

[< Back](#) | [Home](#)

Attack on activism falls short

By:

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To the Editor:

Boris Ryvkin's '09 incredible comparison of student environmental activism to Soviet-style totalitarianism ("More nonsense from Brown activists," Oct. 2) would be laughable if it were not such an important issue.

Ryvkin's assertion that campus initiatives aspiring to make Brown a leading example of sustainability, such as energy usage monitors and the Real Food Challenge, are "affronts to individual liberty and tolerance" relies on a faulty assumption: that students living on campus already enjoy total freedom of lifestyle choices. In fact, Residential Life and Dining Services have a near-monopoly on housing and food.

If Ryvkin rents an apartment, he likely pays bills for his energy usage. Neither is electricity, heat and water usage free in dorms, and ResLife would be fully justified in discouraging consumption of natural resources on campus. Likewise, Brown students on meal plan are limited in their dining choices, and those who want higher-quality and more sustainable food are often out of luck.

As for the reality of anthropogenic climate change, a scientific consensus does exist, and refutations of the misleading arguments of climate-change skeptics that Ryvkin has recklessly embraced are detailed elsewhere. For example, the National Academy of Science in 2006 endorsed, not debunked, the evidence (not a model) behind the "hockey stick" graph. Much recent research suggests that even the IPCC report was far too conservative in its predictions.

No, disagreement with alarmism is not tantamount to a mental defect, but denial and inaction in the face of potentially the most serious crisis humans have faced is certainly tantamount to a collective moral failure.

Nick Hagerty '10

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