

How to

STOP THE WAR!



A guide to action

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Why this handbook was written
2. Why is it important to organize against the war?
3. How to start a group
4. Points of unity
5. How to run the meeting
6. How to keep the group going
7. Join the National Campus Antiwar Network!

Why this handbook was written

This handbook was written by and based on the experiences of the Geneseo Anti-War Coalition (GAWC). It is meant to be a general guide for people who are against the phony “war on terrorism” and want to organize a movement that can stop it.

Roughly 10-20 people regularly attended GAWC’s organizing meetings – it is important to keep this in mind, because if your group has 20-40 people, you will have to modify the way meetings are run.

Again, this is meant as a *general* guide for starting and maintaining an anti-war group.

Why is it important to organize against the war?

The Bush administration wants the “war on terrorism” to be like the Cold War – a convenient excuse for any and every imperial design and every attack on civil liberties. As Ari Fleischer, Bush’s press secretary admitted, “If bin-Laden were dead today, the war would go on tomorrow.”

Unlike the Cold War, the “war on terrorism” does not depend on the existence of any particular group or state. When the U.S.S.R. collapsed, the Cold War ended. But even if every Al-Qaeda member is killed or captured (which is in itself highly unlikely), the war will go on, because there are other “terrorists” and other “terrorist groups”.

This war will be unending – unless a movement is built that is big enough and powerful enough to stop it. The U.S. government has at its disposal the biggest, most powerful war machine ever created. It will probably never be stopped militarily – but it can be stopped by an anti-war movement that stands in solidarity with the people of the world.

In fact, it is only by building an anti-war movement in this country that terrorism can be prevented. If people around the world see that ordinary people are against what the U.S. government is doing around the world, terrorists will be less likely to attack civilian targets. Also, we will be standing up to the mass state-terror of B-52s, daisy cutters, and cluster bombs the majority of which will kill and maim civilians.

The anti-war movement successfully stopped the Viet Nam war; we can, and must, do the same today.

How to start a group

The first thing to do is to try and figure out how many other people are against the war and want to do something about it. Try approaching friends, people from other political groups that might be interested, even religious groups, and ask if anyone would like to start an anti-war group.

Set up a place and time to hold an interest meeting. Any place that is quiet and accessible is fine; don't wait for permission from a campus administration or anyone else, because then it will take weeks and weeks of paper work, bureaucracy, and lots of time and energy. GAWC is still not an official club at SUNY Geneseo – we meet weekly in a lounge in one of the main buildings.

Make lots and lots of flyers – post them on every bulletin board, give them to everyone you know, and ask professors to announce the meeting. If you publicize it, people will come.

The first flyer calling for an anti-war group in Geneseo was posted in late September of 2001, when it became clear that the U.S. was going to war. The headline was, “Don't Turn Tragedy Into War!” and had some information about large anti-war demonstrations.

Make sure the headline and the meeting information is very large – you want to catch peoples' eyes and draw them in to read the rest of the flyer.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration has turned tragedy into war, so that headline no longer fits. Since Iraq is in the cross-hairs and an attack is imminent, “No Blood For Oil!” might be better for a flyer. Headlines and slogans have to be reflective of where things are actually at.

The First Meeting – Since no one knows each other, it's probably a good idea to have everyone introduce themselves, and say why they are against the war, or why they came to the meeting. Generally, you want to win people over to the idea that we need to build a movement against the war, and that the people who are at the meeting should form an anti-war group and meet regularly to organize anti-war activities.

Make sure a sign-up sheet goes around, and get people's names, numbers, and emails, that way you can contact people about the next meeting, or future events.

The interest meeting, out of which GAWC was formed, had about 20 or 25 people (despite the campus' "conservative" reputation). Even if only 5 people show up, you shouldn't be disappointed or discouraged. A core of committed activists can change the world – provided that they are looking outward to get more people involved. The Viet Nam anti-war movement was tiny in 1965 – but 5 years later it was so powerful that the U.S. government had to leave Viet Nam and end the war.

The first meeting is to see who is interested in getting active against the war. Out of it, you want a list of names of people who want to be active, and a commitment from some (hopefully most) of the people there to begin meeting regularly to start building the movement. Also, you want a regular time and place to meet that is convenient for most of the people there.

