

# Starting a Campus Tradition

*A Graduation Pledge of Responsibility*

*By William Ihne*

## Foreword

*Let's just say you woke up one morning, after a night of discussing the plight of the world's fate with folks from a wide range of fields, and expertise. For example, your company may have included: a marine biologist, a chemist, a pastor or rabbi or both, a professor of philosophy and literature, a master of the violin, a member of the Science Board for the military, and thirty young students that have become aware of the major issues of our time; those issues that will play out in their futures. Those students, home schooled and otherwise, between the ages of 18-25, would certainly have some questions. What could an older adult learn from them? What could the violinist teach the chemist, and vice versa of each participant? And what if upon waking, you decide that you're going to make a commitment to one part affecting the futures of those young people? Where would you begin?*

*In 1987, a group of young people committed to helping "that plight" a little, wrote and promoted a simple 21-word statement, which was later rewritten by other students, because it wasn't quite right. That statement, called the Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility, has become a ceremonial tradition on quite a few U.S. university campuses, and has turned into somewhat of a movement. Where it's all going is anybody's guess. I guess it's up to those who participate.*

*This article will give you some idea of how the graduation pledge at Humboldt State University began with the circumstances and thought behind it. It's not meant to be a comprehensive piece on the subject, but rather a record of the major events of the campaign at HSU.*

*Oh, by the way, the aforementioned discussion did take place. In fact, those who started the Graduation Pledge Alliance, and those working successfully with that idea today, had that type of discussion, as a part of their university educations.*

## Introduction

The Graduation Pledge of Social and Environmental Responsibility began in the spring of 1987 at Humboldt State University (HSU) in Arcata, California, a northern coastal town with a history of progressive activism toward issues that effect society, and "it's environment." A meeting was called. The result, a campus club called Student Citizens for Social Responsibility was put in motion, conceived as a campus affiliate of Citizens for Social Responsibility, an Arcata affiliate of the national organization, Physicians for Social Responsibility. The primary focus of these organizations, at the time of the Cold War, was to bring an end to the nuclear arms race.

The United States had produced 60,000 nuclear warheads by the late 1980's, enough to make a statement that we were by far the best at it. No one on earth can deny that. Even the Russians finally agreed, and said "uncle." Then, the cold war ended.

The Pentagon had encouraged top university graduates to join its war making industries, or peace making, depending on which end of the political spectrum you're at. The military budget doubled from 150 billion to 300 billion during the Reagan presidency, and those invested in the war against communism were gifted with great returns. Some refer to it as the "war economy." In school, they called it the "Cold War."

## **The Graduation Pledge Beginning at HSU**

Ten people, including 7 HSU students and 3 community members, decided to show up at the first meeting of Student Citizens for Social Responsibility. Matthew Nicodemus, community member, part-time HSU instructor, and a philosophy graduate of Stanford University, brought the idea of a graduation pledge up. After a discussion, attendees founded Student Citizens for Social Responsibility (SCSR), and set a goal of drafting a graduation pledge for the May 16<sup>th</sup> Humboldt State University graduation ceremony. Jenny Berman, an HSU biology undergraduate, agreed to assist Matt. At the next meeting, they presented the following statement:

*"I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to thoroughly investigate and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job opportunity that I consider."*

SCSR members simply wanted the pledge to become an official part of the 1987 Humboldt State graduation ceremony. If it did, each graduate would be able to choose whether and when to sign it. It would be voluntary, handed out but not collected. An absolute commitment wouldn't occur if the pledge were mandatory, which was our thinking. It had to be a choice, because, it is said, people choose to take responsibility for their actions when they're aware that it is a choice.

With graduation less than two months away, SCSR members quickly sought the support necessary to get the pledge instituted at HSU.

## **The HSU Pledge Campaign**

Two hundred and fifty student signatures gathered by volunteers helped to place an initiative on the April 27<sup>th</sup> student election ballot. Seventeen percent of HSU's 4,500 students participated in the election. The results delivered a narrow victory for the pledge to be included in the spring ceremony; passing with support from 57% of voters.

