



Zero Waste Events 2018 Midterm Report

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The focus of our project this year is to research how we can make events at UCLA become zero-waste. Not only do we want to make this a possibility, we want to make it the norm. The goal of our project directly aligns with and supports the overall UCLA campus wide goal to reach Zero-Waste by 2020. We believe our project will have a significant impact on the campus-wide goal because events, especially at scale on the UCLA campus, generate a large waste stream. By reducing waste in events, we can significantly reduce waste generated by UCLA as a whole. Additionally, implementing more sustainable and zero-waste practices at events allows for the opportunity to educate event-goers. Initially, the scope of our project focused on making events zero waste within UCLA Recreation. After attending different events, our team realized that much of the waste stream at events was generated from food sources and catering. From this learning, we felt that it was a better idea to shift the research scope on making catering food services adopt zero waste practices. We believe that this will have a stronger campus wide impact because catering serves many of the events on campus and is a major source of waste generation.

We are the first SAR team to specifically tackle waste elimination from events. Although this is a daunting task to do, we feel that working towards such an ambitious goal will have a major positive impact to the overall sustainability of the UCLA campus. Cutting waste from events will cut down a huge portion of waste generation at UCLA.

In the past, the SAR Zero Waste Pauley team worked to eliminate waste with a more concentrated focus. In 2014, this team sought to eliminate waste at the UCLA Recreation facility: Pauley Pavilion. They attended different events that were held at Pauley including

UCLA Basketball games. Their focus was on the waste disposal methods by attendees of the events. As a result, by the end of their research, they proposed better disposable bin systems and improved the signage above disposal bins to help event attendees more easily sort their disposables. This SAR team made a positive impact on reducing waste at Pauley and was certainly a step in the right direction. For our research, instead of focusing at the end of a product's life cycle, we want to focus at the source of waste generation--catering. If catering can reduce their waste from the start and remove disposable items that are destined for landfills, then we will have significantly reduced waste streams (Young).

We can learn a lot from the best practices of other schools in Zero Waste Events. Some universities across the nation already implement zero waste strategies and events. For example, Arizona State University (ASU) has a campus wide zero waste goal as well. ASU's strategy for zero waste events targets the supply chain instead of focusing on disposal techniques. They focus on exclusively using compostable and recyclable items at events to divert waste streams. Similar practices and strategies can be used when addressing catering on campus at UCLA (Brown).

Clark University is another school that already implements Zero Waste Events. Clark has an established system and comprehensive guideline for how event planners can set up a Zero Waste Event. The guideline ranges from materials purchasing in the early stages to methods in engaging event participants to the final stage of measuring success and providing official certification of a successful Zero Waste Event. (Sustainable Clark).

The reality that different universities across the nation already implement zero waste events gives hope and assurance that having zero waste events at UCLA is possible. In such an innovative, optimistic, and forward looking university, there is no reason as to why our school

cannot successfully implement zero waste events and make it a norm. We believe that if this goal is not reached within the timeline of our project, we will have at least created the essential stepping stones for future SAR teams to improve upon. Zero Waste Events will certainly be a reality at UCLA, it is just a matter of time. We believe it will be in the near future.

The methodology of our team has been created with a lot of research from techniques employed by other schools. As explained in the challenges section of this paper, much of our progress as a team has been oriented around groundwork in connecting with all of the people that can create or affect Zero Waste Events. The process of cultivating a solid basis of information along with resources within the UCLA community to collaborate with in making Zero Waste Events has been integral in establishing our goals and objectives. As the first SAR team with a scope of Zero Waste Events as a whole, versus a specific subset like the Zero Waste Pauley team, our research process was spent honing in on what is the most efficient use of resources, time and energy. Initially our mission statement regarded UCLA Recreation because it was the department within which our Stakeholder worked. Previously, “Our goal [was] to create a Zero Waste Event guideline system that uses Green incentives, clear & precise criteria, and a centralized communication network.” Now, with a new stakeholder, new ideas around what is feasible, and a better base of information, our interests and goals have shifted. Our team seeks to learn about the parties involved with UCLA event planning in more detail than we have already. We are out to find opportunities for waste reduction, collaboration, and outreach broadly across campus within the scope of Zero Waste Events. Lastly, our final goal is to create a stepping stone for future teams in Zero Waste Event implementation. The entirety of UCLA events is admittedly a lot to handle, however, with the right path to follow in knowing where and what

needs to be done future SAR teams can continue to strategically and methodically create Zero Waste Events as a standard.

