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To cite this article: Sarah T. Romano & Wendy Highby (2018) Environmental Activism of Teacher-Scholars in the Neoliberal University, *New Political Science*, 40:3, 581-598, DOI: 10.1080/07393148.2018.1487112

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1487112>



Published online: 26 Jun 2018.



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ARTICLE



Environmental Activism of Teacher-Scholars in the Neoliberal University

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ABSTRACT

This article takes a case study approach to examine social justice-oriented environmental activism of faculty in the context of neoliberalism. As an evolving trend, university corporatization places new economic burdens on universities and their students and has contributed to a tenuous landscape for faculty in terms of academic freedom and job security. In particular, we examine a faculty-led response to hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado. Drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and campus-wide survey data, we document this response as a “tempered grassroots leadership” approach to workplace inquiry and activism. We discuss both the opportunities and limitations of promoting more transparent, informed, and inclusive decision-making on campus via internal and tempered activism strategies. Ultimately, this case presents lessons learned regarding social change practices of teacher-scholar-activists on college campuses. These experiences are especially germane in the “Trump era” of top-down and socially regressive decision-making.

Abbreviations: IHE: Institutions of Higher Education, TGL: tempered grassroots leadership, UNCO: University of Northern Colorado, HFTF: Hydrofracturing Task Force, NAS: National Association of Scholars.

Introduction

The election of Donald Trump to the United States presidency sharpened the perennial tensions experienced by teacher-scholar-activists in institutions of higher education (IHE). Most visibly, an upsurge in harassment of faculty and the formation of new chapters of alt-right campus groups like Turning Point USA¹ have centered new attention upon longstanding conflicts faculty experience while navigating their roles as teachers and scholars.²

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¹Turning Point USA was founded in 2012 (see <https://www.tpusa.com/>).

²Joshua A. Cuevas, “A New Reality?: The Far Right’s Use of Cyberharassment Against Academics,” *Academe* 104:1 (2018), pp. 24–28; Todd Richmond, “University of Wisconsin Approves Protest Punishment Policy,” *US News & World Report* (October 6, 2017), available online at: <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/wisconsin/articles/2017-10-06/uw-regents-set-to-vote-on-protest-punishment-policy>; Steve Mumme, “Julie Schmid Annual Meeting Address ‘The AAUP in the Trump Era,’” *AAUP Alert!* (Fall 2017), available online at: <https://www.scribd.com/document/366132662/AAUP-Alert-fall2017>; Laura Pappano, “In a Volatile Climate on Campus, Professors Teach on Tenterhooks,” *The New York Times* (October 31, 2017), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/31/education/edlife/liberal-teaching-amid-partisan-divide.html>.

Since Trump's election, navigating actual and perceived divides between the roles of teacher-scholar and activist has become increasingly complicated and at times dangerous for those with commitments to social justice within and outside of the university, and particularly perilous for faculty of color.³

University corporatization, reflecting a broad and ongoing societal pattern of neoliberal restructuring, contributes to an environment in higher education that constrains faculty roles and engagements. Indeed, "the restructuring of public higher education has paralleled that of government."⁴ In practice, the permeation of neoliberal logics and practices into IHE has entailed the defunding of public education and the infusion of IHE with private sector dollars and research agendas.⁵ These trends have placed new and compounding economic burdens on universities and their students, manifesting via issues like rising tuition (paired with growing student debt), increasing reliance on contingent faculty, and salary freezes. Emerging out of commodification trends and the overall infusion of educational institutions with economic and for-profit logics, corporatization has also shown up in the form of "top-down" management practices and openness to "accepting corporate donations with less scrutiny"⁶ as IHE administrations pursue new revenue streams in the face of budget cuts.⁷ Correspondingly, there is growing documentation of the *political* implications of private sector influence on IHE in terms of faculty research agendas and the related issues of "impartiality" and freedom of speech.⁸

³Terrance L. Green and Andre Castro, "Doing Counterwork in the Age of a Counterfeit President: Resisting a Trump-DeVos Education Agenda," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 30:10 (2017), pp. 912–19; Michael Ferguson, "The AAUP in the Trump Era," *Academe* 103:3 (2017), available online at: <https://www.aaup.org/article/aaup-trump-era#.WqwrnKjwbc>; Chris Quintana, "Under Fire, These Professors Were Criticized by Their Colleges," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 28, 2017), available online at: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Under-Fire-These-Professors/240457>; James Joseph Scheurich, "Scholars Respond to the Trump Regime: Varieties of Critique, Resistance, and Community," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 30:10 (2017), pp. 901–03; Laura Pappano, "Professors as Targets of Internet Outrage," *The New York Times* (August 2017), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/04/education/edlife/internet-trolls-social-media-professors.html>.

⁴Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, "The Neo-Liberal University," *New Labor Forum* 6 (2000), p. 73.

⁵As Schwartz explains: "The neoliberal state at all levels from the late 1970s onwards systematically decreased funding for public higher education and basic scientific research and shifted student aid from grants to loans. At the same time, both public and private universities came to conceive of themselves as corporate entities that aim to maximize student tuition revenue and corporate and philanthropic contributions while decreasing operating costs." Joseph M. Schwartz, "Resisting the Exploitation of Contingent Faculty Labor in the Neoliberal University: The Challenge of Building Solidarity between Tenured and Non-Tenured Faculty," *New Political Science* 36:4 (2014), pp. 504–05.

⁶Dean Caivano, Rodney Doody, Terry Maley, and Chris Vandenberg, "Critical Pedagogy in the Neoliberal University: Reflections on the 2015 York University Strike through a Marcusean Lens," *New Political Science* 38:4 (2016), p. 502.

⁷On neoliberalism and education, see also The American Association of University Professors, "The Annexation of Academia," *Academe* 102:5 (2016), available online at: <https://www.aaup.org/issue/september-october-2016>; Bronwyn Davies and Peter Bansel, "Neoliberalism and Education," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 20:3 (2007), pp. 247–59; Dean Caivano, Rodney Doody, Terry Maley, and Chris Vandenberg, "Critical Pedagogy in the Neoliberal University: Reflections on the 2015 York University Strike through a Marcusean Lens," *New Political Science* 38:4 (2016), pp. 501–15; Love M. Chile and Xavier M. Black, "University-Community Engagement: Case Study of University Social Responsibility," *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 10:3 (2015), pp. 234–53; James L. Fisher and James V. Koch, *The Entrepreneurial College President* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004); Penny A. Pasque and Rozana Carducci, "Critical Advocacy Perspectives on Organization in Higher Education," in Michael B. Paulsen (ed), *Higher Education: Handbook on Theory and Research* (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2015), pp. 275–33; Dilys Schoorman, "Resisting the Unholy Alliance Between a University and a Prison Company: Implications for Faculty Governance in a Neoliberal Context," *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies* 13:6 (2013), pp. 510–19.

⁸See, for example, Molly McCluskey, "Public Universities Get an Education in Private Industry: Can Academic Researchers Remain Impartial if They Are Beholden to Private Money?" *The Atlantic* (April 3, 2017), available online at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/04/public-universities-get-an-education-in-private-industry/521379/>; Some environmentalists, media outlets, and scholars have referred to "frackademia" as an ethically problematic industry influence upon university research – including that pertaining to oil and gas development (see, for example, Andrew C. Revkin, "A Deeper Look at Undisclosed Conflicts of Interest in 'Frackademia,'" *Dot Earth New York Times Blog* (August 1, 2012), available online at: http://dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/08/01/a-deeper-look-at-undisclosed-conflicts-of-interest-in-frackademia/?_r=0; Richard Schiffman, "Frackademia: How Big Gas Bought Research on Hydraulic Fracturing," *The Guardian* (January 9, 2013), available online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jan/09/fracking-big-gas-university-research>; Jen Schneider,

The current context of evolving neoliberalism and its counterpart, university corporatization, have been accompanied by alt-right criticism of social justice orientations, and even of the less-overtly politicized “civic engagement,” within IHE. As evidence of the latter, the National Association of Scholars (NAS)⁹ referred to civic engagement as a “movement” that seeks to “takeover [sic] the entire university.”¹⁰ The same report contends that a “new” brand of civic education is anti-free market and beholden to a progressive political agenda that “supports racial preferences in the guise of diversity; supports arbitrary government power in the guise of sustainability; and undermines traditional loyalty to America in the guise of global citizenship.”¹¹ The report reflects an outright hostility toward progressivism as well as an attempt to politicize engaged teaching and learning strategies – including service learning and alternative spring break programs – which have been demonstrably effective at increasing student learning and achieving course outcomes across academic disciplines.¹² These critiques, importantly, have a relationship to the promotion of right wing, anti-progressive agendas on campus through groups like Turning Point USA. These groups not only seek to challenge the social justice-oriented work of students and teacher-scholars on campus, they also aim to redefine the meaning of free speech and co-opt the notion of “tolerance,” redirecting it “to drown dissent against the Establishment, the constellation of corporate, military and state powers that administer and profit from late capitalism.”¹³ In other words, campuses are experiencing contexts in which “tolerance is ironically inverted into an instrument of oppression”¹⁴ through institutional pressure to tolerate – via silence and acquiescence – manifestations of injustice, discrimination, and racism.

