TO: Ad Hoc Committee on Living Wage
FROM: Swarthmore College Living Wage and Democracy Campaign
DATE: April 22, 2003
SUBJECT: Swarthmore College Living Wage and Democracy Campaign Position on Living Wage Figures and Policies

We wish to thank members of the Ad Hoc Committee for meeting with representatives of our Campaign over the past two semesters. This interaction has helped us to understand the process as well as to feel that our views are listened to and respected as you move toward a policy of a living wage.

We have followed the proceedings of the Ad Hoc Committee and would like to report to you on the insights we have gained this past year through our community interactions. We have organized a living wage educational meeting, sponsored guest speakers on economic issues, conducted meetings for faculty, staff and students, researched and supported a policy paper on the benefit bank, published a newsletter and witnessed the recent union organizing campaign at Haverford College. We are now in the process of organizing a publication of testimonials from the staff. We have grown in our understanding of the economic realities of those not earning a living wage, and we have more strongly allied our mission to Swarthmore’s quest for ethical intelligence.

First, we would like to offer our position on arriving at a figure for a living wage and the other benefits that contribute to a just workplace. We recognize that this is a complicated process, and like you, our collective group has spent countless hours in research and discussion. We recommend that the Ad Hoc Committee support a short-term move to a living wage of $14.19 an hour, or $29,515 a year, in 2003 dollars–enough to support a single dependent child–with a long-term goal for the College to move to a more inclusive living wage of $15.53 per hour, or $32,307 per year–enough to support two dependent children. We recommend these wage levels only in conjunction with the College's providing full funding of child care for the College's lowest-paid workers, full funding of the health care premium for families as well as those receiving single coverage (without changing the current Benefit Bank structure), and full tuition reimbursement for dependents for the first $1,000.

We arrived at $14.19 figure assuming a single wage earner supporting just one preschool-age dependent. We used WAWA's 2001 figures for subsistence costs in the areas of housing, food, transportation, health care, and taxes, adjusted the food figure up 5% to account for the higher-than-average costs of food in the Philadelphia area, followed the Economic Policy Institute's procedure for calculating miscellaneous expenses as 28.5% of the sum of housing and food expenses, and adjusted for inflation from 2001 to 2003 according to the Consumer Price Index. We then increased this figure by 10% to approximate necessary costs that do not occur on a monthly basis. Without this ten percent, it is not possible for a person living on a single income to plan for predictable expenses--furniture, appliances, and car--or for unpredictable ones--broken-down car, illness, job loss.

The College should not tell its employees how to spend their money, nor should it make judgments about their choices. Instead, the College must pay enough to make sure that its
employees have choices at all. With no money for non-monthly expenses, supporting oneself on forty hours a week is simply not a choice. It means working an extra job or relying on others for help with money. With just enough for monthly and non-monthly necessities, forty hours a week is viable, but it does not allow any choices. Spending is confined to necessities.

The Campaign believes that forty hours a week at a living wage job should be enough to cover basic necessities and allow some financial choices beyond that. Ten percent is intended not only to cover non-monthly expenses but also to begin to include a little bit of discretionary income, because hard-working people should be able to spend some money on what's most important to them, beyond basic needs. Ten percent is probably a conservative figure to cover both of these categories, and most of it will end up being spent on necessities after all. Nonetheless, it is an important step for the College to acknowledge that a living wage means something more than bare subsistence.

Given the time constraints of working multiple jobs and their lack of financial and other resources, few workers are able to fully enjoy their non-work lives, take advantage of the resources Swarthmore College itself offers (such as academic classes or the student-partnership Program, Learning for Life), or generally move toward an upwardly mobile lifestyle. This reflects very poorly on Swarthmore’s commitment to education when our very own employees salaries become obstacles to their children’s education. The Campaign further recommends that the College fully funds a benefit for the first $1,000 of tuition for dependents. This initiative allows an employee’s children to attend community college lessening the financial hardship of those who live at the edge of a subsistence wage.

