Manufacturing Dissent: Labor Revitalization, Union Summer and Student Protest

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During the late 1990s, college students across the United States mobilized around labor issues. Our research explores whether this explosion of student protest activity was generated, in part, by concerted efforts of the AFL-CIO through its Union Summer college student internship program. A statistical analysis of factors influencing the location of Students Against Sweatshops chapters and student labor protest confirms that the Union Summer program has successfully mobilized a generation of college students for labor activism. This research extends the labor literature by providing evidence of the revitalized labor federation’s success in forming bridges to non-traditional constituencies. Our findings inform social movement scholarship and studies of inter-organizational influence by demonstrating that a professional social movement organization can strategically generate mobilization among a new constituency.

“I credit Union Summer with every organizing skill I have, and Union Summer is basically the reason that I am active in political organizing.”

Female Union Summer participant

American college campuses saw a wave of student protests around labor issues during the late 1990s. Activists formed Students Against Sweatshops chapters to protest labor conditions in the garment factories used by university apparel manufacturers, graduate students turned to unionization in increasing numbers, and several high profile living-wage campaigns challenged pay practices on campus (Clawson 2003; Featherstone and USAS 2002; Lafer 2003; Walsh 2000; Wilton and Crawford 2002). These developments are particularly noteworthy given the supposed apathy afflicting American college students in the 1990s, and mark a qualitative change from student activism of prior decades where labor struggles were largely ignored (Greenhouse 1999). What accounts for this increase in student labor activism, and why did some campuses host labor protests in the late 1990s and early 2000s while others did not? In this paper, we explore these questions and examine the possibility that this wave of student labor protest

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was generated, in part, by concerted efforts of the American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations to engage college youth.

Although ties between young progressives and much of the labor leadership had been strained since the 1960s, in 1996, the AFL-CIO launched its Union Summer program to mobilize college students and recruit them to be union organizers through an intensive, month-long internship on an active labor campaign (Bunnage 2002). The program is part of a broader revitalization strategy by the AFL-CIO and some of its member unions to devote increased resources to organizing, an emphasis on militant tactics and, more generally, a return to labor’s social movement roots (Clawson and Clawson 1999; Cornfield and McCammon 2003; Voss and Sherman 2000). The jury is still out, however, regarding the success of contemporary grassroots labor mobilization efforts. Indeed, it was profound disagreement within the labor movement over the efficacy and direction of such revitalization strategies that contributed to the recent splintering of the AFL-CIO.²

Labor scholarship, moreover, has offered relatively little on the successes and failures of the union revitalization project (but see Turner 2005). Recent literature has informed our understanding of the range of union revitalization strategies and the conditions under which attempts at revitalization are likely to occur (Aronowitz 1998; Clawson 2003; Cornfield and Fletcher 2001; Mantius 1998; Meyerson 1998; Voss and Sherman 2000), yet much of this research remains descriptive and few studies have considered specific outcomes. In this article, we conduct a systematic evaluation of whether the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer program has been successful at generating sustained grassroots student activism, through a study of the program’s impact on the formation of United Students Against Sweatshops chapters and the incidence of student labor protest on college campuses. Exploration of this question has important implications for both scholarship on the American labor movement and social movement theory.

A significant and growing body of research demonstrates that social movement campaigns can critically influence and sometimes even inspire the mobilization of other social movements or movement organizations (Isaac and Christiansen 2002; McDaid 1988; McCammon 2001; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Minkoff 1995, 1997; Taylor 1989; Van Dyke 1998). Yet most studies present diffusion or inter-movement influence as an unintended consequence of social movement activity. Few studies, for example, consider McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) early proposition that professional activists and the formal organizations they inhabit may intentionally generate protest activity among members of a population. This type of influence, however, is somewhat unexpected for the case we study. The federation of labor organizations is an extremely large and bureaucratic organization whose member unions have long operated on a “business unionism” model focused on servicing existing members and negotiating with employers, rather than a social movement orientation focused on representing the interests of all workers through direct action if necessary (Turner and Hurd 2001). Typically, large, formal organizations do not engage in direct action (Staggenborg 1988). Our data on Union Summer activists and the locations of USAS chapters provides us with a unique opportunity to explore whether the AFL-CIO has been able to stimulate grassroots activism among college students.
Labor Revitalization, Union Summer and Students Against Sweatshops

