Spring 5-16-2018

What Obstacles Prevent Students from Engaging in Environmentally Friendly Behaviors?

Carrie Cutler  
ccutler@eagles.ewu.edu

Loretta Sohappy  
lsohappy2009@eagles.ewu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://dc.ewu.edu/scrw_2018

Part of the Environmental Sciences Commons, Medicine and Health Sciences Commons, and the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dc.ewu.edu/scrw_2018/26

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the EWU Student Research and Creative Works Symposium at EWU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2018 Symposium by an authorized administrator of EWU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jotto@ewu.edu.
According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the United States generated 33 million tons of plastic waste in 2014, of which only 9.5% was recycled. The U.S. uses over 17 million barrels of oil a year to meet demands for plastic water bottles. Any reusable plastic that gets thrown away creates the need to harvest new raw materials, which contributes to pollution and energy consumption. Colleges and Universities in the U.S. consume large amounts of plastic. The average college student produces 640 pounds of solid waste each year, including 500 disposable cups and 320 pounds of paper (Boston College, 2016). To gain insight on our own campus recycling and waste consumption, we spoke with Scott Buck, the Transportation Director of the Eastern Washington University (EWU) recycling center. He stated that EWU generated over 1,300 tons of waste in 2016 (Scott Buck, Personal Communication, May 19, 2017).

A focus group was conducted to identify student attitudes towards and barriers for recycling and waste reduction in the dorms. To recruit students, flyers were hung in various buildings around campus with our contact information advertising the focus group. Additionally emails were sent to 15 arbitrarily chosen professors on campus asking them to advertise the focus group to their students. There were no responses to the flyers, so the focus group was conducted with 9 public health students in the Health Behavior Change class. Qualitative data from the focus group was analyzed for important themes. A 12-item Likert scale online survey (“1” Strongly Agree to “5” Strongly Disagree) was administered to identify attitudes and perceived barriers for environmentally friendly behaviors. Just like the focus group, flyers advertising the survey were hung in various buildings around campus. The flyers featured a QR code so that students could take the survey on their smart phones. Additionally, emails including the survey link and flyer were sent to 80 arbitrarily chosen professors on campus asking them to advertise the survey to their students. Survey data was analyzed for descriptive statistics using SPSS.

**Barriers for recycling and waste reduction on campus:**

Knowledge:

- "People throw something in their trash can and they don't give it a second thought, they have no idea where their plastic bottles are really going"
- "Some people don't know what is recyclable, so they just throw it away or they put it in the wrong bin"
- "Some kids might not have even grown up with [recycling] knowledge, they live in a town like Cheney where they only throw things away in the trash bins"

Community Support:

- "You're more likely to do something if your friends are doing it, or your organization is doing it, rather than just solo"
- "It's not a thought to be environmentally friendly, you have your recycling stations but how many people actually use those"
- "When I moved here I called the city and asked if I could get a recycling bin and they said 'we don't do that' and I thought I guess I'm just not going to recycle when I'm here"
- "If Cheney was advertising recycling more and making the behavior more visible then more people would be likely to do it"
- "When I moved here I called the city and asked if I could get a recycling bin and they said 'we don't do that' and I thought I guess I'm just not going to recycle when I'm here"
- "If Cheney was advertising recycling more and making the behavior more visible then more people would be likely to do it"

**SELECTED REFERENCES**