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Cornell University Competes to Reduce in This Year's Campus Conservation Nationals

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As the energy conservation intern in Cornell University's Sustainability Office, I was privileged to lead Cornell through its pilot year participating in Campus Conservation Nationals! When we first decided to participate in the competition, we didn't know what to expect. Unsure of the savings we could make as well as the challenges we would face, we began to put together a vision for our campus-wide energy conservation competition.

As my co-workers and I began to plan the spring semester from a sustainability perspective, we realized we were in for a busy semester - Campus Conservation Nationals, RecycleMania and Sustainability Month. We decided that it would be best to combine the Campus Conservation Nationals and RecycleMania efforts to create a larger Compete to Reduce initiative. This initiative was created with the intent to be an all-inclusive sustainability program and benefit from co-marketing. Our campus wide marketing scheme included creative advertising like videos and posters.

We decided to kick the Compete to Reduce competition off on Feb. 6, 2012, two weeks after the spring semester began. We tried to appeal to all audiences on campus by hosting three kick-off events. We hosted a trivia night including sustainability bonus questions at a local bar with over 40 in attendance, a "Do It In The Dark" party at the Alpha Delta Phi Fraternity house with a large crowd, and a tabling event in an academic atrium in which students and faculty pass and congregate. Those in attendance were entered to win a Campus-To-Campus bus ticket from Ithaca, NY to Manhattan.

Prior to the kick-off activities, I spent a significant amount of time educating the campus and student groups about the energy conservation competition and recruiting meter readers. I reached out to Greek organizations, sustainability clubs, class councils, cooperative housing, EcoReps and many other student groups. Through this process I found 27 committed meter readers and many more conservationists!

To ensure that the meter readers had an accurate baseline of energy use and easy access to the meters in all 85 residence halls, Mike Boggs from our utilities department and I set out on a three day journey all over campus (as well as off campus) to find the meters and take a baseline reading! It was an exhausting process, but for the first time, we compiled meter locations, serial numbers, and constants. We were also able to get square footage and occupancy for all North Campus Dorms, West Campus Dorms, Cooperatives, Theme Houses, Sororities and Fraternities. We were finally ready to rock and roll!

During the course of the competition, the top 25 energy reducing residences saved 7,591 kWh over three weeks, which is equivalent to a $1,213.64 savings and 6,881.13 pounds CO_2 averted from the atmosphere. Building users employed tactics like turning off the lights, using cold-water laundry, turning off power strips, and air drying clothing. We were proud to name winners in several different categories!

- Grand champion: Alpha Xi Delta (24.3% reduction)
- Best Sorority: Alpha Xi Delta (24.3% reduction)
- Best Fraternity: Delta Tau Delta (5.0% reduction)
  Best Cooperative: Watermargin (3.4% reduction)
- Best West Campus Building: North Baker and Baker Tower (3.3% reduction)
- Best Theme House: Ecology House (2.7% reduction)
- Best North Campus Building: Jameson (1.8%)

The Alpha Xi Delta sorority was honored at the Recycle Your Tied Gala on Tuesday, March 27, 2012 with the inaugural plate on the Cornell Campus Conservation Nationals trophy sponsored by the Cornell Chapter of Engineers for a Sustainable World! They will also be rewarded with a BBQ on the lawn of their sorority with a special guest attendee.

All and all this year's Compete to Reduce competition was an excellent pilot initiative from which Cornell's Sustainability Office has learned a lot. Now we have the requisite information about meters, we better know how to engage students and acquire accurate meter reads, and feel ready to meet the Campus Conservation Nationals challenge again next year!
Below is some media coverage on the competition:

http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Feb12/Compete2Reduce.html

http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/March12/ContestResults.html

http://cornellsun.com/section/news/content/2012/03/15/cu-competes-reduce-energy-use

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