



People and Nature: Our Future is in the Balance

National Wildlife Federation

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**Colby College
Waterville, Maine
Spring 2003, Waste Reduction**

BACKGROUND

Campus Profile

Founded in 1813, Colby is one of the nation's oldest independent colleges of liberal arts, and the first previously all-male college to offer admission to women (in 1871). Forty-eight majors are offered by 24 departments and 10 programs. Colby's Environmental Studies Program, begun in 1971, now offers an interdisciplinary major in Environmental Studies with two tracks: policy or science as well as a minor in Environmental Studies. Additionally, the Departments of Biology, Chemistry and Geology offer Environmental Science majors. These majors blend a traditional major in Biology, Chemistry or Geology with a concentration in environmental science.

The average class size at Colby is 17. The current student body consists of 1,800 students hailing from nearly every state and representing 55 foreign countries. Forty-eight percent of students are male and 52 % female. Minority students number more than 10 % of the student population. Colby employs 201 faculty who teach in 26 departments and 10 programs in continuing or tenure-track positions. There is a 10 to 1 student to faculty ratio.

Colby formalized its campus greening initiatives in 2001 with the establishment of the Environmental Advisory Group, composed of 12 members, 4 each students, administrators and faculty, to advise the President and the community on issues related to the environmental stewardship of the campus and region. The group is broadly representative of the campus and includes the top administrators dealing with finance, physical plant and environmental compliance, as well as faculty and students both in the Environmental Studies Program and outside of it. It also includes students who are active in the student Environmental Coalition and student government. The EAG meets weekly and has developed a set of guidelines for evaluating greening projects and has a website (www.colby.edu/eag) which provides updates on greening activities and on actions that college community members can take to promote sustainability.

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GOALS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Goals

Short-Term

Our goal in establishing RESCUE (Recycle Everything, Save Colby's Usable Excess) was to develop an ongoing program to reuse and recycle unwanted household items, clothing and appliances left behind by students at the end of the academic year. In addition to avoiding disposal costs for these materials, we wished to address concerns of members of the campus and local community who were upset about the waste. We also found people going through dumpsters and dorms in the spring to recover unwanted items, which caused other problems. Although Colby had a program that donated unwanted clothing and furniture to local non-profit agencies, this program did not address all of the materials left behind. We investigated the "Dump and Run" program as an alternative, but decided instead to develop our own comprehensive program in order to continue the relationships we have with the non-profits at the same time that we addressed the large volume of household goods being landfilled.

Our initial goals were to:

- Keep all usable materials out of landfills,
- Raise awareness of students about their consumption habits,
- Continue to donate clothing and furniture collected to needy local non-profit agencies,
- Cover the costs of the program through the sale of items not donated,
- Provide students with usable household goods in the fall to set up their dorm rooms,
- Involve students, staff and faculty as volunteers in directing and carrying out the project,
- Establish the program as an annual activity and fully integrate it into campus life and the relevant departments.



Getting ready for spring collection

Long-Term

- Increase involvement of residence hall staff,
- Open the sale of goods to the college and local community.

Accomplishments

We accomplished all of our goals. The program paid for itself and was implemented in an extremely professional manner by volunteers as well as paid staff. Existing relationships with non-profits were strengthened and campus awareness was raised significantly. Hundreds of items were donated to the non-profits and hundreds more sold to students to outfit their dorm rooms in the fall. Many different departments within the College participated.



Donations and collections

Challenges and Responses

The initial request came from a faculty member for Colby to participate in the national “Dump and Run” program. This was initially rejected on the grounds that Colby already had a program donating items to non-profits. After further study, it was determined that our existing program could be greatly expanded while maintaining the relationships we had developed with community organizations. The major obstacle initially was the view that we already had a program; once we tasked a subcommittee with investigating further it was apparent that we should revamp and expand our efforts and RESCUE was on its way.

ENGAGEMENT & SUPPORT

Leaders and Supporters

We established a working subcommittee of the Environmental Advisory Group consisting of six employees and students to direct the program. The subcommittee developed a logo and marketed the program to the campus community through the weekly newspaper, online newsletters and notices, “table tents” in the dining halls, posters and personal calls.

Three paid student coordinators worked a total of 164 hours, and an additional 27 people volunteered more than 400 hours. Many others “jumped in” to help for short periods of time. People who donated at least 5 hours of their time received a RESCUE t-shirt; 17 people were in that category.



First RESCUE Sale

The program was based out of the Physical Plant due to the nature of the work, and Director Patricia Murphy and her staff from Physical Plant were key in making the program a success. RESCUE also relied on the Colby Volunteer Center as a contact point for students interested in volunteering. The Dean of Students’ Office and student hall staff in the dorms were key in helping to reinforce the program. Residence hall staff helped the custodial staff put up posters and also advertised the RESCUE fall yard sale in publications (particularly to incoming first year-students) to encourage students and parents to take advantage of the sale.

Funding

Initial costs were \$2,200 for advertising, trailers for storage over the summer, paint for collection boxes, t-shirts and salary costs for student coordinators. Savings included landfill tipping fees; however, equivalent trucking fees were expended taking donated items to local non-profit agencies. Other savings were time for custodial and grounds crew staff to remove material from dorms. Our financial objective was to cover the costs of the program. When all was complete, the program covered expenses and made a net profit of \$125 (from the sale of household goods at the fall semester yard sale).

If we had not covered the costs of the program through these savings and yard sale, the College’s operating budget would have paid the costs. Due to the financial success of the program, however, that was unnecessary.

The project had support from the Administration and the Environmental Advisory Group, which advises the President and community on campus greening projects and includes students, faculty and administrators.

National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program

As new members we have not taken full advantage of Campus Ecology, but we do receive and take advantage of the monthly email updates.

CLOSING COMMENT

Involve lots of people, including students, faculty and staff. Make it fun! T-shirts and logos helped sell the program.