The labor movement in the United States underwent a profound reorganization during the 1990s. In response to steep losses in membership and heightened employer opposition, many unions, such as the Service Employees International Union and the newly merged Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (now UNITE-HERE), began to reorganize themselves in the 1980s and 1990s. They began devoting considerable resources to organizing new members, employing more militant tactics, hiring activist-oriented leaders and reaching out to new constituencies including college students (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Cornfield and McAmmon 2003; Lopez 2004; Voss and Sherman 2000). Inspired by the efforts of more activist-oriented labor unions as well as frustration with declining union membership and a lack of institutional political support, AFL-CIO member unions elected John Sweeney and his slate of insurgent candidates to the top of the AFL-CIO leadership in 1995. The new leadership immediately re-organized the federation’s budget so that nearly one third of it, or $20 million, was devoted to organizing (Turner and Hurd 2001). The federation’s Organizing Institute, formed in 1989, was able to increase the scope of its programs and its presence on campus with the backing of Sweeney’s “New Voice” leadership. In the summer of 1996, the Organizing Institute implemented its Union Summer student internship program.

Each summer since 1996, the Organizing Institute has recruited college students to participate in Union Summer, a four- to five-week labor-organizing internship program. Students typically participate in a one-week training session in a central location such as Chicago, and then spend four weeks working on labor organizing projects at different sites across the country. Interns receive training on basic organizing and leadership skills and gain first-hand experience on campaigns to organize unions. Through the summer of 2003, more than 2,500 American college students participated (AFL-CIO 2003). The primary goals of the Union Summer program are to “(1) build union power by providing activists to assist on campaigns, (2) attract and commit new organizers to the labor movement (including more white women and people of color), and (3) instill a pro-labor sentiment among interns.” (Bunage 2002) On page 1 of the interns’ handbook, Agents of Change: A Handbook for Student Labor Activists, the institute’s bullet-pointed goals for “student labor activists” include “Educate the university community about the labor movement,” and “Move others in the university community to take action on labor issues.” (AFL-CIO 1999) Thus, while the primary goal of the program may be to recruit union organizers, inspiring college students to bring labor activism to their campuses is another explicitly stated goal. Anecdotal accounts suggest that the program has been successful in generating an increased commitment to labor activism on the part of students, and they credit Union Summer with the rise of campus-based labor mobilizations, including the growing anti-sweatshop movement (Dine 1997; Goldin 1996; Jordan 1999; Squires 1998).

Historical evidence also suggests that the first student anti-sweatshop campaign was influenced by Union Summer. One of the participating unions – UNITE, which represents apparel workers and has a vested interest in combating
sweatshops—helped initiate a campus campaign by having its summer interns research connections between sweatshops and collegiate apparel. It was one of these Union Summer interns, Tico Almeida, who organized the first student anti-sweatshop campaign at Duke University in the fall of 1997 (Featherstone and United Students Against Sweatshops 2002). Duke students and other Union Summer participants went on to help form the United Students Against Sweatshops in the spring of 1998 (Featherstone 2003; Featherstone and USAS 2002). USAS is a loosely organized network of college campus anti-sweatshop organizations, formed with the goal of eliminating the use of sweatshop-produced apparel by licensed university athletic apparel suppliers. In its first five years, USAS achieved some significant victories. In 1999, students at Duke, Georgetown, the University of Arizona, Michigan and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill all staged occupations of administration offices on their campus, and were successful in forcing their schools to commit to requiring the full disclosure of licensee factory locations (Esbenshade 2004). The group has also been active on other labor issues not related to the garment industry, including the working conditions of university employees, and in 2001 redefined its mission to include broader labor rights goals.

The student anti-sweatshop campaign represents not only an important contemporary student movement, but also the promise of efforts to forge new coalitions between labor, students and other constituencies and organizations. Clawson (2003), for example, argues that such campaigns “hold the potential for a new paradigm... that further expands the notion of ‘union,’ or perhaps replaces ‘union’ with ‘labor movement.’” Thus far, however, empirical studies have not weighed in on the outcomes of these efforts. As Turner and Hurd (2001) suggest, “In the absence of convincing evidence that labor has... reinvented itself as a social movement, we can conclude only that the prospects are uncertain.” In this study, we use insights from social movement scholarship to examine empirically whether one specific labor revitalization program has had success.

While there are both anecdotal and theoretical reasons for believing that Union Summer has influenced the student anti-sweatshop movement and student labor protest, other factors undoubtedly help explain the movement’s development and spread. Students have likely been influenced by anti-sweatshop campaigns publicized in the media, including the anti-sweatshop campaign against Guess Jeans in the mid-1990s. The spread of the movement may also have been influenced by political opportunities—given that anti-sweatshop campaigns, including college student actions, were publicized in the media, perhaps the movement spread to locations that had a political climate more favorable to labor protest. As a significant body of research demonstrates, mobilization is far more likely when activists have access to the political system and allies within it (for a review see Meyer 2004). Resource mobilization theory (McCabe and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978), moreover, suggests that new anti-sweatshop organizations may be more likely to form in resource-rich campus environments. While resources and political opportunities may have played a role in the emergence of the student anti-sweatshop movement and other student labor protests, they do not preclude an independent effect of the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer program. We explore the
theoretical reasons for expecting the program to have influenced student labor protest in the following pages.

