



## 2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Amherst College

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### **Focus of Case study:**

Creating and implementing a campus closed loop system across the annual Move Out / Move In cycle that minimizes waste to the landfill

### **Detailed description of campaign or effort:**

When students are moving out at the end of the school year, a lot of reusable items are landfilled/disposed of for the sake of convenience—particularly graduating seniors, who are moving out permanently. Instead of being thrown away, these items could find a new campus home with another student.

At Amherst College we have developed a coordinated campus closed loop system across the annual Move Out / Move In cycle that minimizes waste to the landfill during Move Out and reduces the purchase of new materials during Move In. Unlike many Move Out campaigns at other schools that divert donations to local thrift organizations or charities, we have focused on keeping as many of the items within the campus ecosystem. Donations are gathered during Move Out through a well-coordinated and messaged campaign through the Office of Sustainability, Facilities Team, Athletics Department, and Office of Residential Engagement and Wellbeing. Students are provided donation bags with designated drop spots for collection marked in the first-floor common spaces within each residence hall. Donations are picked up by our Facilities team and amassed in the college ice rink where they are sorted over the summer by a student zero waste fellow. The student fellow sorts, organizes, and stages a giant free Yard Sale in the ice rink held during Move In / Orientation week. All of the usable donated room décor and dorm room accessories (e.g., linens, sheets, lamps, rugs, fans, decorative pillows, shower supplies, storage containers) are made available for free back to students. First year students are given first access, followed by returning students, staff, and faculty, respectively. Items available are typically in good condition and are items that students normally would go out and purchase from the surrounding big box stores or online. The program not only diverts items from the landfill on the back end, but also limits purchasing and consumption on the front end.

Donated clothing is offered in a separate free clothing extravaganza event held in the fall. Winter coats go to international students and students from warm temperate climates. Textbooks are given to a campus student run used book store "The Option". Pleasure reading books are made available via the campus library free book shelf. We have been able to successfully repurpose >90% of what we gather during Move Out.

### **Planning steps & timeline to implement:**

- About two weeks prior to Move Out, the Office of Sustainability partners with the Office of Residential Engagement and Wellbeing to message students about minimizing waste during Move Out and donating any items that they don't intend to store or take with them. We have a [dedicated website](#) that lays out what to donate and what not to donate.
- Donation bags and stickers are distributed to all residence hall rooms by the custodial staff the week before move out for students to collect and label their donations.
- In each residence hall first floor common area, a specified drop zone marked with a "Donations" banner is designated where students are instructed to drop any donations / excess room furniture.
- As donations accumulate in the drop zones, the Facilities team pick up and amass all of the donations in the college's ice rink for sorting and summer storage. The ice rink is not utilized during the summer, and the Athletics Department allows us to use it and collect all of the donations in one place.
- The Office of Sustainability hires a student for the summer to go through all of the donations to sort and assess what items are usable and what are not (e.g., broken, soiled, damaged, trash).
- Items are sorted into various categories (e.g., clothes, linens, towels, room décor, kitchen utensils, electronics, bathroom / shower essentials, school supplies) within the ice rink. We then strive to find a new campus home for every item.
- University owned items (sports equipment, college owned refrigerators, graduation robes) are returned to the appropriate college departments.
- We stage and host a free campus wide Yard Sale in the ice rink during fall orientation and Move In during which we offer up all of the usable room décor / student supply items collected during Move Out to students, and then staff and faculty.
- The Yard Sale is advertised to all incoming students over the summer and built into the orientation schedule during first year Move In day. The Yard Sale remains open through the first week of class so any returning students can take what they want.
- Donated clothes and accessories are made available back to students through a separate large free clothing extravaganza held in the fall. We stage the event on campus in one of the larger campus event spaces.
- Winter coats are given to the Center for International Student Engagement to distribute to international students from warmer climates and students in need.
- Used textbooks are given to the student run on-campus bookstore "The Option" run out of the basement of one of the residence halls that sells used textbooks at a heavily discounted rate.
- Pleasure reading books are made available for free through the campus library on a set of free bookshelves.
- Any donated or abandoned bikes are given to our campus bike shop to be fixed up and put back into circulation.
- Last year more than 90% of what we put out at the Yard Sale and free clothing extravaganza was taken by students. We open up both events to staff and faculty after students have taken what they want. The few remaining clothes and items we donate to the Amherst Survival Center, a local shelter and food bank.
- The Yard Sale and free clothing extravaganza have become signature events for the Office of Sustainability.

