An Assessment of Sustainability within Residential Life at Colgate University

ENST 390: Community-based Study of Environmental Issues
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Executive Summary

Colgate University, a 2009 signatory of the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), has been working to establish an ethos of sustainability on its campus in an effort to align itself with the numerous other higher education institutions across the United States that have made a similar pledge. In order to achieve carbon neutrality by 2019, it will be critical for Colgate to incorporate sustainability into all facets of campus life including Residential Life. This project set out to assess sustainable programming facilitated by Residential Life at Colgate. We assessed sustainability in Residential Life through informational interviews with key stakeholders at Colgate University, peer institutions, and survey data collected from Colgate students. Our interviews allowed for us to compare Colgate’s Residential Life program with our peers as well as other institutions to assess our sustainability progress thus far. The survey data that we collected enabled us to gauge first-year and sophomore student interest and knowledge of sustainability related to their residential living experience.

Our interviews allowed us to place Colgate University in the context of sustainable programming in Residential Life at other institutions. After doing so, we concluded that there was certainly room for improvement in two important sectors of Residential Life: the department’s prioritization of sustainability and student programming. Statements made by key stakeholders allowed us to conclude that there was a lack of effective communication between three offices key to implementing improved sustainable programming for student residents. These three offices include the Office of Residential Life, Office of Sustainability, and the Dean of the College. Due to the “catch-all” nature of the residential life department, sustainability is simply not a feasible priority with the present number of staff and resources available to the department. This leads to inadequate community leader (CL) training regarding sustainable living practices because it is not a topic that is mandatory within their training program. This translates to a lack of information provided to the first-year and sophomore student residents who rely on their CL’s for most advice related to residence hall behavior. From the survey data, it was determined that although current sustainability programming in residential life at Colgate University is deficient according to student residents, there is a demand and receptiveness to it on the part of all 241 respondents. These results, in conjunction with deeper analysis, ultimately led us to recommend that there first be increased interdepartmental communication about, and prioritization of sustainability. Secondly, we make several smaller recommendations to improve upon the current Green Raider program facilitated by the Office of Sustainability.

Conversations with the Dean of the College as well as the directors and assistant programming directors in both the Sustainability and Residential Life offices have expressed a desire on the part of the institution for improved sustainable programming. Our recommendations address the aforementioned areas of weakness in a way that is feasible for an institution of Colgate’s geographic location, size and academic curriculum. These recommendations include increasing the presence of sustainability in the Residential Life department and making improvements to the current Green Raider (Eco-rep) program that increase visibility and accessibility. Our research indicates the prospect of incorporating improved sustainable programming into Colgate’s residential life department is hopeful. There is certainly an existing knowledge and interest in additional sustainable programming in each related department who will be critical in the design and implementation of new plans and policies in the first-year and sophomore residence halls.
Introduction

Our project seeks to assess sustainability in Residential Life at Colgate University by evaluating the programming that is currently in place. Our research consists of preliminary research on sustainability in higher education, informational interviews with administrators, faculty and students at Colgate University and peer institutions, and survey data collected from Colgate students. We will use this research to make an assessment of the potential for programming improvement based on the desires of the students, faculty, and staff as well as the feasibility at the institution itself. We will ultimately make a recommendation as to a new policy or program that Colgate’s Office of Residential Life should consider implementing. These final recommendations may help integrate sustainability in a way that will help Colgate University achieve its goal of carbon neutrality by 2019 while providing Colgate students the sustainability programming they desire.

I. Sustainability in Higher Education

Sustainability in higher education has been a focus of institutions across the United States as the demand for green initiatives and greener campuses continues to grow. According to Sharp, the campus sustainability movement emerged in the early 1990’s when universities began “experimenting with various green projects” (Sharp, 2009, p.1). In 2003, the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) urged educational institutions to lead sustainable practice implementation because of their “unique position to help solve the challenges of environmental, social and economic sustainability through innovations in teaching” (McNamara, 2010, p. 48). An increasing push to foster sustainable campuses has pressured institutions into evaluating their current practices to set a benchmark. Institutions often start by measuring their gross greenhouse gas emissions. The NCSE furthered their request for institutional sustainability in January of 2010 asking that universities as individuals and a collective sector should adopt a comprehensive strategy and holistic approach to sustainability and leadership development (McNamara, 2010, p. 50). The greatest obstacle to the integration of sustainable practices at higher education institutions is changes in campus culture. In order to increase the student body’s awareness and practice of sustainable behavior, it is necessary to examine the effectiveness of an institution’s related programming. This evaluation ensures that both the students and the campus are current with sustainable living practices and have the knowledge to make sustainable choices in all facets of their campus life.

II. Colgate University Context

Located in rural Central New York, Colgate University stands out as an institution of higher education with a rigorous liberal arts academic program, high performance athletics, and an involved student body. With an undergraduate class of 2,890 students, Colgate fosters a close-knit campus community while simultaneously preparing each student for life after college. According to the ‘Thirteen Goals of Colgate,’ part of this preparation includes teaching students how to “be engaged citizens” and “recognize their individual and collective responsibilities for the stewardship of the earth’s resources and the natural environment” (Colgate University, 2015).

In 2009, Colgate University signed the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment (ACUPCC), officially pledging to measure and reduce greenhouse gas emissions while developing an institutional plan to achieve carbon neutrality. In order to reach this goal, Colgate has actively pursued policies and programming that attempt to reduce the
energy, water, and resources the institution consumes and the waste it produces. A majority of these policies and programs have come as recommendations from Colgate’s Office of Sustainability, headed by director John Pumilio. In July of 2014, Colgate was awarded a gold rating by the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS), which is a program of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE, 2015). Although such distinctions demonstrate that Colgate is progressing in the right direction, there remains room for improvement. The ultimate goal of the university is to encourage an ethos of sustainability that presents itself in all facets of campus life, rather than simply specific offices or departments on campus. Our objective was to assess the current sustainability programming initiated and implemented by the Office of Residential Life and its effectiveness on student residents living “up the hill”. We define “up the hill” to mean all residence halls housing first-year and sophomore students located on the upper campus.

