

# COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIAL MARKETING AND WATER CONSUMPTION

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## RESEARCH STATEMENT:

This project will assess how effective a community-based social marketing campaign is in reducing the water consumption of students on the USC campus. The campaign will specifically target behavior related to water consumption, but research suggests that such campaigns also sensitize students to general issues related to sustainability. The effectiveness of the campaign will be evaluated through the use of focus groups and pre- and post-surveys. Results of the research will contribute to theory on social marketing as well as have practical results on campus. Savings could be substantial: If 7,000 residents of campus housing leave the water running to brush their teeth for 4 minutes total per day, they consume 56,000 gallons a day and 392,000 gallons each week. Over the course of an entire academic year, an effective social marketing campaign could save almost 12 million gallons of water!

## GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

The goals of this project are to (1) test the effectiveness of a community-based social marketing campaign focused on student water consumption, (2) educate students about the issues related to water resources and the importance of conserving water, (3) reduce the amount and therefore cost of water used in campus housing, and (4) change the habits and behaviors of as many students as possible by empowering them to make a small change which in turn can lead to an awareness of how they can make a difference more generally in reducing resource consumption.

## RELATIONSHIP TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH/KNOWLEDGE IN THE FIELD:

This project will draw on and contribute to research on community-based social marketing. McKenzie-Mohr and Smith (1999) have shown that prompts, in conjunction with well-designed communication campaigns, have been effective in changing behavior. The campaign will contribute to existing similar and ongoing efforts on the part of University Housing and the Green Quad to promote sustainable living on campus, including the new Eco-Rep program and the housing committee on sustainability.

## METHODOLOGY/ RESEARCH DESIGN:

The overall strategy for this research is to administer an initial survey of students prior to the end of the Spring 2009 semester, implement a water-saving campaign starting with move-in day in the Fall 2009 semester, and administer a final survey of students at the end of the Fall 2009 semester.

The initial survey will be offered to all current undergraduate residents of campus housing, questioning them on their knowledge about water conservation tips, their awareness of trends in sustainability, and their daily habits concerning conservation and recycling. Five focus groups of residents living in the largest on-campus housing facilities (Greek Village, Patterson Hall, Capstone, Bates House, and Green Quad) will also be conducted to measure the opinions and outlooks of student attitudes and behaviors concerning water conservation and sustainability in general.

Implementation of the project will begin prior to move-in day in the Fall 2009 semester. Self-adhesive stickers will be placed above the sinks, with an image of a faucet and copy that reads: "Leaving the tap running while you brush your teeth wastes 2 gallons of water per minute. MAKE SURE YOU TURN THE TAP OFF!" There will also be a simple flyer placed in each resident's room giving a brief description to introduce the new housing initiative to the students and the parents who are helping them move in. Resident Mentors and the Eco-rep for each housing facilities will have received training and a flyer explaining the project's background, purpose, goals, and ways they can help.

At the close of the Fall 2009 semester, another survey will be administered asking a number of the same questions but also asking questions specifically about the stickers. Five follow-up focus groups will also be conducted to get more in-depth and personal opinions to measure the success of the project against the initial surveys and focus groups. The actual amount of water used during the Fall 2009 semester will also be calculated and compared to previous semesters.

## PROJECT TIMELINE:

Fall 2008. Background preparation for the project has already begun. I made initial contact with University Housing in August 2008. Hank Sulley, who has been involved in projects to improve sustainability in campus housing, helped me gain approval for the project from University Housing as well as gave me valuable data on the amount and cost of water used by residence halls yearly. I have also worked with Jason Craig, the Assistant Director of the Green Quad Learning Center, who has also guided and supported me in my project research and execution. Kelley Fink, the Assistant Director of Student Development and University Housing, and her graduate assistant Kathryn McKay, have been involved in creating a design and estimating the printing costs for the stickers that will be placed above the sinks.

