

6

The Vernal Education Project

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Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.

— H.G. Wells

The last chapter described a four-stage strategic program for bringing about fundamental transformation of society. This chapter specifies a project to implement the first stage by developing a network of fifty educational centers across the United States. These centers would bolster the knowledge, skills,

strength, and endurance of thousands of dedicated progressive activists each year, enabling them to support and edu-

cate hundreds of thousands of other activists (as described in Chapters 7 and 8). Together, all these activists would then be able to carry out the rest of the strategic program for fundamental change (as described in Chapter 9).

In order to discuss this project and distinguish it from other education programs and other progressive change efforts, I have named it the Vernal Education Project. I chose the term “vernal” to evoke the image of a new, vibrant effort to revitalize society in a fresh, lively way, reminiscent of springtime.

Please note that I have formulated this education program and the plan for its development in some detail to show that it is feasible to create such an enterprise.* I have spent a great deal of time considering all the necessary elements and testing many combinations of size and cost factors to come up with a self-consistent set that also seems both realistic and desirable. I believe this particular plan is sound, and I hope to work with others to implement it. However, this design is only one possible scheme among innumerable alternatives, and it is not set in stone. As the other developers and I work together to create the first education center and replicate it, we will invariably modify this plan in a variety of ways, probably changing it substantially.

Moreover, other activists might admire some aspects of the Vernal Education Project but have other ideas about

<p>ver•nal \vûr' nûl\ adj. 1. Of, relating to, or occurring in the spring. 2. Fresh or new like the spring; youthful; energetic.</p>

* This chapter summarizes the design. Appendix B includes many additional figures that provide more extensive detail. Chapter 10 lays out a specific timeline for developing and implementing the design.

how to implement them. They might create their own independent endeavors. Inevitably, what actually unfolds will surely be quite different from what is described here. I present this plan simply to show there is at least one way to carry out such a project and to offer it as a first draft for a project.

DESIGN CRITERIA FOR THE VERNAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

There are many classes, workshops, internships, and schools for progressive activists, but they are generally oriented toward beginning activists, toward a particular organization and its needs, or toward specific issues.* With its unique goal of fundamental societal transformation, the Vernal Education Project has a distinct orientation. To successfully implement Phase 1 of the strategic program for change outlined in Chapter 5, it must meet these criteria:

- **Offer a Wide-Ranging Education to Progressive Social Change Activists**

*When the only tool you own
is a hammer, every problem
begins to resemble a nail.*
— Abraham Maslow

The Vernal Education Project must offer activists a broad and diverse education that lets them truly understand how the world now functions and shows them ways to transform all aspects of society.

- **Vastly Increase the Skills, Strength, and Endurance of Activists**

The project must provide a deep education to a large number of progressive activists. It must provide enough skills and offer enough support that activists have the strength and knowledge to effectively transform society. It must offer activists practical skills and useful information they can directly apply to their progressive change work. It must also provide enough support so that activists can carry on their work for many years.

- **Facilitate the Development of a Cooperative Community**

The project must support a cooperative community of progressive activists.

- **Operate Efficiently**

The project must produce substantial results, yet consume few resources. The overall cost must be quite low. The project must also supplement and bolster existing progressive change efforts, not detract from them or compete with them for funding or activist energy.

* A few of these educational programs are described at the end of this chapter.

- **Span the Country**

The project must reach large numbers of activists all across the United States.

- **Integrate with Activists' Lives**

The project must not disrupt activists' lives. In particular, it must educate them without diverting them from their change work.

- **Grow Rapidly and Continue for Decades**

The project, starting from square one, must grow rapidly so that it can quickly reach a large number of activists. It must then be able to continue providing education and support to many activists for many decades.

- **Conform to Progressive Ideals**

The project must be consistent with progressive ideals in its structure, operation, and methods.

Philosophy of Education for Progressive Change

The last design criterion is especially important. Not only must the Vernal Education Project offer extensive education to thousands of activists, but it must do so in a way that is consistent with a good society. Traditional schools often view students as empty vessels into which wise teachers pour knowledge, filling them with The Truth. But this approach is actually more conducive to fostering a dictatorship of docile slaves than to building a democratic, cooperative society of empowered, responsible citizens. It assumes students are not only ignorant, but unable to think for themselves. It also assumes there is a single, absolute truth which teachers know and students must learn.

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education. — Martin Luther King, Jr.

Education is not filling a bucket but lighting a fire.
— William Butler Yeats

The world is infinitely complex. Important truths conflict with other truths, each valid in its way. For students truly to learn, they must have exposure to the full spectrum of ideas. They must also have the opportunity to weigh each new idea — evaluate its merits and flaws, relate it to their previous experiences, compare it to other ideas, explore its ramifications — and then wrestle with it to find an appropriate place for it in their own worldview. Furthermore, to become powerful citizens, students must practice using their own judgment, choosing their own directions, working cooperatively with others, and taking responsibility for their individual and collective choices.

I have tried to design the Vernal Education Program to offer a supportive environment for activists to explore a broad range of ideas about society and social change. Vernal students would be free to envision the kind of world they seek to create and free to choose whatever means they believe are best to get there. They would also have a safe place to try out their ideas and to practice using them with each other.

OVERVIEW OF THE VERNAL EDUCATION PROGRAM AND NETWORK

As I envision it, the Vernal Education Network would consist of fifty Vernal centers spread across the United States. Each Vernal center would be operated locally, but each would use a similar curriculum and similar educational methods. Each center would also coordinate with the others regionally and nationally.

The Vernal Program would be oriented toward activists with at least a year of social change experience and a desire

to support other activists. It would offer Vernal students a wide variety of information, skills, and ongoing support so that after graduating they could do effective, powerful, progressive social change work. Each one-year session, about as intensive as the combination of two semesters of college and a summer job, would consist of these main parts:

- Student-run study groups
- Internships with existing social change groups
- Some independent social change work
- A small amount of social service work
- Self-study of current affairs
- A series of five staffmember-facilitated workshops
- Student-run emotional support groups or individual therapy
- Special events for Vernal students to socialize and network with each other

In addition, Vernal staffmembers would provide information about other educational resources and encourage students to partake of the ones they needed. Students would also be encouraged to maintain good physical health and to exercise regularly.

The first three months of the yearlong session would

Some Definitions

Vernal Education Program — an educational program that would use a particular curriculum and methods to educate progressive activists

Vernal Session — a one-year course of study and mutual support that would involve thirty students who learned together

Vernal Staffmembers — experienced activists who would administer and facilitate Vernal sessions

Vernal Team — four full-time equivalent (FTE) Vernal staffmembers who would facilitate and administer four different Vernal sessions at a time; they would assist the study groups, arrange internships, research and prepare materials, facilitate workshops, mentor and support students, hire and prepare new staffmembers, and administer the whole program; typically, a team would launch a new session every three months

Vernal Center — another name for a Vernal team located in one metropolitan area; note that a Vernal center would be conceptual, not physical — the Vernal team might not even have an office

Vernal Education Network — the network of fifty Vernal centers around the United States.

Regional Administrators — Vernal staffmembers who would provide additional administrative help to Vernal centers and provide coordination between centers; they would not be associated with a particular center, but would work with all the centers in a region

New Staff Preparers — Vernal staffmembers who would help to hire, support, and teach new staffmembers how

to do their jobs; these staffmembers would also not be associated with a particular center, but would work wherever necessary across the country

Vernal Students — activists who enrolled in a Vernal session

Vernal Graduates — activists who graduated from a Vernal session

Very Active Graduates — Vernal graduates who saw progressive social change as their primary focus and worked at least twenty hours per week for fundamental change

Less Active Graduates — Vernal graduates who spent less than twenty hours per week working for progressive change — these people would probably spend some time working for social change, but their *primary* focus would be on some other activity (such as pursuing a traditional career or raising a family)

Vernal Activists — all Vernal students, very active graduates, and less active graduates who were working for progressive change

Vernal Education Project — the effort to create and sustain the Vernal network and to support Vernal activists in their progressive social change work

Note that I have deliberately chosen not to use the term “school” since this word often conjures up images of classrooms, grades, and obedience to authority — the Vernal Education Program would have none of these. I have also chosen to avoid traditional terms like “training,” “instruction,” and “teachers” to escape the negative connotations sometimes associated with these words.

emphasize academic study of theory and history, though it would also include practical, hands-on learning. The next six months would include less theory and be more practical. The last three months would emphasize direct social change work. This last period would also pave the way for Vernal students to make a smooth transition to the change work they would do after graduating.

Students would live at home and do most of their studying, internships, and social change work in their home communities. In this way, their learning would be directly related to the change work they chose to do, and they would not incur any costs of going away to school. This would also significantly decrease the overall cost of the Vernal Program.

Each yearlong Vernal session would enroll about thirty students who lived near each other, learned together, and supported each other. Each session would be largely independent of others, though students would periodically socialize with students from other local sessions.

Four full-time Vernal staffmembers would work together in a team to simultaneously facilitate four sessions in the same area. Vernal staffmembers would provide overall guidance to students, arrange internships, facilitate the workshops, develop and update the curriculum, develop and update lists of local resources, and ensure that students were offered what they needed to become effective activists. Staffmembers would also provide administration for the whole program including recruitment and admission of students, collection of tuition, accounting, hiring new staffmembers, and so on.

To ensure the resources of the Vernal Program were used wisely, admission would be limited to activists who were already knowledgeable and experienced with social change and were committed to long-term progressive change. In particular, the program would be limited to those who intended to devote most of their time to nonviolent, fundamental social change for at least seven years after they graduated from the session and who were willing to support and educate other activists. The program would also be limited to activists who agreed to work to end their own addictive and oppressive behavior and to conduct all their social change work in an exemplary manner so as to serve as positive role models for other activists and the general public. In selecting students, Vernal staffmembers would also seek to assemble a group that reflected the diversity of the region in age, race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth.

Once again, note that I have outlined a specific format for the Vernal program here, but it is likely to change as the developers of the Vernal Project test a variety of possibilities and see what works best.¹

Mission of the Vernal Education Program

The main mission of the Vernal Program would be:

- To pass along the lore of social change to activists — including social change history, social change skills, political

theories, critiques of current society, visions of alternatives, and methods for imparting change skills to other activists

- To develop activists' critical thinking skills
- To provide progressive activists with a chance to experience and practice the skills of direct democracy, consensus decision making, individual and collective responsibility, cooperation, conflict resolution, systematic problem solving in a group, nonviolent struggle, and other methods of progressive social change
- To spread social change skills widely across the entire range of movements for progressive change and across the United States
- To create a community of activists sympathetic with one another's perspectives who could support one another emotionally and physically
- To provide a safe forum for diverse activists to discuss and debate social change ideas with their colleagues
- To sustain progressive activism, especially during hard times
- To inspire hope by serving as a bright beacon of progressive ideals, exemplary moral values, and effective social change shining out through the darkness of conventional society and politics
- To inspire hope by producing enough Vernal graduates who would work assiduously for change so that each graduate would know she was not alone

We have come out of the time when obedience, the acceptance of discipline, intelligent courage and resolution were most important, into that more difficult time when it is a person's duty to understand the world rather than simply fight for it.

— Ernest Hemingway

DETAILS OF THE VERNAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

After studying a variety of progressive change schools, I have tried to craft the Vernal Education Program to convey the greatest amount of social change knowledge to new activists using the fewest resources possible. To ensure the program would be both useful and inexpensive it relies on: (1) having students teach each other, (2) tapping the educational resources of existing social change groups, and (3) avoiding the costs of renting, buying, and maintaining campuses or buildings. The design also incorporates a wide variety of educational methods.

At the heart of the Vernal Program would be direct, hands-on social change work, supplemented by reading, discussion, research, writing, experiential exercises (role-plays), and some lecture presentations. Though the program would include social change theory, it would focus primarily

on the practical aspects of applying this theory to real social change work — especially to the work that Vernal students were presently engaged in or would be soon after graduating. As I envision it, the program would have these ten main parts:

1. Study Groups

Study groups would be the primary means for Vernal students to acquire basic knowledge about the history and theory of progressive social change. Students would conduct study group meetings in their own homes. Each study group would comprise five to nine students who lived in the same neighborhood or city. The students in four or five study groups located near one another would comprise a Vernal session of about thirty students.

Students would meet in their study groups for three hours at a time (see Figure 6.1 for a typical meeting agenda). They would meet four times a week for the first three months of their session (the first quarter), three times a week for the next six months, and twice a week for the last three months except when they were attending workshops (as described below) and during holiday and vacation periods. Following this schedule, Vernal students would meet 116 times in their study groups.*

During the first nine months, students would mostly follow an established curriculum of study topics prepared by Vernal staffmembers (see the illustrative outline of topics below in the section entitled “Study Group Topics”). In preparation for most meetings, students would read an appropriate book or set of articles. Then they would discuss these readings at the study group meeting. Some readings would be introductory in nature for those relatively new to the topic, while others would appeal to those who were already knowledgeable.

Students would focus on several different major topic areas, spending a few weeks on each one. At the beginning of each major topic area, every student would read the same book or set of articles. For the rest of the time devoted to the topic area, each student would choose and read a different set of materials and make a concise five minute presentation to the other students describing the reading and its most important ideas.² In some meetings, students would choose an article or two from a recent magazine or newspaper that covered some current event (on any topic), read it, and present it to the other students.

Each student would read approximately 50–150 pages (and, perhaps, listen to a recording, watch a video, or ex-

Figure 6.1: A Typical Agenda for a Study Group Meeting

10 min.	Check-in (each person briefly says how things are going, especially anything new and good)
5	Agenda Review
15	Business (choose facilitator for next meeting, arrange any important logistical matters related to readings, meeting place, and so on)
50	Presentation of Reports and Clarifying Questions on the readings
15	Break — Refreshments, stretching, games, informal discussion
75	Discussion — What are the useful or interesting ideas in these readings? <i>or</i> How can we reconcile the diverse ideas in these readings? <i>or</i> How could we use this information to bring about progressive change? <i>or</i> something else decided by the group
10	Evaluation — Good aspects of the meeting process, bad aspects, ways to improve the process
3 hours	

plore a web site) in preparation for each study group meeting. Every few weeks, students would also read supplementary materials and prepare brief written summaries for the other students. On average, students would probably spend about six hours preparing for every study group meeting.

During some study group meetings, students might analyze a particular problem using a force-field chart, web chart, or problem-solution-action chart.[†] Alternatively, they might engage in a values clarification exercise, do a campaign simulation exercise, or play a simulation computer game. At other meetings, students might listen to recordings, watch videos, or invite experienced activists to talk about their work. Students might also take field trips to visit nearby social change organizations. At some meetings, particularly when world events were especially exciting, stu-

[†] **Force-field chart:** a brainstormed list of the forces supporting and opposing a particular change campaign.