**Inter-organizational Influence and Strategic Mobilization**

The idea that the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer internship program has helped inspire the formation of United Students Against Sweatshops chapters and other student labor protest actions is consistent with research on inter-organizational influence and diffusion. Studies of inter-organizational influence and social movement diffusion show that activism around one issue, or within one campaign, can profoundly affect subsequent mobilizations (McAdam 1988, 1995; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Minkoff 1995, 1997; Oliver and Myers 2003; Soule 1997; Strang and Soule 1998; Taylor 1989; Van Dyke 1998). Many periods of heightened mobilization, or cycles of protest, are generated by the diffusion of collective action from one set of actors to others, often through social networks (Oliver and Myers 2003). Isaac and Christiansen (2002) illustrate how civil rights mobilization helped infuse the labor movement with a new sense of militancy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while Voss and Sherman (2000) show how inter-movement exchanges of personnel played an important role in the revitalization of certain unions during the 1990s. This influence can happen through shared participants, organizational collaboration or through more indirect channels such as the media. While studies of inter-organizational influence and diffusion have advanced our understanding of social movement dynamics, they typically assume that the influence is an unintended consequence of movement activity.

Disentangling the intended and unintended consequences of social movements is, admittedly, a sticky process. While the labor federation may have preferred that students become labor organizers after participating in the program, having students bring labor activism back to their campuses was an explicit goal of the Union Summer program, as we stated earlier. And, some participating unions, such as UNITE, had a vested interest in, and helped support and initiate student anti-sweatshop activism. However, the federation undoubtedly did not anticipate that its program would help foster the formation and spread of student anti-sweatshop organizations in particular. As movement scholars increasingly recognize, the unintended effects of social movements often surpass the stated goals or demands of organizations (Giugni 1998). McAdam’s (1988) study of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s Mississippi Freedom Summer voter registration drive illustrates this point; Freedom Summer participants went on to play important roles in a host of other movements, demonstrating the far-reaching (if unintended) consequences of the program beyond the initial campaign. In this case, while the formation and spread of USAS may not have been a shared goal of all of the program’s participating unions, increased student labor activism (in one form or another) was one explicitly intended outcome of Union Summer. We argue that, at least in some cases, existing social movement organizations strategically attempt to generate mobilization among a previously un-mobilized population. Indeed, what distinguishes our case from much of the literature is that the AFL-CIO specifically targeted a population that previously had not mobilized for labor activism.
Our hypothesized relationship between the AFL-CIO’s Union Summer program and student labor activism thus recalls a classic resource mobilization question: Can a professional movement organization, through systematic resource allocation and strategic planning, initiate a social movement or independent direct action campaign? One of McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) earliest proposals as they developed resource mobilization theory was that social movements in the United States are increasingly dominated by professional activists who will fully generate protest activity. Early research within the RM perspective found some support for their argument (Berry 1977; Simcock 1979; Wood 1982). For example, Simcock (1979) found that natural scientists were instrumental in mobilizing the modern environmental movement. However, the question was largely abandoned after scholars such as Morris (1981) and Staggenborg (1991) convincingly demonstrated that the civil rights and abortion rights movements, respectively, were initiated by non-professional activists.

A considerable body of research demonstrates that organizations can significantly aid in protest mobilization (Dixon et al. 2004; Jenkins 1983; McAdam 1982, 1988; McCammon 2001; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Morris 1981; Taylor 1989), yet few studies have followed up on McCarthy and Zald’s early proposition. One exception is the work of McCammon (2001), which shows how national women’s suffrage organizations successfully inspired the formation of chapters throughout the United States by sending recruiters to help mobilize people and by providing resources for mobilization, including speakers, literature and funding. McCammon demonstrates that one of the means through which organizations can strategically generate new, independent organizations is by providing resources for local activists. It is unclear, however, if the same effect would be found for other cases. The AFL-CIO’s attempted mobilization of students is different from the suffrage activism in that the national labor federation has attempted to mobilize a particular subpopulation that is not the constituency most affected by labor issues.

