



**University of Chicago**  
**Chicago, Illinois**  
**Transportation –Bike Share Program**

**SCHOOL**

The University of Chicago is a private, 4-year institution with approximately 5,134 undergraduates and 10,492 graduate, professional, and other students.

**ABSTRACT**

Launched in Fall 2009, the University of Chicago's bike share program, **recycles**, provides bikes for students, faculty, and staff to borrow for a day free of charge. Campus bike programs have multiple benefits including decreasing waste and pollution, improving the landscape, encouraging healthy living, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the use of single-occupancy vehicles. Moreover, **recycles** is a great way to introduce alternative transportation and related sustainability initiatives to the campus, it builds community, and helps develop healthy, lifelong habits.



Managed by the Office of Sustainability, **recycles** partners with a local nonprofit, Blackstone Bicycle Works, which provides refurbished bikes for this low-tech program. Within the first year, **recycles** had nearly 1,000 registered users and currently there is an average of over 100 bike rentals each week.

The bike share program operates for eight to nine months each year and closes during the winter. The winter closing date is determined by weather and safe riding conditions while the re-opening coincides with the start of the University's Spring Quarter.

**GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

In addition to building a culture of cycling on campus by making bikes easy to access and thus, make bicycling more appealing, **recycles** was designed to be a fun way to encourage sustainable actions—particularly using alternative transportation—to the University community. It was very important that the bike share program be free, user-friendly, and not burdensome for those checking in/out bikes at the four locations on campus.

Over the next several years, we intend to expand the **recycles** bike share program by making more groups of people eligible for rentals (i.e. alumni and temporary employees), as well as increase the number of bicycles in the fleet. We are considering offering extended rentals and may open up a bike shop or install a do-it-yourself repair station for the campus community. We have created these longer-term program goals based on user feedback.

## Accomplishments and Outcomes

We have been pleasantly surprised with the interest in and commitment to **recycles**, with over 1,300 registered users as of August 2011 and an average of over 100 rentals per week. Overall, the University has experienced an increased interest in cycling and commitment to cycling infrastructure, leading to an Honorable Mention designation as a Bicycle Friendly University from the League of American Bicyclists.

Participation in the City of Chicago's annual Bike to Work Week increased by 77% and this has also motivated more

employees to cycle to work, as demonstrated by the increase in the number of Bike Commuter Benefit Memberships sold and anecdotal information. Furthermore, students have become actively involved with **recycles** program development. Last year, several students suggested adding a tandem bicycle to the fleet and also raised the money for its purchase.



Community building and the development of lifelong habits are another outcome of the bike share program. Not only has **recycles** cultivated relationships with campus program partners and Blackstone Bicycle Works, it has expanded the reach of the Office of Sustainability across campus and into the neighboring communities, facilitating the introduction and support of sustainability programs and related initiatives. Moreover, several departments have established staff-only bike share stations to encourage cycling to meetings, working towards developing long-lasting, healthy habits.

The Office of Sustainability receives many inquiries from peers about **recycles** and the program has been highlighted in numerous local and national publications.

## Challenges and Responses

The major challenges we have encountered are fairly minor: members not returning bikes on time, losing the keys to the bike locks, and not correctly locking the bikes. In order to encourage program participants to return bikes in a timely manner, we worked with the Registrar's office to introduce a fee and penalty schedule. We also worked with the legal department to ensure that we are able to enforce the schedule. We exchanged our small key chains for larger, sturdier ones, which decreased the number of lost bike lock keys. We have also recently started a random bike lock audit to give immediate feedback to users regarding proper locking procedure.

Another challenge we have encountered is ensuring bikes are consistently checked in and out at locations where employees rotate in shifts and their primary responsibilities are not bike share-related. We worked with our program partners (e.g. a residence hall director, library manager) at each bike share location to eliminate Administrator error and provided step-by-step "how to" directions for Administrators to reference during bike transactions. Program partners offer regular **recycles** system re-training to their employees and the bike share mechanic checks in with the bike share locations on a weekly basis to address concerns or needs.

## Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

**recycles** encourages the University community to try two-wheeled transportation, whether that's attending a meeting or class across campus, running errands in the neighborhood, or going for a

leisurely spin. Utilizing bicycles for transportation as an alternative to automobiles reduces greenhouse gas emissions associated with cars. In coming years we may attempt to track the GHG emissions reduced by users of the **recycles** program.

