



2024 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study University of Louisville

Contact info:

Dr. Justin Mog, Assistant to the Provost for Sustainability Initiatives, Office of the Provost, University of Louisville, justin.mog@louisville.edu, 502-852-8575

Focus of Case study:

At UofL, we've had success engaging the full campus community and expanding beyond zero waste, by creating a multi-layered sustainability competition called Ecolympics with the CR2ZW at its core.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

For nine years, the University of Louisville (UofL) has made the CR2ZW a core element of our largest annual sustainability engagement effort, [Ecolympics](#)...and sometimes in Olympic years like 2024, we get to take home the "gold!" Ecolympics is an 8-week layered sustainability competition that incorporates not only the CR2ZW, but also a three-week energy conservation competition amongst campus residence halls, and a month-long community-wide E-waste Recycling Drive. The entire university community is encouraged to participate simply by taking any action for sustainability and SHARING it to inspire others into action. Participants are automatically entered into weekly and Grand Prize drawings by posting an action to social media and tagging @UofLSustainable, or by submitting them through an online form. Sustainability interns then echo these shared actions by reposting to social media and shouting-out weekly winners (along with information about how you, too, could be entered to win next week's prize!). Sustainable action is reinforced and made more fun and social through special events scheduled throughout the competition, such as crafting nights for material upcycling (e.g. [Craft Night: Making T-Shirt Bags](#), [Craft Night: Upcycling](#), and [Cupid's Workshop](#)), Free Store "[Free Sales](#)," campus [litter pick-ups](#) and [composting volunteer days](#), and in 2024 we added a highly-successful [Zero Waste Repair Fair & Free Sale!](#), hosted in partnership with the Louisville TimeBank, Louisville Tool Library, and LV1 Hackerspace. The strategy is simply to use small incentives and the competitive spirit to snowball individual actions into more and varied actions on the part of participants and their cohorts so that by the end of Ecolympics, we have an avalanche of positive actions for long-term culture change.

Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- Late fall:
 1. Select dates for Ecolympics around the CR2ZW, including the 3-week Residence Hall Drawdown! (typically starting early February), and the month-long E-waste Recycling Drive (this

year Valentine's Day to Spring Break).

2. Inform all campus partners of the dates and begin devising plans for marketing, logistics, and data-gathering.

3. Begin soliciting prize donations.

4. Begin assembling an engagement calendar for Ecolympics, with a schedule of outreach tabling and special events to take place throughout the competition.

- January:

1. Finalize graphics/logo and Create participant submission form for Ecolympics actions

2. Post Ecolympics competitions and related programming to university calendars and social media platforms.

3. Assemble and photograph each weekly prize pack so that you can use them to incentivize participation each week.

4. Begin gathering data for baseline/pre-season.

- February:

1. Do a big media push (and possibly a special event) to launch the competition during the first week.

2. Begin recognizing participation immediately and shout-out the first weekly winner on social media while posting photos/description of the prize for week 2. Repeat this pattern each week.

3. Do outreach tabling at various campus venues and various high-traffic times to spread word.

4. Offer at least one related campus event per week of the competition.

5. Launch E-waste Recycling Drive.

- March:

1. Continue with special event programming, shout-outs of weekly winner, and social media promotion, but reduce tabling.

2. Announce winning hall in the Residence Hall Drawdown and reward them with a party (or a green renovation of their choice, if you have the funding).

3. Use "March Madness" to drive excitement in the last weeks of the competition.

4. Announce Grand Prize winner at end of the competition, share total UofL diversion numbers, thank everyone for their participation and shout-out all weekly winners again.

- April:

1. Finalize all data gathering and submission.

2. Announce final UofL standings in the various CR2ZW categories and thank everyone who helped make it happen.

Resources and stakeholders involved:

Partnerships: As with any other sustainability initiative at UofL, Ecolympics is only possible through the active participation of stakeholders and partners, both on- and off-campus. Fundamental to our success is having contracts with local waste haulers and recyclers that are actively engaged, meeting regularly throughout the year to work on continual improvement, providing exceptional landfill diversion services through recycling and composting, providing reliable and timely weights, and even providing small amounts of funding to support Zero Waste Interns and weekly prize packs for participants. We also rely heavily on the help of on-campus partners like Housing, Dining, and Physical Plant, to both get the word out and to manage some of the logistics. We also

developed partnerships with local non-profit organizations to offer some related programming such as our [Zero Waste Repair Fair & Free Sale!](#), hosted in partnership with the Louisville TimeBank, Louisville Tool Library, and LV1 Hackerspace.

