

Our goal in banning the sale of bottled water on our campus was not to be the first university in North America to do so, but we are proud that our collaborative effort made us the first university to achieve this important sustainability milestone. Our students' concern first appeared during our 2008 Commencement activities when we placed bottled water on each chair of our attendees. During the summer of 2008, the university staff working on sustainability issues wanted to figure out an issue that we could work with students on, so that they would understand that we were serious about sustainability issues. This was not to replace our work in drafting a sustainability plan, but rather to help students understand that the Wash U administration was committed to sustainability. We decided that we would do the behind the scenes work so that if when our students returned in August and were interested in pursuing this bottled water ban then we would support this initiative.

During the summer, we first obtained our Chancellor's approval of this initiative and then we met with admissions, dining services and purchasing (responsible for vending machines) to figure out what it would mean to ban the sale of bottled water. Not everyone was as excited by this idea as those of us dealing with sustainability were, but they all agreed that they would work towards it if the students wanted it.

When the students returned, we were incredibly fortunate to have a dynamic junior lead the student effort. She dubbed the campaign "Tap It", which title caused some consternation amongst administrators. Her main efforts revolved around getting our different student union groups to pledge that they would not use bottled water at their events, pasting little tidbits of bottled water information around campus, displaying a huge bottled water sculpture built out of bottles taken out of the trash, and sponsoring a taste test. Her highly visible actions and the pledges she obtained convinced the administration that enough of our students were behind this initiative, and so in January of 2008 we stopped selling bottled water on campus and except for a greatly reduced use at Commencement we do not use university money to purchase bottled water.

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