### **Resources and stakeholders involved:**

This is a collaborative endeavor among numerous offices and stakeholders on campus including the college's Office of Sustainability, Office of Residential Engagement and Wellbeing, Athletics Department, the custodial team, and

Facilities waste team. Students need to vacate and empty their rooms during Move Out. We simply are directing what otherwise normally would have gone to the dumpsters to designated donation drop spots. There is some added effort to move the donations to the ice rink, but we have a team of 4 - 5 staff for those Move Out days making rounds to pick up and take the donations to the rink. The Office of Sustainability hires a student zero waste fellow who works about 20 hours a week for 6 - 8 weeks in the summer to sort through all of the donations and stage the Yard Sale and clothing giveaways. Student Eco reps help staff both the Yard Sale and free clothing events during orientation and the fall. There is a lot of coordinated campus messaging and advertising around both the Move Out process and the Yard Sale and clothing events. The program has been a great partnership and collaborative effort among a variety of campus stakeholders.

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

- **General results:**

Prior to the development of this program, essentially everything left behind went to the landfill. It was literally tens of tons of usable materials being wasted, and worse the next set of students would turn around and buy essentially the same goods again at the return of the fall semester. So not only were we generating excessive and unnecessary waste, but also in not closing the loop causing a large amount of unnecessary and excessive purchasing. It was classic linear economy – buy, use, discard. We have now taken that linear system and made it into a very intentional and coordinated circular one. The program and associated components (e.g. Yard Sale, Free Clothing Extravaganza, Discounted Textbooks, Free Pleasure Reads) have received a ton of attention and buzz across campus, and have now been integrated into both the Campus Wide Move Out and Orientation / Move In programs. The program has been praised by the Administration, Student Centers, and students, and has become one of the signature programs of the Office of Sustainability.

- **Specific measurable impact:**

The environmental and sustainability impact of the program is significant. Although we did not officially weigh all of the donations collected, we estimate we diverted roughly 20 tons / 100 cubic yards of room furnishings and over six thousand articles of clothes, that were passed on to another set of students for use. We estimate that over half the student population attended the free clothing give away (>1,000 students) and 700+ students and staff attended the Move In Yard Sale (including the majority of the first year class). The program has been particularly beneficial and popular to our lower-income students for whom room furnishings, clothing, and textbooks are a significant expense.

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

We are in the second year of the program. We learned a lot in the first year that we have adjusted in this second iteration:

- (1) Better messaging to students as to what they can donate and what they should not donate. In the first iteration there was a fair amount of “wishcycling” with students donating broken electronics, damaged furniture, opened food, soiled or tattered clothes. So, we created a website and repeated messaging that lays out what and what not to donate. This seems to have helped.
- (2) Even with the messaging, donation bags being delivered to rooms, and clearly marked drop zones with bold banners, we still had some students dumping usable stuff into the dumpsters. Next year we plan to work

more closely with the Community Advisors who work and live in each residence hall to have them message their residents more directly about the Move Out and donation collection process.

- (3) Although we have estimated the volume and weight of the donations gathered, we hope to officially weigh donations as we collect them next year using a truck scale.
- (4) Hiring a dedicated summer student to sort the materials and find new homes for all of the donation streams has made a huge difference in the amount of materials we are able to save, and a more refined, coordinated, and consistent sorting process.
- (5) In the first iteration the donated materials had to be moved among different storage locations across campus multiple times. For this second iteration the Athletics department provided us the ice rink for the summer, such that donations could be picked up from the residence halls during Move Out and placed in the rink where they will be sorted and the Yard Sale will be held during Move In. Having the materials only needed to be moved once has significantly increased our efficiency and significantly decreased the labor needed.

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

Here is some advice for those interested in doing something similar:

- (1) Good coordination among the Sustainability Office, Housing and Residence Life, and Facilities with clearly defined roles and responsibilities ensures a smooth collection process.
- (2) Clear, consistent, and timely messaging to students about the donation process and what they can and should not donate is key.
- (3) Make it easy for students to donate. Provide them with donation bags. Have easily accessible and clearly marked donation drop spots within each residence halls to allow for centralized collection of materials.
- (4) Storage of collected materials is always a challenge and limitation. Having access to a huge covered open space (like the college ice rink) to amass, spread out, sort, and stage the yard sale all in one place has made all of the difference for us.
- (5) Having a clear plan and already identified home for each of the donation streams (e.g., books, clothes, room décor, linens, furniture) ensures that little to nothing ends up in the landfill.
- (6) Having a dedicated student or staff member to run point and coordinate the sorting process allows for consistency, efficiency, and good organization and coordination.