Before our assessment began, we contacted several directors of residential life and sustainability at peer institutions similar in geographic location, liberal arts curriculum, and student population to Colgate. With this information forming a contextual background, we began speaking with employees at Colgate University within the Sustainability Office, the Office of Residential Life, and the Dean of the College. At the same time, we worked with a fellow Environmental Studies research group to distribute survey questions to the student body, in order to gauge student interest in existing residential sustainability programming and potential for future residential sustainability programming. By synthesizing the information from these three sources, we can assess what Colgate’s Office of Residential Life is currently doing to advance sustainability, and recommend further steps that can be taken to improve existing programming. This information will be particularly useful to Colgate administrators, faculty, staff and students as a directive for furthering our collective effort to create a campus-wide ethos of sustainability.

III. Research Question and Definitions

How does Colgate’s Office of Residential Life programmatically incorporate the values of sustainability to educate and instill green living practices in students on-campus?

Programmatically: A planned series of events, positions, training, or objectives initiated and implemented through the Office of Residential Life.

Sustainable Values: Attitudes, behaviors, and actions that include an appreciation of the finite availability of resources.

Green Living Practices: Sustainably minded actions such as recycling, energy and water conservation, less overall consumption, etc. that can be implemented in living spaces.

The report will begin with a brief background on Colgate’s Office of Residential Life and our preliminary research on peer institutions. This information will shape our methods to follow. The findings and results of these methods will be organized by source and will then be synthesized in our analysis. The analysis section of our paper will inform the recommendations with which we conclude our paper.
Background

I. Colgate Residential Life

Colgate’s Office of Residential Life is determined to “further the educational mission of Colgate by extending student learning and growth into the residential community, and promote a purposeful and inclusive environment through shared expectation” (Colgate University, 2014). Despite experiencing high turnover rates among staff members for the past five years, the office continues to remain dedicated to serving students in their communities and providing a safe, healthy, and enjoyable transition into college residential living.

Most of the sustainable practices that Residential Life focuses on instilling in student residents are built-in through the Community Leaders (CLs) program (Colgate University, 2014). A community leader is an individual who oversees the health and wellness of the students that inhabit one of the on-campus dormitories at Colgate University.

II. Colgate Office of Sustainability

The Office of Sustainability, headed by John Pumilio as the director, is connected with the Office of Residential Life in several ways. Interns for the Office of Sustainability promote dorm-related events such as Recyclemania (recycling competition) and Campus Conservation Nationals (energy and water conservation), and help disseminate information and materials that encourages responsible waste disposal and resource use. The Environmental Studies and Sustainability Assistant, Steve Dickinson, also facilitates an annual sustainability seminar for Colgate’s student Community Leaders so that they can obtain the knowledge to answer their residents’ questions about sustainability and aid them in practicing green behaviors through residential living.

III. Peer Institutions

According to Egan, since 1990 over 1,000 university leaders have committed to improving sustainability (2006, p.1). AASHE, established in 2005, serves as a lead organization in sustainability that provides guidance to universities for integrating sustainability into their curriculum, research and efforts (AASHE, 2015). Through preliminary research on the web, we learned that many of our peer institutions are also signatories to promises of achieving carbon neutrality whether it be in the next five, fifteen or thirty years. Higher education institutions such as Bucknell University, Hamilton College, Middlebury College and St. Lawrence among others demonstrated a serious interest in promoting campus sustainability through their online publications. These universities openly support interdepartmental communication, themed houses, and complex training programs. Further research on higher education institutions outside of our peer group demonstrated that approximately 700 total institutions have signed the ACUPCC (2015). Clearly, committing to sustainability is a priority for many institutions. However there is limited documentation on the role of sustainability in residential life at these peer and comparison institutions.
Methods

Our method consisted of interviews with peer institutions, interviews with key Colgate University stakeholders, and a student survey. Through these approaches, we sought to understand the complex relationships that allow the offices of residential life and sustainability to be as successful as possible.

I. Study Context

Colgate’s first-year and sophomore residential living structure is similar to many of our peer institutions with some unique attributes. Firstly, Colgate’s living spaces are separated by class year. On-campus housing is guaranteed for all four years, although a limited number of seniors choose to live off campus. Secondly, Colgate’s dormitories can be classified as either being “up the hill” or “down the hill.” Dormitories “up the hill” include all first-year and sophomore living options, designated so because they are either located physically uphill on Colgate’s upper campus, or foster the community feel of undergraduate living. These include Andrews Hall, Curtis Hall, East Hall, Gatehouse, Stillman, and West Hall--the first-year dormitories--as well as Drake Hall, the Bryan Complex, and Cutten Hall--the sophomore options. “Up the hill” housing does not include the Townhouses, Parker Apartments, Newell Apartments, Birch Apartments, or off-campus living. Thirdly, Colgate’s residential options include “special interest” housing and sophomore living communities. Because these living spaces are not characteristic for most incoming first years to experience, we have decided to exclude special interest housing from our definition of “up the hill” housing and will not include them in our assessment. Sophomore living communities (known as Sophomore Residential Seminars, or SRS) are currently located in the Drake Hall dormitory. SRS will be included in our definition of “up the hill” housing but will not be distinguished from other Drake Hall residential options. Finally, Colgate’s residential dormitories are monitored by Community Leaders (CLs) comparable to Residential Advisors (RAs) at other institutions. These CLs are students who are at least of sophomore standing who are responsible for educating students on good residential behaviors, facilitating group living, and promoting a healthy and safe environment for all Colgate students.