Prizes: In previous years, we allocated a small amount of Climate Action Plan funding (about \$25/week) to purchase items for weekly prize packs, but this year, with the help of student interns making the requests, we were able to source 100% of our prizes as donations from sustainability-oriented local businesses (such as an independent bookstore and a new zero waste refillery store) and campus vendors and departments (such as Aramark dining services, campus health, campus bookstore, and our contracted waste hauler & recycler).

Marketing: Apart from a few paper flyers in residence halls and academic buildings, we used only word of mouth/tabling and free digital marketing through campus monitors, newsletters, emails, and social media.

Staffing: The only costs associated with our participation was staff time for our Sustainability Director and six Sustainability Interns working just a few hours/week at \$15/hour.

Describe the Results of this campaign component:

a. General results

We knew we were doing great but were quite pleasantly surprised to learn that our efforts translated into UofL winning in the Diversion category for Large Campuses! This news generated a lot of buzz as we released our own internal news story, just as the entire Louisville community was focused on another little race taking over our city (i.e. the Kentucky Derby on the first Saturday of May!): [UofL wins 2024 Campus Race to Zero Waste](#) (UofL Sustainability News, May 6, 2024); UofL's Office of Communications & Marketing picked up the news and spread word broadly on social media; and we were so delighted to be highlighted in national press such as: [Campus Race to Zero Waste diverts 105 million single-use plastic containers](#) (Recycling Today, May 24, 2024). Now, in summer 2024, we are proudly informing all new incoming freshmen during Orientation that UofL was able to achieve this huge victory for the planet and the university thanks to the dedicated commitment of students like them! On July 17th, UofL will host a delegation of about 50 representatives from different schools at the NACUFS (National Association for College & University Food Service) conference and we will be proudly sharing our CR2ZW success story with them!

b. Specific measurable impact figures:

- i. In the **Diversion** category, UofL finished #1 for large campuses, top in KY, and **4th out of 81** schools with a **diversion rate of 60.567%**.
- ii. In the **Food Waste organics** category, UofL finished top in KY and **32nd out of 84** schools with 60.00 points.
- iii. In the **Per Capita Classic**, UofL finished top in KY and **48th out of 97** schools with a recycling rate of **7.827 lbs/person**.
- iv. In the **E-waste** category, UofL finished **14th out of 19** schools by collecting **4280 lbs. of e-waste for recycling** (or 0.17 lbs/person)
- v. In terms of **Waste Minimization**, UofL finished **35th out of 109** schools with **20.8 lbs/person of total waste generated**.

What would you do differently in the future?

In the future, we'd like to get some kind of campus "celebrity" (e.g. University President, Coach, student athlete star, Derby Festival Princess, or SGA President) to become a spokesperson for Ecolympics and the CR2ZW. We

think that a short promotion video featuring one of them “taking it to the basket” could be a fun way to promote the competition and get members of the campus community (and alumni!) excited to participate.

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

Keep in mind that you don’t necessarily need a large budget or staff to replicate this work and participate successfully in CR2ZW. UofL is a community of 30,000 people with a Sustainability Office of One and no dedicated funding for sustainability initiatives beyond a very modest \$45,000/year Climate Action Plan implementation budget. We are able to stretch that very far using student interns, low- or no-cost initiatives, and seeking donations from local businesses and university vendors to offer prizes and to help cover pay for student interns.

Photos and Graphics:

Photos of some of our 2024 Ecolympians (students, faculty & staff) with their prizes (photo credits: Anna Dittman):





Some Social Media Posts from 2024 Ecolympics:



THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR
ECOLYMPICS PARTICIPANTS!



How to enter:

Step 1: Perform a green action and take a picture!

Step 2: Log your green action with our form for a chance to win a prize each week!



Regan Whitlow

uses an espresso machine to save money and fuel that would otherwise be spent at the coffee shop before class.

