



## Campus Race to Zero Waste 2023 Case Study

### Valparaiso University

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

The Valparaiso University Office of Sustainability created a pilot program in one of its residence halls to see if personal recycling containers in student's rooms would increase the recycling rate of the building.

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

During spring/summer of 2022 the Office of Sustainability completed a comprehensive audit of campus waste and recycling practices. One of the key findings was our Residence Halls has the lowest recycling rate on campus. During this audit, we found that the Residence Halls on average had a recycling rate of only 4.8%, even though 36.8% of the total waste the buildings were producing was recyclable.

In order to try to increase the recycling rate in our Residence Halls, the Office of Sustainability worked with Residential Life to create a program in which students were able to borrow a recycling can during the Campus Race to Zero Waste Competition. 43 students opted to join this program in Brandt Hall, a first year residence hall. The Office of Sustainability also used this program as an opportunity to educate students about proper recycling practices, via large posters in the trash and recycling room, signage on individual bins, speaking at a "house council" meeting, and tabling in the lobby of Brandt Hall.

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

- Spring 2022- Waste audit data was collected. This included sorting through the trash and recycling in various residence halls, speaking to students, walking through buildings and surveying trash and recycling rooms, etc.
  - Part of this audit involved removing unnecessary waste and recycling containers. By doing this we created a stockpile of extra recycling bins that were able to be used in the pilot project.

- January 2023- Campus Race to Zero Waste pre-season begins. We start tracking how much recycling each campus building is producing as a benchmark (including Brandt Hall) without telling anyone about the completion.
- Friday, January 27<sup>th</sup>- The Campus Race to Zero waste competition is announced to campus via a variety of means, including a campus wide email, posters (digital and print), and a campus newspaper article.
- Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup> and Tuesday, January 31<sup>st</sup>- We begin distributing recycling containers to students via tabling in the lobby of Brandt Hall. Students are given their choice of a 3, 7, or 10 gallon container with a list of recyclable items on it. A list of trash guidelines is also provided with each bin for students to put on their trash container in their room.
- February through March 2023- each week we measured how much recycling was being produced by each building. This allowed us to compete in the Campus Race to Zero Waste per capita recycling competition, as well as track the impacts we had on Brandt hall.
- April 2023- we sent residents of Brandt hall who took a recycling bin a survey to ask questions about their recycling habits.

**Resources and stakeholders involved:**

This program didn't require a lot of financial resources. During the waste audit that was conducted the previous year, the audit team removed over 200 unnecessary waste and recycling containers, there were plenty of extra small recycling bins available for this pilot recycling program. Staff to distribute the bins was available from the Office of Sustainability.

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

**General results:**

- In a survey conducted several months after the recycling bins were distributed, many students expressed excitement and enthusiasm about being able to keep a recycling bin in their room. Most students seemed to care about recycling, just didn't have a good way to collect it in their room.
- Due to the positive results of this pilot program, funding has been made available to supply each room with a recycling can.

**Specific measurable impact:**

- Before distributing the recycling bins, over 12% of students surveyed said that they never recycled, and 50% said they only recycled large items that didn't fit into their trash bag (such as cardboard boxes). However afterwards, 100% of respondents said that they either recycled everything that they could or recycled most recyclable items.
- We saw an average 78% increase in the amount of recycling produced in the first 5 weeks after we distributed recycling containers to individual rooms at Brandt Hall during the Race to Zero Waste Competition
- 100% of students said that they would recommend the program be expanded to other Residence Halls.

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

We want to look into more options to make recycling more convenient for students. Since we aren't able to collect recycling in plastic bags, students need to carry their recycling bin downstairs to the dumpster, and then

bring it back up. With trash, students will usually take their trash bag on the way out of the building, and not have to return upstairs with an empty trash can like they do with recycling.

One option for this that is being looked into is providing a reusable bag to collect recycling in. There would be a bin of clean bags in the trash/recycling room, and a bin to put the used bag. Students would bring their recycling down in the bag, dump it out, and put the dirty bag in the bin to be washed. They could then take a clean bag to collect their next load of recycling in.

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

One way to encourage students to recycle more is to have a competition between floors. This could be accomplished by designating a large recycling bin in the trash/recycling room for each floor and weighing each time these were dumped to see which floor has the most recycling. Initially, we wanted to implement this, but it was too much work for building services to weigh the recycling from each floor every morning.

**Photos and Graphics:**



An example of a recycling bin that was distributed to residents to use in their room



This poster was hung in trash rooms of each residence hall to promote better recycling habits