

Promoting a Zero Waste Culture on Campus

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Introduction

Background:

- UNH has succeeded in becoming one of the most sustainable universities in the U.S., but still needs to work on waste, energy, and water reduction. Students who live on campus in large part lead to how much waste is being created. This project aims to create a strategic communications plan to promote a zero waste culture in the residence halls of UNH.

Significance:

- In order for UNH to truly be a sustainable campus, the culture around waste production and resource usage needs to change. Educating residents is an avenue for real change in terms of behaviors around waste creation and excessive resource usage.
- The practices and messages used in this project can be transferred to other parts of campus or other universities – leading to substantial reductions in waste creation, energy and water usage.

Objectives

- Document current status of efforts to reduce waste, energy use, and water use in the residence halls.
- Gather best practices from other universities and develop new practices that can be implemented at UNH.
- Create key messages about waste production, energy and water usage targeted at residents of UNH.
- Construct a timeline for implementation of practices and key messages.

Methods/Approach

- Phone interviews with Sustainability staff at other universities to gather best practices.
- In-person/phone interviews with UNH stakeholders.
- Online research using AASHE STARS as well as university websites.

Preliminary Results

I have created a “lay of the landscape” report to document what types of practices other universities are implementing in order to encourage their students to reduce waste.

- Some universities have created a sustainable living guide that is distributed to students at the beginning of the year.
- Some universities have created campaigns, like “Lug-a-Mug” at Mohawk College, to engage students.¹
- Waste sorting education at the end of zero waste dining events have led to an increased awareness about what to do with waste – as well as waste production in general – at other universities.

I have developed a template for what the communications timeline will look like for the 2018-2019 school year. See Figure 1.

Through background research on values and on other universities, I have been able to create preliminary key messages surrounding the ideas of waste, energy and water.

- **Affiliation:** A true wildcat always has a reusable bottle on the go. Fill up at water stations here and around campus.
- **Benevolence:** Remember to keep heaters unblocked during the winter to keep you and your roommates nice and cozy.
- **Affiliation:** Put your time where it matters: with your friends, not the laundry room. Take less laundry trips by only washing full loads.

References

1. “Waste Management.” *Mohawk College*, <https://www.mohawkcollege.ca/about-mohawk/sustainability/waste-management>.



Caption: UNH Trash 2 Treasure Yard Sale – an example of promoting a zero waste culture. Credit: University of New Hampshire.

Challenges/Questions

- I have not been able to talk with many Hall Directors or Residents Assistants at this time. I would like to hear more about their experiences with how they have engaged with students in order to better form my messages.
- It is difficult to form messages based on intrinsic values that contradict the financial security value.
- How have you incorporated intrinsic values into the way you communicate with others about sustainability?
- What has your experience been in terms of communicating the importance of living sustainability with your roommates or neighbors?

Figure 1:

| Communications Timeline: Promoting a Zero-Waste Culture in UNH Res. Halls | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|--------------|---|---|-----------------|---|---|---|-----------------|---|----------------------|---|-----------------|---|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|
| | Week 1: 5/6-10 | | | | Week 2: 5/13-17 | | | | Week 3: 5/20-24 | | | | Week 4: 5/27-31 | | | | | | | |
| | M | T | W | R | F | M | T | W | R | F | M | T | W | R | F | M | T | W | R | F |
| Events | Classes End | Reading Days | | | Finals | | | | | | Summer Classes Start | | | | | Memorial Day | | | | |
| Messaging | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Media Channels | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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Caption: The month of May in the communications timeline for the 2018-2019 school year.

