



Virginia Wesleyan University 2020 RecycleMania Case Study

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- ### **2. Focus of Case study - A residence hall competition, which included educational programming, and implementation of green-colored bags for recycling increased campus awareness and participation in recycling.**
- ### **3. Detailed description of campaign component:**

To increase student support and participation in Recyclemania, Virginia Wesleyan University conducted a recycling competition within the residence halls. Every night over a 5-week period, the volume of recyclables collected in each hall was measured by a group of four student volunteers. The weekly recycling rates were reported back to the students, allowing them to work together to formulate new

waste management strategies. The competition was aided by the Residence Life team in the dormitories, as the student residence assistants (RAs) acted as the captains for each of their teams.

Educational programming enhanced the residence hall competition and increased student involvement. As per Residence Life requirements, each of the student RAs is required to host two events for their residents each month; one educational and one social. In order to enlist the cooperation of the Residence Life team, a student volunteer co-hosted educational events for the RAs, initially serving to educate the residents about RecycleMania, but later evolving to foster problem solving and strategizing amongst the residents to improve their hall's recycling habits. As an added bonus, each attendant to an event received an increase in the hall's competition "score".

In speaking with students, one common misconception was that recycling was disposed of with the trash after collection. The Facilities Management department implemented a green bag system to increase transparency of the recycling process. Previously, with all bags being black, they could be confused with trash, ending up in the wrong dumpster. Training for the housekeeping staff explained the purpose of using the green bags and the important role of the staff. This system was initially tested with one building, our state of the art Greer Environmental Sciences Center. The green bag process showcased our university's commitment to waste reduction. Today, our green bags are being utilized across our campus.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

Fall Semester

- **Identifying Misconceptions and Barriers to Recycling.** In discussions with students before the competition, we learned that many students did not recycle either because they did not know what materials were recyclable, or because they thought that facilities management was actually throwing out the recycling they collected on campus.
- **Designing the Residence Hall Competition.** The residence hall competition was the main incentive for student involvement, and was structured in a way that best accommodated the student living conditions. This competition utilized residence halls of equal size as the base for the competition.

January Term

- **Volunteer Recruitment.** The scale of the competition was only limited by the number of volunteers. With four dormitory complexes ("Villages") to measure, we recruited a team of four volunteers, with each volunteer recording recycling volume in each hall in a given Village daily. More volunteers were required for the educational events that were added.
- **Collaboration with Residence Life.** Discussions with Residence Life and Student Activities before the competition garnered their support. They allowed us to incorporate our programming into the monthly residence life programming schedule and promote our competition at a meeting of RAs. Student Activities agreed to supply the funds for the prize--a pizza party.

- **Collaboration with Facilities Management.** Discussions with facilities management prior to the competition resulted in support from this key department. Facilities Management evaluated the location of recycling receptacles across campus and implemented the green bag system in response to student concerns that recycling was being put in trash dumpsters after collection.

5. Resources and stakeholders involved

The success of Recyclemania resulted from a broad group of stakeholders who supported and participated in the competition. Most of the measurements and outreach were conducted by a small group of student volunteers, who were recruited from the student environmental club, Marlins Go Green. A student intern in Facilities Management, who was also an officer of the student environmental club, helped facilitate communication between students and Facilities Management. This was beneficial, because she could explain the recycling process to the students, and helped facilities management implement the green bag program, which made recycling more visible on campus. The Assistant Director of Facilities Management held a training meeting with the twenty housekeeping staff to educate them about the new green bag program and the Recyclemania competition. Residence Life enthusiastically agreed to let our student volunteers hold recycling information sessions for dorm RAs who were in need of hall programming. Student Affairs supplied the funds for a pizza party for the winners of the dorm recycling competition. A professor in the Earth & Environmental Sciences Department created an assignment in one of her classes in which students conducted the initial recycling and waste audit to determine the volume to weight conversion factors for the competition.

6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

a. General results

Overall our Recyclemania competition was successful in increasing awareness of recycling on campus, improving the recycling process, and increasing the recycling rate. Our Recyclemania campaign was written up as a story in the student newspaper, *The Marlin Chronicle* (<http://marlinchronicle.vwu.edu/?p=9749>). We sent information on the competition and updates on the university's progress to the university's communication's office. As a result, Recyclemania was featured in three of the university president's weekly campus emails.

b. Specific measurable impact

The residence hall competition began in week two of Recyclemania. The average recycling ratio during the residence hall competition was 27.6% higher than pre-competition, suggesting that the competition and outreach efforts increased the recycling rate.

Table 1. Weekly recycling ration before and during the residence hall competition.

Week	Recycling Ratio
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Initial week, pre-competition	0.29
Dorm competition week 1	0.37
Dorm competition week 2	0.36
Dorm competition week 3	0.33
Dorm competition week 4	0.41
Dorm competition week 5	0.37
<i>Average during competition</i>	<i>0.37</i>

7. What would you do differently in the future?

We can improve our involvement in the Recyclemania competition by increasing campus involvement and taking on new challenges. To increase student involvement, we will reach out to more organizations on campus as well as advertise more via social media, fliers, and various media outlets. To improve participation in the residence hall competition, we could offer a grander prize and advertise the competition campus-wide.

In the future, we would like to participate in multiple sectors of the competition, such as the composting challenge. We are currently in the process of organizing a composting system to generate nutritious humus from food waste in the cafeteria.

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

Our advice for other colleges is to make the competition fun. The beauty of a college campus is the diversity of students, which means that recycling varies in importance from student to student. Making the competition fun and providing incentives such as prizes makes it more enticing for the campus community to participate and learn more about recycling.

9. Photos and Graphics



Virginia Wesleyan Students prepare for the Recyclemania competition by conducting a recycling audit on campus. Photo credit: Elizabeth Malcolm



The student environmental club posted to their Instagram feed promoting the Recyclemania competition. Photo credit: Elizabeth Malcolm