

CRS

CRS on Campus: A How-To Guide



Why we advocate...

"It's not just important because you are calling for change but because you are challenging people to see outside their bubble and speaking for those who may not be able to speak for themselves, you are bringing people together, to be brothers and sisters, creating an avenue for solidarity." - Alexandria Scott, Boise State University

Purpose

As university advocates, you are part of a worldwide initiative to serve the poor and vulnerable overseas, foster charity and justice, and uphold the dignity of all human life. This guide will help you to gather university resources and attention around current priorities of the Catholic Church in the United States and advocate those issues in an effective manner to our US elected officials or instigate lasting change throughout your university community. These basic steps will empower you to make tangible changes that will directly impact the lives of others in need.



Who You Are

You are a person who believes deeply in the **dignity of the human person**, and has a desire to promote this universal value through advocacy and awareness efforts within the university environment. Particularly you are an undergraduate student, but graduate students, CRS moderators, professors, and other university administrators can also benefit and contribute to organizing around CRS issues.

Who CRS Is

The following are fundamental to the CRS ethos:

- **Solidarity** represents the notion of living as one global human family
- **Option for the poor** requires every economic, political and social decision to be made with concern for the poor and marginalized
- **Justice through advocacy** and awareness, which you will carry out on campus.

What You Can Do

You can be the voice of the voiceless, and advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. People throughout the world deserve just policies and community practices that ensure access to food, clean water, health care, and safety. You can be the difference that passes a just policy, or facilitates a community change. University students just like you have already proven their effectiveness through initiatives that address issues from immigration reform to preventing civil war. This guide will provide a basic framework for organizing and advocating, some challenges to this process, and an example of a successful CRS campus initiative.

Do I have to be Catholic?
No, you do NOT have to be a Catholic in order to advocate for and organize around issues that are a priority to the Catholic Church. CRS principles are shared across religious and cultural boundaries, and the organization works with people regardless of their race, religion, or ethnicity.

More about CRS guiding principles: <http://crs.org/about/advocating-principles.cfm>

Structure Yourself...

Use What You Have

There is no exact structure that is correct for organizing on your campus, but some structure is necessary. Some campuses have divided their CRS organizers into issue groups that cover a specific theme which have included: Fair Trade, Peacebuilding, Food Security, Immigration, and HIV/AIDS. Some universities may utilize a student-led model in a structure similar to a student government with a president, secretary, etc., while other universities may use graduate students or faculty as moderators for specific issue groups that are relatively autonomous from each other. **Use what you have and what works best for your university environment.**

Important Structure Points:

1. Use what works for your university
2. Be specific with roles and responsibilities
3. Have an effective administrator, faculty or staff with connections
4. Ensure leadership, sustainability, and consistency across classes
5. Coordinate with other like-minded groups on campus

“Go out and advocate,” can be an overwhelming and unclear mandate. So break it down for yourself and **assign specific roles** in your organization structure. Give your theme groups specific target areas. Assign student leaders to specific tasks or roles that overlap with their interests or current academic coursework.

Catholic vs. Non-Catholic Universities

Students at non-Catholic universities may choose to work through the Newman Center, or seek out support and moderators from centers for social concern, advocacy, campus ministry or professors that deal with CRS-related issues.

Your Moderator

The overall moderator or person who is ultimately responsible for CRS efforts on campus should be an official university faculty, staff or administrator because:

- University employees tend to be in their positions longer than the standard student’s tenure of 4 years. This means that they will retain knowledge across multiple years, and be able to preserve good practices.
- A moderator’s extended time at a university and high level of access to other critical faculty and staff also means that they are far more connected than most students. Having a good overall moderator is critical to the ability of student advocates to request resources for projects.

Meetings

You need to facilitate regular and effective meetings that will lay the groundwork for your event or strategic plan. Each meeting should have an agenda that is specific, and you can empower other group members through taking turns at leading. A three hour meeting will probably guarantee that nobody will show up for the next, so be concise and timely. Assign people with specific tasks in the meeting and make sure everybody has a job.