II. Interviews with Colgate Stakeholders

Interviews were conducted with individuals responsible in the decision making process of each office under evaluation. The most important interviews that we performed were with Office of Residential Life staff members. However, we did reach out to the Office of Sustainability to better understand the history of sustainability at Colgate and interdepartmental relationships. Furthermore, we conversed with the Dean of the College’s Office in order to understand the hierarchy within residential life. Before interviews were conducted, a potential list of Colgate administration and staff was created. The final list of individuals interviewed is listed below in Table 1. These candidates were contacted first by email to establish rapport. Interviews were then set up based on interviewees’ convenience and questions were sent via email prior to the interview. Once candidates agreed to being interviewed, a formal consent form was supplied and then signed. If candidates did not consent to being recorded, our group only took notes during the interview and did not audio or visually record the answers. Of our interviewees, only our interviews with Kerra Hunter and John Pumilio were recorded.
Table 1: List of stakeholders from Colgate University that were interviewed, their position, the justification for the interview, and the length of time each interview was conducted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Pumilio</td>
<td>Director of the Office of Sustainability</td>
<td>Facilitator of sustainable programming and policies</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Dickinson</td>
<td>Environmental Studies and Sustainability Program Assistant</td>
<td>Trains CLs in sustainable behavior</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Ellis</td>
<td>Assistant Director of Residential Life</td>
<td>In charge of student programming</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suzy Nelson</td>
<td>Dean of the College</td>
<td>Dean of the College overseeing Office of Residential Life</td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerra Hunter</td>
<td>Director of Residential Life</td>
<td>Oversees assistant directors and operations in Res Life</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III. Interviews with Peer Institutions

In order to properly assess the current state of sustainability in Residential Life at Colgate, we consulted our peer institutions to learn how they have integrated sustainability into residential living. We selected peer institutions based on characteristics similar to Colgate such as geographic location, a liberal arts curriculum, and comparable student body size. These peer institutions included Bucknell University, Hamilton College, Middlebury College, and St. Lawrence University. In order to better understand the failures and successes that these institutions have had in regard to integrating sustainability into residential life, we found it critical to interview both the Residential Life Office and Office of Sustainability at each institution. We did so with the intention of revealing any discrepancies between departmental ideals and actual implementation. We chose to interview the directors of these two offices respectively as they were likely key stakeholders for implementing the programming relevant to our research. Their actions and outlooks on sustainability in residential life were invaluable to our research, as they served as informational context as to what other universities were doing to facilitate residential sustainability programming.

Residential Program directors and assistants received questions pertaining to Residential Life staffing hierarchies, knowledge of sustainability and programming opportunities. Sustainability Office directors and staff were asked questions pertaining to the sustainability department that inquired about any residential programming initiatives designed by their office,
recommendations for improving sustainability in Residential Life, and the relationship with the Office of Residential Life at their respective institutions. Some interviewees followed up with a phone call depending on their level of interest in our research.

Table 2: Individuals from peer institutions. The universities, individuals, staff position, and question set provided can be found in the list below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Question Set</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middlebury</td>
<td>D. A.</td>
<td>Dean of Students for Residential Life</td>
<td>Residential Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlebury</td>
<td>J. B.</td>
<td>Director of the Office of Sustainability</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlebury</td>
<td></td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucknell</td>
<td>K. D.</td>
<td>Environmental Residential College</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucknell</td>
<td>Student Group</td>
<td>Bucknell Center for Sustainability and the Environment (BCSE)</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lawrence</td>
<td>S. O. L.</td>
<td>Associate Director of Residential Life</td>
<td>Residential Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton College</td>
<td>B. H.</td>
<td>Environmental Health &amp; Safety Director and Sustainability Director</td>
<td>Informal Phone Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton College</td>
<td>S. B.</td>
<td>VP of Facilities and Planning</td>
<td>Residential Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamilton College</td>
<td>T. H.</td>
<td>Director of Residential Life</td>
<td>Residential Life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For research ethical reasons only the initials are used of the interviewees

IV. Interviews with other institutions

The results of our initial interviews with individuals at peer institutions suggested that we also reach out to institutions with characteristics outside of our initial criteria. Although some of our peer institutions have demonstrated an interest in improving sustainability-based programming in residential life, few of them had formal programs already in place. Middlebury College was the only institution with a formal program where there were student representatives who were employed by the Office of Residential Life to facilitate sustainable programming. The
next institutions that we spoke with regarding their programming were chosen based on demonstrated success in residential life sustainability programming on the web. Though we realized there could be constraints to implementing similar models due to differences in traits like student body size, curriculum, funding etc., we contacted them with the hopes of learning about program models that we could alter to fit Colgate’s needs and limitations. We contacted the appropriate individuals by email with the intention of arranging informal phone conversations and eventually spoke with each of them on the phone (Table 3). The phone conversations that we had were not recorded.

Table 3: Individuals from comparison institutions. The universities, individuals, staff position, and question set provided can be found in the list below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>University of Pennsylvania</td>
<td>Student Director of eco-rep program</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>University of South Carolina</td>
<td>Coordinator for Environmental Sustainability</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL</td>
<td>University of Maryland</td>
<td>Staff member for eco-council</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EH</td>
<td>Duke University</td>
<td>Student Eco-rep Director</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For research ethical reasons only the initials are used of the interviewees

V. Survey of Colgate Students

It was crucial for us to extend questions to the students at Colgate University in order to evaluate the success of the Office of Residential Life at Colgate in terms of facilitating sustainable student practices and behaviors. We conducted our survey via email to reach the greatest number of participants in a relatively unbiased way. This email was sent to the entire student body, which is 2,890 total students. The purpose of our survey was to evaluate general student sentiment toward current and future sustainability oriented residential programming. For this reason, we asked two questions specific to CL performance, one question specific to Residential Life Office performance, and one question to gauge student demand for more sustainable initiatives in their residence halls. These questions were part of a larger student engagement survey focused on environmental engagement on campus distributed by another group in our course.

