



2020 RecycleMania Case Study

University of Connecticut

Water Bottle Refill Stations

1. Contact Information

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2. Focus of Case Study

Students advocate for reducing plastic waste on campus by implementing water bottle refill stations and collaborating with administration to ensure the University is moving towards a plastic-free future.

3. Campaign Component Description

UConn has proven themselves to be committed to the environment by earning fifth place in the "Cool School" ranking from the Sierra Club and being ranked the world's eleventh 'greenest' higher education institution out of 780 universities worldwide (2019 UI GreenMetric World University Rankings). While it is obvious that students and the administration care about the environment and our eco-friendly initiatives, the push to improve cannot cease, and we must constantly be reassessing our goals and programs moving forward. This campaign started out as an opportunity to provide more refill stations and clean water access around campus, hence cutting down students' need to purchase non-reusable water bottles. Now, this campaign has sprung into an advocacy platform urging administrators to not resign their contract with Coca-Cola and further sustain students' commitment to reducing our environmental footprint. The bureaucracy of a large institution is difficult to navigate, but passion, student support, and the

fight for what is right and necessary for our University moving forward is what is driving this campaign to the finish line.

4. Planning Steps & Timeline to Implement

- The problem must be clearly stated: UConn needs to provide its community more options for sustainable water sources and reduce its plastic waste.
<https://dailycampus.com/stories/editorial-we-need-more-water-bottle-refilling-stations> (Attachment 1)
- Identify the ask of administrators: To help the Undergraduate Student Government (USG) provide and implement more water bottle refill stations and advocate for not resigning the Coca-Cola contract.
- Get some numbers: How much does implementing a water bottle refill station really cost?
 - Between \$7,350 - \$10,000+
- Pass a budget within USG: State to the members of USG why this is important to our future and our students to get a united support front. USG will then approve and allocate the money needed for the endeavor from student fees.
- Identify priority locations around campus to provide water bottle refill stations.
- Implementation and maintenance: Facilities workers are the only ones that can install the refill stations.
- Keep pushing and asking administration and facilities to put in more stations with concrete timelines.
 - A current inventory must be made of all water fountains on campus that have potential to be made into refill stations, and then assessed based on location, priority, and demand.
- If need be, provide data from students showing that this is what they want, need, and demand from the University.
- Be creative: investigate other options, collaborate with other campus organizations, departments, outside sources, etc...
- Focus discussions on not re-signing the June 30th, 2021 Coca-Cola Contract with UConn.

5. Resources and Stakeholders Involved

Each water bottle refill station costs between \$7,350 - \$10,000+, and that is if there is already an existing fountain to work with. Currently, the Undergraduate Student Government has allocated \$15,000 for further installation of refill stations, but this is currently on hold due to the pandemic. There has been a promised \$30,000 from the current Coca-Cola contract to be put towards more stations.

The Undergraduate Student Government has been representing student interests in these discussions, alongside working with the Facilities Department, Procurement, Office of Sustainability, and Residential Life. Before the Undergraduate Student Government's involvement in advocating for student interests in regards to this issue, a new campaign on campus called Take Back the Tap had already begun meeting with the aforementioned decision makers to urge them to fund the installation of more refill stations and has had a petition

calling on another decision making group, the Board of Trustees, to “invest in well maintained water fill stations in public spaces and provide reusable water bottles for students, faculty and staff, and end the sale of bottled water on campus.”

https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/take-back-the-tap-2?source=direct_link& (Attachment 2)

6. Describe the Results of this Campaign Component

A. General results:

Currently, there are over sixty locations across campus, from residential halls to academic buildings, that have water bottle refill stations (hydration stations).

<https://ecohusky.uconn.edu/water-bottle-refilling/> (Attachment 3)

In January 2019, Facilities decided that individual departments would need to pay for their own water bottle refill stations, will this really happen? Slim chances. And what happens to residential halls that do not have access to clean water? Sarah Hill discussed this in the Daily Campus article

<https://dailycampus.com/stories/2019/1/31/take-back-the-tap-update-water-bottle-refill-stations-to-be-funded-by-individual-departments> (Attachment 4)

November 2018 Campaign update-

<https://dailycampus.com/stories/2018/11/14/take-back-the-tap-aims-to-install-more-water-bottle-refill-stations-on-campus> (Attachment 5)

As you can see, this effort and these conversations have been happening around campus for quite some time, looking back over five years of hard work:

<https://ecohusky.uconn.edu/2015/11/24/hydration-stations-make-a-splash/> (Attachment 6)

The university is doing its own part to limit plastic waste by implementing new guidelines that promote water bottle refill stations instead of water coolers.