Sustainability and Diversity

There absolutely must be opportunities within your structure for leadership roles for the less experienced. Ensure that organizing knowledge is being mutually shared and developed with fresh ideas from the less experienced, and tested strategies from the more experienced. Diversify your efforts with a variety of students from freshmen to seniors, and make sure that effective strategies are preserved for future initiatives.

The Process...

There are two main processes that will be presented in this guide that are commonly used in advocacy and awareness efforts on university campuses.

Pressing Policy Issue

A current pressing advocacy initiative has a specific deadline, often an urgent, time-bound legislative or policy piece, and a need to generate a high turnout of people quickly. An example of this would be the January 2011 referendum in Sudan, where there was a specific date for a vote that would determine if the conflict-ridden country of Sudan would become two countries. Immediate advocacy was needed throughout the US, including university campuses, to request that President Obama take direct action to prevent conflict, which was predicted to arise during the January 2011 process.

Community Change

Community change has no specific deadline, initiates a transformation in perceptions and behaviors, and requires education and awareness throughout the university community. An example of this would be economic justice, and an initiative to advocate for CRS Fair Trade on your campus. A Fair Trade strategy would require educating a good portion of the student body, coordinating with university administrators and food services to sell Fair Trade products, and persuading the university community to buy Fair Trade goods in support of the broader economic justice initiative.

Check out Notre Dame's initiative to support peace in Sudan:
<http://playing4peace.nd.edu/>

Check out the online CRS Fair Trade initiative:
<http://www.crsfairtrade.org/>



The CRS action center is a great resource: <http://actioncenter.crs.org>

Who's Your Audience?

"I like to think of myself as an advocating voice for CRS to inform and educate the university on what CRS does and how they can help get involved."

- Mollie Janicki, Seattle University



Pressing Policy Issue

The audience of a pressing policy-driven university advocacy effort will almost always be US elected officials, specifically Congress and the President, who have access to budgets and the ability to pass policies that define how the United States will directly interact with other countries. It is important to **understand to whom you are advocating** in order for your message to effectively impact the policy decision. Without a targeted audience that has the ability to change policies, your advocacy efforts will fall on deaf ears.

So pick your target audience, and let your subsequent advocacy actions revolve around influencing these specific people. Most of the time, CRS has narrowed down the target audience for you in a short outline of the issue at: <http://actioncenter.crs.org>. This page also contains a valuable tool to find your elected officials through simply using your zip code. Some advocacy efforts may only be directed at one person like the President or the Secretary of State, while other initiatives may call for a specific House committee. After finding your target audience, be sure to have a basic understanding of their political viewpoints so that you can begin to strategize about how best to influence them.

Community Change

The audience in a community initiative will most likely include the student body, and possibly elected officials or university administration. Depending on your issue, determine **who possesses the ability to change policies** that will further your goal and advocacy objective. On campus, this may be the president of your university or dining services management. This may be the mayor of your community or your elected official. Again, choose specific people to whom you can advocate your agenda.

Choose to target specific campus groups within the larger student body that have structures through which you can easily spread messages, such as: Greek life, sports teams, campus life, and clubs. Again, get to know any university administrators that you may target to pass campus-wide changes, and research the issues that are important to them.

Catholic vs. Non-Catholic Universities

Targeting and appealing to administrators for change at a Non-Catholic University may prove to be more challenging simply because Catholic issues are not a direct part of their identity and mission. So present priority Catholic advocacy points as universal values in a manner that directly appeals to the ethos of your university and those individuals.



Educate Yourself...

"Knowing your issue and taking the time to practice articulating what the issue consists of, what CRS's work on the issue entails, and what your fellow students can do is of the highest importance. Knowing your issues, inside and out, will give you the confidence you need to take your knowledge to the next level of advocacy." - Jennifer Maez, Villanova University

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Pressing Policy Issue

For pressing issues, the education piece primarily affects you and your fellow organizers. You have to be aware of what you are advocating for, and able to answer questions that the well-educated students around you will inevitably ask about the issue at hand. Again use

<http://actioncenter.crs.org> as a basis for your education, which gives a brief overview of the advocacy issue. Another useful portal for live information is <http://www.crs.org/public-policy/webcast-schedule.cfm> where there are regular webcasts with experts on critical topics.

