

Take Back the Tap:

Bring sustainability to a first year experience course.

Like many colleges, Unity College has a First Year Experience course designed to introduce incoming students to the mission of the College and what it means to be a college student. The course also covers the issues and challenges that face the typical Unity College incoming student during the year. Unlike many other colleges, Unity College is an environmental college with all of its majors focused on environmental issues. Perhaps one of the most valued part of Unity College's mission is to nurture its students to become stewards of the Earth. Therefore often the first year experience class picks an environmental theme as its focus. This year was no different as the theme was "Take Back the Tap".

The "Take Back the Tap" theme is based on the Take Back the Tap movement of the Food and Water Watch group featured in the documentary Tapped. Basically the idea behind Take Back the Tap is an effort to get people to return to drinking water from their tap and not bottled water. The problem with bottle water is two-fold. The first problem is how the water companies are obtaining their water. Large corporations like Nestlé and Coca-Cola are taking large amounts of water from small towns like Farmington Maine, which adversely affects the water table of the town. In many states, underground water is controlled by the owner of the land above it. This means that a water company can come into a small town, purchase land above a known underground water source, and tap that source regardless of who might using the water downstream. Other times the large water companies are just taking city tap water and bottling it, advertising it as more natural/pure than tap water. The second problem is the plastic bottles the water is packaged in. Manufacturing of the plastic bottles is very harmful to the environment and to people around the manufacturing plant. Additionally, very few plastic bottles are recycled. An example of an environmental problem caused by this is that parts of the ocean are now becoming filled with plastic bottles and some beaches are now made up of small bits of plastic instead of sand.

The "Take Back the Tap" program at Unity College began this past summer in July with the College sponsoring the showing of Tapped at the Maine Film Festival. Tapped is a documentary on the water bottling business in the United States and looks at the problems bottle water is causing in the environment.

The Student Affairs department at Unity College grabbed the reins of the program. Dean for Student Affairs Gary Zane, who also is one of the instructors of the First Year Experience course, was a champion of the Take Back the Tap program with support of the human resources and President's offices. To make sure the program wasn't just a onetime gimmick for incoming students, Dean Zane purchased enough stainless steel water bottles for every student, staff member, and faculty member to use so that the whole campus could become involved in the water discussion. The water bottles are emblazoned with the Student Creed of Integrity, Environment, Community, and Respect. Dean Zane also worked with the college's maintenance department to fit all of the water fountains on campus with special

faucets designed for filling up water bottles. Finally students were encouraged to use their water bottles in the cafeteria and student center.

New Student Orientation this year ended with **"Take Back the Tap" Fest**, an afternoon of games, live music, dancing, and outdoor activities. Students received their stainless steel water bottles to encourage use of tap water.

The final part of the Take Back the Tap program was in the First Year Experience classes where each class viewed the documentary Flow and discussed the pro's and con's of bottle water.

Take Back the Tap has turned into a symbol at Unity College. Students carry their water bottles with pride and are now more knowledgeable about the issues concerning bottled water and are one step closer to becoming stewards of the Earth. The program also was a great response by the College to students' interest in sustainability issues. The Take Back The Tap program is a program any college can adapt, you don't need to be an environmental college and the program can serve as a spring board for any institution thinking about beginning or enhancing their sustainability program.

So go take back the Tap!

Stephen Nason

Sustainability KC coordinator, NASPA region one

Director of Residence Life/Assistant Dean for Student Affairs

Unity College