

Sharing UVIC Sustainability Final Report

Prepared by:

Bronwyn Harvey

UVIC Undergraduate Student: Department of Geography

bee.harv1@gmail.com

587-357-0373

Key Accomplishments

The Western Division of Canadian Association for Geographers (WDCAG) holds an annual conference; bringing delegates from across North America. The objective of the WDCAG Undergraduate Sustainability Committee was to bring awareness to the impact of large academic conferences, and to try and reduce this impact through our key initiatives. By supplying Spokes bikes, BC transit bus tickets and replacing the plastic found in the gift bags we hoped to encourage sustainable actions from all our attendees.

Perhaps the most important thing we accomplished was the level of student engagement that came out of forming our committee. Our students put in weeks of volunteer time to make this conference a success. Without the dedication of committee members, we would not have been able to achieve our goals.

The second key accomplishment of our project was the elimination of plastic from the gift bags. We had nearly 250 attendees attend the conference. This would have been 250 plastic bags, name tags and “gift items” given out had we not taken steps to ensure a “plastic-free” alternative. The tea bags, gift bags and cups were all sourced locally; supporting our partners in the community.

Finally our project, and the associated outreach, provided an awareness to attendees of their own impacts outside of the conference times. For example, students observed the majority of waste ended up in provided compost bins as opposed to landfill garbage.

Student Learning

As previously highlighted, we were able to engage several undergraduate students with the project. This event was 100% volunteer powered, and a large portion of those volunteers were students. Within the Sustainability Committee, there were seven key students who were indispensable. It could not have been done without them.

The Department of Geography relied heavily on undergraduate students to organize this conference. Throughout the entire planning process, there was very little guidance from the Department and the student committee was left to solve problems and take on projects without an end goal. However this was a fantastic learning opportunity and overall, it made students take on management roles and adapt to new situations. These are transferable skills for future development.

Goal Acquisition

The objective of the project was to create sustainable solutions to the biggest elements of waste at academic conferences. It was a first attempt, yet we managed to supply what was promised while staying in our budget. We supplied and ran a success bikes table for the entire conference. People were able to enjoy UVIC's campus while on break from sessions, and we received positive feedback about their experiences.

However, due to the lack of guidance and the lack of experience that students possessed in event planning, the project goals could have been achieved in a more efficient manner. This was especially clear when attempting to purchase bus tickets. Due to the lack of guidance from the Department, students were unclear as to who to get in touch with at BC Transit. We did not have a clear understanding of what the Department expected, or how many tickets we were required to purchase. This led to confusion and last minute planning, and in the end we were unable to achieve the goal of discounted bus tickets.

Long Term Consequences

The Department of Geography greatly appreciated the efforts and determination of this student led project. We received positive feedback from the Chair, who expressed a desire to have student led initiatives at future conferences. The next conference being held at UVIC is the National Association of Geographers, which an event that hosts roughly double the amount of attendees. Bike rentals will likely be utilized at this conference. They were a free and enjoyable benefit for attendees.

It is important to note for future, that BC Transit has changed its community donation guidelines. It was our initial intention to apply for donated tickets. However, their new guidelines made it difficult to achieve this goal. We ended up spending nearly half of our total budget on single bus tickets, and this amount did not cover all of the attendees present. It was a significant loss for the project, and should not be attempted at future events. Although those who received tickets found it to be a useful addition to the gift bags.

Lessons Learned

For future projects it will be important to obtain a written outline of expectations for student projects from the Department. This will ensure that, while the Department's planning process is disorganized, the student projects will not be. In addition, this will help to maintain set timelines, and avoid mix-ups closer to the conference dates.

Personally, I was able to learn a great deal about writing proposals and the feedback from my fellow student collaboratives was that they appreciated the opportunity to apply their skills in a real world situation. Managing budgets and students was challenging, but overall these skills will carry forward into future opportunities. Maintaining spreadsheets and open communication between contributors is key to achieving project goals.

Bikes were a success, and while this success is weather dependent, this aspect of the project should definitely be pursued for future events around campus. Spokes was incredibly helpful and easy to communicate with. The advertising and location of the bike registration was not in an ideal location, with improvements it will be a success in future.

Timeline

February

Begin student led mapping projects for zero waste services at the conference

February 20

Completed student mapping projects for zero waste services

February 28

Cement the role of community stakeholders at the conference.

- Community Cabbage, Zero Waste Emporium

Ensured Spokes bikes are scheduled for the correct time and date Finalize volunteer lists and duties

March

Finalized registration bag merchandise

March 1

Ensure bike rentals are ready and paid for in full for attendees to use at “no charge”

Finalize the locations of zero waste stations match the maps created by students

March 7

Finalized Bus tickets

Purchased tickets from the BC Transit Office

March 8-9th

Conference Dates

Data and Feedback collection

Budget

Registration Bags

Zero Waste Emporium

- Certified Organic Unbleached Tea Bags
- 100 green rooibos: \$.25 a bag = \$25
- 100 black rooibos: \$.25 a bag = \$25
- 200 honeybush: \$.25 a bag = \$50
- TOTAL: \$25 + \$25 + \$50 = **\$100.00**

*With only 250 attendees in attendance, remaining bags were given out as extras

* Student Mackenzie Ross was reimbursed for the cost

Transportation

Spokes

- Two days = \$20.00 for one bike
- **Total:** 20 x 20 = **\$400.00**

*Paid directly by the UVIC Sustainability Office

BC Transit

- 10 sheets of single use bus tickets= \$22.00 each
- a 10% community discount
- 24 sheets x \$22.00- 10% = **\$483.00**

*Paid for by the UVIC Sustainability Office

Total: \$100+ \$108.00+ \$600.00+ \$160.00= \$1000.00

Conclusion

Overall this project was a success. Students were engaged and contributed both their time and enthusiasm for several weeks leading up to the event. The financial objectives were met, and the budget was not exceeded. We managed to provide attendees the items and services we advertised and based on the feedback obtained from student volunteers, attendees noticed the sustainable options we provided. Our project objectives should be perfected and applied to future conferences hosted by the Department of Geography. The UVIC Sustainability Office was an excellent resource and provided significant guidance in moving forward with both the proposal and project planning. Thank you so much for all of your support!