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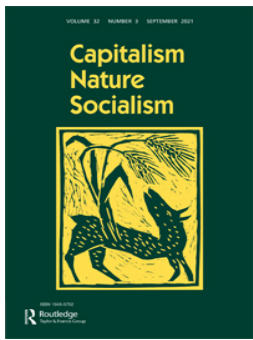
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“Collaborative Research and Action for Climate Justice in California”

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ABSTRACT

How can university scholars and community activists effectively collaborate to produce generative, empowering, and materially impactful knowledge and actions concerning climate change and climate justice? In this paper, we report on a collaborative effort between climate justice non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and university faculty and students to conduct research to produce innovative ideas and insights about just transitions in California and to support social movement campaigns aimed at actually reducing greenhouse gas emissions by keeping fossil fuels in the ground. This collaboration was jointly initiated by faculty and students at a California university alongside leaders of local social movement organizations dedicated to climate justice, as a response to several proposed development projects that would expand oil extraction and fossil fuel use in that state. We argue that these efforts produced a *climate justice gestalt* that serves to amplify our productivity, power, and impact well beyond what any single partner could do separately or individually with respect to addressing climate injustices in our region. This is our plan for addressing climate change from an anti-authoritarian, participatory approach that will speak to new developments in the scholarship on climate and environmental justice studies and collaborative research methods.

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KEYWORDS Climate justice; climate justice gestalt; energy justice; community-based participatory research; social movements; scholar-activism

Introduction

How can university scholars and community activists effectively collaborate to produce generative, empowering, and materially impactful knowledge and actions concerning climate change and climate justice? In this paper, we report on a collaborative effort between climate justice non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and university faculty and students. The goal of this effort was to forge deeper connections between the university and local

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social movement organizations to co-produce knowledge of local climate justice issues and support organizing around those efforts. These scholar-activism (or research-advocacy) efforts were geared toward producing insights about just transitions in California, supporting movements in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by keeping fossil fuels in the ground, and co-creating an intersectional vision of a local fair and just transition from fossil fuel dominance.

This collaboration was jointly initiated by students and faculty at the University of California and leaders of local social movement organizations dedicated to climate justice, as a response to several proposed development projects that would expand oil extraction and fossil fuel use in that state. If those development projects were to go forward, they would dramatically increase greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, threaten local drinking water supplies, and increase the probability of oil spills, all of which would negatively impact local ecosystems and disproportionately affect low-income, people of color, Indigenous and immigrant communities—making this a clear climate justice concern. Numerous studies have indicated the link between oil extraction and groundwater contamination (Khatib and Verbeek 2003). Moreover, this is at a time when the scientific consensus is that global GHG emissions must be cut by at least 45% by 2030 to keep global average temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius (IPCC 2018). To facilitate the necessary transition away from fossil fuel development in a just manner, workers, residents, and activists in frontline communities need to help shape the transition. These projects—and the tangible need for a local transition—presented both a real-time case study of oil extraction and environmental justice and an opportunity for scholars to leverage their research skills and institutional access to make a measurable impact. In other words, they presented an opportunity to develop a practice of scholar-activism for local instances of climate (in)justice.

This collaborative response involved several projects led by undergraduate and graduate students with the mentorship of faculty and community leaders. Projects included conducting critical analyses of Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs) associated with the state's fossil fuel development proposals and producing what we are calling a "People's Environmental Impact Report," which will present data analyses and a vision of how we define environmental risks, problems, and solutions from a non-technocratic, grassroots, democratic, multi-species approach. The just transition work involved conducting research with workers, residents, and activists in frontline communities to understand their concerns and their hopes and dreams for the future of their region. The projects were based in an anti-authoritarian, participatory approach that will speak to new developments in the scholarship on climate and environmental justice studies and collaborative research methods.

