.ca/community/maloca-community-garden/>>.

⁸⁵⁸ Maloca Community Garden. Maloca Community Garden. N.d. <<https://malocagarden.wordpress.com/>>.

⁸⁵⁹ Personal experience and knowledge.

⁸⁶⁰ The Orchard Garden. The Orchard Garden. N.d. <<http://theorchardgarden.blogspot.com/>>.

⁸⁶¹ UBC Wiki Contributors. “The Orchard Garden.” University of British Columbia. 11 May 2015. <https://wiki.ubc.ca/The_Orchard_Garden>.

⁸⁶² The Orchard Garden, *op cit*.

partnerships with the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Land & Food Systems, Faculty of Forestry, School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, Intergenerational Landed Learning Project, UBC Farm, Agora Café, Roots on the Roof, and Think & Eat Green. Food grown is used for educational purposes (such as workshops), sold at harvest time, and provided to the Agora Café. University courses are also held in partnership with the Orchard Garden.

University of Calgary Community Garden^{863,864,865,866}

University of Calgary Community Garden was started in 2001 by three students who took second place in a contest on how to improve campus life held by the University of Calgary President's Office. The university granted the students space to establish a community garden. The garden has since moved from its original location, near Varsity Courts (student family housing), to a new location south of the sports fields near Cascade Hall residence. Since the move, the University's Sustainability Office has taken over operational aspects of the garden, while the student club still oversees events and partnerships. Plots are available for rent to all, including members of the wider community, and surplus produce is provided to the Calgary Food Bank, Campus Food Bank and the Students' Union Wellness Centre Campus Community Kitchen project.

VIU Peace Garden Educational Ecosystem student club⁸⁶⁷

VIU Peace (Community) Garden was created in 2008 by students from the horticultural program at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo. The club manages a

⁸⁶³ Alexandra Venter. "Community Gardeners Cultivate Community Spirit." University of Calgary On Campus Weekly. 23 July 2004. <<https://archive.org/web/20080611200924/http://www.ucalgary.ca:80/oncampus/weekly/july23-04/campus-garden.html>>.

⁸⁶⁴ University of Calgary. "Campus community garden relocates to a fruitful new location." UCalgary News. 23 October 2015. <<https://www.ucalgary.ca/news/campus-community-garden-relocates-fruitful-new-location>>.

⁸⁶⁵ UCalgary Community Garden. UCalgary Community Garden. N.d. <<https://uofcgardenclub.wordpress.com/>>.

⁸⁶⁶ University of Calgary. "Campus Community Garden." University of Calgary Sustainability Office. N.d. <<https://www.ucalgary.ca/sustainability/get-involved/programs/campus-community-garden>>.

⁸⁶⁷ Vancouver Island University. "Vancouver Island University Recognized as a Bee Campus." Vancouver Island University. 16 October 2019. <<https://news.viu.ca/vancouver-island-university-recognized-bee-campus>>.

community garden and an edible forest. The garden is entirely volunteer run and is supported by a small budget from the student union and the occasional small grant. Activities of the club include gardening days, harvest potlucks and workshops on topics such as pollinator-friendly plants and habitats. The club played an important role in getting Vancouver Island University designated a Bee Campus by Bee Cities Canada.

Note on UBC Urban Farm:

While not a student initiative, The UBC Urban Farm, operated by the University of British Columbia, is supported by a .10 cent per student levy fee secured in a 2018 referendum as part of a Sustainable Food Systems referendum organized by a coalition of student food organizations at UBC, including Sprouts, Agora Café, and Roots on the Roof. The farm is operated by the Centre for Sustainable Food Systems in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems. The farm supports various teaching, learning and research opportunities, in addition to food related initiatives and programming such as community-supported agriculture.

Cafés – Non-direct levy (financial support via large environmental group, PIRG, College Council or Student Union)

Caffiends⁸⁶⁸

Caffiends is a student-run café promoting organic and fair-trade options. The café is located at Victoria College's Alumni Hall, and supported by the Victoria University Students' Administrative Council student levy.

Diabolos Coffee Bar⁸⁶⁹

The café is named after Diabolos, an alleged murder victim whose ghost haunts University College (at the University of Toronto). The café is supported by the college council's (University College Literary and Athletic Society) levy.

⁸⁶⁸ Caffiends. Caffiends. N.d. <<https://www.caffiendsvic.com/>>.

⁸⁶⁹ Peter Goffin. "Demystifying the legendary ghost story at U of T's University College." Toronto Star. 6 January 2017. <<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/01/06/demystifying-the-legendary-ghost-story-at-u-of-ts-university-college.html>>.

Cafes – no levy

Out of The Garden Project^{870,871}

Out of the Garden Project is a student-run café operating out of the Ceilidh Pub (Centennial Centre) on Macdonald Campus of McGill University. They currently operate twice weekly between 10AM and 2PM and offer affordably priced meals and snacks made from primarily locally-sourced food.

Cycling Initiatives and Centres – Non-direct levy (financial support via Student Union or College Council)

UMCycle Bike Kiosk (University of Manitoba) (est. 2017)^{872,873,874}

An environmental group, University of Manitoba Recycling & Environmental Group, previously operated a bike centre called Bike Dungeon operated on a PWYC model—it appears the organization, UMREG, and the Bike Dungeon both closed in 2015/2016 for unknown reasons. In 2017, the University of Manitoba Students' Union opened the UM Bike Kiosk, a full-service bike shop operated out of a shipping container at the Fort Garry Campus. Guided DIY bike repairs take place outside under a pergola.

UWSA Bike Lab (University of Winnipeg) (est. 2011)^{875,876}

University of Winnipeg Students' Association Bike Lab is similar to other campus bike shops, offering access to repair services, tools, new and used parts and accessories. The Bike Lab is available to students, faculty, staff and the community at large. Bike Lab was established by members of the UWSA Ice Rider cycling club, in collaboration with the university and student union. They receive a student levy of via the student union, and also apply to grants such as Canada Summer Jobs. The University of Winnipeg provides

⁸⁷⁰ McGill Sustainability. "SP0047: Out of the Garden." McGill University. N.d. <<https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/sp0047-out-garden>>.

⁸⁷¹ The Out of the Garden Project. "The Out of the Garden Project." Facebook. N.d. <<https://www.facebook.com/theoutofthegardenproject>>.

⁸⁷² DeGagné. *op cit.*.

⁸⁷³ UM Today. "UMCycle's Bike Kiosk grand opening." *UM Today*, 1 September 2017. <<https://news.umanitoba.ca/umcycles-bike-kiosk-grand-opening-set-for-sept-14/>>.

⁸⁷⁴ UMSU. "UMCycle Bike Kiosk." *UMSU*. N.d. <<https://umsu.ca/businesses/umcycle/>>.

⁸⁷⁵ DeGagné. *op cit.*

⁸⁷⁶ UWSA. "UWSA Bike Lab." *UWSA*. N.d. <<https://theuwsa.ca/uwsa-bike-lab/>>.

free space for the shipping containers and covers the utility/maintenance cost of the space. The Bike Lab is staffed by a coordinator, head mechanic, and a programming and advocacy coordinator who oversees advocacy, programming, and the recruitment/training of volunteers.

Cycling Initiatives and Centres – non-levy

Bike Root (University of Calgary)⁸⁷⁷

Bike Root is a student club sanctioned by the Students' Union of the University of Calgary, and a registered provincial non-profit society. Founded in 2008, they operate a student volunteer-run community bike centre at the University of Calgary. They operate on an entirely DIY basis. Bike Root, because of their status as a student club under the students' union, is subject to various rules, regulations and policies of the student union, such as requiring student union approval for by-law changes, and restricting executive roles to only members of the undergraduate student union.

SPOKES^{878,879}

Spokes is a unique volunteer-run, university-supported bike recycling and loan program. Bikes are loaned to University of Victoria community members for \$40, with the expectation that bike is maintained and returned at a future date (at which time you get \$20 back). The bike facility is provided rent-free to Spokes. While Spokes does not receive a levy, it does receive funding from the university, student union and UVic Sustainability Project.

Food Banks and Free Food Initiatives (aka Soup Kitchens) - Non-levied groups

Community Cabbage (University of Victoria)^{880, 881}

⁸⁷⁷ University of Calgary Students' Union. "Bike Root." Students' Union University of Calgary Club Hub. University of Calgary Students' Union. N.d. <<https://suuofc.campuslabs.ca/engage/organization/bikeroor>>.

⁸⁷⁸ University of Victoria. "Spokes." University of Victoria. N.d. <<https://www.uvic.ca/sustainability/involved/spokes/index.php>>.

⁸⁷⁹ Travis Paterson. "Spokes rolls out bike drive." Saanich News. 31 March 2016. <<https://www.saanichnews.com/news/spokes-rolls-out-bike-drive/>>.

⁸⁸⁰ Community Cabbage. Community Cabbage. N.d. <<https://uvicecommunitycabbage.wordpress.com/>>.

⁸⁸¹ Cayden Johnson. "Community Cabbage throws down on local food waste." Martlet. 19 February 2015. <<https://www.martlet.ca/community-cabbage-throws-down-on-local-food-waste/>>.

Community Cabbage was established in 2014 by the environmental student-levy organization, University of Victoria Sustainability Project, as a separate student club. The group provides free vegetarian meals to community members from locally-sourced and dumpster dived food.

Happy Belly⁸⁸²

Happy Belly is a reclaimed food initiative at the MacDonald Campus of McGill University. Operating for over ten years, student volunteers collect perishable food through the local campus farm and dumpster diving at local grocery stores. Reclaimed food is shared with students in two ways: through meals prepared by volunteers and by directly giving reclaimed food (produce, canned food, baked goods, etc.) by leaving the items with signs on tables in a central part of campus.

Free Stores - PIRG or Regenesis operated

OPIRG Peterborough Free Market (see entry for OPIRG Peterborough)

Regenesis York – Keele Campus – Free Store (see entry for Regenesis)

Regenesis York – Glendon Campus – Free Store (see entry for Regenesis)

Regenesis Toronto – St. George Campus – Sustainability Office Free Store (see entry for Regenesis)

Regenesis Toronto – St. George Campus – Graduate Free Store (see entry for Regenesis)

Regenesis Toronto – Scarborough Campus – Free Store (see entry for Regenesis)

Free Stores – student union operated

UBC Student Environment Centre Free Store⁸⁸³

UBC Student Environment Centre is a ‘resource group’ of the Alma Mater Society, the undergraduate student union at the University of British Columbia. They

⁸⁸² Mac Happy Belly. “Mac Happy Belly.” Facebook. N.d. <<https://www.facebook.com/machappybelly/>>.

⁸⁸³ The UBC Student Environment Centre. “UBC Free Store.” The UBC Student Environment Centre. N.d. <<https://secubc.com/ubc-free-store/>>.

operate a volunteer-maintained free store in their space at the AMS Nest (Student Centre).

University of Victoria Students' Society Food Bank and Free Store

University of Victoria Students' Society operates a Food Bank and Free Store that receives a dedicated levy.⁸⁸⁴ This free store is a secondary, smaller part of the Food Bank initiative.

PIRGs or groups attempting to form a PIRG existed at one time at the following universities and colleges:

BCPIRG (at UBC)⁸⁸⁵

Students at the University of British Columbia previously attempted on three separate occasions to establish a PIRG. Three failed referendums occurred in 1981 (Yes 2,118; No 2,234); 1982 (Yes 1,980; No 2,241); 1994 (Yes 1,733; No 1,610 ; Total votes 3,402—failed due to lack of quorum). The 1981 referendum was part of a cross-campus referendum to establish a provincial BCPIRG—the referendum at Simon Fraser University passed and SFPIRG still exists today.

CPIRG – Calgary PIRG (University of Calgary)^{886,887,888,889,890,891,892,893}

⁸⁸⁴ University of Victoria Students' Society. "Food Bank and Free Store." University of Victoria Students' Society. N.d. <<https://uvss.ca/foodbank/>>.

⁸⁸⁵ AMS-UBC. Referendum History. 2019. List. <<https://www.ams.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Referendnew-as-of-March-2019.pdf>>.

⁸⁸⁶ CPIRG. CPIRG. N.d. <<http://pirg-calgary.tripod.com/>>.

⁸⁸⁷ CPIRG. CPIRG. 25 May 2004. Internet Archive. <<https://archive.org/web/20040525184321/http://www.cpirg.ca/>>.

⁸⁸⁸ Natalie Sit. "PIRG looks ahead." Gauntlet. 29 March 2001. <<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/pirg-looks-ahead>>.

⁸⁸⁹ Gauntlet. "PIRG on the Prowl." Gauntlet. 31 January 2002. <<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/pirg-prowl>>.

⁸⁹⁰ Joel McNally. "CPIRG set for referendum." Gauntlet. 31 January 2002. <<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/cpirg-set-referendum>>.

⁸⁹¹ Joel McNally. "CPIRG struck from election ballot." Gauntlet. 7 February 2002. <<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/cpirg-struck-election-ballot>>.

⁸⁹² Ben Li. "CPIRG levy not on the ballot." Gauntlet. 16 January 2003. <<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/cpirg-levy-not-ballot>>.

⁸⁹³ University of Calgary Social Work Students' Association. SWSA Newsletter. March 2013. <<http://calgaryswsa.weebly.com/archives/march-2013-edition>>.

CPIRG was established as a student club in 1999, inspired by the WTO protests in Seattle, Washington. A variety of groups include UCalgary EcoClub, Revolutionary Anarchist Kollektive, Development Studies Club, Sierra Youth Coalition, Campus Green Party and others came together to create CPIRG. An undergraduate plebiscite (non-binding referendum) was held in 2001 in which 1,889 students voted, with approximately 60% voting in favour of a \$1.00 per term student levy in support of CPIRG. They attempted to hold a binding student levy referendum for a \$2.00 per term for full time students and \$1.00 per term for part time students (or about \$100,000/year) with the University of Calgary Students' Union in 2002, but the question was pulled from the annual elections at a meeting of the student union executives. The school newspaper wrote an editorial against CPIRG citing the increased financial ask, the lack of a budget, the need to 'prove themselves first' and that not all students support (left/progressive) activism. Some student union executives were skeptical, with some expressing concerns for religious discrimination. Both these examples are typical of conservative criticisms of PIRG. A graduate student levy referendum was held the same year, but it was defeated 267 to 205. Said CPIRG member Jeff Emmett, "None of us want to be in a start-up phase for five years. Myself and most people with CPIRG want to keep working on the issues that concern us and I feel that we have a lot to offer the community no matter what."⁸⁹⁴ CPIRG attempted again to hold a referendum in 2003, requesting \$1.00 per student (or about \$54,000 annually), but were again rebuffed by the student union executive who voted against allowing the question in a 5 to 11 vote (despite having the support of the student union president). CPIRG existed until the 2003-2004 school year. A CPIRG revival was attempted in 2013 by UCalgary and MacEwan University students.

