

WINTER NEWSLETTER



CENTER FOR

Sustainable
Climate Solutions

PREPARED BY
DANIEL BELLEROSE, PROGRAM ASSISTANT
[SUSTAINABLECLIMATESOLUTIONS.ORG](https://www.sustainableclimatesolutions.org)

DOUG GRABER NEUFELD

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This semester I am teaching one of my favorite courses, one called “Environmental Risk and Policy”, where we think through what matters and what doesn’t in environmental risks, and where we learn about how policies can be helpful at mitigating those risks. On the first day of class, I asked how many students had engaged in some kind of advocacy - for instance, talking with lawmakers about an issue, or writing a local or national representative a letter.

Out of twenty students, none raised their hands. I expected not many would raise their hands, after all, I didn’t engage in advocacy back when I was a student. Still, these were mostly Environmental Science students, and I knew firsthand the passion that many of these students felt for making a difference on climate change. They’re willing to change their diets, forego travel, and in general live a simpler lifestyle because they feel a moral obligation to make a difference, and because they feel that they are able to make a difference.

It’s not just those students. When we surveyed students across the seven Mennonite colleges in the United States (see the [white paper](#) on our website to see all of the results), this was one result that jumped out for us. You can see in the results summarized on the next page that only about 15% of students said they had engaged with public officials about climate change in the past year. However, 65% said climate change should be a high or very high priority for the President and Congress, and 70% said that climate change would hurt future generations a great deal. The surveyed students cared, they saw the political process as important for solving the problem, but there was some barrier to engagement.

It’s not just the college age group, and it’s not just Anabaptists. The Environmental Voter Project reminds us that environmentalists in all demographics are pretty bad at voting - the percentage of environmentalists that vote is below average for the general population.

There are various reasons that people may not engage with politics. One thing we’ve learned is that barriers to advocacy are not always large; often they’re just big enough to prevent action, but not too big that we can’t help them over the hurdle. There is low-hanging fruit, in other words. At CSCS, we are identifying those barriers to engagement, and reaching out to groups to help them jump over those barriers. For instance, one major hurdle is simply a lack of knowledge about how to go about advocacy. If you or your friends and family haven’t ever engaged in advocacy, then you may not even know where to start.

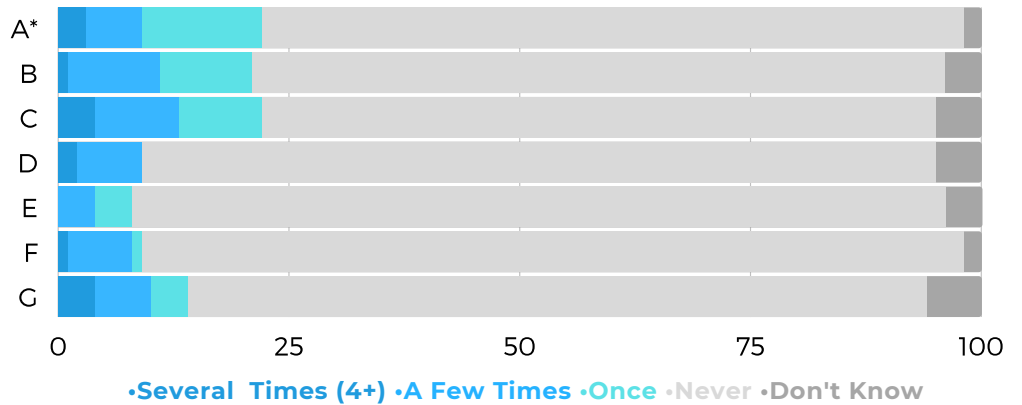
Since our inception five years ago, we’ve ramped up our efforts to engage concerned communities through advocacy. We’ve worked closely with the Washington office of Mennonite Central Committee, most recently by placing a Climate Futures Fellow, Clara Weybright, in Washington D.C. for the year. In this issue we highlight Clara’s insightful of why advocacy is important, steps to effective advocacy, and examples of how that is making a difference.



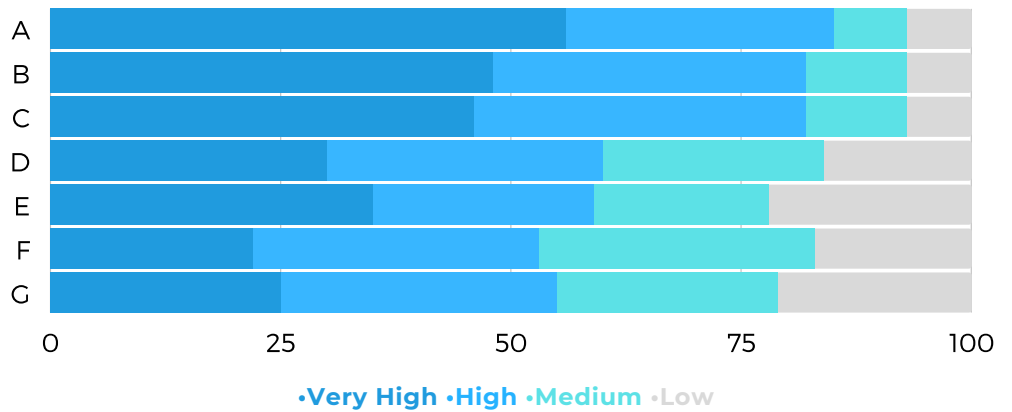


With the help of our CSCS fellow, and the MCC Washington office, those twenty students in my class will walk away from this year all being able to raise their hands when they're asked what difference they've made with their public officials. We're excited for the many other examples of groups that will also be raising their hands as we encourage people to find their voice in our society on climate change!

