

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 change in 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 strategic communications plan and 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.
- Used Canva to create newsletter and social media inserts.

Results

I wrote a report to document what types of practices other universities are implementing in order to encourage their students to reduce waste and conserve resources.

- Some universities have created campaigns, like “Lug-a-Mug” at Mohawk College, to engage students.
- 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.
- I created a zero waste communications timeline for the 2018-2019 school year. See Figure 1.
- Through background research on values, I constructed key messages that address waste, energy and water.
 - I focused on intrinsic values that are known to foster long-term behavioral change: affiliation, benevolence, self-direction, tradition, community and universalism.
 - It was important to choose a range of values that would resonate with students of all political backgrounds.

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				
								Move out													
								Trash 2 Treasure Pick-up													
Messaging																					
Media Channels																					

Caption: The month of May in the communications timeline for the 2018-2019 school year.



Figure 2: Educational waste message on recycling at UNH.



Figure 3: Educational energy message on conservation.

Discussion

- The outreach materials I've created will jumpstart the zero waste campaign in the residence halls. 4x5 inch newsletter inserts will display key messages and reach 85% of residents. Halls that use social media will be able to spread messages by using the Canva social media posts.
- Residence Life staff, Hall Directors and RA's will all have a handout of the key messages as well as access to all materials and program suggestions. This will allow them to implement the campaign easily and effectively.
- These messages have the potential to educate UNH residents, namely freshman, about how to recycle and why resource conservation matters. This education can lead to long-term behavioral changes that transfer outside of the dorms.
- This experience has shown me that changing behavior is a process that includes awareness and education. Those steps are equally as important to actions.

Next Steps

- In order for this campaign to be implemented, the Sustainability Institute must continue to work with Residence Life staff to make sure that the communications plan and timeline are being followed.
- Plans to bring waste education to orientation and Wildcat Days should continue to be pursued.
- Education on recycling, waste and resource conservation should be included in residential programming as well as during all-campus events.
- If residents do not respond to these messages by the end of the year, the plan should be reworked in order to further promote zero waste living actions.