HUMMPIRG⁸⁹⁵

A student club called HUMMPIRG existed at Humber College Lakeshore Campus between 2013 and 2017. Their activities included getting Humber College designated as a fair trade campus and hosting various events, primarily around

⁸⁹⁴ Joel McNally. "CPIRG looks ahead." *Gauntlet*. 14 March 2002. <<http://www.archive.thegauntlet.ca/story/cpirg-looks-ahead>>.

⁸⁹⁵ HUMMPIRG. *HUMMPIRG*. N.d. <<https://hummpirg.wixsite.com/home>>.

international development and environmental issues. HUMMPIRG never sought a student levy.

KPIRG^{896,897,898}

KPIRG was a levy-funded PIRG at Kwantlen Polytechnique University, originally established in 2013 after a successful referendum. KPIRG held events, had a resource library, held an annual disorientation and provided funding and resources to action groups and community action research projects. The Community Action Research Project Program is similar to other student-assisted research programs that a few other PIRGs have, whereby the student is assisted in applying for course credit and receives funding for conducting community research. Past working groups included a pipeline action group and a disability advocacy collective. KPIRG also had a collaboration with QUEST Food Exchange, a chain of non-profit grocery stores, where Kwantlen students facing food insecurity could access these stores. KPIRG was unable to get space between 2013 and 2016 from the student union for their six staff members—they only received space in 2016 after continual pressure and circulating a petition. KPIRG ceased operations after the student union revoked their agreement with KPIRG and ceased providing levy funding. Previously, KPIRG received a \$0.80 per credit levy (or about \$250,000 annually). It is alleged that a former KPIRG staff member committed fraud by billing the organization for consulting. KPIRG website is still up, but the organization appears inactive with no updates since 2018 on their website or social media.

Mohawk PIRG⁸⁹⁹

Mohawk PIRG was an attempt to establish a PIRG at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ontario. The Mohawk PIRG organizer was Mohammad Ali Aumeer, an experienced student union organizer and rapper known as Socialist HipHop. The group

⁸⁹⁶ KPIRG. *KPIRG*. N.d. <<https://kwantlenpirg.wordpress.com/>>.

⁸⁹⁷ Johnston, *op cit.* 2019.

⁸⁹⁸ KPIRG. "Kwantlen Polytechnic University: We call on KPU to provide KPIRG with a space to serve its 20,000 students." *Avaaz.org*. 21 July 2016. <https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/en/Kwantlen_Polytechnic_University_We_call_on_KPU_to_provide_KPIRG_with_a_space_to_serve_its_20000_students/>.

⁸⁹⁹ MohawkPIRG. *MohawkPIRG*. N.d. <<https://mohawkpirg.ca/>>.

established in January 2018, collected over 1000 signatures and submitted them in March 2019 to the Mohawk Students' Association in order to hold a levy referendum to request a \$5 per term levy from students. No referendum was ever passed.

Newfoundland PIRG⁹⁰⁰

There are online references to a Newfoundland PIRG at Memorial University attempting to establish in the 2000s.

Western PIRG^{901,902,903,904,905,906,907,908,909}

WESTERN PIRG existed at two separate time periods. The original incarnation of OPIRG existing at Western occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. Originally starting as a student club in 1976, they brought Ralph Nader to speak on campus, which sparked a push towards establishing a levy fee. A referendum in March 1977 passed, with 1535 students in favour and 1361 opposed, establishing a levy of \$3 per student per year and providing an approximately \$45,000 annual budget. A separate referendum indexing the OPIRG fee to the consumer price index failed, 1759 to 985. UWOPIRG moved into their own office in July 1977 in the University Community Centre and employed two coordinators, Paul Schmidt and Moya Beall. In 1979, the student union attempted to take

⁹⁰⁰ Sierra Youth Coalition. Sustainable Campuses Anti-Opression Guide. Ottawa, ON: Sierra Club of Canada, n.d. <<https://www.tigorg/images/resources/tool/docs/1407.pdf>>.

⁹⁰¹ Western News. "OPIRG based in UCC." Western News. 28 July 1977.

<<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11818/9491>>.

⁹⁰² Western News. "OPIRG supporters protest move by Students' Council." Western News. 19 March 1981. <<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/download/11973/9646/24576>>.

⁹⁰³ Western News. "Nader to visit Western Monday." Western News. 11 March 1976.

<<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11762/9435>>.

⁹⁰⁴ Western News. "Councillors to take office April 6." Western News. 24 March 1977.

<<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11806/9479>>.

⁹⁰⁵ Western News. "OPIRG funds remain frozen." Western News. 25 October 1979.

<<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11913/9586>>.

⁹⁰⁶ Western News. "Supreme Court to hear OPIRG suit against USC." Western News. 18 October 1979.

<<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11912>>.

⁹⁰⁷ Western News. "Fewer students seek OPIRG fee refund." Western News. 19 November 1978.

<<https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/westernnews/article/view/11875/9548>>.

⁹⁰⁸ Matthew Brett. "Ontario University closes pro-Palestinian student group." Canadian Dimension. 25 April 2008. <<https://canadiandimension.com/blog/view/ontario-university-closes-pro-palestinian-student-group>>.

⁹⁰⁹ Carol Arnold. "Grad Students Vote on OPIRG Today." The Newspaper. 24 March 1982.

<<https://www.alternativetoronto.ca/archive/files/original/9d3fa62192b86af315f8bdfdfd1bc06a.pdf>>.

over control of OPIRG. In 1980, the student union attempted to hold a referendum to cut the OPIRG levy by 50%, establishing a new “student research organization.” The courts stopped the student union from holding this referendum—which resulted in a legal battle that cost \$8,000. The University’s Board of Governors froze the levy pending a decision of the Supreme Court of Ontario claiming breach of contract between the student union and UWOPIRG. In March 1981, the student union executive de-ratified UWOPIRG, to which UWOPIRG supporters protested. The student union executive claimed the money was “out of proportion” to the activities UWOPIRG engaged in and other groups received.

A second PIRG incarnation existed at Western University (formerly University of Western Ontario) from 2003 to 2008 as a student club. The student club was unsuccessful at advancing towards establishing a student-fee levy and was ultimately closed down by the student union in 2008 for supporting Palestinian solidarity activism.

PIRG-like organizations

Community Action Centre^{910,911}

Community Action Centre was a PIRG-like action established by the Student Association of George Brown College. The mandate supported education and organizing around social justice, and supporting activities such as lobbying and advocacy, mobilization and research. Since being renamed Community Care Centre, due to the Ontario provincial conservative government student choice initiative, the centre had a radical shift in its mandate towards supporting health and wellness of marginalized students instead of activism. Programs include a student nutrition access program (good food market, food bank, breakfast program), and health programming on topics such as sexual health and consent, and access to health supplies.

Former Canadian Student-Involved Sustainability Initiatives

⁹¹⁰ Student Association of George Brown College. Community Action Centre. N.d. <<https://www.studentassociation.ca/community-action-centre/>>.

⁹¹¹ Student Association of George Brown College. Student Community Care Services. N.d. <<https://www.studentassociation.ca/student-community-care-services/>>.

Over the past 25 years many student-involved environmental initiatives that have closed. Below is a list of closed initiatives. The reasons for the closures vary. Student club led-initiatives, which are organizationally more vulnerable to ending sooner primarily due to the club founders graduating or moving on, mostly close due to inadequate interest in others continuing and/or poor succession planning. Levied-student initiatives are more likely to close due to challenges such as political attacks, but also due to burnout, turnover and lack of succession. This list is robust, but not extensive.

- **Harvest Noon (UofT) 2012-2018** - Student-Run Cafe (levied, had free space) - Closed due to a myriad of reasons, including concerns from the University of Toronto over health and safety violations, internal organizational issues and a decision of the graduate student union.
- **Hot Yam (UofT) 2007-2013** - Student-run PWYC Vegan Food Initiative (had free space) - Closed due to losing cooking/serving space and the inability to secure new space; some members were also involved in Harvest Noon.
- **Radical Roots/Vegetarium (UofT) 1996-2006** - Student-run PWYC Food Initiative (had free space) - Closed due to losing space and lack of support from university administration.
- **Fed Up! The Affordable Food Project (Brock) 2011-2014** - various food initiatives (levied) - Closed due to student union politics and internal interpersonal tensions.
- **University of Manitoba Recycling & Environmental Group ?-2018** - Environmental organization, ran resource centre/library, and bike shop (levied, had free space). Closed for unknown reasons.
- **Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (UVic) 1983-2019** - social and environmental justice organization (levied, had free space) - Closed due to tensions with the student union. This closure is well-documented online.
- **Kwantlen Public Interest Research Group 2013-2018** - social and environmental justice organization (levied, had free space) - Closed due to multiple reasons.
- **Waterloo Public Interest Research Group (UWaterloo) 1973-2016** (levied, had free space) - social and environmental justice organization (levied, free space) - Closed due to misinformation campaign run by conservative students that defunded WPIRG and had the student union take-away their space.
- **LUSU Sustainability Initiative (Lakehead) ?-2019** - Environmental resource centre (levied, free space) - Closed due to student union budget cuts.

- **Seedlings by Sprouts (UBC) 2013-2020** - Student-run cafe (levied, had free space) - closed due to losing space in graduate student centre and unable to secure new space.
- **Et. Al Co-operative (YorkU) 2017-2020** - Graduate Student and Faculty Pub, Restaurant and Catering Service (student and labour union funded, had free space) - Closed due to outstanding debts and lack of income because of COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Soma Cafe (UWinnipeg) ?-2012** - Student union operated cafe (student union funded, had free space) - Closed due to being unprofitable.
- **Teatree House Café (UGuelph) 2009-2011** - Student-run cafe, support by local PIRG (PIRG funded) - Unable to secure a long-term space.
- **Community Action Centre (George Brown College) 2016-2019** - Social justice and activism centre (student union funded, had free space) - Closed due to Ontario Conservative Government Student Choice Initiative which cut funding to student groups deemed non-essential.
- **Counter Culture (YorkU) 2001?-2007?** - Student-run cafe (had free space) - Closed due to losing space when the Faculty of Environmental Studies moved buildings and unable to secure new space.
- **Engineers Without Borders Fair Trade Coffee Club (Memorial) 2006-2016** - Student-run cafe - Closed due to unknown reasons.
- **World Garden (YorkU) 2015** - Community Garden, operated by Regenesiis (had free space) - Closed due to losing space and unable to secure new space.
- **Mount Royal Eco Store 2010-2015** - Student-run eco product store, operated by the student union (student union funded, had free space) - Closed for unknown reasons.
- **Mount Allison Farm (Mount Allison) - 2011-2017** - Student-run farm and farmers' market (free space) - Closed for unknown reasons.
- **People's Potato Garden (Concordia) 2008-2009** - Community Garden, operated by People's Potato PWYC student food initiative (levied, had free space) - Garden closed due to losing space and unable to secure new space.
- **NOM Natural and Organic Market (UofT) 2015** - Student-run farmers' market, run by Regenesiis UofT - Unable to secure long-term space due to university restrictions of selling on-campus. A new market was later re-started in 2024 at UofT by Regenesiis.
- **North Bay Campus Market (NippissingU/Canadore College) - 2012-?** - Student run farmers' market - Closed for unknown reasons.
- **CBU Community Garden (Cape Breton U) - 2012-2016** - Student-run, university sustainability office supported and organized (free space) - Closed due to funding cuts that led to the closure of the university's sustainability office and staff layoffs.

- **WPIRG Community Garden (UWaterloo) ?-2017** - Student-run community garden, operated by WPIRG (OPIRG levy supported, had free space) - Closed after unable to sustain a volunteer group to run the garden due to WPIRG losing their levy funding and organizing staff in 2016.

Appendix B – List of Canadian Student-Involved Environmental Organizations

Sustainability Organization (broad mandate)

Examples of independent student-involved environmental organizations include:⁹¹²

- Embark Sustainability (Simon Fraser University)
- Guelph Students For Environmental Change
- RegenesiS (multiple universities)
- Sustainable Concordia
- Sustainable Trent
- University of Victoria Sustainability Project

Examples of student union environmental offices include:

- AMS Commission of the Environment and Sustainability (Queen's)
- Dalhousie Student Union Sustainability Office
- EnviroWestern
- Sustain SU (University of Alberta)
- University of Ottawa Students' Union Sustainability Centre

Examples of university-run environmental volunteer programs include:

- Laurier Eco-Hawks
- OTU Blue Team
- UTM Green Team

Examples of independent student sustainability levies:

- Concordia Sustainability Action Fund
- UTERN (University of Toronto Environmental Resource Network)⁹¹³

Examples of student union sustainability levies:⁹¹⁴

- Bishop's University Students' Representative Council Green Levy
- Mount Allison Students' University Green Investment Fund
- Students' Society of McGill University Environment Fee

⁹¹² One former independent student-involved environmental organization that previously received a student levy was identified: UMREG (University of Manitoba Recycling and Environment Group). It appears to have shut down and had their levy funding defunded or not renewed.

⁹¹³ UTERN is now administered with the support of the RegenesiS UofT chapter after struggling with audit compliance from past executives failing to meet student union mandatory financial reporting requirements.

⁹¹⁴ Some student union sustainability levies provide funding for all student clubs who want to hold an eco-themed event or project. Other student union sustainability levies are only for internal use of the student union (e.g. to improve the energy efficiency of the student centre, to reduce waste at student union events).

