**VERDANT ENERGY SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS PLAN**

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# I. Executive Summary

Verdant Energy is a company that is devoted to making the world more sustainable by educating consumers on ways they can save energy. Awareness will allow occupants of buildings to reduce their energy costs and to adjust their current habits that are wasting energy.

Our initial target market is the University of Illinois, specifically their dormitories. The University of Illinois has numerous buildings throughout the Champaign-Urbana area. The energy costs for these buildings are quite high and we believe our product will help to substantially reduce these costs. Our initial target of dormitories is two-fold. The dormitories provide multiple opportunities for the occupants to reduce energy consumption. Occupants do control lights, water consumption, and the ability to recycle among many other items. Some of the lab or classroom buildings do not offer as much control to the occupants. The second reason to focus on the dormitories is the educational opportunities to teach students how to live sustainably. The students living in the dormitories are living on their own for the first time and developing habits that they will carry into adulthood. Verdant Energy wants to do as much as they can to assist these young adults in energy efficient habits.

Our main product will be energy information displays throughout the dormitories. We will also create a green community handbook (Exhibit 1) for RAs which will provide suggestions on how to build energy conscious communities. The handbook will include a guide on setting up energy reduction competitions through the dorms as well as ideas for upcycle events (Exhibit 2). The activities and competitions will add an element of accountability to the students to change bad energy habits.

# II. Marketing Situation Analysis

Through various interviews with undergraduate students living in dorms, we find that there are two main reasons for their wasteful behavior: lack of awareness and convenience (Exhibit 10). This falls in line with our experiences as well. Many people are simply not educated on sustainable behaviors. Verdant Energy seeks to rectify this by instilling green behaviors through our Verdant Energy display meters.

## **Internal Strengths**

* Software is user friendly
* Clearly displays energy costs in a visual form
* Language used draws heavily on pop culture colloquialisms as well as internet memes to help connect to target audience (Exhibit 3)
* Easy to implement into dormitories
* Community events are interactive and educational
* Information gives unique tips on how to save energy (Exhibit 4)
* Utilizes the display monitors that are already present in the dormitory
* Information is highly malleable as Verdant Energy can quickly update it to make information fresh and new

## **Internal Weaknesses**

* Despite being located on a monitor, students may still not look at it; they may need reminders to pay attention to the energy cost savings
* The strength of the community events are heavily reliant on the RA
* Well endowed habits are difficult to change
* If Verdant Energy expands to other schools, there may be dormitories that do not have existing monitor displays

## **External Opportunities**

* If product performs well, it’s possible to expand the idea to other universities
* Students are largely unaware of sustainable issues in the world, making it an opportune time to teach them about it
* A great opportunity for students to network and strengthen social links with one another
* Opportunity to expand upon the secondary product by hiring community managers who excel in creating green events; these managers can be representatives that work directly with RA’s from a particular school
* Successful product can lead to lower dormitory costs for students
* Word of mouth can lead others to start implementing green habits

## **External Threats**

* Other green meters are already in the market
* Other green initiatives are already being run in the dormitories
* Environment itself may make it difficult to implement certain community events
* The costs of convenient habits may get in the way of utilizing data
* Dormitory display monitors may be displaying other news and Verdant Energy would have to fight for on-screen time

# III: Desired Outcomes

## **Profits**

Verdant Energy operates with a mission to make electricity consumption practices more sustainable and is also a for profit organization. We drive our value from the fact that given proper tools and support, the general population is willing to switch to more sustainable electricity consumption practices. There are many global players already operating the same space but the current demand, particularly in Champaign region, is unmet. Given our target market as UIUC residence halls, we have ample opportunities to grow and become a successful profitable organization.

Our financial projections and profit calculations are based on the historical data. Given the average electricity bill of over $80,000 per year per residence hall, we have the opportunity to help our client reduce their electricity bill significantly and charge commission out of the annual savings. Revenues will increase on average 10% per year and the profits over the 5 years will increase in line with the growth in revenue (Exhibit 5) The growth of profits will become progressive and cumulative as we obtain revenue from new buildings, but also get substantial chunk of revenue from the support of old residence halls. In 2105, we expect to earn a profit of $2,600. At the end of year 2019, we target to increase the profit by twenty times to $40,550.

## People

Regarding the impact of Verdant Energy on people, our main objective is to help our young demographic target segment to inculcate sustainable energy consumption practices. We believe our fun and educational events will encourage the students to behave sustainably not only during their undergraduate years at UIUC, but for the rest of their lives.

