RecycleMania & Outreach

Introduction:
Spring 2016 has been my second semester working at Western’s Office for Sustainability. My project for this semester was primarily facilitating WMU’s participation in the RecycleMania 2016 competition. I arranged for tabling events, along with other OfS staff. I also talked with students in various academic buildings and outside dining halls about how to participate and why. I was also engaged in other outreach activities and completed multiple jobs and tasks at the OfS.

Methods and Results:
RecycleMania is a two month long competition among roughly 400 campuses nationwide that recognizes the top ranked schools in multiple categories such as the Grand Champion, Gorilla, Waste Minimization, and Per Capita Classic. In order to involve students and the campus, I coordinated tabling events at several buildings to promote the competition. At these outreach events, I and other OfS staff played recycling trivia games with students, handed out free RecycleMania merchandise like recycled tote bags and notepads, and informed the campus about how to get involved and participate. We tabled between the months of February and April in which we held 6 tabling events. In total, we spoke to 46 interested students at the events, many of them being Residential Assistants talking about Ecothon and the RecycleMania posters around resident halls. Upon offering RecycleMania souvenirs, many students declined the offer of free merchandise, reasoned with the decline saying they already have many reusable bags at home. For the final results, Western ranked 160 in the Grand Champion Division.

For events such as new student Open Houses, I helped to represent the OfS. All events were held at the Bernhard Center where we spoke to high school students and their parents. In total, we spoke to 27 interested students and parents, parents being the most engaged. Normally, these events appeal mostly to the parents who ask the majority of questions. I’ve realized tabling at Open Houses can be a hit or miss whether or not we talk to many potential students.

Other small jobs I carried out include entering waste data for the office and RM competition. I also took care of WMU’s Best Way Disposal bill each month. The OfS also gives introduction to sustainability presentations to WMU classes, which I helped out with.
At the RM tabling events, we played trivia and handed out RecycleMania merchandise in order to promote the event and support a sustainable lifestyle, such as reusable tote bags.

Besides tabling for RecycleMania, I helped represent the office at new student open houses in which we strive to recruit potential students.

For the interchanging RecycleMania and Open House events, new displays had to be made and switched out. I worked to design and incorporate new formats, informational blurbs, and pictures into each display.

Commentary, Reflection, and Next Steps:

For RecycleMania, I created promotional posters that were hung in residential halls and during tabling events, many students and RA's commented on the posters. If the competition is done again in the future, promotional posters and flyers are a great initiative to inform students about specific events. Tabling for RecycleMania was very effective as well, in the future, it would be most beneficial to table at dining halls during the dinner rush hour or in academic buildings between passing periods, such as Sangren. Sangren houses many large lecture classes and in between them, many students walk through the halls.

At the Open Houses I believe it's important to showcase many pictures on the display, rather than large blocks of text. This past semester, I rewrote and cut down the previous informative blurbs on the display in order to make them easy to the reader's eye. In doing this, I've noticed, I, or other staff, can lead a more engaging conversation with the viewer regarding the OfS and our projects.