

University of Arizona students campaign against sweatshop-produced apparel, 1997-1999

- [Student Anti-Sweatshop Labor Movement \(1990s - 2010s\)](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]

- [Student Anti-Sweatshop Labor Movement \(1990s - 2010s\)](#)

Timing

Fall

1997

to:

30 April

1999

Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Tucson, Arizona

Location Description:

University of Arizona campus

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

Students Against Sweatshops hoped to convince the University of Arizona to agree to the following:

Any contract or group into which the University of Arizona enters regarding the apparel industry must include full public disclosure of factory addresses for the companies involved and their subcontractors, a pledge to pay a living wage, a pledge to implement unannounced independent monitoring of factories, a pledge to enforce the protection of women's rights with respect to equal pay, non-discrimination, pregnancy and maternity leave, and freedom from sexual harassment. University of Arizona should withdraw from the Fair Labor Association and the Collegiate Licensing Co. if the organizations refuse to adopt these provisions. (Students Against Sweatshops Statement of Position, 1999)

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 014. Mock awards
- 016. Picketing
- 031. "Haunting" officials
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 050. Teach-ins

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 037. Singing
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 013. Deputations
- 035. Humorous skits and pranks
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 162. Sit-in
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

Segment Length:

Approximately 3 months

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice
Human Rights
Group characterization:

- University of Arizona students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Students Against Sweatshops co-founders Monica Wilson and James Tracy; group president Arne Ekstrom; members Avery Kolers, Laura Snow and Molly Snow

Partners:

United Students Against Sweatshops

External allies:

Organized Labor (AFL-CIO), National Labor Committee, UNITE, Global Exchange, Sweatshop Watch, University of Arizona Human and Labor Rights Task Force (represented by Andrew Silverman), Arizona Education Association, 31 UA faculty and staff members, Labor Party of Pima County, the Scholars, Artists and Writers for Social Justice, Southern Arizona People's Law Center, Food Conspiracy Co-Op

Involvement of social elites:

Noam Chomsky

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Sweatshop Watch
- United Students Against Sweatshops
- University of Arizona Students Against Sweatshops

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- AFLCIO and other labor groups

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Noam Chomsky

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Food Conspiracy CoOp
- Southern Arizona People's Law Center
- University of Arizona Human and Labor Rights Task Force

Segment Length:

Approximately 3 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

University of Arizona President, Peter Likins; Apparel companies with unfair labor standards such as Nike, Champion, and Fruit of the Loom

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Non-recognition, non-cooperation

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None 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:

Students Against Sweatshops were able to reach an agreement with the University in which it pledged to meet the goals set forth by the group (see additional information for the full text of the agreement). The agreement stated that the University would meet these goals at various intervals, none later than 2001, and it appeared to make every attempt to do so with the sole exception of withdrawing from the FLA.

While the overall membership of Students Against Sweatshops did not substantially increase between 1997 and 1999 (there were about twenty to thirty active members), they were able to partner with and gain the support of numerous local and national organizations. The group itself grew both in power and influence in order to affect change on campus.

Students Against Sweatshops originally formed in order to convince the University to reexamine their contracts with apparel companies. However, even after the agreement was signed, SAS continued its presence on campus and to work for increased labor and human rights

The anti-sweatshop movement was the largest student activism movement in the United States since the South African divestment movement over ten years before. Students all around the country pressured college and university administrators to adopt strict labor codes that guaranteed that merchandise bearing the college's logo was not made by people working under unacceptable, "sweatshop-like" conditions. Students at the University of Arizona along with students at many other campuses began actively promoting the campaign in 1997 after students at Duke University held the first major anti-sweatshop sit-in that fall (see "Duke students campaign against sweatshops, 1997-1999").

The students at the University of Arizona targeted the administration's support and contracts with major companies like Nike, Champion, and Fruit of the Loom, which paid the University royalties in exchange for the right to use their logo on apparel items. The students demanded that these companies ensure that their workers

were paid a living wage, did not discriminate against women, made public the locations and names of all their factories, and allowed independent monitoring of their practices.

Arizona students Monica Wilson and James Tracy founded the group Students Against Sweatshops in 1997, which soon after became involved with a national umbrella group, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS). This affiliation with USAS meant that the students at the University of Arizona could use the USAS' website and listserv to share ideas, compare tactics and strategies, and to define a "living wage" with numerous groups from other campuses. The University of Arizona's SAS used the website to keep other similar campus groups informed of their actions and to share moral support. In addition to being electronically connected via USAS, student activists also brought laptops and cell phones with them when they occupied administration buildings to stay in contact with other members of the group. In May of 1999, the USAS listserv heated up after the popular Fox television series Party of Five included a scene in which one of the show's characters, Sarah (played by Jennifer Love Hewitt), helped organize a Students Against Sweatshops sit-in on her campus.