The meager voter turnout inspired HSU history professor Simon Green to question, at a faculty senate meeting, "Does this election really represent what the students want?" An SCSR member responded, "To question the election is to question the state of our democracy today," continuing with statistics on the poor turn-out for past U.S. presidential elections." Students had had their opportunity to vote, and the election had been well publicized. That seemed to be the general consensus among the faculty senate after the discussion. They voted in support of it, as mentioned below.

The late Al Elpusan, then HSU Associated Student Body President (ASB), along with SCSR members, presented a resolution to the HSU Faculty Senate, Arcata's City Council members, and later to the HSU Student Legislative Council (SLC). All voted to support "the right of students to have the opportunity to consider the pledge" within the context of the graduation ceremony. (*Grads take pledge; consider job effects, The Union, Mary Barnett, June 10, 1987 Arcata, CA*) (*1,553 HSU students to receive degrees, Job Pledge to be a part of graduation. Times Standard, Betsy Hans, February 15, 1987 Eureka, CA*) (*Chronicle of Higher Education, "Notebook," p. 30, May 20, 1987*)

According to Janet Macedo, community member and an SCSR co-founder, after the student election, "we brought it up with a university staff member" who was planning the graduation ceremonies, and she said, "It will never happen." (*The Union, Mary Barnett, June 10, 1987 Arcata, CA*) Certainly, it wouldn't happen without support. After acquiring support from the HSU Faculty Senate, the Student Legislative Council, and the Arcata City Council, and with newspapers helping to carry the story, SCSR approached that commencement committee member a second time, garnering better results.

SCSR had already decided that the pledge would be offered to graduates whether or not the administration would allow it to be included in the graduation ceremonies. If the wishes of HSU students, as expressed by the election, were ignored, then SCSR volunteers would hand it out to graduates at the reception area outside the corridors of the commencement ceremonies. This plan enabled pledge organizers to inform the media that “the pledge was going to happen,” and instilled confidence into our efforts. Fortunately, the HSU administration was very supportive.

Along the campaign trail, arguments arose against the pledge. Each raised a reasonable concern. Some said the pledge was too vague, not worded strongly enough. Others felt that the graduation ceremony was a “set piece” and was only for honoring the academic accomplishments of graduates. Still others questioned why it was only part of graduation. Shouldn’t we be faced with discussions of responsibility throughout our educations? One administrator at MIT asked, “What has it got to do with commencement? I’m not sure I see it fit.” (*“Activists to present graduate pledge,” The Tech/Commencement Today, Friday, May 27, 1988*)

The commencement tradition has evolved throughout time. It isn’t a “set piece.” That we began exploring when we learned about the ceremonial mace, explained in the HSU Commencement brochure. The mace is a symbol of institutional authority that’s carried by a select member of the academic community to signify the beginning HSU’s commencement. It may seem puzzling that a weapon from the Middle Ages, used to protect kings and dignitaries, would be used in this manner, but it is. This addition, added to U.S. university graduations, shows that the ceremony can evolve and that it isn’t a “set piece.” The mace was evidence that the ceremony had changed, and therefore, could change again.

In early May of 1987, SCSR negotiated with the HSU administration to set the stage for the integration of the pledge into the May 16<sup>th</sup> commencement ceremonies. The administration agreed to place a table to the left of the graduation stage, and to provide a tablecloth and flowers for a formal presentation. In the meantime, SCSR recruited volunteers to hand out pledges at the six graduation ceremonies.

This commencement ceremony pledge was a first at HSU, and likely in U.S history. It was a dramatic moment for our group, and possibly for the HSU administration too. While our plans were solidly written down, we really didn’t know how the pledge would play out in the ceremony, and the ceremonies are such an important moment for the university, and for those celebrating the completion of their degrees.

SCSR followed “the plan,” one step at a time, while keeping fingers crossed, hoping the presentation would flow as expected.