Web chart: a diagram of the various causes of a particular social situation and the causes of those causes, extending out to all the root causes.

Problem-solution-action chart: a brainstormed list of social problems (in a particular issue area), then possible solutions to one of the problems, then possible actions to realize one of the solutions.

For a more detailed description of these exercises, see Philadelphia Macro-Analysis Collective of the Movement for a New Society, *Organizing Macro-Analysis Seminars: Study and Action for a New Society* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1981).

* In each thirteen-week quarter, students would have one week of vacation and two weeks of workshops (three in the first quarter). Hence they would meet in their study groups for nine weeks the first quarter and ten weeks in each of the other three quarters. Figure B.3 in Appendix B has more detail.

Interest is the greatest teacher. — Proverb

dents might decide to forgo the regular topic and instead discuss current affairs.

For the last three months of the session, each study group would research a particular issue area of interest and then cooperatively create a reading list on this topic. Students would be encouraged to choose a topic related to the social change work they were doing or were planning to do. After graduating, they could then use this list as the basis for self-study groups for other (non-Vernal) activists working on this topic as well as by other Vernal groups.

Figure 6.2: A Possible Study Group Schedule

Qtr	Week of Pair*	Meeting in Week	Source of Readings	Students Read Same Materials?
1	A	1st	Prepared List	Same
		2nd	Prepared List	Same
		3rd	Prepared List	Different
		4th	Special Activity	—
	B	1st	Prepared List	Different
		2nd	Prepared List	Different
		3rd	Prepared List	Different
		4th	Current Events	Different
2	A	1st	Prepared List	Same
		2nd	Prepared List	Different
		3rd	Special Activity	—
	B	1st	Prepared List	Different
		2nd	Prepared List	Different
		3rd	Current Events	Different
3	A	1st	Prepared List	Same
		2nd	Prepared List	Different
		3rd	Special Activity	—
	B	1st	Prepared List	Different
		2nd	Prepared List	Different
		3rd	Current Events	Different
4	A	1st	Self-Generated List	Same
		2nd	Self-Generated List	Different
	B	1st	Special Activity	—
		2nd	Current Events	Different

* For each quarter, study groups would first follow the schedule listed as Week A, then Week B, Week A, and so on: A B A B A B A B.

During the last three months, students might also spend some time helping to facilitate other beginning Vernal sessions held nearby and to mentoring new students. This would give them a chance to practice what they had just learned from their Vernal studies about helping others learn.

Figure 6.2 shows a possible study group schedule. In this schedule, students would focus on each topic for two weeks. For the first part of the first week (designated week “A” here), all of the students would read and discuss the same materials. For the rest of the two week period, each student would study a different reading, present it to the other students, and discuss it. At the last meeting of the second week (week “B”), each student would choose a recent article on a current event, present it to the other students, and facilitate a discussion of it. One meeting of each two-week period would be completely devoted to a special activity such as doing an exercise, watching a video, having a guest speaker, going on a field trip, or playing a simulation game.

Following this schedule, students would cover fifteen staffmember-chosen topics (the first topic for only one week) and one topic they had chosen on their own. Of the total 116 meetings, they would read and discuss staffmember-suggested readings at 67 meetings, read and discuss readings they had put together themselves at 10 meetings, read and discuss articles on current events or issues at 19 meetings, and do a special activity at 20 meetings. They would all read the same materials at 24 meetings, and they would read different materials at 72 meetings.

Please note again that this is just a possible plan — Vernal students could adjust the schedule to whatever best suited them, or they might choose to arrange a completely different program of study.

Note also that students would learn not only from reading, discussing social change ideas, and engaging in exercises, but also by working cooperatively to plan their study group activities. A Vernal staffmember would periodically attend study group meetings to see how things were going and to offer information, support, and direction. As I see it, a staffmember would typically visit once a week at the beginning and then once or twice a month for the rest of the year.

2. Internships

A second key part of the Vernal Program would be internships with several existing social change organizations in or near the students’ home community. Internships would offer Vernal students practical, real-world experience and regular contact with experienced mentors.

Students would have a different internship in each of the second, third, and fourth quarters of the session. Each internship would require twelve hours of work per week for ten weeks (skipping weeks with workshops). If possible, sponsoring organizations would pay students a modest stipend. However, most groups could probably not afford to do so.

Groups offering internships would be encouraged to allow students to read the group's literature, attend its planning meetings, and participate in the group like any volunteer or new employee. Students would perform day-to-day work for the organization and also work on at least one instructive project. Typical projects might be:

- Researching and writing an article for publication or a leaflet to be used in canvassing
- Sending out press releases and following up with reporters
- Arranging to speak to several student, labor, church, or civic groups and then doing it
- Arranging a series of film showings
- Helping plan a rally, conference, or fundraising event
- Lobbying for a bill

By carrying out a real project, students would advance the work of the sponsoring group, gain a direct understanding of the work that the group performs, and learn the skills necessary to do their project. After ten weeks, students should have a good understanding of how the organization works, why it is configured the way it is, and why it works for change in the way that it does.

Many organizations would probably seek to offer internships. Vernal staffmembers would select groups that could

provide a good learning experience for students, including a supervisor/mentor who could meet regularly with the student to review the student's work and learning experience. To ensure internships were educational and satisfying, each student would also have a designated Vernal staffmember to confer with about any problems. Whenever problems arose, the Vernal advisor would advocate for the student and negotiate solutions with the sponsoring group.

Typical organizations offering internships might be locally based peace, justice, or environmental groups; neighborhood groups; local groups working against racism, sexism, ageism, or heterosexism; chapters or affiliates of national groups such as the ones listed in Figure 6.3; public-interest law firms; church social action committees; labor unions; social change funding foundations; political campaigns; and progressive publications. Students might also work for social service agencies that have a social change component such as battered women's shelters. Students would work primarily with locally based groups but might have one internship with a national- or state-level organization if it were nearby.

In areas where there were no suitable organizations to offer internships, students might work with an individual activist who agreed to serve as a mentor. Alternatively, stu-

Figure 6.3: Some Progressive National Organizations with Local Offices, Chapters, or Affiliates

- War Resisters League (WRL)
- Peace Action (formerly Sane/Freeze)
- Jobs with Peace (JwP)
- Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND)
- 20/20 Vision
- Democratic Socialists of America (DSA)
- The New Party
- The Greens / Green Party
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- The National Organization for Women (NOW)
- The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)
- Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR)
- Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC)
- New Jewish Agenda
- Interfaith Impact for Justice and Peace
- Common Cause
- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- Alliance for Democracy
- National Lawyers Guild
- The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
- Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR)
- Student Environmental Action Coalition (SEAC)
- Greenpeace
- The Sierra Club
- Citizens Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes
- The Toxic Waste Coalition
- Citizen Action
- Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs)
- The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- The National Urban League
- The Gray Panthers
- The National Council of Senior Citizens
- Children's Defense Fund
- Stand for Children
- Act Up
- Food Not Bombs
- Bread for the World
- Amnesty International
- United Nations Association
- Physicians for Social Responsibility

dents might start a new organization to fill the obvious void in their area.

Students would be encouraged to work both with familiar organizations they found especially interesting and with those that were unfamiliar. By choosing three dissimilar groups, students would see several ways of working for social change, observe a variety of internal processes, and hear a range of social change philosophies. By discussing and comparing their experiences with other students, they would have exposure to even more perspectives.

For example, a student especially interested in legislation to advance women's issues might intern first with the local NOW group and speak before civic groups about the need for day-care centers and battered women shelters. In the next internship, she might choose a very different area and work with a group trying to stop weapons shipments to repressive countries by blockading the local port. Finally, she might work with a campaign to elect a progressive Congressman. At study group meetings she might learn from the experience of one student who helped a lawyer draft a lawsuit to force the clean-up of a local toxic waste dump and from another student who worked with a community organization demanding a police review board. At a workshop, she might compare her experiences with her support buddy who researched progressive tax-code legislation for a progressive party.

Internships would benefit both students and the sponsoring organizations. Students would have direct, personal exposure to a variety of groups and their different social change styles and philosophies. In turn, students would contribute a great deal of inexpensive assistance to the sponsoring organizations. The 120 hours of work students would contribute should be quite valuable since students would already be somewhat skilled and experienced — they would have had at least a year of prior experience before enrolling plus whatever they had learned from the Vernal Program up to that point.

Moving from one internship to the next and discussing their experiences with students who were interning in other places would produce another benefit: students would informally “crossbreed” ideas from one group to another. This could help create bonds between groups and might expedite formation of a broad coalition at some later juncture. Through their internships, students might also discover organizations with which they wanted to continue working after completing their Vernal education.

3. Social Change Work

In addition to their internships, students would work for progressive social change as a regular, ongoing member of a local change group. Typically, this would be a small, self-governing, grassroots group working on a particular issue of great interest to the student, such as reducing military spending, increasing funding for poverty programs, cleaning up toxic wastes, changing the local tax code, or exposing

racist bank policies. For many students, this group would be the one with which they were working before enrolling in the Vernal Program or the one that they intend to work with after graduating. In areas where there were no suitable social change groups, students would start one.

As I envision it, students would work with their local group about three hours per week for the first three quarters and then, to help prepare them to work for change after they graduated, for nine hours per week during the last quarter. Working for only three hours a week, students would probably not be the most active or effective members of their groups. Still, they would probably partake of the full experience. Grappling with concrete problems in a real group would provide students with countless questions for discussion in study group meetings, workshops, and support group meetings. Working with a group would also provide students with an opportunity to immediately try out ideas and techniques as they learned them. During the last quarter, when they would be working nine hours per week, students should have time to accomplish a good deal of social change work.

4. Social Service Work

Besides their social change internships and work for change, students would volunteer a small amount of time during the first quarter (a total of 24 hours) for a social *service* organization helping poor, homeless, disabled, sick, hurt, or emotionally disturbed people, providing assistance to children or infirm elders, or repairing damage to the natural environment. Direct service would introduce students to some of the unmet needs of society and to the organizations that provide assistance. Direct service would also encourage understanding of and altruism towards people in need. Moreover, this service work would help to establish a positive reputation for the local Vernal center.

Though important to society, this part of the Vernal Program would be restricted to a relatively small amount of time in just the first quarter since the program primarily focuses on social *change* and there is not time to do more.

5. Self-Study of Current Affairs

As part of their Vernal education, students would be expected to stay informed about current affairs and social change movements through reading, listening to the radio, and browsing the internet for a total of six hours per week. Students would typically read a good daily newspaper or a weekly news magazine as well as three to six weekly or monthly progressive and alternative newspapers, newsletters, or magazines. They might also listen to a daily news pro-

To be in good moral condition requires at least as much training as to be in good physical condition.

— Jawaharlal Nehru

gram on the radio or read articles and action alerts on web pages or receive them through email. As described above, students would also spend some time in their study groups discussing current affairs.

6. Workshops

As I envision it, over the course of the yearlong Vernal session, the thirty students enrolled in that session would attend together a series of five staffmember-facilitated workshops: a five-day orientation workshop plus four ten-day workshops. Every day of each workshop would have two or three class periods each two-and-one-half hours long. During these classes, Vernal staffmembers would present basic

information on important social change topics, answer questions, facilitate discussions of ideas and solutions, and facilitate experiential exercises (role plays, simulations, games). Experiential exercises would take up the bulk of the time in each class. Figure 6.4 shows an example of a typical agenda for one of these classes. The five workshops would include a total of eighty of these classes.

For each of the classes, students would receive an extensive set of notes — a simple textbook of two to ten pages — on the topic covered. These notes are described more fully below.

One class time during each workshop would be devoted to a structured discussion and evaluation of study group topics, internships, social change work, and the rest of the Vernal Program. Based on this evaluation of the session, Vernal staffmembers would then address any problems and, in conjunction with the students, modify the program as necessary.

Some time each day would be left open for students to relax, play, exercise, study, and informally discuss social change and swap their experiences. There would be a social party held one evening during each workshop for students to dance and sing together. Students would also have a designated time each day to confer and commiserate with a “support buddy” about how things were going for them — a chance for each student to express her joys, fears, and emotional upsets.

These workshops would provide an efficient way for Vernal staffmembers to quickly convey to students a great amount of knowledge and skills. They would also bring Vernal students and staffmembers together in a close, structured, yet relaxed environment — facilitating friendship, bonding, and honest political discussion. This would help to spawn a true community of activists.

Workshops would be held in rented or donated facilities — preferably inexpensive retreat centers in beautiful, natural environments. These retreat centers might be summer camps, ski lodges, or college campuses. To hold down costs, students would help with food preparation and cleaning. Also, if possible, students and staffmembers would perform some physical labor for the retreat center (construction, maintenance, cleaning) in exchange for reduced rent. Besides lowering costs, this work would help strengthen bonds between students and teach cooperation skills.*

He that is taught only by himself has a fool for a master. — Ben Jonson

Figure 6.4: A Typical Agenda for a Workshop Class — Canvassing

5 min.	Gather and a Quick Game
5	Agenda Review
15	Presentation: Purpose and techniques of canvassing to raise funds
5	Demonstration: Canvassing to raise funds
20	Role Play: Canvassing to raise funds — groups of 2: 1 canvasser, 1 person at home — play roles for 5 min., discuss for 5 min. (what works and what doesn't?), then switch
15	Presentation: Purpose and techniques of canvassing to garner support
5	Demonstration: Canvassing to garner support
20	Role Play: Canvassing to garner support — groups of 2: 1 canvasser, 1 person at home — play roles for 5 min., discuss for 5 min., then switch
10	Break — Refreshments, stretching, games, informal discussion
15	Presentation: how to talk with someone who strongly disagrees
5	Demonstration: Talking with someone who strongly disagrees
20	Role Play: Canvassing someone who strongly disagrees — groups of 2: 1 canvasser, 1 person at home — play roles for 5 min., discuss for 5 min., then switch
5	Wrap-up Discussion/Questions
5	Evaluation — Good aspects of the class, bad aspects, ways to improve the class
2.5 hrs	

7. Health and Exercise

Social change work is difficult and often physically demanding. It usually requires great energy and stamina. Many activists are hindered in their work by health prob-

* If there were no work available for students to do, they might engage in some other group activity such as a group hike.

lems, especially as they grow older. The most effective activists are vigorous, healthy, and fit.

True enjoyment comes from activity of the mind and exercise of the body; the two are ever united.

