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SVIC Spotlight Film: Be Green, Wildcats

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Implement More Trash Cans Around Campus: Make Wildcats More Aware About Litter

It has come to our attention that the University of New Hampshire has an increasing amount of litter and trash throughout the Durham campus. As our project reflects, this is concerning for many reasons: proper sanitation during a pandemic, the environmental impacts of misplaced trash and litter, lack of student/community awareness about the issue, further contributions to climate change through poor trash management, and the highly ranked sustainability standing of the UNH Durham campus (University of New Hampshire).

We believe the litter problem is associated with two different sources: a lack of access to outdoor trash cans and a lack of awareness or acknowledgement about the repercussions litter has on the environment. One of the most important aspects of this project is attempting to adapt to the current needs the University requires in managing trash and litter around campus. One of the major factors currently at play is the pandemic which has changed many things about day to day life including the kinds of things being carried around, like covid testing kits, or being worn, like disposable masks, as well as take away food containers. The current solutions in managing trash on campus do not reflect the changes that have come along with the pandemic like the University's testing program or shift to many single use items at the dining halls. The pictures provided of trash around campus in the project show the mass amounts of Covid related litter that have accumulated in vegetation, against buildings, and even just randomly in the middle of walkways as it is dropped or blown from place to place. An article posted by the United Nations News page in 2020 highlights many of the significant issues surrounding the improper discarding of disposable masks due to the plastic materials they are made out of and the mass amounts being utilized globally. Importantly this article points out that the management of public waste should be treated “as an essential public service” (United Nations News) highlighting the need to address the pandemic related litter and have more access to dispose of it properly.

This is not to say all of the litter on the campus is pandemic related, making it important to address the majority of litter found and why it is discouraging to see in the coastal area campus resides, “Trash can travel throughout the world's rivers and oceans, accumulating on beaches and within gyres. This debris harms physical habitats, transports chemical pollutants, threatens aquatic life, and interferes with human uses of river, marine and coastal environments” (Environmental Protection Agency). In interviews, fellow students agreed it would be more helpful to have access and the opportunity to dispose of trash properly, especially in highly populated or used areas. Although testing drop off sites, mask mandates, and single use dining containers and utensils may not be around forever, it is important to consider the ways some of the protocols in place now may remain useful in the future (utilizing outdoor space and more access to trash cans in these areas) and what this means for controlling trash and litter.

We have come up with two major solutions to the trash problem at UNH: Implement more trash cans around campus and make Wildcats more aware about litter. There are 10 different testing sample drop off sites on the Durham campus (“Covid 19 Testing Resources”) that we believe would be great places for additional trash and recycling cans, as well as permanently outside of the dining halls and popular outdoor places like the trailhead at College Woods. We believe these trash cans should be paired with recycling bins in order to promote recycling practices and match the rest of the UNH receptacles, leading us to believe between 10-15 receptacles (one trash and recycling bin pair) should be implemented initially. Sending out a mass email to students and faculty about the new locations would help spread the word on where to find and utilize them. We recognize that there would be a cost associated with this implementation, but it is helpful that the University already has an existing trash and recycling

program in place and the benefit of this should outweigh the cost of placing and maintaining them. Pricing varies, for example, we found by researching costs through Waste Management that for the Durham area, 2-Yard dumpsters holding up to 400 pounds of trash and or recycling, equal to about 12 trash bags, would cost under \$130 each a month to maintain (Waste Management). The reciprocals we envision are smaller but could accumulate collectively to this amount or more each month. Getting this trash and recyclable material into the proper receptacles and off of the ground around campus would benefit students, staff, faculty, animals, and the environment positively.

This is where making students and the community more aware about litter comes in. Implementing more trash and recycling bins is an important step but getting individuals to use them and see the benefit of doing so is a further step that must be taken. The UNH Supervisor of Grounds and Events, James Malo, told us that litter is often found just feet away from trash bins on the campus showing how people who litter will continue to do so even if there are trash cans available. Mr. Malo said, "I feel that this is where the opportunity lies. Personal responsibility of those that generate their own refuse." We believe placing posters or signs with facts about litter and the negative impacts it has on the environment will help spark interest and a shared sense of community to take further steps away from improper trash disposal. This information can send valuable messages about pressing environmental issues and trash pollution while also creating a connection among students, staff, and faculty to do their part in maintaining a beautiful and healthy campus. Posters or signs reminding individuals they are part of a larger community with a mission of promoting sustainability and positively impactful environmental practices is a great way to build pride in not just being a Wildcat, but a Green Wildcat. The money to support these ideas could be factored into the annual waste removal budget or be raised and supported through a campus fundraiser.

As we have stressed, the litter on UNH grounds not only affects the students and local residents of Durham, but the environment. After a weekend of college kids partying, Main Street sees the aftermath. Not only does this degrade the appearance of the University, it also negatively affects the planet. Climate change is an increasing emergency, and it is important that as a sustainable University we take this issue seriously in every aspect. Interviews with students revealed an agreement that climate change is a real issue we face and in turn they have agreed to help UNH be a greener campus and use the newly placed trash and recycle bins that we hope can become a viable option in addressing the trash and litter problem on campus. Holding oneself accountable for proper disposal of trash or recycling is a great start that can build up to something much larger like taking the time to pick up and collect litter when it is seen somewhere it should not be or reminding others that there is a shared sense of responsibility to keep the campus a beautiful and litter free place.

Interviewing both students and staff from the UNH community has provided us with important insider perspectives about trash and litter at the UNH Durham campus. What has become clear to us through these select conversations is that the sustainability of the University is valued highly by both. We believe the two fold approach our project takes addresses the pressing social and environmental issues of litter affecting the UNH and Durham community as well as the planet as a whole, and aims to provide a solution that promotes: the better disposal of pandemic related trash, easement of negative environmental and climate impacts associated with improper disposal of trash, raised awareness about litter in the UNH Durham community, and the maintenance of being a highly ranked sustainable University.

Wild E. is Watching! Are You Being a GREEN Wildcat?

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