The survey data was cleaned in order to better analyze the results in pivot tables and graphs using Microsoft Excel. In cleaning the data, we first eliminated all responses that were from students that do not live “up the hill” as well as students that are not first-years or
sophomores. Furthermore, we re-labeled the response to major and minor in the following manner: the majors and minors labeled with a 1 included environmental studies, environmental biology, environmental economics, environmental geography, environmental geology, biology, biochemistry, molecular biology, geography and geophysics. All other majors and minors were labeled as 0 as they were not directly related to environmental studies and hence were not considered competent with environmental rhetoric or might not have had academic exposure to concepts like sustainability. We did so in order to examine the attitudinal relationships between these independent variables, such as major or minor, and the student responses. The analysis of this data will help us to better understand the sentiment among Colgate students concerning sustainable programming. In our analysis, we will interpret these relationships to assess the effectiveness of current programming, the demand for additional programming, and the student population that should be targeted.

Results

I. Interviews with Colgate Stakeholders

Role of Community Leaders

Community Leaders are integral to introducing first-year students to residential living at Colgate University and often bridge the gap between Residential Life and other departments. They also act as the initiators of much of the office’s programming. CLs apply for the position and undergo a number of training sessions before they take up residence. One of these training programs is a sustainability training run by Steve Dickinson. According to our conversation with Steve, the training is generally pretty informal, lasting about 30 minutes and consisting of an explanation of the sustainable program originating in the Office of Sustainability. The training ends with a call for assistance from CLs (S. Dickinson, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Sarah Ellis stated in her interview that Community Leaders are primarily focused on addressing roommate problems or policy violations and not on sustainable initiatives (S. Ellis, personal communication, March 5, 2015). Because CLs are the initiators of programming, sustainable programming through Residential Life is dependent on their initiative and discretion. Sarah also notes that CLs have a big potential for spreading sustainable programming because their 24/7-dorm presence makes them an accessible resource (S. Ellis, personal communication, March 5, 2015). Suzy Nelson also spoke to the potential of live-in representatives who would help spread sustainable programming, whether this is specialized CLs or a new eco-representative position (S. Nelson, personal communication, April 9, 2015).

Current Residential Programming

Current Residential Life programming does not include any formal sustainability-based training or programming. Individual CLs may sustainable behavior or encourage green living practices but this does not come as a directive from the Office of Residential Life. Better known residential programs such as Recyclemania are run by the student interns of the Sustainability Office and not the Office of Residential Life. In her interview, Sarah Ellis stated that the Sustainability Department sometimes asks for support on their own programming, and the Office of Residential Life allows them to put up posters and encourages students to attend events, but
An Assessment of Sustainability Within Residential Life

there is no existing collaborative programming (S. Ellis, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

Interdepartmental Communication

Several of Kerra Hunter’s responses demonstrated that departmental communication is an issue as she was of the belief that sustainability is not yet a priority for Colgate (K. Hunter, personal communication, April 10, 2015). During her interview, Kerra Hunter was supportive of the possibility of a pilot eco-representative program, or some sort of liaison between Residential Life and different departments on campus (K. Hunter, personal communication, April 10, 2015). Suzy Nelson also mentioned during her interview that by presenting sustainability repeatedly as an item during annual administrative and faculty meetings with the president and staff, administrative groups and deans, and the faculty, sustainability would become an interdepartmental expectation and incentivize divisions to think about their role and responsibility to sustainability (S. Nelson, personal communication, April 9, 2015).

Making Sustainability a Priority

A common step in integrating sustainability values into Residential Life at Colgate appeared to be for interest to originate from within the department instead of coming as directives from the Office of Sustainability. This seemed to present itself through the hiring process for full-time staff at Residential Life or from pressure in the Dean of the College’s Office. Because the mission of Residential Life is compatible with the values of sustainability, it should become more of a priority in programming (J. Pumilio, personal communication, March 3, 2015). At the moment, the Office of Residential Life is focused on making the community comfortable, managing roommate relationships, and fostering friendships. However, Sarah Ellis noted the value of sustainable programming and recognized that if sustainability is something the student community cares about, it should increasingly become a focus for the Office of Residential Life (S. Ellis, personal communication, March 5, 2015).

Current employees in Residential Life are actually well-versed in sustainability, but not because of any formal training or hiring process. Instead, Office of Residential Life staff often arrive at Colgate with a background in sustainability. Sustainable values have yet to be implemented into formal programming for students and Community Leader’s because of a perceived lack of directive from the office’s leadership. This means that the Office of Residential Life leadership does not feel the university and its administration prioritize sustainable programming (K. Hunter, personal communication, April 10, 2015). In many ways, Colgate’s attitude towards sustainability has manifested itself in physical ways, like building certifications or efficient water usage but the less concrete values and attitudes concerning sustainability can be seen in the living the liberal arts guidelines and principles. Colgate’s administration recognizes that the study body has had an increasing interest in and willingness to initiate sustainable programming in the residence halls, and the importance of that interest is recognized on an institutional level (S. Nelson, personal communication, April 9, 2015).

Barriers to Implementation

In Colgate’s current state, there are several barriers to implementing sustainable programming into Residential Life. Several interviewees cited the lack of direct working
relationships between different parts of the university. For example, Sarah Ellis mentioned that the being in different divisions due to Colgate’s infrastructure makes communication between the Office of Sustainability and the Office of Residential Life difficult. Sarah also stated that Residential Life often works as a “catch all” for the university’s responsibilities which, makes it difficult for sustainability to be a priority within the department (S. Ellis, personal communication, March 5, 2015). The complete turnover of staff at Residential Life has also been a barrier to instilling values of sustainability in that department (J. Pumilio, personal communication, March 3, 2015).

II. Interviews with Peer Institutions

Our interviews with peer institutions provided us with good insight into how different institutions have attempted to implement an ethos of sustainability through their Residential Life programming. Combining the responses from both the sustainability and Residential Life offices at each institution provided us with an understanding of the extent to which they are involved in the sustainability movement.

Facilities and Students

Several peer institutions that we evaluated have been successful at implementing sustainability through their Office of Residential Life. Middlebury, Bucknell, and St. Lawrence all have student run initiatives that help to promote sustainability. At Middlebury, the Dean of Student for Residential Life and the Director of the Office of Sustainability work together to hire five “Commons Sustainability Coordinators” who work with first- and second-year dormitory residents to promote sustainable behavior. At Bucknell, the “Bucknell Center for Sustainability and the Environment” (BCSE) was established to promote sustainability on campus.

