Launching the Rutgers Sustainability Ambassador Program: Developing an Integrative Climate Leadership Model

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Abstract

Given the effects of climate change there is a pressing demand, for creative solutions and committed individuals to lead sustainability efforts. The Rutgers Office of Climate Action has launched the Sustainability Ambassador Program, an initiative aimed at equipping students with the expertise, abilities and connections needed to drive sustainability projects and encourage a culture of environmentally conscious practices within the Rutgers community and, beyond.

Recognizing the Imperative

The need for taking action on climate change combined with a growing interest among students in sustainability created the opportunity for the establishment of the Rutgers Sustainability Ambassador Program. Held focus groups with students, which showed their strong desire to actively participate in addressing environmental issues and play a direct role, in shaping institutional policies.

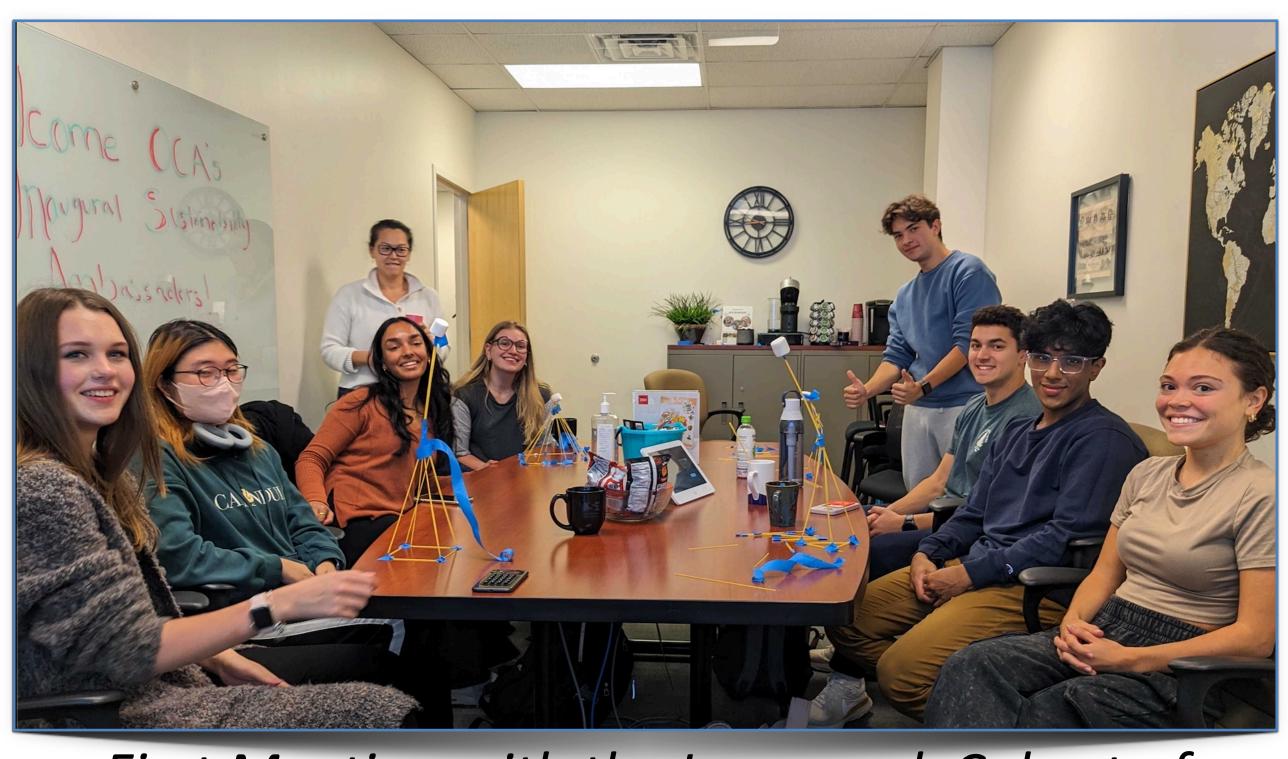## Strategic Outreach & Dynamic Recruitment

To promote the ambassadorship we initially utilized platforms, campus events and personal recommendations. This led to a process involving thorough evaluation of resumes and conducting interviews. Our aim was to form a team that represents the range of disciplines and talents, within our university.

Preliminary Engagement and Educational Milestones

At the beginning of the program, the onboarding process was for ambassadors a Pre-Program Assessment, discussion boards about climate action projects the students would like to see occur on campus, and modules covering topics, like climate science and Rutgers University sustainability objectives. To enhance their knowledge and public engagement skills we organized activities such, as the Green Labs Webinar and tabling training to bolster ambassadors' understanding and public engagement skills.

Recruitment for the Ambassadorship with Representatives from the Office

First Meeting with the Inaugural Cohort of Sustainability Ambassadors

Iterative Program Timeline and Evolution

The programs progress and development are outlined in a designed timeline. This timeline incorporates feedback loops to ensure that the program remains responsive, to the experiences of ambassadors and the sustainability needs of the campus community.

The key milestones throughout the program include:

- **Fall Semester**: *During this time ambassadors establish a foundation by engaging in modules participating in community events and initiating outreach efforts.*
- **End of Fall Semester**: *This period allows for reflection on the outcomes of the fall semester planning for the spring semester and strategizing for events.*
- **Spring Semester**: *The focus shifts towards implementing and expanding upon previous efforts. Ambassadors take on roles in high profile events such, as the Green Jobs Fair and Rutgers Day.*

Adaptive Development Through Continuous Feedback

The incorporation of bi-weekly journals completed by ambassadors about experience in the program and personal check-ins with program coordinators provides a feedback-rich environment, essential for the adaptive management of the program. These insights directly inform the evolution of the program's educational content and engagement strategies.

Conclusion

The Rutgers Sustainability Ambassador Program is an initiative that combines student involvement and efforts to address climate change. By offering an leadership development approach the program strives to promote a sustainable campus culture and empower students, with the knowledge and abilities to advocate for environmental stewardship throughout their lives.

Keywords

Sustainability, Climate Leadership, Student Engagement, Program Development, Adaptive Learning