



Macalester College
St. Paul, Minnesota
Waste Reduction

SCHOOL

Macalester is a four-year private liberal arts college located in St. Paul, Minnesota with approximately 1800 full-time students. There are 150 full-time and 70 part-time faculty members. Macalester offers a major in Environmental Studies and is a signatory of the Talloires Declaration as well as the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment.

ABSTRACT

In spring 2009, Macalester College implemented an online program known as Mac Free Swap for Macalester community members to advertise, dispose of, and obtain items. Mac Free Swap was launched in April 2009 as part of Macalester College Zero Waste Policy to reduce the amount of reusable items that are thrown away.

Mac Free Swap can be accessed through a link on the college's community network, 1600 Grand; the program allows anyone with a Macalester College email address to post an unwanted item or to respond to another's post in order to obtain an item. Items listed include appliances, furniture, art or office supplies, musical instruments, exercise equipment, and electronics. The program is a virtually cost-free; the only expenses in its setup were the time of staff and faculty who collaborated on the project. Now that they program has been established, it requires very little maintenance.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

In the short-term, Macalester College hopes to continue reduce the disposal of reusable materials, facilitate an economic way to obtain needed items, and increase the usefulness of and activity on the Macalester 1600 Grand web portal. Interim goals include developing an outreach plan to further advertise the program. The Macalester College Sustainability Office also has an interim goal of collecting user data, potentially via surveys, to accurately assess the impact of the program. The long-term vision is an expansion of the program that allows for greater detail and information sharing so that users can, for example, post pictures of their tradable items. Overall Macalester College hopes that the community's use of Mac Free Swap will increase.

Accomplishments and Outcomes

The first goal, use of Mac Free Swap, was achieved fairly quickly. In the first week and a half of the program, Mac Free Swap was used frequently, probably particularly so because its launch coincided with the beginning of the spring move-out. 15 people posted a total of 28 items in the first 9 days of the program, forms of interest were sent 62 times, and the product descriptions were viewed 1208 times.

Interim and long-term objectives have yet to be addressed owing to the young age of the program and lack of time to design studies or updates. Even though the program had a great start, the amount of items listed has decreased in the month following the end of the academic year. In order to maintain the amount of products available, the Sustainability Office is instituting a regular outreach effort to remind the community of the program, to inform them about what is currently listed, and to encourage use of the program by departments. In the fall, the Sustainability Office will continue the outreach with an emphasis

in the beginning of the year of advertising the existence of Mac Free Swap to new students. Follow-up surveys with community members who posted or received items from Mac Free Swap will help the college to analyze the impact that the program is having on greenhouse gas (GHG) emission and solid waste reduction.

Challenges and Responses

The main technical challenge of this project was designing an efficient way for Mac Free Swap members to quickly delist items. When the program was first started during the busy time of end of the semester move out, sometimes community members would still be contacting the contacts for listed items when the listed goods were already spoken for/donated. The problem was addressed in two ways. First, it was dealt with by adding a timing option when information is first listed; anyone listing an item can have it automatically taken off the list serve after a specified amount of time. Second the Mac Free Swap program was modified so that anyone who listed an item could remove it. Any similar program to Mac Free Swap should include a similar option to minimize confusion and facilitate item trading/donating.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

Mac Free Swap directly addresses the issues of global climate change by lessening the Macalester College community's collective carbon footprint and by encouraging broad, systematic thinking about the production and disposal of material goods. Mac Free Swap allows Macalester community members to interact in such a way that individuals can reduce their negative environmental impact. Staff members have already begun to reduce Macalester College's impact by expanding on the original model to offer up for trade unwanted items from their department. The Macalester Dewitt Wallace Library, for example, recently posted a notice that boxes of book ends were available for the taking.

