



## **Mercyhurst University Erie, Pennsylvania Energy**

### **SCHOOL**

Mercyhurst University Main Campus, private 4 year institution, 3029 students, Erie, Pennsylvania.

### **ABSTRACT**

In Spring 2012, Mercyhurst University held its very first energy challenge between three freshmen dorms. The purpose of the “Laker Energy Challenge” was to encourage each of the dorms to conserve as much electricity as possible in a two week period. We provided each of the dorms with promotional posters, and posted tips around the buildings every week. The winner of the competition successfully reduced their energy use by 31.7% from week one to week two of the challenge, saving 5,362.9 KWh of electricity for their building.

### **GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

#### **Goals**

When the project was first put together, our hopes were that we could save the university money through this competition and that with this extra saved money, the university could invest in green infrastructure or the money could be put back into the sustainability fund and used at a later date. We also wanted to be able to show the students that they could make a tangible difference by conserving energy. We hoped that by seeing the amount of KWh saved, the students would be able to see what impact they had on saving the college money and impacting the environment.

#### **Accomplishments and Outcomes**

Some of the goals above were achieved, while others are harder to measure. In order to see a decrease in electricity usage throughout the competition, the baseline needed to be changed. Because the weather was so different from this year to last, our original baseline in which we used data from last year between April 22-May 5 didn't work. We thought it was much more practical and would produce the best results if we looked at the energy data given at the start of the competition and compare it to the end number. This way we could see if the students really did work to decrease their electricity use throughout the challenge. The best idea would probably be to have collected energy data from April 22-May 5 from at least four or five years prior and then average out the five years of data to get a solid number of energy use. It's difficult to come up with a perfect baseline number of energy usage, so experimenting with different baselines and picking the best option for your campus is most practical. I am not sure that our project directly impacted wildlife and our natural environment, but by reducing the amount of energy our freshmen use in their dorms, we burned fewer fossil fuels that would have otherwise gone into the air and harmed wildlife.

#### **Challenges and Responses**

We did encounter a number of obstacles while going through this project. Our number one obstacle was lack of resources. We didn't have the money or manpower to put together a project that would get the

entire freshmen class's attention. We used free publicity to get the word out there by printing out flyers and energy saving tip sheets that we hung in the freshmen dorms. We also asked for resident assistants to help us by spreading the words in their residence halls. We were able to put reminders in the "Tuesday Afternoon," which is a publication sent out to students on a weekly basis. We reminded them about the challenge and encouraged them to save as much energy as possible. We also included tips on saving energy in the "Tuesday Afternoon." We were able to use money from a number of departments to award the winning dorm with free pizza and soda, which was their incentive for saving energy. Not as many students showed up as we would have wanted to, so it would have been nice to have planned some type of a dance party or larger event for then, but again, we didn't have the resources. In the future if we plan this type of event, I think we should get more of campus involved in the planning so that we have more resources and possibly more funds to give a better incentive to students entered into the competition. Another challenge we had was getting the word out to the freshmen that lived in the residence halls. We did our best to put up posters, pass the word along to resident assistants and post the competition in campus publications, but by the end of the event many students still were unaware of the competition. I think the only way to combat this unawareness would be if we posted the event and possible incentives a month or two before the competition started. Another idea would be to announce the competition at sporting events and other activities students attend on a regular basis.

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

Our project directly addressed global climate change because it worked to reduce our emissions by saving electricity in the freshmen residence halls. Two out of the three residence halls in the competition successfully reduced their electricity usage. Warde Hall started out producing 17386 KWH of electricity in the first week and by week two they reduced their KWH to 15287.175 kWh. Warde Hall had a total reduction of 2,098.83 KWH or and 12% reduction from week one to week two. Baldwin Hall, the women's residence hall on campus was our grand prize winner. They started out producing 16,895 KWH of electricity in week one and by week two they reduced their electricity use to 11532.012kWH. This came out to be a total reduction of 5,362.99 KWH of electricity or a 31% reduction! By reducing the amount of electricity used in Mercyhurst freshmen residence halls, we effectively reduced the amount of fossil fuels being burned to power electricity in those buildings.



**Laker Energy Challenge**

**Saving Energy**



**To Save the Planet**

Do you live in McAuley, Warde, or Baldwin Residence Hall?

How Much Energy Can YOU Save??

Be part of the **Lakers Energy Challenge** by conserving energy in your residence hall from **April 22nd – May 5th!**

*\*Energy saving tips will be sent to your room weekly\**

For more info contact Energy Corps Member Allison Ellick @ 814-824-2372 or [aelick@mercyhurst.edu](mailto:aelick@mercyhurst.edu)



### **Commentary and Reflection**

Because this was a pilot program, many parts of the challenge were experimental and some may not work as well for other campuses. Depending on the size of your campus and the amount of student involvement you want, your competition guidelines may vary. A number of items need to be considered when doing an energy competition or challenge: you need to establish a baseline on which to measure your new data against. You need to create media attention and awareness on campus to get students involved in the competition. You need to hold events or activities that will engage students and inform them on how to save energy. You also need to come up with a reliable source that will tell you how to best measure the electricity data within each residence hall. The first time you hold this competition it

may not work out the way you planned, but hopefully you will learn from the experience and can use what has been written above to help hold your first campus energy challenge.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

The groups and departments that were involved in this project were our maintenance program, specifically our engineer Thomas Skarupski. He provided us with the numbers for our baseline and gave us updated KWH sheets throughout the challenge. We also had a lot of help from Resident Life resident advisors and hall directors. The key staff from resident life that was involved was Violet Fields, Jen Grisnik, Jacob Gdovin and Michelle Clemens. Brittany Prischak from the Sustainability Office was a big help as well. Her office provided our funding for the entire project (the cost of the pizza party).

### **Funding and Resources**

Our project cost between \$350-400, which was used for the pizza. We purchased 30 pizzas, drinks, cups and plates. The intent was to feed approximately 150 people. The funding was given to us through the Sustainability Office.

### **Education and Community Outreach**

Our community was not involved in the project. It was an internal project that really only involved the freshman and their Resident Advisors. If we do the competition again, we hope to do a campus wide energy challenge so that we can get the entire campus community involved.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **Contacts**

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## **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

### **Campus Sustainability History**

Mercyhurst University strives to incorporate sustainability into everyday life here on campus. We have a Sustainability Office run by Brittany Prischak, our campus's Sustainability Officer. We also have an Energy Corps/ AmeriCorps member on campus that helps to enhance the sustainability initiatives on our campus. The campus has purchased two compost tubs through *Earth Tubs*. Composting on campus will begin as early as this fall. We have also instituted trayless dining in our dining halls. We have a solid recycling program that is enforced as well as Pepsi Dream Machine™ on campus that allows students to receive coupons for recycling their plastic and aluminum. Mercyhurst participates in the nationwide RecycleMania competition every year and it has also established a program called Trash to Treasure that collects miscellaneous items from students and donates them to local charities. Mercyhurst also has a

student and employee run farm out at its West Campus that provides food for campus and community farmers markets.

Image Credit: Allison Elick