St. Lawrence University has an interesting initiative called the “ReUse Store.” Students can use this store to donate their used items, or buy new items that have already been placed in the store. This is an efficient way to reduce waste.

Interest housing is another way to incorporate sustainability in Residential Life. Middlebury, for example, has two sustainability-based residential theme houses that are completely powered by renewable solar energy. In addition, Middlebury also has a sustainable foods house that is not a part of the campus food plan. All three of these themed houses at Middlebury are very competitive for acceptance to live in them, in addition to providing an interesting addition to prospective students on campus.

Another strategy at Bucknell University is affinity houses. Students can form these houses by getting together and proposing a theme for the house. Our research confirmed that sustainability was a theme proposed in the past, and has been implemented one or two times. Applications are submitted on a yearly basis. Similar to affinity houses, St. Lawrence University has themed houses where students can apply to live with a group of people. Currently, they have the Low-Impact Living Greenhouse. Hamilton College’s only themed house is the COOP in Woollcott. The group has installed dual flush toilets, occupancy sensors and during the winter students set the temperature to a maximum 66 degrees.
Sustainability Training

Orientation is also an important training session for first years, many of whom may be new to the environmental sciences and the concept of sustainability all together. At Middlebury and Bucknell, first year students are first exposed to sustainability via a discussion regarding the promotion of recycling and sustainability on campus. Hamilton also addresses recycling requirements during a scheduled orientation period. Specifically they use a student led task force that evaluate each on-campus dormitory and their efficiency in recycling, providing incentives and prizes to the most efficient dorm.

Some universities go as far as to educate their staff on sustainable approaches. Middlebury College has extended its campus training to the Residential Department staff, who undergo a sustainability training course. Residential Advisors are also a critical aspect for first year students at Bucknell. Students have the option to go into ‘Residential Colleges’, which are themed dormitories for first years that are used to educate students in certain areas, one being the environment.

Interdepartmental Communication

In understanding the goals of Residential Life, many of our peer institutions have created a fundamental relationship between the offices in order to promote sustainability. The Dean of the College at Middlebury went as far as stating, “The weekly meetings that are held between the Sustainability and Residential Life offices have been incredibly successful” (D.A., personal communication, 2015). However, even if there is little interaction between the offices, we sometimes still witness funding provisions, similar to how Bucknell Residential Life provides recycling bins to all on campus dormitories. This funding ensures that steps toward implementing sustainability on campus are taking place.

At St. Lawrence, a sustainability coordinator is constantly working within residential life to ensure that all of their decisions are done with the consideration of sustainability. However, the Office of Residential Life also interacts with the Community Assistants and the Theme Coordinator. Community Assistants are Residential Advisors who live in every dorm and the Theme Coordinator works to find the right students to live in the themed houses. A new position in residential life at Hamilton is focused on orientation and first year programming, where they are planning to work with the position to support sustainability initiatives into the future. This communication, similar to Middlebury College, helps to facilitate effective sustainable programming as there are multiple stakeholders involved in the related conversations.

Successful Implementation Strategies

Sustainably themed houses and sustainable programming are efficient and necessary factors in today’s society given the strain on our global ecosystems from climate change. However, these strategies are often difficult to kick start. At Middlebury College, sustainability theme houses were developed over 25 years ago as a result of Middlebury’s involvement in promoting sustainability competitions in solar energy which coupled students and staff. The growth of these programs has created strong interdepartmental connections between the Environmental Studies, Food Studies and the College’s organic farm as students from different educational backgrounds interact in themed houses. It is important to note that while
Middlebury is responsible for the partnerships that were created, students who promoted the program on campus initiated them.

III. Other institutions

Goals of Sustainable Programming

All of the individuals that we interviewed agreed upon one common goal: to increase sustainable actions on their campuses through the programming facilitated by their respective programs. Regardless of the current structure of each program, all of the programs set out with a mission of spreading information about sustainability to their student body. In each interview we asked questions pertaining to these goals to determine whether or not their goals were aligned with the goals we had outlined for Colgate’s programming. Three of the four institutions also disseminated information to a large number of students through one program. Each representative at UMD, USC and UPenn stressed the importance of getting thousands of students involved in their initiatives. SA, of UPenn, specifically stressed how the program was designed to appeal to a large demographic in order to get as many undergraduates involved as possible (personal communication, 2015). “Living sustainably must be a value that is instilled in all residents from the first day they move in, otherwise it is hard to change their behavior several months and years down the road” said MB (personal communication, 2015). Similarly at USC, there are approximately twenty eco-reps with one assigned per dormitory. This assignment is believed to be the best program structure as it is the best means of opening a dialogue between the eco-rep and their assigned student population (MB, personal communication, 2015).

Successes

All four of the representatives we spoke with identified their programs as “successful.” Although we did not specify a metric of measuring success, the representatives were incredibly honest as to the pitfalls of their programming as well. A key marker of success, whether the program was facilitated by the Office of Residential Life or the Office of Sustainability, appeared to be a formal programming structure. MB of USC provided us with a copy of the ‘2014-2015 Eco-rep Manual’ which is a 22-page document that explains everything an eco-rep would need to have knowledge of to perform their job well (personal communication, 2015). SA also reiterated the importance of structure by accrediting the success of UPenn’s programming with several leadership positions offered by the program. Representatives, SA said, are likely to be retained if they feel their actions are making a direct impact to not only the student body, but the organization itself (personal communication, 2015). These roles included director, assistant director, marketing manager, video manager, campaign manager, etc. These positions also promoted retention as representatives who wanted to apply had to have at least a semester of experience as an eco-rep.