Don't stop there:

- Read newspaper articles
- Watch international news channels
- Discuss the topic within your group

Keep in mind that the university community will only have time to understand the basics of what they are advocating for.

Community Change

A community initiative involves a distinctively different strategy because the objective is a changed behavior and perspective through education and awareness of the university community. Again, you must first educate yourself about the topic of concern before you can educate others.

Produce a **consistent and easy-to-grasp education message** that can bring awareness to the university community. This education will be the reasoning for why you want people to change their thinking and actions, such as making

the conscious decision to purchase only fair-trade coffee. Emphasize key elements to which people can relate within the context of your university in preparation for your planning.

Conviction and Passion

You don't need to be an expert, but you do need be passionate. CRS will provide things like policy points, but you have to be motivated. If you care deeply, then you will be an effective advocate.

Important Education Points:

1. Educate yourself first about the topic
2. Use the action center <http://actioncenter.crs.org>
3. Make sure all organizers have a good understanding of the topic and can convey its message concisely

For more education ideas: <http://larscollege.org>



Plan It Out...

"Early in the process we identified key people within our community...The early conversations were encouraging and the momentum of those members helped us sway everyone else. This culminated with a meeting with Loras' president who... agreed to support us." - Yvette Anderson, Loras College



Pressing Policy Issue

Choose a specific engaging event and date that will work to effectively rally as many people as possible to directly advocate for your pressing issue. The **"Pray, Learn, Act"** model is a good basic framework that is often promoted by CRS organizing material. **Learn** involves educating your university community using your consistent and easy-to-grasp message. **Act** means advocating your message to representatives through a specific planned activity like calling, letter writing, or a town hall meeting. **Pray** is your desire to be in solidarity with those who suffer. CRS believes deeply in the power of prayer and it should be a critical component to your advocacy work.

Unique

Be sure to have a budget, a catchy name for your event, and capitalize on what is **unique to you campus**. For instance, Notre Dame used its popular sports programs to produce "Playing for Peace" tournaments and half-time solidarity prayers. Likewise, Cabrini College utilized its active and creative communications department to produce a short video on peace in Sudan.

Capitalize

Your issue is part of a global movement, so elevate your own cause through syncing your event with global movements such as World AIDS Day. Whatever you do, remember to keep your event concise, clear and relatively short. This will ensure that your audience stays engaged, and clearly understands what you need them to do.

Community Change

Choose a specific strategy for spreading awareness about your issue and make a list of the specific changes that you would like to see. The **"Pray, Learn, Act"** model may work here as well, although each component may take place during different events or over the course of a semester.

Accountability

Use your moderator to access funds for a budget, or solicit donations, and determine what is practical to accomplish over the course of an academic year. Remember you are trying to educate the university community to initiate a behavioral change. If there is a policy change that you seek at the university level, develop a strategy for change that holds the university accountable to its self-proclaimed values and principles. For instance, a university that publically prides itself on paying its employees fair and adequate salaries may be inclined to adopt fair-trade coffee, which ensures a fair salary for farmers, throughout the university's coffee shops, thus showing that the institution is consistent in the practice of its values.

*A Word of Caution: Start Small!
One of the biggest problems students have is trying to change the world all at once, and ultimately end up being overwhelmed and scattered with little to show for their good intentions. Be specific and define one event or strategy for which you have sufficient resources and time to complete well.*

Strategize the Message

When planning your long-term strategy, utilize the events already in place at your university, and plan around other major activities, like finals week. You want to optimize your message for the limited windows during which you can gather attention. Work alongside classrooms and professors with subjects that support your cause.

Cabrini College video: <http://peaceinsudan.crs.org/multimedia/sudan-never-again-begins-now/>

Look for natural synergies on campus, and combine your efforts with other groups

Collaborate...

