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Bleeding Green: RecycleMania Strengthens Sustainability at IWU

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – This semester, the Titans proved their green spirit extends beyond the athletic arena.

In January, Illinois Wesleyan University's campus dining service Sodexo joined forces with Illinois State University (ISU) and others to participate in a composting program diverting leftover food away from the county landfill and onto an ISU farm in Lexington, Ill. for reuse. Since the effort began, it has saved over 35,496 pounds of food from the Bertholf Commons, faculty dining areas and large catering events. IWU Director of Government and Community Relations Carl Teichman, who served as co-coordinator of IWU's environmental council GREENetwork during the 2010-2011 academic year, reported that the project could soon expand to include Tommy's and the DugOut.



REC student members (left to right): Ryan Flis '12, Liz Kuehn '13, Hayley Harroun '13, Megan George '13, Kari Grace '11 and Emmy Grace '11.

In February, the same green mindset driving the composting program prompted the Recycling Education Committee (REC), a branch of GREENetwork, to join the national RecycleMania initiative. Held at colleges across the country for a 10-week period each spring, RecycleMania aims to reduce waste production by ranking and rewarding schools based on recycling skills.

According to recent IWU graduate Kari Grace, who served as GREENetwork co-coordinator alongside Teichman, RecycleMania was the perfect opportunity to involve the entire campus community in a painless sustainability effort. "Recycling is something everyone knows about," she said. "It's kind of the bare minimum of taking care of the environment, so it's a good place to start."

"It's a great educational tool because recycling is one of those environmental responsibilities that doesn't take a whole lot of effort," said Teichman.

Both Grace and Teichman credited REC chair and RecycleMania coordinator Jennifer Joseph-Morris with the competition's success this year. "RecycleMania encourages students, faculty and staff to become more aware of their recycling habits," said Joseph-Morris, who also serves as resident director of Harriett Fuller Rust House and Pfeiffer Hall. "Recycling needs to become a part of our lifestyle. Continuously educating the community on the topic can only help."

This year, GREENetwork chose to enter the competition's Benchmark Division, a four-week "trial run" enabling IWU to "take baby steps to figure out how to implement RecycleMania on our campus," Joseph-Morris said. Between Feb. 14 and March 11, residence halls competed to collect the largest amount of recyclables—including aluminum, plastic, paper and cardboard—per resident.

However, even in its practice version, Joseph-Morris referred to RecycleMania as "an enormous undertaking" requiring much work from students, REC members, residence hall custodians and physical plant representatives—not to mention warehouse space for contamination inspection and the immense amount of time required to label and weigh every recycling bag.

Joseph-Morris explained that over the course of RecycleMania, REC member Ryan Flis, '12, weighed the recycling bags and examined each one for contamination, disqualifying those more than 10 percent contaminated. "Trash should never be put in recycling because it causes the entire bag to be unusable, and food containers need to be rinsed out before they are recycled," said Joseph-Morris.

Joseph-Morris also reported campus-wide confusion regarding which plastics can actually be recycled (for more information about recycling contamination and what counts as "recyclable," see box below). According to Teichman, Sodexo is in the process of replacing non-recyclable containers at the DugOut and other on-campus dining locations with compostable fiber- and paper-based materials.

This year's RecycleMania winner, Harriett Fuller Rust House, collected 395 pounds of recyclables—3.76 pounds per person—and earned public recognition at the Shirk Center's Sustainability and Wellness Expo on April 9 as well as a free pizza party the following evening. According to Joseph-Morris, Gulick, Munsell, Dolan and Dodds halls also performed well, collecting over 300 pounds of recyclable materials each. The combined weight of recyclables from all residence halls over the course of the competition amounted to over 2,500 pounds.

"I think the program will contribute to future success. If RecycleMania is implemented each year on campus, students will become more aware of how their behaviors can have a positive impact on the environment," said Joseph-Morris.

And IWU is already trying to head in that direction. In addition to starting the composting program and participating in RecycleMania, current green initiatives include designing the new Main Classroom Building to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver standards and considering installing electric car charging stations at the Minor Myers, jr. Welcome Center, as well as implementing a new recycling initiative for the Inter Fraternity Council that will reward each year's "greenest" fraternity with a \$500 stipend for house improvements. And Grace, who participated in an Action Resource Center internship focusing on paper wastefulness this spring, hopes to see software installed that reduces abuse of IWU's free printing policy by limiting each student's number of printed pages to a "reasonable amount," she said. "Maybe 300 or 400 pages per semester, and after that we would charge a few cents per page."

Joseph-Morris hopes IWU will continue to build on this year's sustainability success. "RecycleMania can be used as an umbrella for all areas of sustainability," she said, praising not only the offices of Residential Life and Student Activity for their efforts during the competition but also student committee members Grace, Flis, Olivia Campbell and Emmy Grace, '11, and Megan George and Liz Kuehn, '13.

For more information about RecycleMania and what you can do to contribute to future green efforts at IWU, please visit GREENetwork's website at www.iwu.edu/greenetwork or the blog at blogs.iwu.edu/green/.

Learning from RecycleMania: Tips to Avoid Recycling Contamination

- If non-recyclable materials or trash is added to recycling, the entire bag becomes unusable for recycling
- Common sources of contamination:
 - greasy pizza boxes
 - dirty soda and coffee cups

- unrinsed food containers with residue

- Plastic salad and sandwich containers from the DugOut are not recyclable, nor is any container marked with a #6
- Bloomington-Normal recyclable containers are marked with #1-5 or 7
- Wax cups from DugOut and Coffee Shoppe are not recyclable, but they are compostable
- Plastic bags and batteries can be recycled at hall desks

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