



Agnes Scott College
Decatur, GA
Environmental Education or Outreach

SCHOOL

Agnes Scott College is a private, all-women's 4-year school with 930 undergraduate students located in Decatur, Georgia.

ABSTRACT

The Environmental Residents (ERs) Program is a student-run organization that promotes sustainable living on Agnes Scott College's campus and acts as the liaison between the Office of Sustainability and the students, faculty, and staff. Since 2006, when the organization was created, the group has doubled in numbers and currently has over 20 students participating, ranging from first-years to seniors. There is at least one ER per floor of each residence hall (15 halls total) allowing them to be visible to the campus community. Their visibility is a vital step of information dissemination on a campus that is 90% residential. Because of their proximity to the actual living environments of the college, the ERs have a direct impact on the energy savings, waste diversions, and education on campus.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

The goals of the Environmental Residents are to provide knowledge and resources for the campus community to live sustainably, in addition to causing students, faculty and staff to stop and rethink their impact on our campus and within the rest of the world. Our goals for the next 2-3 years are to have a thriving organization and an increased interest in our activities across campus.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

We have met our goals of expanding our program participation numbers, and while we want to have healthy retention and recruiting rates, the ER program has the unique opportunity of also functioning as the college's primary environmental club. Because of that, the ERs are able to plan activities centered on educating and promoting awareness of environmental issues. For example, the ERs host two major weeklong events—Recycling Week during the fall semester and Earth Week during the spring semester. The parameters of a week of events allowed room for more creativity. We were able to educate about recycling, climate change, energy, water, etc, as well as raise money and host fun events. We had immense success on our first annual plant sale whose proceeds went to our local community garden. We also had a huge response from the campus



community to expand the sale to more times of the year and with more options of plants and herbs. We had great participation in a recycling relay race during lunch rush in the dining hall. The weeklong programs also provided excellent timing for launching or expanding existing programs. For example, the ERs expanded the Terracycle program during Earth Week and to date has sent more than 1500 chip bags to the company, more than double the bags from last year's total.

Challenges and Responses

The biggest challenge we have is dealing with our lack of budget. Many of the projects and events that we support would be easily obtained with more funding. We also have a very diverse campus community and sometimes the students feel like they are spread thin with so many events occurring on campus, so standing out is another challenge we are trying to overcome. We hope to continue to raise funds and partner with other organizations to help with our budget along with reusing materials for decorations and such, but we also want to continue to make our events as appealing to a broad audience as possible.



Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The Environmental Residents have raised awareness about doing the small things to reduce our impact on climate change. The ERs have hung posters in the dorm laundry rooms as a reminder to use cold water, clean out the lint, and hang dry as much as possible. We also host dorm competitions to see which dorm can reduce the most amount of energy usage. Agnes Scott uses a system called Dashboard to show in real-time the energy reductions, so it's a more visual, hands-on approach to addressing global climate change.

Commentary and Reflection

Since we have a very small, all residential campus, it is easier for this kind of program to thrive, but with a similar setup to an RA, other colleges and universities should be able to adopt the organization. The Environmental Residents is an application-oriented organization due to priority housing. There are nine rooms in which we provide first-choice allowing one ER per floor. Then there are another six halls for first-years and the apartments for seniors and juniors, which are based on the housing lottery. There are an unlimited number of spaces in the ER organization, but the housing is based on seniority and then seniority in the organization. Overall, we have seen more involvement within the campus community when it comes to sustainability issues since the Environmental Residents have had a larger presence on campus.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

This program was first organized by students to help collect recycling around campus. Once the school engaged in a recycling program, the organization has spread to allow more campus education. The ERs are lead by the current Office of Sustainability Fellow, Justine Schwartz who believes in building leaders, which will grow the program. Katie Thompson, Kelly Domino, and Kimberly Reeves, all rising seniors, have been involved in the leading the ERs throughout their Agnes Scott careers and hope to continue the success by allowing others to lead projects, meetings, and events.

Funding and Resources

The organization took no money to start up and has the backing of the Office of Sustainability and Residence Life. Res Life needed to be a partner with the ERs so during Hall Meetings they would have a chance to educate the students, and Res Life coordinates the priority housing, so we can make sure that there is one ER per floor. The Office of Sustainability is a great tool for the ERs and provides information, guidance, and minimal funding.

Education and Community Outreach

Not only are our events directed to the students, but also our faculty and staff, so they normally occur during our lunch hours in the only dining hall on campus where you can see faculty, staff, and students eating. Email is the communication of choice at Agnes Scott, so the ERs create appealing emails to send to the campus community, along with signs made from recycled materials. As our presence grows stronger on campus, more of the local community will also become involved with our efforts. We are fortunate to have a surrounding community that already does so much with environmental awareness, so it won't be long until they know more about the impact the ERs have on campus.

National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program

ClimateEdu: News for the Green Campus e-newsletter helps us stay in-tune to what our fellow colleges and universities are doing and give us ideas for what we can do further as an institution. Also, as a fellow, it has provided the college with better contact with the NWF and caused for more involvement.

The Fellows bi-monthly conference calls have really helped motivate me. I enjoy listening to all the successes that each of my friends and fellow peers have accomplished. When I've hit a stalling point, I hear what the others have to say and it's a bit of inspiration that helps me continue.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

Since signing the ACUPCC in 2007 and committing to become carbon neutral by 2037, Agnes Scott College has made strides in sustainability. The Office of Sustainability works in conjunction with nearly

every department on campus, from buildings and grounds, to student life, to waste management, food services, and beyond. Sustainability is truly becoming integrated into campus life.
www.agnesscott.edu/about/sustainability

Image credits: Agnes Scott College Office of Sustainability