The fact that students would not directly benefit from labor movement gains makes student labor protest notable. As Featherstone and USAS (2002) note, “USAS represents an unusual brand of labor activism... [as] large scale mobilizations over the labor of others have been relatively rare in history.” Although college students have historically been highly involved in many social movements, they are not known for their protest around labor issues. However, we are careful not to take an oversimplified view of contemporary American college students. Unlike in eras past, college students come from a range of social backgrounds, including the working class. Many college students work at low paying jobs to support themselves as they pursue a college education, and many have working class parents. Nonetheless, most students would probably not directly benefit from the implementation of labor reforms such as anti-sweatshop policies, and therefore they can be thought of as what McCarthy and Zald (1977) call conscience constituents or adherents, a group that supports a movement but would not directly benefit from the achievement of the movement’s goals. Conscience constituents may require a push from actors in the external environment and, indeed, may need to form a commitment to a cause, before they will engage in sustained activism on its behalf.
Little research examines whether and how professional movement organizations can strategically mobilize conscience constituents. One important exception is McAdam’s (1988) Freedom Summer study. McAdam conclusively demonstrates that participation in the intensive civil rights program changed the Anglo participants’ lives and influenced their subsequent political activism. The majority of the Freedom Summer activists continued their activism beyond the end of the summer project, playing an instrumental role in the civil rights movement, the Berkeley Free Speech movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement and the women’s movement. There are good theoretical reasons to suspect why an intensive, direct action program — including one like Union Summer, where interns live together and typically work 50 hours a week or more with unions, workers and other activists — might generate sustained activism among participants. Consistent with research on commitment processes, the design of the program likely facilitates a number of factors that are influential for any sustained activism, including collective empowerment (Hirsch 1990; Kanter 1968), consciousness raising (Hirsch 1990; Kanter 1968), and collective identity (Lichterman 1996; Gamson 1991).

McAdam’s (1988) work remains one of the most important studies of individual social movement participation to date, and we certainly draw on his insights. Our case and analytical focus, however, differ in important ways from McAdam’s study. Perhaps most important are the organizational differences between the subjects of our two studies. SNCC was a social movement organization with a direct action tactical orientation when it organized the Freedom Summer program. The AFL-CIO, in contrast, is a large, bureaucratically formal organization that, for the past 40 years, has encouraged negotiation with business to achieve its goals. Typically, formal organizations with a professional leadership are less likely to engage in confrontational direct action protest (Staggenborg 1988). The AFL-CIO is in some ways the epitome of a formal organization, one which some movement scholars had stopped classifying as a social movement organization many years ago.

While anecdotal evidence regarding the effect of Union Summer on student lives and protest activity is mounting (Bunnage 2002; Dine 1997; Greenhouse 1999; Jordan 1999; Squires 1998), few researchers systematically explore whether the program is influencing college student protest activity and organization formation across the country. We do so in this article, and predict that Union Summer is successfully generating student labor protest and influencing the formation of new SMOs.

Data and Methods

In order to examine the influence of Union Summer on college student protest activity and organization formation, we conduct two sets of quantitative analyses on a dataset of 1,933 four-year colleges and universities in the United States, nearly all of those included in the National Center for Education Statistics’ Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System survey. First, we examine the effect of Union Summer on the presence of a USAS chapter on campus. We then
explore the effect of having Union Summer participants and a USAS chapter on campus on the occurrence of student labor protest in the 2000-2001 school year.

**USAS Presence**

As described earlier, USAS was formed in 1998, and had 126 chapters initially. The first dependent variable measures the presence of one of these chapters on a college campus in 1998 and is coded “1” if the campus had a USAS chapter. Data for these analyses came from the USAS website (United Students Against Sweatshops 2000) as well as from unpublished figures provided to us by the organization. See Table 1 for descriptive statistics on the dependent and independent variables.

The key independent variable is whether any students from the school participated in Union Summer. The vast majority of Union Summer participants return to college the next fall. The analyses include a dummy variable coded “1” when students from the college participated in Union Summer in 1996 or 1997. The Union Summer program provided the data on which schools contributed participants. Of the 1,933 schools, 264 contributed Union Summer participants in 1996 and 1997.