These contemporary political-economic shifts have reshaped old, and created new, issues on college campuses, and have not gone unchallenged. University faculty, amongst other campus stakeholders, have engaged in organized responses, including protests, to various issues including racism,¹⁵ rising student debt and tuition,¹⁶ and limits on academic freedom (which a recent study by Jeffrey Adam Sachs revealed to impact “liberal” expressions at a higher rate than “conservative” ones in the Trump era¹⁷).¹⁸

“Frackademia, Divestment, and the Limits of Academic Freedom” (Boulder, CO: The 2015 Conference on Communication and Environment in Boulder: Bridging Divides: Spaces of Scholarship and Practice in Environmental Communication. International Environmental Communication Association, June 11–14, 2015).

⁹In the media, NAS is commonly referred to as a conservative advocacy organization. According to its website, “NAS is a network of scholars and citizens united by our commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in American higher education.” See <https://www.nas.org/about/overview>.

¹⁰David Randall, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* (New York, NY: National Association of Scholars, January 2017), p. 33, available online at: https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS_makingCitizens_fullReport.pdf.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 39. The institution of both authors, the University of Northern Colorado (UNCO), serves as one of NAS’s case studies in the report. UNCO is identified as have a “moderately extensive New Civics bureaucracy.” The campus centers included in the report as promoting this “new” civics includes the Center for Community and Civic Engagement; the Center for Honors, Scholars and Leadership; and the Student Activities Office.

¹²Elizabeth C. Matto, Alison Rios Millett McCartney, Elizabeth A. Bennion, and Dick Simpson (eds), *Teaching Civic Engagement Across the Disciplines* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2017); see also Alison Rios Millett McCartney, Elizabeth A. Bennion, and Dick Simpson (eds), *Teaching Civic Engagement: From Student to Active Citizen* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2013).

¹³Bryant William Sculos and Sean Noah Walsh, “The Counterrevolutionary Campus: Herbert Marcuse and the Suppression of Student Protest Movements,” *New Political Science* 38:4 (2016), pp. 516–32.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 517.

¹⁵For example, Sculos and Walsh, “Counterrevolutionary Campus”; Green and Castro, “Doing Counterwork in the Age of a Counterfeit President.”

¹⁶For example, The American Association of University Professors, “The Annexation of Academia.”

¹⁷Chris Quintana, “The Real Free Speech Crisis is Professors Being Criticized for Liberal Views, A Scholar Finds,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (April 3, 2018), available online at: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Real-Free-Speech-Crisis-Is/243284>.

¹⁸See also Norah MacKendrick, “Out of the Labs and into the Streets: Scientists Get Political,” *Sociological Forum* 32:4 (2017), pp. 896–02.

Attentive to the current pro-fossil fuel and anti-regulatory economic and institutional landscape related to the Trump administration, this paper examines campus-based environmental activism in the context of university corporatization. Specifically, we focus on activism pertaining to the issue of hydraulic fracturing on college campuses. Hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”), a method of unconventional oil and gas extraction combining horizontal drilling and high-pressure injections to “fracture” shale rock to release oil and gas, has been heralded as facilitating a natural gas boom in the United States beginning in the mid-2000s.¹⁹ Nationally, a number of IHE have been faced with the prospect of fracking underneath, or drilling near, their campuses. From Pennsylvania to Tennessee to West Virginia, universities have fielded leasing offers from oil and gas companies.²⁰ Although responses to these developments have been varied on the part of campus administrators, faculty, and students,²¹ tacit support for oil and gas development (via leasing of mineral rights or university land for oil and gas operations) within IHE raises important questions regarding faculty roles and engagement, campus governance processes, and the relationship of universities to the communities in which they are embedded.

Drawing on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and campus-wide survey data, this paper documents the campus-based, faculty-driven response to fracking at the University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) in Greeley, Colorado.²² In 2011, UNCO’s Board of Trustees(BOT) unanimously voted to allow hydraulic fracturing operations near and under campus; in so doing, UNCO joined all major educational institutions in Greeley that had signed mineral leases, including Aims Community College and the largest school district in the county, District 6 (K-12).²³ Two years later, concerned about the “behind closed doors” decision to lease and risks to campus welfare, several faculty members prompted the formation of a Hydrofracturing Task Force (HFTF) to examine this decision and its implications.

Examining activities of the HFTF from 2013 to 2015, we deem this faculty engagement an example of a “tempered grassroots leadership” (TGL) approach to workplace inquiry and activism.²⁴ The TGL approach refers to “the stimulation of social change or

¹⁹Stephen P.A. Brown and Mine K. Yucel, *The Shale Gas and Tight Oil Boom: U.S. States’ Economic Gains and Vulnerabilities* (New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2013), available online at: <https://www.cfr.org/report/shale-gas-and-tight-oil-boom>.

²⁰Scott Carlson, “Colleges Atop Gas-Rich Shale Weigh Offers from Drillers,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (June 27, 2010), available online at: <http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Atop-Natural-Gas/66059/>; Scott Carlson, “Public Colleges Feel the Heat from Gas Boom,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (July 16, 2012), available online at: <http://chronicle.com/article/Colleges-Feel-the-Heat-in-Gas/132873/>; Erika Celeste, “There’s Oil on Them Thar Campuses!,” *National Public Radio* (November 20, 2012), available online at: <https://www.npr.org/2012/11/20/165564546/there-s-oil-on-them-there-campuses>; Hollie Deese and Robbie Brown, “University of Tennessee Wins Approval for Hydraulic Fracturing Plan,” *The New York Times* (March 15, 2013), available online at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/science/earth/university-of-tennessees-fracking-plan-wins-approval-and-stirs-protests.html>; Kenneth L. Kutina and Ana B. Locci, “Analyzing Whether a College/University Should Drill for Natural Gas on Its Property,” *Planning for Higher Education* 42:1 (2013), pp. 67–72; Bill Schackner, “Drilling on Campus: Marcellus Shale Boom Puts Colleges at Crossroads,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (November 6, 2011), available online at: <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/environment/2011/11/06/Drilling-on-Campus-Marcellus-Shale-boom-puts-colleges-at-crossroads/stories/201111060278>.

²¹Sarah T. Romano and Wendy Highby, “Campus Organizing Towards the Democratization of Shale Oil and Gas Governance in Higher Education,” in John Whitton, Matthew Cotton, Ioan M. Charnley-Parry, Kathy Brasier (eds), *Governing Shale Gas: Development, Citizen Participation and Decision Making in the US, Canada, Australia and Europe* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018) [forthcoming].

²²UNCO is a public university with a student population of 12,000; it employs 1347 full-time and 370 part-time workers.

²³Two universities in counties contiguous to Weld County – Colorado State University in Fort Collins and the University of Colorado at Boulder – are parties to leases (Colorado Department of Higher Education and Joint Budget Committee, *FY 2015–16 Joint Budget Committee Hearing Agenda* (Denver, CO: State of Colorado General Assembly, 2014), available online at: http://www.tornado.state.co.us/gov_dir/leg_dir/jbc/2014-15/hedhr3.pdf).