### **Graduation Day- May 16, 1987**

Volunteers handed out green leaflets to the graduate’s parents as they entered the auditorium. The leaflets explained the voluntary nature of “this new pledge tradition” and stated, “There are as many reasons for signing...as there are graduates. Just ask one what it means to them.” It continued on, describing the pledge as being “a first-time event at HSU, and perhaps a first in U.S. history.” A small copy of the pledge was displayed near the top. A list of the contributors was at the bottom.

Graduates shook the hand of Humboldt State University President Alistair McCrone, received their diplomas, and then descended the center stage stairs, where a volunteer offered them the pledge. Some accepted it and stepped over to the table to sign it publicly, while the majority of graduates just took it with them. There were a couple that refused it, and the following year, a conservative SLC member tore it up.

We didn't track those who signed, so that total is unknown. However, SCSR conducted taped interviews with many graduates and their parents to get feedback and to learn.

The pledge received a fair amount of media coverage that spring, including a front-page note in the *Wall Street Journal* (June 2, 1987). Between 1987-88, articles showed up in many other mainstream newspapers and in a host of magazines and newsletters around the country. This helped to spread the word.

### **The National Campaign**

Over the summer of 1987 and into the fall, SCSR raised money from community groups and individuals, including HSU faculty, to advertise a new project, called the Graduation Pledge Alliance (GPA), to schools across the nation. Pledge co-author Matt Nicodemus declared, in the September edition of the HSU Lumberjack, that "it is a national program now."

In late February of 1988, a bulk mailing party brought together volunteers to stuff envelopes and lick stamps (*no self-adhesive stamps then*). We used mailing lists we'd bought to send our national campaign letter that advertised a "Pledge of Responsibility" organizing manual to 3300 college and university student governments, and 3500 campus newspapers. (*We had heard of a thing called a computer bulletin board, but never found anyone who knew much about it. In 1987, there was no Internet as we know it to be today.*)

GPA hadn't raised enough money to do follow-up phone calls; therefore, we never learned the full extent of our success. But we started receiving a fair amount of calls and mail from student governments and campus newspapers.

In April of 1988, the newly formed Graduation Pledge Alliance at HSU, formed out of SCSR with new student members, organized a press conference on top of the tallest building at San Francisco State University. Students from three Bay Area universities attended -- all had active campaigns. Stanford students were holding their pledge vote the following week. Our goal was to get to know the other organizers, and support their campaigns through public education publicity generated by the press conference.

HSU Associated Student Body President, Al Elpusan, was authorized to transport GPA members to San Francisco in a black Lincoln Town Car owned by the university. We called it "the George Bush car" for some reason. I guess because it looked so official. Victor Green, an Arcata City Council member, flew down to make a public statement.

Two reporters from the HSU Lumberjack newspaper traveled with us, so we had our own "embedded" press. We set up an office in a San Francisco penthouse owned by the father of an HSU student legislative council representative. There we prepared speeches and press packets until a late hour.

Earlier in the day, we held a picnic at Freedom Park in San Francisco with Bay Area pledge campaign organizers from Stanford University, University of California at Berkeley, and from San Francisco State University. It was a sunny, warm, and delightfully breezy, gorgeous Bay Area day. With blankets on the grass, we ate picnic sandwiches and discussed our campus organizing challenges.

During the visit, our Bay Area friends expressed amazement at the level of community cooperation we had known at Humboldt. Each shared stories about the petty partisan infighting that was going on at their campuses, and within their student governments, explaining that it was "difficult to accomplish anything." This helped us to understand how unique HSU and the Arcata Community was.

The press conference was a partial success from our point of view. Although we didn't generate the media coverage we had desired, the event granted us a chance to meet and become familiar with other campus organizers, plus our Humboldt crew learned a few things about setting up a national press conference.

Did I say national press conference? We were following the slogan "think global, act local," which was a popular 80's phrase. We wanted national coverage, and why not? In 1988, the President of the United States, George H.W. Bush, was pushing for a mandatory pledge of allegiance in schools, and making burning of the flag a national issue too. Why couldn't our voluntary graduation pledge be part of the national dialogue, a pledge intended to help students to think about how to improve their own lives and our collective future?