— Humboldt

As I see it, staffmembers would set a good example with their own behavior, and they would also encourage students to exercise regularly, eat healthy food, get adequate sleep, bathe, clean their teeth regularly, and otherwise maintain a healthy lifestyle. At workshops, staffmembers would ensure that

students had ample opportunities to engage in vigorous physical activity. They would prepare nutritious meals from healthy ingredients and ensure healthy snacks were always available. Every workshop class and study group meeting might also include some stretching or light exercise.

8. Support Groups/Therapy/Body Work

Social change work usually requires a great deal of intense, personal interaction — cooperating with, challenging, caring for, and struggling with all kinds of people. To be effective, activists must maintain good emotional health and minimize their own ineffectual, inappropriate, or oppressive behavior. The most effective activists are energetic, confi-

dent, clear thinking, focused, and humorous, even in difficult circumstances. To provide emotional sustenance, students would have a chance to meet weekly or bi-weekly in support groups to talk about how things were going and to get encouragement and nurturance from other students in a safe atmosphere.

Early in the year, students would learn about a variety of personal transformation techniques (such as journal writing, solitude, meditation, yoga, massage, peer counseling, therapy with a counselor). Staffmembers would encourage each student to choose a helpful personal transformation practice and engage in it regularly.

Let him that would move the world, first move himself. — Socrates

9. Socializing and Networking

Once a month, students and staffmembers would plan a potluck dinner for all the students in all the local sessions in the area. At these dinners students could meet each other and socialize, sing, dance, and discuss their change work. Students would also be encouraged to set up additional social networking meetings, parties, or celebrations every three or four months with other students and other activists with whom they worked. “Gathering the clan” would remind them that they are not alone in their change work and would provide a chance for activists with diverse backgrounds and orientations to meet in a friendly, informal atmosphere.

After graduating, Vernal activists would likely want to continue to socialize with, support, and learn from each other. They would probably stay in touch by arranging social events, meetings, conferences, or reunions with other graduates.

10. Other Resources

Most communities have many additional educational resources that are useful for activists. These include:

- Workshops for nonprofit organizations concerning fundraising, office management, board development, computer use, and so on
- Workshops on mediation and conflict resolution
- Various classes and workshops focused on personal transformation and emotional counseling therapy — assertiveness training, Parent Effectiveness Training, 12-Step Programs for overcoming alcoholism and other addictions, Re-evaluation Counseling, meditation, yoga, aikido, tai chi, and hundreds of others.

Rather than trying to duplicate any of these resources, Vernal staffmembers would try to evaluate, list, and briefly describe a wide range of local resources. They would recommend resources that seemed especially pertinent, useful, and inexpensive and offer tips on how to evaluate them so students would not waste their time or money.

A Possible Support Group Meeting Agenda

Members of a support group typically divide up the total time they have together so each person has a specific period in which to engage in whatever activity she finds most useful. In her designated time, a member might talk about a recent difficult experience or a problem she is struggling to overcome. She might ask the other members to support her by simply listening attentively, or she may want the others to ask questions, to give her suggestions, to challenge her ideas, or to praise her for her hard work. For comfort, she might want to be complimented, touched, or held.

To focus specifically on achieving her social change goals, she may find it useful to answer the following set of questions:

1. How have I worked for positive social change since the last meeting? What worked well? What hasn't worked so well? How might I have done it better?
2. Considering the current situation, what should be done next to bring about positive social change?
3. What are my specific plans to bring about change in the next few days, weeks, or years?
4. What concerns, fears, or inhibitions do I have about implementing these plans?³

Figure 6.5: A Vernal Student’s Typical Week
(when not attending workshops)

	1-Year Vernal Program				Ongoing
	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	Yrs 2 → 8
Hours in a Week (24 hours x 7 days)	168	168	168	168	168
Life Maintenance and Social Life					
Sleeping (8 hours/day)	56	56	56	56	56
Cooking, Eating, Bathing, Cleaning House, Shopping, Commuting, Paying Bills, Exercising, Attending Church, Socializing, Relaxing, Etc. (avg. 7 hours/day — or 5 hours/day on weekdays and 12 hours/day weekends)	49	49	49	49	49
Total	105	105	105	105	105
Vernal Program	Very Intensive Study	Intensive Study + Internship	Intensive Study + Internship	Study + More Change	Paid Work & Social Change
Study Group Meetings	12	9	9	6	2
Studying for Study Group	24	18	18	15	3
Studying Current Affairs (newspapers, magazines, web pages, etc.)	6	6	6	6	6
Social Change Internships		12	12	12	
Social Change Work with local change group	3	3	3	9	20
Social Service Work	3				
Support Group / Therapy / Body Work	2	2	2	2	2
Total	50	50	50	50	33
Paid Work					20
Other Time in Week Available For Additional Study, Social Change Work, Social Service, Gardening, Other Hobbies, Leisure, and so on	13	13	13	13	11
Total Time Working for Social Change (local change group + internship)	3	15	15	21	20

Note: There is probably not enough time for extensive travel, childrearing, and so on.

Synergistic Learning

Individually, each component of the Vernal Program would enable students to learn and practice crucial social change skills. Combined, these components should be even more educational. Students could immediately apply what they learned from study groups, self-study, and workshops to their social change efforts and see how these ideas worked in practice. They could bring questions and problems from their internships, social change work, and social service work to study group meetings and workshops where

staffmembers and other students could provide insight and guidance. Students could compare their experiences in different internships and social change groups. Throughout, they would be surrounded by other activists offering insight, support, and encouragement.

A VERNAL STUDENT'S TIME

Would there be enough time for Vernal students to fit all these activities into their lives? Figure 6.5 shows how a typical student might spend her time each week of the Vernal session (excluding the weeks spent attending workshops).^{*} Throughout the session, students would devote about fifty hours each week to Vernal activities — with this time allocated in somewhat different ways during each of the four quarters of the year.

As I imagine it, during the first three months (the first quarter), students would spend twelve hours each week meeting with their study groups. They would spend another twenty-four hours each week studying and otherwise preparing for their study group meetings. Students would spend six hours each week reading about current events. They would spend three hours each week working with their social change group and three more hours performing social service. They would also spend two hours per week meeting with an emotional support group or with a personal therapist (or engaging in some other similar activity). During this first quarter, they would devote most of their fifty hours each week to reading and discussing social change information.

For the next six months, students would meet with their study group less often and do no social service work. Instead, they would spend these twelve hours per week in internships. During the last three months, they would meet with their study group even less often and spend these six hours per week working with their local social change group.

I assume that basic life maintenance activities like sleeping, eating, bathing, cooking, shopping, exercising, relaxing, commuting to meetings and internships, and so on would take about 15 hours per day or 105 hours per week. Based on these figures, Figure 6.6 shows what a typical student's week in the third quarter of the session might be like. This is a busy and full schedule, but should not be overly stressful.

The last column of Figure 6.5 shows how Vernal graduates might spend their time during their seven years of intensive activism after they graduate. Here I assume they work twenty hours each week doing unpaid social change work and another twenty hours each week at an income-producing job. They continue to read progressive publications and get emotional support for the same number of

hours they spent during the Vernal session. They also continue to meet with a study group, but only once every other week and they spend much less time preparing for it.

As outlined here, this lifestyle is intensive. There is not much time for activities other than education and social change. Students generally only have about thirteen hours per week for other activities and graduates only have about ten or eleven hours per week. This would probably be enough time for socializing and simple hobbies, but not enough time for extensive travel, childrearing, or other time-intensive activities.

Although this lifestyle would be somewhat limited, it should also be quite fulfilling. Based on my own experience and what I have seen of other activists, I believe many Vernal activists could live this way without becoming weary or disgruntled for eight years (one year as students plus seven more years as very active graduates). I believe they could willingly embrace such an eight-year period of intensive education and social change work since this would comprise only about ten percent of their lives — they would still have time for many other activities in the rest of their lives.

A POSSIBLE VERNAL CURRICULUM

It is important for progressive activists to learn about a variety of specific topics. But it is equally important — if not more so — for them to learn how and where to get information, how to learn, how to think, how to wrestle with ideas, and how to debate ideas productively with other people. As I envision it, the Vernal Education Program would devote at least as much time to these important learning processes as it would to offering specific information.

This section first describes a possible curriculum in terms of general areas of knowledge covered, then specific topics that might be covered in the study groups and workshop classes. Finally, it covers the educational methods the Vernal staffmembers would probably use to help students learn to wrestle with diverse ideas and perspectives.

General Areas of Knowledge

There are a zillion things that are useful for progressive social change activists to learn, and they cannot all be learned in just one year. However, certain basic areas of knowledge seem essential:

- **Current Reality**

How does the world function? What is the conventional way to view social, cultural, political, military, and business affairs? What criticisms do conventional groups have of society?

^{*} Figure B.3 in Appendix B shows an even more detailed week-by-week analysis of time spent in each of these categories including time spent in workshops, time spent studying for the workshops, and the week-long vacation periods at the end of each quarter. Holidays are not shown, but Vernal students would, of course, observe all the major ones — this would reduce the total hours. Overall, students would devote about 2,300 hours to the Vernal Education Program over the course of the year.

• Alternative Perspectives

What criticisms do progressive activists have of current society? What are their alternative visions?

The Ignorant know nothing. The Provincial know only the perspective of their own community. Traditionalists hear new ideas, but cling to those of their ancestors. Conformists learn of alternative perspectives, but embrace only the most conventional. Zealots know of other ideas, but accept only what they already believe. The Confused stumble across many perspectives, but don't know what to believe. It is only the Explorers, the Curious Students, the Free-thinkers, the Scholars who seek out many perspectives and thoroughly investigate each one to dig out its truth.

• Multiple Perspectives

Why do people disagree? Why does each group believe its way is best? What criticism does each group have of every other perspective? What problem does each group's solution solve and how does it solve it? What are the values and assumptions behind each group's perspective? What material conditions or philosophical values underlie each group's perspective? How do you decide who is right?

Until you can see the truth in at least three sides of an issue, you probably don't understand it. And until you can convincingly argue all three perspectives, you probably can't work with a diverse group of people to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

• Bringing About Change

How have activists tried to bring about change in the past? What was effective and what was not? Who opposes progressive change and why? What are the methods usually proposed to bring about social change? How do you design an effective campaign for fundamental social change? What factors make success more likely? How do you sustain yourself and others through a long, difficult campaign? What empowers and inspires others to action?

Below I have outlined a possible preliminary curriculum that covers these basics from a multiplicity of perspectives. This curriculum is only an example — staffmembers and students would develop the actual curriculum, and it would evolve over time.

Study Group Topics

Following the schedule of study groups outlined above, students would spend two weeks on each of fourteen topics and a single week on another topic. These topics would

cover a variety of social change issue areas and a wide range of theoretical and practical aspects of social change. Each topic would have a list of twenty to thirty different sets of staffmember-chosen readings from which students could choose. Students could also find their own readings. These fifteen main topics might be:

• The Environment

- Natural systems
- Consuming natural resources (mining, drilling, logging, ranching, farming, hunting)
- Renewable resources
- Land development
- Population growth, sustainability
- Pollution, garbage, toxic wastes

• Economics

- Self-sufficiency, individualism
- Agriculture
- Producing goods, providing services to others
- Ownership, property
- Wealth distribution
- Feudalism, slavery, capitalism, socialism, privatization
- Government regulation
- Transnational corporations, globalization
- Cooperatives, worker-, community-, or government-controlled businesses, locally owned and controlled businesses, non-profit businesses
- Wages, working conditions, occupational safety
- Unemployment, poverty
- Taxes

• U.S. International Relations

- Colonialism, domination
- Armed military force
- Diplomacy
- Citizen exchanges
- Global communication

• Social Institutions

- Schools
- Churches
- Libraries
- Police
- Prisons
- The military
- The healthcare system
- The welfare system
- Community organizations

• Culture

- Education
- Religion, spirituality
- Entertainment
- Sports
- Mass media, the Internet

- Personal communication
- Ethnicity, racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and so on
- **Personal Relationships**
 - Family, childrearing
 - Paternalism
 - Battering, dysfunctional families
 - Sexual abuse, rape
 - Health and healing
 - Emotional counseling therapy
 - Cooperation
 - Feminism
 - Sex, hetero- and homosexuality
- **Politics**
 - Democracy
 - Elections, voting
 - Theory of government, anarchism
 - Libertarian pluralism
 - The U.S. governmental system of making and enforcing laws
- **History of Movements for Progressive Change**
 - Anti-slavery
 - Populist
 - Socialist (1910s and '20s)
 - Conservation (National Parks)
 - Women's suffrage
 - Labor union
 - Consumer
 - Conscientious objectors to war
 - Black freedom struggle
 - Anti-Vietnam war
 - Anti-nuclear power and weapons
 - Environmental
 - Women's liberation
 - Anti-racism
 - Gay and lesbian freedom
 - Anti-globalization
 - Other movements around the world
- **Visions of a Better Society**
 - Utopian visions
 - Nonviolence
 - Participatory democracy, citizenship
 - Appropriate technology, simple living
 - Multiculturalism
 - Cooperation, community
- **Theory and Practice of Social Change**
 - Analyzing power structures
 - Choosing issues
 - Strategic planning
 - Stages of a movement
 - Political, social, and cultural change

- **Movement Building**
 - Developing visions of a good society
 - Researching an issue
 - Educating and persuading others
 - Lobbying
 - Lawsuits
 - Campaigns for political office
 - Demonstrations, struggling for change
 - Designing effective campaigns
- **Organizational Development**
 - Starting and developing an organization
 - Recruiting volunteers
 - Supporting and empowering people, team building
 - Facilitating meetings
 - Addressing racism, sexism, and so on
 - Resolving conflicts
 - Fundraising
 - Administration
- **Being an Activist**
 - Personal growth and emotional therapy
 - Critical thinking
 - Internalized oppression and liberation
 - Building a supportive community
 - Personal finances
- **Repression of Activists**
 - Spy and intelligence agencies
 - Police, red squads, FBI
 - National Guard, Marine Corps
 - Private security agencies
 - Death squads, Ku Klux Klan, other terror groups
 - Public relations firms
 - Movement-breaking consultants
 - Honesty, trust
 - Building a safe community
- **Teaching Others**
 - Theories of adult education
 - Teaching styles
 - Mentoring activists
 - Developing curricula

*Everyone thinks of
changing the world,
but no one thinks of
changing himself.*
— Leo Tolstoy

Workshop Class Topics

As I see it, the eighty workshop classes (each two and one-half hours long) would cover many of the same topics as listed above, but would focus on aspects that are more easily learned through workshop presentations and experiential exercises than through reading and discussion. Below is a possible list of topics. The numbers in parentheses indicate how many classes might be devoted to each topic. Note that topics are listed in logical categories. However, classes

would probably not be conducted in this order but in an order that matched the study group schedule, students' needs, or staffmembers' schedules.