In getting to our goals we have interviewed event managers, ASUCLA Catering, Medical Center Catering, and the Anderson School of Management. What this method led to was a better idea of how event planning works and how the centralization gets lost with so many entities that can and do host events. Our project scope was narrowed drastically after this research with the idea in mind that future teams will pick up where we leave off. In running a qualitative research scan of a women's basketball game our team found that even with the past work of Zero Waste Pauley the continual need for a Zero Waste team is evident in that even with a singular focus of one entity there is still room for improvement. We found many vendors utilizing landfill items in food distribution which did not correlate with the options of disposal being exclusive for recycling or compost. Subsequently, both the recycling and compost at large are as a janitor put it, "contaminated and sent to landfill." Finding this helped guide our process. In the meetings with event managers we discovered the lack of space for reusables when presented as a potential solution along with the lack of infrastructure access to cleaning and maintaining said materials. Within ASUCLA we found that measures are being taken to create more sustainable events and they are undergoing the changes now so it is best to wait and see what happens. For the Medical Center Catering services it was discovered that customers simply liked the aesthetic of non-compostable and non-recyclable items which leads to lots of unnecessary waste. The Anderson School of Management, as we found out, hosts many events and a graduate student working on their thesis requested our help in addressing the waste from these events. All of these

meetings and brief introductions into different areas of UCLA event planning have led us to formulate our goals. The challenges of getting there are expanded on next.

Our team is the first SAR team focused on Zero Waste Events generally. This has been a major obstacle to the development of our project. We do not have a lot to work to build on or stakeholders and relevant parties that have experience with SAR research teams. Without a previous project to bounce off off, it has been difficult to develop a properly sized scope for our amount of time and determine what is feasible. In a sense it has been difficult to just find the specific “problem” of which we want to address. While there is of course waste generated by events at UCLA there is not central person, department, or service that holds control over this aspect of events.

One of the challenges we have faced as a team is not knowing where to and how to best address the goal of waste stream reduction at UCLA events. Additionally, since we have moved between different stakeholders that has shifted our focus and access to resources and information. When we began our project at the start of the quarter our stakeholder was Katie Zeller, a sustainability manager within UCLA Recreation. While she is passionate about sustainability and zero waste, we quickly learned she had no jurisdiction over actual events and making them zero waste. The set-up of having a stakeholder not in charge of what we are trying to change – UCLA Recreation based event waste – made the task of determining feasible actionable items challenging. Katie did not have a clear direction for us to follow and ended up telling us she was leaving for a new job during Week 8 of the quarter. We are all very excited by our extremely energetic and eager new stakeholder Erin Fabris. However, she is new to the UCLA campus and still learning the whole system along with us.

Another huge barrier we have faced is the extremely decentralized bureaucratic system that surrounds events that go on at UCLA and the sustainability within event planning. With such a huge campus there are numerous different events that go on everyday within different departments in different facilities with different parameters, event planners, caterers, and staff. There is no single angle through which to view UCLA events and their sustainable aspects. While we were initially working through UCLA Recreation, they themselves have many different facilities, varying events, and different staff involved in the event planning, as well as regularly use different catering companies.

A lot of the groundwork for our project has been seeking out the right people to learn more about the different components of events, event planning, and event waste at UCLA. This has slowed the progress of our project. First off, we have found it to be difficult to determine the correct people to talk to within different organizations on campus and obtain the appropriate contact information. Additionally, the combination of staff members' busy working schedules and our busy student schedules has made getting meetings on the books a slow process.

A challenge we learned through our outreach is the different priorities of the involved parties in the UCLA events process. At our meeting with ASUCLA Catering we were pleasantly surprised to learn the company is coming out with a new menu pricing April 1st that will include all compostable and recyclable products as a standard. However, when asking about other avenues for sustainable improvements they constantly emphasized that there are a business and constrained by the need to meet their bottom line. When talking to Med Center Catering they stressed that while they have compostable utensils and flatware in their rotation, customer expectations are their greatest priority and can come in conflict with sustainability. For example,

they mentioned how for big donor events they expect a certain appearance and will replace “ugly” compostables with better-looking plastics. Additionally, event planners prioritize making events easy and convenient for clients; concerns of properly addressing and mitigating waste do not always line up with those priorities.

We’ve kept our heads up and have tried to have the highest level of optimism. It’s difficult being the first SAR team to tackle this, starting at ground zero. But we’ve realized that we’re doing all that we can with the resources we’ve been given and information that’s available. Being able to be flexible and pivot, while remaining with waste reduction as our chief focus wherever we turn to has been really important. Luckily, we now have more resources thanks to our meetings, and a bounty of knowledge and advice from our new stakeholder.

Using the resources, information we’ve collected, and updated goals we’ve pivoted to, we need to target how to centralize communication and purchasing between different catering organizations, reach out to varying sources and departments and explore options that would be reducing waste in their events. Aside from organizing our contacts and trying to see if a managed, centralized purchasing operation for catering is possible, educating the UCLA student body on Zero Waste and sustainable practices is overall a large goal for us as well.

