

Sustainable Alternatives

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Global Sustainability

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Abstract

As a group, we sought to reveal areas of our lives as students that are often overlooked in the realm of sustainability. We each decided that clothing is far too greatly never considered when one decides to live a “green” lifestyle. Our objective is to make our student body aware of the importance of wearing and supporting sustainable clothing. We have created a brochure to spread to make clear the definition of “sustainable clothing,” the benefits of supporting the industry, and sharing stores in the Charlottesville area where students can acquire these products. We have also created a display that we will install at a tabling location in Newcomb Hall this Thursday, December 9th. We hope the display will make the reality of sustainable clothing more prominent and in turn spark conversation and care for the subject. This location was chosen due to the high traffic of the dining hall nearby.

Introduction

The world of sustainability is blossoming as people are growing more concerned with the issues that are facing our environments today. However, these same people tend to have tunnel vision by only seeing a few ways they can help—such as solar panels, better light bulbs, and buying local food. As a consumer however, we can have a much greater impact in many industries that are often overlooked. The industry that we have chosen to attack is the clothing industry. Sustainable clothing is a viable product available in Charlottesville and the benefits of such clothing are many.

The key stakeholders in this project are students and staff members at the University, and the stores around Charlottesville who carry and support sustainable clothing options.

Sustainability affects everyone, and if we can convince people/stores on and off Grounds to make more environmentally conscious decision, we will have taken a successful step in furthering the awareness of sustainability. Our goal is to make the student body aware of how they can live more sustainable lives through the clothing they purchase and wear.

Body

In the very beginning, our project started out as an idea for a Sustainable Fair, where student organizations and outside groups advocating for sustainability could have an information table at the fair which would be attended by University of Virginia students and people from the community. The idea then changed to a display showing the resources needed to make a particular good. This was intended to highlight the consumerism present in the United States and the disconnect between consumer and product. Then, our project was modified further to a photographic display of the materials needed to make a product. After that, our idea formed into a similar version of what it is currently. Our earlier project design included a visual display, a brochure, and a survey to question stores of their sustainable options. The survey was to benefit the brochure and the information included in it. In the end, our project is a brochure with information on the importance of sustainable clothing and a list of stores that offer sustainable clothing options. We removed the store survey portion for we found various resources that served this purpose as well. As we researched more options of gaining information from stores we decided that the survey was not the most effective way to obtain the necessary information. We received names of stores that we would use in the brochure from various sources—our own

previous knowledge, suggestions from fellow classmates, and directories available online from Better World Betty, The Downtown Mall, and the Charlottesville Chamber of Commerce.

Cianne went to the stores we decided on as a group to focus on and spoke freely with most of the store owners, see Appendix A for full list of stores included in the brochure. Kathy compiled a list of ways clothing can be labeled “sustainable” which included—natural dyes, natural fibers, organic material, second-hand, or fair trade. Clothing can be sustainable in many ways; one of them considers the type of natural fiber used to make the clothing, and these fibers include: (organic) cotton, hemp, bamboo, wool, flax/linen, soy, cashmere, and silk. A second way to determine sustainability is the dye and dying process, the most eco-friendly ways of dying include leaving the cloth undyed, in its natural state, using clay or dirt dyes that use natural mineral from the earth, low-impact fiber-reactive dyes, a synthetic dye which produces 70% less water waste, and natural dyes which are made from plants and fruits. Third, according to the Organic Trade Association in the United States, there are four levels of organic labeling: “100% cotton” which means all parts of the article of clothing are made from organically grown products, “Organic” which means 95% of the fibers are organic, “made with organic products” indicating that at least 70% of the garment follows organic standards, and “less than 70% organically produced” which indicates that there are some organic methods used, but they total less than 70% of the fiber used. Finally, other considerations that make clothing sustainable include whether it is “fair trade,” where the workers making the clothes are working in safe conditions and are compensated for their work, and whether the clothing is secondhand. From these guidelines, we were able to decipher exactly what type of sustainable apparel these stores offered. By exploring the stores and reading clothing descriptions on the store websites, we were able to find materials used and methods of production which were then used to categorize the

stores with the icons seen in the brochure. Once we required this information we were able to put together the brochure. It includes the definition and importance of sustainable clothing, how it affects us, the guidelines to buying sustainability, a directory of stores, and potential gift ideas for students to use for this coming holiday season.