Our intervention centers around a concept we introduce here: *climate justice gestalt*. Gestalt is a term that generally refers to a phenomenon, or an organized whole, that is perceived as greater than the sum of its parts. From a methodological perspective, the university-NGO collaboration produces a climate justice gestalt because it amplifies our productivity, power, and impact well beyond what any single partner could do separately or individually. From the perspective of climate and energy justice scholarship, a gestalt approach to building energy democracy, promoting decolonization, and shaping just transitions reframes these activities as building power and producing visions, tactics, strategies, and actions that are imaginative and transformative.

Such a gestalt is evidenced in our collaboration as it not only advanced knowledge of climate justice threats and solutions, it also imparted new skills to students, engendered new areas of research-advocacy for faculty, and produced new partners for NGOs. All of these goals and outcomes were made possible by this mutually supportive coalitional work, and resulted in the intensification of each partner's potential and power, both individually and collectively. That is the nature of a *climate justice gestalt*.

Climate and Energy Justice Scholarship and Politics

Scholars studying the drivers and consequences of anthropogenic climate change have robustly demonstrated that this “wicked problem” of epochal proportions strongly mirrors trends observed in environmental inequalities more broadly. Specifically, while temperatures, atmospheric carbon, and sea levels are rising around the planet because of industrial-scale human activities (Ekwurzel et al. 2017), these concerning dynamics are occurring with vastly uneven impacts across social and physical geographies. Specifically, nations of the Global South, Indigenous communities, people of color, women, low-income persons, and immigrants are among those hit hardest by climate disruption, a pattern scholars and activists call *climate injustice* because the very same communities affected the most by climate disruption have contributed the least to creating the problem (Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan 2015; Roberts, Pellow, and Mohai 2018). In particular, these populations experience greater vulnerability to extreme weather events, wildfires, incidents of respiratory illness and infectious disease, heat-related illness and death, and they tend to pay more for energy usage (Dunlap and Brulle 2015; Kaijser and Kronsell 2014; Shonkoff et al. 2011). Moreover, the GHG emissions driving the crisis of anthropogenic climate disruption we face today are products of the extractive and violent actions endemic to capitalism, the Industrial Revolution, settler colonialism, and human enslavement (Estes 2019; Gilio-Whitaker 2019). Thus, social inequalities and injustices linked to institutionalized racial, class, and gender violence are a

foundational source of this crisis, and therefore any solutions must address these troubling realities.

This logic has led to significant growth in social movement campaigning and scholarly work focused on climate justice—a vision and framework for addressing the climate crisis while simultaneously confronting the long-standing crises of social inequality and injustice (Bhavnani et al. 2019; Okereke 2010; Schlosberg and Collins 2014; Williams 2020). Climate justice activism spans the globe, with millions of activists and innumerable networks of organizations pushing for changes at the individual, local, regional, national, and global scale through altering consumption patterns, corporate behavior, and policy-making (Forman and Pellow 2019; Méndez 2020).

A closely related body of research is focused on energy (in)justice and energy democracy (Healy and Barry 2017), which includes analyses of energy systems, regimes, and the cultural/political discourses that support them (Partridge et al. 2018). One goal in this literature is to develop a stronger grasp of why and how energy extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal practices have become so highly uneven across populations and space, and how nation-state, capitalist, and colonial political-economic and cultural frameworks undergird and support them (Lennon 2017; Malin 2015; Powell 2018). Scholars are also joining and leading efforts to explore transformative alternatives to prevailing energy systems and logics, pursuing ways of knowing and actions that reveal how we might confront the socioecological injustices that are part and parcel of dominant energy infrastructures (Voyles 2015). Another related discussion centers on engaging the goal of decolonizing energy systems and infrastructures. Decolonizing energy begins with an acknowledgement that one of the major problems we must confront is what Catalina M. de Onís (2018) calls “energy coloniality”—those discourses and social systems that colonize places and people in order to control different forms of energy. That is, going beyond merely including Indigenous peoples and people of color in public debates and decision making about sustainable energy (i.e. *energy democracy*), these scholars argue that we must also transform existing institutions and organizations by unsettling the colonial logics that fuel them (Lennon 2017, 26).