• **Choosing One's Values (4)**

- Personal change, social change, and values clarification, developing a vision of a good society (1)
- Becoming informed — newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, the Internet, and other news and communication media (1)
- Deciphering and overcoming media propaganda (1)
- Appreciating other perspectives and developing truths to live by — creating, testing, and challenging models of reality, thinking clearly, debating different perspectives, critical argumentation (1)

• **Being an Activist (12)**

- Self-esteem and assertiveness — being bold and non-violent (1)
- Internalized oppression and liberation (2)
- Emotional and physical sustenance in tough times (1)
- Building a supportive community — daily interaction, concern, support, humor, singing, massage (2)
- A range of counseling therapy and personal growth techniques (1)
- Living lightly on the earth every day (1)
- The many roles of an activist — rebel, citizen, reformer, social changer, scholar, manager, facilitator, worker, secretary, counselor, minister, spokesperson, teacher (1)
- Personal finances — toward financial independence (1)
- Money and class on a personal level (2)

• **Developing a Social Change Organization (15)**

- Starting and developing a social change group (1)
- Organizational forms and structures (1)
- Discussing, debating, and struggling with ideas (1)
- Encouraging diversity and dissent, avoiding group-think, mind-control, and cult-like behavior (1)
- Addressing racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, and other prejudices (2)
- Addressing classism and money issues (2)
- Dealing with emotional trauma and craziness — emotional support (2)
- Resolving conflicts (2)
- Dealing with infiltration, provocateurs, harassment (1)
- Helping other activists learn new skills (2)

• **Meeting Together and Making Decisions (7)**

- Leadership and management theories (1)
- Parliamentary procedure and voting (1)
- Making cooperative decisions (1)
- Facilitating a group meeting (2)
- Effective problem solving in groups (1)
- Working in large, dispersed organizations (1)

• **Running a Social Change Office (4)**

- Basic office management skills — filing, accounting, communication, computer use (2)
- Basic organization maintenance skills — fundraising, membership, personnel management (2)

• **Social Change Methods (17)**

- Researching an issue (1)
- Developing visions of alternatives (1)
- Writing, publishing, and distributing leaflets, pamphlets, newspapers, books, and web pages (1)
- Persuasion techniques and methods (1)
- Speaking out publicly (1)
- Canvassing (1)
- Outreach to the news media (1)
- Political film and video (1)
- Political music, art, and theater (1)
- Protest demonstrations — rallies, vigils, fasts, pickets, marches, confrontations (1)
- Strikes and boycotts (1)
- Civil disobedience and direct action (2)
- Risking arrest and going to jail for a cause (1)
- Electoral politics and lobbying (2)
- Lawsuits, referenda, and other legal action (1)

• **Social Change Campaigns (6)**

- Strategic planning for social change — force field analysis (2)
- Designing effective campaigns — constituencies, issues, and action (2)
- Campaign simulation (2)

• **Working with Others (7)**

- Addressing special constituencies — racial/ethnic minorities, religious groups, elders, young people, labor union members, lesbians and gays, women, rural folks, and so on (3)
- The diversity of social change groups — their ideas and practices (2)
- Working in coalitions and federations (1)
- Local grassroots groups and how they relate to national social change organizations (1)

• **Social Change Movements (3)**

- Types of change movements and their goals: resistance, liberation, democracy, and stewardship (1)
- Evaluating and choosing ten important areas of focus for social change in the next few decades (2)

• **History of Social Change Movements (4)**

- Overview of world movements for change (1)
- Oral history of recent local movements presented by active participants (2)
- Lessons we can learn from earlier social change efforts (1)

Reading Lists

Vernal staffmembers, working in conjunction with students, would continually revise the list of reading materials for study groups, adding new books and articles and retiring weak and outdated materials. They would also maintain a library of all these materials to loan to students.

The Vernal Education Program Curriculum Checklist:

- Why are we studying this?
- Why are we using these methods?
- Is there a more educational or empowering way?

Workshop Notes and Agendas

Vernal staffmembers would also prepare detailed workshop notes on the topics outlined above. Generally, for each topic, the notes would include major points of interest and discussion, the range of perspectives held by progressive activists (and others), active areas of contention and debate, and references to books, articles, web pages, and other sources of information. They would also include lists of questions and discussion topics to challenge and stimulate students to learn and explore new ideas. They might include provocative quotations or koans (paradoxical Zen Buddhist riddles to ponder in order to attain intuitive knowledge). For some topics, the notes might simply be annotated bibliographies of important books, articles, and web pages. Some notes might include a sample workshop agenda.

The notes would give students more information than they could absorb in workshop classes. After graduating, Vernal activists could review the notes when they were actually faced with difficult situations in their change work. Graduates could also use the notes and agendas to develop evening or weekend workshops for other activists, and when appropriate, they could pass copies of the notes to others. Moreover, these notes would be broadly distributed outside of activist circles — posted on the Vernal Project web site <<http://www.vernalproject.org>> — to help advance social change more widely. “Information is power,” and these short, clear, and understandable summaries of progressive change theory and practice could be very powerful.⁴

Researching and Developing the Curriculum

With help from students, Vernal staffmembers would continually update the curriculum, incorporating new social change issues, new social change methods, and new change philosophies. They would draw on magazine articles, books, web pages, their own social change experience, and the experiences of other activists.⁵ Vernal staffmembers would

share their research and coordinate the development of new curricula with other Vernal teams around the country.

Educational Methods and Style

The curriculum of the Vernal Program would be very important, but the way that it was presented would be just as important — students learn as much by watching their teachers and mentors as they do from studying. I expect that the Vernal Program would refrain from using the cruel and disempowering techniques common in many traditional schools.

Though public and church schools have the admirable goal of educating children, they also usually have a more sinister goal: to mold students so they will conform to societal norms and accommodate themselves to the ruling authorities. To accomplish this unsavory goal, schools usually employ four main processes:

- **Selective information:** Schools present a limited amount of information, usually from a narrow spectrum of perspectives and declare “this is the way it is.” If mentioned at all, alternative ideas are usually explained badly and belittled. Standardized textbooks ensure that everyone receives the same one-sided information.
- **Indoctrination:** Schools repeatedly present the same information as fact until “the Truth” seems self-evident and all other ideas seem ludicrous.
- **Manipulation:** Schools use grading and tracking to control and steer students into acceptance of the status quo. Those who best adopt conventional dogma are encouraged and rewarded; those who do not are held back, criticized, and even ostracized.
- **Demoralization:** Students are controlled and restricted. They are forced to attend (often boring) lectures. This steals their initiative and demoralizes them.

Social change schools teach a more progressive ideology, but some actually employ the same mind-numbing and manipulative teaching processes as conventional schools. As I see it, the Vernal Program would empower students to explore a variety of ideas and develop their own ideology by using these alternative methods:

- **Comprehensive Information, Diverse Perspectives**

The Vernal Program would present a wide array of information and perspectives including age-old wisdom, conventional thought, and a range of alternative perspectives: “Here’s what different people think and their reasons for thinking it.”

*What you are speaks
so loudly I can't hear
what you say.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

• **Questioning**

The Vernal Program would encourage questioning: “How do we know this is true? How do we find out? How else do people look at things? Why do some people disagree? Whom can we believe? Are there other ways of looking at an issue that no one has ever considered?”

Take from others what you want, but never be a disciple of anyone.

— A. S. Neill, director of Summerhill School

• **Discussion and Problem Solving**

The Vernal Program would show students how to gently and productively discuss divisive topics and resolve conflicts by clearly summarizing all perspectives, sorting ideas into categories, and synthesizing new, more comprehensive perspectives.

• **Scientific Method**

The Vernal program would encourage students to ascertain truth by evaluating evidence — not to accept dogma based on blind faith. “What works? What doesn’t? What is useful? What might work better? How can we test this? Do our hypotheses seem to predict future events accurately? If not, what new postulate can we test that might predict it better? Which entities and postulates seem useless and can be discarded?”

An ideology that cannot withstand intense challenge is invariably anti-progressive. Through questioning, ideas grow to be more robust and compelling.

Question Authority!

• **Open Education, Collegial Atmosphere**

The Vernal Program would have no requirements for participation in any activities. Students would not be graded, and every student who completed the session would receive a diploma. Staffmembers would assist students to learn whatever the students thought was best for themselves (within the constraints of the overall Vernal Program). Staffmembers would strive to maintain their role as helpful resource people rather than as leaders or controllers of students.

Students would be encouraged to collaborate with, help, and teach each other — passing on what they had learned through their years of experience or what they just learned the day before. Staffmembers would also ask students to help them to evaluate and modify the curriculum, materials, and educational methods.

The Vernal Program would in no way be value-free — the curriculum would clearly be quite progressive and the

staffmembers’ various progressive views would permeate the program. But as much as possible, when staffmembers expressed their perspectives, they would try to make their ideological bent explicit, allow it to be discussed, and encourage it to be challenged.

The true teacher defends his pupils against his own personal influence.

— Amos Bronson Alcott

• **Humane, Gentle Struggle**

The Vernal Program would also encourage staffmembers and students to acknowledge that they are each human beings with feelings, desires, and limitations. The program would encourage them to respect their differences and to treat each other well even as they struggled over ideas.

VERNAL STAFFMEMBERS

Background and Skills

Vernal staffmembers would be chosen for their experience as social change activists and for their educational skills, especially their ability to use alternative, student-centered education methods. When hiring new staffmembers, existing staffmembers would try to recruit people with whom they could easily work. They would also seek demographic and ideological diversity.

Each staffmember in a Vernal team would have similar responsibilities, differing according to need and according to each staffmember’s interests. Those with more experience and skill in education might focus more on facilitating workshops; those with more administrative skill might work more on setting up internships, handling finances, and hiring. Optimally, every staffmember would be skilled in all the areas required for educating students and administering the program. More likely, though, staffmembers of each Vernal team would have complementary skills that could address everything necessary.

Staff Hiring and Pay

Given all that would be expected of them, staffmembers would likely work quite hard. The work should be rewarding, but the amount of it might still be exhausting. Since staffmembers would be experienced and skilled in many areas, disgruntled staffmembers could probably find other lucrative jobs without much effort. In order to induce staffmembers to work for years without burning out or leaving, they would need to be paid reasonable wages and benefits. On the other hand, wages could not be too generous or the cost would threaten the overall viability of the Vernal Project.

Aiming for a prudent balance, I assume the Vernal Program would pay full-time Vernal staffers \$24,000 per year (in 1995 dollars) and offer generous benefits that included paid vacation, holidays, and health and dental care coverage.⁶ In addition, the Vernal Program would put \$2,000 per year into a retirement account for each staffer. Part-time staffers would earn a proportional share of salary and benefits.

Dedicated Vernal staffers with few obligations should be able to live reasonably well on this salary. However, it would probably be too small an amount for staffers to support a spouse and children or for them to save much during their tenure. Still, I expect many activists would be eager to work as Vernal staffers since the work would be quite satisfying and the organization would be very supportive.

Hiring and integrating new staffers would require a great deal of effort, so people would be hired who planned to stay with the Vernal center for at least five years. But staffers who stayed too long could become stale and stodgy, so they might be encouraged to move on to other endeavors after ten or fifteen years. Staffers would be evaluated each year by their peers and the local center's board of directors (see below).

VERNAL STUDENTS

Admission Requirements

The main purpose of the Vernal Project would be to bring about fundamental progressive transformation of society. However, it is possible that over time the Vernal Program might be seen as a surrogate business school by those seeking an inexpensive entrance to the executive ranks of corporate America or as an inviting intellectual sandbox for those seeking an inexpensive place to play with philosophical ideas.

Admissions must therefore be quite selective to ensure that the limited resources of the Vernal Project would be used wisely. The program must be available only to those most open to learning and most interested in using what they learn to work for progressive change. These would be the minimum requirements:

- **One-Year of Experience with Active Social Change Work**

It would be important that applicants already have some activist experience so they would know the joys and disappointments of working for change and how this work affected them. After doing it for a while, many activists discover that social change work frustrates, bores, or frightens them. Other activists realize that other activities are more important to them, at least at that particular point in their lives.

After a year of social change work, applicants should have a good sense of what social change work is all about, and they could knowledgeably decide if they wanted to work long-term for fundamental change. In addition, by having at least a year of experience, students would have a much better idea of what they needed or wanted to learn. Moreover, they would have accumulated some valuable experience to share with other students.

- **Academically Capable**

The Vernal Program, as I envision it, would be similar to college, requiring extensive reading and studying. Students would need to handle a fairly heavy academic workload. Many people do not enjoy this kind of academic work and the Vernal Program would be inappropriate for them. Non-academically oriented activists would probably learn better with an activist mentor who could assist and guide them "on the job."

- **Willing and Able to Work Primarily for Fundamental Social Change for Eight Years**

Applicants would have to seriously intend to make social change work their highest priority for eight years (one year in the Vernal session plus seven years after graduating). During this eight-year period, they would be expected to work at least twenty hours per week for fundamental change. They must also be willing to work to end their own oppressive and addictive behaviors, support and encourage other nonviolent activists, and as much as possible, serve as a good role model for others by living in an exemplary way.

By making fundamental change their highest priority, Vernal activists might be forced to delay for eight years many of the pleasures and activities of their peers: partying nightly, traveling, raising children, pursuing a conventional career, saving money for a house and retirement, and so on. Older activists who had already done most of these things might find it easier to make this commitment, though some might have a difficult time adjusting after years of a more conventional lifestyle.

Respectable men and women content with good and easy living are missing some of the most important things in life. Unless you give yourself to some great cause you haven't even begun to live.

— William P. Merrill

Also, since social change work usually pays little or nothing, Vernal students and graduates would likely need to live modestly and inexpensively. Since they would probably be able to work no more than half-time at a non-social change job or full-time at a change job, most could probably earn only \$10,000 to \$30,000 per year. This limitation would probably not be very important for those financially supported by spouses or family members, those living on retirement funds, or those relying on independent wealth.

However, those relying only on their earned income would be forced to have a frugal lifestyle: living in shared housing; riding a bicycle, taking public transportation or having an older car; doing without fancy clothes, expensive furniture, and expensive appliances; and so on.

- **Oriented Toward Behind-the-Scenes Support of Other Activists**

Priority for admission would also be given to applicants who indicated interest in doing the kind of basic support work that the Vernal Program most encourages. Vernal graduates would generally be helpers, facilitators, and supporters — providing leadership from below — rather than designated powerholders or leaders who controlled or directed others.

