Final Report

Katie Donnelly Moran
Ecolympics Intern
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Introduction

Ecolympics is a three-week electricity and water competition between college dorms, co-ops, and Oberlin Public Schools. Oberlin also participates in a nationwide conservation competition: Campus Conservation Nationals (CCN). During the three-week competition, environmentally focused events (speakers, screening, activities) are held. Individual and dorm participation at these events are tallied and rewarded. The dorms that participated the most, conserved the most water, and conserved the most electricity are rewarded with ice cream prizes and an infrastructural prize. As one of the two Ecolympics interns, I helped to plan events and prizes and helped to oversee the events. It was the first year we both held the position.

Accomplishments

- **Funding:** We wrote and received a grant from EnviroAlums and from the Green EDGE Fund for raffle prizes and infrastructural prizes, respectively. We also received contributions from some of the co-ops by reaching out to the co-ops’ treasurers and attending the co-ops’ money nights to ask the co-op for money. We got a contribution from Fairchild in the fall semester and from Pyle, Harkness, and Tank in the spring semester. The history department also gave us $500 to bring an environmental historian to campus to give a guest lecture.
- **Speakers:** I brought two professors from local schools to give guest lectures on what they focus on: local food systems and medieval environmental ethics.
- **Events:** We put on and publicized over 30 environmentally themed events in the span of three weeks! I worked with the Communications & Web Initiatives intern to help publicize the events. And I put on a toothpaste making workshop.

Challenges

Work was very abstract in the fall as the main goal was getting prepared to plan for Ecolympics in the spring. It would have been better to do more work upfront in the fall in order to have a better base in the spring. It would have been better to reach out to companies to ask to be sponsored earlier, because that takes time and should definitely be more of a main focus early on. Also as a first year, I did not fully know and thus was not able to anticipate what would have made the spring easier. I think the fall should also be used more as an opportunity to brainstorm what conceptually we would like Ecolympics to focus on. I think it would work better to have fewer but more intentional events.
As a first year, I did not have as many connections to student groups and organizations as Peter, the other Ecolympics intern, did, so he took on reaching out to many student organizations. I think it was hard for him to follow through with all of those organizations, so I wish I had been able to better support him with that.

The actual three weeks of Ecolympics was overwhelming and busy. Over spring break I had gotten ahead on readings for some of my classes, but it was still hard to be completely on top of all of my assignments.

I think we also struggled this year to get a lot of participation from the majority of campus. It would have been easier to really publicize and focus on working on getting a strong turnout for fewer events. April is also a busy month for many other student organizations and there are a lot of events that are happening and the weather is getting better, so it is reasonable and makes sense that people would rather be outside than going to a talk or movie screening. I think there also was not much awareness of the Ecolympics competition in general across all of campus.

Key Stakeholders

- The RCT – they were great!
- ResEd. FacOps, and the Communications Office were present at some of the core planning meetings but not all of them.
- John Peterson, Sam Hartman, and Danny Rosenberg-Daneri – Dashboard and Public Schools
- Student organizations and college departments.
- EnviroAlums: Andrew DeCoriolis and Carl McDaniel
- Green EDGE Fund: Liam Leslie was the chair: edgefund@oberlin.edu
- History department contribution: originally emailed history@oberlin.edu, then got a reply from Kathy King kathy.king@oberlin.edu (the department’s administrative assistant) and Professor Fisher (chair of the department)
- Co-op treasurers:
  - Harkness: Leila Benedyk lbenedyk@oberlin.edu
  - Pyle: Leah Cohen lcohen@oberlin.edu
  - Fairkid (fall semester): Leah Newman lnewman@oberlin.edu
  - Tank (Peter did this money night): Claire Coleman ccoleman@oberlin.edu

Deliverables

The Google folder of documents and spreadsheets has notes from meetings and the planning spreadsheet. There is also a suggestions tab in the spreadsheet for recommendations for future years.

I also took notes during various meetings in order to personally keep track of what I should do going forward.
Recommendations

I would have wanted to have done more concrete work in the fall semester as I had mentioned before. The amount of freedom, however, was also nice. So trying to balance that will be hard, but having some more structure would have made the individual tasks of the individual interns clearer.

I also think it would help to get more people involved and engaged if there were fewer events. I think there should be fewer events and maybe choose to focus on a particular topic each year (for example: transportation, food, etc.) in order to give the year’s events a coherent theme. Having just one theme, however, might hinder our ability to collaborate student groups, so maybe OES planned events should be advertised under a specific theme and other events should be advertised as collaborations. I also think the hands-on and active events were well received and gave people a break from schoolwork.

Ecolympics also has a presence in the public schools. The dashboard crew did most of the work with that, but in the future I think it would be better to talk earlier with them about what we would like to do with that aspect of Ecolympics. It would have been more possible to actively help with the competition in the public schools if it had been talked about earlier.

I think the spreadsheet has good suggestions of how to get more engagement from dorms (be in contact with RAs, get emails out timely, etc.)

Suggestions

I also was not a fan of the tickets and individual raffles at each event. I liked the overall concept of a participation prize, but not the raffles at every event. I would rather there be no raffle at any of the events, especially because the raffle prizes reinforce materialism and capitalism instead of sustainability. Maybe a compromise would still be to record attendance at events in order to keep track of overall participation, because some people did get excited about the bike prize.

Also the dorms that won an infrastructural prize did not have any ownership over the prize. Because Ecolympics happens at the end of the school year, there is not enough time to install the prizes before the end of the school year. Thus, the thought of the prizes does not provide much incentive to students to conserve water and electricity and to participate in events.

Having the competition in the fall would reduce the amount of competition with other groups having a lot of events and the weather. It would also deal with dorms not getting to use the infrastructural prizes. I think having Ecolympics in the fall would increase overall participation and engagement. Bridget and I talked about it happening between fall break and Thanksgiving.

In order to talk about making these larger changes, I think it could be beneficial to have a meeting of the larger planning meeting in the fall.
Unanswered Questions

No.

Conclusion

I have enjoyed working for the OES this year and enjoyed Ecolympics. I am now more comfortable and willing to reach out to people I do not know.