### **Commentary and Reflection**

The **recycles** bike share program has been resoundingly successful for several reasons. It accomplished our three main goals: it's free, low-tech, and user-friendly. It has had many other unexpected benefits, such as drawing attention to broader campus sustainability efforts, building good will for environmental efforts, and making cycling accessible to those who can't afford their own bikes.

User feedback is taken into serious consideration and drives the changes made to the program. Furthermore, building a true partnership with a local non-profit has strengthened the University's relationship with the surrounding community and using refurbished bicycles brings the **recycles** concept full circle. For more information on how **recycles** was created and is currently managed, [click here \(PDF\)](#).

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

The Office of Sustainability spearheaded the planning, organization, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of **recycles**. Yet the success of the program wouldn't be possible without the following partners:

- Blackstone Bicycle Works—provides refurbished bicycles for the program; a graduate of their apprenticeship program is the bike mechanic and maintains the **recycles** fleet
- Bike Share Program Partners—four different academic and staff buildings are bike share locations on campus and their front desk staff manage checking bikes in and out
- Information Technology Services—assist with integrating **recycles** website with University website
- CityRyde—bike share consulting firm that provides planning, development and ongoing management advice and services for the **recycles** bike share program, as well as provides ongoing software support
- University Legal Counsel—aids with drafting contracts, waivers and policies
- University Communications Department—helps with branding and marketing program
- The Dean of the College is an advocate of the program, as are the University Architect and Associate Vice President for Facilities Services, and the Assistant Vice President for Campus and Student Life.

### **Funding and Resources**

The project is fully funded by the Office of Sustainability. The capital expenses for the program included 20 bicycles, locks, software, marketing, and designs. The bikes are \$200 each, many of them abandoned on campus and then refurbished by Blackstone Bicycle Works. A sustainability program coordinator spends half her time managing the bikeshare program and the part-time bike mechanic. This program is partially supported by a grant. Additional information regarding program costs is available upon request.

The bike share program idea received overwhelming support from the University and was made a priority for the Office of Sustainability. Because the University community was enthusiastic about the

program, bike parking space outside of bike share locations was easily identified and a space in the Facilities Services' building was identified for the bike mechanic to set up shop.

### **Education and Community Outreach**

Outreach efforts include the following:

- Designing and maintaining **recycles** webpage on the Office of Sustainability website
  - Developing a bicycling safety resource, available online
  - Providing other online bicycling resources, including rules of the road, maps indicating bike parking and routes
- Advertisements in student newspaper (online and hard copy) at the start of each Fall and Spring Quarter
- Program information included in accepted student resource and new student orientation week packets
- Program information disseminated at all resource fairs (new student, graduate student, family resource, new faculty, etc.)
- Flyers at bike share locations on campus
- Mentioned in all Office of Sustainability presentations, both on and off-campus
- Information included in New Employee Orientation power point presentation

Program outreach is augmented through the provision of **recycles** swag, including buttons and stickers.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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### **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

#### **Campus Sustainability History**

The University of Chicago is working to make our campus more sustainable through the efforts of the Office of Sustainability and its partners. The Office is engaging students, staff, and faculty in developing sustainable practices and policies. Below are just some of the initiatives the Office of Sustainability and its partners are working on to make UChicago more sustainable:

- The University has a Sustainable Building Policy and two LEED Gold buildings, and recently completed its first greenhouse gas inventory.
- To reduce energy consumption, the University is making energy efficiency upgrades and implementing energy conservation campaigns in campus buildings.
- The University recycles 40% of its waste and e-waste recycling is offered every spring.
- As of Fall 2011, the University will use only cage-free eggs and compost from all dining halls and student-run cafes. UChicago will also procure more food locally, with 35% of food products purchased from a maximum of 250 miles from Chicago.

- SAGE—Sustainable Actions for a Greener Environment—is the University’s leadership program that brings dedicated individuals together to learn more about the University’s green initiatives and encourage their peers to make sustainable actions a part of their daily lives.
- Please visit [sustainability.uchicago.edu](http://sustainability.uchicago.edu) for more information.

**Image credit:** Tom McGrath