

## Portland State University, EcoReps, Portland, Oregon

### Campus Conservation Nationals 2014 Case Study



#### WHAT TYPE OF COMPETITION DID YOU DO?

Both Electricity and Water

#### DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN A GROUP COMPETITION?

No. We were thinking about participating in the Cascadia Cup and would like to consider this for the future. However, this year it was not possible due to staff turnover.

#### SCHOOL

Portland State University, Public, not a minority serving institution, 4 year, 29,000 students, Portland, OR.

#### ABSTRACT

Six Portland State University buildings participated in the Campus Conservation Nationals competition, out of 10 total residence halls. This was double the number of buildings we included in last year's challenge. PSU students averted nearly 42,000 pounds of carbon dioxide from being emitted into the atmosphere, and placed in the top 10 in the nation for energy reduction during the challenge. While Portland State did not conserve water due to a leak in one of the residence halls, the university saved 92,086 kWh through energy conservation efforts. Through this competition, the EcoReps and students in housing saved the university an estimated \$6,446 in utility costs through conservation efforts. There are approximately 3,000 students living on campus. The EcoReps team consisted of six students including the EcoReps Coordinator, as well as a board of 10 representatives from across the university. University Housing and Residence Life designated a staff member to serve as a liaison for the competition and the EcoReps. Portland State's campus dining hall, Victors, was supportive and allowed the EcoReps to coordinate our kick-off event during dinner hours. Some of our signature events included a Candlelight Dinner paired with our Sustainability Pledge, where students dine with the lights off and wrote their own pledges to live more sustainably. Over 100 students took the pledge in one night. PSU's participation in Campus Conservation Nationals also received attention from the PSU Vanguard student newspaper, which covered our preparation for the competition in its [Nov. 12, 2013 edition](#), covered our participation the three-week challenge in its [Feb. 24, 2014 edition](#), and our winning results in the [April 29, 2014 edition](#).

#### GOALS AND OUTCOMES

##### Goals

While we wanted to conserve energy and water, our CCN participation was more about educating students about why it's important to conserve and how they can do their part. As residents, they are learning 24/7. Once they are done at PSU, it is our hope that they can continue to use these skills in their lives.

We set a goal to have at least 50 students stop by each CCN event, and this was accomplished most of the time.

We didn't really set many quantitative goals because we had a turnover in the EcoReps Coordinator position. We just wanted to participate in the national competition and see what happened! We were very surprised at how well we did! We were proud that we managed to engage so many students on campus.

### **Accomplishments and Outcomes**

We did an overall good job connecting with the students on campus. In future years we will work to make our messages more clear and inclusive and add more opportunities for discussion at our supporting events. Most of our events featured information tables with EcoReps there to share the facts with students. In the future, we look forward to adding more discussion to make information sharing even more effective.

We could also have improved in our water conservation efforts and we will work to highlight that aspect of the competition more next year. We have a good relationship with PSU's very supportive utilities manager, but next year we will work with him to plan ahead so that we can have more data reported more quickly during the competition. Providing up-to-date results within our residence community will build an even greater buzz around the challenge. In addition, our campus recreation director had the idea to expand the competition to the whole campus, allowing everyone to participate. For example, some of our cardio equipment allows you to generate electricity for the lights in the building—that is pretty rad.

We also plan to work harder to ensure that participants adopt good habits that will last beyond the competition. It's hard for us to measure exactly how much students acted, because we did mostly information-sharing events. If we had more engaging events and allowed students to talk back and forth, we might get a better sense of their adoption of sustainability practices.

Water: 0

Electricity: 92,086 kWh

### **Challenges and Responses**

Our EcoReps Coordinator left the position about a month before the competition started, so the EcoReps had to pull together as a team to make sure we were ready and trained.

We are a large commuter campus, and it can be hard to get departments on board for these types of events. We worked with departments like our school newspaper to get multiple published articles before, during, and after the competition. Our publicist created excellent flyers that were distributed around the residence halls and also throughout the housing department. And we had support from specific staff within the department. One Resident Assistant made conservation a topic at an event, allowing us to distribute the message more officially. We look forward to even better communication next year—it's something our whole school can work on.