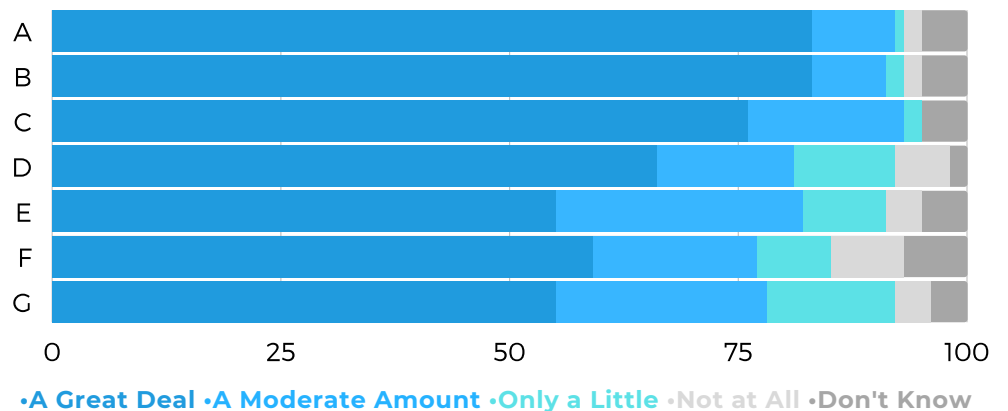
Over the past 12 months how many times have you talked with public officials about global warming?



Do you think global warming should be a low, medium, high, or very high priority for the President and Congress?



How much do you think global warming will harm future generations of people?



*A-G represent each of the colleges surveyed, and results are in percentages

Climate Advocacy As a Faith Practice: An Introduction

Clara Weybright, CSCS Fellow

As I reflect on 2020 and wonder what it means to move forward, I recognize the ways that inequities were laid bare last year. I think many of us are wondering what meaningful action to address these injustices will look like this year.

One way to respond to the injustices we see is through advocacy. As we continue to identify the ways that climate change intersects with other justice issues, we can use advocacy as an effective tool.



How can climate advocacy help us respond to these seemingly insurmountable injustices? Put simply, advocacy is speaking to positions of power about your convictions. Climate advocacy is centered around finding good solutions to the climate crisis.

Sometimes advocacy is specific: “Please support this bill in the Senate, which helps the countries most impacted by climate change adapt to harsher farming conditions.” Sometimes, advocacy is general: “Policymaker, I am a person of faith and one of your constituents. I am worried about the harm being done to God’s creation and want to make sure that your decisions align with my concerns. How can I help you learn more about this issue?”

Regardless of how you advocate, this method of working for climate justice is a key tool in helping our country respond to a changing climate.

I entered the fellowship in August 2020, convinced that advocacy is a crucial part of responding to the climate crisis; and that people of faith are uniquely suited to speaking into this issue. Through the fellowship, my goal has been to engage with Anabaptist churches on this subject and empower them to advocate for climate justice. With CSCS’s support, I moved to Washington, D.C. and started work in partnership with Mennonite Central Committee’s Washington Office. Under the guidance of Tammy Alexander, MCC’s Director of Advocacy and Program, I began reaching out to churches.

In the last five months of my fellowship, I’ve had ongoing conversations with churches from Kansas to Vermont. When we meet, I ask how they think about climate advocacy, and how CSCS and the Washington Office can support their work on this issue. Some churches have advocated on issues like immigration and peace and justice issues for years. Others are unfamiliar with advocacy and unsure how political engagement fits with their faith. As I’ve talked with these churches, I’ve come across some common questions and concerns that I’ll name here:

1.) Does political advocacy fit with Anabaptist theology and practice?

Anabaptists have a long history of personal action in the face of injustice. Because of this, personal climate actions like biking more and driving less, installing solar panels, and planting trees often feel most natural to many congregants. Many churches aren't sure how climate advocacy would fit in with their other work. How does engaging in the political process connect to the work of the church? Should churches just focus on changing themselves before they engage with the world?

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2.) Is advocacy for climate solutions actually worthwhile or effective? Maybe I should just focus on reducing meat in my diet or something else...

It's easy to create either/or scenarios: "Either I should make personal changes to my carbon footprint, or work to change climate policies." The truth is that both are important and different people are called to different work.