- Students' Union of the University of Calgary Sustainability Fund
- UBC AMS Sustainability

Examples of universities with sustainability funds:⁹¹⁵

- Carleton University
- Concordia University
- McGill University
- Thompson Rivers University
- Université de Montréal
- Université Laval
- University of Alberta
- University of British Columbia
- University of Northern British Columbia
- University of Regina
- University of Saskatchewan Green Revolving Fund
- University of Victoria
- York University
- University of Saskatchewan – Student Sustainability Grants
- University of New Brunswick Student Sustainability Fund

Examples of sustainability funds that are partnerships between universities and student unions:

- University of Saskatchewan – Student Sustainability Grants
- University of New Brunswick Student Sustainability Fund

Initiatives of Regenesys include:

• **Borrowing Centres (item library)**

Current: York University Keele (2016-present), University of Toronto St. George (2024-present), University of Toronto Mississauga (2024-present), University of Toronto Scarborough (2024-present)

In Development: Toronto Metropolitan University

Former: York University Glendon (2019-2022)

⁹¹⁵ University sustainability funds are either funded by a student-levy, directly by the university, as a 'green revolving fund' with savings gained from university energy and waste projects being placed into the fund, or some combination of the three. Some university sustainability funds provide funding for any eco-themed event or project (whether it is organized by a faculty, student club, professor or department). Some university sustainability funds are for internal use only (e.g. to improve the energy efficiency of university buildings, reduce waste on campus).

- **Community Bike Centres**

Current: York University Keele (2018-present), Toronto Metropolitan University (2023-present), University of Toronto Mississauga (2025-present), Brickworks (2025-present)

In Development: University of Toronto Scarborough

- **Community Gardens and Urban Agriculture**

Current: University of Toronto St. George (multiple gardens, pre-Regenesis initiative that merged with Regenesis UofT – 2008-present), University of Toronto Scarborough (2020-present)

Past: York University Keele (2013)

- **Farmers' Markets**

Current: York University – Keele (2013-present), Toronto Metropolitan University (2022-present), University of Toronto Mississauga (2023-present), University of Toronto St. George (2015, 2024-present)

Past: York University – Glendon (2018-2020)

- **Food Centres**

These are community kitchen spaces that provides free meals, food-related workshops and other food-related services.

In Development: Toronto Metropolitan University, University of Toronto St. George (restarting), York University – Keele

Past: University of Toronto St. George 2017-2020

- **Free Stores**

Current: York University – Keele (2009-present), York University – Glendon (2013, 2019-present), University of Toronto Scarborough (2021-present), Two at University of Toronto St. George (2017-2020, 2024-present)

In Development: Toronto Metropolitan University, University of Toronto Mississauga

- **Grocery Co-operative**

In Development: University of Toronto Scarborough, University of Toronto St. George, York University – Keele

List of environmental student clubs

Bacc Vert (Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières)

Bishop's University Environmental Club

Brock Eco Society

CBU Environmental Society (Cape Breton University)

Ceres Eco Club (McGill University – MacDonald Campus)

Comité environnemental du MAGE-UQAC
 Common Energy
 EcoAction MTA
 Écoleaders de l'Université de Montréal
 Environmental Society UPEI
 Green Earth Club (Dawson College)
 Jull Environmental Club (UWindsor)
 Lakehead University (Orillia) Environmental Sustainability Club
 LEAP (Mount Royal)
 Mac Environmentors
 Polysphere (Polytechnique Montreal)
 Seneca Environmental Association
 SMU Environmental Society (Saint Mary's University)
 Sustainable Earth Laurentian
 Tributerre ETS
 TRU Eco Club
 UCalgary Eco Club
 UManitoba Students for the Environment
 UTEA (UofT Environmental Action)
 VIU Eco Club
 Your Environmental Sustainability Society (Dalhousie University)

List of environmental student coalitions or collectives:⁹¹⁶

Campus Durable (Université de Sherbrooke)
 Environmental Working Group (University of Toronto – St. George)

List of Canadian Student-Involved Sustainability Initiatives (SII) (specific mandate)

List of Student-Run Bike Shares:

University of British Columbia – Purple and Yellow Bike Share (Operated by The Bike Co-op)

List of Student-Run Bike Rental Services:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

University of British Columbia – The Bike Kitchen (Operated by the Alma Mater Society Bike Coop) – est. 1998
 University of Victoria – SPOKES (Student Promotion of Kickstands Etc. Salvaging)

MANITOBA

Canadian Mennonite University – Sanctoral Cycle Co-op

ONTARIO

Trent University – B!KE: Peterborough Community Cycling Hub – est. 2013

⁹¹⁶ Coalitions or collectives aim to bring together existing student groups around a single topic. These coalitions most often only exist informally. Some such coalitions, such as UTERN or the Concordia Food Coalition, are organizations that receive student levies—refer to their separate entries for more information.

University of Toronto – Bike Chain – est. 2005
University of Toronto Mississauga – UTM Bike Share – est. 2010
University of Waterloo – Bike Centre’s Yellow Bikes
University of Western Ontario – Purple Bikes – est. 2010

NEW BRUNSWICK

Mount Allison University – Sackville Bike Co-op (Operated by the Mount Allison Students’ Union)

NOVA SCOTIA

Dalhousie University – Bike Centre (Operated by the Dalhousie Student Union) – est. 2011

List of DIY and Community Bike Repair Shops on Canadian campuses:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

[SII] (student co-op)] – University of British Columbia – Bike Kitchen (Operated by the Alma Mater Society Bike Coop) – est. 1998
[SII] – University of Victoria – SPOKES

ALBERTA

[SII] – University of Calgary – BikeRoot

MANITOBA

[SII (student co-op)] – Canadian Mennonite University – Sanctoral Cycle Co-op
[SII] – University of Manitoba – The Bike Dungeon
[SII (student union)] – University of Winnipeg - UWSA Bike Lab

ONTARIO

[SII] – Lakehead University – Community Spokes Bicycle Co-operative
[SII (student union)] – McMaster University – Macycle
[SII (student union)] – Queen’s University – AMS Bike Shop
[SII] – Trent University – B!KE: Peterborough Community Cycling Hub – est. 2013
[SII (student union)] – University of Guelph – CSA Bike Centre
[SII (student union)] – University of Ottawa – SFUO Bike Co-op
[SII] – University of Toronto – BikeChain
[SII] – University of Toronto Mississauga – UTM BikeShare & Repair – est. 2010
[SII] – University of Waterloo – University of Waterloo Bike Centre
[SII] – University of Western Ontario – Purple Bikes – est. 2010
**proposed [SII (REGENESIS)] – York University – Jack Layton Community Bike Centre*

QUEBEC

[SII (student co-op)] – Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf – Coop Bécik
Concordia University – Right to Move/La voie libre
McGill University – The Flat Bike Collective
Université de Montréal – Biciklo
Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM) - BQAM, Atelier de réparation de vélo communautaire

L'Université du Québec École de technologie supérieure (ETS) – CRABE (Centre de Reparation et Adjustment de Bicyclette de l'ETS)

NOVA SCOTIA

[University-run] – Dalhousie University – DAL Campus Bike Centre – est. 2011

List of Student-involved Cafés:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

[SII (student union)] – Kwantlen Polytechnic University – Grassroots Café and Lounge

[SII (student union)] – Thompson Rivers University – Common Grounds

**former [SII] – University of British Columbia – Seedlings (Operated by Sprouts) – 2014-2020*

[SII] – University of British Columbia – Sprouts Café and Store (Operated by Sprouts)

[SII (student union)] – University of Northern British Columbia – Degrees Coffee Co. (Two locations – est. 2008 and 2014)

University of British Columbia – Agora Café (Operated by Food Nutrition and Health Student Committee of the Faculty of Land and Food Systems)

SASKATCHEWAN

[SII (student union)] – University of Saskatchewan – Browers Café and Consignment Bookstore

MANITOBA

[SII] – Canadian Mennonite University – Blaurock Café

**former [SII (student union)] – University of Winnipeg – Soma Café – ?-2013 – (Closed due to financial issues)*

ONTARIO

[SII (student union)] – Carleton University – Rooster's

[SII (student union)] – Lakehead University (Thunder Bay) – The Study Coffeehouse

McMaster University – Bridges Café

[SII (student union)] – Queens University – Common Ground Coffeehouse and The Brew

[SII (Engineering Society)] – Queens University – The Tea Room

[Student-owned (student centre)] – Ryerson University – The Oakham House Café

[SII (student coop)] – Trent University – The Seasoned Spoon

**former [SII] – University of Guelph – Teatree House Café 2011-2013*

[SII (student union)] – University of Ottawa – Café Alt – est. Oct. 2008

[SII (SKULE Engineering Society)] – University of Toronto – Hard Hat Café

**former [SII (student coop)] – University of Toronto – Harvest Noon (Toronto Sustainable Food Cooperative)*

**former [SII] – University of Toronto – Hot Yam – 2007-2013 – (Closed due to loss of space)*

**former [SII] – University of Toronto – Radical Roots/Vegetarium – 1999-2006 – (Closed due to loss of space and lack of university administration support)*

[Non-Profit] – University of Toronto (New College) – CoffeeShed

[SII] – University of Toronto (Victoria College) – Caffiends
 [SII] – University of Toronto (University College) – Diabolos
 [SII] – University of Waterloo – Environmental Studies Coffee Shop (Operated by the Environmental Students Society)
 [Student-owned (student-union)] – University of Waterloo – The Dispensary
 [SII (graduate student union)] – Western University Ontario – The Grad Club
 *proposed [SII (student coop)] – York University – Green Campus Cooperative
 *former [SII] – York University – Counterculture – (Closed due to loss of space)
 [SII (student coop)] – York University Glendon Campus – Lunik Coop Café

QUEBEC

*former [SII] – Concordia University – Burritoville (?-2017)
 *former [SII] – Concordia University – Café X (1983-2018)
 *former [SII] – Concordia University – Tia Café (2019-2020)
 [SII (solidarity coop)] – Concordia University – The Hive Cafe Solidarity Co-op
 [SII (solidarity coop)] – Concordia University – Reggie's Bar Solidarity Co-operative
 [SII (student union)] – Laval University – Café Equilibrium
 [SII (graduate student union)] – Laval University – Café Fou ÆLIÉS
 *former [SII] – McGill University – Organic Campus
 *former [SII] – McGill University – SNAX The Coffee Co-op
 *former [SII (student union)] – McGill University – The Nest
 [SII (student union)] – Université du Québec à Rimouski – Café l'Auriculaire
 [SII (student union)] – Université du Québec à Chicoutimi – L'Escale

NOVA SCOTIA

[SII (Enactus)] – Université Sainte-Anne – Café Bric-à-Brac
 [SII] – University of King's College – The King's Galley

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

*former [SII] – Memorial University – Engineers Without Borders Fair Trade Coffee Club

List of Student-Run Food Services (Cafeterias, Cafes, Catering and Food Outlets):

ONTARIO

[SII (student co-op)] – Collège Boréal – Boréal Coop – est. 1996

QUEBEC

[SII (non-profit)] – Laval University – The Entithé – est. 2006
 [SII (student co-op)] – Université de Sherbrooke – Café CAUS – est. 2009

List of Campus Community & Market Gardens:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

[SII] – Capilano University – CU Community Garden
 [SII (student union)] – Kwantlen Polytechnic University – Westerman Campus Community Garden
 [SII] – Simon Fraser University – Embark Learning Garden

[SII] – Trinity Western University – ARTWU Community Garden
[SII] – University of British Columbia – Roots on the Roof
[SII] – University of Victoria – The Campus Community Garden
[SII] – Vancouver Island University – Nanaimo Campus Community Peace Garden

ALBERTA

[SII] – Athabasca University – AU Community Garden
[University-run] – MacEwan University – MacEwan Community Garden
[SII] – Mount Royal University – MRU Community Garden
[SII/Non-Profit Partnership] – University of Alberta – Green & Gold Community Garden
[University-run] – University of Alberta – Campus Saint-Jean Community Garden
[Community-group run] – University of Alberta – Edmonton Organic Growers Guild
[SII (student union)] – University of Alberta – Sustain SU's Campus Community Garden
[SII] – University of Calgary – UofC Community Garden
[SII] – University of Lethbridge – Campus Roots Community Garden

SASKATCHEWAN

[SII] – First Nations University of Canada – FNU Shared Community Garden
[University-Department-run] – University of Regina – Le Potager (Institut Francais)
[SII (PIRG)] – University of Regina – The RPIRG Green Patch
[SII] – University of Saskatchewan – Horticulture Club Community Garden and Greenhouse
[University-run] – University of Saskatchewan – McEown Community Garden
[SII] – University of Saskatchewan – Seager Wheeler Residence Community Garden

MANITOBA

[SII] – Brandon University – Green Futures Community Garden
[SII] – Canadian Mennonite University – CMU Community Garden
[SII] – University of Manitoba – Student Community Garden (formerly Student Community Farm)
[SII (student union)] – University of Winnipeg – UWSA Community Garden

ONTARIO

[SII (student union)] – Algoma University – The People's Garden
[SII (PIRG)] – Brock University – Develop, Integrate and Grow (D.I.G.) Brock Community Garden
[SII (graduate student union)] – Carleton University – Kitigànensag GSA Carleton Community Garden
[SII (student union)] – George Brown College – SNAP Spadina Community Garden
[University-run] – Georgian College – Georgian Community Garden
[University-run] – Humber College – Humber Food Learning Garden
[University-run] – Mohawk College – Mohawk College Community Garden
[University-run] – Lakehead University Orillia – Lakehead Farm Lab
[SII] – Lakehead University Orillia – Lakehead Community Gardens
[SII] – Laurentian University – Laurentian Student Community Garden

[SII] – Laurentian University – Voyageur Community Garden (Operated by the Sustainable Earth Club)

[SII (University-Student Union Partnership)] – McMaster University – The McMaster Teaching & Community Garden (MTCG)

[SII (Non-Profit/Student Partnership)] – Niagara College – United Way Niagara College Garden Hub