²⁴Adrianna Kezar, Tricia Bertram Gallant, and Jaime Lester, “Everyday People Making a Difference on College Campuses: The Tempered Grassroots Leadership Tactics of Faculty and Staff,” *Studies in Higher Education* 36:2 (2011), pp. 129–51.

the challenge of the status quo by those who lack formal authority, delegated power or ‘institutionalized methods for doing so.’”²⁵ Like other forms of activism, TGL emanates from the bottom-up, yet contrasts in important ways. In particular, TGL arises in employees who question authority and seek change in their workplace yet refrain from confrontation that might be risky to undertake due to reputational or job security concerns. We use this case to draw attention to both the opportunities and limitations of promoting more transparent, inclusive, and environmentally responsible decision-making on campus via internal and tempered activism strategies. Ultimately, our experience demonstrates that TGL approaches to social change and social justice on the part of teacher-scholar-activists have the potential to be transformative in their disruption of business as usual on college campuses, and, in this case, in regard to their influence on short-term environmental outcomes. These lessons learned regarding TGL are especially germane in the “Trump era” of top-down and socially regressive decision-making.

Methodology

This paper is informed by extensive participant observation of the authors in HFTF meetings and organized campus events related to oil and gas development during 2013–2015. Both authors were active members of the task force from its inception in 2013 through 2015. Data are also drawn from a campus-wide survey (428 respondents, or 3.25 percent of faculty, staff, and students) the authors implemented in May 2014 to assess knowledge and attitudes about hydraulic fracturing, as well as awareness of the university’s mineral lease, amongst faculty, staff, and students. The survey was most heavily responded to by staff (fifty-seven percent), followed by faculty (thirty-seven percent). A small minority of the respondents (seven percent) were students.²⁶ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven HFTF members from January to May 2015; those participating had responded to an email invitation originally sent to all eighteen members (including the authors) in July 2014. The central themes discussed in the empirical part of the paper were inductively derived from the interviews and survey data. Finally, the paper is also informed by analysis of primary and secondary data sources including email communication from University administration to the campus community, newspaper articles, and the university oil and gas lease.

Faculty Environmental Activism in the “Era of Trump”

In a global context of accelerating climate change, dwindling freshwater resources, and worsening air pollution, the growth of unconventional shale oil and gas development has become one of the most politically contentious issues of the twenty-first century.²⁷ Viewed in international perspective, fracking operations in the United States may give the impression of a political consensus on this method of resource extraction even as the country finds itself

²⁵ John Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973), p. 32; Kezar, Gallant, and Lester, *Everyday People Making a Difference on College Campuses*, p. 129.

²⁶ The authors have several ideas – none conclusive – about why the student response rate was low. These include that the survey offered no incentives for participation and was administered near the end of the semester, close to finals week.

²⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report* (Geneva, CH: World Meteorological Organization, 2015), available online at: <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>; World Health Organization, *7 Million Premature Deaths Annually Linked to Air Pollution* (New York, NY: World Health Organization, 2014) [News Release], available online at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2014/air-pollution/en/>; Alexandra S. Richey, Brian F. Thomas, Min-Hui Lo, John T. Reager, James S. Famiglietti, Katalyn Voss, Sean Swenson, and Matthew Rodell, “Quantifying Renewable Groundwater Stress with GRACE,” *Water Resources Research* 51:7 (2015), pp. 5217–38.

immersed in an ongoing debate over fracking. Indeed, the United States' energetic embrace of new resource extraction technologies contrasts with other countries' more cautious approach.²⁸ United States shale plays produced over eleven thousand billion cubic feet of gas in 2013,²⁹ and President Obama linked natural gas and renewables together as "cleaner forms of energy" in his "all-of-the above" energy plan.³⁰ Since Trump's election, his administration has advocated for increased use of fossil fuels globally and has worked to roll back regulations impeding oil and gas development, including via fracking technologies.³¹

Yet a closer examination, particularly at the subnational level, reveals myriad political conflicts surrounding fracking. Concern has become particularly heightened regarding fracking's health, safety, and environmental impacts and regulation in urban areas. Residents across states with shale oil and gas formations, who may or may not identify as activists,³² have contested fracking-related industrial operations in close proximity to homes and schools, citing issues of air pollution, potential water contamination, and outdated emergency response systems, amongst others.³³ Concerns are also global in scope. Scientists, for example, have issued warnings that the "expansion of shale gas fracking is inconsistent with climate change mitigation" due to the rate of methane leakage from shale-gas wells and a carbon footprint that is similar to coal when compared over the long term.³⁴

²⁸The United States Energy Information Administration deems extraction of shale oil and gas resources "technically recoverable" in over a dozen countries worldwide (USEIA, "Shale Oil and Shale Gas Resources are Globally Abundant"), yet many countries have only warily begun to assess their shale reserves. Some, like France, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic in Europe, have opted to ban the practice completely (see BBC News, "Fracking Bid Should Be Approved, Lancashire Council Officers Say," *BBC News* (June 15, 2015), available online at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-33132569>; David Jolly, "France Upholds Ban on Hydraulic Fracturing," *New York Times* (October 11, 2013), available online at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/12/business/international/france-upholds-fracking-ban.html?_r=0; see also Arthur Neslen, "Majority of MEPs Support Fracking Moratorium in Symbolic Vote," *The Guardian* (June 10, 2015), available online at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/10/majority-of-meps-support-fracking-moratorium-in-symbolic-vote>; Mira Schirmeister, "Controversial Futures: Discourse Analysis on Utilizing the 'Fracking' Technology in Germany," *European Journal of Futures Research* 2:38 (2014), pp. 1–9.

²⁹United States Energy Information Administration, "Shale Oil and Shale Gas Resources are Globally Abundant," (January 2, 2014), available online at: <http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=14431>.

³⁰White House, "Advancing American Energy" (2015), available online at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/energy/securing-american-energy#energy-menu>.

³¹Lisa Freedman, "Trump Team to Promote Fossil Fuels and Nuclear Power at Bonn Climate Talks," *The New York Times* (November 2, 2017), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/02/climate/trump-coal-cop23-bonn.html>; Hiroko Tabuchi and Eric Lipton, "How Rollbacks at Scott Pruitt's E.P.A. Are a Boon to Oil and Gas," *The New York Times* (May 20, 2017), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/20/business/energy-environment/devon-energy.html>.

³²See, for example, Jessica Smartt Guillion, *Fracking the Neighborhood: Reluctant Activists and Natural Gas Drilling* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

³³For example, John L. Adgate, Bernard D. Goldstein, and Lisa M. McKenzie, "Potential Public Health Hazards, Exposures and Health Effects from Unconventional Natural Gas Development," *Environmental Science & Technology* 48:15 (2014), pp. 8307–20; Matthew Fry, David J. Hoehlinghaus, Alexandra G. Ponette-Gonzalez, Ruthanne Thompson, and Thomas W. LaPoint, "Fracking vs Faucets: Balancing Energy Needs and Water Sustainability at Urban Frontiers," *Environmental Science & Technology* 46:14 (2012), pp. 7444–45; Shaun A. Goho, "Municipalities and Hydraulic Fracturing: Trends in State Preemption," *Planning & Environmental Law* 64:7 (2012), pp. 3–9; Jeffrey B. Jacquet, "Review of Risks to Communities from Shale Energy Development," *Environmental Science & Technology* 48:15 (2014), pp. 8321–33; Sorell E. Negro, "Fracking Wars: Federal, State and Local Conflicts Over the Regulation of Natural Gas Activities," *Zoning and Planning Law Report* 35:2 (2012), pp. 1–14; Avner Vengosh, Robert B. Jackson, Nathaniel Warner, Thomas H. Darrah, and Andrew Kondash, "A Critical Review of the Risks to Water Resources from Unconventional Shale Gas Development and Hydraulic Fracturing in the United States," *Environmental Science & Technology* 48:15 (2014), pp. 8334–48; Stephanie A. Malin and Kathryn Teigen DeMaster, "A Devil's Bargain: Rural Environmental Injustices and Hydraulic Fracturing on Pennsylvania's Farms," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 47:A (2016), pp. 278–90; Roxana Z. Witter, Liliana Tenney, Suzanne Clark, and Lee S. Newman, "Occupational Exposures in the Oil and Gas Extraction Industry: State of the Science and Research Recommendations," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 57:7 (2014), pp. 847–56.

