



**Hobart and William Smith Colleges
2020 RecycleMania Case Study**

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2. Focus of case study

To engage HWS campus in an education and awareness campaign that taught participants to correctly sort commonly disposed of items into recycling, compost, or trash.

3. Detailed description of campaign component:

The Office of Sustainability set up a tabling activity at multiple locations on campus, such as the student center, college store, library, residence halls, and fieldhouse. A paid student intern and volunteer EcoReps (student members of an on-campus club) engaged with students, faculty, and staff from HWS. Participants were asked to sort 15 items on the table into bins for landfill, recycling, or compost. The items participants sorted were either commonly used across campus or items found to be frequently disposed of incorrectly in waste audits. Participants were told to dispose of items as if they were alone and had to make a choice. When complete, the EcoReps went over each item that was placed in the incorrect bin and explained why it was wrong. To encourage campus members to play, small prizes were offered for participating and if a participant got every answer correct, they were entered in a raffle for a larger prize. A follow-up online post-activity quiz was sent to the participants a few weeks later. The post-quiz featured pictures of the 15 items from the tabling activity and participants were asked again to choose the correct location for disposal.

As part of the campaign, the Office of Sustainability promoted the message ***“When in Doubt...Throw it Out!”*** While it might seem a strange message to come from a sustainability office, when people incorrectly put trash into a recycling bin, a bag of perfectly good and clean recyclables becomes contaminated and is instead sent to the landfill. The Office of Sustainability wants to encourage the campus to recycle frequently and correctly; but to recycle everything is incorrect and counterproductive.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

A great part about this activity is it requires minimal planning and steps to implement yet makes a huge impact! The steps and timeline are as follows:

- Early in the semester, perform waste audits at several locations around campus to determine items that are frequently disposed of incorrectly. This also serves as a training and education for the students who will be working at the table.
- Purchase prizes to encourage participation.
- Train the intern and EcoReps on how to operate the table. It is especially important they resist the urge to give hints and tips to their friends.
- Reserve location and dates on campus for setting up a table. Email schedule to EcoReps and ask them to sign up for 1-2 dates each.
- Email all of campus that the new campaign will be starting and encourage everyone to test their knowledge at the table and win prizes!
- Email participants 2-3 weeks after sorting items at the table with a link to the online quiz that will gauge learning and retention of information.

5. Resources and stakeholders involved

To staff the table, the Office of Sustainability hired a student intern who worked 2-hour shifts, twice a week. In addition, every EcoRep was asked to volunteer once or twice a semester to be at the table with the intern. This is important because different students have different friend groups and it was quite common for students to recruit their friends to participate. The labor cost will depend on minimum wage in each state. During this case study, the intern labor costs were approximately \$700-800 per semester.

The bins used for sorting were supplied by the HWS facilities department and were the same type found in residential student housing on campus. The items for sorting were collected during the Office of Sustainability waste audits. The items were washed and sterilized prior to being put on the table for sorting and reused repeatedly so these supplies were free!

The only other expense was for the participant prizes. The prizes had the secondary benefit of reducing waste on campus by providing: a reusable metal straw and utensils with a carrying case, upcycled notebooks, and coupons to the campus café. These were given to participants for playing and helped boost participation numbers. The cost ranged from \$1 to \$2.50 per prize with the total cost depending on the number of participants. For this case study, the participation prize costs were approximately \$300-600 per semester.

The larger prizes that participants could win in a raffle after sorting all of the items correctly were more expensive: reusable coffee mugs and water bottles. Participants were allowed entry into the raffle twice: once from the correct table sorting and once from the correct online quiz. For this case study, the raffle prize costs were approximately \$100 per semester.