[University-run] – Ontario Tech University – Community Garden

[University-run] – Queen’s University – Community Garden

[University-run] – Sheridan College – Sheridan Community Garden

[SII] – Trent University – Trent Oxfam Donation Garden

[SII] – Trent University – Trent Vegetable Gardens (Rooftop Garden and Field Garden)

[SII] – Trent University Oshawa – Organic Community Garden (Operated by the Trent Oshawa Green Party)

[University-PIRG Partnership] – University of Ottawa – Community Gardens (two sites)

[SII] – University of Toronto – Anthropology Building Greenhouse Renewal Project

[SII] – University of Toronto – Dig In! Demonstration Gardens (various sites)

[SII (student union)] – University of Toronto – Food For All Equity Garden

[SII] – University of Toronto – Hart House Farm Committee, St. George Campus Plots

[SII] – University of Toronto – Kahonitake Kitikan (Operated by the Native Student Association)

[SII] – University of Toronto – New College (Ecology and Spirituality) Community Garden

[SII (Non-Profit/Student Partnership)] – University of Toronto – Sky Garden (Operated by The Food & Water Institute)

[SII] – University of Toronto – Victoria College Community Garden

**former [SII] – University of Toronto – Mississauga – McGrath Valley Community Food Garden (UTM Urban Agriculture Society, later transferred to UTMSU student union)*

[University-run] – University of Toronto Scarborough – Grow The Roof UTSC Rooftop Garden

[University-run] – University of Toronto Scarborough – UTSC Community Garden (Operated by the UTSC Sustainability Office)

[University-run] – University of Waterloo – North Campus Community Garden

[University-run] – University of Waterloo – V1 Food Garden

[SII (graduate student union)] – University of Western Ontario – Western Community Garden

[SII (PIRG)] – University of Windsor – WPIRG Community Garden

[SII] – University of Windsor – The Campus Community Garden Project

[SII (PIRG)] – Wilfrid Laurier University – Food Justice Garden

[SII (Aboriginal Centre)] – Wilfrid Laurier University – Mino-Kummik Aboriginal Community Garden

[SII (Non-Profit/Student Partnership)] – Wilfrid Laurier University – Patchwork (Multicultural) Community Gardens, Northdale Campus Site

[SII] – York University – Maloca Community Garden

[SII (REGENESIS)] – York University Glendon Campus – Glendon Community Garden

**former [SII (REGENESIS)] – York University – Regenesi@York World Garden*

[SII (student union)] – Conestoga College Cambridge Campus – Conestoga Acres Community Garden
[SII (Student-University Partnership)] – Seneca College Newham Campus – Seneca College Community Garden

QUEBEC

[SII (University-run)] – Bishop’s University – Community Garden
[SII (Non-Profit/Student Partnership)] – CÉGEP du Vieux Montréal – Garden Committee Terrace Rooftop Garden Project (in partnership with the Rooftop Garden Project)
[SII] – Concordia University – Mind, Heart, Mouth (Loyola Campus)
**former [SII] – Concordia University – People’s Potato Garden (2008-2009)*
[SII (Black-led)] – Concordia University – Sankofa Farms (Loyola Campus)
[SII] – Concordia University – The Concordia Greenhouse Urban Agriculture Projects (Rooftop Greenhouse and Atrium Tea Lounge, Loyola City Farm, Mackay Garden)
[SII] – McGill University – Campus Crops
[SII (Non-Profit/Student Partnership)] – McGill University – Santropol Roulant’s Edible Campus Garden (in partnership with the Rooftop Garden Project)
[SII] – Université de Montréal – La Place Commune / Collective CRATERRE
[SII] – Université de Montréal – P.A.U.S.E. (Production Agricole Urbaine Soutenable et Écologique)
[SII] – Université de Sherbrooke - Campus Nourricier
[SII] – Université du Québec à Montréal – Le CRAPAUD
[SII (PIRG)] – Université du Québec à Montréal – TOAD
[SII] – Université Laval – Community Organic Garden – est. 1978

NEW BRUNSWICK

[SII (student union)] – University of New Brunswick – UNB Community Garden
[SII] – University of New Brunswick Saint John – UNBSJ Community Garden

NOVA SCOTIA

[SII] – Acadia University – Acadia Community Farm⁹¹⁷
[SII (student union)] – Cape Breton University – CBU Community Garden
[SII] – Dalhousie University – Dal Urban Garden Society
[SII] – Dalhousie University – See More Community Garden
[University-run] – Dalhousie University (Truro Campus) – Chef’s Garden
[SII (student union)] – University of King’s College – King’s Community Garden
[SII] – Mount Saint Vincent University – The Mount Community Garden
[SII, University Managed] – Saint Mary’s University – Saint Mary’s University Community Garden

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

[SII (University-run)] – Memorial University – MUN Community Garden

⁹¹⁷ The Acadia Community Farm is only a farm in name. It is classified here as a community garden because of its small size.

List of Campus Farms:⁹¹⁸

BRITISH COLUMBIA

[University-run] – University of British Columbia – UBC Farm

ALBERTA

[University-run] – University of Alberta – Prairie Urban Farm

ONTARIO

[University-run] – Seneca College – The Seneca Farm

[University-run] – Toronto Metropolitan University – TMU Urban Farm

[University-run] – University of Guelph – The Guelph Urban Organic Farm (Guelph Centre for Urban Organic Farming) – est. Sept 2008

[Student Centre run] – University of Toronto – Hart House Farm Caledon⁹¹⁹

[University-run] – University of Toronto Scarborough – UTSC Campus Farm

QUEBEC

[SII] – McGill University Macdonald Campus – Macdonald Student-Run Ecological Gardens

[University-run] – Bishop's University – Educational Farm

NEW BRUNSWICK

[SII (University/Student Partnership)] – Mount Allison University – Mount Allison University Farm

List of Campus Farmers' Markets:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

- [SII] – University of British Columbia – UBC Farm Markets (Indoor/Outdoor, Twice Weekly, June-October)
- [SII] – University of Northern British Columbia – University Farmers' Market (Indoor, Weekly, School Year) – est. 2010

ALBERTA

- [SII, with Student Union support] – University of Alberta – Farmers' Market at the U of A (Indoor, Bi-Weekly, School Year) – est. 2011

SASKATCHEWAN

- [Rental to non-profit community coop] – University of Regina – Regina Farmers' Market UofR site (Indoor, Weekly, School Year)

ONTARIO

- [University-run] – Brock University – Brock Farmers' Market (Indoor in facility constructed for the market, Weekly, June-September) – est. 2008

⁹¹⁸ Agricultural College farms and strictly research farms are not included in this list. Only campus farms that involved student volunteers or staff in agricultural production were included.

⁹¹⁹ The Hart House Farm is a retreat centre that has some student-led agricultural activity on site.

- [Proximity to Existing Farmers' Market] – Carleton University – Ottawa Farmers' Market Brewer Park (Outdoor, Weekly, May-November)
- [SII, with University support] – Fanshawe College – Fanshawe Farmers' Market (Indoor, Weekly, School Year)
- [SII (Student union, with University support)] – McMaster University – MSU Farmers' Market (Indoor, Twice Weekly, June-October) – est. 2010
- [SII] – Nipissing University/Canadore College – North Bay Campus Market (Operated by the NUSU Herbalist Association) (?, Weekly, ?) – est. 2012/3
- [SII] – Queen's University – The Farmers' Market at Queen's (Indoor, Weekly, School Year) – est. 2007
- [University-rental agreement with for-profit company] – Toronto Metropolitan University – TMU (formerly Ryerson) Farmers' Market (Outdoor, Monthly, June, August, September) – 2011-2013, 201?-2019, 2023-present
- **proposed [SII] – Trent University – Trent Farmers' Market (Proposed by Trent Active Minds, 2012)*
- [University-run] – University of Guelph – GCUOF Farmers' Market (Indoor/Outdoor, Weekly, July-October)
- [University-run] – University of Ottawa – University of Ottawa Farmers' Market (Indoor, Bi-Weekly, September-November)
- **Former [SII, with University support] – University of Waterloo – UW Farmers' Market (Indoor, Weekly, September-October) - est. Sept 2006*
- [University-run] – University of Western Ontario – Western Farmers' Market (Indoor/Outdoor, Weekly, School Year) – est. 2012
- [SII (Student union)] – University of Windsor – U Windsor Campus Farmers' Market (Indoor, Weekly, September-October) – est. 2013
- [SII, with University support] – University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (Indoor/Outdoor, Weekly June-October Monthly November-April, Year Round) – est. 2011
- [SII, with University support] – Wilfrid Laurier University – WLU Farmers' Market (Indoor, Weekly, School Year) – est. 2008
- [SII (Regenesis), with University support] – York University (Keele Campus) – YUM! Farmers' Market (Operated by Regenesis@York) (Indoor, Weekly, School Year) – est. Oct 2013
- **Former [SII - Regenesis] – York University (Glendon College) – Glendon Farmers' Market (Operated by Regenesis@York, Indoor, Weekly, September-April) – 2017-2020*

QUEBEC

- [University providing free space to non-profit association] – Bishop's University – Lennoxville Farmers' Market (Outdoor, Bi-Weekly, May-October) – est. 2012
- [SII (non-profit organization)] – McGill University – McGill Farmers' Market (Outdoor, Weekly, August-October – CSA operated year-round) – est. 2008

NOVA SCOTIA

- [University-lease agreement with non-profit community coop] – Acadia University – Wolfville Farmers’ Market (Indoor in Farmers’ Market specific building, Twice Weekly, Year-Round) – est. 1992
- [SII (Student union)] – Dalhousie University – DSU Farmers’ Market (Indoor, Weekly, School Year) – est. Oct 2013

List of Student Soup Kitchens:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

[SII] – University of British Columbia – Community Eats (Operated by Sprouts)
**former [University-run] – University of British Columbia – Fooood (\$3/meals) 2019-2022*

ONTARIO

[SII (non-profit/student union partnership)] – Humber College – Soup Bar
 [SII (student union)] – OCAD – Hot Lunch
**former [SII (Student Union)] – Seneca College Newham – Breakfast Club*
 [SII] – University of Ottawa – The People's Republic of Delicious

QUEBEC

**former [SII] – Concordia University – Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard*
 [SII] – Concordia University – The People’s Potato
 [SII (student union)] – Concordia University – Loyola Luncheon
 [SII] – McGill University – Midnight Kitchen

NOVA SCOTIA

[SII (student union)] – Dalhousie University – Loaded Ladle

List of On-Campus Food Banks:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

[SII (student union)] – Capilano University – CSU Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – Kwantlen Polytechnic University – KSA Member Services Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – Royal Roads University – RRU Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – Simon Fraser University – SFU Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – Thompson Rivers University – TRUSU Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – University of British Columbia – UBC/AMS Food Bank

ALBERTA

[SII (student union)] – Grant MacEwan University – Grant MacEwan University Food Bank, (SAMU)
 [SII (student union)] – Mount Royal University – (SAMRU) Food bank depot
 [SII (registered charity)] – University of Alberta – Campus Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – University of Calgary – UFCSU Campus Food Bank
 [SII (student union)] – University of Lethbridge – ULSU Food Bank

SASKATCHEWAN

[SII (student union)] – University of Saskatchewan – USSU Food Centre

MANITOBA

[SII (student union)] – Brandon University – BUSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – University of Manitoba – UMSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – University of Winnipeg – UWSA Food Bank

ONTARIO

[SII (student union)] – Algoma University – Student Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Brock University – BUSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Carleton University – CUSA Food Centre

[SII (student union)] – Lakehead University – LUSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Laurentian University – Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – McMaster University – Food Collective Centre

[SII (student union)] – Nipissing University – NUSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – OCAD – OCADSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Queen’s University – AMS Food Centre

[SII (student union)] – Toronto Metropolitan University – Community Food Room

[SII (student union)] – University of Guelph – CSA Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – University of Ottawa – SFUO Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – University of Toronto – Food and Clothing Bank

[SII (student union)] – University of Toronto – Mississauga – UFTSU Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – University of Waterloo – WUSA Food Support Service

[SII (student union)] – University of Western Ontario – USC Food Support Service

[SII (student union via womyn’s centre)] – University of Windsor – Iona/Canterbury College Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Wilfred Laurier University – Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – York University – YFS Food 4 Thought (On-Campus Food Bank)

[SII (student union)] – Conestoga College (Doon, Waterloo, Cambridge & Guelph campuses) – CSI Food Bank

[University run] – Fanshawe College – Sharing Shop

[SII (student union)] – George Brown College – Food Bank (St. James, Casa Loma and Waterfront campuses)

[SII (student union)] – Humber College – HSF Food Bank (North and Lakeshore campuses)

[SII (student union)] – Seneca College – Seneca Student Federation Food Bank (Markham, Newham and Seneca@York campuses)

[SII (student union)] – Sheridan College – SSIU Emergency Food Resource

NEW BRUNSWICK

[SII] – St. Thomas University – Student Food Bank

NOVA SCOTIA

[SII (student union)] – Dalhousie University – Food Bank

[Catholic Chaplaincy run] – Cape Breton University – Chaplaincy Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Mount Saint Vincent University – MSVU Campus Food Bank

[SII (student union)] – Saint Francis Xavier University – Student Food Resource Centre
[Catholic Chaplaincy run] – Saint Mary’s University – Student Food Bank

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

[University run] – Memorial University of Newfoundland – Campus Food Bank

List of Student-run Food Co-op Grocers:

[SII] – University of British Columbia – Sprouts (formerly UBC Natural Food Co-op)
[SII] – OCAD University – Campus Cupboard (Student Union)
[SII] – Concordia University – Le Frigo Vert
[SII (student union)] – Wilfried Laurier University – Mini-Market PWYC Grocery Store
[SII (Regenesi)] – University of Toronto – UofT Grocery Co-operative⁹²⁰
[Co-op run] – UQAM – Co-op Berri UQAM
[Co-op run] – Halifax, NS – Grainery Food Coop⁹²¹

List of Student-Run Food Services (Cafeterias, Cafes, Catering and Food Outlets):⁹²²

ONTARIO

[SII (student co-op)] – Collège Boréal – Boréal Coop – est. 1996

QUEBEC

In Development [SII] – Concordia University – EquiTable*

[SII (non-profit)] – Laval University – The Entithé – est. 2006

[SII (student co-op)] – Université de Sherbrooke – Café CAUS – est. 2009

List of Student-run CSAs (Community-Supported Agriculture):

[SII] – Canadian Mennonite University – CMU Farm CSA

List of Free Stores on Canadian campuses:⁹²³

ONTARIO

[SII (PIRG)] – Trent University – OPIRG Trent Free Market

[University run] – University of Ottawa – Free Store

[Partnership – University Housing / SII (Regenesi)] – University of Toronto
Scarborough – Free Store

[Partnership – University Sustainability Office / SII (Regenesi)] – University of Toronto
– Free Store (formerly Swap Shop)⁹²⁴

[SII (Regenesi)] – University of Toronto – Graduate Free Store

[SII (Regenesi)] – York University – Regenesi@York Free Store

⁹²⁰ Opening late 2026.