Success for several of these programs was also attributed to the personal relationships developed between the sustainability rep, sometimes otherwise known as the eco-rep. EH at Duke accredited the assignment of two individual eco-reps to each dormitory was most effective because there was less “ground to cover” (personal communication, 2015). The program aimed to have the eco-rep’s assigned to each dorm who were already residents of that hall to provide a friendly face. MB confirmed that such assignments at USC also facilitate a closer relationship between eco-reps and their fellow residents as opposed to random assignment. These eco-reps
will set up tables in the common rooms of their residence halls and speak to students as they enter and exit the buildings a few times a month. This set-up allows for the representatives to be both visible and easily accessible to their residents. AL and MB agree that incentives often must be present in order to attract students to these tabling events. However, these incentives can be something as small as a free reusable water bottle or even a pen with a sustainable message written on it.

Barriers

Though each of the four programs have certainly helped to facilitate sustainable living practices in residence halls at the respective institutions, there have also been barriers encountered as well. AL and MB spoke to the successes of having student ideas grow into programming that can accommodate at least all of the first-year students at each institution. However, this bottom-up approach lends itself to several years of figuring out the kinks of the program (AL, personal communication, 2015). At UMD, the current structure allows for five total representatives that sit on the subcommittee for sustainability in the pre-established residence hall association. However, with only five representatives, AL said that it can also be difficult to determine what issues to target with such large ground to cover (personal communication, 2015). Essentially the structure of this program limits this committee to targeting issues related to administrative decision making. For example, the UMD sustainability committee wrote a proposal to the buildings and grounds department with the suggestion of switching all residence hall cleaning products to green products. This was eventually approved by the department and now all cleaning products purchased by UMD for dormitories must be green-certified.

Retention Issues

The programming at all four schools experiences the issue of member retention at different time intervals depending on the program’s structure. At UMD, AL says the turnover rate of the sustainability committee is high which lends itself to problems in consistency. The teams of representatives who work together are subject to change each semester with new elections. Therefore, it is important that the group “hits the ground running” at the start of each semester, and if that does not happen there are likely to be fewer successful initiatives that semester. EH also complained of high turnover rates inhibiting the program’s effectiveness because it is a first-year program. Furthermore, EH shared the same frustrations as MB in that reaching the portion of the student body who lack general interest in sustainability (personal communication, 2015). Retention issues only exist as a further hindrance because students start to feel disconnected at a certain point if the relationship does not remain consistent.

Event Initiatives

EH described the weekly meetings at Duke as the reps splitting up into smaller groups based on interests such as recycling, transportation, outreach, etc. She believes this is most effective in designing the best programs because the reps are motivated to work on projects they are most interested in. Similarly at USC, MB explained that each eco-rep partners with a group of eco-reps who share the same interests. These groups have designed programming ranging
from water taste-tests to green dorm room certifications. Events that engage the student are critical to the continued success and momentum of the sustainable programming.

IV. Survey of Colgate Students

Approximately 60% of the respondents were first-year students and 40% of the respondents were sophomores. Basic pie charts of the results to our questions demonstrated a positive trend in desired information. Our first question judged the amount of communication between the student and their CL about sustainable practices. A response of 72% being either indifferent or disagreeing that their CL encouraged them to practice sustainable behavior can be seen in Figure 1. Our second question sought to investigate if this could be due to student’s general disinterest in having such conversations. However, 100% of our 241 respondents replied that they would prefer to receive either the same or more information from their CL concerning sustainable behavior as seen in Figure 2. The purpose of asking this question was also to determine whether or not there was a desire for additional sustainability programming at Colgate. A chi-square test further determined that there was a statistical significance on class year in that first-year students were more likely to want more information.

Figure 1: Survey results from 241 first year and sophomore students living in up the hill residence halls. The question asked concerns CL and student communication of sustainable behavior information.

Figure 2: Survey results from 241 first year and sophomore students living in up the hill residence halls. The question asked concerns student demand for information about sustainable practices in their halls. There was also the option “less,” however it was selected by 0 students.
Chi-Square tests of our results also indicate there is a difference between the responses to certain questions based on class year, and whether or not the student’s major or minor is environmentally related. In Table 4, it is apparent there is variation between the responses of students categorized under each major. A Chi–square test further suggests that a student’s major is statistically significant. Respondents coded for environmentally related majors were more likely to indicate that their CL does not give them enough information than those who are other majors. Furthermore, we looked at the relationship between first year and sophomore responses to our second question. These results are seen in Table 5. The results indicate that students who are first year’s are more likely than sophomore students to want ‘more’ information.

Table 4: This table displays the results of coding the independent variables major and minor for whether or not the respondent was studying environmental studies, or a related subject.

“My CL provides me with the right amount of information regarding sustainable behaviors.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count of Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not environmentally-related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally-related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P value: .0017

Table 5: This table displays the results of coding the independent variables for class year. A comparison was then made between class year of those who selected ‘More’ and those who selected ‘The Same.’

“I would prefer my CL provide me with ________ information regarding sustainable behaviors in my residence hall.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count of Respondent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Row Labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P value: .03
Analysis

I. Interviews with Colgate Stakeholders

Our analysis of the results from Colgate stakeholders gave us some interesting insights into sustainability in residential life. Firstly, the Community Leader sustainability training as it stands now is inadequate for educating CLs and therefore up-the-hill students about sustainability in residence halls. The informal and optional nature of the program results in a weak and ineffective sustainable mindset for CLs. Education is necessary for fostering active participation (McNamara, 2010) and the current educational program is not sufficiently conveying sustainable information to community leaders. This prevents both CLs and students from actively participating in sustainability at Colgate.

Secondly, effective communication between the Offices of Residential Life and Sustainability is challenged because each office is in a different division (Sustainability is under Dean of the Faculty and Finance and Administration and Residential Life is under the Dean of the College). Without frequent and coordinated communication, sustainability initiatives as a whole will suffer. Communication is especially important in sustainability issues because of its collaborative nature (Dasgupta et al., 2000). Communication between key stakeholders, whether these are departments, administration, or students, is a vital component for long-term successful sustainability initiatives (McNamara, 2010). The Sustainability Office is willing to support the Office of Residential Life in their move towards sustainability, and our conversations with both departments suggested that the relationship between the departments would only improve with time (S. Dickinson, personal communication, April 6, 2015; S. Ellis, personal communication, March 5, 2015; J. Pumilio, personal communication, March 3, 2015). As of now, the working relationship and interdepartmental communication between different parts of the university is a barrier to effective programming.