"We could only do so much with our 7-member group, so it was extremely important to collaborate with Dining Services, Campus Ministry, and the Peace and Justice departments for more effective ways to achieve our goals or even surpass our expectations." - Victoria Hoang, Villanova University



Pressing Policy Issue

After you have a decisive plan, collaboration will make your scheme come to life. Reaching out to other groups on campus will first ensure that you are not duplicating efforts. Many pressing overseas crisis situations trigger a landslide of stateside advocacy efforts by groups that share a similar mission to the Catholic Church. Take advantage of this opportunity and link up with like-minded groups, which will immediately increase the number of people you can reach in the university community. If another group already has the lead on the issue, then fold your efforts into theirs and add to what they have initiated. You will also need to connect with key university administrators (use your group's moderator), who will give you important access to people like your university's public relations professional or food services administrators. Again, **be specific**, and assign individual CRS advocates to form and maintain relationships with different groups and critical administrators.

Community Change

Collaborating with other groups during a long-term initiative will probably take place during certain phases of your strategy? Do not underestimate the effectiveness of forming a good relationship with departments like food services. In many cases, campus food services will donate food and drinks to charitable causes. Not only will your events be more attractive if you include free food, but having a good relationship with the food service administration will allow you to reach a broad base of the student body through the cafeterias.

Important Collaboration Points:

1. Don't duplicate efforts, and work with other groups
2. Connect with key people in departments like food services and the campus newspaper
3. Assign specific people to develop personal relationships with different departments and groups

Using the student newspaper as a way of educating people in a community change initiative is especially useful. However, you will need a savvy student journalist, and it would be a good idea to form an individual long-term relationship with this on-campus journalist. **Collaborate with professors** who could incorporate your issue into their related classes or allow you to be a guest speaker.

Collaborate with groups like STAND: <http://www.standnow.org/>



Debbie DeVoe/CRS

Advertise...

"Student journalists have the power to be the voice of the voiceless, and that is not something to take for granted." - Kelsey Kastrava, Cabrini College



Pressing Policy Issue

After you have a decisive plan, let the university community know the exact location and date/time of the event with a brief summary or catchy phrase to get them interested. Remember, the goal is to have a high turnout to advocate for a specific policy change or piece of legislation. Use social media tools like Facebook to set-up events that have an attendance function, which will help in estimating the crowd. Utilize the campus newspapers and local news sources if possible to continuously advertise. Setup a text-messaging list, or split contacts between your individual core organizers and give a few **concise text reminders** about the event:

- A week in advance
- A couple days prior
- The day of the event

Be Personal

Technology is necessary but never underestimate the power of **personal invitations** and conversations. Get personal commitments from people in face-to-face interactions. Ask friends and acquaintances if you can count on them being there, and give them small roles to fulfill if possible. Expanding your personal network on campus to get a high turnout may be your most valuable advertising strategy, and use it in conjunction with Internet publicity, text messaging, and signs on campus. You have to create a popular buzz around your pressing policy event, and students are most convinced when all their friends are planning on attending. So start small with your circle of contacts and expand outwards.

Community Change

In many cases, advertising for community change is part of achieving your education and awareness goal. Handouts and flyers that you produce will contain more informational material than ads for a pressing policy issue event. You may even have a few specific events to get your concise educational points across to your university audience. However, giving multiple personal talks to small crowds of people can be more effective than a large event turnout because students will be more engaged and able to ask questions. Give presentations to

classrooms with professors that are invested in the issue that you are trying to advocate for on campus.

Be Consistent

Like with pressing policy events, you can build up a contact list for e-mail and text-messaging outreach for important events that arise, or to rally support when needed for things like petitions or demonstrations. **Be consistent and specific** in your advertised message, so that your audience does not become confused, and will hear the main point multiple times. Be sure to

relay the advertised message in a way that somehow connects your issue in a relatable manner to the university community. For instance, a series of advertisements in the school newspaper during the academic year on the benefits of having a Fair Trade campus would familiarize students with the topic. Furthermore, this strategy provides a base of informed individuals who could be used to support critical negotiations over using Fair Trade products on campus.

