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# Environmental Stewardship on the URI Campus

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# Environmental Stewardship on the URI Campus

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### **Analyze the basis for the problem.**

Litter is a big problem affecting the United States today. It has many negative effects on the environment and public health. Not only does littering poison animals and their habitats, pollute water supplies, provide breeding sites for mosquitoes and other disease-causing insects, and make the environment less attractive, but it also costs millions of dollars annually to clean up.

Here at URI, many people do not respect the campus environment as much as they should, so they leave their trash in campus buildings and outside on the campus grounds. There are many reasons that this could be happening. Many people have no idea how much litter affects the environment. Especially if litter has already accumulated, people are more inclined to add their own trash to the pile. Since there are no penalties for littering or reinforcements for putting garbage in trashcans, many people don't care if they leave their trash on the ground, especially since there's no social pressure to do the right thing and throw it away. Sometimes there aren't enough trashcans nearby, so instead of carrying their trash around with them, people will just leave it on the ground. Also, sometimes people don't view the item as litter, which is very common with cigarette butts.

There are several explanations as to why people think these things. The **social learning theory** says that behavior is learned through observation of others as well as through the direct experience of rewards and punishment. If people see other people littering, and when they do it themselves and receive no punishment, this theory says it is expected that people will start littering even more.

**Conformity** plays a role in why people litter as well. If littering is perceived as a norm, people may change their behaviors to fit in with that “norm”. The **theory of planned behavior** says that attitudes toward a specific behavior as well as subjective norms and perceived control influence a person’s actions. If there is litter all over the ground, people may perceive littering as a norm, so even though they may know it’s bad, they may decide to litter anyways because other people do it too. The **actor-observer effect** may play a role when there is not a trashcan present. An individual can know that littering is bad and think that other people who litter don’t care about the environment. When there is no trashcan present, however, and that individual decides to litter, the individual could tell himself that he does care about the environment and that it was the situation he was in that made him litter.

When litter has already accumulated, the **false-consensus effect** may influence people, making them overestimate the extent to which others think it’s ok to litter. If many people are perceived to think littering is ok, an individual might be more likely to do so as well. A version of **pluralistic ignorance** seems to be in effect as well. When people see a lot of trash on the ground and they don’t see anyone else concerned about it, they may think there’s no reason to be concerned, making them more likely to add their own trash to the environment around them. **Habituation** also has a part in this issue. As people see litter everyday, almost everywhere they go, their responses to it are reduced, and they eventually become used to it. They may forget that littering is even a problem that has to be addressed and fixed. **Diffusion of responsibility** plays a role as well. If people believe that others will take action and clean up their trash, they may feel like littering is ok because someone else will clean it later.

## **Campaign aimed at cleaning up the campus environment**

Phase one of the clean up of the University of Rhode Island campus would begin with an addition of numerous trash cans and recycling bins, spanning all around the campus as a whole. Then a vast amount of flyers supporting throwing away trash and recycling would be posted in numerous classrooms, bathrooms, hallways, walkways, offices, bus stops, and all over the campus grounds. These signs would incorporate positive messages to clean up after yourself, and include alarming statistics to make students more wise to the urgent issue at hand. These signs would help to raise awareness of the problem and get more students to throw away their trash.

After phase one is completed phase two would begin. Phase two would incorporate the use of numerous volunteers. Volunteers would come from various places such as environmental groups on campus, and the URI 101 course, which calls for community service hours to be completed. We would also advertise the community service opportunity so anyone willing and wanting to help out could be included. With these volunteers we would hold various fund-raising drives. We would hold a benefit concert, with all profits going to our cause. We would sell raffle tickets and raffle off a sum of money, and use the left over funds for our cause. We would also hold a booth on the quad that offered extensive information on littering and pollution, and asking for donations for our cause.

With the funds we raised from these events we could then begin the third and final phase of our campaign. The third and final phase would begin by advertising the event that would be taking place on campus. The advertisement would read as follows, "Turn Trash Into Cash! Do you need some extra cash? Here's your chance to earn some!

If you're spotted throwing away your trash on campus you could be handed \$5, \$10, or even \$20 on the spot!!! So make sure you're doing your part and you might get lucky!"

The event would work by having the volunteers take rounds on the campus numerous times daily, equipped with many \$5, \$10, and \$20 certificates. The volunteers would have specific routes to follow that walked by many different trash cans on the campus. If the volunteers spotted someone throwing away their trash at random, they would then hand out a certificate to that person for 5, 10, or 20 dollars. That person would then be able to come to our group and claim their cash reward for throwing away trash and making our campus a cleaner place!

**Explain the concepts that are the basis for the advertising campaign.**

There are several social psychology concepts that go along with our advertising campaign. **Compliance** comes into play as the students are requested by the college to change their behavior, which is to throw away their trash. We hope that by actually seeing other students model the behavior, students themselves will **conform** and replicate that behavior. By randomly rewarding students with cash prizes for engaging in the behavior, we are putting into effect the **that's-not-all technique**. Not only are they doing something good for their campus and the rest of the students, they get a little something special for themselves too, encouraging everyone to engage in **pro-social behavior**.

We are **persuading** students to throw away their trash by hanging up signs all around campus that show other students being rewarded for their behavior. Our **super ordinate goal** is that we want everyone on campus to automatically throw away trash when they have some instead of littering the campus, therefore making campus a better and cleaner place. We feel that students will be more easily influenced to throw away

their trash through **positive reinforcement**, so when they see more and more that this behavior is linked with many rewards, the students will do it on a regular basis. This goes along with the **social impact theory**. If students know a campaign is going on to decrease the amount of litter, and they can see the many rewards of the campaign on campus, then they may not want other students seeing them going against this campaign.

No one wants to look bad especially when they come to understand that their personal actions are linked to the success of a good cause. This goes along with the **evaluation apprehension theory**. If students know that each and every one of them has the power to change the way their campus looks, on the subject of cleanliness and litter, and when they have a positive attitude about wanting to make the campus better, they are more likely to throw away their trash. This goes along with the **theory of planned behavior**. By letting students know that they could be given a cash prize if seen throwing away trash, they know that when they take part in this positive behavior that a positive behavior will be **reciprocated** back to them in many forms. By putting up flyers, and asking everyone to throw away their own trash this becomes an example of the **social responsibility norm**.

Everyone shares this responsibility because it impacts each of them. It is also known that throwing away one's trash is a standard **social norm**. If students are modeled as they are seen throwing away their trash, the behavior will extend beyond campus life. When students see they will get rewarded and highly praised for being pro-social with a cash prize this behavior will catch on. This **directly and indirectly** influences the behavior by clearly linking it to a consequence, and letting every one know that this is a behavior that should be repeated. This is an example of **positive reinforcement**.



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