The second portion of the project was to create a visual display to evidence the difference of quantity of resources involved in sustainable and unsustainable resources. This is where our mentor, Emily Miles helped us the most. She is the Activities Advisor from the Student Activities Center and she was able to guide us in deciding what size to make the display, what would be the most effective way of presenting this information so it would impact students, and where the display would get the most reaction, meaning a place with the most traffic. She helped us learn how to use the University's resources for finding where and when we can install a table by introducing us to „The Source.“ She led us to printing resources in the Student Activities Center, online resources, and others the University so greatly provides for its students. We used a tri-fold poster board and will place it in Newcomb Dining Hall beginning Thursday, December 9th until December 13th, the maximum five days allotted for Newcomb table reservations.

Alternatives include implementing only one part of the project by just having the brochure or just having the display. We find that having both parts is most effective because though the brochure can be distributed anywhere, the display gives the students a visual model to see the contrast between sustainable and traditional clothing. Handing out the brochure along with the display allows students to have their questions about the display answered when they read the brochure. Our own experiences as students led us to this conclusion for when we are given information in the media of paper handouts, we will take note of them but a visual display

brings more attention and more of an impact. The combination of extensive information as well as a visually stimulating display is most effective.

Conclusion

So far we have completed the final design of the brochure. It includes definitions, the various facets of sustainable clothing, the directory, gift ideas, and even maps so students know exactly where their options are located. The display has also been completed. On this display we have explanations of sustainability, fun facts about sustainable clothing, a sustainable shirt, an unsustainable shirt, a design of a tree with information about sustainable options and why they are important. The display will be displayed and the brochure will be made available for students this Thursday, December 9th. We believe our project will succeed because of the valuable contacts we have made. The resources we have acquired through our mentor, Emily Miles, and the store owners themselves who are consistently eager to help in any way they can. Through this, if something were to go wrong, we would have plenty of support and help to fix it. A question we still have yet to clearly answer is how exactly we will measure success. However, we feel it might not be feasible to accurately measure success in our project because our goal was simply to raise awareness and hopefully change some individuals' practice on the subject. For now, our measure of success will be to return to the storeowners after the semester break to see if their sales for sustainable options have seen any increase since the fall—outside the realm of Christmas shopping. Lastly, a feasible way we may assess our work is to take note of the number of brochures taken on each day.

Future Work

What we have left to do is implementing the project itself. Thursday Andrea will put up the poster that she made as our display. On this Wednesday all three of us will go to the Student Activities Center to print our brochures on recycled paper achieved from the Bookstore. The table and poster will be put up and taken down each day by all three of us at various times. After the winter break, all that will be left to do is to catch up with storeowners. That can be done by all of us as well. After that point this project will be completed.

Lessons Learned

The first issue in this project and in arguably most every project conducted in teams was communication. This issue was mainly present in the beginning of the semester as we had various papers and it was often left up to a single individual to complete it. However, as the semester progressed we were able to get a better feel of our team dynamic and the way the class operated we were better able to share the load and get assignments done efficiently.

Our project took many turns in the first couple weeks of the course and the lesson learned here was that projects never turn out the way expected. Our ideas at first were very big and as we learned, not feasible whatsoever in the time span in which we preferred to have the project completed. From the class lectures we were able to focus on the “act locally” motto. The importance of the small things was greatly emphasized through the speakers and the readings and this exactly was the change we were hoping to increase here in Charlottesville.

Appendices

Appendix A

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Appendix B

Budget and Costs

Tri-fold Poster Board: \$5.99

100 copies of brochure, estimate: $.045 \times 100 = \$4.50$

Appendix C

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