⁹²¹ Grainery Food Coop was founded as a student food co-op at Dalhousie by NSPIRG, and is now an independent food coop.

⁹²² Also see: *Cafés and Restaurant Pubs, Student-Run and Other > Multiple Operations* for more student-run food service operators.

⁹²³ Only free stores with physical space included, not pop-up markets.

⁹²⁴ Originally operated solely by University of Toronto facilities department, and only open Wednesdays 12-2 during the school year. Selection was limited to surplus furniture and lost items.

QUEBEC

[SII (Student Union)] – Concordia University – Swap Shop

List of PIRGs on Canadian campuses:

BRITISH COLUMBIA

University of Northern British Columbia – PGPIRG

Simon Fraser University – SFPIRG

University of Victoria – VIPIRG

ALBERTA

University of Lethbridge – LPIRG

University of Alberta – APIRG

SASKATCHEWAN

University of Regina – RPIRG

**forming – University of Saskatchewan – SPIRG – est. 2012*

MANITOBA

**former – University of Winnipeg – MPIRG – 1982-?*

ONTARIO

Brock University – OPIRG Brock – est. 1988

Carleton University – OPIRG Carleton – est. 1980

McMaster University – OPIRG McMaster – est. 1995 (1975)

Queen's University – OPIRG Kingston – est. 1992

Trent University – OPIRG Peterborough – est. 1976

University of Guelph – OPIRG Guelph – est. 1976

University of Ottawa – OPIRG-GRIPO Ottawa – est. 1977-2024 (*Closed due to de-funding referendum*)

University of Toronto – OPIRG Toronto – est. 1982

University of Waterloo – WPIRG (OPIRG Waterloo) – est. 1973-2018 (*Closed due to de-funding referendum*)

**former – University of Western Ontario – OPIRG Western – (Closed due to de-funding referendum) – est. 1977, closed mid-1980s*

University of Windsor – OPIRG Windsor – est. 1978 (1980)

Wilfrid Laurier University – LSPIRG – est. 2006

York University – OPIRG York – est. 1992

QUEBEC

Concordia University – OPIRG Concordia – est. 1980, student levy gained in 1989

McGill University – QPIRG McGill – est. 1980, student levy gained in 1988

University of Quebec at Montreal – GRIP – est. 1993

**former – Université de Montréal QPIRG – 1991-?*

NOVA SCOTIA

Dalhousie University/King's College – NSPIRG

Other⁹²⁵

The following are other student owned and operated sustainability services that exist or existed on Canadian campuses:

Borrowing Centre

- *[SII (REGENESIS)] – University of Toronto – St. George (Main Campus)
- *[SII (REGENESIS)] – University of Toronto – Mississauga
- *[SII (REGENESIS)] – University of Toronto – Scarborough
- *[SII (REGENESIS)] – York University

Brewing

- *former [SII] – Concordia University – Coopérative des brasseurs illumines*
- *former [SII] – OCAD/University of Toronto/York University – Fermentors' Cooperative*⁹²⁶

Community Food Centre

- *proposed [SII (REGENESIS)] – York University*

Community Kitchen

- *proposed [SII (REGENESIS)] – York University (Winters College)*
- *former [SII (faculty-based student association)] – Université de Sherbrooke – General Association of Students of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences and Humanities (AGEFLESH) – ?-2005*

Computer Repair

- [Student-owned (student union)] – Kwantlen Polytechnic University – ReBoot

Eco Store

- [SII (student union)] – Mount Royal University – Eco Store

Thrift Stores

- [SII] – University of British Columbia – Get Thrifty

⁹²⁵ While I attempted to make this as comprehensive and complete as possible, I cannot say this is not an exhaustive list.

⁹²⁶ Beer, wine and cider brewing co-operative hosted at the student housing co-operatives in Toronto.

Appendix C – Site Visits

I visited various student environmental organizations during my research and recorded my thoughts and observations—any observations of note are included in the environmental scan section in the main body of the dissertation. I visited the following organizations and initiatives during the course of my research:

Bike Centres

- BikeChain (University of Toronto)
- BikeShare (University of Toronto Mississauga)
- Coop Bécik (Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf)
- Regenesis Cycle York (York University)

Community Gardens and Agricultural Initiatives

- Concordia Greenhouse (Concordia University)
- Dig In! Campus Agriculture (University of Toronto)
- Glendon Community Garden (Glendon College)
- Macdonald Student-run Ecological Gardens (McGill University Macdonald Campus)
- Maloca Community Garden (York University)

Environmental Organizations

- ECOLE (McGill University)
- Polysphere (Ecole Polytechnique)
- Regenesis (various campuses)

Food Initiatives

- En Vrac (Université de Montréal)
- Le Frigo Vert (Concordia University)
- Lunik Co-op (Glendon College)
- Regenesis Youth Food Centre (University of Toronto)
- The Hive Solidary Co-op (Concordia University)
- The People's Potato (Concordia University)
- The Seasoned Spoon (Trent University)

Social Justice Organizations

- OPIRG Toronto (University of Toronto)
- OPIRG York (York University)

Appendix D – Images

This appendix has a series of photographs and graphics I collected throughout my research. I share them here with hope these images can better understand the dynamics of these organizations and their initiatives.



Figure: List of Dig In! Campus Agriculture locations in 2019 (From *Dig In! Campus Agriculture*).⁹²⁷

⁹²⁷ Dig In! Campus Agriculture, *op cit*.



Figure: A History of the Hive Café (both Main and Loyola locations) (From *Hive Café*).⁹²⁸

⁹²⁸ Hive Café, *op cit*.



Figure: The Loaded Ladle (From *Jessica Hirtle*).⁹²⁹

⁹²⁹ Hirtle, *op cit.*



Figure: Le Frigo Vert (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Le Frigo Vert (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Le Frigo Vert (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Former OPIRG Brock InfoShop at 10 Summer Street in St. Catharines⁹³⁰

⁹³⁰ The Brock News. *St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada*. 6 July 2011. The Brock News.



Figure: Former OPIRG Brock InfoShop at 73 St. Paul's Street in St. Catharines⁹³¹



Figure: Picture of the former OPIRG House at 372 California Avenue in Windsor⁹³²

⁹³¹ OPIRG Brock. *St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada*. 2009. OPIRG Brock Infoshop.

⁹³² Lindsay S. *Windsor, Ontario, Canada*. 2013. Foursquare.



Figure: MSEG (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: MSEG (Michael Jodah Kenny)

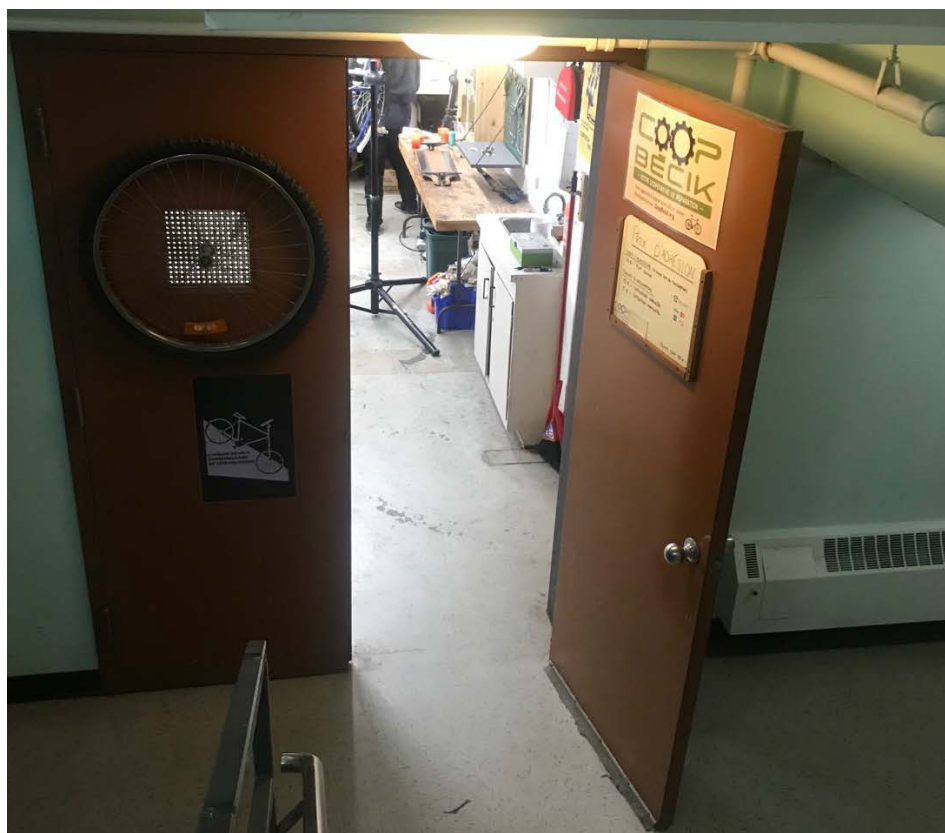


Figure: Coop Bécik (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Concordia Greenhouse (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Concordia Greenhouse (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Concordia Greenhouse (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: People's Potato (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Hive Café Solidarity Coop, Downtown Campus (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Hive Café Solidarity Coop, Loyola Campus (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Le Frigo Vert (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: Le Frigo Vert (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: ECOLE McGill (Michael Jodah Kenny)



Figure: ECOLE McGill (Michael Jodah Kenny)

Appendix E – Research Activities

This section provides an outline my research activities.

1. Review related literature.
2. Conduct surveys and field research (selected campuses and organizations) with current and former member-volunteers and staff/executives to determine:

Individual Factors

- a. Identify why participants get involved with a cause or organization.
- b. Identify why participants stay involved with an organization.
- c. Identify how participants view activism and volunteering.
- d. Identify long-term commitments to activism and volunteering.
- e. Identify personal benefits and drawbacks from participation.
- f. Identify the role of leaders in student-involved environmental organizations.
- g. Identify how and why students support these organizations.
- h. Understanding of organizational structures and governance.
- i. Identify how participants hear about student-involved environmental organizations.
- j. Identifying how organizations recruit and retain people.
- k. Identify how community is formed and maintained.

Educational Factors

- a. Identify how learning occurs (formally and informally) within student-involved environmental organizations.
- b. Identify the successes and/or failures of formal educational training and programs.
- c. Identify how environmental and social justice education is enacted within student-involved environmental organizations.
- d. Identify the roll of education within these student-involved environmental organizations.

- e. Identify how reflection takes place within these organizations and with their leadership.
- f. Identify if greater commitments to environmental sustainability and/or social justice have been achieved.

Organizational Factors

- g. Identify the organizational factors unique to student-involved environmental organizations.
- a. Identify structural, procedural or cultural issues that benefit or hinder participation, transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of organizations and their initiatives.
- b. Identify organizational legal structures and how decisions are made.
- h. Identify how student-involved environmental organizations start and grow.
- c. Identify reason(s) for closure of organizations and initiatives.
- d. Identify the challenges these organizations and initiatives face.
- i. Identify the ideal circumstances for student-involved environmental organizations.
- e. Identify how activism, politics and social movements is seen and enacted within these organizations.
- f. Identify environmental and social justice impacts.
- j. Identify other impacts of student-involved environmental organizations.

Contextual and Relational Factors

- a. Identify contextual factors (e.g. geographic location, institution population, etc.) that may have an impact on the success of student-involved environmental organizations.
- b. Identify institutional factors (e.g. attitudes, policies, connections, supportive administrators, etc.) that impact student-involved environmental organizations.
- c. Identify the relationships between these organizations, faculty and labour unions.

- d. Identify the relationships between these organizations, student unions and student clubs.
- e. Identify the relationships between these organizations, other organizations and the community.
- f. Identify the political contexts (local, national and international) that may have an impact on the success of student-involved environmental organizations.

Resource Factors

- a. For organizations with levies, determine what led to a successful levy campaign.
 - b. Identify the financial dimensions of student-involved environmental organizations.
 - c. Identify how space was obtained for initiatives.
3. Conduct an analysis of the collected data in order to describe the current situation of student-involved environmental organizations and establish suggestions based on the findings.
 4. [in-progress] Engage in knowledge mobilization through:
 - a. Social media
 - b. Press coverage
 - c. Research summaries
 - d. Website hosting materials and findings
 - e. Journal article(s)
 - f. Conference presentations

Appendix F – Survey questions – omitted questions and additional responses

Several survey questions were omitted in order to maintain conciseness. These survey answers and analysis are included here for future research consideration and do not contribute substantively to the core analysis.

Staff and Core Members

Question: Respondents by region of Canada

Respondents in this category were either current students or alumni (in most cases a graduate from the same university as the initiative or organization they work for). The response rate was close to proportional to the population of Canada, with two exceptions: Ontario (receiving a higher response) and the Prairies (receiving a lower response). I believe this is due to two factors: [1] the Prairies having fewer universities per capita, as older provinces, such as Nova Scotia, Ontario and Quebec, have significantly more universities per capita; [2] the political culture of the Prairies is more right leaning,⁹³³ making it less likely to have environmental organizations or initiatives at their post-secondary institutions.⁹³⁴

⁹³³ See historical federal and provincial electoral results. Right-leaning parties have won the large majority of federal parliament seats in the Prairie provinces since 1958.