*A Word of Caution: Social Media
Any good initiative will utilize the Internet's powerful social media tools like Facebook, Twitter or just good old fashion e-mail. However, be careful about over-use of this medium. Be strategic and give clear and regular messages, but not every day. Too much activity and promoting your issue as the most important thing on the Internet will only win you a swift trip to the spam folder, and a desensitized audience.*

Example student article: <http://www.thevillanovan.com/features/saving-sudan-1.1782309>

Look at past initiatives on your campus to see what captures attention and use those methods

Implement...

"We worked with existing organizations...our group has a strong emphasis on personal interactions and community. As an example, over the past year we have focused on bringing together groups of people to share a meal and conversation about relevant topics." - Sara Boro and Jonathan Jones, Eastern Illinois University



Pressing Policy Issue

When executing your event to advocate for your pressing policy issue, don't become disturbed when something goes wrong. **No event goes exactly as planned**, and you should be patiently flexible with the circumstances that you are given. People have short attention spans so timeliness will be very important in your event. Events that last longer than an hour will probably lose the audience, so create a schedule with timeframes and distribute it to all organizers and those involved. While timeliness is important, you cannot be so worried about the schedule that you create a poor atmosphere where everything feels rushed. Keep the event rolling along, making sure to transition smoothly between the various components, and remaining flexible to unexpected changes.

Be Personal

More than likely, some part of your event should advocate to a US elected official. Just like in advertising, the more personal you can be, then the more effective your message will be received. If you can facilitate an in-person office visit to your elected representative, then do it. Personalized handwritten letters take more time than template-typed documents, but have a higher rate of effectiveness if you can get students to write them. Mass personal phone calls to an elected official's office on a specific point can effectively encourage the support of a critical bill or policy decision.

Community Change

If your event involves changing a specific university policy or practice, then utilize your knowledge of the topic to make your concise well-researched points to the audience that has the ability to change the policy. Before going into meetings with university administrators or other elected officials, make sure that you have a consistent and well-practiced message that everybody in your group understands, and be able to list out exactly both your reasons and the change that you are seeking. Having one person in your group blurt out a point in a critical meeting that is counterproductive to your intended message will make you seem disorganized, decrease your effectiveness, or even confuse your audience. Be clear, rational and consistent in your message and what you want to see changed.

Make It Tangible

When educating the broader community, give them something **tangible** that is related to their life. Talking about the importance of immigration reform is vague and overwhelming, but giving the student body a five minute video of a university student's story about her immigration during the half-time of a basketball game can be one very effective event in your broader strategy. Again, consistent messages are important and people need to hear information multiple times before the subject even begins to register in their consciousness. Use creative methods for capturing peoples attention, and do it consistently over time.

Sign up: http://actioncenter.crs.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ccgp_signup



Your issue is one of a thousand on a college campus, so make it stand out!

Sustain Your Efforts...

"It's my hope that we can keep the best ideas from the past 2 years and continue them. This would include the coffee houses that attract students with coffee, goodies and music by their friends. These are great learning opportunities around Fair Trade and they can be continued..." - Matt Sanford, Loras College



Pressing Policy Issue

After your event and pressing issue has passed, have a meeting with your main organizers to discuss strategies that worked, and improvements for similar future initiatives. Be sure that these **best practices** can be passed onto the younger students leaders who will develop future initiatives. Continue to maintain the personal relationships with various university administrators, groups, and students, which will increase your efficiency and capability in planning future events. When the definitive event is over or the policy passed, it doesn't necessarily mean that the issue or international crisis has ended. Use your built-up human network to keep the student community informed.

Community Change

Community change requires persistence far beyond even long-term initiatives, because perceptions and campus policies can reverse themselves. For instance, a campus that decides to sell only Fair Trade coffee due to a student-led initiative may change food services vendors who may not use Fair Trade products. Be sure to keep students involved beyond the initiative through your online network. This process should help to develop you into a leader that can use these planning and collaborative skills to **carry out other successful initiatives** on campus and beyond.