Sustainable behavior will also help save the electricity costs that the students incur during their stay in residence halls. The significant savings can be put to better use and hence, there is a reduction in education cost for the students. Once Verdant Energy meters are implemented successfully in UIUC undergraduate residence halls, we can expand the implementation in other graduate residence halls, libraries, and office buildings in the UIUC campus as well. Verdant Energy can set an example for other universities to implement - creating a wider, much needed impact- for behaving sustainably.

## Planet

Verdant Energy has a great potential to reduce carbon footprint of the residence halls of UIUC campus over the next five years. Reduced carbon footprint is a small, but powerful step towards impacting the planet positively. Verdant Energy can lead by example and encourage other universities to follow the suit. Our main goal is to educate residence hall students about sustainable energy practices which we hope will be continued every year by the new incoming students.

# IV. Marketing Strategies

The main target market for our product are the UIUC dorms which consume a considerable amount of energy and act as a major contributor to the energy costs for the university. Through awareness programs and knowledge transfer, our product will help in reducing the energy costs. Secondly, we are targeting university students who will have a direct stake in not only using this product, but also in getting exposed to the nuances of energy saving methods at the young adulthood part of their life. Our main focus is on the freshmen students for a number of reasons. With the rise of technology, there is a huge consumption of energy by students. The adoption of optimum ways of energy usage by students will lead to comparatively lower energy consumptions. Since these students will start living on their own for the first time in the university dorms, changing their behavior towards adopting energy efficient practices will be a task that can be readily achievable. Similarly, their capacity towards gathering knowledge and their ability to influence new batches of freshmen once they become seniors will be higher.

Since our product will not be directly responsible to save energy and reduce costs for the client, demonstrating the value proposition becomes much more critical. Our plan in reaching the target market is to show the energy wastage that is happening currently due to lack of awareness and then show various energy saving methods. We also plan to show that this loss can be recovered through an interactive way of engaging students and bringing an inclusive change with the able support of RA’s. While showcasing the energy and cost benefits, a key aspect of our product is reduced energy stress on the environment. The university will not only have a reduced carbon footprint, but management can also take pride in its contribution towards saving the environment and adopting green practices. With our main focus being dorms at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we intend to expand to private dorms and other universities within Illinois after we have set up a strong foothold.

Our product is a combination of technology and training material. From the technology side, we are offering an aesthetically pleasing and highly interactive software. Integration of this software with existing monitors is highly compatible and can save operational costs. The display will showcase information in the following categories:

1. A floor by floor comparison of energy consumption against a predefined target (Exhibit 6)
2. Information about environmental friendly events in and around campus
3. Carbon Footprint of the dorm for a specific period (Exhibit 7)
4. Impact of energy saved or used through interactive messages (Exhibit 8)
5. Breakdown of energy consumed based on different categories

Along with the software, we will also be providing a green community guidebook that lists various community activities. Our sales representatives will also be teaching RA’s about how to initiate activities so that RAs can conduct the sessions appropriately and educate students on green practices. Examples of some of the events and activities include floor vs. floor competitions, a recycled art project competition, and a garden project. We are also planning to create an app which can be used by students to check real time scores. In addition to being a user friendly product, the whole program allows students to bond and engage in healthy competition. The productivity of the program will be optimum when the software is installed in a high traffic area in order to capture the maximum attention of the students.

In order to capture market share, we are giving out the product free of cost. However, we will be getting a 20% cut of the saved energy costs once the customers start saving money with a reduced energy consumption. Our promotional strategy will include advertising locally through internal university communication channels. We also plan to reach out to not only the management of the university dorms, but also to students by promoting our product through sustainable magazines published in the university and social media websites. This will help us in reaching out to the right stakeholders who are interested in sustainable solutions. The functional demonstration to the customers is very critical in building confidence about the product and hence, we plan to hold multiple demos before finalizing the sale. Initially, the products will be distributed through management at the university or the dorm managers. As we expand and our product holds its value among the customers, we plan to expand to external markets within Illinois. This will include private housing groups on the University campus as well as retailers having external market access.

# V. Action Plans

## Targeting and Positioning Statements

For UIUC dormitory residents, the Verdant Energy products are a fun and convenient way to raise awareness on ways to live a sustainable lifestyle by participating in competitions and activities that reward them for reducing their energy consumption.