These frameworks uplift the need for a “just transition”—the vision and practice of ensuring critical support for workers and populations who might be negatively impacted or displaced by policymaking that seeks to move societies away from fossil-fuel dependence toward regenerative, ecologically healthy structures (Ottinger 2013). A just transition, for example, could include guaranteeing the solvency of workers’ pension funds and providing resources for retraining and relocation. Scholars and activists agree that just transitions will be further strengthened when and where they

include plans for energy independence, contract-based protections for workers, massive renewable energy investments, and a range of solutions that are driven by community-based organizations that ultimately promote grassroots empowerment and democratization (Sze 2020, 95–96). It was with this foundation that we approached our research-teaching-communal learning-action collaboration.

Methods

The overarching methodological framework we draw on for this project comes from what has been variously termed community-based participatory research (CBPR) and/or participatory action research (PAR). There are many ways to define and practice CBPR/PAR. Vàsquez, Minkler, and Shepard (2006, 101) define CBPR as “systematic inquiry, with the participation of those affected by the issue being studied, for the purposes of education and taking action or effecting social change.” Minkler and Wallerstein (2008) add that CBPR aims to link knowledge and action to support social change efforts that improve community health. Reason (1994) argues that Participatory Action Research (PAR) has three key elements: 1) a commitment to liberationist movements; 2) a commitment to honoring the knowledge and lived experience of the people involved, frequently from marginalized communities; and 3) adherence to principles and practices of genuine collaboration in the research (see also Gattenby and Humphries 2000). Pulido (2008) describes the multitude of ways to practice scholar-activism, from engaging in advocacy research, to practicing “militant ethnography,” to developing theory to be used by activists.

Throughout the process, we grappled with whether the activism component should be an end product of the community-university collaboration or if it would be developed and implemented throughout the duration of the project. Because of the rapidly changing character of fossil fuel extraction projects and their associated timelines for community input and review (and therefore the corresponding rapidly changing need for NGO action), we improvised and produced materials for NGO partners during the first phase and agreed to continue doing so beyond that initial time period. In this collaboration, we primarily pursued advocacy research in order to advance our activist partner organizations’ campaigns while simultaneously advancing scholarly knowledge of the multifaceted climate (in)justices faced by communities along the Central California Coast.

At the conclusion of the first phase of the project in late spring of 2019, we developed a series of methods for receiving feedback from the NGO partners, including: 1) a survey instrument to assess participants’ experiences with the process and outcomes; 2) one-on-one conversations; and 3) a discussion

among members of the whole C3JN. We report on that feedback later in the paper.

This project is also reflective of recent scholarship on the practice of radical pedagogy. As Chattopadhyay, Gahman, and Watson (2019, 28) note, “radical teaching alone cannot sensitize students to the challenges of those who are most affected by climate change unless teachers engage their students outside their classroom with local community experiences” (2019, 28). That is precisely what we aim to achieve here. Moreover, as this work is rooted in the struggles of students, educators, and activists in the Central Coast region of California, we consider this to be an example of place-based environmental pedagogy (Engel-di Mauro and Carroll 2014) devised, in part, to challenge “institutionalized essentialist, corporate-driven teaching” (Chattopadhyay 2019, 33).

Case Study: Community-University Collaboration for Energy Justice

The collaboration was developed between university scholars and activist leaders of the Central Coast Climate Justice Network (C3JN), whose mission is “to forge a regional partnership between social justice and environmental movements to expand our collective power, so we can advance restorative actions and systems change centering on communities who bear the greatest burden of climate change impacts” (C3JN Charter, n.d.). The majority of members, activists, and organizations in the C3JN are people of color and whose organizations advocate on behalf of and represent Latinx, immigrant, and Indigenous populations. The authors of this paper are core members of C3JN; therefore, the existence of these pre-existing relationships built trust, allowing for the preparatory work to occur over a relatively short period of time. We engaged in four months of preparatory work to develop shared goals and identify desired projects, based largely on the various priorities and campaigns of the network.