Thirdly, direct support from administration is required for systemic change toward sustainability (McNamara, 2010). This means that until the Dean of the College’s Office and other supporting administration take direct and obvious actions that demonstrates their endorsement the integration of sustainability into Residential Life, change is unlikely to occur.

II. Interviews with Peer Institutions

Numerous universities with similar goals to Colgate University in terms of sustainability have already taken steps to implement sustainable programming into their residential life programming. However, the characteristics shared by these institutions have both helped and inhibited their attempts to design and implement their pilot programming.

Sustainability Training

Orientation is an informational program designed by each institution to ensure students are best acclimated to their new living environment. Nearly every school that we surveyed had a sustainability aspect to their orientation programming that focused on teaching new student residents about the best living practices for their residence halls. This was identified as a crucial step by several of the interviewees we spoke with as it increases the likelihood that students will be made aware of the importance of sustainable living habits from their very first day on campus.
It is furthermore crucial for universities to educate their Residential Assistants and Residential Staff on sustainable living practices. If these individuals underwent a sustainability training program, it is likely that we would see more green initiatives within our residential dormitories. It was seen that at Hamilton College and St. Lawrence University that when a series of students were provided an educational program, it was more likely that they would link together and promote sustainable initiatives.

*Interactions between the Offices*

Linking the sustainability and residential office is a crucial step in developing a residential setting that fosters a sustainable ethos. The Dean of the College at Middlebury College claimed that “the weekly meetings that are held between the Sustainability and Residential offices have been incredibly successful” (personal communication, 2015). This statement demonstrates how successful the expansion of dialogue has been at some of our peer institutions. Even in the cases where there was limited interaction, meaning there was no formal meeting or position within residential life that promoted sustainability, informal dialogue alone was attributed to promoting funding towards recycling in dorms and promoted sustainability initiatives altogether. It appears that whenever there is a dialogue, even informal, successful programming is certain to be at least in the works.

*Themed Houses*

Themed houses are another important step in the development of sustainability on college campuses. An added benefit to them is that they also have been known to draw interest from prospective students who could also bring an ethos of sustainability to campus out of personal interest. Universities like Middlebury College, Bucknell University, St. Lawrence University, and Hamilton College all have themed houses directed at limited consumption and reduced waste. These houses are most effective when they have a competitive application process, meaning that they are effective in their goals of sustainable initiatives. For example, Middlebury College’s implementation of its three theme houses not only reduces waste and the institution’s carbon footprint, but is also shown on campus tours to prospective student in order to draw student’s with an environmental awareness to the institution.

*How to Implement Sustainability Strategies*

Implementation is the most difficult aspect of kick-starting an initiative that promotes sustainability on a college campus. Often times programs are initiated through student initiatives and are ultimately picked up by a department within the university, and finally receive funding from the institution. Throughout our research, it was clear that student concern spearheaded most programs. At Middlebury College, Bucknell University and St. Lawrence University student-run initiatives were the drivers behind several programs. Issues on campus that students tend to notice once they adjust to residential life were the motivation behind getting these programs off the ground.
III. Survey of Colgate Students

An analysis of our survey results was critical to informing our recommendations because these very respondents are the student residents that improved programming will target in the future. Our first question concerning CL communication indicates there is a significant amount of room for improvement in the communication between CL’s and their residents. This will be used to support our second recommendation. Our second question, which was asked to gauge student demand for additional programming, will also be used to support our second recommendation. The response of every student surveyed wanting at least the same, or more, information from their CL evidences that improved programming is likely to be welcomed by first year and sophomore student residents.

Beyond testing for age, we also wanted to identify the populations that need programming the most. Coding for major also demonstrated a statistically significant result. Majors who were related to the sciences were more likely to want more information on sustainable behaviors than were those who are not. This suggests several possible underlying reasons that will be accounted for in our programming recommendation. For instance, it seems problematic that majors who are in the sciences do not believe they are receiving enough information. This could mean there just isn’t this type of information out there unless a formal program is put together and spread. It could also mean that students with unrelated majors simply do not have an interest in sustainability. Therefore, we must consider better ways to incentivize their engagement in new programming.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our results and analysis, the first part of our recommendation is to increase the presence of sustainability in the department of Residential Life. This can be done through three main steps. The first step is to deepen and formalize the existing Community Leader sustainability training. This could be done in several ways: by creating a set curriculum for the training, to make the training mandatory for all community leaders, to make the training available both in the fall and spring, and to lengthen and elaborate on the themes discussed in the original training. Formalization of the existing training program could be done with the help of the Office of Sustainability, which has expressed its willingness to support integration of sustainability into Residential Life.

A second step could be to list sustainability as a topic of discussion in administrative meetings between Residential Life and the Dean of the College and among other administrative, faculty, and staff meetings. Although sustainability is a value appreciated by all interviewees, in both a personal and professional sense for some, it has not been prioritized in Residential Life due to its absence from administrative conversation. Awareness and engagement are vital to the integration of sustainability into Residential Life and higher education as a whole, and this could be addressed conveniently by recurrence on meeting agendas, which would show the importance of sustainability to the institution and direct departments to be responsible.

The final step in our “part one” recommendation for increasing the presence of sustainability in Residential Life would be to increase interdepartmental communication between the offices of Residential Life and Sustainability. This could be achieved through the creation of a formal liaison between the departments or a revision to the existing eco-rep program. This would alleviate potential pressure to existing full-time employees of residential life who do not have the time and resources to make sustainable programming a priority due to their focus on
student health and well being.