For UIUC Facilities Management, the Verdant Energy products are an easy and convenient way to reduce energy costs because they teach the occupants of University owned dormitories ways to reduce their energy consumption. (Exhibit 11)

## Promotional Plan

We will promote our product through local newspapers and publish our product details in sustainability magazines at University and advertise on the Web. Demo sessions of the product to first time users will also be undertaken as well.

## Distribution Plan

The products will be sold directly through university management or dorm managers. In the long run, the products will be distributed to private housing companies on campus. This will also include collaborating with retailers having external market access.

## New Product Forecast

Products to assist people in reducing energy consumption are popular now and the market will most likely get saturated. By starting now and providing quantifiable metrics of success, we will be able to differentiate our product from others. We are also focusing on the niche market of UIUC dormitories which have a renewable consumer base with new students moving into the dormitories each year.

## Product Launch Schedule

1) Preliminary work activities and schedule: There are four preliminary activities need to be completed before making the Verdant Energy display meter available to clients on a commercial scale. All these four activities need to be accomplished prior to product launch date.

1. Development of support echosystem (May 2014 to Dec 2014): Successful operation of Verdant Energy display meters requires a creation of a backed database system which has the capability to capture the electricity consumption data in real-time for all its clients. Moreover, this database will generate and store the analytics out of the consumption patterns of individual clients such as converting the percentage reduction in electricity consumption into equivalent amount of dollars saved or equivalent amount to carbon footprint reduced. The development of this database requires six months of extensive database development.
2. Software frontend (May 2014 to Dec 2014): As we plan to give our clients the capability to use their computers to log into our website and extract the consumption data to track and monitor their progress, we need to develop a frontend website which should support all operating systems and all browsers. This website needs to be integrated with the echosystem that we plan to develop in parallel.
3. Development of mobile/tab app (May 2014 to Dec 2014): As we intend to give our clients more flexibility by allowing them to track their progress on-the-go, we need to develop a mobile app that possesses all the primary features and tools that the main website has. For this, we need to develop a mobile app which will be integrated with the echosystem.
4. Negotiating a business contract with UIUC undergraduate dorm finance department (May 2014 to Dec 2014): With the development of the software capabilities, we intend to negotiate a formal contract with the UIUC undergraduate residence halls finance departments as undergraduate hall are the initial clients of Verdant Energy display meters.

2) Initial product launch (Jan 2015): We currently plan to rollout our product to all 21 UIUC undergraduate halls within 5 years. In the first year, we intend to cover three undergraduate halls.

3) Further business expansion (Jan 2016): After successfully covering three undergraduate residence halls in the first year, we plan to cover eight new UIUC undergraduate residence halls in the next two years, adding four new residence halls each year. After three years of operation, we intend to add the last ten undergraduate halls in last two years.

Operational schedule(Exhibit 9)

1. First Year (Jan 2015 to Dec 2015) : Launch the service and cover 3 UIUC undergraduate residence halls
2. Second Year(Jan 2016 to Dec 2016) : Extend service to four new UIUC undergraduate residence halls, while supporting the 3 old residence halls
3. Third Year(Jan 2017 to Dec 2017) : Extend service to four new UIUC undergraduate residence halls, while supporting the 7 old residence halls
4. Fourth Year(Jan 2018 to Dec 2018) : Extend service to five new UIUC undergraduate residence halls, while supporting the 11 old residence halls
5. Fifth Year(Jan 2019 to Dec 2019) : Extend service to five new UIUC undergraduate residence halls, while supporting the 16 old residence halls

## Financial Forecast

Besides supporting and promoting sustainable electricity consumption practices, Verdant Energy’s display meter has the potential to become a financially lucrative project. Considering an initial business cost of $45,000, Verdant Energy will break even in the first quarter of the fifth year and become profitable at the end of fifth year. If we don’t consider the initial sunk cost of $45,000, then Verdant Energy becomes profitable in the first year of operation itself. Verdant Energy does not charge any upfront fees from its client, but instead charges a commission on the overall annual savings in electricity bill. Below are the cost and profit forecasts for the first five years of operations with a scope of 21 UIUC undergraduate residence halls. If we can expand our business to other UIUC graduate residence halls and office buildings, the profits and earning can be substantially greater.