The national press conference was a last-minute venture, like the original pledge campaign the previous year. Only one TV station, two radio stations, and two reporters from our very own Lumberjack had shown up. We read our prepared statements, fielded questions, and then headed back to redwood country.

The Graduation Pledge Alliance national campaign letter, sent to U.S. university and college governments in late February of 1988, began:

*"IMAGINE THIS, it's the year 2015, and at thousands of universities around the world, students have the opportunity to sign a pledge like the following..."*

*(The same graduation pledge from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology campaign was placed under this statement, and after that, the letter continued with more of the vision for the pledge...)*

What difference could be made if hundreds of thousands, or millions, of students entering the workforce investigated the ethics of their potential employers? Would some choose a different employer? Or simply "work from within" to improve their company's impacts? Could a powerful pledge movement influence policymakers to make changes for the betterment of society and the environment? Would students make more of a difference if the university encouraged them a little more? We had a lot of questions, actually. Young people usually do.

Keep in mind that in the late 1980's, there were many issues being raised on university campuses. We were in the middle of a nuclear arms race, with a huge hole in the ozone. There was talk about the U.S. having traded arms for hostages in Iran, and massive species extinctions in the forecast. On and on continued the list of concerns: global warming, destruction of the rain forests, nuclear testing, toxic waste, U.S. support of wars in Latin America, apartheid in South Africa, and in our own Arcata backyard, a Texas oil tycoon was quickly liquidating the largest private holdings of ancient old growth redwood forest to pay for his company takeover. There were a lot of issues, like today - a mind-boggling amount for any young person.

I think it's hard, for young people especially, not to care or to feel something about the world's plight, and painfully difficult to accept that we are each a part of the destructiveness. Somehow, the pledge simplifies things to ground level. Having it a part of the graduation ceremony draws attention to the fact that what you do, your actions and their resulting consequences, have an impact on society and the environment, and that that impact matters.

We figured that if the university valued the graduation pledge project, recognizing it as an educational tool, then opportunities for ethics discussion would gain support outside the ceremony. Many students, at least from my generation, had professors who were adults during the Vietnam years. Those professors still believed in the promise of our nation's democracy, and were continually threading ethics into the curriculum.

The GPA national campaign letter, sent in late February of 1988, was written as a hopeful history piece as if looking back from the year 2015 at all the positive changes that might have occurred, envisioning a deep integration of “matching values with careers” into educational programs and other campus activities. The following excerpt from GPA’s campaign letter revealed the basic initial support we envisioned the university would provide for students:

*“...The university community knew that for students to truly understand what this pledge commitment meant, students would need more opportunities to think, discuss and develop their concerns and concepts of individual responsibility.”* The letter continued with: *“Today, students, faculty and administrators are addressing daily questions of responsibility,”* suggesting roles for each at the university-- all working together.

Earlier in February of 1988, the HSU student government became divided after new conservative members were elected. The debate surrounding the pledge brought out students in droves. Most were for the pledge, and some were against it. It was a healthy process. SCSR presented a resolution to the HSU Student Legislative Council asking for more pledge visibility at the graduation ceremony, including a mention in the formal commencement brochure, an announcement at the ceremony that the option existed, and for an endorsement for its formal inclusion into all future HSU graduation ceremonies, including a yearly financial allocation.

The Student Legislative Council (SLC) debated the resolution on three consecutive Wednesday nights in front of a standing-room-only crowd. Many students waited in the hallways to speak, and for the outcome of the council’s decision. Rumors were flying that the newly elected conservative student government members wanted to “crush the pledge.”

