Q: What is the living wage campaign?
A: The Living Wage Campaign is a coalition of Swarthmore staff, faculty and students working to improve staff wages, transparency of staff-related decisions, and staff inclusion at the College. It is currently comprised of concerned students, staff and faculty. We are continually attempting to increase our representation from all sectors of the college community.

Q: What's the democracy part of the living wage and democracy campaign?
A: It’s the committee structure, stupid. (Just kidding.) A major part of our proposal is to address the lack of transparency and the concentrated decision-making power at Swarthmore. We believe that not only should a Swarthmore wage be a living wage, but also that all members of the community should have a real voice in the process that decides their wages and other important decisions.

Q: Are staff a part of this campaign?
A: Staff have been a part of this campaign from the start. However, there is a continued effort to garner more support and individual involvement from all members of the college community, especially those directly affected by the Campaign.

Q: Has the campaign made efforts to work with the administration?
A: From numerous meetings with Human Resources to talks with the senior administrators, the LW & DC has sought to engage the administration in both informal conversations and formal meetings. This campaign is not about alienating staff from the Administration; it’s about opening up lines of communication and dialogue within the community.

Q: Are there other living wage campaigns?
A: Numerous cities and counties have passed ordinances to secure a living wage for their workers, and campaigns are currently running everywhere from Birmingham to Salt Lake City. In addition to Swarthmore, campus campaigns are taking place throughout the nation, including significant victories at Haverford and Stanford.

Q: Why does Swarthmore have a living wage campaign?
A: As a school that has prided itself upon and publicized its commitment to social justice, Swarthmore College has a moral imperative to pay a self-sufficiency wage to its staff and to make the decision-making processes involving staff more transparent and democratic. To do otherwise would be contrary to the Quaker foundations upon which the College rests. Paying staff a living wage and including staff in decisions relating to them is simply a matter of respect, appreciation, and commitment. The Living Wage campaign is aware that few businesses and organizations have implemented a living wage. This, however, is not an argument against Swarthmore implementing a living wage. What's popular isn't always right.

Q: What wage are you recommending?
A: The Living Wage campaign is not currently endorsing a specific wage; the main goal right now is to secure a commitment to developing a living wage at Swarthmore. As a base, however, we are working with self-sufficiency numbers, such as the ones provided by Women's Association for Women's Alternatives (WAWA), that are tailored to estimate the cost of living in Delaware County, as opposed to numbers based on what other colleges pay their workers.

Q: Is the living wage campaign advocating wages based on family size?
A: Wait, isn't that Communism? Seriously, paying wages based on family size is illegal. We are asking that the Swarthmore minimum wage be a wage that will allow most staff to provide for their basic needs without working second or third jobs.

Q: Don’t staff here get good benefits? Shouldn’t this be taken into account in your campaign for a living wage?
A: Many staff report that the benefits offered by Swarthmore are far better than average, relative to other employers in the area. However, benefits...
Q: Where would the money for staff salary increases come from?
A: Probably the biggest opposition to the campaign comes from people who fear that their interests (be it faculty salaries, student financial aid, athletics or salary pool) will be jeopardized by any increase to the staff salary. There’s a general assumption that the money for staff salaries will have to be wrestled out of an already-tight budget.

Q: Would a living wage policy mean that some staff would lose their jobs?
A: A living wage plan that includes current staff would result in losing their jobs. The members of this group believe that Swarthmore has the resources to raise wages without resorting to downsizing. It’s a matter of our priorities.

Q: If the college commits to pay its permanent staff better wages, don’t you worry that it would subcontract lower wages?
A: Our proposal asks Swarthmore to commit not only to a living wage for permanent staff, but also not to subcontract work. The intent of this policy is to eliminate the incentive to subcontract.

Q: Has the campaign offered any specific suggestions?
A: While we have not submitted a detailed proposal about where the money is to come from to finance staff salaries, the overall strategy is to focus on making the current budget more efficient. We’ve asked that the college look at the current budget to find ways to reduce costs. The current campaign is not about raising money; it’s about making the current budget do more.