

A Note on Class Stratification in Recruitment in the Student Movement

By Aaron Kreider

I was digging through my old research notes, and thought people would be interested in the research I did that provides solid evidence of how most national student activist groups are disproportionately focussed on *elite* schools.

In 1999 and 2000, there was a wave of 20 sweatshop (or student labor) related sit-ins. The data on United Students Against Sweatshops membership is from a message to the USAS email list in 2000. USAS was the most active national student network during the 1999-2000 period, and had a large enough number of member groups for these results to be statistically significant.

This shows that USAS has 11 times more groups in the top quartile of schools than in the bottom quartile.

In 2000, I also looked at group membership for the Student Peace Action Network (note: the figures below exclude a couple high school groups), Young Democratic Socialists, and the Movement for Democracy and Education. They generally showed a very similar level of stratification, only with MDE being slightly less elite.

Rank	USAS Sit-Ins		USAS Groups		SPAN Groups		YDS Groups		MDE Groups	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	13	65	68	53	23	50	7	50	5	39
2	6	30	31	24	12	26	4	29	3	23
3	1	15	20	16	5	11	2	14	3	23
4	0	0	6	5	4	9	1	7	2	15
5	0	0	3	2	2	4	0	0	0	0

(Rank - US News and World Report ranking, by quartile, with community colleges listed as rank=5)

(Sources: USAS list email 2000, SPAN November 1999 email, YDS website Oct 2000, MDE Andy Burn private email 2000)

Therefore there are two major factors that cause student activists to be disproportionately from the upper and upper-middle classes. Firstly, national organizations are more likely to recruit college students – and in general college students are more privileged than non-college youth. Secondly, the college students that are recruited/organized are more likely to be from elite schools where the students are more privileged than the average college student is.

It is common to hear at national student organization conferences that our organization should be recruiting more people from high schools, public schools, community colleges and historically black colleges and universities. However, apparently either very little is being done about it or little success is being achieved.