



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Lehigh University students pursue a Living Wage, increased appreciation for campus workers, 2005

- Student Living Wage Movement (late 1990s - mid 2000s)

**Time period notes:** *Exact date of the first formation of the activism is not reported.*

September

2005

to: 4 September

2006

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

**Location Description:** Campus of Lehigh University

**Goals:**

To increase appreciation for university employees and to promote a living wage on campus

## Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 021. Delivering symbolic objects › Appreciation council members served a meal to the workers in the campus dormitories.

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects › Appreciation council members served a Valentines day meal to the workers at the campus cafeteria.

**Methods in 4th segment:**

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

**Group characterization:**

- students (graduates and undergraduates)

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Lehigh's Progressive Student Alliance, Lehigh Workers Appreciation Council, Alexi Cherney, Liz Roth

**Partners:**

not known

**External allies:**

Dawn Liberto (organizer for the United Students Against Sweatshops)

**Involvement of social elites:**

not known

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- students (graduates and undergraduates)

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** *approximately 2 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Lehigh University administrators, Sodexo, One Source, Brickman

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

not known

**Campaigner violence:**

not known

**Repressive Violence:**

not known

## Success Outcome

### Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

1 point out of 6 points

### Survival:

0 points out of 1 point

### Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

### Notes on outcomes:

The worker appreciation campaign did not continue openly past Labor Day, early September 2006. It is possible that the contracts had since been renegotiated, but this information would not be publicly revealed.

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Lehigh is a university of 5,000 students located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The University provides campus food services, maintenance of facilities and campus grounds through contracts with corporations Sodexo, One Source and Brickman respectively.

On 23 April 2005 an organizer for United Students against Sweatshop, Dawn Liberto, gave a speech at Lehigh, in which she encouraged students to take increased interest in campus workers. Liberto called for a campus living wage, suggesting that students begin with appreciation lunches and then pursue contract provisions.

The Progressive Student Alliance was a campus group with 25 members that historically promoted liberal values at Lehigh. In 2005, the Alliance formed the Lehigh Workers Appreciation Committee, tasked with increasing student respect for campus workers. The Appreciation Committee held its first event in the fall of 2005, recognizing the maintenance staff for Taylor residence hall with gift cards and flowers. The Taylor staff members expressed thanks, and they reciprocated by preparing a lunch for student residents.

On 14 February 2006 students from the Appreciation Committee served a Valentine's breakfast to employees at the University Center, a dining hall on the Lehigh campus. Students wore red shirts, and they greeted workers with handmade Valentine's cards. Bakery worker Joe Feiertag presented committee members with a treat platter, saying "It's nice to be appreciated."

Sophomore Alexi Cherney followed by publishing an opinion piece in the student paper – titled "Recognizing our Ocean" - calling for students to be aware of campus workers.

On Labor Day, September 2006, Lehigh administrators observed the holiday, but students, faculty and staff still had regular work hours. The Progressive Student Alliance claimed this was an unfair discrepancy and protested out front of the University Center. Alliance members distributed fliers and shared free sandwiches, suggesting that their fellow students give dining staff a break. A number of students participated, but several were reportedly only interested in the food. Alliance members deemed the event a success, claiming it had forced students to think about labor issues.

Any subsequent Alliance activities on wage and worker appreciation were not publicly recorded. The Progressive Student Alliance appears to have directed attention to other causes, specifically environmental issues.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

On 12 October 2004, Rev. James A. Forbes II arrived at the campus with the National Council of Churches' "Let Freedom Roll" tour, a nonpartisan progressive campaign demanding higher minimum wages, inspiring students to take action against

“...economic and social injustices suffered by the poor and marginalized ...”. (1)

On 19 February 2010, the Lehigh University students formed Lehigh Valley Students for Workers and published a letter to the editor in the campus newspaper demanding a living wage for the university staff. (2)

On September 2005, there was a forty person rally in Bethlehem that promoted an increase to the Pennsylvania minimum wage. (2)

**Sources:**

“Activists Calls for Workers’ Rights.” Marissa Hassen. 26 April 2005. The Brown and White.

“UC Employees Appreciated on V-Day.” Jessica Herlihy. 17 February 2006 . The Brown and White.

“Recognizing Our Ocean.” Alexi Cherney. 17 February 2006. The Brown and White.

“PSA Urges Community to Remember Labor Day.” Katie Ginda. 8 September 2006. The Brown and White.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Hayden Dahmm, 08/05/2014

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**Links:**

[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>