At the culmination of that initial period, we convened a seminar with nine graduate students and ten undergraduates focused on the ways in which the participation of activists, scholars, and other actors shapes, reinforces, and challenges energy justice histories and futures. The seminar was structured around group projects co-developed with C3JN representatives. The students met with C3JN representatives—who had volunteered to act as mentors for the students—at the beginning of a course to hear about and sign up for projects. Each participating student in the project was required to develop the following: a research question and a research plan; a portfolio of the sources they are drawing on for the work; and a final product (i.e. series of fact sheets, a report/white paper, web-based resources, etc.) to be decided upon collectively by their group.

Some key guiding questions that we pursued throughout the project included: What does community-university collaboration mean to us, what are our goals, and what do we want to get out of the process? What skill sets, opportunities, and resources do we have to offer in community-university collaborations? How can we recognize and challenge the politics of privilege and the all-too-frequently extractive relationships that exist between universities and communities on the frontlines of social change struggles? How can we ensure that our projects are effective and useful for our community partners given the different timeline and expectations of the academic calendar versus the longer-term timelines needed to build sustainable relationships and complete meaningful projects?

A significant portion of the data presented in this paper comes from an evaluation we conducted of the research collaboration, drawing on both student and NGO leader testimonials and responses gathered from an online survey and face-to-face interviews (including 18 students and 9 NGO leaders). That feedback covered several key questions, listed in [Table 1](#).

The Projects

Student-NGO groups worked on four scholar-activism campaigns, which we discuss below.

Group 1: Oil Well Drilling in Santa Barbara County. In 2019, three energy companies—TerraCore, Aera, and Petro Rock—were collectively proposing to drill over 760 new oil wells in Northern Santa Barbara County’s Cat Canyon, using cyclic steam injection, an energy-intensive process that involves pumping steam underground to reduce oil viscosity to enable easier extraction (Alvarez and Han 2013). If allowed to proceed, these projects would have tripled oil production in Santa Barbara County, resulted in hundreds of additional oil tanker trucks on local roadways that would threaten air and water quality as well as public health, and posed major

Table 1. Survey questions for students and NGO leaders post-collaboration.

Respondent	Questions
Students	To what extent do you think your research made a difference for the community organization you worked with?
	Have you ever practiced scholar activism and how would you evaluate this experience with this method?
	How did you address your privilege as a university student in relation to a community fighting for climate justice?
	How did this educational experience differ from your general engagement with the university?
NGO leaders	How satisfied were you with the process of selecting projects?
	How intensive was communication with students?
	How useful were the final products and how likely are to you to use them?
	Would you like to collaborate again in the future? If so, what projects would you like to see addressed?

risks to the Santa Maria Valley Groundwater Basin, which serves 12 cities and 200,000 people.

With NGO guidance, students conducted critical analyses of the Environmental Impact Reports (EIR) and distilled them into plain language for use by the C3JN NGO partners via factsheets and reports. This included 1) analysis of the GHG emissions and 2) examination of potential impacts that fell outside of the scope of EIRs. Students also participated in public hearings, testifying on the projects in written and oral form. The research surfaced several key messages, including the fact that these proposed projects would dramatically exceed Santa Barbara County's legally allowable threshold of greenhouse gas emissions and that the greatest reduction in emissions for the county (85%) was due to the shutdown of key ExxonMobil operations after a major oil spill in 2015 (suggesting that keeping oil in the ground is the most effective GHG mitigation strategy).

Out of this project, students and NGO partners discussed the possibility of pursuing community-engaged alternatives to a government-corporate led process. Students learned that while a critical approach that calls attention to environmental injustices is crucial, it is also necessary to articulate a strong vision of a more just future, rather than ceding this responsibility to technocrats or the state. These key observations informed the students' recommendations for a "People's EIR," as an alternative to conventional Environmental Impact Reports. Accordingly, one student wrote in their class evaluation: "The state of California's current assessment process has an ingrained incentive and ideological orientation that favors approving polluting infrastructure projects like the ones we focused on. A people's EIR would instead follow the Precautionary Principle expressed by many community members in their public comments, and would assume that these projects *will* cause harm and place the burden of proof to the contrary on the permit applicant (student's emphasis)."