### **Photos and Graphics:**

#### **Some Social Media Posts and Short Videos**

##### **For the Yard Sale:**

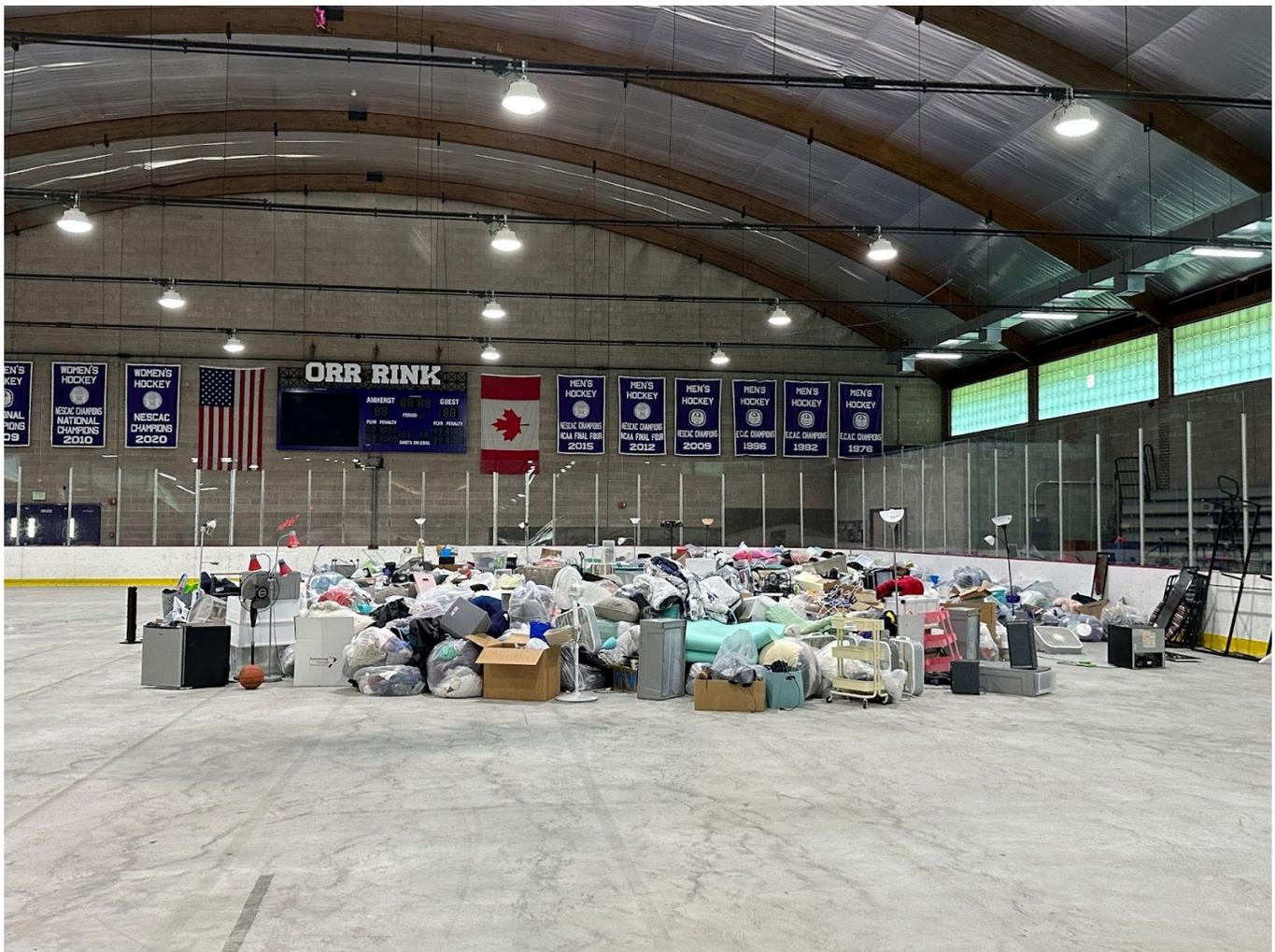
- [instagram.com/p/Cg2SGdPA4Sy/](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cg2SGdPA4Sy/)
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkQuQ-RAOhG/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/ChswglwOgxL/>