The resolution initially passed by one vote at the February 10<sup>th</sup> assembly of the SLC. However, at the next meeting, there was a motion to rescind the resolution, which was to be voted on at the next meeting. Over eighty students attended that meeting. At the final meeting, the SLC voted to support the Graduation Pledge Alliance’s proposal, giving the pledge a home in all future graduation ceremonies. The vote was 7 to 4. (*SLC retains environmental graduation pledge, The Lumberjack, Vicky Boyd, p.5, Feb. 24, 1988*), The council’s decision was included in GPA’s national campaign letter which was mailed out days later.

Spring of 1988 delivered 20 graduation pledge campaigns, including a California junior college and high school. The majority of university campaigns were in California. The most visible of those was at Stanford, where Stanford University President Donald Kennedy encouraged signing of the pledge in his commencement address to 30,000 attending the Stanford stadium ceremony that June of 1988.

Kennedy quoted Hippocrates, stating,

*“...First, please do go to work on the world's problems. They look much more overwhelming when one cannot envision oneself as part of the solution... It is not for nothing that Hippocrates led off his string of aphorisms with: "First do no harm." Evaluate what you do in terms of all its consequences so that you have confidence in the worth of your commitments. **It is that context in which I view the Commencement pledge idea.** It asks that we consider outcomes- not that we declare allegiance in advance to some normative standard it supplies. It should be as acceptable to the political conservative as to the liberal, because it does something we all need to do more of- that is, it helps us focus on the consequences of what we do, urges us to estimate them, and urges us to try to decide whether they are acceptable.”*  
(*The Stanford University, Campus Report, June 15, 1988*)

We hadn't spoken with Donald Kennedy personally, but were delighted that he had acted, as we had hoped some administrators might do, in supporting the pledge. His point, discussed below, speaks of changes in education. While it lacks specificity in what changes to enact, it did raise at least one pertinent question.

According to the cover of a brochure advertising The Eleventh Annual International Conference on Critical Thinking and Educational Reform, August 4-7, 1991, organized by the Center for Critical Thinking & Moral Critique at Sonoma State University in California, Kennedy wrote a letter to 3,000 college and university presidents.

Kennedy's quote on the cover of that brochure read as follows:

*"It simply will not do for our schools to produce a small elite to power our scientific establishment and a larger cadre of workers with basic skills to do routine work. Millions of people around the world now have these same basic skills and are willing to work twice as long for as little as one-tenth our basic wage. To maintain and enhance our quality of life, we must develop a leading-edge economy based on workers who can think for a living... This means we have to educate a vast mass of people capable of thinking critically, creatively, and imaginatively."*

Kennedy suggested educational reform based on current world realities -- that being globalization, referencing the link between the university and the outside world which was undergoing unprecedented changes. One of the questions raised was, Just how were U.S. universities responding to the rapid global economic and environmental changes? The term "globalization" wasn't such a central term in the 1980's, but there was a growing movement at that time to "buy American" in order to save the jobs that were being exported.

This graduation pledge points to standards for examining consequences that career decisions have on society and the environment, and does so at an important "rite of passage" for young people entering society's work force. One can't really argue that a graduate's knowledge, when applied, doesn't have adverse consequences on human beings and "their" environment. Just read the costly Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund clean-up list. On the other hand, knowledge can also be applied to improve planetary conditions. However, a graduate must inevitably find a job after graduation, and make a living. That's the bottom line. Where does the university draw their line in helping students to find the jobs that are 'right' for them?

Is the role of the university to instill a sense of responsibility, and inspire their students to think about how we, for example, are going to prevent the continuing creation of toxic landscapes, or solve a zillion other problems that citizens are concerned about? If so, then students need opportunities to think critically about their own roles, and to develop tools for analysis and application. They are the future. Increasing discussion may be a way to harness the idealism and creative problem solving forces of future generations.

The Graduation Pledge Alliance (GPA) assumed that university students want to carry their values into their careers and find ways to apply them in the workplace. That's certainly an ideal at Humboldt State University, but how to do that was a question that we thought might be more fully answered as this whole project evolved. We had only raised questions. We were young people who didn't have the solutions. We needed more than a graduation pledge. We needed a course of action.