By trading unwanted goods, the Macalester community is literally embracing the saying that one person's trash is another's treasure. Trading unwanted goods reduces the energy and emissions generated during the production and transport of new goods. Mac Free Swap is also an effective way to reduce the amount of solid waste that is land filled and the emissions, especially the potent greenhouse gas methane, generated during the decomposition process.

Commentary and Reflection

A baseline study of Macalester College's waste completed by Macalester's recycling vendor, Eureka Recycling, calculated that eight percent of Macalester's waste is reusable. A survey completed by students in the spring of 2009 found that most students surveyed were aware that they threw away reusable goods, but that the majority indicated that they did so because they were "too lazy" to take alternative action. Sixty eight percent of the same group of students indicated that an internet "free store" would be the most convenient way of donating/reusing their unwanted items.

Mac Free Swap is a model of how environmentalism can be effectively implemented in a way that is "green" in multiple senses of the word. A product free swap is cost effective, inclusive, and can have a large environmental impact. An online free swap can be especially valuable during end of the year move out from dorms when many students are forced to discard large, unwanted, and valuable items such as furniture, clothing, and electronics. When presented with the choice of a physical "store" for trading goods or an online program, Macalester students who participated in a survey ranked the actual store as their preference closely followed by an internet program as second choice. An online program was implemented at Macalester College because of logistical concerns and space constraints.

Setting up a Free Swap on your college is a relatively simple project that can have a big impact: get started today! First you might want to collaborate with other students, faculty, and staff on your campus. At the very least, you will probably need the assistance of your campus' web service. Setting up a campus

wide free swap could also be a perfect class project to study, among other topics, individual resistance to or acceptance of everyday environmental action.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

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Funding and Resources

The set up of Mac Free Swap was virtually cost free. The single expense was staff time, and this project was undertaken by already existing staff. Mac Free Swap was not supported through a NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship. Knowledge of website design and access to Macalester College's 1600 Grand Ave web portal were key resources for the success of this project.

Education and Community Outreach

The Mac Free Swap was advertised through already established methods of on-campus communication. An announcement and description of the program was included in the Macalester online daily newsletter, *The Daily Piper*. Highlighting its potential role in Macalester College's Zero Waste Move-Out at the end of the spring semester, advertisements were posted (and then recycled) around campus on bulletin and community boards. The response and interest from the community is indicated by the amount of material that was posted in the first few weeks of the program's start. Items were listed by faculty, staff, students, and departments. A wide range of items appeared: everything from bedding to furniture to compost buckets.

National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program

Free Swap was proposed and implemented by Macalester students with the help of a class and the web director and with the support of the Sustainability Office. The National Wildlife Foundation's Campus Ecology program has, through the annual case studies, given Macalester College another way to publicize this project and to provide inspiration and information to other colleges looking for ways to reduce their campuses' negative environmental impact.

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL

Campus Sustainability History

Macalester College has an active student body, which receives strong support from the college's faculty, staff, and administration. Students have been working independently, on class projects and as part of multiple campus organizations to research and implement sustainability projects. Some of the active student organizations are MacCARES (the Macalester Conservation and Renewable Society), MacBike, MULCH (Macalester Urban Land and Community Health gardening/food awareness club), the Macalester chapter of MPIRG (Minnesota Public Interest and Research Group), and MELT (Macalester Energy Leadership Team). Students have been instrumental in funding and planting two green roofs, a rain garden, enacting a wind turbine, and in encouraging the creation of a Sustainability Office.

In addition, the college is committed to becoming carbon neutral; it is a signatory of the Talloires Declaration as well as the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). To help meet this goal, the Sustainability Office was created and a Sustainability Manager, currently Suzanne Savanick Hansen, was hired in January 2007. As part of its commitment to the ACUPCC, Macalester is developing a comprehensive Sustainability Plan that will set a date for becoming carbon neutral and incorporate strategies for achieving environmental, economic, and social justice goals.

For more information, please visit Macalester College's Sustainability Website:
<http://www.macalester.edu/sustainability/index.html>.