

Students for Environmental and Racial Justice

On March 15th, 2019, over 1.4 million students in excess of 300 cities around the world participated in a global climate strike to protest government inaction on climate change. Now, inspired by our fellow students, Students for Environmental and Racial Justice (SERJ) will be holding a rally a month later, on April 15th. We are a student committee focused on environmental and racial justice issues inspired by this climate strike.

The purpose of the rally is to formally support the [Environmental Justice Working Group's cluster hire petition](#). In addition, our rally will be a demonstration, platform, and campus community space for engaging about environmental justice (EJ) issues, specifically relating to the [implications of Stanford University's](#) complicity in environmental and racial injustices, as well as for issues beyond campus.

SERJ Demands for Stanford:

- 1) Institutionalize EJ through **cluster hire of EJ faculty**.
- 2) Recognize Stanford's ongoing history of injustices and oppression of the Ohlone and open the conversation about making reparations to them, starting by advocating for **Stanford to pay the [Shuumi Land tax](#)**.
- 3) Center **Environmental and Racial Justice (ERJ)** by **cultivating and practicing justice and reparations frameworks** in the long-ranging planning implementation, university administrative direction, etc. SERJ advocates for the establishment of a transparent, reciprocal, and Black; Indigenous; People of Color (BIPOC) student-focused ERJ university policy advisory committee.

1 - Environmental Justice Cluster Hire

The **E**nvironmental **J**ustice **W**orking **G**roup (EJWG) has put forth a proposal for an Environmental Justice cluster hire as part of the long-range planning process. SERJ, representing the student-community interests, supports this proposal, and advocates for the expansion of Environmental Justice-related academic opportunities beyond the cluster hire, in the form of

academic notations, minors/majors/programs, conferences, support of intentional/community based research etc.

In the 2017-2018 academic year, Stanford initiated a long-range planning process to shape the future direction of the University and conceptualize how the overarching vision should be implemented. As an outcome of the initial outreach phase of the planning process, one of the core values of the University was identified as “sustainability”. In the recommendations given by the steering-group, the synthesis calls for the prioritization of instituting a sustainability-related educational requirement for all Stanford students (“Synthesis of Sustainability”, 2018, p. 12).

As an integral part of developing “an ethos of social-environmental sustainability” campus-wide and integrating a sustainability-related educational requirement, it is imperative that environmental justice is not left out of this new wave of sustainability education.

One way to define sustainability is as the harmonious balance of social, economic, and environmental considerations under which we can “strengthen our communities and foster prosperity” for current and future generations (*Sustainability Primer*, 2015). Environmental justice lies at the core of sustainability because we cannot achieve sustainability without ensuring that all communities of people are able to live healthy lives with the freedom to continue on their cultural traditions, unburdened by pollution and other environmental hazards. As the 2018 Sustainability White Paper stated, “Developing a comprehensive and integrated initiative focused on social-environmental sustainability would inspire bold thinking and action... Global social-environmental threats are imminent, sustainability challenges are urgent, and we do not have time to waste” (p.13). Therefore, environmental justice education should no longer be a subtopic or singular lecture in sustainability and environmental education at Stanford, which sends the message that these issues are peripheral to the sustainability and environmentalism movement and recreates the oppressiveness of mainstream environmentalism by continuing to marginalize communities affected by environmental injustice. Instead, there should be dedicated faculty, courses, and even a program on the subject of environmental justice to create a deeper understanding of the issues and to show students that the University is serious about this issue.

Academic institutions have a lot of power in legitimizing knowledge and politicizing what is “important”. Not to discredit the knowledge that is created or dismiss the work being done outside of institutions as unimportant because it should be recognized that so much is accomplished outside of academia by the collective action of folks who have dedicated their lives to fighting for justice. However, it does not seem unreasonable to hold academic institutions, especially those of such prestige as Stanford, to a higher standard of expectations recognizing the power and influence that they hold in shaping the minds of many students, many of whom will leave the university to work on behalf of justice.

We need students at Stanford, a top-tier research institution, to understand this power that they possess in shaping the minds of its students and sending the message of what is deemed important through what is prioritized in funding and support (e.g. STEM over humanities), in the hopes that they recognize that they could use it could leverage this power to make a positive impact on the world around them and go about their future work with intentionality. Furthermore, Stanford holds another level of privilege and influence due to the fact that it is considered an elite academic institution and should be held accountable to educating its students to be well informed and aware people by the time they graduate. The students that leave academic institutions, such as Stanford, hold much privilege with great potential to make a large impact on society.

The fact that *Intro to Environmental Justice*, taught in Fall of 2018, is one of the few environmental justice courses and the first introductory course to be taught on the subject at Stanford is significant and it should not end here.

Therefore, SERJ feels a strong sense of urgency in pushing these goals forward. As students, we have felt the need to go beyond the formal channels to provide input to the University’s long-term plans because we have felt that they do not allow us to adequately enact institutional change due to the lack of accountability to students. Additionally, the university’s efforts to address issues pertaining to marginalized communities have felt minimal, contributing to its complicity in perpetuating systems of inequity and oppression.