<https://dailycampus.com/stories/2019/8/28/new-guideline-promotes-water-refilling-stations> (Attachment 7)

B. Specific measurable impact figures:

About 22.29 plastic water bottles per day are reduced by a single refill station according to <https://www.wired.com/story/how-many-water-bottles-could-a-filling-station-save/>; this means in one week about 156.03 plastic water bottles are reduced by one refill station.

With just 50 refill stations, about 400,000 plastic water bottles can be reduced in a single year according to <https://today.duke.edu/2015/10/hydrationstations>

Refilling a reusable bottle at a refill station saves ¼ bottle of oil every time according to <https://ecohusky.uconn.edu/water-bottle-refilling/>

Take Back the Tap has gathered about 575 petition signatures and in 2019 won a national competition held by Food & Water Watch, called Tap-a-palooza, with a record-setting number of text ins from students saying “I <3 tap” and emphasizing the need for more refill stations. From this competition a \$1500 grant was won by UConn’s Take Back the Tap to be used for refill stations that have not yet been used.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

In the future, it would be helpful to get more concrete promises and timelines from administrators. Waiting around for answers and progress, when everything is set on the student side is not fair. Many groups on campus are focused on similar issues, collaborating with more student groups would show a more united front to administration.

8. What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

Go for it! It is difficult to keep these conversations ongoing and to get our student voices heard to administration, but if this is meaningful to you and your community, keep pushing and be heard. Be creative! Fridays for Future alongside other environmental groups on campus, hosted a large climate strike with written demands for the University to take seriously moving forward - <https://dailycampus.com/stories/2019/9/23/students-march-to-demand-uconn-respond-to-climate-change> (Attachment 8)

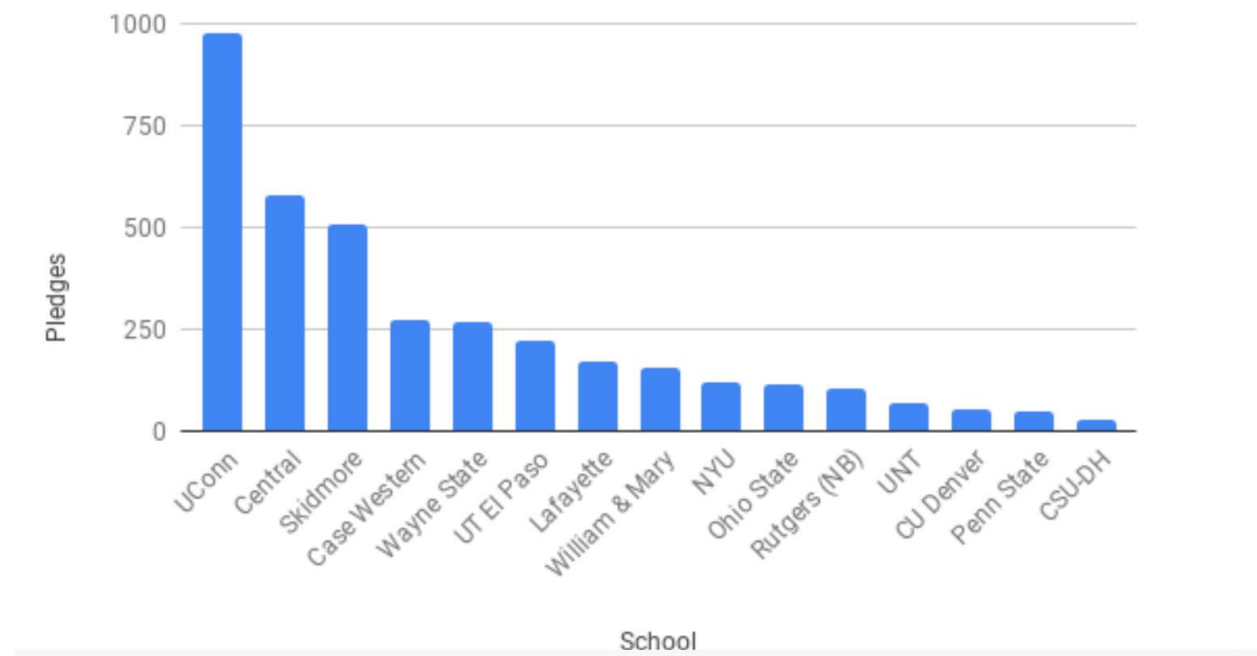
Our University President, Thomas Katsouleas, said “The fact that they come from a large group of students makes me take whatever’s in that list really seriously. So we’re gonna go through it one by one and try to take action on every one that we can and try to understand what the implications and consequences are.”

If it takes a climate strike to be heard, do it! If it takes countless conversations with administration and frustrating emails, do it! Your efforts are valid and important.

9. Photos and Graphics



Source: The Daily Campus <https://dailycampus.com/stories/2018/11/14/take-back-the-tap-aims-to-install-more-water-bottle-refill-stations-on-campus> (Attachment 5)



Tap-a-Palooza