Our Campaign members appreciate that the Ad Hoc Committee has tried to move the process of determining a living wage along quickly. However, for employees receiving less than a living wage now, they will be seriously economically compromised for yet another year. The Campaign recommends $10 an hour or $20,800 yearly salary minimum be implemented immediately for the 2003-04 academic year. As a reasonable compromise, we recommend that the Committee ask the Board for this wage as a transition wage until the final figure is determined. If the Ad Hoc Committee investigates the cost of this request, they will find that the expense is fairly minimal in comparison with other College expenditures. A one-dollar increase will be a true demonstration of the College’s commitment to rectify wage unfairness. This figure, however, is in no way meant to infer a representation of a final wage benchmark.

Second, we would like to share with you our mission and our vision as we’ve come to a further understanding of how democratic processes must take hold and how the College must serve as a model for participation and decision-making for all of our community members. All those who contribute to the College’s success must be treated fairly and justly, with respect and dignity. We realize that you may have not had time yet to consider these points in your deliberations, but we felt that we should to bring them to the table as they represent important considerations in reflecting on a living wage and democratic process.

1. All working members of the Swarthmore College community guaranteed a living wage. All working members of the Swarthmore College community, including all individuals directly employed by Swarthmore College, all employees of subcontracted companies, and all other
workers otherwise affiliated with the College, must be guaranteed a living wage, or its salary equivalent, under College policy.

2. **Annual adjustment of living wage.** The mandated living wage will be adjusted annually based on the cost of living in the Philadelphia/Delaware County area, reflecting the costs of food, housing, child care, health care, transportation, utilities, education and allowance for savings—the basic necessities of life—for all working members of the Swarthmore College and their families.

3. **Fair working conditions.** Everyone in the Swarthmore College community has the right to a safe and harassment-free environment. The living wage policy guarantees this right to all Swarthmore’s working members, regardless of whether they are employed directly by the College or not, and will ensure access to appropriate grievance procedures if their rights are violated. Some employees fear that a living wage implementation will result in increased work assignments and additional time pressures. The living wage policy will monitor working conditions to guarantee that employees are not assigned increased workloads.

4. **Commitment to a sustainable work force.** The living wage policy commits Swarthmore College to providing full-time jobs when possible, and part-time or temporary work only when necessary, as determined by the nature of the work. Two part-time workers are not preferable to one full-time worker doing the same job.

5. **Job security.** All working members of the Swarthmore College community have the right to job security, regardless of departmental or contractual reorganization. In implementing the living wage policy and in any and all subsequent organizational changes, no jobs, wages or union status (including contracts and/or recognition) will be eliminated or diminished as a result of said changes.

6. **Right to organize.** In keeping with our philosophy of moving toward democratic process the living wage policy guarantees all working members of the Swarthmore community the right to freely associate and organize, and commits the College to card-check neutrality. Swarthmore College will remain neutral and not interfere in organizing or union matters, will recognize a union bargaining agent following the demonstration of a majority of workers’ signed union cards, and will not contest NLRB elections or engage in other legal manipulation and maneuvering that would violate the spirit of neutrality. Union organizers should be able to meet with any and all workers (on non-working time) without the employee fearing for their job security.

7. **Disclosure.** The University and subcontracted employers must disclose the pertinent economic details regarding the implementation of the living wage policy. Swarthmore College must provide detailed and updated information on wage scales, benefit packages, grievance procedures, neutrality policies, etc. Without open dialogue and transparency of policy between the administration and the campus community as a whole, a college that respects the value of democracy will have no mechanism by which to evaluate the effectiveness of this or any policy.

If you have further questions or would like to meet with the members of our Campaign to discuss these proposals, please contact us through our email address at swatlivingwage@yahoo.com. We invite you to attend the following event where the Living Wage and Democracy campaign will be a presenter: Collaborating Across Boundaries for Social Justice on a College Campus: Learning for Life and the Living Wage and Democracy Campaign, June 28, Plenary Session, at Swarthmore College.