**Costs (initial)**

1) Software development (required) : USD 15,000

2) Mobile app Development (Optional) : USD 5 000

3) echo system data consolidation (required) : USD 20,000

4) Cost of developing training material(required): USD 5,000

**Costs (Operational/ per year)**

1) Operational maintenance cost/ year/dorm : USD 1000

2) Training material development and upgrade cost/ year : USD 1000

3) Software maintenance and support cost/year: USD 5000

**Profits/Revenues**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Year | New dorms Covered | cost | Revenue/ year USD) | **Net Profit/ Year (USD)** |
| 1 | 3 | 7000 | 9600 | **+2600** |
| 2 | 4 | 7000 | 12800+7680 | **+13480** |
| 3 | 4 | 7000 | 12800+10240+4915=28000 | **+21000** |
| 4 | 5 | 7000 | 16000+8192+6553+4000=34657 | **+27657** |
| 5 | 5 | 7000 | 16000+12800+8192+6553+3942=47457 | **+40457** |

\*Revenue is the function of how much % commission is charged

\*Revenue can be increased exponentially by covering more buildings/clients

\*All cost and revenues are in USD

## Ecological Impact Forecast

As Verdant Energy’s display meter is introduced in university residence halls, we anticipate a change in student’s attitudes to adopt sustainable practices. Adoption of sustainable practices will lead to lower CO2 emissions, efficient energy usage and reduced electricity bills. A reduction in CO2 emissions in the next 5 years from all the 21 residence halls will decrease the UIUC residence halls’ carbon footprint and serve as a small step towards re-building a greener planet. The saved costs from energy consumption could be put to better use in deprived areas. As our target market is young student demographic, the fun and educational events will encourage students to practice efficient energy usage throughout their lifetimes.

## Societal Impact Forecast

Verdant Energy’s focus is to educate students about the benefits of saving energy. The goal is to eventually ingrain sustainable habits into the students over the course of the school year. When students gain insight into the viability of keeping the environment safe, they help society as a whole when they begin saving energy during the other parts of their lives. It’s also important to consider that students will teach other students about ways in which they can easily save money.

Verdant Energy will have a direct impact on the energy costs of the university. With energy costs being an average of $80,000, Verdant Energy’s indicatives are projected to reduce energy costs by 5%-10%. These savings can go into implementing other green projects around campus. Alternatively, it can be used to lower housing costs and/or tuition which would be a boon for all aspiring students within the university.

Another side issue that Verdant Energy affects is the transitioning period of freshmen. College may be a trying time for many undergraduates. Verdant Energy seeks to alleviate these negative social impacts by creating opportunities for students to interact and form bonds while in the dorms.

# VI. Implementation, Controls and Evaluation

## Implementation

To successfully implement the Verdant Energy display meter and make Verdant Energy a profitable organization, we have carefully chosen the marketing mix. We identified our product as a product which helps users and client to adapt, improve and pursue sustainable electricity consumption. Our value proposition is that as a result of using our product, the client not only become more sustainable in behavior, but also will save a substantial amount of their annual electricity expenditure. As a result, UIUC’s carbon footprint gets reduced and the users save dollars and Verdant Energy reaps profits. We don’t charge any upfront fees to our clients; instead we will operate on a commission base model where we will charge a 20% fee of annual electricity bill savings from our clients.

Verdant Energy operates in a very specific target market and for the first five years of our business operations, we choose to target only the undergraduate residence halls of the UIUC campus. The reason we chose this specific market is that we have a competitive advantage against major similar service providers. As we are an in-house organization and can afford to charge lowest logistics fees compared to national operators of other energy display meters, we surely have an edge and are confident of capturing the target market fully without any threat of competition.

At Verdant Energy, we understand that educating and consistently motivating our clients to adopt and pursue sustainable electricity consumption is a critical part of our overall business strategy. Educating the students of residence halls will directly affect the annual electricity bill and thus directly affect the overall revenue and profitability of our firm. We will educate the RA’s of all residence halls by giving them intensive training and training materials. Also, we will arrange workshops and awareness camps (with the residence halls’ RA’s) to bring awareness of possible sustainable behaviors. To avoid the common human behavior of “why should I behave sustainably when no one else is,” we decided to create the display metrics for each floor in residence halls and each floor competes with other floors within the residence halls. This will encourage the participants of each hall to try their best to reduce the electricity consumption of that particular floor in hopes of obtaining floor pride as well as an end-of-semester prize given by the RA.

Overall, we will reach all undergraduate residence halls and put displays at locations which are easily visible and easily accessible such as cafeterias and receptions. We will run banners with interesting sustainability information (alongside energy consumption display). Lastly, we will train everyone on routine basis to help the residents switch to a more sustainable energy consumption behavior.

