



Going Waste-Free On Campuses

Eco Promotional Products, Inc.
Case Study, Volume Two

DOING COOL THINGS THAT MATTER

An Eco Promotional Products, Inc.
Initiative to Create Change

Colleges and universities achieve great success with their campus initiatives when they bring students together, building a strong sense of community. Eco Promotional Products, Inc. (EPP) wanted to understand how higher education institutions made progress in their waste-free campaigns with impactful tools and strategies after experiencing barriers from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Appalachian State, University of Colorado Denver, Washington University in St. Louis, American University and Lafayette College were actively leading waste-free initiatives before the shutdowns and have continued to make an impact since their campuses reopened. Learn from their experiences and discover how they overcame social, environmental, and financial barriers to promote sustainability and community engagement.

Consistent with our first study done in 2019, awareness was identified as a major challenge to reducing single-use plastics on campus. Next, budget cuts and institution size.

Campus engagement plays a vital role in spreading educational awareness. For waste-free campaigns, higher education institutions saw in-person events as a key opportunity to share the benefits of rejecting single-use plastics with giveaways in alignment with their sustainable values.

There is a strong return on investment in in-

person student events such as relationship building, rebuilding campus culture, and sparking collaboration. These interactions help combat social isolation, anxiety, and other mental health challenges experienced during the pandemic lockdowns. Students are able to engage with each other and make new friends and learn more about campus efforts to become more environmentally conscious.

During outreach events, sustainability departments use reusable promotional items for giveaways, tabling, and interactive games to reach their student body and give them the proper tools to make further progress. When students received a practical promotional product during their interaction, they were encouraged to practice more environmentally conscious lifestyles on campus and actively participate in the school's waste-free mission.

The University of Colorado Denver hosts a waste-free block party every August and "Waste Wise Wednesday" is held at the end of each month at Appalachian State University to promote environmentally friendly behaviors on campus. Both involve giving away reusable utensil kits and other waste-free prizes to participants and attendees.

In-person events also help boost collaborations with other campus departments outside of the sustainability space. For instance, Lafayette College partners with its athletic department to help curb plastic waste during sporting events. American University partners with the Office of Campus Life to eliminate plastic cups

at its Family Day event. They offer reusable cups to minimize waste. At Appalachian State University, department representatives work closely with their Student Government which has a sustainability chair. They collaborate to find data related to student interests, seek new partnerships with student-led groups, and improve communication for their waste-free campaigns.

Higher education institutions shifted their focus to promote waste-free behaviors in dining halls and on-campus eateries after reopening from the pandemic lockdowns. Dining halls and campus cafes are major sources of waste on campus, generating large amounts of single-use packaging, utensils, straws, and food waste. At The University of Colorado students bring off-campus waste to be disposed on campus since they have a large commuter population. Strategically, these were great locations to reach their target audience while presenting the value of cutting back on disposable items.

At American University, students are given reusable takeaway containers at on-campus dining locations and are encouraged to bring them back. Lafayette College has eliminated single-use to-go containers at dining halls and instead offers a free reusable clamshell program to students, faculty, and staff with meal plans.

Appalachian State University completely removed Styrofoam from campus dining halls before the pandemic lockdowns. They were able to successfully swap the plastic takeaway containers with a compostable option. After

returning to campus, the university was challenged with having to offset costs for salaries and university management, leading to the removal of the compostable options. Appalachian State has since transitioned back to compostable food containers. The campus has plans to introduce a takeaway system featuring reusable containers.

Consistent with our first case study in 2019, incentive programs are still effective in encouraging campus populations to skip single-use plastics and choose reusable products. Incentive programs continue to draw interest for going waste-free by offering students fun and interactive rewards when they make more sustainable choices.

For instance, at Lafayette College, their two cafes have different incentives: 10% off your beverage for "Bring[ing] Your Own," and getting a free sustainable product after completing their punch card. Appalachian State has a "Skip the Bag" program where students can elect to donate to student-run organizations when they reject single-use bags at the campus bookstore. During Campus Race to Zero Waste, American University experienced a 500% increase in discount usage linked to the waste-free campaign. Students saved \$1.00 off a beverage when they used reusable drinkware.

American University, Washington University in St. Louis, Appalachian State University, and Lafayette College all have incentive programs catered to their sustainability goals on campus.



with sustainability initiatives while boosting student engagement. By promoting in-person interactions and giving away functional promotional products, they encourage students to stay engaged and see the differences they are making in going waste-free. It also grants opportunities to rebuild campus culture, encourage more social interactions, and start collaborations with other departments. The strong social and environmental returns add tremendous value to higher education institutions and their waste-free campaigns.

We are eager to see how higher education institutions continue to expand their reach, especially with communities outside of the sustainability space. Departments use educational resources to attract potential collaborations and share the benefits of going waste-free. We are curious if this approach is enough to bring more departments on board. Will this bring more success to waste-free campaigns in higher education? How will higher education track its impacts?

Eco Promotional Products, Inc. (EPP) has learned how building a sense of community and promoting educational awareness are two consistent values in waste reduction campaigns.

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Rewards programs offer students the opportunity to encourage peers to join in on the fun while making a positive environmental impact. Most of these incentives are active throughout the academic year, allowing students to incorporate sustainable actions as a part of their daily routines on campus. Incentive programs can also bring attention to on-campus eateries which can boost the local economy and increase student engagement.

While the pandemic shutdown had an impact on university efforts to eliminate single-use plastics, it was not the main barrier to the initiatives. Appalachian State University, Washington University in St. Louis, American University, Lafayette College, and University of Colorado Denver continue to make progress