However, before the movement had become nationally known, Students Against Sweatshops (SAS) was simply a developing group on the University of Arizona's campus. Their first campaign was targeted against a proposed \$7 million contract between the University and Nike. On February 25, 1998, about twelve SAS protesters picketed in front of the administration building and surrounded UA President Peter Likins as he walked by. They asked him questions about the contract to which he responded that he would like to put terms in the UA-Nike contract that would motivate the company to treat its workers better. Likins invited the protesters to attend a meeting where the terms would be discussed, but made it clear that students were "not yet part of the conversation".

Less than two months later, on April 21, 1998, Students Against Sweatshops, unhappy with their exclusion, staged another protest. "Christmas in April" featured a visit from Santa Claus who, along with several protesters, presented President Likins with "presents" of old Nike sneakers donated by fellow students in protest. Each pair of shoes had a tale of Nike's abuses attached to them for the president to consider when evaluating the Nike contract. SAS notified newspapers and television stations of the protest in advance and they were present to provide media coverage. Later that day, SAS hosted a teach-in on free trade and labor, which was attended by 50 students and community members.

Unfortunately, despite SAS' efforts, the University signed the contract with Nike on August 17. Earlier that month, realizing the likelihood of this event, SAS had decided not to oppose the contract but rather to focus on ways to void the deal if Nike did not comply with labor rights or its own code of conduct. SAS leaders compiled a list of independent labor monitoring groups and presented it to Likins with hopes that he would consider hiring a monitoring group to make sure Nike followed fair labor practices. Likins responded by including a clause in the contract that stated that the University had the power to call for the inspection of factories and if Nike knowingly violated its code of conduct or overlooked human rights violations made by subcontractors, the University could void the contract. Likins seemed to respect the efforts of SAS stating, "I have to give credit to SAS. They caused me to give extra consideration to determine whether an independent entity was necessary. It is very substantial step to put a clause like that in a contract."

However, SAS president, Arne Ekstrom, still had some reservations. "We feel that most of what the administration had done is empty," he said. "I don't think that most of the dialogue we have had was effective by any means."

It was during this time that Students Against Sweatshops gained the majority of their outside supporters. The national movement was receiving media attention and SAS worked hard to make their efforts known. Local groups and organizations responded to the students' calls for support and national groups and labor unions were

also backing these efforts. Renowned MIT linguistics professor Noam Chomsky as well as faculty and staff from the University of Arizona also put their faith in SAS's mission.

Students Against Sweatshops went on a slight hiatus during the winter of 1998 but reemerged with new energy the following spring. In March 1999, the group drafted a statement of position and sent a letter to all of the student groups and President Likins asking for their support of the anti-sweatshop campaign. The statement outlined the group's goals (full public disclosure of factory locations, a pledge to pay a living wage, allowing independent companies to monitor their labor practices, and a pledge to support the equal rights of female workers) and called for University of Arizona's withdrawal from the federal government's Fair Labor Association and the Collegiate Licensing Co. if the organizations refused to adopt these provisions. SAS received no response from President Likins.

On April 21, 1999, Students Against Sweatshops began their biggest and most influential action. Demanding Likins' endorsement on their workers rights resolution, over 100 students marched on the Administration Building. The protesters had invited the school's mascots and the "radical cheerleaders," and they marched through campus along with other SAS members and supporters. Once they reached the president's office, the protesters performed a skit ridiculing the UA's involvement with the Fair Labor Association and presented the president with a petition with more 1000 student signatures opposing UA participation in the FLA. Sixty-seven students then stayed to initiate a sit-in outside the president's office.

That night, 30 students camped out in Likins' office and continued the sit-in for 225 hours (almost 10 days – the longest protest of any prior USAS sit-in). The students brought games and homework and began working in shifts to ensure as many as possible could continue to attend classes. Food was donated by the Food Conspiracy Co-Op and legal council offered by Southern Arizona People's Law Center. However, with the exception of a police officer stationed overnight to ensure the student's safety, the University never called in law enforcement. Instead, President Likins sat down on the floor with the demonstrators and discussed their resolution for over an hour and a half. Likins agreed to support the resolution but would not commit to a deadline. This was not acceptable to the protesters, so they continued the sit-in outside the president's office.