Group 2: ExxonMobil Oil Transport. The massive Unocal oil blowout in 1969 off the coast of Santa Barbara awakened the anger, anxiety, and consciousness of many people who soon joined the environmental movement, ushering in new federal legislation including the Clean Air Act and the National Environmental Policy Act, as well as the first Earth Day (1970). Nearly half a century later, in 2015, another oil spill occurred in Santa Barbara, this time from a ruptured onshore pipeline transporting oil produced offshore. While several offshore oil platforms are currently awaiting decommissioning, ExxonMobil owns three of those platforms that have been offline since the 2015 spill due to an inability to transport oil once it reaches shore. At the time of this writing, Plains All American (owner of the ruptured pipeline) seeks a permit to build a new oil pipeline, which would effectively allow ExxonMobil to restart its three rigs. As it would

take several years to bring that project online, ExxonMobil is pursuing a permit to truck the oil on local highways. That trucking proposal involves moving crude oil on 70 trucks per day, seven days a week, for at least seven years—a process that has raised major concerns among environmental and climate justice leaders.

As with Group 1, Group 2 also conducted critical analyses of the Exxon-Mobil EIR and distilled it into publicly digestible, user-friendly fact sheets to mobilize people to attend and participate in community hearings on this proposal. The factsheet, titled “No to ExxonMobil: Frequently Asked Questions on Environmental Impact Report,” included basic information on the EIR and, on the flipside, recommendations for “three simple ways to get involved.” Students worked alongside NGO mentors to share the information online, urging county residents to submit public comments online and in-person at the public hearings regarding the company’s proposal. Based on these analyses, students themselves wrote comments to the County Board of Supervisors regarding this project, in support of frameworks that our climate justice NGO partners embraced, and testified at the hearings.

Finally, the students produced a detailed report for our NGO partners that explored the impacts of the trucking scheme on local biodiversity (plants and animals), the probability of accidents and oil spills, the broader environmental and public health impacts of this proposal (including its contribution to climate change via greenhouse gas emissions), and a range of alternatives to the proposal. Ultimately, they concluded that the EIR was misleading in presenting minimized environmental health impact scenarios and in the consideration of too few alternatives.

Group 3: A Fair and Just Transition for Labor and Communities. There has long been a tension in the U.S.—manufactured and real—between job protection and environmental regulation (Kazis and Grossman 1982). Numerous political struggles have ensued between environmentalists and labor leaders around the infamous “jobs versus environment” conflict, with a history that includes a mixture of mutual condemnation and, at times, collaboration (Gottlieb 2005). In our project, students and NGO leaders conducted interviews with 18 labor leaders in the Central Coast region of California to assess their views on and support for a just transition. Interviewing techniques included both semi-structured interviews and the use of focus group discussions. In some cases, labor leaders had a history of being vocally in support of fossil fuel extraction projects opposed by environmental and climate justice activists, so this series of interviews provided an opportunity for bridge building and listening. The conversations centered around gauging what kind of future these workers would like to see in the region, what concerns they have regarding actions and language/framing

associated with climate justice movements, and what points of common ground they believe we might have.

The research our collaborative team conducted revealed a number of conclusions:

- 1) Labor leaders are supportive of a transition to a greener economy but are hesitant to do so when other unions resist such moves.
- 2) Environmental groups must advocate for renewable energy projects in consultation with unions through promotion of labor matching for local projects and project labor agreements that ensure that union labor is employed in such endeavors.
- 3) The discourse and framing around the terms “climate justice” and the phrase “keep it in the ground” was rejected by labor unions, who preferred language like “climate responsibility” and “climate protectors.”
- 4) Any “green” jobs created through a fair and just transition must involve meaningful work with sustainable wages and healthcare benefits.