In addition, it was hard to know just how successful we were in really getting students interested and on board. Our EcoReps were still new in the fall and winter terms as we prepared and launched our participation in the challenge. By spring term, they were really comfortable in their roles and were

completing their own personally designed sustainability projects—writing blog entries for our campus green living blog and teaming up to host a workshop on green cosmetics. Next year, we will try to encourage that kind of independent planning earlier in the year so that our performance in Campus Conservation Nationals will benefit.

### **Commentary and Reflection**

Each year your school participates in CCN, you will learn more and your capacity will increase. It's surprising to see the impact grow. This year was our best yet. We started with one building, and this year we included six. Now we are considering how we can connect with all of the buildings and have an EcoRep represent each building, also expanding to the whole campus! The first year, we never would have dreamed this was possible.

Along the way, we've learned to not take it too seriously – make the events fun, and don't worry so much about the numbers. Engage students and have a good time. Make sustainability a great way to live and balance positive and negative information. You can't force anyone to participate no matter how awesome your events and marketing can be. It's up to the student to make the choice about their own lifestyle. Community building is an important aspect to both CCN and our own goals for life on campus.

### **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

#### **Leaders and Supporters**

Our small team of EcoReps divided themselves into subcommittees. The Logistics Manager read meter data, the Data Coordinator entered the data into the building dashboard program provided by CCN. Our Marketing Manager promoted CCN through social networking, and collaborated with the Sustainability Leadership Center's publicist and the communications staff at the Institute for Sustainable Solutions. Our Staff/Faculty liaison contacted professors to ask them to promote CCN in their classrooms, targeting professors we thought would be most likely to participate. In addition to these roles, our five events had event managers, who promoted and hosted our conservation programs.

While the EcoReps were in charge of Campus Conservation Nationals, the Campus Sustainability Office was conducting Recyclemania, a similar competition to reduce waste across campus and increase the use of recycling.

#### **Funding and Resources**

We pay hourly for our EcoReps Coordinator, and it is an average of 15 hours a week. We also provide internships. We had one intern receiving \$300 in winter term. She worked on social media, hosting events, and supporting EcoReps in general.

Supplies: We had \$500 set aside for materials, food, raffle prizes, etc. Also, we designated \$200 for EcoReps t-shirts.

We're still creating this year's budget and aren't sure what we will do differently. There will be minor changes. Maybe less on raffles and more on arts and craft supplies.

#### **Education and Community Outreach**

The EcoReps held four different educational programs:

- Candlelight Dinner/Sustainability Pledge: Students dined with LED candles and took personal sustainability pledges.

- Conservation Conversation: a dialogue event where students could discuss with EcoReps various ways to conserve energy and water, and why it is important to conserve.
- Logical Laundry: laundry tips were distributed to students who visited our EcoReps table, such as washing with cold water and washing full loads instead of smaller ones.
- Blackout Board Games: A celebration for the end of Campus Conservation Nationals, where we encouraged students to turn off the lights in their rooms and meet in their lobbies to play board games.

Community outreach was conducted through articles written by ISS, the PSU Vanguard, and by posters designed by our publicist. Raffle prizes were used at most of our events to encourage students to stop by. Prizes included energy efficient light bulbs, power strips that could be turned on or off, eco-friendly laundry products, and water bottles.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **Contacts**

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Expected graduation - Spring, 2017

## **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

### **Campus Sustainability History**

At Portland State University, green is more than just our color. We hold an AASHE Gold Star ranking, and are determined to incorporate sustainability into every aspect of our university. In 2008, the Miller foundation gave our school the \$25 million challenge grant to catapult PSU as a regional and national leader in sustainability research, education, and outreach. The Sustainability Leadership center was established shortly after, and has been engaging students in sustainability leadership through various task forces. The Sustainability Leadership Center is part of the Institute for Sustainable Solutions, the hub for sustainability at PSU--focusing on research, curriculum, and co-curricular activities. Our Campus Sustainability Office fosters partnerships across departments and disciplines that nourish institutional stewardship of our environment and support a growing culture of sustainability within PSU. In addition to our sustainability branches at Portland State, we offer many sustainability-related classes and degrees. Our students engage in sustainability through the Sustainability Leadership Center and many other student organizations, including the Environmental Club and Food Action Collective. Our student group that have a focus on sustainability, and all other sustainability information can be found here <http://www.pdx.edu/sustainability/>