In the fall of 1987, pledge co-author Matt Nicodemus had the idea to develop a resource manual called *How to Investigate Potential Employers -- A guide for the responsible student*. Matt began initial planning and co-authoring of that "Good Work" project with writer Melissa Everett and therapist Joseph Maizlish. Melissa ran with the idea, producing *Making a Living While Making a Difference*.

Bantam Books published Everett's book in 1995. Then, New Society Publishers released a new, revised edition in 1999, with a second printing in 2000. Just short of 20,000 copies have been sold, many to campus career centers, where there is a growing interest in supporting students' exploration of ethics and responsibility in career choices. Everett's guide provides practical frameworks for investigating one's own ethics, and resources for finding ways to apply them within a career.

*Melissa also founded the Sustainable Careers Institute ([www.sustainablecareers.com](http://www.sustainablecareers.com)), a small training organization that works with campus career centers, as well as students, to help facilitate an understanding of the complexities of "socially responsible career development."*

Offering the pledge was a beginning for the Graduation Pledge Alliance. GPA's plan was to increase the amount of resources to assist students in expressing their deepest values in their life's work, thinking that if we did that, then possibly more future workers and management would be able to do so. We liked the idea of job satisfaction coming from living in concert with personal values, hoping that if more people were able to do that, then maybe they would have a better impact on our society, and the environment.

Increasing resources and opportunities for graduates to find jobs aligned with their values is a much larger, but equally important task as instituting a graduation pledge into a school's graduation ceremony. However, by instituting a pledge, those efforts are given a focal point, or purpose in fulfilling a mission guided by this new tradition.

Stanford's President Kennedy understood that the graduation pledge didn't prescribe a definition of what was acceptable behavior, which he made clear in his speech. The pledge wording is such that people on both sides of the court, whether tree huggers or tree cutters, Republicans or Democrats, Enron executives or their workers, can, in their own "good conscience," sign. That is the beauty of this pledge.

Pledge promoters support the potential of human beings to progress, and see this pledge as a tool in fostering an environment where responsibility is more openly discussed. This type of an environment, supported by a pledge movement and the educational community, can assist the tapping of human potential, which can likely lead to positive changes in policies, and actions directed towards a common good, not just for narrow national interests, but for humankind. In the spirit of the 1969 U.S. space program, our country, the world's most influential super power, needs to continue taking "one large step for mankind."

Here are a few pledge-inspired examples that we've learned about along the way that exemplify this potential:

- At Humboldt State University, Bill Ziemer, an HSU chemistry major who regularly attended our GPA meetings in 1988, began wondering where the chemical waste was going from his classroom experiments. His investigation revealed that the HSU chemistry department was using a waste disposal manual from near Roman times. He and other students worked with the department to develop new waste disposal policies.
- A HSU philosophy major, Lindamarie King, who also attended our weekly GPA meetings that same year, was upset at having to dissect real animals in her classes. She got the university to approve the option of working with models instead of real, living animals killed for dissection.
- In the spring of 1988, HSU students from both ends of the political spectrum worked together to organize a diverse panel discussion to look at the implications of scientific knowledge applied. Professors teaching physics and those working in the field of nuclear

weapons development participated. The discussion framework was: “What does it mean to be socially and environmentally responsible working in my scientific field? How do I define responsibility? And how does my definition of environmental and social responsibility align with that of the organization that I work for?” The forum, which attracted a sizable audience, was called “Careers and Conscience.”