Group 4: Exploring a Moratorium on Oil and Gas Well Drilling. In 2019, communities in Oxnard, California were informed that the United States Geological Survey found thermogenic gases—byproducts of oil drilling—in the groundwater. The concern was that that same water source was being used to irrigate farms in the area, putting human health at considerable risk. Oxnard is a majority working class and people of color community that has, for decades, borne the brunt of environmental and climate injustices—including heavy pesticide and herbicide usage, a superfund site, a metal smelter, and the construction of three polluting power plants (which, ironically, is a producer of the electricity consumed by our university). Compounding the situation, the Peak Oil Corporation applied for a permit to drill dozens of new fracking wells in Oxnard.

Responding to the urgency of this threat, students and NGO partners collaborated to review existing research and create a bilingual public outreach zine about oil extraction and groundwater contamination in Ventura County and, together, mobilized community members to attend a County supervisors meeting, at which they successfully got a moratorium on new oil and gas well drilling passed. In their reflection on these events, one of the student researchers wrote:

It was useful to keep Laura Pulido’s words on scholar activism in mind. In her description of scholar activism, Pulido emphasizes the significance of accountability and reciprocity in guiding one’s community work. For Pulido, “accountability refers to the fact that scholar activists are not lone mavericks” (2008, 351), and they must therefore understand that their own desires—for data, publications, or otherwise—cannot take precedence over those of the community in which they are embedded. Moreover, it is necessary for scholar activists to see themselves as part of the community they work in—

as part of a “community of struggle” (ibid). Reciprocity, on the other hand, “denotes a mutual give and take” (351) that cannot be reduced to writing and publishing about a community. Both of these concepts would prove useful in shaping our project throughout the process.

Impacts: Climate Justice Gestalt in Off-Campus Communities

NGO leaders were asked the following questions about the process by which collaborative projects were selected: “How satisfied are you with (1) the process by which the projects were chosen and (2) which projects were ultimately prioritized?” The following were representative responses:

- “Thought it was a good process (the most timely projects got selected). Was glad that undergrads got to participate as well.”
- “I thought the pre-meeting where we responded to ideas and brainstormed was a really valuable and essential exercise. I thought the notion of providing a list but also giving students some element of choice was a good idea and way to get students to really buy-in and take ownership of their projects. I was sorry that the Climate Resilience / Preparing for Climate Impacts project wasn’t selected, but supported the process by which this decision was reached by the students.”
- “I thought the choices were good ones. This session luckily coincided with comment periods on EIRs and public hearings on oil projects and this exposure and participation in the public process is a great introduction to the issues and learn-by-doing experience.”

Overall, this feedback suggested that NGO partners felt that we had a good process for selecting projects, and that the process worked well because, while we worked together to identify key projects, students were able to ultimately choose which ones to work on.

We also asked NGO partners what they thought about the final projects. The questionnaire asked: How useful are the final products? How likely are you to use it/them? One respondent stated, “Really liked the zine—pushes back against trend of overcomplicating stuff. Good it was bilingual. Saw people actually reading them.” With regard to how likely they are to use the final project, another respondent wrote, “Very likely/definitely.”

We then asked our NGO partners: How useful was the collaboration overall? One NGO leader responded, “Very.” When we asked, do you want to see the collaboration with the university continue? That same NGO partner stated, “Hell yes,” while other respondents stated, “Yes definitely” and “I strongly support continued collaboration with UCSB moving forward.” One NGO partner noted that “the students gave me hope for the future and I think they’re amazing.” Thus overall, the feedback was clear that there was strong support for continued collaboration.

We expanded this line of questions and asked if NGOs wanted to continue with the collaboration and what changes, if any, they might want to make in developing the next iteration? The themes from the responses to this question can be summarized as follows:

- There is a need to determine the relative focus on scholar-*activism* and scholar-*advocacy*, where the former refers to scholarship conducted in order to advance activism while the latter refers to engagement in advocacy to advance findings of and potential solutions implied by scholarship. Specifically, the suggestion was to get clear from get-go if students want to do activism, or just scholarship to be useful to activists. The former group can get plugged into organizing, while the latter group would just attend meetings *about* organizing.
- Questions were raised about sustaining the collaboration, given the short-term nature of the average student's tenure at a college or university and the resulting high turn-over rate in student organizing and scholarship. Specifically, how do we build a system to support students—including training about the local context, plugging them into local organizing efforts, etc.—while managing high turn-over rates?
- Finally, the suggestion was made to expand the number of university faculty and student groups involved in the collaboration to increase its reach and impact.