However, political advocacy is a deeply necessary piece of our response to climate change. Many climate scientists recognize that the climate crisis has reached such a magnitude that the only way to respond is through collective action – political action. This kind of action works, too. Elected officials must listen to the people who elect them: their constituents. As a constituent of a group of policymakers, you have the right to engage in public witness, write letters, make phone calls, and be as persistent as you can to advocate for climate justice.

People of faith can use a moral perspective to speak to the decisions that otherwise-skeptical elected officials make. Churches are effective community structures and they hold influence. Using your faith to speak into places of power is effective.

3.) Is policy something I can work on if I don't have a political science degree or expertise in this issue?

"Yes, absolutely" is the short answer. The policies that shape our country's response to climate change are seen as largely inaccessible. However, a simple google search for current climate policies includes helpful explanations and analyses from a variety of organizations. Additionally, advocacy staff, like those in MCC's Washington Office, are dedicated to making policies accessible to constituents like you.

You don't need to use complicated policy language or know the ins and outs of climate finance to tell your story and advocate for climate justice. You just need a human connection to the policymakers who are deciding how our country responds to climate change.

Okay, you've convinced me. What opportunities do I have to advocate?

For interested people, the opportunities to engage with climate advocacy are numerous. To start, reach out to me: clara.veybright@sustainableclimatesolutions.org. I am happy to talk more about what advocating can look like, or connect you with MCC's Washington Office. If you're interested in being connected with other churches advocating for climate justice, or you want to work with a local grassroots organization, I can help you make those connections. Whether it's writing letters, making phone calls, attending vigils and protests, or showing up at a town hall meeting, the opportunities to advocate for climate justice are accessible for almost everybody. Let's talk about what might work best for you.



People of faith everywhere should feel empowered to engage with the decisions that shape how we respond to the climate crisis. If you are interested in what climate advocacy might look like for you and your church, keep an eye out for a new climate advocacy page on CSCS website in the coming months. The page will include advocacy resources for small groups and church groups and the analysis of a survey assessing church relationships with climate advocacy.

If you are a member of a church that is not yet represented in the CSCS climate advocacy survey, please respond to this 5-10 minute survey [here](#). For those of you reading this in print, here's the link: <http://bit.ly/climateadvocacysurvey>.

Another (paid!) way to get involved in advocacy:

Our new Creation Advocacy Teams program is a paid opportunity for young adults who are interested in climate justice, community organizing, and advocacy in the context of Anabaptism. Participants have the opportunity to engage more deeply in their local community, learn about advocacy, and receive remote training.

Go to <https://sustainableclimatesolutions.org/creation-advocacy-teams-application/> to learn more and apply!

MEET THE TEAM; INTRODUCING THE NEW RACIAL JUSTICE STAFF

AJ Delgadillo

Climate & Racial Justice Campus Associate

AJ Delgadillo is excited to join CSCS in their Climate and Racial Justice work. He has a BA in Peace, Justice, and Conflict Studies (GC '17) and has worked in facilitating conflict resolution and educational internships. On his own time he runs a community compost service and sits on the City of Goshen's Community Relations Commission (a city commission for creating a community without discrimination).



Nicole Litwiller

Climate & Racial Justice Coordinator

Nicole is a recent graduate of EMU (2019) and the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding (2020). She has joined CSCS because of her excitement and energy around intersections. "When I learn about how various social justice issues are interconnected, it feels a bit less overwhelming to know that dismantling these systems of oppression are not individual issues, but rather inseparable from one another."



When she's not working to dismantle systems of oppression, Nicole devotes her time to creating sustainable, planet-centered artwork, and making (and eating) beautiful food. We are so excited to have her on the team!

If you want to get in touch with AJ or Nicole to learn more about their work, you can email them at aj_ajdelgadillo95@gmail.com and nicole.litwiller@emu.edu.

AT CSCS WE ARE ADVOCATING FOR JUSTICE

Our Advocacy Programs work to impact both the Anabaptist community and national policy. From training young adults to engage in advocacy in their local communities to advocating with our board in Washington, D.C., our advocacy programs are diverse and impactful. Some of our advocacy initiatives are:

- Climate Advocacy Internship with MCC Washington DC**
- Climate Futures Fellowship working towards advocating with churches**
- Board of Reference Advocacy Day**
- New Creation Advocacy Teams Program (announcement below)**

Donating to CSCS is a way you can help us continue our impactful work. Consider joining the CSCS impact by giving in any amount, and helping us continue our important programs. Go to sustainableclimatesolutions.org/donate to learn more!



CSCS Staff and Board of Reference members stand in the Hart Senate Office Building before a meeting with representatives in 2019

Follow along with our upcoming Climate Ride!

CSCS is riding across the country this year to bring attention to the climate crisis! **16 riders, 3737 miles, 59 days, and many conversations.** A group of passionate young adults are crossing the country on bicycle in order to talk with communities and hear how climate change is affecting them.

Sign up for biweekly updates highlighting the riders, locations and events here:
<https://sustainableclimatesolutions.org/climate-ride/>



Map of the intended route for the CSCS Climate Ride