

Go Green campaign proposal: Transition Universities

1. Issue and context

Starting in 2005 the Transition Town movement is made up of small groups working to shift their towns and villages to a low-energy future supplied by locally grown food and supporting businesses. The Transition model is designed for small groups or “Transition Initiatives” to show them how to firstly, engage their community on a large scale in the problems of peak oil and climate change, and secondly, use their collective energy to massively reduce energy usage.

2. What are the potential campaign objectives in this area and are they achievable by 2011?

Like Transition Town groups the campaign would aim to make the University ready for a low-energy consumption future. It could do this through getting the University senior management to publicly agree to:

1. Carry out comprehensive survey of campus energy use and available or potential resources (aka. “oil vulnerability auditing”).
2. Commit to offer more degrees and courses in environmental sustainability (including optional “tack-on” courses for undergraduates) and massively increase research focus towards localised and low-energy energy solutions.
3. Commit to a specific energy-use reduction (this could be per numbers of people, a gross figure, a percentage decrease, or even include specific targets such as percentage of energy from local renewables).
4. Open a collaborative process to devise an energy descent plan with students and staff with waypoint-targets ‘back-casted’ from the energy-use reduction goal (e.g. percentage cut by 2020).

As a response to the transient nature of University populations, the campaign would look to set up formal organisations to carry out this work in the University, rather than make the changes itself. For example, rather than looking to run its own food-growing schemes, a Transition University group would seek to lobby for growing space and eventually hand over its use to a separate society, the students union, or a University body.

3. Why would campaigning on this area lead to a “significant” environmental impact?

The Transition Towns movement is one of the fastest growing grassroots movements in the UK and a campaign that could harness this energy would lead to significant changes. There has already been interest in starting Transition groups in several Universities, and Edinburgh, is already campaigning on this.

4. Who must students target to achieve this?

The campaign will work with a three-streamed approach.

- Lobbying the university for institutional change will aim to embed the principles of local low energy living into all unis practices. Eventually the Universities will be encouraged to sign up to four specific targets which are outlined above.
- Students can host or arrange education and training to bring people into the project, explain the issues of peak oil and climate change, using successes in direct action projects and lobbying to explain the way forward, and training members of the group

- in skills they can pass on.
- Direct action projects will excite the community by showing them practical solutions and giving the University a vision of how they can make these changes themselves.

5. Explain how this campaign includes a range of possible actions and strategies catering for people with different skills, levels of experience and preference of campaigning methods in the network.

For each of the above streams there are a number of different possible strategies:

Direct Action Projects

- Set up a bike co-op or organise a bike workshop on campus.
- Set up an University allotment on campus land or near-by council allotments.
- Invite a farmers market to come to campus.
- Start a food co-op joint with a Transition project in your town.

Lobbying the University

- Get the support of your Student's Union for your demands.
- Organise a meeting with your Vice Chancellor explaining the problem of peak oil.
- Set up a working group with University officials to discuss the demands.

Education and Training

- Organise a film night or talk about Peak Oil.
 - Start a peak oil and climate change bookshelf in an accessible place on campus.
 - Organise trips to local Transition projects.
- Also see answer to 4.

6. What are the potential barriers or weaknesses of this campaign? e.g. Is this campaign objective applicable for all University groups?

- Three-streamed approach may be too much work for the majority of groups.
- There is potential overlap with the existing Go Green demands.
- Groups could become 'distracted' by the direct action projects and ignore the lobbying, meaning there is little lasting change.
- Includes areas new to P&P (local direct action intrinsic to the campaign).
- Energy descent plan is research intensive and may be beyond the comprehension of volunteers and beyond the interest of the University.

7. How would the new objective build upon the existing four factors?

Transition initiatives and People & Planet groups provide different approaches to environmental activism. Traditionally, P&P groups focus on lobbying decision-makers to make structural changes. Transition groups, on the other hand, focus on practical direct action. However, with the P&P Go Green campaign having reached the stage it has, and with Transition needing a more structural approach in order to succeed on campuses there is room for these methods to be combined.

Useful links for further research

Film explaining the 12 steps of Transition <http://transitionculture.org/2007/06/28/the-12-steps-of-transition-the-movies/>

<http://www.transitiontowns.org/TransitionNetwork/12Steps>