⁹³⁴ Environmentalism is generally synonymous with the political left. See Eric Neumayer. “The environment, left-wing political orientation and ecological economics.” *Ecological Economics*, 51(3-4), pp. 167-175.

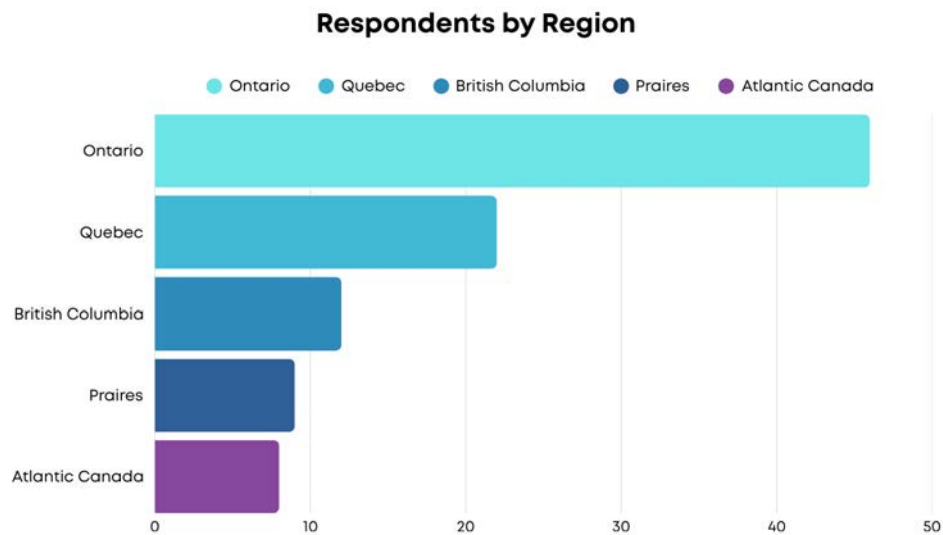


Figure 13: Responses by region (leaders and staff)

Question: Respondents by university size⁹³⁵

- 54.2% of all students attend 16 very large universities. Very large (35,000+) universities represent 19.18% of all universities in Canada. 37 respondents were from very large universities.
- 19.1% of all students attend 10 large universities. Large (20,000–34,999) universities represent 12.3% of all universities in Canada. 18 respondents were from large universities.
- 14.4% of all students attend 14 medium universities. Medium (10,000–19,999) universities represent 17.3% of all universities in Canada. 25 respondents were from medium-sized universities or colleges.
- 9.5% of all students attend 19 small universities. Small (4,000–9,999) universities represent 23.5% of all universities in Canada. 7 respondents were from small universities.
- 2.7% of all students attend 22 very small universities. Very small ($\leq 3,999$) universities represent 27.2% of all universities in Canada. 10 respondents were from very small universities or colleges.

⁹³⁵ Based on the latest enrollment data published by each university, available on Universities Canada (<https://www.univcan.ca/universities/facts-and-stats/enrolment-by-university/>), on Wikipedia, or their respective website.

Respondents from very large, large and medium universities made up most of my respondents. I believe the reasons for this include: [1] that larger universities are better resourced; [2] that larger universities tend to be in major population centres, and larger cities tend to be more progressive ; [3] larger universities (and student unions) have systems in place that allow for student levies to go towards independent student organizations (while many smaller universities often don't), and large universities better fund and support student clubs ; [4] that the larger populations allow for more students to come together around causes they care about, such as the environmental, local food production, cycling, etc.

Question: Program (current or graduated from)

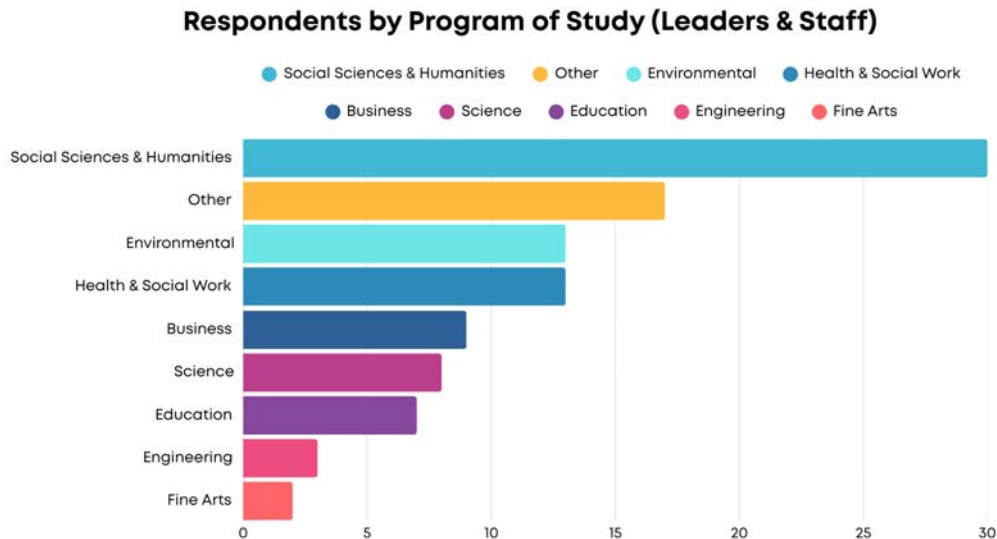


Figure 14: Responses by program(s) of study

Social Sciences & Humanities students and graduates make up the largest cohort, with 30 respondents, 9 of whom were from Geography programs. Students have different motivations for getting involved in extra-curricular activities (e.g. belief in the cause, wanting to make friends, etc.), but motivations related to career advancement (e.g. building experience in their field) is a primary reason why I believe we see a high portions of geography, environmental, and health-related students involved in environmental initiatives. Note that some respondents reported multiple degrees or

programs, as some of those involved were graduate students, had graduate degrees, or were in dual degree programs.

Question: Year of current program

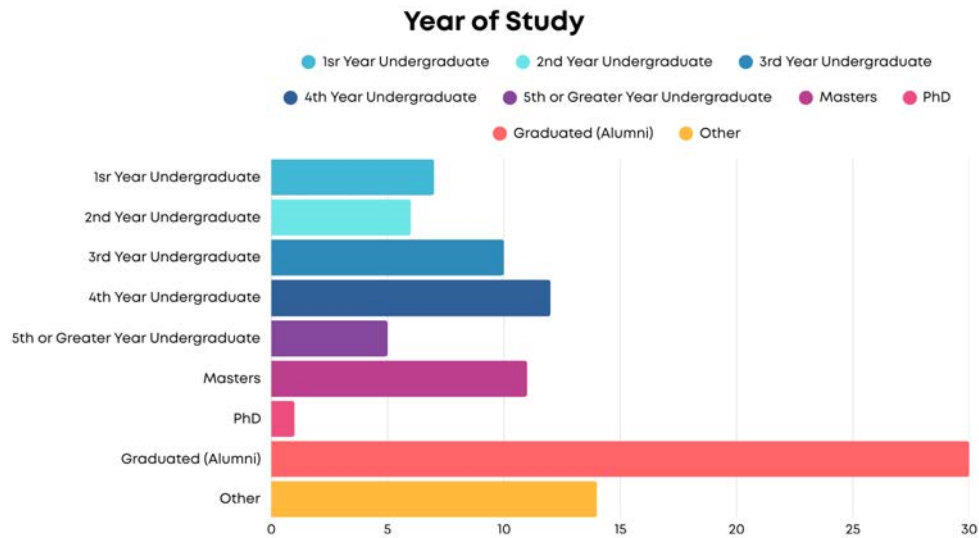


Figure 15: Year of current program of respondents (leaders and staff)

The respondents were a mix of undergraduate, graduate and alumni. The proportion of graduate respondents is representative, as graduate students typically make up between 0-20% of the overall student body population at most universities. Undergraduate students can get involved in any year, but typically leadership roles are taken up by upper year students, which is reflective in the responses (having more 3rd and 4th year undergraduate students). Many of those who work full-time for student environmental organizations are alumni, which is also reflected in the responses. Some employees, however, were not alumni at the campus where they work now.

Question: Role/position held (check all that apply)

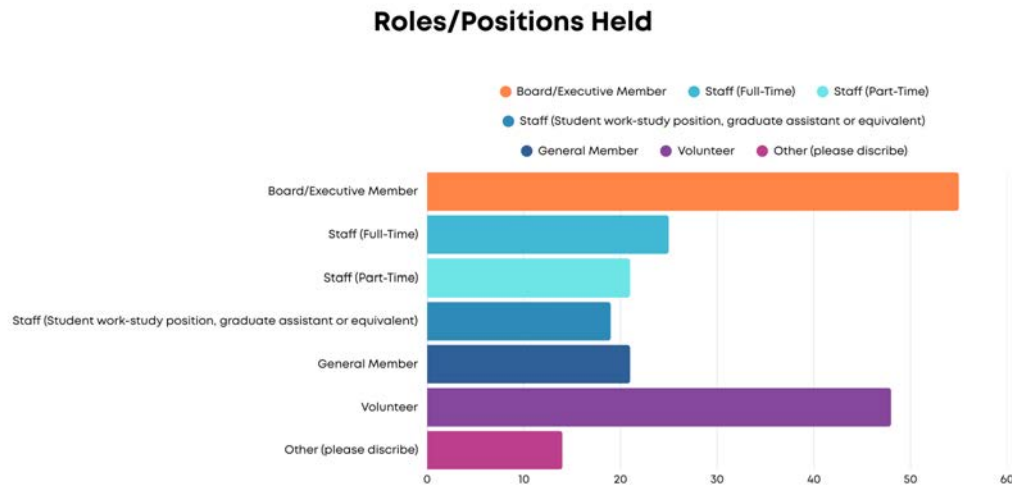


Figure 16: Role of respondents (leaders and staff)

Leaders in the organization who responded often held multiple roles in their organization, as such, I allowed respondents to choose multiple answers to this question. 56.7% of all respondents served as a board member currently or in the past. 25.77%, 21.65% and 19.59% of all respondents worked either as full-time, part-time, or student work-study staff currently or in the past. 49.48% of all respondents were volunteers during some point of their involvement. I also asked respondents to describe involvement. The roles varied widely, with many respondents holding different roles as their involvement grew over time. Many described their involvement as growing over time from a volunteer role to a board role and/or staff roles. Said one respondent, “there was a vacuum of leadership at the organization I quickly took on a large amount of responsibilities and began functioning as the coordinator.”⁹³⁶ Respondents include everyone from presidents (or executive members) of organizations, various staff roles including Executive Directors, PIRG staff, student union initiative coordinators (most often students working part-time), to volunteer leadership roles such as garden coordinators.

⁹³⁶ Owenetta (pseudonym), survey response.

Question: Length of involvement

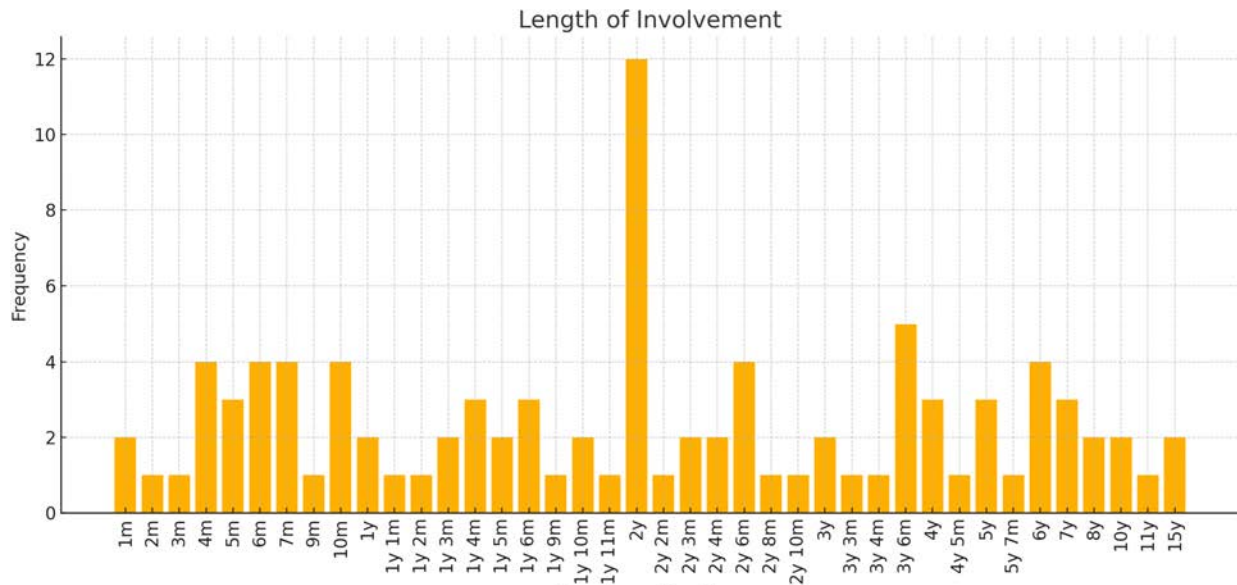


Figure 17: Length of involvement of respondents (leaders and staff)

Respondents indicated a wide array of answers, from one month to fifteen years, with the average (median and mode) being two years, and the mean average being two years, ten months.

The following are questions for the staff and core members (board, executive) that were included in the body and analysis of the dissertation, but low-frequency responses that were omitted but might warrant inclusion in the design of future research:

Question: What benefits does your organization provide that could be given as selling points to the university? (for example: education, reputation, quality of life, communication, services)

7.46% (5 respondents) spoke to social justice impacts. Less frequently mentioned (two or fewer) were benefits such as strengthening campus-community connections, providing

research opportunities, and attracting external funding to the university.

Question: How does your organization support broader social movements?

- Membership in coalitions or networks (2 respondents).
- Support of local businesses or farmers (2 respondents).
- Solidarity with other movements or causes (2 respondents)
- Advocacy (1 respondent).

Question: How does the organization contribute to improving campus life?

- Poverty relief (1) and job opportunities (1) were also each mentioned once.

Question: What (if any) are the ongoing challenges facing the organization?