##### **For the Free Clothing Extravaganza:**

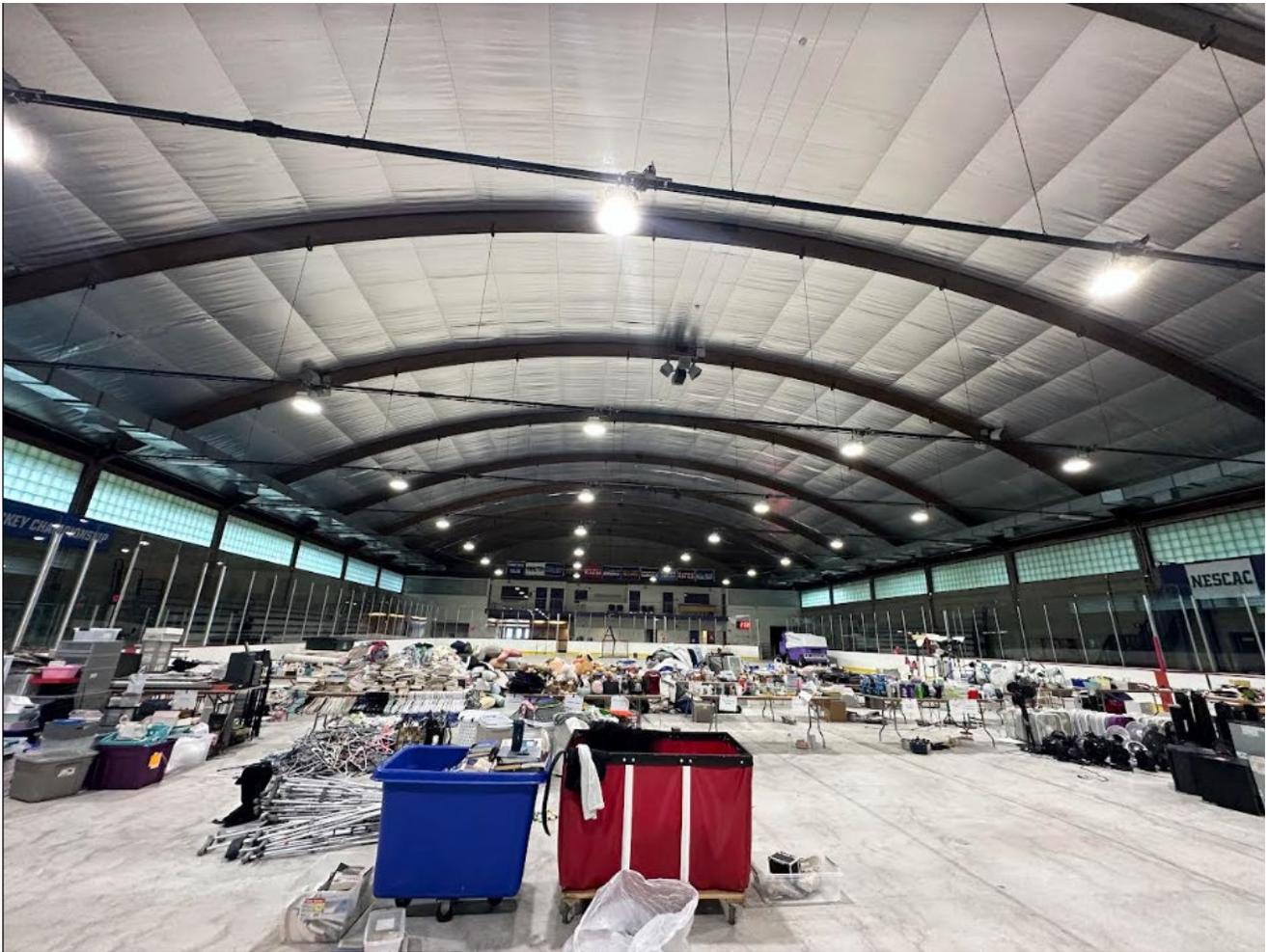
- <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkRCvT4JrM3/>
- [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-jNLmdeWfOe3hAdY3Pf4\\_jPVUibPQ\\_C/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-jNLmdeWfOe3hAdY3Pf4_jPVUibPQ_C/view?usp=sharing)



The sign that was posted in the first floor of each residence hall to mark the collection location for donations. (PC: The Office of Sustainability)