³⁴Philip L. Staddon and Michael H. Depledge, "Fracking Cannot Be Reconciled with Climate Change Mitigation Policies," *Environmental Science & Technology* 49:14 (2015), p. 8270; see also Madelon L. Finkel and Jake Hays, "The Implications of Unconventional Drilling for Natural Gas: A Global Public Health Concern," *Public Health* 127:10 (2013), pp. 889–93.

As “ground zero for the debate over hydraulic fracturing” in the United States,³⁵ Colorado has experienced several state-local “tugs-of-war” over fracking rules and regulations since Longmont residents voted to ban fracking in 2012. The vast majority of the state’s oil and gas production occurs in Greeley’s Weld County, which produced eighty-two percent of the state’s total output in 2014. As of mid-2015, Weld County had 22,493 active oil and gas wells.³⁶ With the exception of Boulder, each city to pass a moratorium was sued by the oil and gas trade association COGA – in some cases joined by the state’s regulatory agency, the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission. Similar to cases in Texas and Ohio, this legal activity has resulted in the “banning” of local fracking bans and moratoria by a state Supreme Court decision in 2016.³⁷

What has the debate over fracking looked like on college campuses? We contend that corporatization provides a point of departure for understanding universities’ leasing of mineral rights and/or campus land to oil and gas companies as a source of revenue. Indeed, IHE, like homeowners or other mineral rights owners, must confront the question of whether or not to lease their mineral rights and/or land for industrial activities as fracking operations move into densely populated urban areas.³⁸ To date, there is little scholarship on organizing or activism pertaining to fracking on college campuses, although several experiences with this issue have been documented via reports and websites. For example, at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, campus administration supported the creation of the Bousson Advisory Group in 2012 to investigate gas exploration on university property – in this case, on an Environmental Research Reserve atop the Utica shale formation.³⁹ The Bousson Group (composed of students, faculty,

³⁵Paul S. Enockson, “State Legislation: Will State Authority or Local Preference Regulate Colorado’s Fracking?” *Natural Gas & Electricity* 30:9 (2014), pp. 12–17.

³⁶Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, *Staff Report, Corrected* (July 20, 2015), available online at: http://cogcc.state.co.us/documents/library/Staff_Reports/2015/201507_StaffReport.pdf.

³⁷For example, Bruce Finley, “Colorado Supreme Court Rules State Law Trumps Local Bans on Fracking,” *Denver Post* (May 2, 2016), available online at: <https://www.denverpost.com/2016/05/02/colorado-supreme-court-rules-state-law-trumps-local-bans-on-fracking/>; Michael Wines, “Colorado Court Strikes Down Local Bans on Fracking,” *The New York Times* (May 3, 2016), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/colorado-court-strikes-down-local-bans-on-fracking.html>; see also Shaun A. Goho, “Municipalities and Hydraulic Fracturing.” The political tensions evident in public expressions of concern over fracking merit scholarly attention: they constitute part of the social and political processes contextualizing the industrial operations associated with fracking and have demonstrated the potential to influence the evolution of oil and gas development in urban areas (see, for example, Charles Davis, “The Politics of ‘Fracking’: Regulating Natural Gas Drilling Practices in Colorado and Texas,” *Review of Policy Research* 29:2 (2012), pp. 177–91; Matthew Fry, David J. Hoenghaus, Alexandra G. Ponette-Gonzalez, Ruthanne Thompson, and Thomas W. LaPoint, “Fracking vs Faucets”; Joel Minor, “Local Government Fracking Regulations: A Colorado Case Study,” *Stanford Environmental Law Journal* 33:1 (2014), pp. 59–120; Rachael Rawlins, “Planning for Fracking on the Barnett Shale: Urban Air Pollution, Improving Health Based Regulation, and the Role of Local Governments,” *Virginia Environmental Law Journal* 31:1 (2013), pp. 226–06; Sara Rinfret, Jeffrey J. Cook, and Michelle C. Pautz, “Understanding State Rulemaking Processes: Development Fracking Rules in Colorado, New York, and Ohio,” *Review of Policy Research*, 31:2 (2014), pp. 88–104.

³⁸Split estates (contexts in which home owners do not own the mineral rights under their property) and forced pooling (when mineral rights owners decline to sign but are “forced” into leases) are common in Colorado. See, for example, Stacia S. Ryder and Peter M. Hall, “This Land is Your Land, Maybe: A Historical Institutionalist Analysis for Contextualizing Split Estate Conflicts in United States Unconventional Oil and Gas Development,” *Land Use Policy* 63 (2017), pp. 149–59; Tyler Silvy, “Anti-Fracking and Won’t Sell, but Still Liable for Drilling Accidents,” *The Greeley Tribune* (July 19, 2017), available online at: <https://www.greeleytribune.com/news/local/anti-fracking-and-wont-sell-but-still-liable-for-drilling-accidents/>; and Cathy Proctor, “Bill Would Make it Harder to Pool Mineral Rights for Drilling in Colorado,” *Denver Business Journal* (April 13, 2017), available online at: <https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2017/04/13/bill-would-make-it-harder-to-pool-mineral-rights.html>; see also John Aguilar, “Mineral Owners Assert Property Rights in Colorado’s Oil and Gas Fight,” *The Denver Post* (March 5, 2016), available online at: <https://www.denverpost.com/2016/03/05/mineral-owners-assert-property-rights-in-colorados-oil-and-gas-fight/>.

³⁹Allegheny College, *Sustainability: Environmental Guiding Principles* (Meadville, PA: Allegheny College, 2016), available online at: <https://sites.allegheny.edu/green/campus-commitments/environmental-guiding-principles/>.

administrators, and alumni) issued a fifty-one-page report reflecting comprehensive analysis and recommendations grounded in the university's "Environmental Guiding Principles" which emphasize health, environment, and participatory decision-making.⁴⁰ Allegheny's experience shows that universities may recognize how environmental decision-making fundamentally intersects with other institutional values and commitments.⁴¹ Fossil Free Divestment movements on college campuses, which have received more scholarly attention, have similarly framed environmental activism in terms of universities' commitment to the public good.⁴² For example, in documenting campus experiences with divestment movements, Grady-Benson and Sarathy characterize institutions' divestment decisions as reflecting a "desire to align all aspects of the institution with its values."⁴³

Trump's election to the United States presidency has meant, in part, a more complicated and challenging political context for those concerned about the social and environmental implications of continued dependence on and investment in fossil fuels. Trump's election has entailed climate change denialism emanating from the highest political office in the country combined with aggressive promotion of coal and other extractive industries.⁴⁴ On college campuses, Turning Point USA has actively opposed movements, like student-led divestment movements, which promote greater support for and reliance on renewable energy sources.⁴⁵ Moreover, there is evidence that faculty are experiencing constraints on academic freedom in relation to political debate and dialogue in the classroom – mostly in relation to perceptions of "leftist" political orientations.⁴⁶ Thus, at the same time that environmental activism becomes more urgent in ecological and political terms,⁴⁷ university stakeholders are facing a context in which this activism has increased potential to experience backlash.

This paper characterizes the approach to faculty inquiry and activism represented by UNCO's HFTF as TGL.⁴⁸ As noted, a TGL approach to social change is one that arises from

⁴⁰ Allegheny College, Bousson Advisory Group, *Report to Trustees: Shale Gas Development and the Bousson Environmental Research Reserve* (Meadville, PA: Allegheny College, November 2013), available online at: <https://sitesmedia.s3.amazonaws.com/boussonadvisorygroup/files/2013/11/Report-to-Trustees-on-Shale-Gas-Development-and-the-BERR1.pdf>.

