



2021 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

Virtual Waste Reduction Focus Groups

1. Contact info (name, department, school, email, phone)

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2. Focus of Case study (Education and Awareness Campaign)

Due to COVID-19, standard campus operations and interactions between our department and students have been severely limited. As part of our Outreach & Education efforts, hosting virtual focus groups provided an opportunity for Waste Reduction & Recycling (WRR) to

- gather information about students' waste knowledge & habits
- gather students' ideas & feedback about waste on campus
- spark conversations about waste between students
- provide team-building activities for student organizations
- provide service experience for student organizations

Eight (8) focus groups took place February - March 2021.

3. Detailed description of campaign or effort:

This campaign was motivated by the need for our office of Waste Reduction and Recycling to provide educational outreach to students AND by a student organization looking to be involved on campus in a service-learning opportunity. In January 2021, the Masters of Accounting (MAC) student organization contacted us to do some sort of service project, like a litter pick-up or waste audit (activities normally scheduled by our office each Spring). Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, all in-person group activities had been cancelled. Instead, I proposed this virtual activity as the information gleaned would assist our outreach efforts and provide a way for their student organization to safely meet and connect with one another.

To kickstart the campaign, I then presented an overview of "Waste at NC State" to the student organization and briefly discussed our office, our sustainability goals, and why waste management is important to our campus and community. I then introduced the Focus Group project to MAC and answered their questions.

Students were asked to schedule a COVID-safe meeting with up to 5 current NC State students. They did not need to belong to MAC. Together, they then went through an online Google Form featuring 41 questions sectioned into the following categories:

- Waste Reduction & You
- Waste Reduction & Others
- Composting
- Recycling
- Reuse
- Outreach

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After discussing each question, individuals would then submit their own answers using their own form. (*View the form at: [NC State Campus Focus Group: Waste Reduction](#)*) The form closed on March 15, 2021 and I then reviewed and analyzed all of the responses and populated a report for our office. (*View the report at: [Virtual Waste Reduction Focus Group Results](#)*)

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- January 2021: WRR Contacted by MAC student organization service chair regarding possible volunteer opportunities and virtually meet to discuss ideas
- January 2021: WRR writes the Focus Group questions and reviews as a team to ensure we are asking information we want to gather
- February 2021: WRR presents to MAC on “Waste at NC State” and introduces the Focus Group project to the group
- February – March 2021: MAC students conduct virtual focus groups (a total of 41 responses were returned)
- March – May 2021: WRR reviews/analyzes responses and reports to WRR team (also sends out the report to participants)

5. Resources and stakeholders involved

This project only entailed the time taken by WRR to coordinate and collaborate with the student organization, create the Google form, and analyze/report on the results. Estimated total time taken Jan. – May 2021: 40 hours

6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

- General results
 - a) Provide service learning project to NC State students that enabled them to interact with one another and kickstart conversations about their relationship with waste and campus waste reduction efforts
 - b) WRR receives feedback from students who are generally underrepresented in outreach activities, as the MAC student organization is a graduate student organization within our business school, the Poole College of Management. (A few students outside of MAC also participated representing our College of Engineering, Humanities, and Natural Resources as well). 31 graduate students and 9 undergraduate students participated in the focus groups. In general, this demographic of students is not introduced to sustainability in their courses and/or their participation in campus events (which predominantly are attended by undergraduates).
 - c) WRR now has a template for focus groups that can be rolled out as needed for other student organizations, staff, and/or faculty.
- Specific measurable impact figures
 - a) 41 NC State students were able to participate in a service-learning project
 - b) WRR learned that from this sample, majority of students employ some sort of waste reduction strategy in their lives
 - c) WRR learned that while they feel comfortable talking to people they know about waste reduction strategies; those conversations do not translate to their workplace or campus as a whole
 - d) WRR learned that few students compost with 37% stating it’s the lack of bins (access) to composting that create an obstacle for them on campus. To overcome this barrier, more education and more bins were seen as something that would encourage them to participate more.

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- e) WRR learned that most students recycle, though there is still some uncertainty as to whether or not they are recycling properly. 51% note that a lack of knowledge about recycling is an obstacle to them recycling more on campus.
- f) WRR learned that 78% of participants use a water bottle on campus. They also noted that the best reusable product to giveaway was reusable bottles. Interestingly enough, the type of reusable product that they would like to start using more of would be reusable towels/ napkins to replace paper products.
- g) Most students noted that mandatory training would be the most effective way to communicate and educate people on waste reduction at NC State.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

- I would like to provide these focus group questions to more students across campus, and even outreach to staff and faculty to participate.
- There are a few questions that I would delete but I included as I was curious, i.e. question regarding government interventions.
- I would like to host a post-focus group presentation to discuss the results and have the students talk to one another about their experiences. For this Spring session, due to the timing, I only emailed the students the report. I think there is more value in continuing the conversation through another virtual meeting (for everyone) though.

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

- Do it! There is value in just having students have these conversations with one another. It allows them to hear from their peers their thoughts and actions within waste management and can inspire one another to attempt new actions and be more mindful about waste
- The Google form is free and easy to receive all of the responses real time! By having the students fill in their own responses, you can be sure that all voices are heard (as opposed to some group focus group settings, only a few participate tending to listen more vs. actively providing their input)

9. Photos and Graphics

For this activity, we did not take any photos or release (at this time) any social media regarding the project. However, please see the attached report that highlights the activity.