

## **Undergraduate Attitudes Toward Social Change**

Your school has been randomly selected to represent the tens of thousands of undergraduate students who are now studying environmental issues or processes. Your careful response to the questions in this survey will help us make recommendations to faculty and administrators who design and teach in environmental programs in the United States.

### **Purpose:**

We are conducting research to elucidate different perspectives among students about the nature of environmental problems and the best ways of addressing them. This study will help us better understand the effectiveness of U.S. undergraduate environmental studies programs.

### **Procedures:**

We ask you to respond to 31 questions about your understanding of and attitudes toward environmental problems. If you participate you will undertake these activities only once. You will also be asked to provide some personal information. The total time required for completion is about 20 minutes.

### **Risks and Benefits:**

If you participate in this research you may experience some minor anxiety from reflecting on the nature of environmental problems. You may also experience minor anxiety disclosing limited personal information. This research is designed to deepen our collective understandings of critical aspects of environmental studies education, and to inform the redesign of undergraduate environmental science and environmental studies programs.

### **Confidentiality:**

Your responses will be held in confidence. Only the researchers involved in this study will have access to the information you provide. The school code that you provide at the beginning of the survey allows us to compare responses among different kinds of colleges and universities, e.g. large universities vs. small liberal arts colleges. Your responses cannot be tracked back to you. You remain anonymous throughout this process. Your responses will be stored digitally on a data server and accessible only to those involved in this project.

### **Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to participate, to end participation at any time for any reason, or to refuse to answer any individual question without penalty. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.

### **Questions:**

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact the Primary Investigator: Michael Maniates, Yale-NUS College, at michael.maniates@yale-nus.edu.sg or (65) 8138 2249.

*Please click on this box to indicate your informed consent to take this survey: \_\_\_\_\_*

*Please enter your school code here: \_\_\_\_\_*

This survey was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the National University of Singapore on 8 April 2014 (#A-14-059E).

**Note: If you wish to do so, you may go back and alter your prior answers as you move through this survey.**

SAMPLE

## **PART I: Help Us Understand Your Thoughts About Social Change (Nine Questions)**

*Most Americans indicate that they are concerned about environmental issues. There is a difference of opinion, however, about how this concern is best expressed in everyday life. The following questions ask for your thoughts on this issue.*

*These questions present both sides of an argument that may be familiar to you.*

1. Many people concerned about environmental issues believe that if individuals do several little things for the environment (e.g. recycling, composting, biking, eating less meat), the resulting collective effort will make a significant difference. These small acts can combine with the small acts of others and spread throughout the population to have a meaningful impact on environmental problems.

What is your view on this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. Many people believe that “voting with our dollar” by buying ecological or “green” products is an important way to promote better environmental conditions. Individual consumers can influence business and government via their purchasing decisions.

What is your view on this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3. You have probably seen lists like “10 Easy Things You Can Do To Save the Environment.” These lists typically focus on small, easy things that everyone can do to make a difference, like recycling, using efficient light bulbs, biking or walking instead of driving, and taking shorter showers.

What is your view of lists like these (mark ALL that apply):

They should be more widely disseminated

They should be ignored

They are helpful in mobilizing Americans to address environmental problems

They trivialize the environmental problems before us

They empower people by starting them off with easy things to do

They help companies sell us so-called environmentally friendly products

4. Consider the following statement: “My lifestyle choices – how much energy I use, what I consume, what sort of products I buy and how I live my life – can have a significant impact on environmental problems, either directly or by inspiring others to act in similar ways.”

Do you:

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

5. Some people in the environmental movement insist that individual acts of environmental consumption have only a small impact on environmental problems. These individual efforts (e.g. recycling, buying ecological products, riding a bike, flying less) are morally correct, but they are too small by themselves to address environmental problems.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

6. People who believe that lifestyle changes and green consumption are too small to make a meaningful difference argue that individuals should instead work with others to change laws and implement policies.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

7. Advocates of 'green consumption' and small lifestyle changes for the environment are not against changing laws or policies. They typically believe that legal and policy change *is* important. But they see political change as being too difficult or frustrating for most individuals to pursue. Thus, if we want to make a difference, changing our lifestyles and buying ecological products is the best way forward.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

8. Critics of this strategy of promoting lifestyle changes and green consumption fear that focusing on buying green products or "living ecologically" distracts people from joining together to change policies or get laws passed that would favor the environment.

What do you think about this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

9. Many argue that simple lifestyle changes and small acts of green consumption are a good springboard for more ambitious environmental actions like working to change laws or implement policies. One of the best ways to get people politically involved is to start them off with small lifestyle changes and consumer changes like buying energy-efficient light bulbs, eating less meat, flying less, recycling their waste.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neither Agree nor Disagree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

SAMPLE

## PART II: Help Us Understand Your Ideas about Information, Education, and Value Change (Five Questions)

*Regardless of how Americans choose to act on their environmental concerns, one question that arises is “what makes people act on behalf of the environment?” We are interested in your thoughts about this question with respect to information, education, and values.*

10. The lack of information is one of the greatest barriers keeping people from acting to solve environmental problems. If people knew more about the seriousness of environmental problems, we would see more action on these issues.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

11. Many people suggest that we need more formal environmental education at all levels of schooling, from kindergarten to college. Educating people about environmental issues is one of the best ways of getting people to act on behalf of the environment.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

12. Others suggest that a fundamental barrier to action is “values.” People do not value or care about the environment in ways that they should. Other values – like a focus on material objects and consumption, or selfishness and short-sightedness – prevail. Until these values change across America, we will make little progress on addressing or solving environmental ills.

