



## 2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

### Contact info:

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### Focus of Case study:

Upcycled Art Competition: A student event to turn “trash” into art

### Detailed description of campaign or effort:

On March 22, 2023, Emerson’s Iwasaki Library, Costume Shop, and Campus Services departments collaborated to host an Upcycled Art Competition. Student participants created works of art from items that would have otherwise gone to the trash or recycling. The event highlighted a unique intersection between the creative strengths of Emerson College students and the institution’s commitment to sustainability.

In addition to other items, the library provided armchairs that had begun to show signs of wear and tear. Instead of replacing the chairs entirely, library staff were interested in giving them new life through the art competition. Students sewed, embroidered, and otherwise redecorated the chairs, which have now been placed back in the library’s Presidents Room for use. Participants were also welcomed to bring their own supplies.

After the 90-minute window ended, the students presented their final works of art to a panel of faculty and staff judges and to spectators who had filled the room. The three judges, who represented different departments, evaluated the final products and selected the winning pieces based on three criteria: sustainability, innovation, and artistic skill. Student participants wove sustainability messages into their art in many ways. One created a web of thread across the back of a chair to represent the intersectionality of sustainability concepts. Another created a mask that was then used as a prop in a student film, eliminating the need to buy something new for the project.

The winning work of art was titled “No Estas Solo,” which translates to “You’re Not Alone” in English. The idea came from the student’s interest in supporting mental health on campus by prompting people to spread kindness to others, including strangers. She refurbished a library chair by using scraps from Emerson’s Costume Shop to add fabric paneling and bows to the back of the chair. The project is interactive and includes materials for each person who sits in the chair to make a friendship bracelet for the next person who sits there or write a kind message on slips of paper attached to the arm of the chair. The artist also spraypainted the chair with cheery golden polka dots and a large heart.

During the busy spring semester, student participants and spectators alike appreciated the opportunity the Upcycled Art Competition provided to turn items that would have gone to waste into something new and to observe others’ interpretations of the challenge.

### Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- January – March, 2023: Held three meetings with planning team, which included representatives from Campus Services, Emerson’s Library, the Costume Shop, and a student sustainability employee.
- February 2023: Recruited three judges to evaluate the projects
- March 8 – 22, 2023: Promoted the event
- March 13 – 17, 2023: Collected supplies
- March 22, 2023: Event
- March – April 2023: Collected notes from participants and organizers to improve the event in future years

**Resources and stakeholders involved:**

**Resources**

Amount	Resource	Details
In-kind	Planning	Staff from the Iwasaki Library, Costume Shop, and Campus Services planned the event with the help of a student employee and members of the Sustainability Committee.
In-kind	Judges	One faculty member and two staff members volunteered to judge the competition.
In-kind	Supplies	We used donated art supplies from the library, costume shop, and Campus Services. All supplies were left over from previous uses or events.
In-kind	Space	We hosted the event on campus in the library’s CoLab room, a flexible space that we were able to arrange in an ideal format for the event. The space also has a large glass wall facing the library, which brought in additional curious spectators.
\$300	Cash prizes	We provided cash prizes for the top three finishers
\$150	Food	We supplied snacks (fruit and vegan donuts) for all participants and attendees.

**Describe the Results of this campaign component:**

- **General results:**
  - Students who attended the event remarked that they enjoyed the time to work on a creative project and reflect on how items we frequently consider “waste” can often be reused.
  - While Emerson did host one upcycled art competition several years ago. this was our first iteration of the event in its current format. A significant result of the pilot event is a better understanding of how to organize similar opportunities in the future.
  - The event was covered in Emerson Today [here](#) and the final works of art left behind by participants were on display in the library for the remainder of the semester. We also posted a [blog post](#) about the event on Sustainable Emerson and shared photos on the Emerson Sustainability Instagram account.
- **Specific measurable impact:**
  - Eight teams entered the competition.
  - About 20 additional students, faculty, and staff observed the competition.
  - Photos of the event on our Instagram account were viewed 81 times.
  - Three chairs were refurbished and turned into functional artwork.

**What would you do differently in the future?**

We are considering adding an option next year to allow participants to work on their projects for a couple of weeks leading up to the event. This year, everyone had to create their piece of art during a 90-minute window at the event. It was fun to have everyone in one room working on their creations, but some students would have preferred a slower pace. We may reserve a room for two weeks before the event next year to allow students to come and go as their schedules permit. All participants would then get together after the two weeks in person to present their projects to the judges and receive awards.

We might also try to hold this event earlier in the semester in the future. This year, it coincided with the last week of the Campus Race to Zero Waste competition, but we might consider holding it in February at the beginning of the competition instead. Students get very busy with schoolwork and other activities by the middle of the semester, and we heard some feedback from folks who would have loved to participate but were not able that earlier in the semester might have been better.

Finally, we hope that as the event gains popularity, we learn of other sources of supplies on campus. The more departments and organizations that provide supplies, the better we can achieve our goal of increasing awareness on campus about the reuse potential of items traditionally destined for the trash or recycling.

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

We would recommend collaborating with other departments on campus to organize an event like this. In addition to increasing our staff capacity by bringing together several departments, the collaboration reinforced the message that achieving our waste diversion goals will require the participation of everyone on campus, not just sustainability staff.

More broadly, I would recommend that other colleges consider their institutional strengths and focuses when designing events. Given Emerson's focus on arts and communication in the context of the liberal arts, the Upcycled Art Competition attracted a wider range of participants and spectators than our more standard sustainability programming. It also prompted students working towards a career in the arts to think more carefully about from where they source supplies.

**Photos and Graphics:**

We are including below two photos from the event, the event poster, the form the judges used to evaluate the submissions, and three links to Emerson publications about the event.



*"No Estas Solo" (photo by Anna Arriaga)*



*Participants (photo by Anna Arriaga)*

Campus Services X Iwasaki Library Present:

# LIBRARY LOVE!

## upcycled art competition

**3/22/2023 2-4PM**  
**library CoLab space**

to celebrate sustainability  
& creativity, we're  
calling all creatives to  
join us in the library to  
create art from "trash" -  
winners will receive  
cash prizes & vegan  
snacks will be served!  
sign up by 3/19!



**SCAN FOR  
INFO & TO  
SIGN UP!**



Event poster

## UPCYCLED ART COMPETITION

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Sustainability (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Innovation (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Artistic skill (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Sustainability (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Innovation (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Artistic skill (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

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Notes:

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Sustainability (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Innovation (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Artistic skill (5 is best)

1 2 3 4 5

Total score: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

*Judges' evaluation form (each of the three judges filled out the form individually for each participant and then came to a consensus on the first, second, and third place winners).*

Blog post: <https://websites.emerson.edu/sustainable-emerson/2023/03/28/library-love-an-upcycled-art-competition/>

Emerson Today article: <https://today.emerson.edu/2023/03/31/trash-to-treasure-ecoambassadors-host-upcycled-art-competition/>

Instagram post: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CqdKHghOJwJ/>