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Working In The System; Unlike their 1960s forebears, the current generation of student activists is more likely to protest with PowerPoint than a bullhorn.

By Tony Dokoupil

When Andrew Zabel, a Dartmouth senior, decided in fall 2006 to join the fight against global warming, he didn't pick up a bullhorn. Instead he put together a PowerPoint presentation for major corporations. His aim: sponsorship for the Big Green Bus, a vegetable powered vehicle that would help spread a message of green living. Businesses including Newman's Own, Timberland and Burt's Bees liked what they saw and poured in more than \$50,000 to support the 40-city trip. "I wanted to work with the system," explains Zabel. "When you align yourself against things, it's harder to change them."

Zabel's change-from-within philosophy is increasingly common these days. While their Vietnam-era forebears preferred to rage against the establishment, today's activists favor a more cooperative style. "The impulse today is to be practical," says Columbia sociologist Todd Gitlin, an organizer of Vietnam protests. "That means turning to tactics that, like volunteering, return tangible results."

Rather than rallying on the quad, for instance, students at more than 50 schools have opened chapters of the Responsible Endowments Coalition, which encourages universities to invest their funds with a social conscience. Student advisory groups make investment recommendations to a school's board of trustees. Following campus activism, Williams, Middlebury and dozens of other schools have divested money tied to Sudan, while Brown now invests a portion of its funds in environmentally friendly companies.

Student bodies are more diverse than ever, and the unifying rally cry of the Vietnam era has been replaced by a range of concerns, including human rights, environmentalism, immigration and Middle East peace. At the same time, activism has become more focused, better funded and often centrally controlled through groups such as MoveOn.org and Campus Progress, the student arm of the Center for American Progress.

Not everything has changed. Hunger strikes proved a popular form of protest in the last few years, when students on at least eight campuses refused to eat. They protested for curriculum changes, better wages for campus employees and ending the use of sweatshops to make school apparel. And in 2006, the ultimate expression of 1960s campus activism resurfaced with the new Students for a Democratic Society --an antiwar group famed for its national marches against the Vietnam War.

The resurgence of SDS shows that this generation isn't immune to the Iraq War. It's just expressing its antiwar sentiment differently--in thousands of blogs, satirical YouTube videos and ironic T shirts (like the one with the tourist message SKI IRAQ). "College is an ideal time to explore your passions," says Sarah Searle, a University of Virginia junior, "so when the time comes to narrow it down, you know exactly what you're taking up and what you're leaving behind." Sounds like someone who gets the point of college.