At the conclusion of the spring 2019 collaboration, the students made public presentations to share the results of their work. One NGO partner stated, “[T]his is the first time [the university] has demonstrated that it can be useful to our communities. Thank you.”

At a meeting of the Climate Justice Network (C3JN) in January 2020 the question was raised: “What value does the network offer to its members?” Members of the university-community collaboration responded with the following statements:

- “We have developed a foundation for our organization rooted in strong relationships.”
- C3JN has “Facilitated connection between academics and activists. This connection brings value to both.”
- “The network amplifies our specific work and our shared voice.”
- C3JN “has provided a formalized space for collaborative work and learning. It is continuing.”

Another key indicator of the collaboration's impacts are the effects we observed beyond our network. The group (#4) that was studying the policy options available to community members concerned about fossil

fuel pollution in the agricultural water system of Ventura County is a particularly illustrative example. That group did two things that produced broader community-wide impacts. First, they wrote an op-ed in a local newspaper detailing the threats to environmental and public health posed by oil and gas drilling in the area. Second, they went into residential and commercial areas to mobilize people to attend a County Supervisors meeting. They were especially effective because of a bilingual zine they created that provided key information on the hazards facing the community and how they might leverage their collective power. Eventually, that group of students was able to support our NGO partner Food and Water Action in the coalition-wide effort to extend a moratorium on oil and gas well drilling in Ventura County.

Another example is found in Group 1, which analyzed the EIR for the ERG oil drilling proposal in Cat Canyon, in that they translated their main findings for a public audience. The group produced factsheets and decided to participate in advocacy, testifying at public hearings on the shortcomings they found in the EIR as well as concerns they held regarding greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the project from their own personal stakes as young people. While we do not intend to ascribe causality, after the testimony of these students alongside community members, due to both ERG's inability to mitigate the significant GHG emissions associated with their project and after the company's own struggle facing imminent bankruptcy, ERG indefinitely withdrew its application from the county's agenda. After filing for bankruptcy, ERG was bought—along with its projects—by TerraCore who, at the time of this writing, is the only remaining company of the initial three pursuing a Cat Canyon oil project.

In sum, our assessment revealed that our university-community collaboration was viewed as inclusive, equitable, and valuable to our NGO partners, who sought to build relationships that would strengthen their ability to get work done and support important climate justice campaigns. Given that this collaboration only spanned a few months, there are clear limitations in how much we might expect to achieve. However, we are pleased to report that, as a result of this work, the collaboration has been extended via C3JN. Perhaps the single most important development and accomplishment is the strengthening of the relationships of trust and respect between the university and activist organizations in the community, something that is unfortunately all too rare (Pulido 2008).

Climate Justice Gestalt on Campus

Students took away significant skills and knowledge from the class experience. The main message we received in feedback from students was that learning about climate justice in classes is one thing, but getting to work on *applied* issues in their community is another thing entirely. The following

are responses from students regarding what they took away from the collaboration.

- “... what made this course particularly enjoyable was that our work throughout the quarter had a greater purpose. The projects my team and I worked on were relevant to issues happening right now in Santa Barbara which made me want to apply for this course in the first place.”
- “I have gained not only new skills but more importantly a new perspective on environmental justice.”
- “I have learned so much simply by engaging with my community and fellow classmates and it has completely changed my idea of what it means to be a scholar.”
- “... this research challenge[d] my critical thinking skills in a way that I had not yet had the chance to do in college ... this project was about asking the questions that others are not asking to synthesize new knowledge that others can use in posing their arguments.”
- “The environmental humanities is a relatively new field. Growing vastly within the past decade, there has finally become a way to see the world and its most daunting issues, within an interdisciplinary scope (Armiero et al. 2019). What I found most compelling about the field was that it attempts to include people who are not of academia; it aims to be inclusive.”