Selection bias is a potential problem with these data. It is possible that some schools are more likely to have both Union Summer volunteers and USAS chapters because students on the campus are more attuned to labor issues or for some reason are more apt to engage in activism. In addition, the Organizing Institute sends organizing staff onto college campuses in order to recruit program participants, and therefore our findings may reflect the OI’s selection process rather than characteristics of the schools. We therefore include several variables in our models to control for this potential bias. First, there is a measure
of whether any students from the school submitted an application to a recruiter for the summer internship (other students sent applications in directly to the Organizing Institute). This measure is powerful because it controls for the fact that OI recruiters selected certain colleges to solicit applications. Second, we include two measures of the history of protest on campus. An Organizing Institute Recruiting Coordinator that we spoke with indicated that recruiters sometimes target activist-oriented schools and colleges. One variable measures the effect of having a strong activist culture on campus during the 1960s, and is in the form of a dummy variable coded “1” if the campus was host to a Students for a Democratic Society chapter by 1966. Schools that had an earlier SDS chapter would have had a longer and more sustained (and more publicized) activist culture on campus in the 1960s. This variable comes from a dataset used by one of the authors (Van Dyke 1998). Our second variable measures more contemporary student protest activity. This variable is a dummy coded “1” if any protest activity was reported on campus in the 1994-1995 school year. These data come from the Lexis-Nexis News Service. We searched the on-line archive, including both regional news sources and the campus newswire, for articles that mentioned college students and protests or demonstrations. Some 109 schools reported information about 184 protest events that occurred during the 1994-1995 school year. In addition to helping control for selection bias, these variables also help control for the fact that some schools may be more likely to host protest activity than others due to a history of activism on campus and the presence of activist subcultures (Lipset 1972; Soule 1997; Van Dyke 1998, 2003).

USAS chapters are more likely on campuses that have a licensing agreement with an apparel provider that has ties to sweatshops because students at these schools have a better target for action and opportunity to publicize grievances. We were unable to find data on which colleges have licensing agreements, but can measure the size of the athletic program on campus by the size of the athletic budget (in thousands). Colleges with larger athletic programs likely sell more collegiate apparel. These data come from the 1995-96 IPEDS survey. We also include a measure indicating whether the college participates in National Collegiate Athletic Association basketball or football. Presumably those colleges with NCAA basketball or football programs sell more collegiate athletic wear, and are more likely to have contracts with vendors that sell clothing made in sweatshops. These data come from the NCAA website (NCAA 2002).

We include several variables to control for characteristics of colleges that may influence levels of protest activity and the likelihood of an institution hosting a USAS chapter. Research consistently finds that larger and more elite schools are more likely to host student protest activity (Hodgkinson 1970; Lipset 1972; Soule 1997; Van Dyke 1998). Evidence suggests that early USAS chapters were more likely to form on elite campuses (Elliott and Freeman 2005; Featherstone and USAS 2002). Therefore, we include variables measuring the size of the enrollment at the school and the school’s quality ranking. The enrollment variable is in the form of a dummy variable coded “1” when the school had an enrollment size one standard deviation or more above the average or mean enrollment. We use a dummy variable rather than a continuous measure of the number of
students because the continuous measure caused a multicollinearity problem in the models. These data come from the 1995-96 IPEDS survey. To measure the school’s “eliteness,” we include a variable representing the school’s ranking, ranging from 1 to 5, from the *Gourman Report* (Gourman 1996).

Analyses also assess the influence of other potentially influential college characteristics on organization formation including a school’s public status, scored “1” if the college is a public institution, and the percent of the student population that is of minority status (African American, Native American, Hispanic or Asian). USAS chapters may be more likely at private schools, as these institutions may have more resources available for student organizations. Models include the measure of minority student presence due to the mobilization of identity movements among several American minority groups. These measures come from the 1995-96 IPEDS survey. Finally, the analysis includes two measures of the school’s social context. One variable measures whether the school is located in an urban setting. One might expect to see higher levels of student protest in more urban areas because students at these schools are more likely to be exposed to the social unrest that is common in larger urban areas. This measure comes from the IPEDS survey, and is a dummy variable coded “1” if the school resides in an urban area as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Models also include a measure of the state’s political context. Based on political opportunity theory (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1994; Tilly 1978), one might expect to see higher levels of student labor protest in more liberal states because students in these states might perceive the political climate to be more favorable to protest. This variable is a measure of the percent of the state’s legislature that was Republican in 1994, and comes from *The Statistical Abstract of the United States* (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1996).6

These analyses utilize logistic regression, which is appropriate for dichotomous dependent variables. Four models predict an early USAS chapter. The first model examines the effect of having Union Summer participants on campus. The second model adds measures to control for selection bias including whether recruiters received any applications from the school and measures of the history of activism, while the third and fourth models add variables measuring streetwalk protest opportunity and college and community characteristics respectively. Declines in the magnitude of coefficients across models indicate how prior protest and other pertinent institutional characteristics mediate the effect of union summer participants on USAS presence.