- **Able to Pay Tuition and Support Themselves**

Applicants for admission would have to indicate how they would plan to pay Vernal tuition and how they would sustain themselves during the one-year session. The nature of the Vernal Program would probably prevent students from tapping conventional Federal and State education grants or loans. Loans of any kind might be problematic since most Vernal graduates would earn little money.

Some of the students' internships might pay stipends, and some internally generated scholarships would be available (see below). However, most students would need to tap their savings or rely on their spouse, parents, grown children, friends, or other supporters for financial support. As part of the application procedure, each indigent student would be encouraged to assemble a group of personal supporters who could contribute financially to her education and could then share in the glory of her accomplishments.

- **Positive Recommendations**

Applicants would need to have very positive written recommendations from three activists, professors, clergy people, or others who knew them well and could honestly evaluate

how well they work as progressive social change activists.

Applicants who did not meet these criteria would be encouraged to wait until they could satisfy them or would be directed to other educational programs (including on-the-job mentoring). The Vernal Program would not be appropriate for everyone. Moreover, even if the Vernal Project becomes wildly successful, most activists working for fundamental change (even those working more than twenty hours per week) would never attend a Vernal Program. So being rejected would in no way imply that applicants were stupid, lazy, politically incorrect, or in any way inferior to those who did attend.

Likely Applicants

The Vernal Program would be most appealing to those who were politically sophisticated enough to understand social problems and solutions, progressive enough to work for a positive vision of a good society, dedicated enough to commit to work primarily for change for many years (and forgo other major commitments), and prosperous enough to attend a Vernal session and then work mostly for change for a seven-year period.

After considering the nature of our society, the Vernal Program would likely be most accessible and attractive to five types of people:

- **Career Activists**

Some activists have dedicated their lives to social change. They either work full-time for progressive organizations or work part-time at a conventional job and devote the rest of their time to social change. Some of these activists might decide to take a year off from their change work to attend a Vernal Program.

The purpose of life is a life of purpose.

— Robert Byrne

- **Progressive Organization Staffmembers**

A subset of the above group are staffmembers of enlightened social change organizations that value skilled staffmembers and can afford to let them take most of a year off to further their change knowledge and skills. These organizations might partially or fully pay their staffmembers while they attended a Vernal session. In exchange for this support, these students might spend all their social change time (three hours per week for the first three quarters, nine hours per week the last quarter) working for their sponsoring organization. Note, though, that students in this circumstance should have internships with other social change groups so they could experience a range of activist philosophies and work styles.

- **People Financially Supported by their Spouses**

Some activists have sympathetic spouses who can support them while they do social change work. In the past, "housewives" — financially supported by an employed

Some Notes on Political Sophistication

Political scientist Russell Neuman finds that less than five percent of the U.S. population (perhaps 10 million adults) is highly sophisticated politically.⁷ Neuman defines political sophistication to include three components:

- **Political salience** — interest, concern, and attentiveness toward political issues

- **Political knowledge** — familiarity with major issues, prominent political figures, and events and accurate knowledge about the forces that shape political decisions

- **Political conceptualization** — the ability to evaluate, relate, differentiate, integrate, and form abstract mental models about political forces and their interaction.

Figure 6.7: Rough Guesstimates of the Age Distribution of Vernal Students

	% of Total	Age at Time of Enrollment						
		18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66-70	71+
Progressive Organization Staff	5%	20%	25%	25%	20%	10%	0%	0%
Other Career Activists	25%	10%	25%	20%	20%	20%	5%	0%
Supported by Spouses	10%	5%	15%	20%	30%	30%	0%	0%
Vigorous Retirees	20%	0%	0%	0%	14%	65%	20%	1%
Bright-Eyed Young People	40%	60%	40%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Everyone	100%	28%	25%	8%	12%	22%	5%	0%

Average Age = 39.7

husband — often devoted much of their time to charity or civic groups. Women in this situation have traditionally been the backbone of many change organizations like the League of Women Voters (LWV) and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). In these economically-constrained but more gender-liberated times, there are a lot fewer women who are financially supported by their spouses, but perhaps a few more men supported by theirs.

• **Vigorous Retirees**

Some older people, who have already completed a conventional career and raised children, are still healthy and vigorous. Typically in their fifties or sixties, they have worked enough of their lives to have accumulated substantial savings and are also still healthy and hearty enough to do intensive social change work. Many of these people might have been activists earlier in their lives but pulled back when family or other life commitments took precedence. These people might decide to refresh and update their social change skills by attending a Vernal session. Others are “late bloomers” who are just beginning to work for social change.

• **Bright-Eyed Young People**

Many young people are new to social change, often having gotten involved in high school or college. These adventurous and idealistic young people might decide to attend a Vernal session instead of more traditional paths like going to college, graduate school, or a trade school, starting a conventional career job, joining the Peace Corps, hitchhiking around the world, joining a rural commune, working at a crisis hotline, or volunteering at a social service agency. Those from more affluent backgrounds might receive financial support from their parents or other relatives to attend a session.

Because of the heavy academic component of the Vernal Program, I assume a relatively high percentage of applicants would be college-educated. Because of its cost, it would probably attract more activists from middle-income and wealthy families. Still, the Vernal Program should appeal to a wide variety of people. When possible, Vernal staffmembers would select a group that reflected the diversity of the region in age, race, ethnicity, economic class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on.

Vernal staffmembers would make a special effort to attract and support students from oppressed groups who might otherwise feel intimidated. To make it less difficult for these people to attend, some Vernal sessions might consist entirely of students who were all poor, all non-white, all rural, all elders, or whatever. In addition, to increase the number of poorer students, the Vernal Program would offer scholarships and stipends (see below).

Figure 6.7 shows my rough guesstimate of the age distribution of Vernal students. Based on my experience with activists and my projection of who would be interested in the Vernal program, I expect there would be a large number of young people in their early twenties and also a large number of people in their late fifties and early sixties. I assume that the average age would be about forty, but relatively few students would actually be that age.

THE VERNAL EDUCATION NETWORK

Vernal Centers

As I envision it, when the Vernal network had reached full size, it would consist of fifty centers, each with a team of four full-time equivalent (FTE) staffmembers. Each Vernal

center might have a small office, but more likely, the staffmembers would just work out of their own homes. Centers would be based in the most populous metropolitan areas in the country. Every year, each team would facilitate four sessions of about thirty students. The Vernal network would therefore offer education to about six thousand students each year.

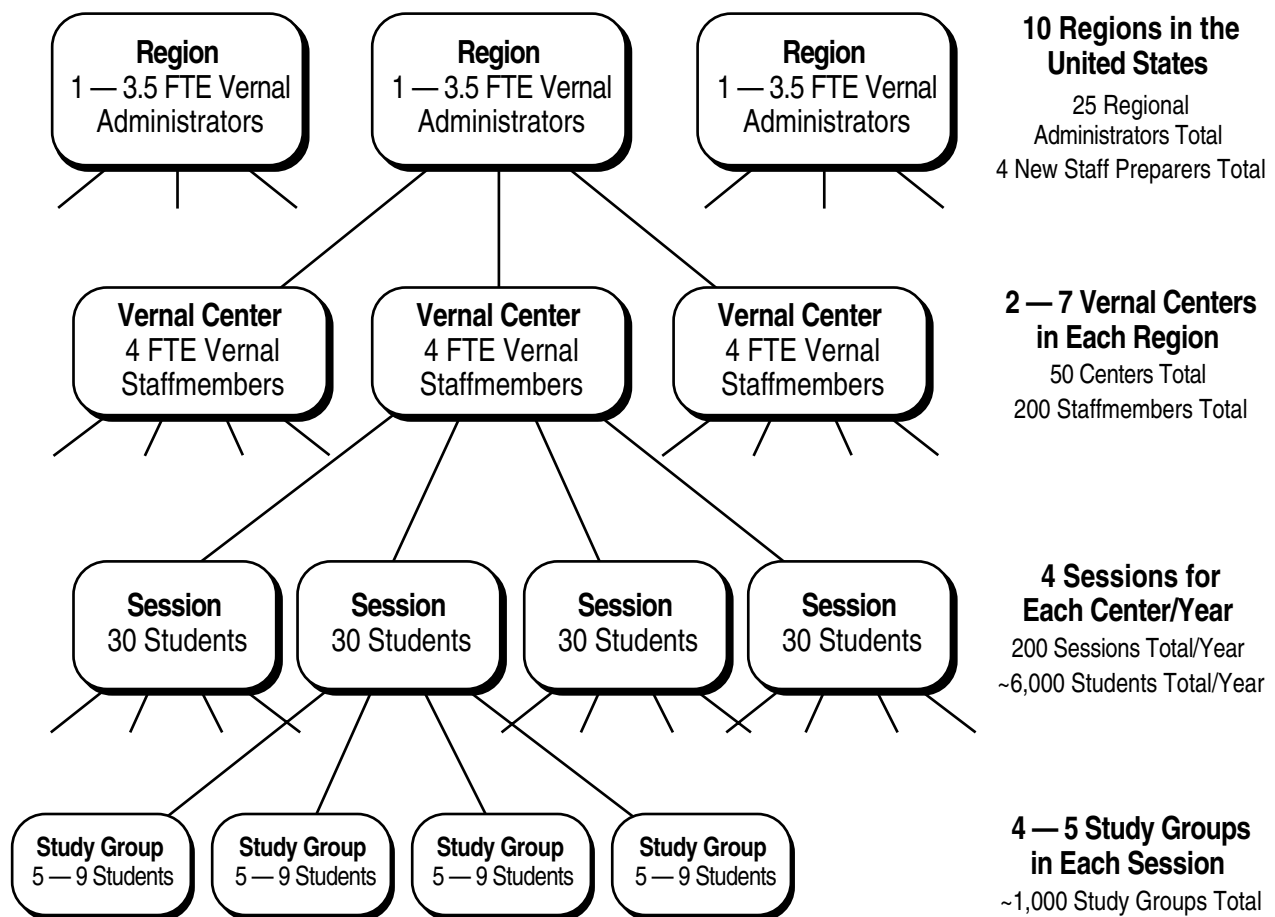
Each session would consist of four or five study groups of five to nine students each — totaling 28 to 32 students. A typical session might consist of five separate study groups with six students apiece. Each study group would include students who all lived very close to one another (a few miles at most) so they could easily meet. The study groups comprising a session, however, might be very spread out, so that students could attend from many widely scattered communities. Typically, a Vernal team would work with study groups within a reasonable driving distance of 75 miles in each direction from its central base (within 150 miles from

each other). However, in sparsely populated regions, study groups might be scattered even wider. In such situations, Vernal staffmembers would travel far from their home metro area to distant communities and stay for several days at a time to set up and monitor internships and to confer with students at meetings of their study group.

This arrangement would enable the fifty Vernal teams to reach a very large number of potential students. As detailed in Figure B.11 in Appendix B, if the fifty Vernal centers were located in the most populous cities, about two-thirds of the U.S. population would be close enough to a center that they could attend a Vernal session.

In the early years, when the Vernal network was just beginning to grow, each Vernal team would recruit, hire, teach, and support all the new staffmembers it needed. However, when the network grew large enough, the number of new people required each year to cover expansion and to replace retiring staffmembers would be quite large. To ex-

Figure 6.8: A Possible Vernal Geographical Structure



Students in a study group would usually live within a few miles of each other. Students in a session would generally live within 75 miles of a Vernal center and within 150 miles of each other.

Note: This is **not** the decision-making structure!

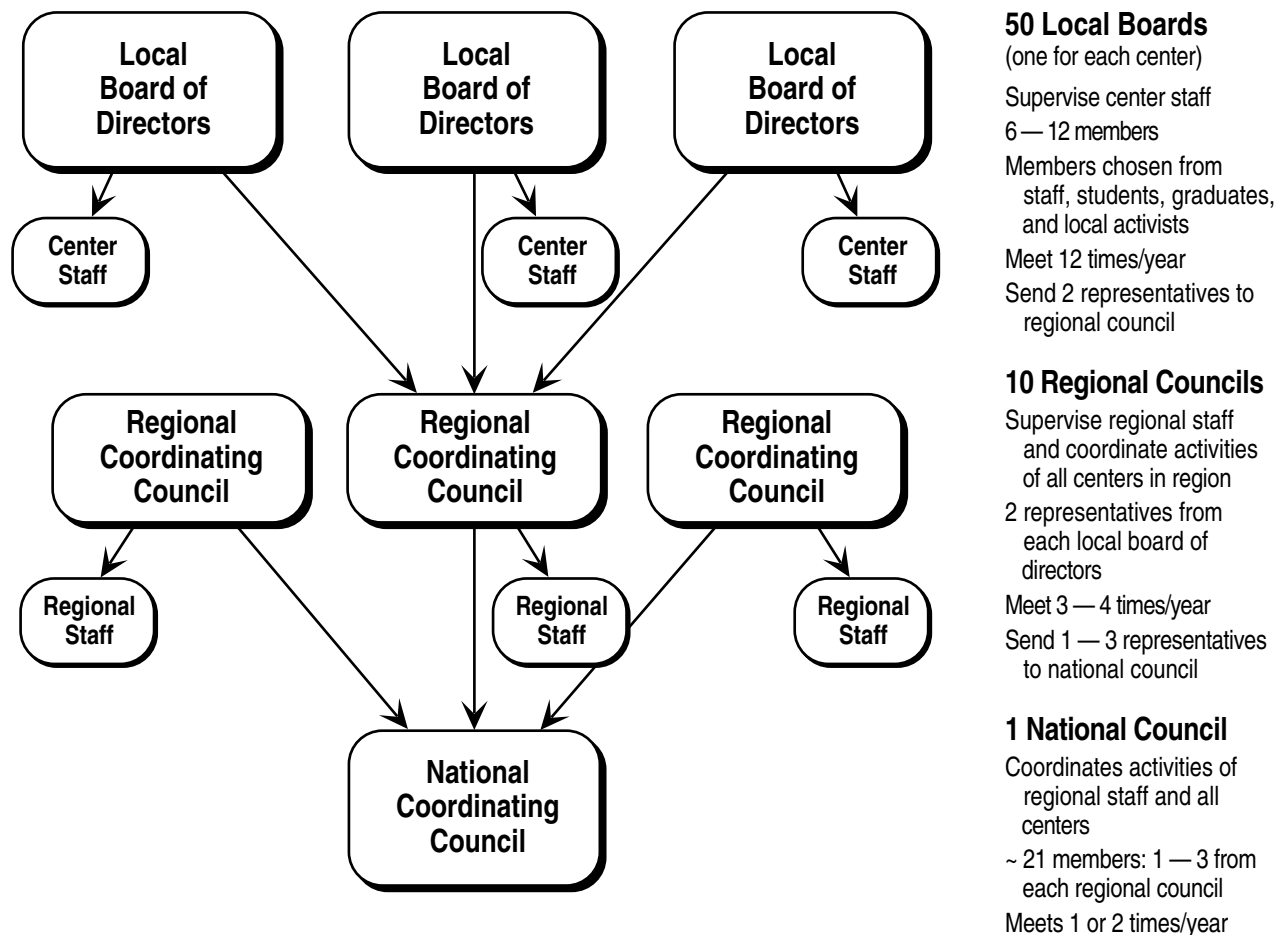
pedite this process, I envision that some experienced activists would be hired solely to recruit, hire, teach, and support new staffmembers. With special assistance from these “new staff preparers,” newcomers would be better prepared to join their Vernal team.

