Final Report

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Ecolympics Intern
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Introduction

The aim of this position is to engage more students with sustainability topics and integrate sustainability into campus culture under the auspices of Ecolympics, a resource conservation competition and event series. The dorms that participated the most in events, conserved the most water, and conserved the most electricity are rewarded with ice cream prizes and an infrastructural prize.

Accomplishments

- **Events:** We put on and publicized 30 environmentally themed events in the span of two weeks with the help of over
- **Panelists:** I planned and managed the inaugural Sustainability Careers Event Series in collaboration with the Oberlin EnviroAlums - five events (workshops, seminars, panels, and individual speakers) that brought together alumni and other local professionals with current students to share experiences on sustainability-related careers and create networking opportunities.
- **Promotional Material:** I created various materials that were displayed around town and campus to promote Ecolympics, which can be reused for future years (outdoor banner, prefabricated RA bulletin boards, an exhibit in Mudd, the template for an interactive digital activity, a Wilder banner). Also expanded the Ecolympics page on the OES website.
- **Ran and organized planning meetings:** Scheduled and ran planning meetings with core planning team, including students and staff.

Challenges

One of the previous Ecolympics interns stated in their final report that they struggled with their work in the fall because of the abstract nature of getting prepared for the spring. They thought that since they were a first year who had never experienced Ecolympics before it was difficult to anticipate what to do to prepare - but even as a fourth-year, it was difficult for me to anticipate what to do. The thing is - the Ecolympics intern(s) shouldn’t have to anticipate what to do.
This was the greatest challenge for me: Ecolympics has been going on in various forms for almost 10 years now, but there is little written, formalized record of that work available. (There aren’t even records of how long it’s been going on or when it started - I am working off of an off-handed remark that someone threw out during a planning meeting.) There are various key people who have been involved in it for various years: Bridget Flynn, John Petersen, Rebecca Mosely, etc - but a lot of information is in their heads. I believe I understand why this information is not available: after the hectic, three-week dash through Ecolympics, what intern - who needs to shift their focus onto their schoolwork and finals - would have the time to write all this down? Nonetheless, it is unfair to ask that Bridget, as the Ecolympics supervisor, have to detail everything that needs to be done from the top of her head every year.

Working off of some of the other suggestions from previous interns and collaborators, this year’s Ecolympics was shortened to two weeks with more intentional events. We hoped that to make up for the shortened competition, we would have a lead-up promotional week to get the campus ready and hyped for Ecolympics. However, we still ended up getting started on event planning late in the game, which meant that we did not have this promotional week and instead used this time for basic promotional preparation and last minute organizing. A lot of this is on me - I let various personal issues get in the way of my work when we most needed to be reaching out to groups and preparing the event schedule.

In the future, I think there needs to be a hard deadline for events to be ready BY spring break. This was a point brought up by multiple other stakeholders throughout the planning process. Bridget did not think this was realistic, given the difficulty in working with student organizations to have things finalized ahead of time. I think this year it certainly was unrealistic, but if - with the help of a timeline - interns are able to get started on outreach early and can impress the importance of early planning on partner organizations, then it should be possible.

I made some efforts to reach out to student groups that we hadn’t worked with in the past to develop events that had multicultural focus - the MRC, AAA, JSA - but had difficulty getting the right energy going: how do you make it so that it’s an equal collaboration, and not you just trying to get them to do work for you? We got some interest from JSA, but there was another event planned around the time of Ecolympics that kept them from working with us.

Lastly, while I was very enthusiastic about Bridget getting ready for and participating in bodybuilding competitions in the weeks leading up to Ecolympics, I think given the extraordinary amount of work she already has on her plate at OES and the work that only she can do to get ready for Ecolympics, it may not be a good idea to do bodybuilding competitions around Ecolympics in the future.

**Key Stakeholders**

**Ecolympics Planning Committee**

- Bridget Flynn, OES
Event Organizers and Contributors

- Resource Conservation Team
- Oberlin Animal Rights
- Adam Joseph Lewis Center
- EnviroAlums (Andrew DeCoriolis ('07), Peter Nicholson ('91))
- Oberlin Rock Wall
- Oberlin College Environmental Studies Program
- Slow Train
- Oberlin College Library
- Oberlin City School District
- Swerve Bike Shop
- City of Oberlin Police Department
- Oberlin College Office of Environmental Sustainability
- Oberlin Environmental Dashboard

Sponsors

- Oberlin College Environmental Studies Program
- Oberlin College Office of Environmental Sustainability
- Oberlin College Facilities Operations
- Oberlin College Residential Education
- EnviroAlums
- Oberlin College Career Center
- Green EDGE Fund
- Oberlin Animal Rights
- Oberlin College Office of the President of Oberlin College, and
- Old Barrows Co-op
- VegFund

Deliverables

I greatly expanded on the Ecolympics Google Drive resources and organized them into various subfolders. Hopefully this is more useful than overwhelming. The Ecolympics Planning folder now has all of the strategy and planning meeting notes, all promotional materials, graphical assets, and copies or photos of most forms that need to be filed. I designed and set-up various promotional materials, including the outdoor banner for town, the exhibit in the front of Mudd, and the RA Bulletin Boards.
I also have documented all the planning information for the Sustainability Careers events: budgets, info sheets, student surveys, etc.