After nearly ten days camped outside the president's office, the sit-in officially ended after 225 hours when Likins agreed to meet the student's demands. The protesters were invited into the conference room to watch as SAS officials and Likins signed documents designed to increase workers' rights in overseas factories that manufacture UA apparel. Likins agreed to the four main goals of SAS resolution and to withdraw from FLA by Aug. 1, 2000 if the organization did not place the four points in its own code of conduct. The University also agreed to create a six-person task force, made up both of faculty members and students that would work to ensure these points were met and to obtain factory locations for any companies who renewed or formed new licensing contracts with the University. While SAS member Avery Kolers was hesitant to call the protest a victory, he did say they group had made important progress toward their goals.

Five years later, in 2004, the Faculty Senate Task Force for Monitoring Human Rights and Labor Issues released a report on UA's progress. While they recognized the University's significant progress, especially with independent factory monitors, they also acknowledged it could do more. Sweatshop-free apparel had become standard in athletics but not yet in the student bookstore. And even though the task force had determined the FLA had violated its labor rights contract, Likins refused to withdraw. Overall, however, the University of Arizona's anti-sweatshop campaign is seen as a victory. The students and administration were able to reach a mutually acceptable agreement and work together to ensure workers' rights were protected and codes of conduct upheld and respected.

Research Notes

Influences:

The University of Arizona's anti-sweatshop campaign was part of a wider national movement that eventually included more than 100 campuses. It was sparked by a sit-in at Duke University (see "Duke students campaign against sweatshops, 1997-1999") and influenced by the numerous student-organized campaigns around the country (1).

Sources:

Williams, Tate. "Protesters say goodbye, pledge to continue battle." Arizona Daily Wildcat, 3 May 1999.

Dreier, Peter and Richard Appelbaum. "The Campus Anti-Sweatshop Movement." The American Prospect: Liberal Intelligence. 1 Sept. 1999.

Heubeck, Eric. "Behind the anti-sweatshop movement." Capital Research Center: Labor Watch. 19 July 1999

Additional Notes:

University of Arizona Labor Agreement - Signed Apr. 30, 1999

On April 30, 1999, University President Peter Likins and Students Against Sweatshops signed an agreement regarding labor abuses in factories known as "sweatshops" in which garments bearing the UA logo are manufactured. Among the agreements they made are the following:

1. The formation of an advisory Task Force to be composed of six people recommended by President Likins and six recommended by Students Against Sweatshops. The Senate Task Force for Monitoring Labor and Human Rights Issues must have its first meeting in Sept, 1999.

The Task Force, Chaired by Professor Andy Silverman, had its first meeting on Sept. 29 and has met eight times since. President Likins has joined them at two meetings at their request.

2. No later than Aug. 15, 1999, the university will notify its licensees through the Collegiate Licensing Company of the principles contained in the CLC code.

Provided the CLC with the attached letter to be sent to all 300 UA licensees by Aug 14.

3. By Nov. 15, 1999, licensees must incorporate the University of Arizona code into all new or renewed licenses.

On Nov. 30, 1999, the attached letter was distributed by CLC to every licensee for every University in their data base. No licenses were renewed or approved prior to this notification.

4. By March 1, 2000 the UA will adopt a policy for new and renewed licensing contracts to require that licensees release directly to the University Task Force the addresses of all factories involved in the manufacture of finished products and/or pieces thereof. This policy must be fully implemented by Sept. 1, 2000.

In February 2000, CLC and the University provided the Task Force a 95 page document containing approximately 900 factory locations.

5. Vigorous efforts will be made to adopt the disclosure and monitoring principles no later than March 1, 2000 and implement them by Sept 1, 2000.

On January 1, 2000, (two months ahead of schedule) the University of Arizona informed its licensees that they will be required to adopt the disclosure principles included in our labor standards. Approximately 80 percent of them have already provided the information.

6. By May 1, 2000, small companies must also be in compliance.

The University is already working with small licensees to assist them in providing the necessary information in time to meet the May 1 deadline.

7. On August 1, 2000, the University of Arizona commits to withdraw from the FLA if the FLA failed to adopt all four principles in its Code of Conduct.

Two of the four principles have been accomplished: full public disclosure as required by the University of Arizona, and the adoption of the principle calling for the enforcement of the rights of women.

8. Any goals adopted by the FLA must be implemented by six months after their respective adoption dates, and if all four goals have not been implemented by Feb. 1, 2001, the University will seek alternative means.

In addition to fulfilling the commitments to Students Against Sweatshops, the University of Arizona has taken an aggressive leadership role in eliminating labor abuses in factories known as sweatshops. The University participates as a voting member of the FLA's University Advisory Council, and has actively investigated three pilot programs aimed at increasing the pool of accredited monitors and assisting manufacturers in the process of identifying internal problems.

<http://uanews.org/node/2550>

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

Meghan Auker Becker, 14/02/2010

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