As the number of Vernal centers grew, it would be advantageous for the centers in the same part of the country to work together in a regional alliance and to have additional help. They would hire regional administrators to take over much of the administrative work of the centers, including record-keeping, accounting, and payroll. This would free up the Vernal team staffmembers to focus more on education. Charged with supporting the needs of the region and the whole network, the regional administrators would also work to facilitate communication and cooperation between the

centers in the region and with centers in the rest of the country.

Figure 6.8 summarizes a possible geographical structure of the Vernal Project when it had reached full size. Four to five nearby study groups of five to nine students each would comprise a Vernal session (about thirty students in all). Each team of four (full-time equivalent) staffmembers would facilitate four sessions. Two to seven teams would work in each of ten regions throughout the country (fifty teams total), and there would be one regional administrator for every two centers (twenty-five total). Four new staff preparers would help to recruit, teach, and support new staffmembers around the country. Overall, Vernal teams would conduct two hundred sessions each year for six thousand students.

Figure 6.9: A Possible Vernal Decision-Making Structure



A local board of directors would supervise each Vernal center. Boards would be responsible for all decisions (including curriculum, admissions, and hiring) though Vernal staffmembers would probably make most everyday decisions. Regional coordinating councils would coordinate publicity and recruitment for the local centers. The national coordinating council would gather articles for a national alumni newsletter, coordinate national publicity, coordinate curriculum changes, and ensure a reasonable balance of salaries and tuition across regions.

Note: In this model, there are no national staffmembers. All national work would be carried out by regional or local staffmembers.

Network Governance

To be consistent with progressive ideals, the Vernal Education Network must be governed in a decentralized, democratic, cooperative way. Figure 6.9 shows a possible decision-making structure for the network when it had reached full size.

Each Vernal team would make most of the decisions regarding the day-to-day running of its sessions. For important policy decisions, each center would be governed by a board of directors. This board might have six to twelve members consisting of perhaps roughly equal numbers of Vernal staffmembers, active graduates, current students, and interested local activists. Working in conjunction with the Vernal team, the board would chart overall direction and make important policy decisions concerning the following:

- Personnel — recruiting, hiring, salary levels, evaluation
- Student recruitment and admissions
- Levels of financial support for students — scholarships and stipends
- Curriculum
- Coordination with other centers

I assume the board would use a cooperative consensus decision-making process for all decisions. They would meet once a month and meetings would be open to any interested member of the Vernal community (and perhaps the larger community). Observers would be allowed to participate as long as they were not disruptive, though final decisions would be made by the official members. Boardmembers would be chosen by their peer constituency (staffmembers, students, graduates, community activists). They would serve staggered terms lasting three years (one year for students).

Make yourself an honest man, and then you may be sure there is one less rascal in the world.

— Thomas Carlyle

I envision that all of the Vernal teams in a region would cooperate to maintain and support the centers in that region. Each center's board would send two representatives to a regional coordinating council that would meet three or four times each year. The Regional Council would coordinate publicity and recruitment in the region to reduce duplication of effort. It would also hire and supervise the regional administrators.* Regional Council meetings would also provide a forum for discussion of curricula and a place to share innovative education methods, study lists, and so on.

To coordinate the overall affairs of the nationwide Vernal Education Network, I envision a governing board consisting of representatives from each of the regional coordinating councils — perhaps, one to three from each region

proportionate with its size. This Council would meet once or twice a year and coordinate the following work:

- Publish an alumni newsletter twice each year and distribute it to every Vernal graduate, perhaps via e-mail.
- Maintain a Vernal Project web site.
- Arrange periodic visits or exchanges of staffmembers from one center to another so they could learn from each other and get a sense of current issues in other regions.
- Coordinate Vernal curricular development, publicity, and so on to reduce duplication of effort.
- Monitor each center to ensure the curriculum and facilitation at each were first rate.

Note that, as I envision it, there would be no national staffmembers. All national work would be delegated to regional administrators or center staffmembers.

By being highly decentralized and narrowly focused on education, the Vernal Education Network should be relatively impervious to attacks and less susceptible to infighting. As I see it, neither the network as a whole nor any of its parts would take official stands on any political issues or attempt to force anyone to do or believe anything. This would lessen internal disharmony and shield the network from outside criticism. Also, the total resources of the Vernal network would be small and divided almost evenly among all the centers, so it would not be a very desirable target for powermongers seeking to control, exploit, or plunder it. Since all Vernal staffmembers, students, and graduates would have extensive skill and experience working cooperatively, the network should operate well and serve as an exemplary model of good governance.

Concentrated power can easily be captured and diverted to pernicious ends; democratic power, because it is dispersed, is more secure and resilient.

Affiliation with Other Organizations

As outlined here, the Vernal Education Network would be independently controlled and operated. However, the network might be fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit organization (like Agape Foundation or A. J. Muste Foundation) to provide a means for tax-exempt donations. To establish name recognition and a positive reputation, the network as a whole or some individual centers might also be loosely associated with a small progressive group like the War Resisters League or ACORN. The network might even be directly affiliated with some larger group like the American Friends Service Committee or an existing school like Antioch College, which already has a strong reputation, a complete administrative and fundraising structure, and tax-exempt status. The advantages of an established organization's support for the Vernal Project would, of course, need to be weighed against the possible disadvantages of being controlled or influenced by another organization that might

* Note, though, that it would not control the Vernal Centers in any way.

seek to impose its own ideas regarding the curriculum or structure.

THE GROWTH OF THE VERNAL EDUCATION NETWORK

Three Steps

The main goal of the Vernal Education Network would be to produce enough skilled and knowledgeable graduates in all parts of the United States to bring about fundamental progressive transformation of society in a few decades. To accomplish this goal, the network would eventually need to be quite large and extend across the country. To get from the current situation of no Vernal centers to this large network of fifty centers using a minimum of resources, I envision three distinct steps:

(1) Set up the first center and determine the best way to conduct high-quality sessions

This step would require hiring several staffmembers and having them learn to work together as a team. They would develop the curriculum and educational materials, identify progressive organizations that would be willing and able to offer internships, attract potential students, conduct a few sessions, and then adjust all the components until the whole process worked well. In this step, the emphasis would be on developing a quality educational process and developing a positive reputation in the progressive community so that it would then be easier to attract students and find internship organizations. Once the team was cohesive and had figured out how to conduct high-quality sessions, it would be time to:

(2) Rapidly replicate the center to fifty locations around the country

This would be a very energy-intensive process of hiring new staffmembers in other locations, imparting to them the necessary skills and knowledge to conduct high-quality sessions, identifying internship organizations in those distant locations, and recruiting students in all those locations. During this step, the emphasis on rapid growth would mean that the quality of the sessions would probably suffer somewhat. Existing centers would devote much of their resources to spawning new centers, which would likely detract from their efforts to conduct good sessions. Moreover, the new centers would be experiencing growing pains, so the quality of their sessions would probably not be the best.

When the network had reached full size, then it would be time to:

(3) Conduct a large number of high-quality sessions steadily for many years

In this third step, the network would not grow in size. Innovation would be limited. All energy would be devoted to conducting high-quality sessions and ensuring students were adequately prepared to work for fundamental change.

Three Phases

To implement these three steps, I assume the Vernal Project would have three main phases. The initial creation phase (Phase 1) would last five years, the expansion phase (Phase 2) would last fifteen years, and the steady phase (Phase 3) would last forty years. To prepare for the first main phase, there would also be two development phases (Phases D1 and D2). In Development Phase D1, the initiators of the Vernal Project would develop the curriculum and test it in several short workshops. In Development Phase D2, they would further develop and test the curriculum in a six-month pilot session. They would also publicize the program and recruit students in preparation for the first actual session.*

At the end of the development phases, the initiators of the Project would become the first Vernal staffmembers and begin the first actual session in Vernal Year 1. Comprising three (full-time equivalent) people, these staffmembers would recruit students, arrange internships, facilitate workshops, research and prepare study group materials, counsel and support students, hire and teach any new staffmembers, and provide all the necessary administration for this session. They would probably make a number of mistakes and have to learn how to overcome them.

Over the next four years of Phase 1, the first center would grow from holding a single session to holding four sessions each year. During this phase the staffmembers would devote a great deal of time to developing procedures and methods, further refining the curriculum, and publicizing the center more widely. The number of staffmembers would grow to a complete team of four plus one more staffmember who would make preparations for a new center in another region. In Vernal Year 5, this additional staffmember would recruit and hire new staffmembers, arrange internships in the new location, and recruit students in the new location.

In the sixth year, at the start of Phase 2, staffmembers would start an additional center in another region. Some of the original staffmembers might move to the new location to provide guidance in establishing procedures and administration or they might rely completely on staffmembers hired at the new location. This style of growth would be repeated at a rapid pace throughout Phase 2 (Vernal Project Years 6 through 20) across the United States until there

* The development phases are discussed in much more detail in Chapter 10. Appendix B provides more detail for Phases 1, 2, and 3.

were a total of fifty Vernal teams facilitating two hundred sessions each year. During this Phase, Vernal staffmembers would also set up regional administration offices.

Phase 3 would begin in Vernal Project Year 21 and continue for forty years. During this period, the network would remain the same size with all efforts devoted to educating students and supporting the graduates.

In Project Year 61 the Vernal Project would end. By this time, society might have been transformed enough that the Vernal program would no longer be needed. Or if the Vernal Project had not yet been successful, then it would be time to try a different approach.

A Political Education Movement

As stated earlier, the main goal of the Vernal Education Network would be to produce skilled and knowledgeable activists who could then work to bring about fundamental progressive transformation of society. The Vernal Project would be primarily oriented towards supporting various progressive social change movements.

Still, if the Vernal Education Project proceeded as described here, it would, by itself, form the backbone of a specific social change movement: a political education movement dedicated to informing people about the need for fundamental change, about the ways and means of working for positive change, about productive ways of wrestling with diverse ideas, and about gratifying ways to work together with other people. In convincing activists to attend a Vernal session, Vernal staffmembers would be building this movement. When these students graduated and then encouraged their friends and colleagues to attend a Vernal session, they would also be building this movement. Moreover, when Vernal graduates taught their fellow activists, they would be further building this movement.

Widespread political education is a crucial part of fundamental progressive social change, but it is not the only part. In the first twenty years of the Vernal Project, it would be essential that this political education movement grow and spread across the country. However, once it had reached a certain size, activists would need to put much more emphasis on challenging the power structure, challenging entrenched cultural and social norms, building alternative institutions, and providing support to those working for positive change. The political education movement would continue its important work, but other, larger movements to bring about specific societal changes would arise and the overall focus would shift to them. The Vernal Education Project would assume its proper place as a support project bolstering the work of other movements.

A Note on Overall Size

Eventually, the number of Vernal centers must be large enough to ensure that graduates could transform society. However, the number of centers should not be so large that the Vernal network would pull resources away from other endeavors (such as the actual effort to transform society). The size of the Vernal network would also be constrained by the number of viable applicants for admission, that is, the total number of activists who were serious about long-term progressive social change and also eager and able to devote a year to study in a Vernal program.

I believe a network of fifty centers, educating 6,000 students each year, would be about the right size. As I show in Chapters 7 and 9, this should be large enough to ensure a reasonable chance of overall success. I also believe that Vernal staffmembers could, without excessive effort, attract 6,000 activists with the necessary interest and resources to attend a Vernal session each year once the Vernal network had established a positive reputation and demonstrated its value.

To provide some context for this figure of 6,000 Vernal students annually, consider that about 4,000 people have joined the Peace Corps every year since its inception in 1961. In the 1998–1999 school year, about 40,000 young people served in the AmeriCorps domestic volunteer program. In 1995, about 1,186,000 college students received bachelor's degrees, and in 1997, about 2,500,000 people turned 55 years old.⁸

VERNAL PROJECT FINANCES

Expenses

By relying mostly on study groups, self-study, and internships, the Vernal program would have relatively few expenses. The greatest costs would be for staffmember support and retreat center rental. I assume that for the first few years, while the Vernal network was developing, full-time staffmembers would be paid just \$18,000 per year (in 1995 dollars and adjusted periodically for inflation*). As the centers became established, salaries would rise and finally stabilize at \$24,000. Assuming an additional cost of 33% to cover health care, pensions,

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.

—Derek Bok, President,
Harvard University

* All these costs and salaries are specified in 1995 dollars — they would be adjusted in the future to account for inflation. For example, in 2000 the cost of living is up about 13% from 1995, so \$18,000 in 1995 dollars would be adjusted to \$20,400 in 2000 dollars; \$24,000 (1995) would be adjusted to \$27,200 (2000).

Figure 6.10: Summary of Assumed Vernal Expenses

	Expenses Per Student	Expenses Per Session (30 Students Per Session)	Expenses Per Center Per Year (4 Sessions Per Center)
Retreat center rental, cook's fee, food costs	\$ 1,000	\$ 30,000	\$ 120,000
Salaries and benefits for Vernal team (4 FTE/center)	1,067	32,000	128,000
Vernal center administrative expenses	125	3,750	15,000
Salaries and benefits for regional administrator (0.5 FTE/center)	133	4,000	16,000
Regional administration expenses	42	1,250	5,000
Salaries and benefits for new staff preparers (0.08 FTE/center)	21	640	2,560
New staff preparer expenses	12	360	1,440
Total	\$ 2,400	\$ 72,000	\$ 288,000

Assumptions:

Retreat center expenses include rental of the retreat center, the cook's fee, and the cost of food. Assume this costs \$25/day/student for 40 days (35 full days, 10 half-days) = \$1,000/student.

Assume a salary of \$24,000/staffmember plus \$8,000 more to cover benefits and taxes = \$32,000/staffmember.