**Recommendations**

- **Resource competition point person**
  
  The individual events went well because there were individual people who were taking the lead on them and ensuring that they went well. We do not have that for the resource competition. If we want the resource competition to succeed, it may be helpful to have somebody or some group of people be responsible for being the “competition team” - getting people hyped up, going around to dorms and dining halls, developing specific educational/promotional material for it, etc.

- **Focus on person-to-person promotion**
  
  In many ways we did more overall promotion this year than in previous years, but we did less person-to-person promotion - and that is where we failed. For Ecolympics in previous years, what has made people get involved is having friends and colleagues who were excited and involved. It is important to keep that in mind as a focal point of the promotional process.

- **Promote all year round**
  
  Remind people that Ecolympics is a thing that they should be excited for! Rather than building up suddenly in the spring, keep it in people’s minds all year round. It can be as easy as having Ecolympics posters at OES hangout or ENVS events.

- **Mandatory OES intern participation**
  
  There should be a mandatory Ecolympics intern meeting early in spring semester where the OES interns are asked to take point on some aspect of the competition: reaching out to town businesses for prizes, reaching out to organizations they may be connected to for event planning, anything that grabs their interest. All interns should also be asked to devote at least 2 hours in the two weeks leading up to Ecolympics to posterering and interpersonal outreach.

- **Timeline**
  
  Each intern should wrap-up their tenure, not only with a final report, but with a revision of the suggested timeline for next year. Each new intern should understand that the timeline is flexible as each new year brings new challenges, but it should help make the job more concrete.

- **Interview stakeholders to develop formal Ecolympics “History”**
  
  To know where we’re going, we should reflect on where we’ve been. At present, the “history” of Ecolympics only extends back a few years and only in the wrap-up articles. It might be a good task for the next intern(s), when first coming into the position, to talk to various key stakeholders who have been involved in Ecolympics for a long time. They shouldn’t have to devote too much time to this - maybe just one week early on - and then use this information to
write up a “History” section of the OES Ecolympics page. This serves to help them understand what they’re getting into and can then be used in promotion for Ecolympics to emphasize the legacy and good work that has been done in the past.

- Collaboration as a focal point of the branding/promotion process
  In the process of interviewing stakeholders, make a list of nice quotes or blurbs that can be used to advertise their involvement in Ecolympics. People should be more aware that Ecolympics is a community effort, at every point from the planning process to individual students turning off the lights in their rooms.

- Commission and determine the Ecolympics poster in the fall
  Even if the dates are not set yet, the rest of the poster can be designed and space left for the dates. This way, it can be incorporated into branding all year leading up to Ecolympics.

- Determine events before Spring Break
  If we are going to focus on a lead-up promotional week before Ecolympics starts, we can’t still be tying up loose ends on the rest of the events. Events MUST be determined before Spring Break. It really should not be a big deal if they don’t make it onto the big events calendar - notes and posters can always be tacked up onto or next to the big calendars.

- Ecolympics organizers should not offer to make posters and calendar listings for individual events
  We have enough on our plates as it is. That should either be something individual event organizers handle or that another OES intern takes up. It is time consuming and trivial compared to the other work that needs to happen for a truly successful Ecolympics.

- Kick-off event
  The Green EDGE fund this year expressed interest at working on a kick-off event. We should reach out to them and/or other organizations early next year to see if they still would be interested in that. Perhaps similarly to how the disparate Asian-American organizations come together to do Asian Night Market, Ecolympics could bring together the disparate environmentally related organizations to organize a big, multi-faceted kick-off event (and pool funds to pay for it). Outreach for this should begin in the fall so that organization can begin right away in the spring.

- Improve metrics
  As was mentioned in our wrap-up meeting, we should put more effort into measuring the impact of our work. Participation should be measured not by tickets submitted, but by a volunteer tallying all the people who attended - regardless of whether they filled out a ticket or not. Are there other metrics we should consider keeping track of? People reached in outreach/promotional activities? Non-electricity or -water related resources saved/reused/recycled?
• More community outreach/ connection between the public school and college competitions
  As much as we brand Ecolympics as a community-wide endeavor, there is little infrastructure to
  make that a reality. The public school and college competitions are totally divorced from each
  other. The torch relay this year was last minute but was a great start to bridging that gap, but
  the Ecolympics intern ought to be more knowledgeable of what’s going on in the schools. We
  could also do more to work with local businesses to promote Ecolympics - this would be a good
  endeavor to get started on early, in the fall.