The Second Meeting – The second meeting is actually more important than the first, because now you will see who is actually committed to building an anti-war group.

Regular meetings are key because the situation is always changing, and the group has to be ready to take action at any turn.

At the second meeting, points of unity should be discussed and decided upon by majority vote.

Points of Unity

At GAWC's second meeting, we discussed "Points of Unity". These points are the basis on which people are included (or excluded), and the core ideas of the group that doesn't change.

GAWC's points of unity were: no to war, no to racism, and defend civil liberties. We kept the points simple and to the point because there are a lot of different reasons to oppose the war. Some people are against killing altogether, some people think Bush stole the election and cannot be trusted, some people think that any war the U.S. wages will be for corporate profits and empire, and some people a little bit of each.

People from different backgrounds and different political perspectives oppose the war for all kinds of reasons. But in order to build a movement that can stop the war, the movement's demands have to be clear and concise in order to make the movement's appeal as broad as possible.

Obviously, "no to war" is not a divisive demand in an anti-war group. But why did GAWC also include points about racism and civil liberties?

In the wake of September 11th, the Justice Department rounded up thousands of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. for no other reason except that they were Arabs and Muslims. There were racist attacks on mosques and even murders of people who "looked Muslim" or "looked Arab." Racism was and is inseparably linked to the drive to war because it is easier to carpet bomb and murder thousands of people who "tend" to be "terrorists." It is easier to slaughter people when the government dehumanizes them.

The round up of so many Arabs and Muslims did nothing to improve safety, just as the round up of thousands of Japanese Americans during World War II didn't save a single life. It had nothing to do with safety, and everything to do with demonizing the Japanese people and creating a climate of fear and hysteria in the country.

The attack on civil liberties is also part and parcel of the drive to war. After September 11th, professors and students who spoke out against the war were harassed and threatened by the administrations; government agencies obtained confidential files of thousands of students; the USA-PATRIOT Act was passed, giving the government the right to tap your phone and search your possessions without probable cause; military tribunals, free of transparency and civilian oversight, were set up.

Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at Berkeley lost its right to be a group and organize on campus. Several students were suspended for demonstrating and organizing a peaceful sit-in. Because of outrage at the Berkeley administration and the outpouring of solidarity from groups all across the country, SJP won its right to organize on campus.

All these measures are an attack on our right to speak out against the war. The movement against the war cannot be indifferent to whether or not we have the right to speak out and organize around our beliefs. This is why it is crucial that we defend civil liberties and connect it to the war.

How to run the meeting

This section deals with how to run the regular weekly meetings of the group.

Moderator – unfortunately, with groups of people larger than 5, it is often difficult to stay on track and get things done. This is why a moderator is necessary – some one has to make sure the group makes the most of its meeting time. Also, the moderator should make sure people don't shout at each other, and that heated discussions don't become yelling matches. If necessary, the moderator should ask people to raise their hands and keep a speakers' list.

The moderator should be elected, or rotate, on a weekly basis. This is to prevent any single person from dominating the group, and it will give every one the experience of running a meeting. If one person moderates all the time, and gets sick and doesn't attend a meeting, the group would be unprepared to run the meeting.

Building the Agenda – at the beginning of each meeting, the moderator should ask the group what needs to be talked about, what needs to be done. This way, the agenda is built democratically which will ensure that the entire group is thinking collectively about the group's activities.

The group should also prioritize the agenda items according to their importance. Obviously, if the U.S. attacks Iran, North Korea, and Iraq the day of the meeting, it is far more urgent to talk and do something about this, than having a cookie sale to raise money.

Mini-teach-ins – The anti-war movement has to be able to answer tough political questions, questions like, "What would

YOU do to fight terrorism?,” “We have to do something,” “Is being against the war make you a terrorist?” Also, we need to educate ourselves about all different aspects of the war – from civil liberties to “liberating” the women of Afghanistan. Lastly, our side needs to discuss and learn the lessons of the past, namely those of the Viet Nam and Persian Gulf anti-war movements.

In order to do all this, people should volunteer to research and give short 5-10 minute presentations on a particular subject or question. Generally the presentations should be well-researched and aimed at getting the group to think, discuss, and debate.