For the upcoming quarter, one area we can improve on in a team is organized and collective engagement. This includes organizing our tasks better and also ensuring that tasks are equally distributed throughout the team. With this being our first quarter in SAR, it’s taken time to find flow as a group and get used to the management and requirements of SAR as a program, but knowing what to improve on for efficiency and time management we’re set to have a great quarter.

As it has been mentioned previously, we have looked into varying courses for our project scope. When we first started our project, our stakeholder was Katie Zeller and since her scope was in recreation, our goal was to address zero waste events specifically in recreation. We also figured it would be a suitable project to follow-up with the Zero Waste Pauley team. However, after observing a few recreation events, we felt like there were not many tangible implementations and improvements we could accomplish in recreation. We had ideas and suggestions after our observations, but were presented with barriers and obstacles we didn't have control over. These ideas revolved around creating a third waste stream, implementing guidelines in contracts with third-party vendors, and a regular- on site compost bin. We also started with the idea of possibly improving the green events seal by catering it to the type of event and somehow making it more accountable. However, as the quarter continued, we were presented with the idea of working with catering. We figured with catering, we could have a larger impact in the event process. Since then, we have been looking for into catering, their disposables, and their food waste.

We understand that in the short amount of time we have, we will not be able to get all catering services we have met with to implement zero waste practices across their entire organizations. However, by the end of spring quarter, we ultimately would like to create a stepping stone for future SAR projects related to zero waste events by gathering as much information as we can on feasible options among several organizations on campus. From our many meetings this Winter quarter, we have brainstormed several options going into Spring quarter.

One of these options is the possibility of connecting campus catering organizations for purchasing power. This was brought up to us during the Medical Center Catering meeting. If Medical Center Catering, UCLA Catering, ASUCLA Catering, and other catering services could collaborate and purchase environmentally-friendly products in bulk, this could significantly lower the costs of pricey items such as compostable spoons and forks. Expensive compostable items has been a common issue brought up in the meetings, and we hope that this idea could potentially address that. We are also planning to reach out to catering services that practice zero waste at other universities, such as Cal Catering at UC Berkeley, to gather more information on zero waste strategies.

We also have been presented the opportunity to help with a graduate student's pursuits on making a large scale UCLA event more sustainable. Anderson's Net Impact Week is a series of events throughout the week focusing on responsible business. David Poli, one of the event organizers and a graduate student pursuing a certificate in Sustainability at Anderson, is looking into certifying Net Impact Week as a Green Event, a certification system established by event planners at UCLA. Our vision for this event is to organize separated waste bins, create informative signage for the bins, inform attendees about waste practices at the event, assess the event's overall waste patterns, and discuss measures of success and future steps from our efforts as this can pose as a case study for future teams and event planners.

Additionally, we would like to possibly address a waste issue in Pauley since one of the results from auditing a women's basketball event was that the compost at Pauley ultimately goes to the landfill due to excessive contamination. This is due to the fact that there are landfill items from concessions and vendors but there are no labeled landfill bins. Although our original idea

was to create a landfill option, there are drawbacks with the idea so we would like to look into other options, such as potentially working with outside vendors to create a zero waste policy for the items they sell.

Finally, from meeting with various people involved in the event planning process, we have realized the lack of knowledge when it comes to Environmental Health and Safety standards and regulations. It seems as if people are not sure whether certain rules are due to event contracts, due to the EH&S standards, or other factors. Therefore, we would like to brainstorm ways to better convey this information so that it is readily available to all those involved. A potential goal of ours is to create a spreadsheet of contacts in different departments to close the gap in communication.

Our team has several options going forward and have yet to discuss them and their feasibility with both of our current stakeholders, Erin Fabris and Bonny Bentzin. Although there are numerous possible plans for Spring Quarter, we are planning to narrow them down to what is most feasible and impactful to solidify our goals for the next quarter. We also understand the results we ultimately create will be very different from the other teams in that we are not targeting a single organization. In short, the goal for our results is to create a good foundation for future teams, providing them the information and contacts we found. We also want to bridge the gap in communication between different departments and overall making necessary information for accessible.

While our project has been riddled with obstacles and challenges, our team remains hopeful. We have learned a lot about work in sustainability in general and the difficulties that arise when addressing new problems. We know that any small impact we can make as a team

will be a step in the right direction. Even just opening up conversations among campus employees about sustainability and zero waste has stimulated the conversation about accomplishing the UCLA and UC-wide goal of zero waste by 2020. While it may seem that zero waste events are not achievable currently, we remain hopeful for progress on UCLA campus, as a progressive leader in sustainable practices. Like our valuable supporter Carolyn Anderson mentioned, everyone used to smoke cigarettes in public venues and no one ever thought that would change. But here we are in 2018 cigarette smoking in public banned and enjoying going to school at smoke free college campus. Change is possible and will happen with time!

Works Cited

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