⁴¹ Romano and Highby, "Campus Organizing."

⁴² Ira Harkavy, "The Role of Universities in Advancing Citizenship and Social Justice in the 21st Century," *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 1:1 (2006), pp. 5–37.

⁴³ Jessica Grady-Benson and Brinda Sarathy, "Fossil Fuel Divestment in US Higher Education: Student-Led Organising for Climate Justice," *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 21:6 (2016), p. 9; see also Eve Bratman, Kate Brunette, Deidre C. Shelly, and Simon Nicholson, "Justice is the Goal: Divestment as Climate Change Resistance," *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences* 6:4 (2016), pp. 677–90, and Noel Healy and Jessica Debski, "Fossil Fuel Divestment: Implications for the Future of Sustainability Discourse and Action within Higher Education," *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability* 22:6 (2017), pp. 699–24.

⁴⁴ For example, Jillian Kestler-D'Amours, "One Year Under Trump: 'Attack' on Climate Change Fight," *Al Jazeera* (January 17, 2018), available online at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/explained-donald-trump-attack-environment-171203184502851.html>; Clifford Krauss, "Coal's Decline Seems Impervious to Trump's Promises," *The New York Times* (January 24, 2018), available online at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/24/business/energy-environment/coal-miners.html>.

⁴⁵ See "The 10 Ways Fossil Fuels Improve Our Daily Lives," (2016) from Turning Point USA, available online at: <https://tpusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/10WaysFossilFuelsImproveOurDailyLives.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Ferguson, "AAUP in the Era of Trump"; see also Quintana, "Under Fire."

⁴⁷ Marcus Peter Ford, "Education for the Common Good," *Academe* (September-October 2016), available online at: <https://www.aaup.org/article/education-common-good#.WrAe9Kjwbcs>.

⁴⁸ Kezar, Gallant, and Lester, "Everyday People Making a Difference on College Campuses." Kezar et al.'s expansive TGL framework identifies nine grassroots strategies employed by academic change agents: (1) organizing extra-curricular intellectual opportunities, (2) creating professional development, (3) leveraging curricula and using classrooms as forums, (4) working with and mentoring students, (5) hiring like-minded social activists, (6) garnering resources and support, (7) using data to tell a story, (8) joining in utilizing existing networks, (9) and partnership with key external stakeholders (2011, p. 129).

within a given institution to challenge the status quo; hence, activism may appear largely in line with employee roles and responsibilities in taking into account the dominant norms, values, and beliefs of the institution from which it springs. A TGL approach to social change may look decidedly non-radical, verging on “taking the activism out of activism.”⁴⁹ We contend that appreciating a TGL approach to social change requires a broadened view of the “labors of resistance” and how these productively integrate the work of “tempered radicals.”⁵⁰ As Meyerson elaborates:

The labor of resistance may be divided among those who push for change from the inside, from the outside, and from the margin, each effort being essential to the others and to an overall movement of change. . . . Thinking in terms of a collaborative division of labor among activists helps resist the counter-productive tendency, particularly among liberals and radicals, to judge who is being the best and most true advocate for change.⁵¹

As individuals who also maintain work and contributions as community-based activists, we know that tempered radicals working “from the inside” may have dual identities entailing more contentious and confrontational forms of activism *outside* of their institutions. However, the importance of tempered, internal radicalism exists even in the absence of dual, or multisited, activist commitments, given the potential and actual synergies between and amongst different social change strategies. Moreover, we want to highlight that a TGL approach to social change may not be the result of a strategic, nor consensus-based, decision-making process. At UNCO, the TGL response to fracking emerged in a more organic way as an ad hoc and, in temporal terms, much delayed response to the university’s decision to lease its mineral rights. The HFTF does not reflect a collective view that TGL was the “best” way to contest the administration’s decision. It more so reflects, we contend, the form of resistance in which most faculty were willing to engage given some members’ propensity toward risk-aversion – including not wanting to be viewed as critical of university administration. In this sense, the tempered approach “won” over more contentious and confrontational approaches for which some members advocated, but that may have threatened sustaining the task force (and collective action) itself.

The following section explains how the issue of fracking prompted the formation of the faculty-led HFTF at UNCO.⁵² It proceeds with an overview of the HFTF as an internal and tempered approach to environmental activism, documenting two of the most tangible outcomes of the task force’s efforts: a research-based report and campus-wide survey. The results of the survey and interviews with HFTF members are discussed together. Both the survey and interviews were spearheaded by the authors and

⁴⁹Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for sharing this important reflection.

⁵⁰Debra E. Meyerson and Maureen A. Scully, “Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change,” *Organization Science* 6:5 (1995), pp. 585–600.

⁵¹Meyerson and Scully, “Tempered Radicalism,” p. 598.

⁵²In a community where climate change denial, three hundred-foot drilling rig setbacks, and fracking proximate to schoolyards are considered by some to be patriotic norms, civil and measured questioning of a mineral lease was a disturbance of the status quo and did not accommodate the desire for pro-fracking business as usual. For examples of city-, county-, and state-level political dynamics in Colorado, see Tribune Editorial Board, “Tribune Opinion: Development at Oil and Gas Site Near Bella Romero Should Be Allowed to Continue,” *The Greeley Tribune* (February 27, 2018), available online at: <https://www.greeleytribune.com/opinion/tribune-opinion-development-at-oil-and-gas-site-near-bella-romero-should-be-allowed-to-continue/>; Amanda Paulson, “Why Climate Change Divides Us,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (October 12, 2016), available online at: <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2016/1012/Why-climate-change-divides-us>; Joel Dyer, “Behind the Curtain: An Inside Look at the Oil & Gas Industry/Republican ‘REDPRINT’ for Turning Colorado from Blue to Red,” *Boulder Weekly* (September 17, 2015), available online at: <http://www.boulderweekly.com/news/behind-the-curtain/>.

supported the development of the HFTF's report and this article. In this sense, this article has an autoethnographic component, and can be characterized as a "critical advocacy case study" of organization in higher education seeking "transformative change toward social justice, inclusion and educational equity."⁵³ The empirical section of the article ends with a discussion of the opportunities and limitations of an internal and tempered approach to environmental activism on campus, findings with implications for social change efforts beyond environmental concerns as well as the university as an institution.

The HFTF at UNCO

UNCO's Board of Trustees leased its mineral rights to Mineral Resources, Inc., in November 2011, granting the company a subsurface easement for the drilling of directional wells underneath campus. Trustee meeting minutes asserted UNCO's "positive financial opportunity" and referenced a year-long period of "discussions regarding oil and gas on UNC[O]'s property."⁵⁴ The decision came as a surprise to the campus community; campus governance groups, like Faculty Senate, were not consulted prior to the decision. Although the university issued a brief press release on its website,⁵⁵ public relations were limited. The president was quoted in a March 2013 article explaining that this kind of entrepreneurial partnership was not unusual in this era of rising tuition and falling state support.⁵⁶ Indeed, the decline of state funding for education has been particularly steep in Colorado, dropping some 69.4 percent from 1980 to 2011.⁵⁷ Between the lines, we contend, the president's justification also reflects an ideological stance "that views oil and gas operations as both natural and necessary elements of a landscape in which economic growth is paramount while the risks of fracking are downplayed or ignored."⁵⁸ Two urban drilling sites selected by the developer included "Midtown," situated in the most densely populated neighborhood in Greeley, 451 feet from the nearest rental apartment building, two blocks from University family housing, and two blocks from a newly constructed student rental complex. The second site was fewer than one thousand feet from an elementary school playground.⁵⁹

In fall of 2013, four faculty began the process of organizing the HFTF, an explicit attempt to create a campus dialogue on the impending drilling near campus and increase awareness of the decision to lease, which had flown mostly under the radar

⁵³Penny A. Pasque and Rozana Carducci, "Critical Advocacy Perspectives," p. 296; see also Miguel A. Guajardo, Francisco J. Guajardo, and Leslie Locke, "An Introduction to Ecologies of Engaged Scholarship: Stories from Activist-Academics," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 30:1 (2017), pp. 1–5.