Spring 2009. During the current semester, I am taking a web design class and will be creating the website for the campaign as my course project. The website will serve as a means to (1) explain the project and its progress, (2) host the links to surveys, and (3) offer other information and news about other efforts of conservation and 'going green' that would be relevant and interesting to the age group. I am working with Professor David Whiteman as my primary mentor for this project, using his expertise with research and implementation of social marketing campaigns and sustainability projects involving the Green Quad and USC. I will be assisted by Professor John Besley, of the School of Journalism, who has extensive experience in survey research and focus group design. The initial survey will be administered to campus residents and the initial focus groups will be held prior to the end of the Spring 2009 semester. The website will be completed and critiqued by my professor and Jeff Salter, the campus web designer, by the end of the semester.

Summer 2009. In order to give the printing company plenty of time to print and leave ample time to place the stickers above all the sinks in all campus housing, I will need to order 2,500 stickers immediately after the end of the spring semester. During the summer of 2009, the educational pamphlets will be created to be distributed to all RAs and Eco-reps during their August training sessions. The move-in day flyer will also be created and printed.

Fall 2009. The campaign will begin on move-in day, when residents will receive their flyers, observe the stickers, and be exposed to the website and other reminders. At the end of September I will meet with the Resident Mentors, Eco-reps, and Residence Hall Association (RHA) officers to get their opinions on how the stickers were physically holding up and find out what reactions and feedback they had received about the campaign. I will also be doing an independent study course with Professor Whiteman in the Fall 2009 semester to work on the implementation and on-going data collection for the project. For Campus Sustainability Day, in October 2009, I will set up a table on Greene Street to answer questions about water conservation, the current project, and pass out flyers similar to the move-in day flyers. During the first week of December 2009, a link for the final survey that will be on the website will be sent out to all residents. The final focus groups will take place at the closing of the Fall 2009 semester. The information gathered from the surveys, focus groups, and data of water usage will then be analyzed and eventually presented on Discovery Day in April 2010.

#### ANTICIPATED RESULTS:

This project is designed as a social marketing campaign to educate and encourage residents to become more aware of their water usage habits and ultimately change the way they consume and conserve natural resources. The immediate result of the project should be to lower the amount of water used in the resident halls. This will also reduce water costs for the university as well as improve the university's progress and image concerning sustainability. Another result will be to demonstrate to organizations such as the RHA, Students Advocating a Greener Environment (SAGE), and University Housing, through campus events such as Campus Sustainability Day, the components and effectiveness of community-based social marketing campaigns. Similarly, campaign results will reach a wider audience of faculty and staff at Discovery Day in April 2010. Ideally the project will be documented thoroughly enough to contribute to the increasing research literature on social marketing and to inspire our campus and other universities to implement similar projects to increase sustainability.

#### PERSONAL STATEMENT:

I gained inspiration for starting this project after noticing a change in my daily habits upon returning home from studying abroad in Australia. I lived in on-campus housing at the University of Newcastle, which had a small laminated sign above all of the bathroom sinks reminding users to turn off the tap to save water. This simple daily reminder not only made me think about how much water I had previously wasted, but it also caused me to make a conscious effort to turn off the tap. This conscious effort instantly transitioned into an effortless subconscious habit to turn the tap off other places I did not see the sign; in other bathrooms, in the kitchen, and in the shower. After returning home in July 2008, I noticed how cautious I had become in the way I used resources, including energy and gasoline. The transformation I saw in my own behavior, which began from such a simple reminder, is my motivation to try and create the same positive change in sustainable behavior here at USC. I am proud of how I have changed, and I would love to see other students have a transition in sustainable behavior similar to mine, creating better habits among my generation and promoting sustainable living at USC.

I feel well-prepared to take on this research. As the Research Director of the 2009 USC Advertising Team, I have experience creating, analyzing, and summarizing primary and secondary research. I have personally designed online surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus groups. Our current project is to create an advertising campaign for the Century Council to combat the binge-drinking problem on college campuses; and that has given me knowledge and experience in methods to change behaviors and how to measure and evaluate the change. With these skills and with the help of David Whiteman and John Besley's experience with the Green Quad and social marketing campaigns, I am ready to conduct this research and produce useful results.

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