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Mixing It Up: Collaborating with Campus Students and Staff to Promote Sustainability via a Large Library Display

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Mixing It Up

Collaborating with Campus Students and Staff to Promote Sustainability via a Large Library Display

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This recipe outlines how librarians from a mid- to large-sized university or college library can build connections with the campus sustainability office and student organizations to promote sustainability in the community. The project lays the groundwork for increased communication between the library and other campus departments and opens up campus-wide discussion about our impact on the environment. In this case, the recipe was used to create an Earth Month library display, but it could be modified to accomplish other programming goals as a campus-wide collaborative effort.

NUMBER SERVED

This recipe is best for mid- to large-sized universities or colleges that already have a sustainability office or program, as well as some students interested in promoting sustainability. A coordinating librarian and space for a display are also necessary, but other resources listed below are optional and could be replaced by other objects.

COOKING TIME

4–6 weeks

INGREDIENTS AND EQUIPMENT

- Display or event space
- One or more coordinating chefs (i.e., librarians)
- Marketing material from campus sustainability office
- Donated materials from student groups, including examples of student work, marketing materials, etc.
- Single-use plastic items paired with reusable alternatives (plastic straws and metal or wooden straws, plastic bags and cloth bags, etc.)
- Blackboard (or whiteboard)
- Sustainability-related books
- TV or screen for showing sustainability-related videos from the collection (with licensing permission)
- “Special” recycling bins (for batteries, plastic bags, etc.) from the library that can be moved to the display space

PREPARATION

- Establish relationship with sustainability office or officer, as well as student sustainability group on campus; may require sitting in on a student group meeting and explaining what resources the library can offer.

- Determine when to facilitate display. Options include
 - Preservation Week (around April 21)
 - Campus Sustainability Day or Month (late October or the month of October)
 - World Water Day (around March 22)
 - Sustainability Month (April)
 - Earth Day or Month (late April or the month of April)
- Reserve display space.
- Coordinate with library marketing staff member or team to determine a theme for display.

COOKING METHOD

1. Assemble the library-supplied ingredients for your display: relevant books from the collection, signage, a blackboard or whiteboard with a question such as “What do you do to be greener?” and a TV with a relevant video playing at busy times, if appropriate.
2. Now you can begin adding objects and materials from your collaborators. Once you have completed the hard work of establishing a relationship with campus sustainability advocates, explain to them what space you have

available for a display. Ask them what materials they can offer and how they envision displaying them. You may find that many students in your campus sustainability student group study environmental studies or science or life or earth sciences; these students may be excited to share local rock and plant samples as examples of the ecological systems the campus community depends on.

3. Collaborators can also be a good source of suggestions for books to include in the display. If you decide to focus on, for instance, alternatives to single-use plastic in your display, find both plastic items and their sustainable alternatives for each (see Ingredients section for examples). The students may be excited to contribute their own examples.
4. The sustainability officer may also be able to provide marketing materials for relevant sustainability initiatives on campus, such as examples of compostable materials used on campus, marketing material, and other items.
5. In the display space, include recycling bins for more unusual materials to be recycled, such as batteries and plastic bags, if your library offers such services.
6. It may help to complete the display in conjunction with a large-scale sustainability event, if your campus offers one. Attendees can then be encouraged to stop in to the library and see the dis-

play, which also increases library traffic.

7. Invite the student group to help set up the display space and choose what will go where. This can help them feel a sense of ownership for the display and get them excited about the final product.

ALLERGY WARNINGS

Involving students in creating a library display can be very rewarding. However, you may need to tactfully focus their ideas to avoid having a very haphazard collection of items. If you include student-owned work or items in the display, be prepared to remove the items at the end of the school year if students are leaving for the summer and need them back.

As with any program that includes soliciting responses with a blackboard or whiteboard, you will need to keep an eye on it in case inappropriate comments appear.

As you choose books to be included in the display, you may find that some recommended titles are not in your collection. This is an opportunity to justify building your sustainability collection.

We thought it would be visually stimulating to include a TV with several videos from our Kanopy collection playing, but playing these videos all day used quite a bit of energy. Consider if you would like to include this in your display and, if so, whether you can put the TV on a timer to turn off at low-traffic times.

CHEF'S NOTE

While this recipe might seem simple, it can result in a high-visibility sustainability program that involves others on campus in a library initiative, resulting in lasting relationships. Your library might not have a display space that can accommodate the display as we implemented it, but the students and staff on your campus likely have materials they would love to share that would work for your display space. Combining the display with a major sustainability event and simultaneously showcasing the library's collection helps increase the impact of the effort.