Democratic Decision Making – The major decisions of the group – whether or not hold teach-ins, take positions on specific issues – should be debated and decided by majority vote. This will ensure that every decision made by the group is done formally, as opposed to informally, and will ensure that everyone has a voice and a vote in the group’s decision making.

There may be sharp disagreements on many issues, but a rigorous debate followed by a vote will ensure that both (or all) sides had input on a particular question and preserve the group’s unity. If it turns out the group made a bad decision, the question can always be re-opened and discussed at the next meeting.

Taking responsibility – after the group decides something, some one should volunteer to make sure it gets done. If the group decides to petition against the USA-PATRIOT Act, some one has to write the petition, otherwise the group’s decision remains a dead letter. The volunteer needs to be held accountable if he or she does not fulfill the task volunteered for.

Also, if the group decides to do a protest or a march, some one should volunteer to coordinate the overall effort. This might

include asking certain people to make placards, some one to make a flyer, others to make a banner, and some one to write a letter to the local newspaper.

Tasks should not be the burden of a small handful of people, but should be spread out as much as possible.

Subcommittees – for groups of larger than 20, it might be a good idea to divide the group into large subcommittees, like education, and publicity. GAWC was never large enough to make this a necessity, but if groups are this large (which is a good thing) they should debate big questions as a group, but break up into subcommittees to hammer out the details of the group's decision.

Note-taker – some one should volunteer to be the group's note taker. This position shouldn't rotate if possible to prevent the group from getting disorganized. If it is the same person, every week, week-in and week-out, note-taking will become a habit and be consistent. If it is a different person each week, the notes will be inconsistent and confusing.

The note-taker should e-mail the minutes of the meeting to the group, so that people who take responsibility to do certain tasks do not forget, and that there is a formal record of what the group voted on. Also, it keeps people who didn't attend for whatever reason up to date and informed.

How to keep the group going

Building an anti-war movement that can stop the war means, on a day-to-day, week-to-week level means educating ourselves about the war, and convincing others that they should oppose the war and join the group.

There are several things that groups can do to this end.

Teach-ins – teach-ins are central to convincing people why they should oppose the war and join the movement. GAWC regularly had about 40 people come to teach-ins; the subjects included: “Why war is NOT the answer,” “the Attack on Civil Liberties,” and the April 20th protests against the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, Plan Colombia, the war, and Israel’s attack on the Palestinians in Washington, D.C.

The first thing to do for a teach-in is to get a room at a time when many people can come (usually evenings). The second thing to do is build it – with flyers, emails, anything and everything to get the word out that something is going on.

At the teach-in, a couple people should speak on different subjects, like “why you should oppose the war” and “why we need a movement to stop it.” The speakers should be ready to answer questions or points from the audience

Also, a moderator is necessary to call on people, and to make sure the speakers don’t go on and on and on and on.

No one person should monopolize the right to speak on the group’s behalf in public, so speakers should rotate between teach-ins.

Weekly tabling – GAWC had a table regularly in one of the main thoroughfares on campus. We tabled at lunch time, had some signs hanging up to let people know who we were, and had lots of flyers about upcoming events, general anti-war information. We also had sign-up sheets for people interested in getting active, as well as a petition against the USA-PATRIOT Act.

Because we had a regular visible presence on campus, we recruited many people to GAWC, were able to raise money, and get the word out about our debates, teach-ins, meetings, and other activities.

Debates – GAWC set up two debates in its first year on campus. Both debates were against the College Republicans (an easy target). One was simply pro-war vs. anti-war, the other was about “should we sacrifice our civil liberties in the ‘war on terrorism’?”

The debates were great because our arguments and ideas went head-to-head with those of the Bush administration. This is an excellent way to win people to being against the war, because they are presented with both sides since many people will come and see a debate, but not a “one-sided” teach-in.

Again, publicizing this is crucial. Make announcements in class, put flyers up where ever people will see them, email people you met tabling, and get your opponents to do the same.

Fundraising – unfortunately, it costs money to make flyers, and it costs money to go to other cities to protest. This is why fundraising is important.

GAWC had a bake sale, in which we sold 30 dozen chocolate chip cookies, raising about \$90 for the April 20th protest. We also produced a cd of anti-war songs, selling about 8 or so.