⁵⁴The details of discussions amongst the President, BOT, and oil and gas companies are opaque.

⁵⁵University of Northern Colorado, Board of Trustees, "Trustees Approve 2011–12 Budget Updates, Mineral Rights Lease, Board Policy Revisions" (November 18, 2011), available online at: <http://www.unco.edu/news/releases.aspx?id=3398>.

⁵⁶Anthony Cotton, "Weld County Schools Use Oil, Gas Leases to Tap into Revenue Streams," *The Denver Post* (March 23, 2013), available online at: <https://www.denverpost.com/2013/03/23/weld-county-schools-use-oil-gas-leases-to-tap-into-revenue-streams/>.

⁵⁷Thomas G. Mortenson, "State Funding: A Race to the Bottom," *The Presidency* (American Council on Education, Winter, 2012), available online at: <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/state-funding-a-race-to-the-bottom.aspx>.

⁵⁸Schneider, "Frackademia, Divestment, and the Limits of Academic Freedom."

⁵⁹These proposed sites reflect "business as usual" in Greeley, which had 450 active wells within city limits as of February 2016 (Linda Kane, "Oil, Gas Added into Greeley's Collection of Impact Fees," *The Greeley Tribune* (February 3, 2016), available online at: <https://www.greeleytribune.com/news/business/oil-gas-added-into-greeleys-collection-of-impact-fees/>).

since 2011. Via email solicitations, the HFTF sought equitable representation across campus colleges, libraries, and governing bodies in line with the approach of official campus stakeholder groups and committees. A direct invitation was extended to the Environmental Health & Safety Office to ensure administrative representation, and, to reach students, an electronic news bulletin was sent to the entire campus community. Although the Faculty Senate declined a proposal to create an official university task force, it communicated that it would be willing to send two representatives to become members. The official goal of the HFTF would be “to propose informed and ethical policy, and/or resolution(s), and transmit same to the Faculty Senate and the campus community for its consideration.”⁶⁰ Ultimately, nineteen people – a small percentage (1.1 percent) of 1717 full- and part-time employees – joined the task force. Despite the open invitation to the campus community, only two students (graduate and undergraduate, respectively) participated.

From 2013 to 2015, the HFTF worked toward developing a research-based report on the potential impacts of fracking near and under campus. The HFTF shared its “Progress Report, Interim Findings, and Recommendations” with administration and the campus community in 2014. The Report recognized unconventional natural gas “production as a part of our local, state, and national economies at the present time,” and indicated “[appreciation of] the intentions of the Board of Trustees to contribute to the financial health and solvency of the institution by entering into the agreement.”⁶¹ It also, in tempered fashion, acknowledged the enticement of the projected revenue gain of ten million dollars or more over the next twenty years. However, the Report countered with two main findings: first, the proposed drilling sites posed substantial health and safety risks to campus and community and negative health, social, and environmental externalities were not considered in the financial analysis of the decision; and second, there was potential for a public relations problem that would impact UNCO’s public image, enrollment, and retention. The Report synthesized literature on the health, safety, and environmental impacts of fracking. The Report also drew on the results of the campus-wide survey to emphasize the diversity of opinions on fracking reflected by survey results, in addition to knowledge gaps about fracking and the decision to lease revealed by responses.

The campus-wide survey of faculty, staff, and students conducted in Spring 2014 presented significant overlap with task force member interviews in terms of concerns related to fracking near and under campus, as well as interests and expectations regarding how the university could and “should” approach environmental decision-making. Of survey respondents, thirty-two percent indicated support for fracking, thirty-nine percent indicated they were opposed, and twenty-six percent indicated they were undecided. Notably, fifty percent said they would support “a ban on campus fracking until it is proven safe.” Across survey and interview data, four themes emerged: (1) the health, safety, and environmental impacts of drilling near campus, (2) internal decision-making processes regarding the lease, (3) university reputation, and (4) education and research on the topic of hydraulic fracturing.

⁶⁰Wendy Highby, Mark Anderson, and Marilyn Welsh, *Charge of the Hydrofracturing Task Force and Description of the Process* (Greeley, CO: University of Northern Colorado, 2013) [unpublished document], and Hydrofracturing Task Force, Minutes of the Meeting of November 7, 2013, available online at: <https://www.facebook.com/UNCHydrofracturing>.

⁶¹Hydrofracturing Task Force, “Progress Report, Interim Findings, and Recommendations” (May 9, 2014), available online at: <https://www.facebook.com/UNCHydrofracturing>.

Survey responses reflected diverse views on the health, safety, and environmental impacts of fracking. Within optional comment sections, a minority asserted fracking to be safe and sufficiently regulated, as this representative remark expresses: “Fracking has been proven safe over the last 60 years. With EPA controls in place, we can work our way to energy independence.” Across the more numerous comments expressing concern, possible negative impacts of fracking related to health and safety predominated.⁶² According to a student respondent:

I learned about the decision to frack on campus in my course last year and was severely disappointed and disgusted with the thought that such a beautiful campus would be destroyed by such a terrible decision. [Fracking] can have grave affects [sic] on the water, air, land, and overall quality of the campus [and] should be banned on all university property or within a certain range of a university as student, faculty, and worker’s health should be a top priority to any campus. It is a terrible idea to move forward on something that can have terrible ramifications without it being presented to those that are most affected by such a decision...I was always proud to say I attend UNC[O], but honestly if this occurs I will not recommend this college to anyone...A university needs to consider much more than any monetary gain if it means the health and welfare of the campus population.

Notably, this student’s testimony reflects concerns that transcend health and safety: attention is also drawn to issues of transparency and communication with the campus the community, as well as to risks pertaining to future student enrollment and retention.

The themes of transparency and communication were apparent in the response of over a third of respondents who indicated they were “unsure” as to whether the university had signed a lease (thirty-five percent) and the four percent who responded (incorrectly) that no lease had been signed. Of the sixty-two percent responding affirmatively, many included comments. One respondent advocated for supporting the administration’s authority to make the decision: “The president is very familiar with fracking and petroleum industry negotiations, let her make responsible decisions on this subject on our behalf.” This response, however, was atypical. Most survey responses mirrored HFTF interviews in critiquing the “behind closed doors” decision to lease and in expressing a sense of entitlement to be involved as key stakeholders.⁶³ When asked if “UNC[O] faculty, staff, and students should be consulted and/or asked for input before allowing fracking-related activities below or near University property,” 68.7 percent “agreed” and “strongly agreed” (a number that rises to 80.8 percent looking only at student responses). This compares to 16.6 percent who “disagreed” and “strongly disagreed.”⁶⁴ Several comments recognized the administration’s ultimate authority to lease the school’s mineral rights, but were critical of the missed opportunity to be inclusive of campus stakeholders in line with many IHEs’ “norms of shared governance and transparent decision-making.”⁶⁵

⁶²Several respondents indicated their direct and personal experience with fracking in Colorado as the basis for their concerns. According to one: “I have been strongly affected by fracking in city limits. [Oil company name] applied for and were [sic] approved for a 16–22 site one block from my home. I have done a massive amount of research and know the harmful effects of fracking and the impact on home values.”

⁶³Several respondents wanted more information about the lease and how the royalties would be spent by the university. One respondent, self-described as “not particularly worried about fracking under campus,” expressed that it “makes sense...that the University is consulted before a decision like this” and that he/she “would like the University to explain how the lease money will be spent.”

⁶⁴While thirty-five percent of respondents indicated agreement that UNCO should “proceed with fracking” if a lease has been signed, forty-five percent said “no” and seventeen percent indicated they were “unsure.” Of the student respondents, 61.5 percent indicated either “no” or “undecided.”

⁶⁵Pasque and Carducci, “Critical Advocacy Perspectives,” p. 283.

HFTF members and several survey respondents alike cast the leasing of mineral rights and proposal for drilling near to campus as a potential public relations problem for the university. In the words of one survey respondent:

The decision to drill and frack on campus, particularly near student housing, without any input from the campus community and without even informing the campus community appears to constitute malfeasance on the part of the administration and the particular administrators who made this decision in the absence of other input. Students are already asking faculty and others about how fracking will affect their health and the health of the university. *Will we continue to attract students as negative impacts of fracking receive more research and more media attention?* (Emphasis added.)

