
Georgetown University students catalyze win for living wage for university workers, 2001-2006

- [Student Living Wage Movement \(late 1990s - mid 2000s\)](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]
- [included participation by more than one social class](#) [3]

- [Student Living Wage Movement \(late 1990s - mid 2000s\)](#)

Timing

2001

to:

May

2006

Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Washington, D.C.

Location Description:

Georgetown University

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

To accomplish a living wage (approximately \$14.93/hour) for Georgetown University employees.

The right to unionize with card check neutrality.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 015. Group lobbying

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 015. Group lobbying

Methods in 4th segment:

- 015. Group lobbying

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 016. Picketing
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 038. Marches
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 6th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing
- 038. Marches

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 177. Speak-in

Segment Length:

Approximately 1 year

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Georgetown Solidarity Committee, Living Wage Coalition

Partners:

Not known

External allies:

US Rep. Stephen F. Lynch, US Rep. Michael H. Michaud, US Rep. Linda T. Sanchez, US Rep. Eleanor Holmes, Joslyn Williams, Metro Washington Central Labor Council, Catholic Labor Network (national organization), AFL-CIO (national organization)

Involvement of social elites:

Twenty Democratic members of the U.S. Congress supported the campaign

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Georgetown University students
- Georgetown University workers

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- AFL-CIO
- Catholic Labor Network
- Joslyn Williams

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Linda T. Sanchez
- Michael H. Michaud
- Stephen F. Lynch

Segment Length:

Approximately 1 year

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Georgetown University administration, President John J. DeGioia

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Total points:

9 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

While the campaign was quite successful, the University administration did not meet all demands, including the \$14.93 per hour wage.

The Georgetown Solidarity Committee (GSC) formed at Georgetown University in 1996 to support workers' rights. In the fall of 2001, a group of students, headed by the GSC, formed the Living Wage Coalition (LWC) in order to guarantee University workers an income to meet their subsistence needs. The students held meetings on how to take action and organized breakfast events with workers to hear their grievances and concerns. By 2002, the administration agreed to raise the minimum wage of workers directly employed by the university to \$10.25 per hour but did not address the pay of the many subcontracted workers.

Because of this, the campaign continued, now pushing for a living wage for all workers at Georgetown. Students organized worker appreciation events and planned meetings in order to listen to workers' concerns. The GSC also began to organize English-as-a-Second-Language classes for campus workers who wanted them.

On 17 March 2003, the GSC issued the Georgetown Living Wage Report, a twelve-page document outlining the group's demands in a living wage policy and discussing Georgetown's historical and cultural background involving social justice, Jesuit values, and the reality of campus workers' wage situation.

In 2004, students met with the Advisory Committee on Business Practices, resulting in promises for a small wage increase and health care for all workers.

In January of 2005, the GSC organized a rally at the university, bringing students and campus workers to talk about Georgetown's need to adopt a living wage for workers and improve workers' rights. The rally involved posters, chanting slogans, and speeches. In addition, speakers appealed to Georgetown University's Catholic Jesuit mission and called on the administration to support the campaign. The students also led a march on administrative buildings, taking their posters to the university president's office, and finally entering a Board of Directors Main Campus Budget Committee meeting to list the Living Wage Coalition's demands. The students entered the meeting unannounced and called for an increase in workers' wages to \$14.93 per hour, job security, access to university resources, the right to organize with card check neutrality, and transparency in the administration's implementation of a living wage. The board members were receptive and told the students that the matter would be further discussed.

In March of 2005, the LWC submitted a Living Wage Policy Proposal to the administration, giving them a deadline of 14 March by which they would have to respond to LWC's demands. The proposal contained the demands from January's march along with explanations of Georgetown's ethical obligations to provide a living wage for its workers and details on living wage in Washington, D.C.

When the University administration did not meet this deadline, the students decided to take more direct action. On 15 March 2005, twenty-six students began a hunger strike in order to bring attention to the need for immediacy in responding to living wage concerns. The hunger strike went on for nine days, during which the striking students reported difficulty functioning and concentrating, with one student taken to the hospital. GSC organized frequent rallies and marches to administrative offices with support from the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Catholic Labor Network, Joslyn Williams of Metro Washington Central Labor Council, and many other labor groups.

On 22 March, campaigners held a large rally in Georgetown's Red Square, gathering union representatives, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes, Vice President of AFL-CIO Richard Trumka, and others. When President DeGioia did not come out to meet with the protesters, Williams threatened to join the students' hunger strike if the administration did not give in by midnight of 23 March. On 23 March, many students returned to protest

outside the president's office, and by 10:30 pm, the administration broadcast a new wage policy, ending the hunger strike.

The University's Advisory Committee on Business Practices (ACBP) issued the Just Employment Policy, promising an increase in total compensation for full-time workers over the next two years. The minimum in 2005 was \$11.33 per hour; the Policy promised an increase to \$13.00 by 1 July 2005, and an increase to \$14.00 by 1 July 2007. The Policy's increases still fell short of the \$14.93 demanded, and card check neutrality was not given to the workers.

News coverage both on and off campus claimed a secure victory for the campaign by the end of March 2005. However, as the year went on, it became clear that the administration had not made the promised changes. In the fall of 2005, the LWC pushed the Georgetown administration to require its contractors to guarantee their workers the right to unionize with card check neutrality.

Due to this failure to meet the movement's demands, GSC continued its campaign. On 1 February 2006, students in GSC and campus workers were blocked from entering an ACBP meeting where they planned to protest for unionizing rights and a living wage, which were still not guaranteed to janitors after the Just Employment Policy of 2005. Georgetown Department of Public Safety officers restrained the protesters and kept them from interrupting the meeting.

In March of 2006, twenty Democratic members of Congress signed a letter to President DeGioia to ask him to support the workers' unionization rights. By the end of the spring semester, the janitors were given the right to organize through card check and they formed a union.

Research Notes

Influences:

The Georgetown University students' living wage campaign was influenced by Harvard University students' similar living wage campaign in 2001. (1)

Sources:

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[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/student-living-wage-movement-late-1990s-mid-2000s>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>

[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>