

# College activists focus on environmental issues

(CPS)—Students from more than 250 campuses, almost ten percent of the country's major two-year and four-year colleges, are expected to descend on the University of North Carolina (UNC) in Chapel Hill October 27-29 to try to start a political movement.

"We're hoping to unify and get a stronger movement to raise environmental activism on campus," declared Jimmy Langman, chairman of the Student Environmental Action Committee at UNC.

Langman and his cohorts are aiming to jumpstart the long-flagging college environmental movement, and energize it with the kind of political urgency that characterized student anti-apartheid, campus security and arms control efforts earlier in the decade.

Many groups like Langman's have previously plotted to make their causes into this year's issue. Students from 35 colleges, for example, congregated at the University of New Hampshire in 1987 to outline a plan to transplant West Germany's environmentalist Green Party to the United States.

Now, however, ecology groups are getting help.

The Earth's environment is getting star treatment in the popular culture. Once relegated to public-television documentaries, the issue this year will be featured on episodes of prime-time television shows *Murphy Brown* and *Head of the Class*. Michael Stipe of REM has recorded a public service announcement, to air on 1,400 college radio stations, encouraging students to get involved with the cause.

In January, *Time* magazine named "Endangered Earth"—its man of the year, and has since featured stories about the ruin of the Brazilian rain forest and the slaughter of African elephants.

And on March 24, the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* struck a reef in Alaska's Prince William Sound, leaking 11 million gallons of crude oil into the water. It turned out to be the worst oil spill in national history, but, observers say, helped turn public attention to environmental issues.

"A lot of people are realizing we've done a really wonderful job screwing up the Earth," said Robin

Rhein, a regional coordinator for the "Cool It!" project, the National Wildlife Federation's student drive to slow global warming.

In Rhein's 11-state Midwest region, students from Stephens, Carleton and Concordia colleges, as well as about 60 other campuses, have submitted recycling, packaging and tree-planting proposals to help slow global warming.

Of course, environmental issues have always attracted a sizable segment of the campus activist population. In 1970, more than 20 million people participated in Earth Day, including students from 2,000 schools. It was the largest public

demonstration in history.

Organizers are planning a twentieth anniversary of Earth Day for April 22. "There will be a greater sense of urgency this time," predicted Owen Byrd, national student coordinator of Earth Day, headquartered in Palo Alto, California.

Students are working on a local campus level, too.

Collegians at places as diverse as Central College in Iowa, Brown University in Rhode Island and California State in Sacramento have mounted drives to force their schools to replace foam cups and plates that are made of polystyrene, whose manufacture requires the re-

lease of chlorofluorocarbons that, in turn, deplete the ozone layer in the upper reaches of the atmosphere.

Most campuses, in fact, now have some kind of recycling program in place, student activists say.

"These things seem to run in cycles," Earth Day's Byrd said. "We've lucked into a period of renewed public interest."

"The environment movement is not only an issue for 1989 and 1990, but for the decade," claimed Julianne Marley, president of the United States Student Association (USSA) in Washington, D.C.

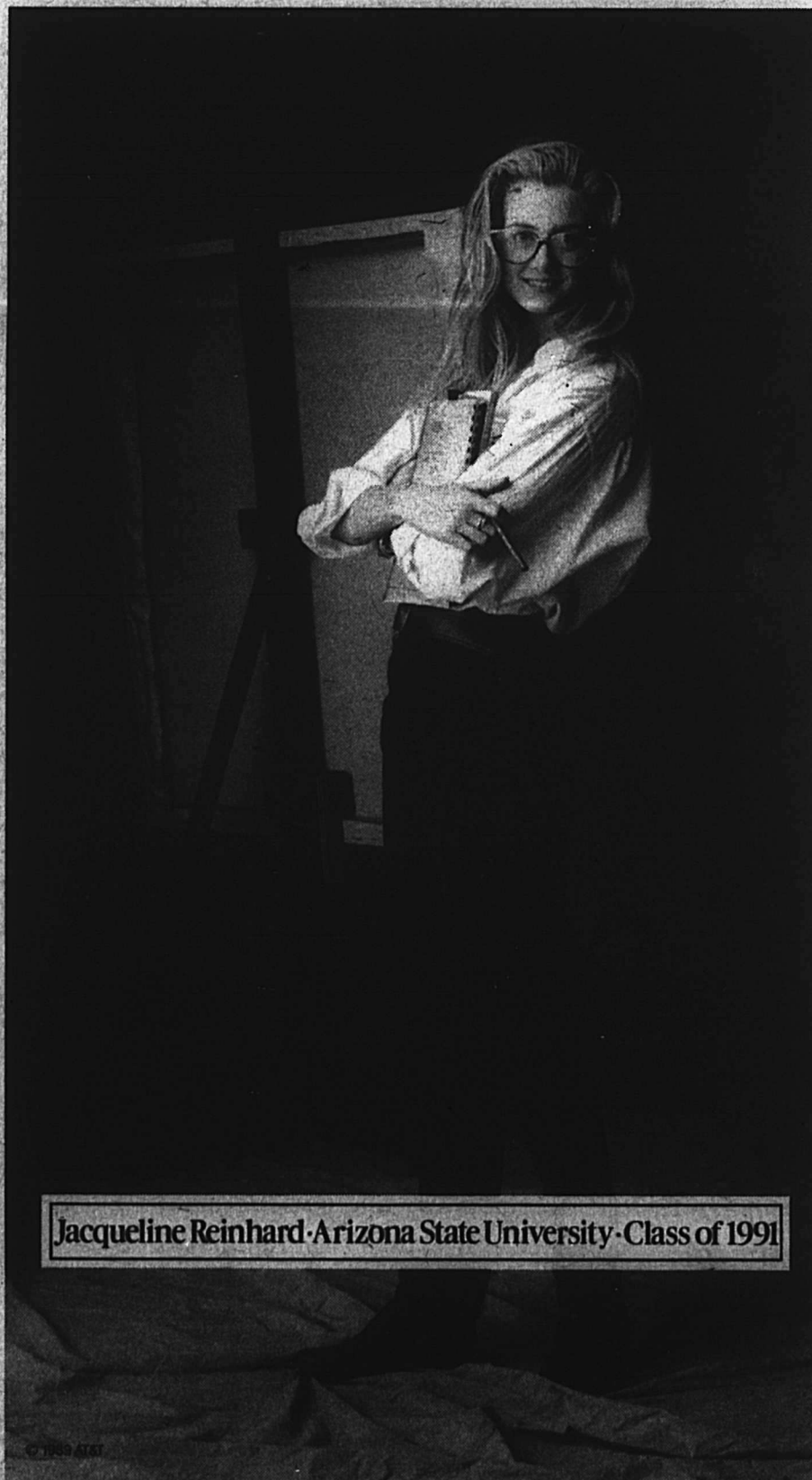
"People are finally starting to realize we're responsible and that we

have to do something about it," mused Holly Mehl, who helped start Central College's first environmental group two years ago.

Others see the environment replacing other issues, at least momentarily because there's a sense that individual efforts will help, said Ken Hoover, chairman of the political science department at Western Washington University. Students, he said, can easily see when a forest is completely cleared.

"Some of the other issues seem to be less current," he added. "For instance, arms control appears to be under control, and with the deficit there's just a sense of futility."

"I may be an art major,  
but I know  
a little something  
about economics."



Jacqueline Reinhard - Arizona State University - Class of 1991

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