The “part two” of our recommendation focuses on improving the already existing Green Raider (eco-rep) program currently housed in the Office of Sustainability. The first problem that must be solved is the current visibility and accessibility of the program. Even after several conversations with key stakeholders as well as thorough research on the web, it was only through online browsing that we happened upon Colgate’s Green Raider (eco-rep) site. Furthermore, the format of the program is troublesome in that its structure is the same as those criticized by key stakeholders at other institutions. Being that Colgate is currently only approaching the “emergence” phase of implementing sustainability on campus, it is crucial that programs are designed to go to the student as opposed to student having to approach the program. This can be ensured through facilitating thorough sustainability programming through a first-year’s orientation program. This is supported by our findings that first-year students are more likely to want more information from their CL on sustainable programming. This is not feasible without first the implementation of our initial recommendation of increased interdepartmental communication as this will be necessary to coordinate such programming. Therefore, although this is our key recommendation, the first recommendation must occur in order for a more effective Green Raider program to be put into place.

In conclusion, we believe that with the right resources and staff support, as we confirmed are present through our research, Colgate should redesign the current Green Raider (eco-rep) program similar to the program at the University of Pennsylvania in order to ensure that all students are receiving direct communication in their dormitories regarding sustainable behavior. This program must be directly facilitated by the Office of Residential Life as opposed to the Office of Sustainability which is the department it is currently run by. This ensures increased direct communication between a designated individual and their assigned residents which does not currently take place through the Green Raider program. A model of anywhere between eight to ten total eco representatives for the first-year residence halls appears to be the most feasible for an institution of Colgate’s size, liberal arts curriculum and geographic location. It also leaves room for expansion, just as UPenn did, once the program is up and running into a Residential Hall Association where there are actual committees that also contribute to the conversation on sustainability programming. As Colgate continues to take steps toward establishing a campus ethos of sustainability, it will be important that key stakeholders critically examine and value such successes and barriers of implementation and retention of similar programs at peer and other institutions to ensure long-term success.
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Travis Hill, Assistant Dean of Students for Residential Life at Hamilton College
Steve Bellona, Associate Vice President of Facilities and Planning at Hamilton College
Works Cited


Appendices

Appendix A:

Questions for the Residential Life Department at other schools:

1. What initiatives do you have for making residential living more sustainable? RA education? Housing contests?
2. How successful have you been in accomplishing these goals? and How can you be more successful?
3. Do you interact with the Sustainability Office?
4. Do you hire individuals with a background in sustainability? Or is there a sustainability chair within your residential life office?
5. Do you have any fully sustainable dorms or a themed environment house?
   a. If so, would you mind answering a few questions about the house?
   b. How did this get implemented?
   c. Was it through sustainably-minded students, faculty or staff?
   d. How does it work? Everything from toilets to cooking and heating?

Questions for the Sustainability Department at other schools:

1. Please describe your position and main responsibilities
2. Do you have any interaction with the Office of Residential Life?
3. Do you believe the Office of Residential Life is concerned with helping to achieve your sustainability goals?
   a. If so, how did you align the residential life group to incorporate either sustainable individuals or programing?
4. What are any educational programs that have helped promote sustainability on campus through students that you could briefly speak about?
5. Do you have any fully sustainable dorms or themed houses?
   a. If so do you mind answering a few more questions?

Questions from the student survey at Colgate:

1. My CL encourages me to practice sustainable behaviors in my residence hall (recycling, water conservation, energy conservation and the like)
2. My CL provides me with the right amount of information about practicing sustainable behaviors in my residence hall
3. I would prefer my CL to provide me with more information on sustainable behavior
4. I have received information regarding sustainable behavior from the Office of Residential Life itself
Appendix B:

*Sample Email - Colgate Stakeholder Interviews*

Good afternoon ______,

We are a group of students enrolled in the Environmental Studies class "Community-based Studies of Environmental Issues" and are examining the role of sustainability in Residential Life here on the Colgate campus for our semester long project.

Our group is in the preliminary stages of research, and are reaching out to various staff and faculty at Colgate to discuss how the Residential Life department programmatically incorporates the values of sustainability to educate and instill green living practices in students both on and off-campus. We would love to meet with you briefly (no more than 30 minutes) to introduce ourselves and discuss your thoughts on our project.

Our availability for the coming week is:
...

Please let us know if this fits into your schedule, and if not, let us know when you are free.

Thank you for your time... We look forward to meeting with you!

Sincerely,
Anna Heil, Kristina McNamara, and Fritz Richter
Appendix C:

Sample Consent Form

Certificate of Informed Consent

Overview and Procedure: The information being collected in this interview is for the purpose of completing a research project entitled “Assessing Sustainability in Residential Life” at Colgate University. This project is for the course ENST 390: Community-Based Studies of Environmental Studies. Our objective is to assess the current sustainability programming implemented by Residential Life and its effectiveness on Colgate’s campus. We will first learn about said programming through faculty interviews and student surveys, and then compare this information with our peer institutions. This information will be critical in helping us work with the department of residential life, department of finance and office of sustainability to ultimately implement improved green programming.

Risks and Benefits: It is important to know that any information or opinions that you provide us with will potentially be used in our research that will be presented to Colgate administration, and could be published on the Colgate website. However, the information that you provide us will be beneficial as it could facilitate improvement in green programming.

Confidentiality: Your name, position and quotes could be used in our paper and our project video. If you would prefer us to keep this information confidential, please indicate so below.

Compensation: There is no monetary compensation for participating in this interview, but you will be credited with the information provided in our final research paper.

Your Rights: You have the right not to answer any of the questions that we ask of you, and also to terminate this interview at any time if you wish.

Contact Information: If you have any further questions or concerns, you may contact Anna Heil, Frederick Richter and/or Kristina McNamara of Colgate University for further information at _____. _____. _____.

Please circle the appropriate choice for each of the following:

Yes or No: I give permission for my voice, image, name etc. to be used for your video component of your class project

Yes or No: I give permission for my quotes to be used in your project

By signing below, you are agreeing 1) to participate in this study, and 2) that you have read and understand all of the information provided on this form.

Participant Name (please print) __________________________

Researcher Name (please print) __________________________

Participant Signature __________________________

Researcher Signature __________________________

Date __________________________

Date __________________________