



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Washington University students sit-in to end university ties with Peabody Coal, 2014

- Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement (2010 - )

9 April

2014

to: 2 May

2014

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** *St. Louis, Missouri*

**Location Description:** *Washington University in St. Louis*

### Goals:

Peabody Energy CEO Greg Bocy to resign from the Washington University board, Chancellor Mark Wrighton to visit communities affected by Peabody's mines, the university remove the term "clean coal" from the Consortium for Clean Coal Utilization's name, and representation and voting power for students on the board of trustees.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects › Delivery of oversized letter
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 162. Sit-in

### Methods in 5th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 162. Sit-in

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 021. Delivering symbolic objects › 7 students attempted to deliver a letter to Greg Boycer
- 162. Sit-in

## Classifications

**Cluster:**

Economic Justice

Environment

**Group characterization:**

- Washington University faculty
- Washington University students
- and Washington University alumni
- local community groups

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Washington University Students Against Peabody Energy

**External allies:**

MORE (Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment)

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Students Against Peabody Energy

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

**Segment Length:** 4 Days

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Greg Boyce (CEO of Peabody Energy), Chancellor Wrighton and Provost Holden Thorp

**Campaigner violence:**

No campaigner violence

**Repressive Violence:**

Police arrived with riot gear and arrested 7 students at the 2 May 2014 board meeting, but did not cause significant physical harm.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

0 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**

2 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

They won no demands and the organizers shifted to working on a fossil fuel divestment campaign.

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The Washington University in St. Louis student campaign to cut the university's ties with Peabody Coal came after months of community organizing in St. Louis against Peabody Energy, one of the largest corporations in the city. During the spring of 2014, Missourians Organizing for Reform and Empowerment (MORE) organized around the "Take Back St. Louis" ballot initiative, which would prevent fossil fuel companies like Peabody from taking advantage of city tax incentives. MORE argued that the money should be used to support underfunded city programs and schools. After collecting 36,000 registered voters' signatures, they forced the city government to put the initiative on the ballot for April 2014. However, Jane Dueker, a lawyer and former Peabody lobbyist, successfully blocked the ballot measure by filing suit against the initiative, claiming it violated city laws.

Following the blockage of this ballot measure, Washington University Students Against Peabody Energy challenged their university's connection with Peabody. On 9 April 2014, a dozen students began a sit-in under the campus' iconic Brooking Archway calling for Peabody Energy Chairman Greg Boyce to resign from the Washington University Board of Trustees. While Boyce's resignation was their primary demand, they also called for Chancellor Mark Wrighton to visit communities affected by Peabody's mines, that the university remove the term "clean coal" from the Consortium for Clean Coal Utilization's name, and that students gain representation and voting power on the board of trustees. Later that day, students held a rally and teach-in about Peabody Energy in front of the occupation. They established a decentralized, consensus-based decision making structure based on open working groups.

As the occupation continued, student and community support grew. On 10 April, Students Against Peabody Energy held a rally with 100 students, alumni, and local community members. The rally featured speakers from communities directly impacted by Peabody. Throughout the sit-in, the group emphasized the human costs of Peabody's coal extraction, arguing that Washington University's relationship with the company was unethical. That evening, over 40 students camped out in tents under the archway.

On 11 April, 100 students, faculty, and community members rallied in front of Brooking Archway as Students Against Peabody Energy formally released the conditions that they said must be met for the sit-in to end. They demanded the removal of Greg Boyce from the Board of Trustees and that the Chancellor "attend community-organized tours of Peabody extraction zones and issue a public statement about his experience."

Following repeated displays of public support, Chancellor Wrighton offered to meet with the students on the morning of 12 April. Even though Wrighton was unable to cut ties himself, students called on him to take a public stance against Peabody, which he refused to do. Disappointed by the meeting results, 40 students and community members delivered an oversized letter

demanding he cut the university's ties with Peabody quickly after the meeting ended. In addition, alumni joined by pledging to withhold donations from the university until it ended ties with Peabody. By 14 April, over 50 alumni pledged not to donate.

On 19 April, 400 gathered for a rally in front of Brooking Archway that included speakers from areas affected by Peabody's coal mining, as well as student, faculty, and local community speakers. The students expanded their demands to include that the university remove the term "clean coal" from the Consortium for Clean Coal Utilization's name and that students gain representation and voting power on the board of trustees.

Following the 19 April rally and a meeting with students and community members impacted by Peabody's coal mining, Chancellor Wrighton and Provost Holden Thorp, according to students, agreed to go on a community-led tour of Peabody's impacts on Rocky Branch, Illinois. However, once students pressed them to tour Black Mesa, Arizona instead, they rescinded the offer to visit an impacted community. They refused to meet all other student demands.

As the sit-in continued, Wrighton and Thorp tried to reach an agreement with the students on 24 April. They offered to host a symposium on corporate social responsibility, allow student representatives to present Student Union resolutions to the board of trustees, and reconsider terminology used for scientific research, such as the name of the "Consortium for Clean Coal Utilization." The students rejected this offer and reiterated their full demands.

Later that evening, students shifted tactics and ended the sit-in, pledging to confront Boyce and the Board of Trustees directly. On 26 April students dropped a banner reading "May 1st," the first day of the Board meeting, "Greg Boyce, you shall not pass" and issued an ultimatum declaring that "Students Against Peabody has formally 'uninvited' Boyce to the meeting."

Students demanded action directly from Boyce and the board of trustees at their May Board meeting. On 2 May, 100 students and community members rallied outside the meeting in Knight Hall. For 30 minutes following the rally, students sat down in front of the building, yelling "Boyce, Boyce, go away, don't come back another day" and other anti-Peabody chants. St. Louis Police, carrying riot gear arrived to support the campus police in blocking the doors. After this chanting and blockading produced no results, 7 students attempted to walk into the meeting to deliver a letter directly to Boyce and were immediately arrested by St. Louis Police. The rally dispersed shortly after, marking the last action of the campaign. The students won none of their demands and the campaign ended, transitioning into a fossil fuel divestment campaign that fall.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

(1) Many students participated in the "Take Back St. Louis" Ballot initiative to end tax breaks for fossil fuel companies, Peabody in particular, within the city.

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

Stephen O'Hanlon, 08/03/2015

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[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/local-community-or-neighborhood-level-campaign>