Since 2009, Western Michigan University's Office for Sustainability has handed out approximately 4,000 EcoMugs per year to incoming students. By doing so, it helps reduce disposable cup use on campus and stimulate sustainable behaviors among students. Starting Fall of 2014, the Office for Sustainability will provide an option for an EcoJug. The EcoJug is 17 ounces, instead of 15 ounces like the EcoMug, and is primarily for cold beverages.

Part of the EcoMug program is to get local businesses to provide discounts to students who use their EcoMug or EcoJug. This summer, we checked with current participants to make sure everything was going well and to make sure they would also accept the EcoJug. Out of all of our participants, only a few said they were not getting many EcoMug users. The complaints were mainly from businesses downtown. We have since been brainstorming ways to better our promotion techniques so students know where they can use their EcoMugs and EcoJugs.

Thus far, three new EcoMug participants have been added to the list of participants. A new café called The Grind opened up right down the street and was very pleased to offer students 20% off beverages when they use their EcoMug. Pita Pit and Roma’s Pizza have also become participants offering free drinks when students use their EcoMug and spend a certain amount. The goal for the summer was three new participants. Even though this goal was already met, we are aiming higher than that and have seen a lot of interest in many local restaurants. We see no problem gaining a few more participants by the end of the summer.

Consumers Credit Union has been a sponsor since 2012 and will continue its sponsorship through the 2014-2015 school year. The sponsorship agreement needs to be modified to allow companies of all sizes to sponsor.
During the summer of 2014, Dining Services was able to obtain approval from the Health Department to use EcoJugs in the Dining Halls. Concern over the probability that students may contaminate the drinking machines when filling their EcoJug created a setback with the Health Department. Judy Gipper, the Director of Dining Services, helped clarify the proper filling technique for the EcoJug and provided language concerning cleanliness to be inserted into EcoMugs and EcoJugs.

Incoming students will have the choice of an EcoMug or an EcoJug this year. Students must rinse out the EcoMug/EcoJug before bringing it to the dining halls and the rim of both bottles must not come into contact with the beverage-dispensing nozzle to reduce contamination.

Fall Welcome is fast approaching and in order for the Office for Sustainability to get ready, sign up sheets have been created. We have emphasized that this is an “all hands on deck” event and we have gotten a good response from the interns as well as other volunteers.