Other challenges mentioned by two or fewer respondents included:

- Student union or student politics difficulties
- Infrequent or limited open hours
- Difficulty securing insurance
- Pest issues (in gardens or farms)
- Student apathy or overextension
- Conflict with or lack of support from the university
- Lack of suppliers or vendors
- Inadequate demand
- Internal capacity
- Bookkeeping and audit difficulties
- Political gatekeeping or cliquishness
- Absence of structure or defined roles
- Lack of institutional memory
- Unreliable board members
- Declining campus enrollment
- Poor quality of work
- Weak internal communication

Question: Imagine the organization in ideal circumstances, what would those circumstances be and how might the organization's practices/impacts differ?

Less frequently mentioned ideal conditions (each cited by three or fewer respondents) included:

- Access to more diverse products, food, or vendors (3 respondents)
- Increased and more stable funding (3 respondents)
- Longer opening hours
- Structured mentorship programs
- More initiatives
- More frequency and variety of events
- Improved volunteer reliability
- Students that care about the issues
- Operate all food operations on campus (instead of a for-profit multinational company)
- Having their initiative institutionalized (i.e. operated by the university)
- Increased donations
- Improved and greater training opportunities
- Having a national office to support chapters
- Being part of a network of similar organizations
- Mutual aid
- Stronger institutional memory
- An improved student union (more reliable, accountable, stable)
- Improved relationships with student unions
- That the organization needs to be taken over by better, less extreme people
- Proper financial recordkeeping
- Retention of people for more than two years
- Free tuition for all students
- Better pest control
- Improved chapter expansion process
- More efficiency operations and follow-through

- More equipment
- Integration with academic courses
- Larger customer base
- More effective or experienced staff

Question: Ideally, what level of resources would be needed? (e.g. more space, more money, more staff, more members, etc.)

Additional resource needs—each mentioned by three or fewer respondents—included:

- Increased campus visibility and engagement
- More customers (for revenue-generating initiatives)
- Professional expertise
- Extended operating hours
- More training opportunities
- Affordable rent
- Inflation-indexed levies (tied to CPI)
- Equipment and supplies
- Additional vendors (for markets)
- Strategic planning and auditing capacity
- More community or university connections
- Improved infrastructure (e.g., fencing and irrigation for gardens)

Question: What strategies would you recommend to other student organizations to help them acquire the resources they need to operate?

Other suggestions—each mentioned by two or fewer respondents—included:

- Leveraging university resources and facilities
- Building connections with faculty and academic departments
- Establishing a strong internal structure and governance model
- Being persistent and committed over time
- Recruiting a dedicated and capable team
- Conducting needs assessments or research before launching new efforts
- Fundraising

- Encouraging volunteerism and becoming more volunteer-led
- Hosting more events
- Demonstrating community need to justify funding
- Securing free or subsidized space
- Setting clear organizational goals
- Ensuring continuity year-over-year through documentation or mentorship
- Finding someone adept at navigating institutional politics
- Simply asking for help when needed

Question: What contextual factors (e.g. geographic location, campus political culture, local community) have impacted the organization positively or negatively?

Other less frequently mentioned factors (three or fewer respondents) included:

- Inadequate student involvement
- Provincial government decisions (in Ontario)
- Duplication of services by other campus organizations
- Declining student enrollment, which impacted both participation and levy-based funding

Question: How would you improve on formal training and educational opportunities?

Other mentioned suggestions included:

- Mentorship or job shadowing opportunities (3 respondents)
- More opportunities for feedback and Q&A (3 respondents)
- Streamlined training processes to accommodate students' limited time (2 respondents)
- Opportunities for course credit related to training or involvement (2 respondents)
- Less frequent suggestions (each mentioned by one respondent) included:
 - Seeking more input from members into training processes
 - Adhering to already-developed procedures
 - Making training mandatory
 - Offering placements
 - More field trips

- Increasing the training budget
- Running more awareness campaigns
- Making training more engaging
- Creating more self-led learning options
- Assigning a dedicated staff role for education and training

Question: What does it mean to think of the organization as an education organization?

Additional themes included:

- Raising awareness (e.g., sustainability, social justice, anti-capitalism, veganism)
- Learning about the organization
- Ensuring accessible and diverse education
- Career development
- Critical reflection and deep listening
- Serving as a learning resources and space
- Critical reflection and deep listening
- Applying what one learns to your own life

Question: How does the organization create space and time for reflection and discussion to occur?

- Conferences or retreats (2 respondents)
- Office hours (2 respondents), where staff or leaders were available to talk with members
- Gardens (2 respondents), used as quiet spaces for personal or group reflection
- Shared meals
- Social time outside of work
- Using a facilitator
- Collecting feedback through surveys
- Semesterly organizational reviews
- Staff check-ins
- Using coursework as a reflection tool

Question: How does the organization facilitate action based upon those reflections and discussions?

Other action-oriented practices, each cited by two or fewer respondents, included:

- Adjusting practices or programming as needed
- Integrating reflection into planning processes
- Using notes or records from meetings
- Encouraging behaviour change or new habits
- Utilizing reflection to inform decision-making
- Working with the student union to implement ideas
- Standardizing procedures
- Using meetings as both reflection and action spaces
- Relying on staff to carry institutional memory and ensure continuity
- Hosting events
- Using signage to remind members of procedures
- Doing outreach to involve broader membership
- Encouraging member-led initiatives or suggestions
- Defining organizational priorities through feedback
- Collaborating with external groups
- Developing or revising policies
- Debriefing
- Holding retreats to set direction
- Delegating action items for follow-through

Question: What departments support you or do you work with? Describe the relationship

Additional departments mentioned (with three or fewer responses each) included:

- Campus food services
- University residences
- Student life (club/student group administration)
- Health and safety
- Career centres

- University communications
- Community engagement offices
- Sports and recreation
- DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) office
- International student support office

Question: Universities are prioritizing experiential education. How could the organization take advantage?

Additional ideas included:

- Presenting in classes
- Offering more workshops
- Advocating for environmental involvement as a graduation requirement
- Enhancing the organization's credibility and profile
- Boosting connections between the campus and broader community

Question: How does the organization frame issues and programs to gain administration support?

Other strategic frames mentioned (with two or fewer responses) included:

- Strengthening community-university relations
- Supporting student recruitment and retention
- Offering research opportunities for students and faculty
- Demonstrating cost-effectiveness and fiscal responsibility in delivering services
- Using metrics and reporting to communicate impact

Question: Who drives university sustainability?

Other reported drivers included:

- Student unions (3 responses)
- Sustainability committees (2 responses)
- All stakeholders (2 responses)
- Faculty or professors (1 response)

Question: What is the relationship the organization has with community organizations? (charities, non-profits)

Other forms of collaboration mentioned included:

- Participation in organizational networks
- Joint advocacy
- Receiving donated space
- Community members volunteering with the organization

Question: Who are the allies of the organization and how do you support each other/work together?

Additional allies included (with two or fewer mentions each): environmental groups, the sustainability office, professors, specific academic departments, local farms or vendors, labour unions, and Regenesi chapters.

Question: How does the organization frame issues and programs to gain student support?

Other frequently cited frames included:

- Environmental sustainability, which many organizations tied to broader student values.
- Educational and leadership development, including acquiring new skills, experiential learning, and résumé-building.
- Highlighting opportunities for student involvement and agency, including the ability to shape the initiative or gain experience.

Less common themes (3 or fewer mentions) included:

- Advocating for political or social change.
- Emphasizing community and friendship.
- Visibility tactics, such as active tabling or advertising.
- Framing involvement as flexible or fun, to meet students where they are.

Question: What does your organization do (or could it do) to cultivate an activist culture that contributes to turning members/volunteers into lifelong activists?

Additional themes raised by respondents include:

- Being more friendly and less dogmatic
- Offering more inspiring events
- Generating more awareness
- Allowing for the creation of a community with shared goals and beliefs
- Promotion of self-care and avoiding burnout
- Aiding in people living more socially conscious lifestyles
- Allowing self-directed involvement
- Providing resources and space

Question: How does your organization recruit volunteers? What works best?

Additional methods included outreach through career or volunteer centres (3), general meetings (2), department newsletters or listservs (2), classroom announcements (2), and student newspaper articles (2). A few unique approaches were mentioned by one respondent each, such as campus signage, university-led promotions, placement students becoming volunteers, flyer distribution, open-door office policies, and the use of volunteer management software (e.g. simplyk.org). A couple of organizations reported not having volunteers at all.

Question: How do you retain volunteers and how do you deal with volunteer turnover?

Other strategies, each mentioned by two or fewer respondents, included:

- Having HR staff to support volunteer management
- Reminder emails or messages
- Recognition or certificates
- Giving volunteers responsibility or leadership opportunities
- Offering free stuff like food or access to resources (e.g. garden plots)
- Providing training and development
- Ensuring successful transitions and successions
- Tracking volunteer hours
- Being conveniently located on campus

- Running a regular newsletter
- Encouraging personal growth and learning opportunities
- Having a base of year-round volunteers from those who live on campus

Question: How does your organization cultivate and prepare volunteers for leadership roles (e.g. board/executive, staff, program managers)?

Less frequent responses (each mentioned by 2 or fewer respondents) included:

- Providing a manual
- Cultivating leadership through meetings
- Promoting available roles
- Relying on volunteers who are self-motivated
- Requiring prior involvement before assuming leadership
- Encouraging leadership through friendships
- Retreats or team-building events
- One-on-one check-ins
- Use of transition reports
- Having a facilitator assist in development
- Elections or interviews to determine leadership
- Use of formal job descriptions
- Outgoing executive selecting successors
- Occasionally pressuring volunteers to step up
- Having informal discussions about leadership opportunities

Question: What does the organization do to lead social and environmental change?

Additional responses, each mentioned by two or fewer participants, included: waste reduction, sustainable practices (eco-practices), organizing through working groups, community building, student empowerment, improving affordability, providing intensive training, promoting sustainable lifestyles, boosting the green economy, providing funding, hosting conferences, and fostering a friendly and less extreme political environment.

Question: What is the impact of your organization? What benefits does the organization create?

Other benefits mentioned (3 or fewer respondents) included:

- Health and well-being
- Free stores, including waste reduction and receiving free clothing
- Avenue for activism
- Reducing carbon footprint
- Shared values and interests
- Events
- Collaboration with other organizations
- Jobs and employment
- Personal growth
- Fun and enjoyment
- Providing funding
- Putting pressure on the university to make sustainability and social justice commitments
- Advocacy for university policy change
- Collective sustainable living
- Encouraging alternative thinking
- Stewardship of the environment
- Leadership development
- Supporting marginalized communities
- Friendships
- Encouraging critical thinking
- Access to free space and resources

Question: How does the organization impact university sustainability?

Additional responses (with 2 or fewer mentions) included:

- Pressuring the university and holding it accountable
- Events focused on sustainability
- Positive marketing/public relations for the university
- Waste reduction

- Awareness-raising
- Carbon footprint reduction
- Community connections
- Campus beautification through planting
- Shifting the Overton window on environmental issues
- Providing student jobs related to sustainability

Question: How does the organization impact university social justice?

Additional themes (mentioned by 2 or fewer respondents) include:

- Raising awareness around social justice
- Hosting events
- Collaborations and partnerships
- Hosting working groups on specific social justice issues

VOLUNTEER MEMBERS

Respondents by region of Canada

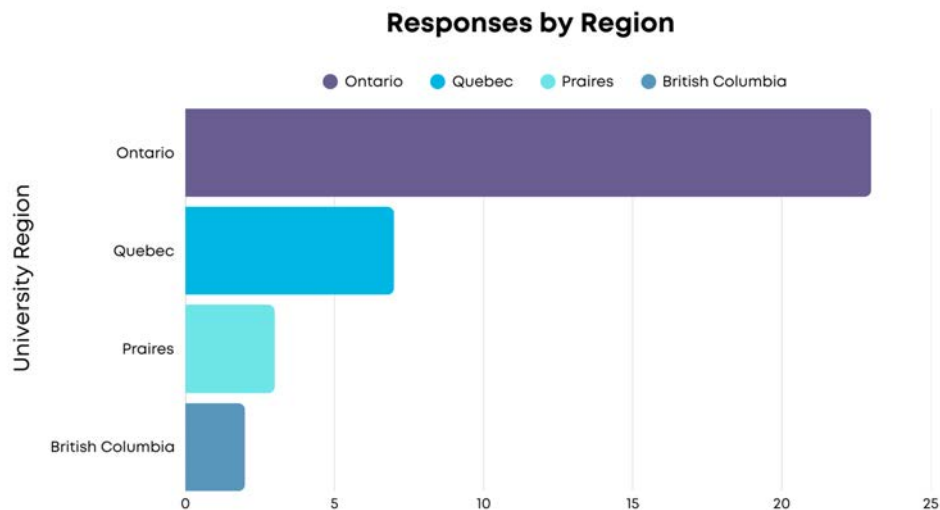


Figure 39: Responses by region (members and volunteers)

Survey respondents were drawn from multiple regions across Canada, with notable regional variation in participation. The majority of respondents (over 60%) were

affiliated with universities in Ontario, which contributed 24 volunteer responses. Quebec followed with 6 responses, while the Prairies (Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan) accounted for 3. British Columbia had the fewest participants, with only 2 volunteers. Notably, no respondents from Atlantic Canada participated in the survey, despite the region representing approximately 6.5% of the national population.