## Control and Evaluation

There are a set of simple assessments and metrics that we will use to evaluate the success of our clients and success of Verdant Energy. As a firm which promotes sustainable electricity consumption, the first and foremost important criterion is to evaluate our success on how much we helped our clients to reduce their carbon footprints. We evaluate our performance based on the following criteria:

1. Taking the historical average annual bill of last 5 years as base, we track how much we helped our clients to reduce the annual bill in a given period
2. To track the overall sustainability initiative success and track the reduction of carbon footprints, we will measure the reduction in amount of annual energy consumption in Kw.
3. As a for-profit organization which seeks continuous business opportunities, we will gauge our success on how many new clients that we added in a given year. This will help us directly gauge the actual demand of our product and will help us to take corrective measures, if any.
4. A core part of our business philosophy is to educate the end users about sustainable practices and help inculcate long term, sustainable habits in our clients. We will interview our clients on routine basis and gauge the positive behavioral changes that happened in our clients over a period of time and use this measurement as an important variable in gauging our overall success.
5. As we encourage inter-floor competition to motivate students to switch to sustainable behavior, we will continuously gauge the participation of students from each floor. The percentage of participation of students from a particular floor is a clear indication of our success in efforts to loop more and more students into sustainable practices motivation.

# Exhibit 1

Green Community Handbook

**Intro**

Hello and welcome to Verdant Meter’s green community handbook. In this handbook, we detail several activities and events that you can implement into your dorm to get students interacting with one another while learning green habits at the same time. With the rising concern over issues such as global warming, increased pollution, and the rising cost of gas, it’s important that young adults are educated about how to be more sustainable in their daily lives. It’s very easy to be wasteful when there is no obvious benefit to oneself. Many dorms will put up signs such as “Wasting food will increase food plan costs by 5% next year” and “Dorm costs will go up if electricity is wasted.” These signs have little effect on students because most stay in the dorms for one year. Instead, it’s been psychologically proven that positive incentives are stronger motivators than negative incentives. Finally, dorm life is so much more fun when everyone feels like they’re part of a strong dorm community.

**Format**

The format of these competitions will be a floor vs. floor format. Teams are divided by floors. Every event and activity will be an opportunity for each floor to garner points. At the end of each semester, the team with the most points at the end of the semester wins and they are awarded a prize of your choosing. We have put suggestions on points for each project, but the allocation of points is ultimately up to you. In almost all of the events, you are the final judge of the projects. If there are green events on campus that you can attend, you can encourage students to take part in them. Give out a point for every person who attends the event.

**Activities**

**Energy Saved Every Week**

This will be the main competition that utilizes the meter displays on the dormitory monitor. Every week, each floor will try to minimize the amount of energy used. Various tips will be given in the form of ads within the Verdant Meter software slides. Don’t forget to remind the students of these energy saving tips as well. If a floor manages to get below the target amount of energy used, they get two points.

1st place: 6 points

2nd place: 3 points

3rd place: 1 point

**Recycled Art Project**

Each floor will have to design an art piece using only recycled or recyclable material. Tell them that they can be creative. Their time limit will be one week. Encourage them to either work together or create something in their spare time. Every floor is allowed to present a maximum of three art pieces. Each art piece turned in is one point.

1st place: 10 points

2nd place: 6 points

3rd place: 3 points

**Urbana’s Market at the Square Cook-Off**

Urbana’s Market at the Square is a great place to buy local produce. The goal of this is to have the dorm take an excursion to this market and to buy food. They are to go back to the dorm and then each floor will craft a dish using the materials they bought. You be the judge of the tastiest dish.

1st place: 30 points

2nd place: 20 points

3rd place: 10 points

**Garden Project**

Create a garden during spring time to help make the campus more green, literally. Each student who participates adds two points to their floor.

**Upcycle Clothing Swap**

It’s quite wasteful to get rid of clothes you no longer use. Therefore, encourage saving by allowing students to donate clothes to you. Students get two points awarded to their floor for each piece of clothing that they donate. At the end of every two months, have a clothing swap event where everyone in the dorm can browse through clothes that may want to use. At the end of the year, donate all the unused clothes to a goodwill store.

**Upcycle Valentine’s**

As a Valentine’s Day project, all the students gather and create Valentine’s Day cards using recycled material. Award two points for every student who participants in the event.

**Prizes**

To promote positive incentives, give a prize at the end of each semester to the floor with the most points. Some example of prizes may be:

* Soup and salad party
* Organic root beer floats
* Gift cards
* Vegan pizza party

**Going forward**

These activities can be repeated or you can come up with your own. The green community handbook will be updated with more events and activities as time passes by. Feel free to incorporate other ways for your students to get involved.