• Do an interactive exhibit with Aden Bailey (abailey@oberlin.edu) for the lead-up week
  We had been planning on doing an interactive exhibit with Makey Makey technology: we
  decided on a “Dance Dance Revolution” style exhibit that would play on the idea of an ecological
  footprint through stomping on the dance pads. It fell through because we got started on it late
  and Aden got tonsillitis, but I think this had a lot of potential to grab attention and pull people in
  to talk about Ecolympics.

• Bathroom stall ads
  This year the bathroom stall ads consisted entirely of the calendar. In the future, they should
  instead focus on general information on the resource competition, event series, and prizes. We
  may also want to try implementing the “interactive” bathroom stall ads that encourage people
  to write on them. Or we could have larger interactive posters in the communal spaces of
  bathrooms (ex for people waiting for a stall).

• Standardize the ice cream party timing
  Have the timing and logistics set up before the competition - it should just always be the
  evening of the first Monday of reading period. (Cow Haus says Mondays are normally a slow day
  for them and they appreciate the extra custom. The first Monday of reading period is a good
  time for people to get out and take a break from their studying.) That way we don’t have to
  spend time thinking about, “Oh, when should we have this?” and can tell people exactly when
  and where it will be ahead of time.

• Send out an announcement/ call for Ecolympics events early in the spring
  There’s often the problem of events happening during Ecolympics that we didn’t know about,
  which are missed opportunities and/or timing conflicts that split audiences. Send out
  announcements early in the spring with the Ecolympics dates - this serves to both promote
  Ecolympics and bring in events for cross-branding. Announcements should be sent out via the
  ENVS and greenscene list servs, as email blasts to key organizations, through the
  Communications office, etc.

Suggestions and Insiders Info
● Externalize individual event planning as much as possible
I got very in my head about planning good events - what speakers would be good, what activities will people like, how do I reach out to them and make it all happen? But really, your job as Ecolympics intern isn’t necessarily about making individual events happen - it’s about pulling things together. There are plenty of people around campus who may have good ideas. You just need to go talk to them: professors, student organizations, etc. And speaking of event planning...

● Events come through
I got very nervous when we didn’t have much lined up by early March, but by the end of the competition we had 30 events. Events come through because student organizations are always doing something. There were things in the works that we didn’t know about, or organizations were late in planning them. So don’t sweat it TOO much. Things come together - you just want to try to get out in front of it instead of rushing to field them all at once in the weeks before the competition.

● FacOps and ResEd are your best friends.
Going in, I knew we’d be working with FacOps and ResEd at least a little bit to make certain things happen - but their involvement turned out to be even more valuable than I realized. Their jobs are to get things done. They work with tangible, real world projects every day, so when you go to a meeting saying, “Alright, we need to figure out how to do X,” they can give you a suggested game plan for exactly how to get the ball moving on that right then and there. Dan Roddy is a gem, and if he’s working with Ecolympics again next year, then you are in good hands.

● BE ORGANIZED AND RESPECT PEOPLE’S TIME
I feel like this is important for any and all jobs where you are working with people, but in case the next Ecolympics intern hasn’t had much experience working with this kind of thing before: be organized. Go into planning meetings knowing exactly which A, B, C, and D things need to be addressed that week. Keep track of what people say they will do during the meeting and remind people at the end of the meeting what they said they would do. Respect the planning committee and respect everybody working on Ecolympics. You can’t do this without their help and you should let them know how much you appreciate them. Everyone is busy and they are taking time out of their precious schedules to work on this with you, so respect that time.

Unanswered Questions
Midway through Spring Semester, I talked with a classmate about Ecolympics and was shocked to discover that they were in charge of designing and implementing Ecolympics related curriculum for one (or more?) of the public schools as part of their educational work. They were overwhelmed by the process and felt like they were not getting enough support from Augustus because he had never gone through the Ecolympics process before. At that point I felt there was nothing I could do to help them
because Ecolympics was coming up so soon but - how did I not know that this person was so crucially involved? Augustus had never mentioned them in any planning meeting. My unanswered question is: who else do we not know about who is involved in putting Ecolympics together, especially on the community/ schools side of things? This is another reason why I think interviewing Ecolympics stakeholders would be a good thing. I wish we could have done more to help this person. Plus, I would really like to have understood better what was happening in the public schools.

**Conclusion**

Being the Ecolympics intern is an amazing opportunity. You get to work with so many different people across Oberlin campus - and beyond. You can use your position as an event organizer to reach out to alumni, speakers, etc. Bring your interests into the position, and use the job to learn more about it.

I have always been afraid of reaching out to people and this job was exactly what I needed to start overcoming that. Having both the skill and the willingness to connect with people is so valuable, and they are perhaps my greatest takeaways from this position.