UNH On-Campus Waste Programs
Research, Assessment, and Engagement

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Abstract

In striving to be a more sustainable institution of higher education, the University of New Haven has supported this summer research project to quantitatively and qualitatively examine the state of its waste programs. These programs include solid municipal waste and the university's relatively new single stream recycling program. Benchmarking of waste and single stream recycling disposal on campus for fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013 found that UNH had a recycling rate of approximately 8.7% for FY 2011, 9.3% for FY 2012, and 9.4% for FY 2013. The creation and launch of a 23-question anonymous survey garnered more than 500 responses. The on-going analysis of this survey's results is on track to produce a report in the spring of 2014, which will be presented to the university's Facilities Department. A thorough understanding of the programs' current state helps to ensure that improvement strategies will be well-advised, appropriately targeted, and effective. Such groundwork will contribute to the goal of creating a more sustainable campus at the University of New Haven.

Introduction

The University of New Haven (UNH) continues to pursue and attain sustainability goals on campus.

The campus began instituting single stream recycling (SSR) in 2009, switching from a program of sorted recycling for common items such as paper, cardboard, glass, aluminum, plastics, etc. The transition from a sorted recycling program to an SSR program was driven by the campus's waste contractor, All American Waste, which initiated the switch to SSR. All American Waste explained

time staff and faculty were converted to full-time equivalents using the conversion ratio of 1/3. Part-time students who do not reside on campus were also converted to FTE using this ratio. The only part-time campus members who were not converted to an FTE were part-time students who reside on campus.

Assessing the intangible aspects of the campus recycling and waste programs was more difficult. While it is easy enough to determine what is available in the form of waste and recycling receptacles, associated signage, and other disseminated information, it was not so straight-forward determining how the users interact with and perceive these and other aspects of the programs. The Facilities Department was able to provide insight into areas of the programs that suffered the most from inefficiencies or miscommunication, but specifics as to why these occurred was less clear.

A survey was developed to better understand attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of those using the UNH waste programs. The goal was to determine how users interact with the program infrastructure as well as how aware they are of the supporting information that is disseminated. Due to the fact that UNH was not disseminating much information about the specifics of recycling and waste disposal, the survey also had questions about what methods of i
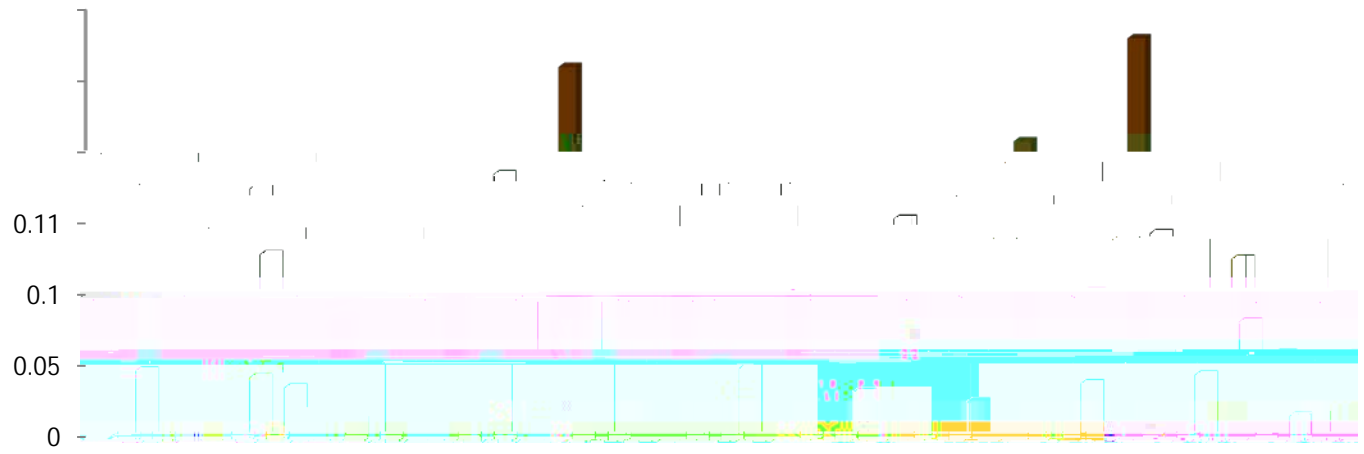
Figure 1: Waste per FTE for the University of New Haven in Comparison with the Sierra Club's 2013 "Ten Coolest Schools."

Figure 2: Recycling Rate of the University of New Haven in Comparison with the Sierra Club's 2013 "Top Ten Coolest Schools."