Reputational concerns were salient amongst HFTF members as well. When asked about under what circumstances, if any, faculty and staff should have a greater role in university decision-making, one interviewee shared: “When we made our [progress report to send to the President and the BOT] we sort of contextualized a lot of our concern in terms of being really worried about the university’s reputation, and the public relations aspect of having this fracking right near campus” (March 6 2015). Another similarly stated: “I agreed [with a colleague that] we actually damaged our reputation as a leading institution by just going in with a resource extraction industry without actually giving it a second thought” (April 8 2015).

In regard to research and education, a majority of survey respondents indicated support for fracking-related educational forums and research on campus – an important finding given the diversity of opinions and knowledge gaps pertaining to fracking reflected in the survey. Sixty-one percent said they would be “willing to support” both “campus educational forums on fracking” and “university-sponsored research about fracking.” In a city with a remarkably high concentration of wells near homes and schools, the lack of knowledge about fracking revealed in the survey was surprising. These comments reflected interest in the university taking an active role in fracking-related education and research: “UNC[O] should have open forums to educate the student[s], faculty, and staff on what [fracking] involves” and “I don’t have information about this and I think that UNC[O] faculty/staff could benefit from information sessions regarding this issue.”

Opportunities and Limitations of a TGL Approach to Environmental Inquiry and Activism

Organizing as a tempered group internal to the university had clear advantages for countering top-down and exclusive decision-making on campus. Most HFTF members perceived the task force’s internal nature as promoting expanded space for education and dialogue on campus, including through helping to facilitate expression of concerns about the environmental and other implications of fracking. Some tied being faculty of the university to the group’s ability to promote inquiry and dialogue: “[I]f we were a group doing the same thing but from without we wouldn’t have the same legitimacy I think that we do as being part of this institution” (January 16, 2015). Campus participation in the survey was likely facilitated by the fact that it was led by university faculty,

rather than “outside” researchers, because of how this may influence participants’ trust or perceptions of credibility of the researchers.⁶⁶

Taking an internal and tempered approach to contesting the administration’s decision-making, the HFTF was able to carry out forms of inquiry and activism dovetailing with conventional faculty roles and responsibilities.⁶⁷ Notably, all seven interviewed task force members found productive parallels with HFTF activities and their roles as educators, mostly in regard to classroom teaching. Moreover, the task force undertook several activities, for example, bringing speakers to campus and conducting research, that aligned with official faculty roles and responsibilities. HFTF members saw value in conducting research toward engaging the campus community and embraced the view that “more voices would yield more viewpoints, which would support more robust decision-making that was representative of broad-based faculty concerns.”⁶⁸ In this way, the HFTF reflected pursuit of social as well as procedural justice. These aims could be pursued from within the university as forms of research and “service” and without high perceptions of risk in terms of potential backlash from administration.

In important ways, the faculty-produced report can be seen as countering the absence of scientific data (or other evidence of “due diligence” invoked by interviewees and survey respondents) in the administration’s communicated rationale for signing a lease. In this sense, the report reflects the promotion of intellectual inquiry and constitutes a form of activism, albeit tempered. The level of campus stakeholder knowledge of fracking and awareness of the decision to lease, although not measured after the survey, had much potential to increase given the wide dissemination of the Report to faculty, staff, and students. Additionally, the survey was an investigative effort by HFTF members to assess knowledge of the lease and attitudes around fracking *and* a mechanism to raise awareness and foster dialogue, as survey results were integrated into the Report.

The internal and tempered, versus overtly confrontational and critical, nature of the group also helped to open channels of institutional dialogue on fracking as an important environmental issue, even though the HFTF never achieved official status as a university organization or committee. For example, being employees of the university likely aided access to information, like the lease document itself and a face-to-face meeting with University Counsel; both of these informed the HFTF’s information-gathering for the Report. When the Report’s issuing did not receive a response from the president or BOT, the HFTF reached out to the president’s office to request a meeting. In total, HFTF members had three meetings with campus administration across summer 2014 to discuss the lease and task force recommendations, none of which were embraced. Nevertheless, three interview respondents mentioned meetings with the president’s office as one of the HFTF’s primary short-term accomplishments. It is unclear if the meetings and Report will have set any kind of procedural precedent in regard to university transparency and dialogue, but they reveal the potential for a TGL approach

⁶⁶For example, Tom Clark, “On ‘Being Researched’: Why Do People Engage with Qualitative Research?” *Qualitative Research* 10:4 (2010), pp. 399–19.

⁶⁷Kezar, Gallant, and Lester, “Everyday People Making a Difference on College Campuses.”

⁶⁸Dilys Schoorman and Michele Acker-Hocevar, “Viewing Faculty Governance within a Social Justice Framework: Struggles and Possibilities for Democratic Decision-Making in Higher Education,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 43:3 (2010), p. 314.

to facilitate campus dialogue and communication, even in the absence of formalized institutional channels – or invited spaces – for doing so.⁶⁹

Ironically, it could be argued that the corporatization of the university itself contributed to changing the course of oil and gas development near campus. In the midst of the HFTF's meetings with administration in 2014, the site was relocated to a more industrial area, further away from academic buildings, student dormitories, and community residences. Simultaneously, a news story appeared in which the operator said an alternative site to Midtown was being considered.⁷⁰ In mid-September 2014, the permits were pulled. It is not possible to verify if the moving of the site can be attributed to HFTF interventions. Yet, it is possible that the group's efforts to shed light on the university's decision were influential. The movement of the site was brought up by two interview respondents; according to one: "I think we did have something to do with the Midtown site being changed...but we'll never know [for certain] because it was sort of done behind closed doors" (January 23, 2015). Another's comment reflected a perception of greater certainty, citing the moving of the drilling site "as major successes of the task force even though I'm not directly sure how things that we did affected that decision" (April 10, 2015). The HFTF's emphasis on public relations and potential enrollment issues were likely salient in the context of economic concerns created by state cuts to education.⁷¹ Yet, as Slaughter and Rhoades contend, "although public colleges and universities...sometimes behave like corporations in a neoliberal state, they still may be centers for change through grassroots organizing around more democratic goals."⁷² This owes to how public IHE may be more susceptible to internal organizing for change than private entities because of their links to the state; we would add that this susceptibility also owes to public universities' implicit and explicit commitments to the public good.⁷³

Although presenting benefits in terms of education and dialogue on campus, and even a potential shift in resource extraction outcomes, a TGL approach to campus inquiry and activism had obvious limitations. Several of these pertained to faculty members' desire to be inclusive as a task force and some members' sense of vulnerability vis-à-vis tenure and promotion processes – both of which limited the group's ability to achieve consensus on a position "for or against" the mineral lease and made some cautious regarding drawing press attention to the Report.⁷⁴ For example, the HFTF member representing the university's Environmental Health and Safety Office declined to sign the Report, which recommended a moratorium on the proposed fracking and UNCO's protection of its public image via

⁶⁹Corporatization of the university – in this case, facilitating of drilling and fracking as a means to increase revenue – may prove difficult to challenge if policies and practices cannot be countered through explicit reliance on an institution's own stated values and policies. As noted, in cases of successful divestment from fossil fuels, it was deemed that "institutional values of environmental sustainability and social justice played key roles in colleges' decision" (Jessica Grady-Benson and Brinda Sarathy, "Fossil Fuel Divestment in US Higher Education," p. 17). In the absence of an explicit institutional commitment to certain procedural or environmental values, arguments informed by corporatization may stand strong against faculty-promoted alternatives.

⁷⁰Sharon Dunn, "East Greeley Drilling Site May Move to Another Location," *Greeley Tribune* (June 23, 2014), available online at: <https://www.greeleytribune.com/news/local/east-greeley-drilling-site-may-move-to-another-location/>.

⁷¹See, for example, Marta Baltodano, "Neoliberalism and the Demise of Public Education: The Corporatization of Schools of Education," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 25:4 (2012), pp. 487–507; Sanford Schram, "The Future of Higher Education and American Democracy: An Introduction," *New Political Science* 36:4 (2014), pp. 425–37.

