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Champlain College

PGC Day 3: Greenest

Wasteful Practices At Champlain College:

- Special Events Waste: The Events themselves
 - Open Houses
 - Admitted Students Days
 - February Formal
 - Orientation (August and January)
 - Student Activity Programmer Events (movies, food related things)
 - RA Programming
 - Clubs in general (always have a food budget)
- Special Events Waste: The Materials
 - Food (cookies, candy and other snacks bought from the store wrapped and packaged in plastic)
 - Utensils (often at these events the dining hall staff will use compostable plates and utensils. Even though they are compostable- it's still waste)
 - Handouts
 - Notebooks or pens, other "gifts" that people love to grab but don't really use
 - T-shirts at all events
 - Stickers and sunglasses
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- Marketing Material
 - They send out so much and have tons of extra every year. Not to mention half the people who get them just throw them away
- Fliers
 - To promote events, to post up on the walls in different spaces, to leave places and hope people find them, just to get thrown away, recycled, or left on the ground
- Vending Machines and To-Go snacks at our cafe and grille

Action Plan Task: First Year Orientation

The Problem: First Year Orientation is a busy time. With over 600+ students moving on to campus in the span of four hours, it's important to get them settled in and excited for school. After initial move in comes three packed days of events, information sessions, games, and getting to know the school and other students. Along with this comes posters, schedules, freebies, fliers, and every other easy-to-hand-out item imaginable.

Besides the students, family and friends also get information packets, free materials and "gifts" along with their students. This totals up to about 600 paper copies of each item. That is- 600 for the students and 600 for the parents. That is also only for information that is a single page.

The largest chunk of this comes from the orientation schedule, although there is other information about local restaurants, important numbers, a welcome from the president, and fliers from businesses. This is just all from the first hour the students arrive on campus. A majority of these papers get discarded (through the proper channels or not, who knows) and is generally unnecessary.

What to do about it?

Orientation generates copious amounts of waste, so it's important to start with one task at a time. Each step requires thought and questioning. There are boatloads of candy bought for events, prizes that are all wrapped in plastic, and prepackaged food. Tackling all of Orientation moves on piece at a time. I decided to focus on merely the printed paper for this assignment.

Students and families need to know certain information, but is it necessary to be in the form of a piece of paper?

1. Take inventory of all papers that have previously been printed. What is the focus of each one and why is it important to have in our new student packets?
2. Question why they were printed. Just because they have always been printed, doesn't mean we can't change!
3. Evaluate other means of delivering this same information.

Number three is of course the most difficult. What is an alternative route to having a paper copy of everything?

Alternative solutions:

1. Print all papers but in different ways. Print the orientation schedules for students and parents but limit the amounts of all the other papers. Maybe hang them up on the inside door to every first year room. Each first year has anywhere from one to four roommates, so by only having one copy per room, you save a decent amount of paper and ink.

Alternatively, you can print them and hang them in the common room or with the RA bulletin board.

2. Keep only the most important papers printed. This might include the orientation schedule for the students and the parent's schedule as well, along with the list of important contacts. Send the rest via email or through the individual first year hall Facebook pages or through the class Facebook page.
3. Keep all the paper electronic. Deliver it through the student's emails, post on Facebook and/or other social media, send it as a Google Drive link, airdrop stuff to the families and friends who arrive on campus as well.

A few years ago an Orientation Leader created an app for his capstone project that was just for orientation. It took you through the schedule, your hall and group, plus color coded for different events (mandatory events, free time, meals, extracurricular events like bowling or the boat cruise). This would be an incredible way to access the schedule without needing to print all the pages (assuming everyone has access to a smart phone to view this). Or it could be a way to push those who are able to use the electronic copy and still have those who need it with the paper copy.

Steps and Assistance

The first major step to accomplishing this project would be to have a meeting with the main faces of orientation on Champlain's staff. There are three I have in mind who oversee orientation directly and also advisor/are the bosses of the Orientation Leaders. These staff members have a huge say in what happens and their opinions and beliefs around this event are taken very seriously.

Having a conversation about reducing waste, starting with the paper copies, would be a very important dialogue to open up with them. They would be able to agree with, turn down, or offer suggestions to the ideas listed above. Once that process has been thoroughly scrutinized and revised, I (or they) could bring it to the other staff members to also have their hand in orientation.

The biggest logistical detail would simply be- if we're not printing it then how are we getting all the information to everyone equally. Not everyone has access to a smart phone or to an RA at all times to let them know what's going on. This is also one of the biggest barriers. The other may be just that people like paper copies and it's what we've always done. It's hard to change something that works well. Especially when it's the norm.

This is something I'd definitely like to see improve on campus. Orientation is one of my favorite times of year, but this year my eyes were really opened to the excess we create. Excess papers, plastic, all kinds of products. Change starts with one thing at a time though, and I do believe this could be implemented on campus.