- Bill Devall, author of *Deep Ecology -- Living as if Nature Mattered* (Peregrine Books, 1985), and an HSU sociology professor, invited SCSR members to speak to his Critical Thinking classes. His students wrote essays on whether or not they thought the pledge would be effective, and how a pledge signer might go about following through on their promise.
- A couple years ago, the faculty at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) made a suggestion to organize their graduation pledge more deeply into the university fabric. Their task force wrote a recommendation letter to the BGSU President, suggesting that a pledge be included from the beginning of a student’s admission to the university, and that a senior graduation pledge, modeled after Humboldt’s, be the conclusion, choosing one “intentionally designed to produce principled graduates.” (See [Committee on Visions and Values report to the President, www.bgsu.edu/offices/president/vision/ucvreport/ucvreport\\_5.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/president/vision/ucvreport/ucvreport_5.html)).
- At Harvard, Graduation Pledge organizers developed a series of panel discussions on making a difference with career choices and placed pertinent information in their university’s career center library (*Harvard Magazine* May/June 2001, pp.81-83).
- At Princeton University, Eighty percent of the members of the Class of 2002 adopted the graduation pledge. ([http://www.princeton.edu/~paw/headlines/headline\\_052202.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~paw/headlines/headline_052202.html))
- At Manchester College in North Manchester, Indiana, home of the first U.S. peace studies program (started in 1948) and current headquarters for the national Graduation Pledge Alliance effort, they distribute the pledge at their ceremony along with green ribbons to be worn on grad gowns in signification of their commitment.

Manchester College got involved with the pledge in 1988, but in 1996 began organizing the pledge nationally. At that point, the GPA movement had lost some spark, and many campaigns had failed to institutionalize the pledge permanently into their schools’ commencement ceremonies.

Student organizers, with the help of Neil Wollman, a senior fellow and psychology professor who’s been instrumental in developing and maintaining the program at Manchester, changed the pledge wording to include decisions that one faces while working in a job.

Manchester's version is the popular wording on most campuses today:

*"I, \_\_\_\_\_, pledge to explore and take into account the social and environmental consequences of any job I consider and will try to improve these aspects of any organizations for which I work."*

Manchester College’s GPA has a web site, [www.graduationpledge.org](http://www.graduationpledge.org), that provides resources for those organizing pledge campaigns, and has links for career choice resources to support those pledge signers that intend to follow through on their commitments. Manchester’s graduation pledge campaign website lists over a hundred schools involved.

The pledge recently found its way over the border to Canada. At Dalhousie University in Canada, a student organization called The Society for Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility, held a small alternative graduation pledge ceremony on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2002. The next year, organizers campaigned to make it a part of their official campus graduation ceremony. Since learning of their pledge work, we've found that the University of British Columbia in Vancouver has embraced the graduation pledge, calling it an "American idea," in an article on their website.

## Conclusion

It doesn't seem like this "American idea" has become any less relevant since 1987, and with exponential growth of environmental awareness ever since the 1960's and polls showing strong public concern for corporate and environmental responsibility, it's unlikely that it will be discarded any time soon. Finding solutions to the major issues of our time isn't the easiest task, but solutions do exist somewhere in the hearts and minds of people living on this relatively small blue planet. Making solutions popular IS the ever more challenging test. It takes open dialogue and participation by dedicated individuals.

The pledge isn't the answer. It's just a piece of paper with words. On the other hand, it's much more. The words and concept point towards solutions -- that is, it points to the individual and suggests a role for the educational community. The vision that goes along with it is simple. If thousands of schools around the world give graduating students an opportunity to sign the pledge, and if even a small percentage of pledge-signers dedicate themselves to ensuring positive, constructive consequences, then humanity, and the systems that support life on our earth, might very well reap a substantial benefit.

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## Quotations

"This pledge is important because it is a wonderful thing for people to publicly proclaim their commitment to improving the world." President Garvey, Prescott College, Arizona.  
(<http://www.prescott.edu/news/headlines/050301.html>)

"I am delighted to support this effort of our students... This pledge correlates with the Siena College mission statement, in affirming the unique worth of each person, and the responsibility of individuals to cooperate in the creation of a just and peaceful society." Br. Michael Harlan, OFM, director of Siena's Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy. ([www.siena.edu/siena\\_news/Current%20Stories/Grad%20Pledge%20Alliance.htm](http://www.siena.edu/siena_news/Current%20Stories/Grad%20Pledge%20Alliance.htm))

"It's something we all need to do more of...it asks us to consider outcomes.... It should be as acceptable to the political conservative as to the liberal" President Donald Kennedy, Stanford University (*The Stanford University, Campus Report, June 15, 1988*).