**Labor Protest on Campus**

The second set of analyses explores whether the presence of Union Summer participants and a USAS chapter is associated with a greater likelihood that the campus will have seen student labor protest activity in the 2000-2001 school year. The dependent variable for this analysis is a dummy variable coded “1” if the campus experienced student labor protest during the year. These data come from the Lexis-Nexis News Service, and the variable was constructed similarly to the control for prior student protest. Of the schools in our dataset, 40 saw student labor protest in 2000-2001. Because protest is more likely to be reported
at colleges included in the online newswire service, a control variable measures whether the newswire reported protest at the college in the 1994-1995 school year as described above.

Four models explore the factors influencing student labor protest activity. The first model examines the effect of Union Summer participants and applicants on student labor protest. The second model adds a variable measuring the presence of a USAS chapter in order to explore whether the influence of Union Summer participants operates through USAS organizations. Resource mobilization theory suggests that organizations, rather than lone individuals, are more likely to stage protest events. The third model confirms that the labor activist and organization effects are not the result of selection bias by including the measures of prior activism described earlier, including an SDS chapter in the early 1960s and prior protest activity in 1994-95. The fourth model adds controls for other institutional or community factors that may influence the incidence of protest activity, including institution size, elite rating, public status and minority composition, and whether or not a school is located in an urban area and the percent Republican of the state's legislature in which the school resides. Additionally, a variable measuring the school's level of funding for student services is included. This inclusion is based on resource mobilization theory, which argues that protest is more likely in resource-rich social contexts. It is not included in the first set of models predicting USAS presence because it is highly collinear with the size of the school's athletics budget.

Findings

Predicting United Students Against Sweatshops Chapters

In order to explore whether Union Summer participants have influenced labor movement activity on college campuses, this research examines their influence on the presence of an early United Students Against Sweatshops chapter. In the first model, we find strong support for our hypothesis. The presence of Union Summer participants is associated with a 17 times greater odds that an early USAS chapter will have formed on campus (see Table 2). Subsequent models show that various factors mediate this relationship. However, the Union Summer variable continues to have a positive, significant effect in all of the models. In the full model (Model 4), the presence of Union Summer participants is associated with a more than 200 percent greater likelihood that a USAS chapter will reside on campus.7

The second model indicates that recruiting and a history of activism explain some of this effect. The variables measuring whether recruiters received applications from the campus, the presence of an SDS chapter in the mid-1960s, and protest in the 1994-1995 school year all have a significant positive effect on the likelihood of an early USAS chapter. The magnitude of the Union Summer variable is reduced; in this model, the presence of Union Summer participants makes a USAS chapter 5.3 times more likely. The applicant variable and the SDS chapter variable continue to have a significant positive effect in models 3 and 4, while the variable for 1994-1995 protest becomes non-significant in the full
Table 2: Predicting the Presence of an Early United Students Against Sweatshops Chapter on Campus

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<th>Model 1</th>
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<td>Urban</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Republican in the State</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>-2.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislature</td>
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<td>(1.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-3.66***</td>
<td>-3.96***</td>
<td>-5.11***</td>
<td>-6.54***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.16)</td>
<td>(.17)</td>
<td>(.36)</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
<td>197.89</td>
<td>317.45</td>
<td>368.53</td>
<td>426.10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logistic Regression.

N = 1933

*p < .05    **p < .01    ***p < .001 one-tailed test

These results provide support for the idea that the OI may have selected colleges to recruit Union Summer participants based in part on their history of activism. The results also suggest that a history of activism may have influenced USAS chapter locations, however, the lack of significance for the 1994-1995 protest suggests that the history effect may be due more to recruiting than to the presence of an activist subculture.

Model 3 demonstrates that opportunities influence the formation of USAS chapters as well. The school's participation in NCAA basketball or football
increases the likelihood of an early USAS chapter by 369 percent. The amount the school spends on athletics also has a significant positive effect on USAS chapter formation in Model 3, however the coefficient becomes non-significant in the full model. The NCAA measure remains significant in the full model (Model 4), though the magnitude of the effect is reduced. These results suggest that a school’s ties to collegiate apparel manufacturers make it a more appealing target for student USAS chapters.

Model 4 includes variables measuring college and community characteristics. As in past research, larger and more elite schools are more likely to host a USAS chapter. Schools with a high student enrollment are almost twice as likely to have a USAS chapter, and each additional point in a college’s ranking increases the odds that the school will host a chapter by 3.4 times. The results also suggest that private schools are more likely to host a USAS chapter, as are schools with fewer non-white students. These results are counter to the results of past research, but may reflect the greater resources available for student organizations at private schools. We also find that students in more liberal states are more likely to form an early USAS chapter. Each additional percent of the state legislature that is Republican decreases the likelihood of a chapter by almost 1 percent.

These results provide strong support for our hypothesis that Union Summer has been successful at generating sustained student labor activism. Even when including powerful controls for selection bias and other institutional characteristics associated with student protest, the presence of Union Summer graduates greatly increases the likelihood that the school will host an early USAS chapter.

