



April 29, 2021

Sustainability Tracking and Assessment Rating System (STARS) Innovation Credit

RE: Ditch the Dumpster

TO: AASHE's STARS Committee:

Spring of 2015, the Office of Sustainability began the annual Ditch the Dumpster Move-Out campaign. This campaign was an effort to reduce the amount of waste generated by students during move-out and to "re-home" items in good condition with local non-profits and other organizations. During Finals Week, student volunteers helped staff a centrally located collection site to collect various items including but not limited to toiletries, kitchen items, lamps, mirrors, and couches. Students who donated items received raffle tickets to be entered into a drawing to win an Amazon gift card. The intention of the incentive system was to encourage students to think twice before discarding usable items.

In 2016, the Office of Sustainability joined forces with the college's Mobilization of Volunteers Efforts (MOVE) office to expand the campaign's impact on and off campus. With MOVE's help, the campaign was able to increase the list of acceptable items (and organizations that benefited from the campaign) to include clothing and non-perishable food items.

With the partnership between MOVE and the Office of Sustainability, Ditch the Dumpster continued to be a presence at Saint Michael's College during the campus move out process in both 2017 and 2018. The initiative engaged student leaders looking to minimize waste, contribute to the needs of the community, and raise awareness of alternative options to trash with peers on campus. Ditch the Dumpster continued to partner with local non profit organizations to make donations of clothing, food, and other items collected. During 2017 and 2018, Ditch the Dumpster grew in success as more students were made aware of the initiative, signage about how to participate was more present and visible, and access to participate increased. In these years conversations about items like mini refrigerators began, considering ways to reuse items that students buy annually right on our own campus.

The spring of 2019 offered a shift for Ditch the Dumpster transitioning the program from being a partnership between MOVE and the Office of Sustainability to it being part of the Sustainability Team, a committee that developed out of the, new at the time, Center for the Environment. That spring MOVE did not have the capacity to coordinate a growing effort so MOVE leadership requested that the Sustainability Team consider supporting and advising the initiative. In a year of transition, Ditch the Dumpster took on a different and somewhat smaller look. The 2019 initiative made its way literally into the residence halls. The hope was to catch items before they even left the building on their way to the trash. Boxes were set up in the foyers of many residence halls and collected many of the same items as previous years.

Following the 2019 move out process, it was clear structural improvements were needed and a more collaborative approach was necessary for the Ditch the Dumpster's continued success. Under the leadership of a staff member from the Sustainability Team, a committee formed including members from a variety of campus constituents (Residential Life, Facilities, Public Safety, MOVE, student leaders from the Center for the Environment, and a committee Chair from the Sustainability Team). Extensive discussion, planning, and preparation went in to the spring 2020 Ditch the Dumpster. A number of improvements were made including organizing multiple drop off spots across campus to encourage more students to participate, more visibility with pop up tents, a partnership with large reuse organizations such as ReSOURCE, and distribution of non-perishable food to small local food shelves in need (specifically organizations that have long standing partnerships with MOVE). Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 the effort was put on hold.

The planning and improvements coordinated for 2020 set the committee up for success in 2021. This year the committee, comprised of very similar departments to ensure campus-wide collaboration and student engagement, picked up where they left off and are set for a very successful 2021 Ditch the Dumpster. The multiple drop off locations will be staffed by faculty, staff, and student volunteers with a point person from the planning committee also staffing the event each day. A very strong partnership with ReSOURCE is in place again for 2021 allowing the Ditch the Dumpster effort to collect more items than previous including towels, open laundry detergent, and shampoo. Additionally, the Ditch the Dumpster committee is partnering with the SMC Bookstore to collect and resell mini refrigerators and microwaves – a consideration that started in 2018 will now come to fruition. The support Ditch the Dumpster has been able to offer to local food shelves by donating unopened, un-expired non-perishable food will also continue. The initiative plans to donate to three local food shelves that each have high needs right now. Again this year an incentive offered by ReSOURCE will be available to participants. And, this year's initiative will be even more visible with incredible art work by two student leaders as well as new t-shirts for volunteers. This year's effort, is sure to be a success and to continue to meet the main goal of the project – to divert items from the landfill.

Since its inception, the Ditch the Dumpster campaign has not only successfully diverted thousands of pounds annually from the waste stream, but it has also raised awareness about the importance of donating items to those in need rather than carelessly tossing them away.

I, Lara Scott, Director of MOVE, affirm that the Ditch the Dumpster campaign meets the criteria for an innovation credit from STARS.

Lara Scott
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