6. Describe the results of this campaign component

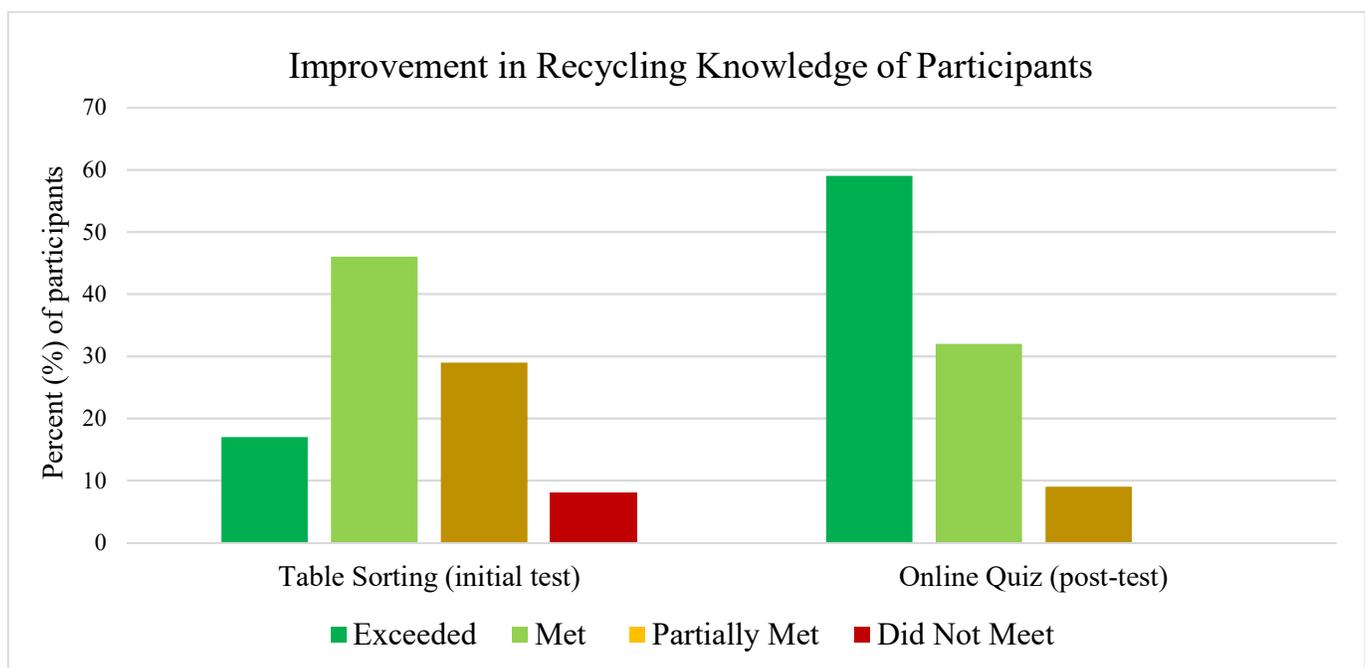
a. General results

Over the academic year, there were a total of 513 participants. The HWS campus has 2,763 students, faculty, and staff which means nearly 20% of the entire campus community participated! Not everyone decided to take the post-activity quiz online; there were a total of 245 quiz completions.

b. Specific measurable impact figures, if applicable

The results of the post-activity quiz show a large improvement in disposal knowledge compared to results from the initial table sorting! Participants were grouped into four categories based on how many of the 15 items they sorted correctly. The groups were:

- **Exceeded Expectations:** 14-15 items correct
- **Met Expectations:** 12-13 items correct
- **Partially Met Expectations:** 10-11 items correct
- **Did Not Meet Expectations:** 9 or fewer items correct



Only 17% of participants exceeded expectations initially when table sorting the objects. When asked to sort the same objects a few weeks later for the online quiz, 59% of participants exceeded expectations! The most common mistakes were putting plastic bags, bubble wrap envelopes, and paper coffee cups in the recycling bin.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

One idea we are considering is to allow participants to look at the HWS Guide to Recycling posters that are already hung throughout campus. While it would make the sorting of items easier, it may reduce the perceived effectiveness of our activity when comparing the table results versus the post-activity quiz results. The process of actively looking at posters to determine how to sort items will hopefully serve as a memory cue to help the campus always recycle correctly.

8. What advice would you give to another college?

Do it! We would highly recommend this activity to all sustainability offices at higher education institutions. It is affordable, straightforward, very effective, and engaging. Posters can be ignored, but by talking with individuals, the interaction led to recordable transfer of knowledge. Further, we found some participants were convinced they were disposing of an item correctly when they were not. Most importantly, this activity serves as a way to empower EcoReps to continue to be dedicated to waste minimization and make change on campus. Instead of complaining about the lack of recycling knowledge on campus, this activity allowed the EcoReps to get out and make a difference!

9. Photos and graphics

The following photos were taken by the Office of Sustainability at HWS, showing the tabling activity, a waste audit, and some of the prizes given out.



Figure 1: Intern with two EcoReps working at the table while a student sorts items into the different bins.



Figure 2: HWS Sustainability Manager, Michael Amadori, and two student EcoReps holding the water bottle raffle prizes at the tabling activity in the student center.



Figure 3: EcoReps performing a waste audit to identify the most commonly missed items and collect them for the tabling activity.



Figure 4: Carrying bag with metal utensils and metal straw used as a participation prize.



Figure 5: Upcycled notebooks made by EcoReps used as a participation prize. The covers are made from previously-used laminated signs; the pages were printed on one-side, collected from the library recycling bins. The print shop on campus bound the notebook together.