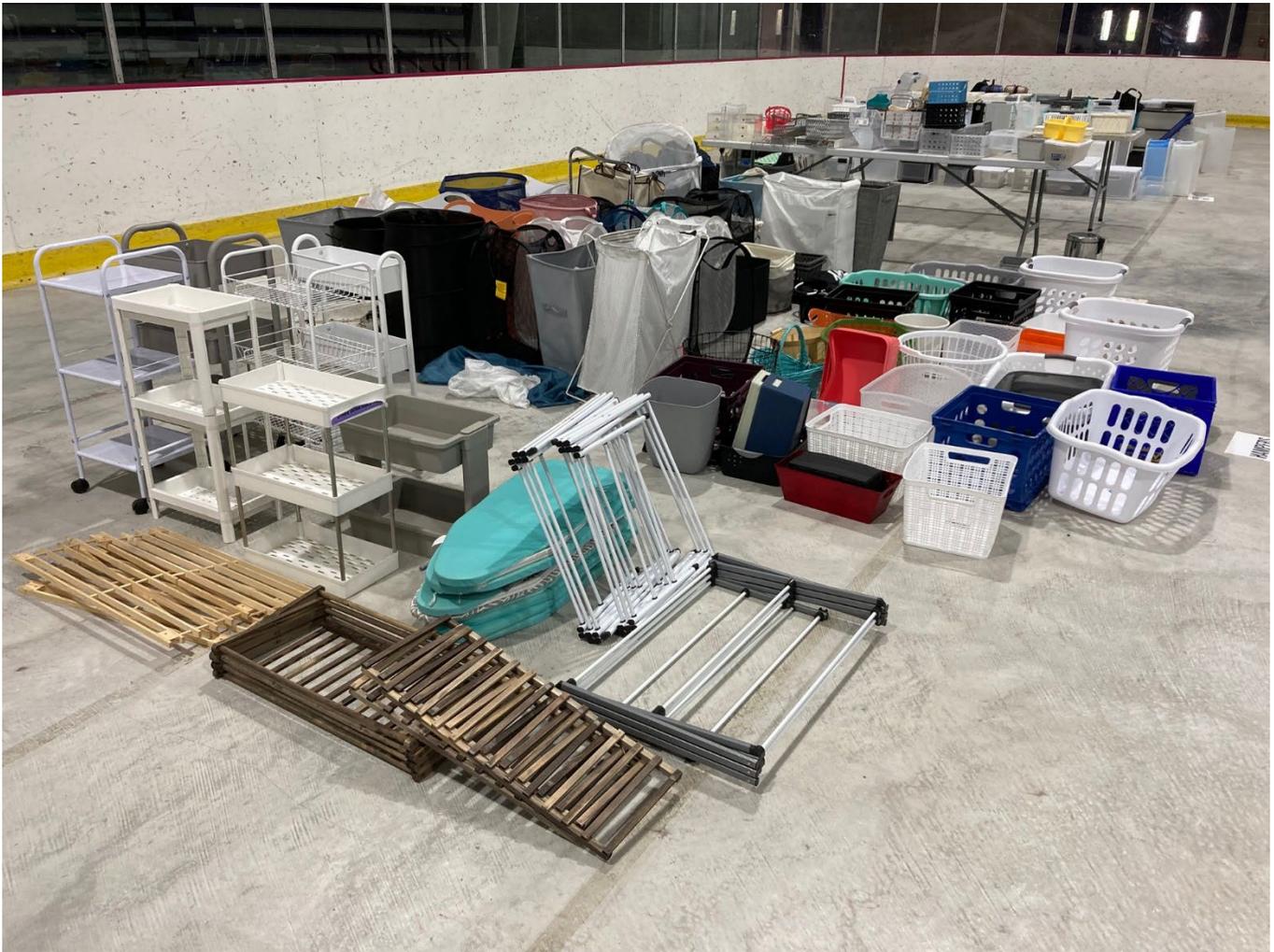
All the donations that were collected at spring Move Out 2023 congregated in the ice rink waiting to be sorted. (PC: Cora Spelke '25)



Sorting of the donations that were collected at spring Move Out 2023 in the ice rink. (PC: Cora Spelke '25)



Sorting the Move Out donations from Move Out 2022 during the summer of 2022. (PC: Wes Dripps)



The 2022 Free Yard Sale in the Ice Rink. The items were organized by type within the campus ice rink and made available to incoming and returning students. (PC: Wes Dripps)



Students thrifting at the 2022 Free Yard Sale. (PC: Wes Dripps)



The set up for the 2022 Free Clothing Extravaganza. (PC: Wes Dripps)



The 2022 Free Clothing Extravaganza Event (PC: Wes Dripps)



The student run campus book shop "The Option" located in the basement of a residence hall that sells used textbooks including those collected during the Move Out process. (PC: Wes Dripps)