# Exhibit 2



# Exhibit 3

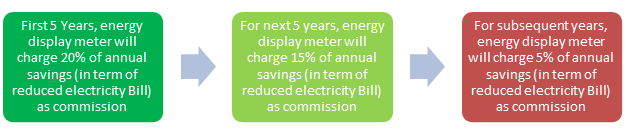


# Exhibit 4

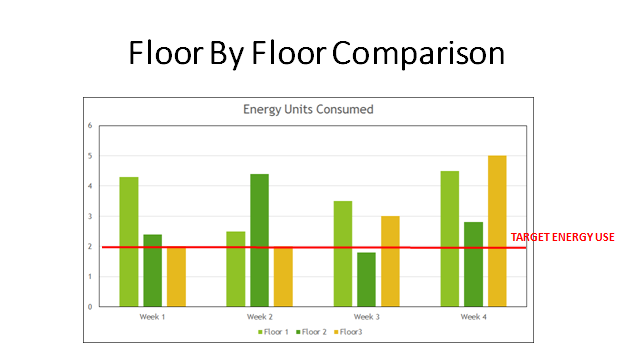


# Exhibit 5





# Exhibit 6



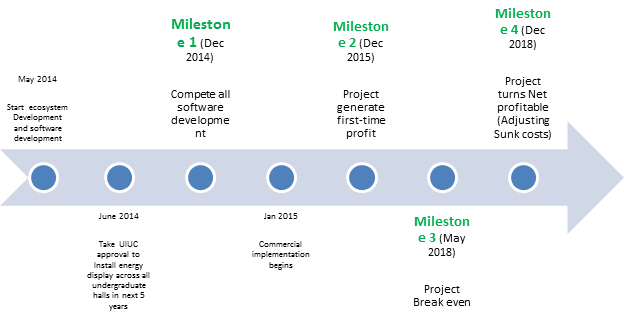
# Exhibit 7



# Exhibit 8



# Exhibit 9



# Exhibit 10

1. List down your frequently used electronic gadgets

Laptop

Cell phone

Tv

Fridge

Gaming systems

Surround sounds

Air fresheners

Christmas lights

Razors, hair gadgets

2. Do you put the chargers in the electric sockets while not using ?

Yes

3. Do you continuously charge your equipments without draining the whole charge ?

Ok charging done efficiently

4. Do you perform laundry in small batches or big batches ?

Yes, mostly full loads, coz of the money and saves time

5. How often do you forget to switch off the lamps, heat or air conditioning before leaving the room ?

Bathroom lights usually people forgot very often

6. Do you have any habits which cause energy draining ?

Charging the phones overnight’

Old buildings – hallway lights on always

7. If ans to 6 is Yes, how much of it is because of convenience and how much of it is due to lack of knowledge ?

Convenience

Awareness – exists- not sure

 How do you go about giving information to the students in your dorm? (RA)

Emails

Electronic tv displays

Claims that students read them

2) What would be the ideal way of receiving information about events/news in your dorm? (resident)

3) Does your employer place any restrictions on the type of recreational activities that you can use with the students? (RA)

4) How long are your showers?

5-7 mins – guys are really quick- should have asked a girl!

5) Are you allotted any money that you can use to give as prizes to students for recreational games? If the money comes off your own pocket, how much money are you willing to spend on community building activities? (RA)

Goodies bags usually distributed

free food is an incentive for students to attend

6) How long do you leave your heater on a daily basis?

7) How many hour, on average, do you use your computer per week inside the dorm?

5 – 8 hrs everyday

8) What is your number one motivator for recycling?

Learning, awareness

9) Are there public TV's in the dorm? If so, how long are they usually on for?

24x7

. Do you have any habits that you would like to change?

Hallway lights remain on- sensors

2.  How long have you had this habit?

3. What do you think may help you to kick the bad habit?

4. What places in the dorm do you look for information?

Housing website

Email

Tv display

5. Is there a common space in the dorm that you feel most of the residence walk through most days?

Entrance, main entrances on each floor

6. Do you read billboards, monitors or bulletin boards?  Please elaborate?

Yup, each floor 4 per floor, everyone reads, main entrance – RA would post on it

7. Do you turn your computer off when you are not using it?  Why or Why not?

8. What could motivate you to do this?

Convenience

# Exhibit 11