Administrative Expenses include office rental, office equipment (file cabinets, computers, office materials), phone, mailings (paper, printing, postage), and travel.

Assume center administrative expenses would be \$15,000/center (probably a tiny office or none).

Assume regional administrative offices would cost \$10,000/administrator.

Assume administrative costs for each new staff preparer would be \$18,000 (probably no office, but high phone and travel costs).

All figure are in 1995 dollars.

other benefits, and the employer share of taxes, total expenses would be \$32,000 for each staffmember.

I assume that each yearlong Vernal session would cost about \$30,000 to cover retreat center rental, the cook's fee and food costs at the retreat center. I assume each Vernal center would also require \$15,000 per year to pay for books, printing, postage, computers, travel, and so on. I have assumed that each regional administrator would spend \$10,000 per year for office rent, equipment, printing, mailing, and travel. I also assume each new staff preparer would spend \$18,000 per year, primarily for travel and long-distance phone calls. Figure 6.10 summarizes the cost of these items for each student, each session, and each center.

Tuition

For students to be able to attend a Vernal session, the cost cannot be too great. Most students attending a Vernal session would probably not be wealthy, and after graduating, most would probably have little earning potential. Also, because of the political nature of the Vernal program, it would probably be difficult to secure government accreditation, so students would most likely not be able to qualify for education grants or loans. Even if they could get loans, most graduates would probably find it difficult to pay them off.

So, tuition must be kept to a minimum, and there must be scholarships and stipends available to cover living expenses for the least well-off students.

Still, all the expenses must be paid somehow. Since students would be the primary beneficiaries of the Vernal program, it makes sense to charge a reasonable amount for what they are receiving (rather than, for example, reducing the salaries and benefits of staffmembers). Moreover, many students from wealthy or middle-class backgrounds would be able to pay relatively high tuition.

Aiming for a prudent balance, I have assumed a moderate tuition with substantial scholarships and stipends for those who could not afford it. I assume that tuition for a Vernal session would be \$5,000 (in 1995 dollars and adjusted periodically for inflation).^{*} For comparison purposes, the average tuition and required fees for public, four-year colleges in the United States in 1995 was about \$3,000 for an academic school year (two semesters or three quarters) and about \$14,500 for private colleges.⁹

^{*} For example, adjusting for 13.3% inflation from 1995 to 2000, tuition would be \$5,650 in year 2000.

Tuition Income

At the beginning of the Vernal Project when expenses would be higher and income lower, I assume that scholarships would be smaller and students would pay closer to the full amount of tuition, averaging about \$3,600 per student per year. The fourth column of Figure 6.11 shows a possible distribution of tuition, scholarships, and stipends that would produce an average of \$3,600 income to the Veral Project per student. In this distribution, fifty percent of the students (fifteen students) would pay full tuition, twenty percent (six students) would pay \$3,500, twenty percent (six students) would pay \$2,500, and ten percent (three students) would pay no tuition and receive a \$1,000 stipend to help with their living expenses.

Figure 6.11: A Typical Distribution of Tuition in Phases 1 and 3

Situation	Annual Tuition Paid	Stipend Received	Percentage of Students	
			Phase 1	Phase 3
Full Tuition	\$5,000		50%	30%
Partial Tuition	\$3,500		20%	20%
Half Scholarship	\$2,500		20%	15%
Large Scholarship	\$500			5%
Full Scholarship	\$0			10%
Full Scholarship + Stipend	\$0	\$ 1,000	10%	20%
Avg. Income Collected Per Student =			100%	100%
			\$3,600	\$2,400

As the Vernal network grew and expenses declined, more scholarships and stipends could be offered. I calculate that the average income to the Project per student per year could drop to \$2,400 by Vernal Project Year 21. The last column of Figure 6.11 shows a distribution of tuition, scholarships, and stipends that would bring in an average of \$2,400. In this distribution, thirty percent of students would pay full tuition, twenty percent would pay \$3,500, fifteen percent would pay \$2,500, five percent would pay \$500, ten percent would receive full scholarships, and twenty percent would receive full scholarships and also receive a \$1,000 stipend for expenses.

Figures B.8 and B.9 in Appendix B show other distributions that also deliver an average of \$3,600 and \$2,400 per student.

The initial tuition amount that each student would pay would be determined by the Vernal team and the board of directors for the center. But this amount might later be adjusted by a collective decision of all the students attending

one session. After students had learned about and discussed economic class and money issues and after they had gotten to know and trust each other well, staffmembers could facilitate a special meeting at one of the retreat center workshops. At this meeting, each student could present her own personal money situation. Then the group could collectively and consensually decide how much each student would pay.

This group process would allow much more flexibility of outcome and compel students to honestly address real money issues in a practical way. Some wealthy students might find themselves offering to pay even more than \$5,000 while those who were especially poor might receive a larger stipend. Every student would likely learn a great deal about money and economic class in our society and how these important issues affected her personally.

Net Finances

Using these expense and tuition assumptions, it is simple to calculate the finances of the Vernal Project. As shown in Figure 6.12, tuition income and overall expenses would each be about \$100,000 in Vernal Year 1 and would grow to a steady \$14.4 million in Phase 3. After the development phases, the Vernal network would bring in more income than it would cost in every year except one: only in Year 9, when a relatively large number of centers would be starting up, would expenses exceed income, and then only by \$5,000.*

In the development phases, startup costs not matched by income would result in a deficit of \$103,000.† However, if this amount were borrowed, the loan could be paid back from subsequent tuition income by Vernal Year 5. Figure 6.13 shows the projected net income for each of the first thirty years of the Vernal Project. Note that in Years 21 and beyond, the net is exactly zero.

* See Figures B.13, B.15, B.16, B.17, and B.18 in Appendix B for details on the number of sessions, students, and paid staffmembers that underlie this summary.

† I assume the average tuition collected for the two ten-day test workshops in Development Phase 2 would be \$300, and I assume expenses (other than staffmember salary) would be one-fifth of a regular session. For the six-month pilot session, I assume an average of \$1,800 tuition collected per student and expenses of one-half of a regular session.

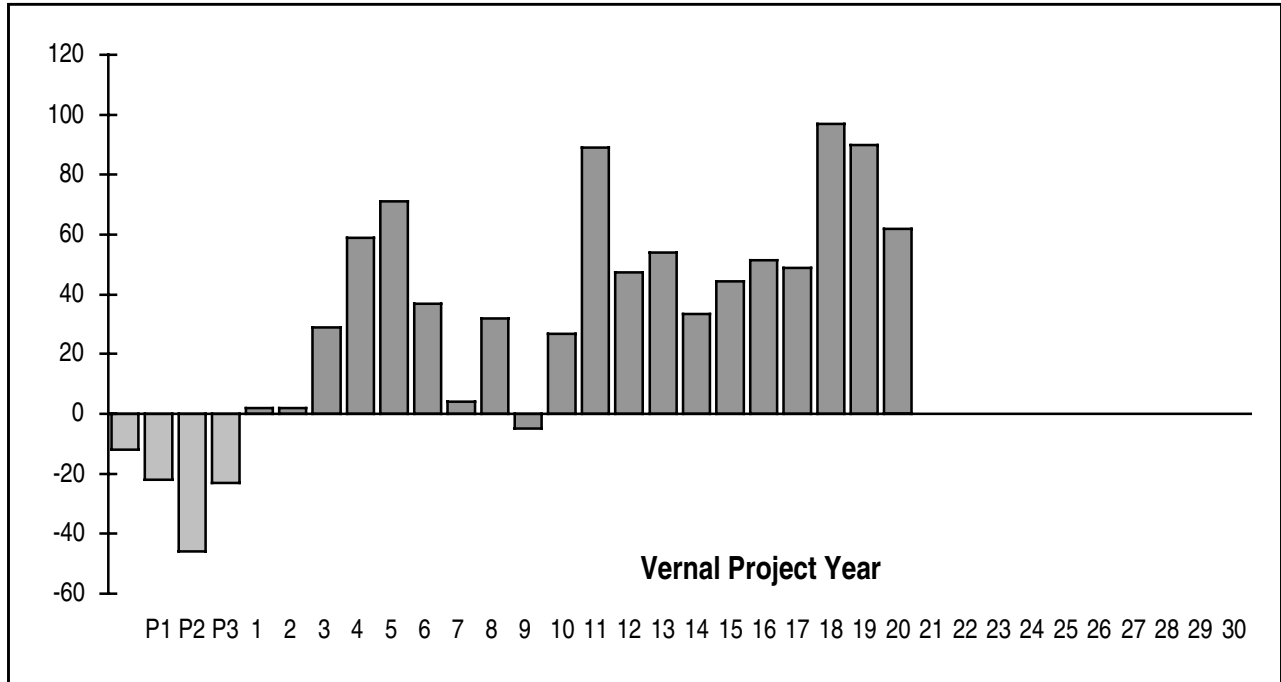
Figure 6.12: Summary of Vernal Project Characteristics and Finances

Phase	Year	Number of Students Enrolled	Average Tuition Income /Student (\$)	Total Number of Paid Staff	Staff Salary (\$)	Total Yearly Tuition Income (\$ in 1,000s)	Total Yearly Expenses (\$ in 1,000s)	Total Net Income (\$ in 1,000s)	Running Total Net Income (\$ in 1,000s)
D1		0	0	0.5	18,000	0	12	-12	-12
D2	Prep-1	30	300	1.0	18,000	9	31	-22	-34
	Prep-2	30	300	2.0	18,000	9	55	-46	-80
	Prep-3	30	1,800	2.5	18,000	54	77	-23	-103
1	1	30	3,600	3.0	18,000	108	106	2	-101
	2	30	3,600	3.0	18,000	108	106	2	-99
	3	60	3,200	3.0	24,000	192	163	29	-70
	4	90	3,200	4.0	24,000	288	229	59	-11
	5	120	3,200	5.0	24,000	384	313	71	60
2	6	150	3,200	8.0	24,000	480	443	37	97
	7	180	3,200	11.0	24,000	576	572	4	101
	8	240	3,200	14.0	24,000	768	736	32	133
	9	390	3,200	24.0	24,000	1,248	1,253	-5	128
	10	630	2,900	32.5	24,000	1,827	1,800	27	155
	11	870	2,800	41.0	24,000	2,436	2,347	89	244
	12	1,110	2,650	49.5	24,000	2,942	2,894	48	292
	13	1,440	2,650	64.0	24,000	3,816	3,762	54	346
	14	1,950	2,650	88.0	24,000	5,168	5,134	34	379
	15	2,550	2,550	107.5	24,000	6,503	6,458	45	424
	16	3,150	2,550	132.5	24,000	8,033	7,981	52	475
	17	3,840	2,550	161.5	24,000	9,792	9,743	49	524
	18	4,620	2,550	193.5	24,000	11,781	11,684	97	621
	19	5,340	2,500	216.5	24,000	13,350	13,260	90	711
	20	5,820	2,450	229.0	24,000	14,259	14,197	62	773
3	21	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	22	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	23	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	24	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	25	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	26	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	27	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	28	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	29	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
	30	6,000	2,400	229.0	24,000	14,400	14,400	0	773
Total for first 30 years		92,610				228,057	227,181	876	830

Phase	Years	Students	Income	Expenses	Net
D1		0	0	12	-12
D2	P-1->P-3	90	72	163	-91
1	1->5	330	1,080	917	163
2	6->20	32,280	82,977	82,264	713
3	21->30	60,000	144,000	144,000	0
Total =		92,700	228,129	227,356	773
including Phases D1 & D2					

All figures are in 1995 dollars.

Figure 6.13: Vernal Project Projected Net Income
(thousands of 1995 dollars)



MEETING THE DESIGN CRITERIA

The beginning of this chapter listed eight design criteria that the Vernal Education Project must meet to effectively transform society. Here is how its design specifically meets each of these criteria:

• Offer a Wide-Ranging Education to Progressive Social Change Activists

• The Vernal program would have ten diverse components that address different aspects of an activist’s life and involve different kinds of learning (lectures, readings, discussion, experiential role-plays, internships, direct “on-the-job” experience, personal mentoring, counseling).

• The program would cover both abstract theory and actual practice. Students would immediately practice what they learn in their internships, their change work, and the governance of their study group.

• The curriculum would cover a wide diversity of topics including social change history, current affairs, current change efforts, visions of the future, barriers to change, and personal aspects of becoming and being an activist. It would cover all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural change.

• Students would have three internships with different change organizations. They would also work with a social service agency and with their own change group. Working with these many organizations, they would meet a variety of people with a variety of perspectives and styles.

• Students would learn together with thirty other activists from their metropolitan area. These activists would likely be a diverse group — including men and women, poor residents of the city and richer residents of the surrounding suburbs, and people from a variety of cultural backgrounds.*

• Vastly Increase the Skills, Strength, and Endurance of Activists

• The program’s yearlong session would provide enough time for students to learn the skills they needed to do effective social change work.

• The program’s emphasis on practical skills and direct learning (in internships and social change work) would ensure students learned information useful to their future change work.

• The program would offer practical skills to thousands of progressive activists every year. After graduating, they would immediately be part of a vast network of skilled

* Admittedly, Vernal students would connect only with other students from similar *geographic* backgrounds since they would continue to live in their home communities while attending a Vernal session.

activists all working simultaneously for fundamental progressive change (see Chapters 7 and 9).

- The program would provide strong personal support for every student from many sources. Students would learn how to develop a personal support network for themselves and how to effectively support others.

- The program would facilitate strong bonding between students so they could continue to provide solid support to one another for many years after graduating.

They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel. — Carl W. Buechner

• Facilitate the Development of a Cooperative Community

- The program would teach cooperative skills and demonstrate them in the operation and governance of the Vernal program.

- The students in a session would have many opportunities to develop strong connections and to practice working cooperatively with each other. The program would bring the six (or so) students in a study group together on an almost daily basis for a year. It would bring them together with the other twenty-four (or so) students in their session for a total of forty-five days at retreat center workshops. Students would be cooperatively learning, discussing ideas, working, and making decisions together for the whole year.

• Operate Efficiently

- The program would be limited to those activists who could make the most of it and could best support and educate other activists.

- By encouraging Vernal graduates to educate and support other activists, the program would greatly multiply the number of activists it could reach, educate, and support (see Chapter 7).

- The program would require little capital by relying on existing infrastructure: student's homes, existing change groups, and established retreat centers.

- The program would require relatively few staffmembers by relying heavily on peer education and internships with existing change groups.

- The program would pay the staffmembers a relatively small salary (but still enough to attract skilled activist-teachers).