"We become educated men and women so we can go on and act in an environmentally responsible manner...It (the pledge) is a reminder for us. It's not what the education is and what it can do for us, it's what you can do for society with that education." Mark Murray, former HSU student body president and 15-year executive director of *Californians Against Waste* (*Science for the People, News Notes, Sept/Oct. 1987*).

“Just reciting the words is not really what makes the difference. What makes the difference is that these graduates have been at Humboldt where there is a lot of consciousness about the importance of the environment and man’s place in it. They’ve given thought to these things, and the pledge is symbolic of what they have learned and what they’re thinking about as they go out into the world.” David Craigie, HSU natural resources professor. (1987 HSU Commencement Interview conducted by pledge organizers, The Union, Mary Barnett, June 10, 1987 Arcata, CA).

### Fairly Recent Press Coverage

**Students choose school, jobs or starting their own companies**, MIT Tech Talk, published by the MIT News Office at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, May 31, 2000 (mention of Pledge signers applying values.) (<http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/tt/2000/may31/jobs.html>)

**When College Graduates Put Ideals Before Dollars**, The Washington Post, Colman McCarthy, June 5, 2000; p.C04 (<http://hcs.harvard.edu/~gradpldg/post.shtml>)

**Students pledge not to forget social responsibility**, Associated Press, Justin Pope, Associated Press Writer, June 7, 2000(<http://hcs.harvard.edu/~gradpldg/ap.shtml>)

**The Undergraduate -- Commitment 101**, Harvard Magazine, May/June 2001, p.81-83

**Taking the pledge**, Wiretap, Eric Eldon, June 12, 2001 (<http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=11020>)

**Will Grads Raise the Bar?** Gallup Poll Organization, June 18, 2002 ([www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com))

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### Press Coverage 1987-1988

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**Kennedy to encourage signing of Senior Pledge**, The Stanford Daily, Rob Burwell, May 12, 1988.

**Activists to present graduate pledge**, The Tech/Commencement Today, Seth Gordan, May 27, 1988 (A main feature article on the MIT pledge campaign [Missing archive article]. However, an opinion letter, written by organizers and addressed to MIT President Gray comparing a long-standing MIT graduation ritual with the new pledge can be found at the following website. ([http://kurzweil.mit.edu/archives/VOL\\_108/TECH\\_V108\\_S0472\\_P004.pdf](http://kurzweil.mit.edu/archives/VOL_108/TECH_V108_S0472_P004.pdf))

**MIT grads get moral pitch**, Boston Herald, Ted Fine, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1988 p.10 (paragraph on the pledge being handed out by the Coalition to Humanize MIT)

**Stanford grads pledge to weigh social values**, Times-Standard, Eureka, CA. United Press International, June 13, 1988

**Graduation Pledge Stirs Debate at Colleges,** *Los Angeles Times*, Larry Gordan, June 22, 1988 (p. 3)

**A Hippocratic Oath for Mathematicians?** *A paper presented to the International Congress on Mathematics Education, by Chandler Davis, Budapest, Hungary. (Pledge discussed on p,7) July 1988*

**Many grads taking the pledge,** *Santa Rosa Press-Democrat*, Elizabeth Dunn, *Associated Press*, July 10, 1988

**Imagine Render-** *A Gift of Peace*, a book published by the *Michigan Art Education Association*, (no date- 1988 or 1989), included an edited reprint of GPA's national graduation pledge campaign letter, entitled Graduation Pledge Alliance. Six thousand copies of the book were donated to Michigan Art teachers and schools.

**Special Note:** A 7 foot-tall Peace Pole, one of thousands planted around the globe, was donated to HSU in 1988 by a Michigan peace organization in recognition of its efforts to establish the graduation pledge. The peace pole is located in front of the HSU campus Health Center, and reads: "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in four languages: English, Russian, Spanish, and Yurok. The last name is of the tribe of Native Americans that lived where the HSU campus now resides.