**Predicting Student Labor Protest**

In the second set of quantitative analyses, we examine whether the presence of Union Summer participants and USAS chapters increase the likelihood that the school will have student labor protest activity. In these analyses, the dependent variable is whether the school saw student labor protest activity in the 2000-2001 school year.

The first model explores whether the presence of Union Summer participants, controlling for recruits, increases the likelihood of student labor protest. The results are consistent with our hypothesis: schools with Union Summer participants are 5.29 times more likely to host student labor protest (see Table 3, Model 1). However, Model 2 suggests that this influence operates through the presence of USAS chapters. Inclusion of a variable measuring the effect of hosting a USAS chapter renders the Union Summer participant variable non-significant. This is not surprising – isolated individuals rarely organize protest events. The presence of a USAS chapter increases the odds that the school will host student labor protest activity by 14.8 times. This effect remains significant through the inclusion of additional control variables (models 3 and 4). Part of this effect is explained by selection and a history of activism on campus; both the variables for 1960s activism and for protest in the 1994-1995 school year are positive and significant (see Model 3). As mentioned earlier, this is probably due to the recruiting strategy of the Union Summer organizers, who aim their
Table 3: Predicting the Presence of Student Labor Protest on Campus in the 2000-2001 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Union Summer Participants on Campus</td>
<td>1.67***</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>-.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.47)</td>
<td>(.52)</td>
<td>(.59)</td>
<td>(.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Summer Applications from the Campus</td>
<td>1.58***</td>
<td>.81*</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>-.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.44)</td>
<td>(.47)</td>
<td>(.57)</td>
<td>(.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Students Against Sweatshops on Campus</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.70***</td>
<td>2.33***</td>
<td>1.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.47)</td>
<td>(.53)</td>
<td>(.52)</td>
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<td>Prior Activism:</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDS Chapter in the mid-1960s</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2.14***</td>
<td>1.41***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.49)</td>
<td>(.49)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Protest in the 1994-1995 School Year</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1.51***</td>
<td>1.13**</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.41)</td>
<td>(.43)</td>
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<td>College Characteristics:</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Enrollment</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Rating</td>
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<td>1.09**</td>
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<td>(.39)</td>
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<tr>
<td>High Level of Funding for Student Services</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.97</td>
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<td>(.70)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public School</td>
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<td>Percent Minority</td>
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<td>—</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(.53)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Republican in the State Legislature</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-5.07***</td>
<td>-5.32***</td>
<td>-5.49***</td>
<td>-9.23***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.31)</td>
<td>(.33)</td>
<td>(.34)</td>
<td>(1.52)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chi Square</td>
<td>75.77</td>
<td>115.34</td>
<td>150.50</td>
<td>177.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Logistic Regression.
N = 1933
*p < .05   **p < .01   ***p < .001 one-tailed test

Efforts at schools that are likely to have activist students. In the full model, schools with USAS chapters are 4.33 times more likely to have student labor protest activity on campus.

Consistent with prior research on student protest, student protest activity is more likely at more elite colleges and universities (see Model 4). Each one-unit increase in the college's rating is associated with a 3 times greater odds of student protest. More elite schools may be more likely to host protest activity either because of the greater resources they have available for student activities,
the presence of more activist-oriented faculty, or due to the relative affluence of the students, who may feel more self-efficacious or may be available for protest because they do not need to work while in school (Lipset 1972; McAdam 1988). Contrary to past research, the size of the college is not significantly associated with student labor protest. The two variables for community context, urban location and Republican state legislature, are also non-significant.

The results of the quantitative analyses provide strong support for the idea that Union Summer graduates continue their labor activism after the summer program and influence protest activity on college campuses. The presence of Union Summer participants on campus is associated with the presence of USAS chapters, and the presence of USAS chapters is associated with an increased likelihood of student labor protest activity.

Conclusions

This research makes several important contributions to the study of the American labor movement, the resurgence of college student activism and social movements more generally. First, we demonstrate that the AFL-CIO has been successful at inspiring grassroots labor activism among American college students. The presence of Union Summer participants on campus is associated with the formation of USAS chapters. The presence of USAS chapters, in turn, is associated with a greater likelihood of student labor protest on campus. While many scholars have noted the attempted revitalization of the American labor movement, few studies provide conclusive evidence that the federation has been successful at turning labor into a social movement. This study demonstrates that, at least in terms of college student activism, it has been successful at fostering mobilization. This case is particularly interesting because student activism around labor issues is relatively unexpected, especially given the fairly hostile relationship between the labor movement and student activism during the late 1960s. Many union members supported the war in Vietnam and sometimes clashed with the identity movements that arose during the period (Freeman 1993). That labor unions are now successfully reaching out to new constituencies, including college students, reflects a sea change in the organization.