How do you feel about this perspective?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

13. Consider the following statement:

“It is too late for college-aged Americans to do much about environmental problems because they don’t value the environment as they should. Today’s children, who are being raised with a much greater sensitivity to environmental issues, will be the real agents for change.”

How do you feel about this statement?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

14. Most people agree that significant social change for the environment depends, to some extent, on Americans understanding the seriousness of environmental problems and valuing ideas like environmental sustainability. In your view, what percentage of the American population must adequately understand and deeply care about environmental problems before significant social and political change for the environment can occur?

Less than 5% of the population  
5% - 20% of the population  
20 – 40% of the population  
40 – 60% of the population  
60 – 80% of the population  
80 – 95% of the population  
More than 95% of the population



15. Please share any additional thoughts that come to mind after answering these questions.

SAMPLE

### Part III. What Do You Think About Crisis? (Eight Questions)

Some people who worry about environmental problems see impending crisis as a great motivator for action. Others are not so sure. This next set of questions asks for your thoughts about crisis.

16. Will a significant crisis be necessary before the United States moves in meaningful ways towards policies and ways of living that are compatible with environmental sustainability?

Absolutely      Probably      Unsure      Probably Not      Absolutely Not

17. If you said “Unsure,” “Probably Not” or “Absolutely Not,” can you explain why in a few words? Afterwards, skip to question # 20.

18. If you said “Absolutely” or “Probably” above, why? What is the benefit of crisis when it comes to addressing environmental ills? (Check all that apply.)

- The public will support strong environmental leaders to solve our environmental problems
- The public will take the warnings of natural scientists more seriously
- People will change their consumption habits – they’ll use less and buy more green products
- People will finally notice that there are pressing environmental problems: crisis will focus their attention
- Growing fear or concern will make new policies for environmental sustainability easier to enact
- Industry will adopt more efficient and environmentally friendly production practices
- Other (explain in the box below)

19. Again, if you said “Absolutely” or “Probably” to question # 16, what kind of crisis do you see as being **most capable** of bringing about a transition to environmental sustainability?

Economic crash

Natural disaster

Abrupt climate change and sea level rise

Global resource scarcities (food, water, energy)

War

Other (explain in box below)

20. Consider the following statement:

“People are normally short-sighted and focused on their own immediate well-being. It takes a crisis to make voters, and their leaders, deal with serious and sometimes hidden problems like environmental degradation.”

How do you feel about this statement?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

21. Consider the following statement:

“We must take drastic political action (like higher taxes on fossil fuel energy, limitations on corporate freedom, more spending on green technology, and/or stronger environmental regulation) to prevent future environmental crises before it is too late.”

How do you feel about this statement?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

22. Consider the following statement:

“The market is a powerful force in society. If an environmental crisis occurs, market forces (like higher prices on some products, or increased competition among business) will foster innovation and new technologies that will ultimately solve our most pressing environmental problems.”

How do you feel about this statement?

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neither Agree nor Disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

23. Consider the following statement:

“Crisis brings out the worst in people, and in their governments. Decisions made during a crisis are typically not very good decisions.”

How do you feel about this statement?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

24. We all hope that society can address the most pressing environmental problems before us. If we are to successfully address these problems and avert a potentially catastrophic crisis, which group of actors below will be **most important** in moving us toward environmental sustainability?

You may only choose one.

- A) Voters
- B) Politicians
- C) Engineers
- D) Scientists
- E) Corporations
- F) Consumers

25. Consider the following statement:

“Social change usually occurs because of a crisis.”

How do you feel about this statement?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

#### **PART IV. Tell Us Something About Yourself (Six Questions)**

**Thank you for participating in this survey. Please end by telling us a bit about yourself.**

26. I am currently a

- First Year Student
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other

27. Your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other

28. Select the division(s) under which most of your environmentally focused courses fall:

- Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences Humanities Interdisciplinary Studies Public Policy
- My courses fall equally across two or more of these divisions
- Other (please specify)

29. How many courses have you taken (including those that you are taking this semester) that you'd include under the broad heading of 'Environmental Studies and Science' (ESS).

- None
- One
- 2 – 3
- 4 – 5
- 6 – 7
- More than seven

30. Learning about environmental issues in my classes (mark all that apply):

Motivates me to keep learning about the issues

Depresses me to the point of inaction

Inspires me to search for solutions

Overwhelms me to the point of not wanting to engage the issues

Leaves me largely unaffected

Weakens my faith in human nature

Strengthens my faith in human nature

Makes me want to become a smarter consumer by choosing products that are good for the environment

Makes me want to become a more engaged citizen by becoming more politically active

31. By now, we imagine that you're tired of all these questions. If, however, you have anything else to add about any aspect of this survey, please feel free to do so in the box below.

THANK YOU!