Recycling at the University of Utah

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Undergraduate research helped pave the way for the successes shown on the poster. Ongoing research continues to shape the progress of these efforts. My UROP projects have utilized the framework of Community-Based Research. This methodology utilizes collaborations between researchers and populations affected by the issue under investigation. Thus, we are not passive subjects scrutinized from a distance. Instead, empowered participants are actively engaged in the discovery process. All participants gain valuable insights and new knowledge, contributing to beneficial changes in the real world.

Three central principles of Community-Based Research:
1. Collaboration among participants at every stage of research process
2. Alternative modes of knowing, discovery, and dissemination
3. Social action for social change

Principles of Community-Based Research in the Union Waste Audit were presented at the 2004 Undergraduate Research Symposium. The collaborative partnership originated in the student environmental club, where the need for a waste audit was identified. Participants expanded to include the Union administration and university food service providers. The most unique aspect relating to the second principle was dissemination of the findings. This research was cited in legislation passed by the student government providing funding for a pilot recycling program at the Union. Shifting from students naming demands to joint problem solving with administrators is a testament to the validity of the third central principle (thesis project).

The second UROP project, Interviewing Recycling Stakeholders, has also pursued UBR principles. This collaboration seeks to include stakeholders who have been underrepresented in efforts thus far. Desired participants are those who will be most directly impacted by implementing a new recycling system, people whose jobs involve recycling at the grassroots level. The identified groups are custodial staff, grounds crews, and administrative assistants who manage departmental recycling programs. The unique knowledge possessed by these stakeholders is invaluable for troubleshooting potential drawbacks. By these efforts, the University can progress. Dissemination of these findings provides a direct avenue into the recycling task force. Ideally, social actions for social change are realized as the underrepresented groups find their voices and become outspoken and informed advocates for these efforts.

Timeline: The following timeline portrays major events in the current recycling revitalization effort including research, partnerships, and educational opportunities.

**Fall 03: UROP Union Waste Audit**
- Participatory process of information gathering, rather than adversarial posing.
- Easterly Center coordinated the student environmental club and Union administration.
- Fall 03: present ASUU Auxiliary Services, Special Projects, and Recycling Boards.
- Collaboration of representative student voice within student government.

**Spring 04: Development of Recycling Task Force**
- Task force interview candidates and makes tentative based on defined criteria.
- Scoping included generation types, number of samples, and acquiring funding.
- Service-learning students participate in computer course concept.

**Spring 05: Integrative Service Project Development**
- Service-learning student represents development, goals statements, and action plan.

**Summer 05: Preliminary Feasibility Assessment**
- Audit data targets assist effective, large impact system that incorporates campus culture.

**Fall 05: present Union Recycling Program**
- Recruiting of socially constructed groups in small hands.
- Lean and grounds crews, administrative assistants in Union, recycling
- Institutional housing within Facilities Department.
- Communication with facility managers and underrepresented stakeholders.

**Spring 06: Business Plan**
- Conduct and submit business plan for alternative recycling program.

**Spring 06: Conduct Integrative Service Project**
- Service-learning student update.
- Meet an identified need of the community partner and is self-sustaining.

**Fall 06: Implement Recycling Recommendations**
- Create a consistent infrastructure across campus.
- Possibly involve compensation, supervision, labor, and contracts.

**Fall 06: Review Recycling efforts**
- Examined various models that didn't lead to viable process improvement and future goals.