Moreover, students were proud of the work they did and felt they made a difference:

- “I was proud of all the hard work and time that my group and myself put into this project ... I truly believe that we helped make a difference within our community ...”
- “Through the course, we have all learned that energy justice centers certain bodies and de-centers others. Most prominently, we have pushed to decolonize energy justice ... we cannot reach for energy justice if working class people are left out of the transition—without them, we reinforce a social sacrifice zone in lieu of an energy sacrifice zone. To that end, our research project helped build some bridges between environmentalists and trade unions because the Pipefitters and IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] members indicated they felt heard and wanted to continue working together. My hope, of course, is that research re-shapes who ‘participates in energy justice and leads to what both trade groups called for—’a place at the table.’”

Discussion and Conclusion

A key takeaway from this collaboration concerns the process that should be pursued to strike a balance in scholar-activism. Specifically, we explored the following question in practice: what methodological process should be followed in determining project goals in a scholar-activist collaboration? Should the activism component—the op-ed writing or the testifying against a project—be a product of the participatory action research, or can the two be developed simultaneously or iteratively? Recognizing the fallacy of “scholarly objectivity,” we practiced an iterative approach to research and advocacy. Students chose projects based on their interest in the subject, many times motivated by their own knowledge of the local context and environmental and climate justice issues related to water quality and climate change. In conducting research, they were guided toward building normative positions based on their findings, so that if their teams chose to engage in advocacy—be it public comment testimony, writing op-eds, or producing zines—it was rooted in scholarly research.

Additionally, the projects highlighted the failing of the systems meant to increase democratic engagement in decision-making processes: both within the government and in academia. First, as students saw their primary goal as being one of increasing accessibility, which could not be achieved through traditional academic writing but rather needed to be done in the form of fact-sheets, this serves to underscore the relative opacity of the academic process. Similarly, the students, in some ways, were doing the job of the government in translating what is meant to be a publicly accessible EIR into terms non-technically trained residents could engage with.

As with any such collaboration, there were mistakes and shortcomings; however, both provided opportunities to learn and refine the next iteration. One example that emerged from our evaluation was that as we proceed with the collaboration into the future, we need to build stronger support systems for students by way of training, in order to introduce them to the local context and scholar-advocacy from the beginning, so they can enter this work equipped with all they need. A related suggestion that came out of the evaluation process was the need to provide students with skillshares that are generated organically—that is, provided by other students, faculty, and our NGO partners. We are pleased that the next iteration of the collaboration will deliver on that goal, with skillshares on community organizing, consensus-based decision-making techniques, and digital map-making.

Fortunately, we are presented with an opportunity to build on the successes and address the mistakes and missteps as this collaboration is transformed into a newer, long-term partnership. This course laid the groundwork for a newly-forming scholar-advocacy “collab” in which students—undergraduate and graduate—can learn from and work alongside

faculty and community members. This collaboration includes workshops and trainings to address student turn-over issues and other concerns, while offering both course credit and funding for student workers to address capacity needs. Furthermore, this collaboration provides space to build additional scholar-advocacy projects, including a peoples' account of climate impacts and risk in the region, due to heatwaves, wildfires, sea level rise, and drought (for an example, see Climate Action Lab 2019).

We argue that the total impact and implication of these collaborative university-NGO projects is greater than the sum of their parts. In other words, we produced a *climate justice gestalt* in that, across these efforts, we successfully: 1) built relationships between a major public research university and the leading climate justice movement organizations in our region; 2) amplified the potential and power of all parties involved; 3) strengthened critical skills among students who are seeking to enter the labor force with credentials that can lead to gainful employment and access to levers of social change; and 4) achieved a considerable range of goals that the global climate justice movement holds dear. This collaborative scholar-advocacy effort has assisted in taking major steps toward keeping fossil fuels in the ground and reducing climate emissions by halting extractive projects, altering the public discourse around fossil fuel development by creating and sharing knowledge to challenge dominant narratives, building bridges between environmental/climate justice leaders and labor leaders for a just transition, and mobilizing significant grassroots democratic support for those aims.

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