

**University of Wisconsin – La Crosse**  
**Undergraduate Research Grant Application – Spring**  
**Cover Sheet**

1. Title of Project: Environmental Movement Organizations:  
A Study in Collective Identity and Collective Action

2. Applicant: Adam Conlin SS#: \_\_\_\_\_  
Major: Sociology Year in School: Senior  
Date of Graduation: May 2008 Local Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Local Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: conlin.adam@students.uwlax.edu

3. Faculty Sponsor: Timothy Gongaware Email: gongawar.timo@uwlax.edu  
Department: Sociology Campus Phone: 608.785.6672  
Campus Address: 1725 State Street. La Crosse WI, 54601

4. Synopsis of proposed research (do not exceed space provided)

The proposed study is to provide an in-depth analysis into the collective identity of a local environmental movement. Several theories attempt to explain the formation of social movements, but few focus on the concept of movement emergence through collective identity especially in terms of a fluid and dynamic process. The focus of the research will be based on this view of collective identity as it applies to the environmental movement. Data will be collected through participant observation and formal interviews to develop an analysis into the collective identity of the environmental movement among university students.

The final results will contribute to research of social movements on collective identity and modern social movement theory, particularly into the dynamic and fluid qualities of the environmental movement at the university level. Results will be presented at the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creativity Ceremony at the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse and will also be submitted for publication in the *UW-L Journal of Undergraduate Research*. I also hope to compile the information in a form and language that would be accessible to university organizations to strengthen their groups and add to student involvement on campus.

5. Grant Effort. (Provide dates of research and time to be spent on project): Data collection and analysis will be from January to May 2008.

6. Total amount requested for completion of research project (from Budget Summary page): \$ 1044.92

7. Compliances. (If "yes" for any of the below, compliance documentation **must** be filed if this proposal is funded). Does this proposal require review for:

|                         |                   |                  |
|-------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| a. Human Subjects?      | Yes <u>X</u>      | No <u>      </u> |
| b. Animal Care?         | Yes <u>      </u> | No <u>X</u>      |
| c. Hazardous materials? | Yes <u>      </u> | No <u>X</u>      |

8. Signatures

a. Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Department Chair: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Academic Dean: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Background/Statement of the Problem**

The world abounds with surmounting issues that seem ever pressing and important. However, some issues remain stagnant, simply existing as global problems, while others become the centerpieces of active organizations. How it is that collective action develops only around certain issues has remained a consistent question for researchers. However, it is only recently that the question arose of *why* collective action occurs and the role of collective identity in the formation and development of movement organizations.

Though the environmental movement has been active for quite some time, the identity of the movement has often shifted. It has developed from early groundings in conservation and preservation to a merging with peace, ecology and nuclear disarmament movements. This included shifts to environmental justice and grassroots organizing, and toward direct action (Silveira, 2001). As this development occurred, not only did the focus of movements change, but also the focus of research. Several theories developed to explain the formation of social movements: Resource Mobilization theory, Political Process theory, Framing theory, and the New Social Movements theory with emphasis on culture and collective identity (Kebede 2005).

Specifically, the New Social Movements theory with collective identity posits that collective action “cannot be considered the simple effect of structural preconditions or the expression of values and beliefs” (Melucci 1988:332). This is unlike structural or rational choice theories, as collective action is seen as a more complex dynamic involving rational individuals within a social system of limitations, possibilities, and relationships (Melucci 1995).

The *view* of collective action has been challenged as well. Traditionally, it was treated as an object—a *thing*. The collective aspect of action, the collective identity, was an assumed given. This view emerged largely because the quantitative research conducted on social

movements saw only the visible events and actions that resulted from an unseen base of relationships and meaning. However, Melucci (1988) rejects the idea that unity can be a presumed starting point and argues that the unity is a result that requires explanation.

The traditional concept of collective action as a fact, a thing, has been challenged with the new idea of collective action as a process and collective identity as an integral part of that process. Melucci defines collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals...and concerned with the orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which action takes place” (Melucci 1995:44). By this, Melucci argues, collective identity must be a process because it is created among individuals and negotiated as the movement forms and progresses (Melucci 1995).

From this definition arises another definition for collective *action* as “the result of purposes, resources, and limits, as a purposive orientation constructed by means of social relationships within a system of opportunity and constraints” (Melucci 1995:43). By this, Melucci argues that collective action is not just the result of deterministic structures or of rational choices. Actors are able to define themselves in their relationships with each other and in relationship to other groups, as well as defining their environment (Melucci 1995).

