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## SVIC Project Summary

### *The Problem*

The issue our project focuses on is recycling and waste management on UNH campus. According to Columbia University's Green Program, college students on average produce up to 640 pounds of solid waste each year. In the United States alone, college students are estimated to contribute over 200 million tons of waste each year (Moscone, 2014). UNH contributes to this waste management problem every year and must take responsibility as such. UNH has the duty to minimize its waste output in order to save our planet, teach lifelong sustainability practices to students, create a cleaner campus, and save money.

Recycling participant rates are often difficult to maintain in places with dense populations and inconvenient facilities, like college campuses (Zhou, et al., 2021). According to faculty and students, the recycling system at UNH can be more efficient with the implementation of new ideas into our current waste management system. Wasted time is one of the main costs of waste disposal (Kuo & Perrings, 2010). In order to reduce the time cost of recycling and sustainable waste disposal practices, it's vital that we make recycling easy, time-efficient, and incentivized. This could mean increasing the number of properly labeled recycling and waste bins around campus, educating students on the benefits, necessity, and rules of local recycling practices, and creating incentive programs for students, faculty, and staff.

Research has shown that more often than not, Americans give up trying to sort their recycling and or engage in 'wishful recycling', placing nonrecyclables into their bins (Delmas, 2021). In a 2019 survey of 2,000 Americans, 53% believed that greasy pizza boxes and used plastic utensils (68%) could be recycled (Delmas, 2010). When enough compostable and/or non-recyclable matter ends up in the recycling, the batches are considered "contaminated" and are thrown away – despite any other recyclable material in that batch (Moscone, 2014). This is very common on college campuses, especially UNH when access to waste and recycling bins is limited, inconvenient, and/or knowledge of such restrictions are is low.

### *Importance*

Without risk of oversimplifying - our planet is dying. The resources we take for granted every day are nonrenewable and will continue to become more limited, expensive, and harmful to our planet. Recycling materials and proper waste management can act as resources of useful

materials, as well as prevent pollution and save energy. Overpopulation and failure to implement successful waste management programs in the United States has led to exporting our trash to other countries to be improperly disposed of, out of sight, by burning it, releasing harmful chemicals into our atmosphere (McCormick et. al, 2019). The current waste management systems in our country are no longer viable. A switch must be made. Let UNH be a leader in changing the way we think and handle waste management.

### *Our Solution: Can Return Center*

Adding a can return center with two bottle return machines would improve the sustainability and aesthetics of UNH's campus while also incentivizing students, faculty, and staff via credit to their cat's cache. The campus has over 15,000 college students who would likely welcome any chance to earn extra money (UNH, 2021). The return could offer students a credit incentive of one to five cents per clean can/bottle depending on what the school prefers. The center would be run by a small group of experienced staff or faculty overseeing volunteers and interns that do the bulk of the work in exchange for class credit and/or community service hours. Students and interns will be in charge of checking bags of returns for dirty recyclables, deny returns not substantially clean, sanitize the machines at the end of every day, as well as sort and bag returns once they've gone through the machine for sale to the recycler. The center could be located at or around the Memorial Union Building and operate on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, from 9 am to 5 pm and 12 pm - 4 pm on Sundays. This way, the school won't have to pay to keep the center open every day but enough for lines to remain short. Sunday hours would be convenient for can and bottle returns after weekend parties and events. After students/interns sort the returns, UNH can sell the recycled materials to a recycler. Opening a small bottle return center would offer students an opportunity to generate income as an incentive for sustainable recycling practices, allowing recyclables to be turned into secondary materials.

### *Who will benefit?*

Not only will this help our environment, but it will help create a cleaner, more beautiful campus, help students learn sustainable recycling practices, and save money for UNH by minimizing waste and maximizing student labor to do so. The less waste we produce, the less money will have to be spent on waste disposal – creating an opportunity to allocate funding to startup programs that can make the university money (Moscone, 2014). Clubs such as the Student Environmental Action Coalition will benefit and likely support the cause. Additionally, students who participate in the volunteer/intern program through the can return center will also benefit by receiving class credit and/or community service hours. In short, a can return machine would benefit the students by rewarding them for recycling. Students such as Luke Botticelli (Class of 2023) enjoy the idea of the bottle return. “It would be nice to have the bottle exchange on campus to get money back for recycling.”

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