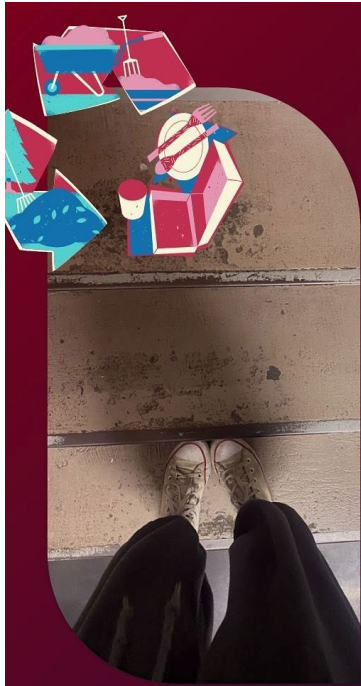
Regan also uses dairy-free creamers with sustainably sourced coffee and unplugs the machine between uses for minimum environmental impact!



SARTHAK MAHENDROO

Went grocery shopping using the TARC instead of a car, saving money on gas and reducing emissions all at once!



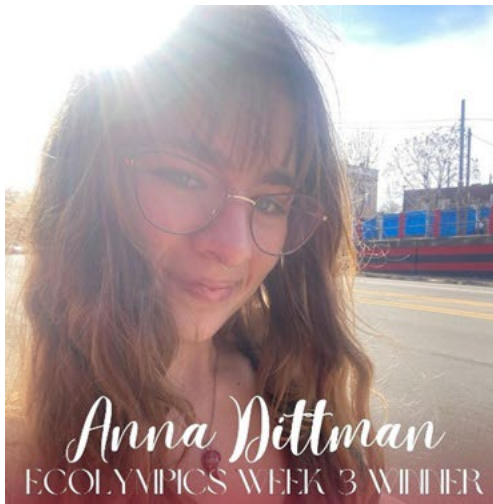


Anna Dittman

Led a compost session at the Ville Grill!

She also chooses to walk to nearby stores instead of driving, when possible.

Even when she's tired, Anna takes the stairs instead of the elevator to save energy!



Anna Dittman
ECOLYMPICS WEEK 3 WINNER



How to enter:

Step 1: Perform a green action and take a picture!

Step 2: Log your green action with our form for a chance to win a prize each week!





How to enter:

Step 1: Perform a green action and take a picture!

Step 2: Log your green action with our form for a chance to win a prize each week!



Use the QR code or the "Ecolympics" link in our linktree to submit!

John PYron

Rides the bus to campus every day instead of driving!

John is able to go months without filling up the gas tank by using public transportation.



John PYron

Ecolympics week 4 Winner



HOW TO ENTER:

Step 1: Perform a green action and take a picture!

Step 2: Log your green action with our form for a chance to win a prize each week!

Use the QR code or the "Ecolympics" link in our linktree to submit!



PATTY PAYETTE

Patty organized a neighborhood E-waste collection with the help of Brian Barnes, filling a whole bin for UofL's E-waste drive!



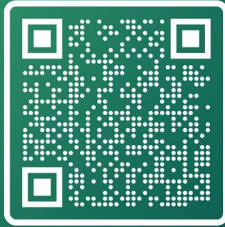


How to enter:

Step 1: Perform a green action and take a picture!

Step 2: Log your green action with our form for a chance to win a prize each week!

Use the QR code or the "Ecolympics" link in our linktree to submit!



Rachel Singel

Every little bit counts!

Biking to campus daily since 2015, Rachel uses the compostor on the urban farm where she lives, turning off the lights when not using them, and donating old items to the UofL Free Store.

Recently, Rachel led a "Papermaking with Invasive Plants" Workshop to spread awareness about invasive species!



HOW TO ENTER:

Step 1: Perform a green action and take a picture!

Step 2: Log your green action with our form for a chance to win a prize each week!

Use the QR code or the "Ecolympics" link in our linktree to submit!



RACHEL MUDD

spent spring break in Virginia Beach on an Alternative Service Break!

In addition to working at a compost site and repainting old picnic tables for reuse, Rachel participated in cleanups of the Chesapeake Bay and Lynnhaven River, where she and her peers picked up over 160 pounds of trash!

The UofL Free Store, the Louisville TimeBank, Louisville Tool Library
and LVL1 Hackerspace present:



Zero Waste Repair Fair

Join us for a chance to learn new skills from community leaders!
There will be different stations with skills to learn to live a more sustainable lifestyle. There will also be a Free sale at the event.

Tuesday, March 26th

4:30pm to 6:30pm In the Red Barn

OPEN TO STUDENTS AND THE PUBLIC