In response, we have resorted to grassroots efforts, from tabling to holding a rally to generate widespread student support for the EJ cluster hire proposal. Through all of our efforts, we aspire to

hold space for campus-wide engagement and brainstorming of what resisting Environmental Racism could look like, in the context of Stanford.

2- Stanford Pay the Shuumi Land Tax

As part of dismantling the systems of oppression and achieving environmental justice, it is important for the University to formally acknowledge a fuller history that includes the perspectives and narratives of those who have been oppressed. As Stanford moves forward with pursuing its core value of sustainability as part of its wider vision “to promote the public welfare by exercising an influence in behalf of humanity and civilization” (*Stanford's Mission*, 2018) we must not forget its history in the context of environmental injustice.

Stanford University sits on top of Rumsen Ohlone land, that was violently dispossessed and stolen by Governor Leland Stanford Sr. As governor, Stanford supported CA state conscription of civil war soldiers to “bounty-hunt” native peoples for the purpose of stealing and exploiting this land. Native peoples within the current U.S. borders face a larger, violently anti-indigenous federal system. Today, Ohlone people struggle to gain federal recognition, are largely impacted by the gentrifying processes in the Bay Area, and like many colonized peoples, continue to experience the effects of imperial and colonial violence.

The [Shuumi Land tax](#) is organized by the [Sogorea Te' Land Trust](#). From Sogorea Te' Site:

“**The Sogorea Te Land Trust** is an urban, Indigenous, women-led community organization that facilitates the return of Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone lands in the San Francisco Bay Area to Indigenous stewardship. Sogorea Te creates opportunities for all people living in Ohlone territory to work together to re-envision the Bay Area community and what it means to live on Ohlone land. Guided by the belief that land is the foundation that can bring us together, Sogorea Te calls on us all to heal from the legacies of colonialism and genocide, to remember different ways of living, and to do the work that our ancestors and future generations are calling us to do. The **Shuumi Land Tax is a voluntary annual financial contribution** that non-Indigenous people living on traditional Chochenyo and Karkin Ohlone territory make to support the critical work of the Sogorea Te' Land Trust.

The **Shuumi Land Tax** directly supports **Sogorea Te's** work to acquire and preserve land, establish a cemetery to reinter stolen Ohlone ancestral remains and build urban gardens, community centers, and sacred arbors so current and future generations of Indigenous people can thrive in the Bay Area.”

Currently, the only formal recognition of Ohlone territory is a stone & plaque located on west campus, at the corner of Electioneer Road and Searsville Road.



The plaque falsely portrays Ohlone history as bygone. Recognition of Ohlone peoples is virtually nonexistent on Stanford's campus and in academic agendas. SERJ advocates that Stanford pay the Shuumi Land Tax, as a first step in cultivating & practicing a Justice and Reparations framework. SERJ will be supporting and co-writing a teach-in and petition campaign for these efforts with S.A.I.O. (Stanford American Indian Organization.) Paying the Shuumi Land Tax would be an intentional and directed first step towards Environmental, Racial, and Anti-colonial Justice.

3 - Center ERJ, & Cultivate/Practice Justice and Reparations Framework

People of color are underrepresented in faculty, administrative, and board positions, compared to the composition of an increasingly diverse student body, and cohort of lecturers. SERJ believes that centering ERJ should deeply involve Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) student agency, as opposed to traditional, extractive focus group and feedback models. In light of highly

racialized power dynamics between authoritative and disempowered positions, it is vital in any honest pursuit of justice and reparations frameworks that Stanford elevates and supports BIPOC student agency.

SERJ advocates for the **establishment of a transparent, reciprocal, and BIPOC student focused University policy advisory committee for furthering environmental racial justice work**. Some suggestions thus far in terms of cultivating and practicing justice and reparations frameworks at Stanford are included below:

- Increased agency (as opposed to extractive focus group models) for BIPOC students in Long Range Planning implementation.
- Center and support environmental justice frameworks in Stanford's academic opportunities.
- Move towards returning stolen Ohlone Land (one example beyond the Shuumi Land Tax could be to start with re-matriation or co-management of Jasper Ridge).
- Advocates for African & African American Studies' efforts for departmentalization ASAP
- Increased transparency of Stanford's endowment sources, investments, etc.
- Strategic/staggered plan for fossil fuel divestment (specifically regarding Earth Systems oil industry funding)
- Etc. (seeking additional demands/asks from community groups/student orgs)

Given Stanford's history of environmental injustices, the development and implementation of these environmental and racial justice demands is an opportunity for the University to acknowledge and begin to rectify its past and current history of marginalization, as well as to begin to model a just university.

Signed,

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Resources

p.s. Attached below are a few resources relating to our inspiration to form as a committee to the contents of this list of demands

- <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.pdf>
- www.ejnet.org/ej/ejlf.pdf
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reP7awDdeRk>
- <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2017/01/23/before-stanford-the-muwekma-ohlone-people/>
- <https://sogoreate-landtrust.com>