Stay involved with CRS by texting CCGP to 306414

Words into Action...

An Example of a Pressing Policy Issue

If you have a passion for justice, and a desire to see change in the world that benefits the poorest of the poor, then you can make a serious impact using the steps provided in this paper. Advocating now for priority Catholic issues and community changes has made a real difference in the lives of people around the world. The "Stand in Solidarity for Peace in Sudan" event that Villanova held is one example of an initiative that rallied around a pressing policy issue and succeeded as part of a nationwide effort to press President Obama to take preemptive peace actions. This is how they did it...



Who's Your Audience?

As directed through the action alert center, President Obama became the primary audience for the appeal to prevent civil war in Sudan. After some debate, the team decided that the best way to effectively make their point would be through personal phone calls to the White House.



Educate Yourself...

In addition to the action alert center posting, the CRS Villanova Peacebuilding team researched the Sudan issue, and some group members even incorporated this work into their individual classroom projects and papers. The group also participated in a webcast produced through CRS that connected Villanova to experts about the impending Sudan crises. The issue was discussed in meetings until every organizer had a basic and clear understanding of the issue, what was at stake, and how best to advocate.

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Plan It Out...

The Villanova group specified a day before finals, which also avoided other major university activities and sports games. The timeframe for the event was set at an hour, but funding was sparse, so the group worked with the Peace and Justice department to solicit a small amount of funds for the project. However, the event still needed a unique twist that tangibly related the issue to Villanova students. It turned out that there was a current Villanova graduate student named Malual, who had become one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan” following the second major civil war during the 1990’s. By agreeing to speak at the event, Malual tangibly connected the Sudan issue to the Villanova community. The planned event was not only to showcase Malual’s story but also to invoke solidarity through prayer, and a personalized advocacy effort through calling the White House.

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Collaborate...

The small CRS organizing team at Villanova doubled its capacity when it began to cooperate with STAND, another like-minded group focused around preventing genocide. Individuals were assigned to form relationships with key university staff, one of which was food services that readily donated hot drinks and food for the day of the event. Connections were also made with Peace and Justice classroom professors, one enthusiastic student journalist, and the official university media/communications administrator.

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Advertise...

The student body was relatively unaware about the Sudan situation, so the Villanova student newspaper showcased a three-part mini-series, through a student journalist connection, on Malual’s story leading up to the Stand in Solidarity event, which sparked interest and effectively produced a high turnout. In an effort to advertise in a way that would make the initiative stand out from the hundreds of other activities on campus, the group produced and distributed business cards through personal conversations to all parts of campus with quotes about the situation in Sudan, and a web address that connected students to a Facebook page for the Stand in Solidarity event, where attendance could be tracked.

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Implement...

The event was originally scheduled to be held outside, but the blisteringly cold weather meant that the backup location inside the campus church had to be utilized. As the team rushed around to change the venue, there was some doubt as to the number of students that would actually turn out. However, people arrived in crowds, and the months of prep-work and strategic planning had paid off. T-shirts were distributed, the crowd prayed together in solidarity, and Malual spoke with two of his fellow Sudanese refugee friends, which truly made the issue personal to the Villanova community and served as motivation for calling the White House.

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Sustain Your Efforts...

The Villanova Stand in Solidarity event had packed over 300 students into the church, and hundreds of Villanova students made calls to the White House requesting attention to the circumstances surrounding the Sudan referendum. In conjunction with other nationwide efforts, President Obama eventually took steps to support a peaceful referendum process. As an example of how Villanova sustained its commitment to the Sudan cause, Sudanese refugees from the Philadelphia area were provided a charter bus to DC so that they could vote on the referendum in January. Many of the Villanova student leaders on the project were sophomores, and will continue to bring their knowledge of successful planning to bear on future Villanova advocacy initiatives.



Photo courtesy of Barbara Johnston/Villanova University