⁷²Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, "The Neo-Liberal University," *New Labor Forum* 6 (2000), p. 77.

⁷³Romano and Highby, "Campus Organizing."

⁷⁴While members expressed different proclivities in regard to resistance and organizing strategies, there was never an official or explicit consensus reached in regard to approach. It is likely that this was compounded by the group's ideological diversity and different perceptions of what was appropriate, or "safe," to do as employees of the university, particularly for non-tenured faculty, of which there were three on the task force.

divestment from fossil fuels and conducting an economic analysis including the negative externalities of allowing fracking operations under and near campus.⁷⁵ Additionally, there was not consensus within the HFTF as to whether or not the Report should be sent directly to the press, given one member's concern that further public dissemination of the Report could compromise faculty job security.⁷⁶ In the end, no press release was developed, and one member declined an interview with a *Denver Post* reporter who made inquiries regarding the Report.

The internal and tempered response of the HFTF reflects the high level of caution for which some members advocated in approaching the issue of fracking on campus; to the extent that this limited the visibility of faculty efforts, this is a drawback of TGL approaches to effecting social change. Although the HFTF supported raising awareness about the lease and increased faculty-administration communication on the issue of fracking, some members promoted quite cautious behavior like not talking to the press or making statements that would be interpreted as a criticism of campus administration. As one member expressed: "This is my workplace and I didn't want to make huge waves. I mean obviously I wanted to make some waves because I did want to raise awareness and change some things, but I didn't want to do it in a manner that would endanger my job or my colleagues' jobs" (January 23, 2015). Some members were inclined to keep the group's programming as "neutral" and "objective" as possible, at least until all shared a common knowledge base. As one interviewee expressed, "We were really working within our positions as faculty and staff, we weren't trying to rock the boat" (January 16, 2015). The final Report and internal HFTF processes attempted to model a democratic IHE tradition of shared governance as shared authority. However, the group's tempered approach and some members' concerns with appearing neutral and objective unwittingly embraced and *reproduced* inhibiting features of the Trump era in striving to achieve social justice-oriented change on and off campus.

The tempered approach of the HFTF may have proved limiting in regard to student involvement and empowerment as well; yet, explaining (the lack of) student involvement proves difficult. It is not known if student interest in the topic was low or if the HFTF approach to campus inquiry and engagement was not appealing to students.⁷⁷ If the approach to campus organizing had been different at the outset would more student interest have been generated? Contrastingly, would the organized campus response itself have been different in character and effects had these efforts produced greater student interest and involvement? In regard to the latter, limited student involvement may help to explain why this instance of campus inquiry and resistance *was* so tempered in contrast to examples of student-led activism, like divestment movements, whose tactics are much more visible and confrontational.⁷⁸ Relative to full-time employees of the university, students may deem more overt and disruptive tactics as less risky, even though they must weigh similar issues of interest and time when deciding whether or not to engage in organized groups.

⁷⁵Sixteen faculty and staff from eight programs across campus signed the Report, which was written by four members of the task force; notably, these were all women. The text of the Report was agreed upon by all signatories.

⁷⁶The referenced faculty member was not tenured at the time these views were expressed via email to all HFTF members.

⁷⁷Psychologists measuring generational differences in civic orientation (spanning from Boomers to Millennials, 1966–2009) found that some of the largest declines have been in the area of taking action to help the environment (Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell, and Elise C. Freeman, "Generational Differences in Young Adults' Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966–09," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 102:5 (2012), pp. 1045–62).

⁷⁸For example, Jessica Grady-Benson and Brinda Sarathy note that sit-ins and protests like "human oil spills" have been part of student-led divestment movement repertoires ("Fossil Fuel Divestment in Higher Education").

Conclusion

In the United States, faculty have clearly delineated roles and responsibilities pertaining to teaching, research, and service, but faculty may not be “in positions or roles that have the power to easily and directly create change,”⁷⁹ particularly when it comes to affecting institutional decision-making norms and structures. This raises the question of how teacher-scholar-activists best pursue social change related to internal university decision-making and outcomes, and what factors support or inhibit socially progressive, including environmentally protective, change. As emphasized above, a TGL approach to social change encounters both opportunities and limitations in the context of university corporatization. For example, a tempered, internal approach may lessen the risk of potential backlash from employers because it allows activists to try to create change “by staying within the organization.”⁸⁰ A TGL approach also dovetails with Schoorman’s encouragement of the democratization of faculty governance in order to counteract top-down decision-making structures that could be perceived as conflicting with the traditional mission and decision-making values of higher education. Such democratization would entail “openness to all perspectives, an obligation to listen to and build consensus from this diversity, transparency in the decision-making process, and leadership accountability through listening and action.”⁸¹ Nevertheless, a TGL approach to inquiry and activism on campus may also have limitations such as low visibility relative to more confrontational approaches, failure to achieve sustained institutional or structural changes, and reproduction of some of the constraining features (for example, attempted commitments to “neutrality”) of the broader political landscape.

Arguably, the practice of campus citizenship and the creation of “counter-practices”⁸² cannot be disconnected from engagement with the surrounding community. Indeed, faculty participating in the UNCO task force experienced their university “role” to have been expanded by their experience. According to one member: “I feel like I’m a part of something that’s not isolated in the ivory tower...that something about the work that we’re doing connects in really deliberate conscientious ways to what’s going on in the community, and so there’s momentum there and a feeling that what we’re doing is important in a different kind of way, in a larger way than most of the work that I do as a scholar and teacher” (March 30, 2015). Like other socio-environmental issues, hydraulic fracturing transcends the university and reveals the ways in which these institutions are embedded within and help to constitute local and global social, political, and environmental contexts. In the case of oil and gas development in the United States, multi-scalar and cross-sectoral decision-making processes are required for determining extraction practices.⁸³ Support for a community-engaged professoriate is essential for the

⁷⁹Kezar, Gallant, and Lester, “Everyday People Making a Difference on College Campuses,” p. 132.

⁸⁰Ibid, 130.

⁸¹Schoorman, “Resisting the Unholy Alliance Between a University and a Prison Company,” p. 314.

⁸²As Caivano et al. assert, “To arrest the perpetuation of neoliberal austerity in the university, students, faculty, staff – and administrators – need to create counter-institutions or counter practices within it.” Dean Caivano, Rodney Doody, Terry Maley, and Chris Vandenberg, “Critical Pedagogy in the Neoliberal University,” p. 514; see also Green and Castro, “Doing Counterwork in the Age of a Counterfeit President.”

⁸³See, for example, Enockson, “State Legislation”; Goho, “Municipalities and Hydraulic Fracturing”; Barry G. Rabe, “Shale Play Politics: The Intergovernmental Odyssey of American Shale Governance,” *Environmental Science & Technology* 48:15 (2014), pp. 8369–75.

creation of an evidence- and participatory research-based body of knowledge that, in turn, informs public policy and social movements for change.

This UNCO case of campus activism raises the question: what *are* “our positions” as faculty vis-à-vis environmental decision-making and other substantive issue areas with potentially serious health, safety, and socio-economic impacts?⁸⁴ Corporatization of the university continues to erode progress gained toward greater social justice and democratization on college campuses. It becomes increasingly incumbent upon faculty to counter top-down, exclusive decision-making, and exercising of power within the university. This means championing shared governance, participatory decision-making, and activism and democracy in the workplace. It also means recognizing how the university reflects a microcosm of many of the political dynamics, including new opportunities and challenges, the “era of Trump” presents in relation to issues like immigration, free speech, and environmental protection. Ultimately, an engaged and activist faculty – even when enacting tempered strategies – encourages democratizing university governance and supporting the pursuit of social justice both on and off campus.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the University of Northern Colorado Summer Support Initiative.

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⁸⁴Anna J. Willow and Sara Wylie, “Politics, Ecology, and the New Anthropology of Energy: Exploring the Emerging Frontiers of Hydraulic Fracking,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 21 (2014), pp. 222–36.