These findings also have important implications for the study of social movements more broadly. We demonstrate that under some circumstances, a professional organization can successfully generate protest activity among conscience constituents. This finding supports McCarthy and Zald’s (1977) early argument that movement organizations run by professional activists can willfully generate protest activity among a segment of the population. One of the goals of the Union Summer program is to inspire students to bring labor activism back to their college campuses, and the program has been successful at doing so. Whether a program could inspire one specific form and outlet for activism remains to be seen – Union Summer was not designed to inspire antisweatshop activism in particular. However, the program clearly is successful at mobilizing college students for labor activism. While we would never argue that a similar process explains the origins of most social movements, the evidence we describe here demonstrates that it can happen.
College students are not known for their labor activism and, indeed, many of them would benefit only indirectly from gains won by the movement. However, many contemporary college students work their way through college or have working class parents, while others may be inspired to act altruistically (Giugni and Passy 2001), and a push from a resource-rich national organization may facilitate their doing so. The AFL-CIO has successfully recruited student activists to focus on labor issues. This does not mean that any organization can easily generate dissent among any population. For many participants, their established political views and experience with activism made them likely recruits, especially during times where other mobilizations against sweatshops were being publicized through the media (Featherstone 2002). In addition, the Union Summer program is an expensive and intensive operation that could not easily be sustained by organizations with fewer resources than the large Federation of labor unions. In 2003, the OL was forced to scale back the program and contemporary labor developments put the future of the program in doubt. Whether the program will continue to have the same effect remains to be seen. And, should the federation decide to cancel the program, student attention to labor issues and the anti-sweatshop movement may well wane. Future research should explore whether programs like Union Summer can have a sustained effect on student protest, even in the face of decreased attention and resources.

This research also challenges the assumption that SMOs inevitably proceed down an irreversible path toward increasing conservatism and tactical institutionalization over time. The nation’s highly bureaucratic federation of labor organizations has helped generate a large student-based movement against sweatshops that relies heavily on direct action to press for change. The nation’s largest, arguably most bureaucratic social movement organization has been able to generate new direct action campaigns through a strategic targeting of resources and the development of a program that facilitates a commitment to labor issues among college students. Time will tell whether this recent period of union renewal is ephemeral or represents a more fundamental change in the fortunes of the labor movement. Indeed, the labor movement is in flux and intense debate over these issues persists within and outside union circles. This research suggests that if organized labor is interested in mobilizing new constituencies and fostering labor activism, they may want to pursue and support programs like Union Summer that encourage organization building. The Union Summer model for mobilizing new constituencies for labor activism and union building appears to have great potential.

Notes

1. Personal communication.

2. Some of the unions that left the federation in 2005, most notably the Service Employees International Union, argued that such revitalization efforts did not go far enough, and were frustrated that the federation could not compel all member unions to carry out such changes. This paper offers an important (yet rare) assessment of one significant component of the attempted revitalization of the American labor movement in the 1990s and early 2000s.
3. The student anti-sweatshop movement operates as an independent movement, free of any control by, or affiliation with, the AFL-CIO.

4. Because we do not know the dates of USAS chapter formation after 1998, we only examine the effect of Union Summer participants on early chapters.

5. Based on the work of Charles Tilly (1978) and Doug McAdam and his colleagues (McAdam and Su 2002; Soule et al. 1999), we defined a protest event as any action that collectively expressed a grievance, was public and had a goal of causing or preventing social change. Student protests took various tactical forms, including demonstrations, petitions, marches, sit-ins and letter-writing campaigns, and were staged around a variety of issues, including women’s rights, anti-war, gay rights, environment and campus issues.

6. We also ran the models including a dummy variable measuring whether the school had a religious affiliation, but it was never statistically significant so we do not include it in the models presented here. A small number of schools were missing data for minority population and student enrollment. We employed mean substitution for these cases. We also examined whether the school’s regional location influenced the likelihood of hosting a USAS chapter or student labor protest. Because region dummies were non-significant in all of the models and did not significantly alter the results, we omit them from the analyses we present. Because Nebraska’s state legislature is non-partisan, we assigned the mean percent Republican value to schools in the state. We also ran models excluding the Nebraska schools and obtained comparable results.

7. We calculated likelihoods by transforming coefficients using the formula (\( \exp(b) - 1 \)) * 100.

References


Feathersone, Liza. 2003. Personal communication with author on Nov. 9.


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