- The whole Vernal Project would be self-supporting. After receiving a small start-up loan, it would rely completely on tuition income for funding. It should also be a net provider of activist energy: students would contribute to their internship group as much as or more than they would require in support.

• Span the Country

- Vernal centers would be located in fifty locations across the country and each one would reach out to students

in a wide area. Students from almost every part of the country could attend while continuing to live at home.

- As soon as they graduated, Vernal graduates could immediately start working for change all across the country since they would already be living in the communities where they intended to work.

• Integrate with Activists' Lives

- Students' activities in the Vernal program would be similar to their normal activities as activists. In particular, the mode of working and living in the last three months of the program would guide students towards sustainable social change activism.

• Grow Rapidly and Continue for Decades

- The Project's three phases would allow the first center to develop a quality program, then encourage rapid growth to full size with fifty centers, and finally continue providing a quality education at this level for forty years. Once developed, the curriculum, methods, and materials of the Vernal program could be easily transported and adapted to other places or situations (including other countries).

• Conform to Progressive Ideals

- The Project would encourage and practice honesty, compassion, cooperation, democracy, support, respect for each person, and nonviolent methods of resolving conflict. No student would be forced or coerced to think or do anything.

- By being decentralized and focused exclusively on progressive education, the program would not be particularly attractive to those who wanted to dominate or control others. This would make it easier to implement and sustain practices that adhere to high ideals.

- The size of the Project would ensure that graduates, working in conjunction with hundreds of thousands of other progressive activists, would have enough strength to bring about fundamental change without having to sacrifice their ethics for expediency (see Chapters 7 and 9).

The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, "The children are now working as if I did not exist."

— Maria Montessori

OTHER EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The idea of an educational program for progressive activists is not new. The Vernal program was inspired in part by the many schools and training programs across the United States that have contributed so much to progressive change. Below, listed roughly in chronological order, are

brief descriptions of some of the recent ones that have influenced the design of the Vernal program.

- From 1921–1936, the Brookwood Labor College in Westchester County, New York, with A.J. Muste as director, taught a two-year program in labor organizing for about twenty or thirty students. Students lived on campus, but also attended meetings of their labor unions and participated in labor activities. The college was quite successful for several years. In 1928, the American Federation of Labor attacked it, and during the Depression, it suffered from money troubles. In 1933, Muste left after an internal conflict.¹⁰

- Myles Horton set up the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee in the 1930s to teach and empower the poor rural people of Appalachia and the South. Highlander has played an extremely important role in stimulating and supporting the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and almost every other progressive social change effort in the South since then.

- After organizing the Back of the Yards area of Chicago, Saul Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation in 1940 which organized and taught organizers across the country. In 1969, Alinsky began a training school for organizers with a fifteen-month full-time program.

- Conscientious objector prison camps for those refusing to fight in World War II served as a fertile breeding ground for radical pacifists. “Internment in the Civilian Public Service camps or in federal prison was a formative experience for a new generation of pacifist leaders, providing them with the equivalent of a postgraduate education in applied Gandhianism. . . . Outside they would have found themselves a tiny minority committed to unpopular beliefs and unable to have any measurable effect on national policy. Inside they found themselves surrounded by political comrades, with their opponents equally close at hand.”¹¹

- As part of the Civil Rights movement in the South, activists established “Citizenship Schools” that taught literacy and the basic concepts of democratic government.

- In the 1960s, the New England Committee for Non-violent Action had a school/community in Voluntown, Connecticut. Here activists shared their experiences and organized peace walks, civil disobedience, and anti-war and draft resistance speaking tours. They also learned how to live nonviolently with other people by actually doing it.

- In the late 1960s, a plethora of alternative education programs for adults sprang up across the nation. In the area where I now live, the Free U provided a way for students to connect with those willing to teach them. Classes ranged from guitar lessons to Marxist economics. Some of these classes were eventually formalized and absorbed by community adult education programs.

- The “consciousness raising groups” or “rap groups” of the early women’s liberation movement allowed women to understand their oppression. By sharing their personal experiences and noting the similarities in their stories, they were

able to formulate a more general analysis of patriarchal oppression and develop political strategies for ending it.

- The Movement for a New Society (MNS) taught activists the skills of nonviolent action and cooperative organization and living from 1970 until about 1985. Their Life Center in Philadelphia had weekend workshops, two-week long workshops, and a two-year long training program. MNS trainers traveled around the country offering nonviolence trainings for a variety of activists. Activists trained by MNS constituted the core of the nonviolent direct action anti-nuclear power and weapons movements. In December 1977, I attended a five-day workshop conducted by MNS activists and held at the Quaker Center in Ben Lomond, California. Many of my ideas about the staffmember-facilitated workshops come from this workshop.

- MNS activists also developed a formal study group model (called a “Macro-Analysis Seminar”) with an extensive reading list and recommendations for ways people could read the materials and study together. Thousands of people organized these seminars across the country.

- In the mid-1970s, Heather Booth and other New Left activists formed the Midwest Academy to teach people how to organize grassroots groups to fight for progressive change in their communities. The Midwest Academy has been instrumental in developing a network of progressive “citizen action” organizations in several states, primarily in the Midwest and Northeast.

- Nonviolence training/preparations conducted for most civil disobedience and direct actions since the civil rights movement have given hundreds of thousands of activists their first deep exposure to the lore and practice of nonviolent social change. Knowing they will soon be at a demonstration with the potential for violent repression, attendees often learn an incredible amount in these brief workshops.

- Political education classes conducted by arrestees in jail during almost every large progressive demonstration in the last few decades have also been instrumental in expanding the knowledge base of activists. In jail, seasoned activists have often been able to share their experiences and philosophies with an interested and “captive” audience. For example, during the two weeks that Clamshell Alliance activists were held in National Guard armories in 1977, experienced activists conducted numerous workshops on nuclear energy, alternative energy, and all aspects of organizing.

- The War Resisters League offers a ten-day workshop for about twenty activists every August in western Massachusetts. Many pacifists and war tax resisters attend these workshops and go on to organize for peace.

- The Fellowship of Reconciliation, in its Peacemaker Training Institute, offers several week-long training programs around the country for young people. These workshops focus on nonviolence and cultural diversity.

- Greenpeace has a week-long training class for its employees who engage in nonviolent direct action demonstrations (such as hanging banners from polluting factories and intercepting whaling ships).

- The Ruckus Society conducts weeklong Action Training Camps for activists who engage in nonviolent direct action demonstrations, especially hanging banners and sitting in the top of endangered old-growth trees.

- The Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland, California, offers three-day workshops and a five-week apprenticeship program primarily for community activists of color.

- The Green Corps offers internships to young activists working on environmental issues. The yearlong program begins with one month of classroom training. For the rest of the year, students work on a series of five different environmental campaigns separated by four week-long trainings.

- The two-year long Community Studies program at the University of California at Santa Cruz is an experiential program oriented toward social change. In addition to extensive classroom education, students complete two internships — one three months long and one six months long. They then write a thesis or carry out a large project.

There are also currently a variety of other training centers for community organizers.¹²

Though inspired by these educational programs, the Vernal program would have a different focus and scope than any of them. Being a full-time program for a full year and addressing a wide variety of issues, the Vernal program would be much broader and deeper than most of the currently operating programs. It would also be directed toward more experienced activists and toward those who could devote years of their lives to fundamental progressive change. Therefore, the Vernal program should generally complement, rather than compete with, these other programs.

CARRYING OUT STAGE 1 OF THE STRATEGIC PROGRAM

The previous chapter described a four-stage program for fundamentally transforming society. In the first stage, a large number of progressives would find each other, would learn how society functions, would learn and practice the change skills they needed to transform society, and would form supportive communities. I believe the Vernal Education Project, as described in this chapter, could successfully accomplish the goals of Stage 1. If carried out as described here, the Project would result in a large number of progressive activists, willing and able to work for fundamental change.

The next chapter describes how these activists could develop powerful communities of support and build powerful social change movements. Then Chapter 8 tells a story that illustrates what this might look like in a single community.

NOTES FOR CHAPTER 6

¹ I have outlined a specific format to give a feel for what is possible, but it is merely illustrative. As the Vernal Project develops over time and more centers are formed, the best way to educate activists in these skills will surely evolve. Here are a few examples of some possible alternatives we might consider:

- Some Vernal centers might create a stretched out two-year program. Such a program could be more compatible with part-time employment, thus opening the program to students of more limited financial means.

- Some Vernal centers might affiliate with local colleges, community colleges, or alternative institutions of higher education to offer more widely recognized certifications (perhaps, a masters degree in Applied Social Change).

- While the live-at-home model described here minimizes costs and ensures that graduates understand their community, some Vernal centers might encourage activists to move nearby for the duration of the program. Such residential programs could be particularly important for activists from rural areas.

- As new technologies develop and the costs of using older technologies declines, the centers will probably develop a number of tools for distance learning. These efforts start with the already existing web site <<http://www.vernalproject.org>> and the resources posted there. In the future, tools for distance learning might include such items as video games that help teach nonviolent action and online tools that facilitate online meetings and group problem-solving processes.

- Some centers might combine distance learning with intense three-week onsite programs twice a year. There are several innovative MBA programs for fully employed managers that follow this model.

- Some centers might focus on global issues and bring in multinational students (or locate classes on several continents).

- Some centers might try to build a stronger connection between alumni and students, perhaps relying on alumni to do much of the teaching. Vernal staffmembers might then focus almost exclusively on administration, and it might be possible to have fewer staffmembers.

- Centers might also do more to support the alumni community, perhaps sponsoring annual retreats that would encourage mutual support and sharing of experiences.

- There might be a regional follow-on program geared to a small subset of the graduates of Vernal sessions, especially those graduates who might eventually become Vernal staffmembers. This second tier program might consist of three-week-long workshops held twice a year for two years and be facilitated primarily by a new staff preparer. The program might focus on advanced topics in social change and methods for teaching social change skills. This would provide opportunities for continued learning and community building even if these activists did not become Vernal staffmembers.

² For more on the philosophy and practical organization of social change study groups, see Philadelphia Macro-Analysis Collective of Movement for a New Society, *Organizing Macro-Analysis Seminars: Study & Action for a New Society* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1981).

³ These four questions are based partly on Harvey Jackins, *The Enjoyment of Leadership* (Seattle: Rational Island Publishers, 1987), p. 40.

For an excellent article describing support groups and how to make them effective see Tova Green, "Support Groups" in Tova Green and Peter Woodrow, *Insight and Action: How to Discover and Support a Life of Integrity and Commitment to Change* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1994, HM133 .G7 1994), pp. 7–52.

⁴ The notes and agendas that I have prepared for workshops on consensus decision-making and nonviolent direct action are examples of the kind of papers I would expect staffers to prepare (see <<http://www.vernalproject.org>> for a list). Virginia Coover, et al., *Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: New Society Press, 1978, HN65 .R47 1978), Neil Wollman, ed., *Working for Peace* (San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers, 1985, JX1963.W72 1985) and other organizing manuals are also examples of such notes.

⁵ For example, in their September 1997 annual meeting, the National Organizers Alliance debated the advantages and disadvantages of seven tenets of Alinsky-style political organizing: democracy, simplicity, quantity, winning, pragmatism, diversity, and harmony. For a description of the process and some of the perspectives that were illuminated see Kim Fellner, "Is Nothing Sacred?!", in *The Ark*, Newsletter of the National Organizers Alliance, no. 10 (January 1998): 12–16; or Joel Bleifuss, "Sacred Cow, Or Bull?: Questioning the Tenets of Political Organizing," in *In These Times* 21, no. 25–26 (November 23, 1997): 16–17.

⁶ A salary of \$24,000/year in 1995 was relatively good for a full-time social change activist, but for an activist with many years of experience it is low. Compared to conventional jobs, it is quite low. Salaries for classroom teachers in 1995 averaged \$37,264 and for public college professors averaged \$49,100. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1998*, "Table 276: Average Salary and Wages Paid in Public School Systems: 1980 to 1998" and "Table 314: Average Salaries for College Faculty Members: 1995 to 1997," drawn from American Association of University Professors, Washington, DC, *AAUP Annual Report on the Economic Status of the Profession*. <<http://www.census.gov:80/statab/www/index.html>>

Still, I believe these jobs would be quite desirable. I do not think it would be difficult to find qualified candidates.

⁷ W. Russell Neuman, *The Paradox of Mass Politics: Knowledge and Opinion in the American Electorate* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, JK1967 .N48 1986). The five percent figure is on page 170; the definition of political sophistication is on page 54.

Note that Neuman mostly focuses on politics in the traditional sense: elections, politicians, and the issues discussed in the conventional news media. This point of view overemphasizes the two major parties and the issues they find important, and it overlooks

most of the work of progressive and conservative activists. My own definition of political salience, knowledge, and conceptualization is broader than just electoral politics and includes economic, social, and cultural aspects of society.

⁸ According to an October 16, 1998, Peace Corps press release, "Budget Agreement Allows Peace Corps To Expand; Gearan Says 8 Percent Increase Puts Agency on Path to 10,000 Volunteers," there have been 150,000 volunteers and trainees from the time the program was established in March 1961 through Fall 1998 (37.5 years). This averages about 4,000 per year. <<http://www.peacecorps.gov/news/index.html>>

The AmeriCorps data appears on this web page dated October 1998: <<http://www.americorps.org/100k/history.html>>

AmeriCorps volunteers work with organizations such as the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Big Brothers/ Big Sisters, and Boys and Girls Clubs. After completing a year of service, they receive an education award to help pay for college or vocational training.

The number of college graduates comes from U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1998*, "Table 252: School Enrollment, Faculty, Graduates, and Finances, With Projections: 1985 to 2008," drawn from U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, annual, and *Projections of Educational Statistics*, annual. <<http://www.census.gov:80/statab/www/index.html>>

The number of people turning age 55 comes from U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1998*, "Table 16: Resident Population, by Sex and Age: 1997," drawn from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Paper Listings PPL-91*. <<http://www.census.gov:80/statab/www/index.html>>

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the U.S., 1998*, "Table 312: Institutions of Higher Education — Charges: 1985 to 1997," drawn from U.S. National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, annual. <<http://www.census.gov:80/statab/www/index.html>>

¹⁰ A. J. Muste, *The Essays of A. J. Muste*, Nat Hentoff, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967, JX1963 .M8455), pp. 84–154.

¹¹ Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987, HN90 .R3187 1987), p. 132.

¹² For a list of 17 community training centers see Center for Third World Organizing, "Training Centers & Organizing Networks," *Third Force*, Special Section published in conjunction with *The Neighborhood Works* 5, no. 1 (March/April 1997): 32.