Program (current or graduated from)

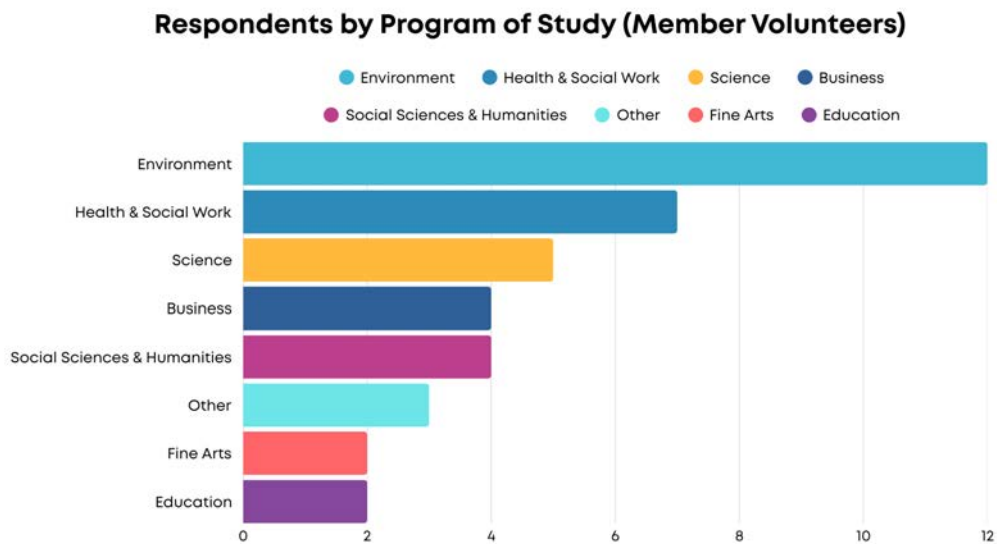


Figure 40: Responses by program(s) of study

While the largest proportion of respondents were enrolled in or had graduated from Environmental Studies programs (12 respondents), volunteer interest in campus environmental organizations came from a diverse range of academic disciplines. Health and Social Work were the next most represented with 7 respondents. Other areas of study included Science (5 respondents), Business (4), Social Sciences & Humanities (4), Other (3), Education (2), and Fine Arts (2). This distribution suggests that while environmental organizations naturally attract those studying environment-related subjects, they also engage students from a wide array of academic backgrounds, highlighting the interdisciplinary appeal of environmental causes.

Question: What are your future work/career plans?

This open-ended question was answered by 30 respondents, several of whom listed multiple possible career options. The responses reflected a wide range of interests, including conventional professional roles, socially engaged work, and alternative paths.

Commonly mentioned aspirations included:

- Teaching (4 respondents)
- Careers in the environmental field (4)
- Uncertainty about future plans (4)
- Health-related careers (3)
- Academia (3)
- Farming (3)
- Respondents already employed (3)
- No career mentioned (2)
- Seeking to leave the workforce or not interested in working (2)
- Travelling (1)
- Green energy (1)
- Bike repair (1)
- Non-profit sector (1)
- Scientist (1)
- Consultant (1)
- Researcher (1)
- Life coach (1)
- Yoga teacher (1)
- Social worker (1)
- International development (1)
- Outdoor work (1)
- Pursuing further education (1)

The following are questions to the volunteers that were included in the body and analysis of the dissertation, but low-frequency responses that were omitted but might warrant inclusion in the design of future research:

Question: What do you like about current training and educational opportunities?

Several additional strengths were each mentioned by one or two respondents, including:

- The fact that training was free

- Appreciation for formal learning structures
- Self-paced or flexible formats
- The novelty and enjoyment of learning something new
- Opportunities for self-improvement
- Resume-building potential
- Staff support during the learning process

Question: How would you improve on formal training and educational opportunities?

Additional suggestions included:

- Increased frequency and flexibility of learning opportunities (11.5%, 3 respondents)
- Mentorship programs (7.7%, 2 respondents)
- Use of visual learning materials, such as bulletin boards (7.7%, 2 respondents)
- Hiring educational staff (1 respondent)
- Creating more fun or engaging opportunities (1 respondent)
- Increasing educational support (1 respondent)
- Offering more experiential learning or educational events (1 respondent)
- Better tailoring opportunities to learner needs (1 respondent)
- Inviting external speakers (1 respondent)

Question: How does the organization contribute to improving campus life?

- Encouraging participation in broader social movements (1)
- Providing opportunities for community service (1)

Question: How has the community created by the organization contributed to your learning?

On the educational side, respondents highlighted:

- Skill development (1)
- Improvements in academic performance (1)
- General learning not otherwise classified (6)

Respondents also reported important social benefits, such as:

- Networking opportunities (1)

Other contributions to learning included:

- Access to space for learning and organizing (3)
- Self-improvement (2)
- Mutual aid (1)
- Attending events (1)
- Learning how to navigate bureaucracy (1)
- Increased passion or motivation (1)

Question: How has the organization helped you grow?

- Personal growth in general terms (11.76%, 4 respondents)
- Improved teaching skills (8.82%, 3 respondents)
- Problem-solving skills (5.88%, 2 respondents)
- Increased optimism (5.88%, 2 respondents)
- Improvements in personal health (5.88%, 2 respondents)
- Critical thinking skills (2.94%, 1 respondent)

Question: What are the benefits you get from your involvement?

- Opportunities for relaxation (3)
- Access to space or equipment (2)
- Greater commitment to sustainability (2)
- Experiences described as fun (2)
- Opportunities for teaching or mentoring others (2)
- General volunteering opportunities (2)
- The ability to create social change (1)
- Health improvements (1)
- Increased self-esteem (1)
- Work opportunities (1)
- Resume-building (1)
- Spending time outdoors (1)

Question: Are there any drawbacks to your involvement?

- Cost of transit fare was a barrier for 2 respondents.
- Difficult interpersonal dynamics—such as challenging customers or peers—were mentioned by 2 respondents.
- Lack of volunteer or staff capacity was also reported by 2 respondents, pointing to issues of burnout or overextension by the activities of the organization or initiative.
- Frustration with a difficult student union (1)
- Receiving negative feedback (1)
- Being too busy overall (1)
- Getting sunburned (1)
- Feeling there were limited opportunities for growth within the organization (1)

Question: How has the organization contributed to your university experience?

- Fun and enjoyment (2)
- Additional unique contributions mentioned included:
- Gaining experience (1)
- Physical activity (1)
- Engaging in community service (1)
- Personal development (1)
- Improved access to transportation (1), particularly through bike-related initiatives

Question: How does the organization contribute to improving campus life?

- Fostering a sense of community (3)
- Enhancing student well-being (2)
- Hosting events (2)

Appendix G – Invitation to participate

Hi,

I'm Mike, a PhD student at York University's Faculty of Education. My passion for the environment and related issues (food, cycling, social justice, etc.) lead me to create this research project on campus organizations that work on these and related issues. The goal of this research is to help campus organizations improve upon the member/volunteer experience and critical pedagogy education.

I will be sharing the results of this research with organizations such as yours, but I first need your help.

I am looking for individuals who are **currently or have previously been involved with your organization** to complete a survey. There are two surveys: Survey #1 is for organizers, leaders, staff and board members. Survey #2 is for all other members and volunteers.

Please select the survey most applicable to your role in the organization.

******Please forward the surveys to your current and past members, volunteers, staff, organizers, board/executive members******

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V9CRZ3R>

(takes about 30 minutes, depending on how detailed your answers are -

I have also attached the survey questions as a Microsoft Word file so you can prepare your answers before submitting them on Survey Monkey)

All who complete the survey in its entirety will be entered in a draw for **gift cards** (up to \$20 in value) to a store of their choice.

Submissions close will close in three weeks.

If you have any questions, I can be reached at:

Michael Kenny

Faculty of Education

York University

4700 Keele Street - Winters College 138

Toronto, ON M3J 1P3

campusorgresearch@gmail.com or ecomike@yorku.ca

Appendix H – Informed consent

Survey Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study: Towards an Ecopedagogy: Non-profit organizations and student experiences at the nexus of education and environmental action

Principle Investigator:

Michael Kenny, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University

You are invited to participate in a research study by Michael Kenny because you are involved with a non-profit organization at a Canadian post-secondary institution that is involved in environmental sustainability and related issues. This process is open any interested individuals eighteen and over. This research is being conducted by Michael Kenny as part of his doctorate dissertation.

In order to decide whether you want to be a part of this research study, you should understand what is involved and any potential benefits and risks. This form provides you detailed information about the research being conducted. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact Michael Kenny at 416-755-4382 or ecomike@yorku.ca.

Who can participate in this survey? Any current university student or recent alumni who has completed a minimum of 20 volunteer hours with the participating organization.

Why is this research being done? This research is being done to fill a void in existing education research relating to student involvement and education within the context of non-profit organizations at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

What is the purpose of this study? The goal of this study is to determine the current state of student involvement and education within the context of Canadian campus-based non-profit organizations involved in environmental sustainability and related issues.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this study? If you decide to volunteer to take part in this study, you will be invited to complete an online survey regarding your participation with a non-profit organization at a Canadian post-secondary institution. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes. Responses only visible to myself and my supervisor Dr. Stephen Gaetz. Participants will not be identified in publication.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of my participation? There are no physical risks involved in participating in this study. It is possible that you will become upset by the nature of the questions or topics being discussed. You may refuse to answer any question, and have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time.

What are the possible benefits for me? There may or may not be any direct benefits to you. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the organization.

What if I do not want to take part in this research study? Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and that participants may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to continue participating will not influence their relationship or the nature of their relationship with researcher or with staff of York University either now or in the future.

What if I want to end my participation early? You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

What information will be made public? All content provided during interviews, unless otherwise agreed upon, could be subject to publication. Personal data, other than the name of the organization, will be kept private. In the case of sensitive information, such as questions regarding interpersonal conflict, the name of all parties and the organization will be omitted. If there is any information that you completed on the survey that you would not want published, please email me your request at: ecomike@yorku.ca. All information will be kept indefinitely, in either electronic or paper format. All materials will be securely stored at the residence of the principle investigator. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. The address and contact information for all existing student-involved non-profit organizations at Canadian post-secondary institutions will be published. Should you request, a copy of my dissertation can be made available to you.

Will there be any costs related to my participation? There should be no additional costs to you personally for your participation.

Will I be paid or compensated for any costs for my participation in this study? You will not be paid or compensated in any way for your participation.

IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:

Michael Kenny
York University
353A York Lanes
4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
416-755-4382
ecomike@yorku.ca

Faculty of Education Graduate Program Office
York University
113 Winters College
4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
416-736-5018
gradprogram@edu.yorku.ca

This research has been reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. You may contact the Senior Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University, 416-736-5914 or ore@yorku.ca for information about your rights as research participants or questions about this process.

For ethical reasons, York University requires participants in research projects to be informed of the nature of the activities and their rights as participants, and sign a document to indicate that they are informed and participating willingly.

Informed Consent

I, _____ (please print), consent to participate in *Towards an Ecopedagogy: Non-profit organizations and student experiences at the nexus of education and environmental action* conducted by Michael Kenny. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks from if, I hereby agree to participate in this project. I further acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form and statement. I agree to participate in this research study, to have my survey responses recorded and to have my name or pseudonym disclosed in publication. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature of participant

Printed name of participant

Signature of principle investigator

Printed name of principle investigator

Date

Date

Interview Participant Information Sheet

Title of Study: Towards an Ecopedagogy: Non-profit organizations and student experiences at the nexus of education and environmental action

Principle Investigator:

Michael Kenny, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, York University

You are invited to participate in a research study by Michael Kenny because you are involved with a non-profit organization at a Canadian post-secondary institution that is involved in environmental sustainability and related issues. This process is open any interested individuals eighteen and over. This research is being conducted by Michael Kenny as part of his doctorate dissertation.

In order to decide whether you want to be a part of this research study, you should understand what is involved and any potential benefits and risks. This form provides you detailed information about the research being conducted. If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please contact Michael Kenny at 416-755-4382 or ecomike@yorku.ca.

Why is this research being done? This research is being done to fill a void in existing education research relating to student involvement and education within the context of non-profit organizations at Canadian post-secondary institutions.

What is the purpose of this study? The goal of this study is to determine the current state of student involvement and education within the context of Canadian campus-based non-profit organizations involved in environmental sustainability and related issues.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this study? If you decide to volunteer to take part in this study, you will be invited to complete an interview regarding your participation with a non-profit organization present at a Canadian post-secondary institution. The interviews will be conducted by myself, either in person or via teleconference. Interviews will take approximately 60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed, with the responses only visible to myself, my supervisor Dr. Stephen Gaetz, and my transcription assistant. Participants will not be identified in publication unless they express in writing their desire to share their name in publication.

What are the possible risks and discomforts of my participation? There are no physical risks involved in participating in this study. It is possible that you will become upset by the nature of the questions or topics being discussed. You may refuse to answer any question, and have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point in time.

What are the possible benefits for me? There may or may not be any direct benefits to you. You will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the organization.

What if I do not want to take part in this research study? Your participation in the research is completely voluntary and that participants may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to continue participating will not influence their relationship or the nature of their relationship with researcher or with staff of York University either now or in the future.

What if I want to end my participation early? You may stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you so decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event that you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

What information will be made public? All content provided during interviews, unless otherwise agreed upon, could be subject to publication. Personal data, other than the name of the organization, will be kept private. In the case of sensitive information, such as questions regarding interpersonal conflict, the name of all parties and the organization will be omitted. If there is any information that you completed on the survey that you would not want published, please email me your request at: ecomike@yorku.ca. All information will be kept indefinitely, in either electronic or paper format. All materials will be securely stored at the residence of the principle investigator. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. The address and contact information for all existing student-involved non-profit organizations at Canadian post-secondary institutions will be published. Should you request, a copy of my dissertation can be made available to you.

Will there be any costs related to my participation? There should be no additional costs to you personally for your participation.

Will I be paid or compensated for any costs for my participation in this study? You will be provided with monetary compensation (up to \$50) for your participation.

IF YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:

Michael Kenny
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This research has been reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Subcommittee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. You may contact the Senior Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University, 416-736-5914 or ore@yorku.ca for information about your rights as research participants or questions about this process.

For ethical reasons, York University requires participants in research projects to be informed of the nature of the activities and their rights as participants, and sign a document to indicate that they are informed and participating willingly.

Informed Consent

I, _____ (please print), consent to participate in *Towards an Ecopedagogy: Non-profit organizations and student experiences at the nexus of education and environmental action* conducted by Michael Kenny. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks from if, I hereby agree to participate in this project. I further acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form and statement. I agree to participate in this research study, to have my survey responses recorded and to have my name or pseudonym disclosed in publication. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature of participant

Printed name of participant

Signature of principle investigator

Printed name of principle investigator

Date

Date