In addition, GAWC had a mock refugee camp to expose the plight of millions of Afghans displaced by U.S. bombing. We had tents made out of sticks and bed sheets, and we appealed to passers-by for “money for refugees, not for war.” We raised \$300 in about 5 hours, and we sent it to the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA).

Be creative! Have a party, have bands play shows, do whatever people will pay money for.

Protests, rallies, marches – Building interest in and getting people to large protests is really important. National marches against the war, if they are large enough, can project the anti-war message into the mainstream media to a mass audience. For activists or potential activists, it shows that they are not the only ones who are against the war – in fact we are tens of thousands strong.

When the U.S. started bombing Afghanistan, marches took place in Geneseo, N.Y., but GAWC hadn't formed yet. We marched from an outdoor college square into a lunch room, where people got up on chairs and made speeches to students eating. The marches were somewhat confused and disorganized, but they showed that there was opposition to the war from the beginning.

The same must be done when the U.S. attacks Iraq (again). Every group should have an emergency response rally in case the U.S. attacks no matter what the country.

Working with other local groups – While the focus of the group is to organize against the war, this doesn't exclude the possibility of working with other groups. The opposite is the case.

Our movement should actively seek support where ever it can. If you want to hold a teach-in about the attack on civil liberties, contact the ACLU. If you want to have a teach-in about or a march on the I.N.S., contact the local mosque.

Approach any and every group for joint **actions** if there is even the slight possibility of working together. Churches, mosques, the Green party, socialists, communists, anarchist groups, ethnic groups like the Muslim Student Association or Black Student Union, all should be approached for endorsing and publicizing anti-war events.

Becoming an official group on campus – You may want to consider becoming an official group on campus, or you may decide not to. There are pros and cons to each side.

The pros of being an official group are that you can get funding from the college, you can reserve rooms in your own name, you can get speakers, and you can use college equipment (vans, microphones, etc).

The cons of being an official group are that you have to deal with a fair amount of paper work and bureaucracy, and if the campus administration doesn't like what the group is doing, it can revoke the group's status and put pressure on individual students by threatening suspension, or expulsion.

The pros of not being an official group are that you don't have to deal with the campus administrative bureaucracy, and that it

is much harder for them to find out who is involved in the group.

The cons of not being an official group are that you have to pay for flyers on your own (or through other campus groups), you can't reserve rooms in your own name, and you can't have a subsection on the school's website.

At first, GAWC decided not to be an official campus group, for the pros stated above, but later decided to become an official campus group because it was very cumbersome to go through other groups to make flyers, reserve rooms, and use campus equipment.

Whatever your group decides, don't let paperwork and bureaucracy get in the way of your activism! Don't wait for paperwork to clear to organize – after all, there's a war that's not willing to wait.

Join the National Campus Antiwar Network!

Who we are - The National Campus Antiwar Network (NCAN) is a nation-wide organization of campus-based antiwar coalitions and committees. We were formed at the National Student Antiwar Conference held at Columbia University on February 22-24, 2002. The Columbia University conference brought together over 200 elected student delegates from almost 50 schools across the United States and Canada. Delegates came to the conference with the goal of establishing a national organization of campus antiwar coalitions that could act in a united way and make decisions democratically, from the bottom up.

NCAN is divided into 8 geographical regions: Northeast, Tri-state (NY/NJ/CT), Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Southwest, Mid-West, California, and Northwest. Each region elects 2 representatives to our national coordinating committee.

How to join – Circulate this document among your group members as well as NCAN's points of unity:

1. We oppose this war.
2. We call for an end to racism, especially racial profiling and ethnic scapegoating.
3. We call for the protection of civil liberties and the repeal of legislation which threatens them.
4. We call for the funding of education and jobs, not for war.

Send an email to our temporary email address **campusantiwar@hotmail.com** with the following information:

- name and contact details of one or several contact people on campus.
- the name of your school and where it is.
- a general introduction: How many people attend meetings? Do you have an email list? If so, how many people are on it?

Any successful outreach strategies? Have you been able to work with other groups on campus such as MECHA, Afghan Student Union, Filipino student groups, etc. Don't feel like you have to write a thesis, but a paragraph or two would be really helpful.

Here is NCAN's website: <http://www.antiwarnetwork.org>

To join the NCAN listserv, send a blank email to nsan-subscribe@lists.riseup.net