## **Objectives**

Using the New Social Movement theory as a base, this research project will explore the collective identity of the environmental movement through participant observation of an environmental social movement organization at the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse. The primary purpose is to explore and develop a better understanding of the group’s collective identity particularly in relation to consequent collective action and behavior in the organization. Such an understanding can benefit the organization itself, the university and research on collective identity .

## **Research Methods**

I will conduct research and at the UW-L in the Spring of 2008. In part, I will attend meetings of The UW-L Progressives on Tuesday nights at 7:00pm. Data in the form of extensive field notes will be gathered through participant observations at formal meetings and during informal gatherings. Additionally, I will conduct formal interviews with movement participants.

To enter and gain access to the group, I will begin by attending meetings which are open to the public. Then, observations will be conducted at formal meetings, public events as well as informal social gatherings held by members of the organization. In these various settings, I will work to deepen my understanding of the movement. Through these interactions, I will make jottings that will be expanded into full field notes and later analyzed. In addition, I will continually develop connections to immerse myself into the group setting so that my presence will be taken for granted, though I will talk openly about my purpose as a researcher if anyone asks. It is important to note that no attempt will be made on my part during any portion of the study to conceal my identity as a researcher or the purpose of the study. The subjects will participate in the study voluntarily; the responses will remain confidential; all will be adults; and all subjects will fill out an informed consent form.

Additionally, through the meetings, I will develop relationships with particular members in order to engage in discussions and conduct informal interviews. This will help to strengthen my relationships within the group and expand on the data collected in the observations. In the discussions and informal interviews, I may ask questions to confirm observations, probe for more in-depth information on specific topics, and listen for what the subjects feel is important about the organization and its dynamics.

Finally, formal, quasi-standardized interviews will be set up with both new and veteran movement participants. While questions about observations will be asked to begin the interview, the subject will be allowed to steer the direction of the discussion. In this way, the perspective of the movement participants (instead of my own) will help to guide the developing understanding of the movement's collective identity. These interviews will be tape recorded so that they can be transcribed for analysis along with the field notes. However, the tapes will be destroyed for the protection of privacy for the individuals in the interviews after the transcription has been made.

The data will then be analyzed through the coding and analysis of field notes and interview data. Coding will be done by a detailed, line by line reading of the notes, coding of the recorded behaviors and categorization of the coded phenomena. This should yield patterns of themes in the collective identity dynamics of the group.

### **Final Products and Dissemination**

The final product of this study will be a case study of the social movement's collective identity. The investigation will contribute to the research on social movements particularly in the areas of collective identity and modern social movement theory. This particular study will add insight into the dynamic and fluid qualities of the environmental movement, specifically at the university level.

The final results will be presented at the Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creativity Ceremony at the University of Wisconsin—La Crosse and will also be submitted for publication in the *UWL Journal of Undergraduate Research*. I will also compile the information in a form and language that would be useful for UW-L organizations to strengthen their group and to help add to the level of involvement on campus in these groups. Thank you for your time in reading and considering this proposal.

## References

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- Hunt, Scott A. and Robert Benford. 1994. "Identity Talk in the Peace and Justice Movement." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22: 488-517.
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**University of Wisconsin – La Crosse**  
**Undergraduate Research Grant Application - Spring**  
**Project Budget Summary**

Project Title: Collective Identity and Modern Environmentalism:  
A Case Study of La Crosse Environmental Movement Organization Participation

Student Researcher: Adam Conlin SS#: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Sponsor: Timothy Gongaware Department: Sociology

**I. Honorarium..... \$ 500.00**

Describe research duties and expected time commitment to project. If multiple investigators, explain how the \$800 honorarium is to be distributed among them:

The primary duties of the research will involve attending meetings on campus and in the community (2 hours each meeting) and events developed by the organizations I will follow (time varying), documenting my observations in field notes (2 hours), interviews with individuals (1-2 hours), along with the respective transcription (3-4 hours), and analysis of patterns to guide research and results.

**II. Supplies & Services..... \$ 544.92**

A. Consumable supplies (itemize) \$ 29.84

Cassette tapes: \$15.96 (2 packages of 6 at \$7.98 each)

Mini notebooks: \$ 9.90 (10 at \$0.99 each)

Pens: \$ 3.98 (2 packages of 6 at \$1.99 each)

B. Duplicating, postage, communications, etc. \$ 0.00

C. Other (describe and itemize) \$ 514.98

Tape recorder (interviews): \$ 64.99

Transcriber (transcription of interviews): \$ 249.99

NVIVO 7 Qualitative Data Analysis Program (analysis of interviews): \$ 200.00

**III. Travel..... \$ 0.00**

A. Transportation (describe arrangements) \$ 0.00

B. Lodging (describe arrangements) \$ 0.00

**IV. TOTAL FUNDING REQUESTED..... \$ 1044.92**