

### **Research Journal Entry One**

My teammates and I planned on analyzing sustainability awareness and public opinion of sustainability on Dartmouth's campus. We selected this topic primarily because, even before Professor Colven introduced this activity in class, we were having an interesting debate on whether or not Dartmouth recycles the trash from the recycling bins and, if so, how much. We hoped to identify the answer to this question through public opinion and hopefully correct our biases/skewed perceptions of campus sustainability through this activity. Besides working with my friends, I was excited to work on my first geography fieldwork experience.

Designing the survey was simultaneously the most challenging and engaging part of this assignment. Initially, I found it slightly tough to create questions free from my personal biases and assumptions of the typical, hypothesized survey respondents. One such example of a contentious question was, 'What is your political affiliation?' I was curious to learn how civilians of different affiliations thought of sustainability and sustainable practices. This curiosity stemmed from my knowledge of sustainability being a highly politicized topic in the US and people of opposing political affiliations either acting on or denying climate change. After discussing it with the rest of my team, however, we decided not to put this question on the survey.

Despite this drawback, I enjoyed the survey planning session since my team and I were able to create an effective survey to achieve our goal. Apart from analyzing the awareness of Dartmouth affiliates on sustainability drives and initiatives on campus, we also decided to incorporate a comparison to the respondent's hometown. This question would allow us to view sustainability practices in other locations and cultures and see if there were any viable opportunities to implement them on campus. Another question on our survey that I found insightful was our inquiry into how the sustainability drive on campus has changed since the respondent first came to Dartmouth. We included this question to see how Dartmouth changed subjectively through the respondents' perspectives and to learn of any sustainability practices we were unaware of.

Our discussion on the survey experience for the respondents was also interesting. We wanted to create a survey that the user could enjoy filling out and allow us to get as much information as possible for our research question. Sri, Hikaru, and I dislike taking surveys with identical question types. As a result, we incorporated different question types to keep the respondents engaged while completing our survey. We employed Parfitt's "back-to-front" approach, in which we took the survey before everyone else to assess its quality (Parfitt 79).

We also created an ingenious solution to combat low survey response rates. Since Dartmouth students, a large part of our study group, are always short of time, we limited our survey to the essential questions. This process was engaging as it involved creating questions, debating their presence on the survey, taking questions off the survey, and not to mention putting questions back on the survey. We did our best to empathize with the respondents and to make a successful survey, finding the balance between question types, tones, phrases, and topics covered (Parfitt 85-93).

Asking people to take the survey was one of the simplest parts of the survey process for me. I went to the library, where I knew I would find Dartmouth affiliates of numerous age groups. I approached people who seemed friendly and not too occupied with homework. Initially, everyone I asked to fill out the survey was a freshman, which I found interesting. To diversify the age group of respondents, I actively sought out older-looking college students and faculty members in the library.

While walking around and asking people to complete our surveys, my mind wandered to Francisca Rockey. As a person of color doing Geography, I wondered what thoughts and emotions she went through while working on projects and fieldwork. The reading I could relate to most was “Don’t Just Pay It Back, Pay It Forward: From Accountability to Reciprocity in Research Relationships” by Megan Ybarra. Although the author talks about individual relationships influenced by her research work in Guatemala, I was thinking about my relationship with Dartmouth College. Like Ybarra, I am grateful for all the learning opportunities I have received and allowed to join the Dartmouth community. Although there is not much I can do now to give back to Dartmouth, I use a “broad(er) interpretation of reciprocity (Ybarra),” whether this includes helping students or talking to administrators and thanking them for their time and efforts.

The results of the survey surprised me. I had anticipated many students would be familiar with the concept of sustainability but only slightly familiar with the various sustainability drives on campus. This assumption held for the undergraduate students and the faculty members I had interviewed. This result highlights that despite being on campus for numerous years, it is easy to be unaware of the various sustainability efforts of the campus. Out of the campus’ sustainability initiatives, many responses and answers from the conversations with the interviewees pointed out that Green-2-Go was the most noticed sustainability drive. Green-2-Go’s popularity stems from many students participating in this drive daily or at least a few times each quarter. The DOC’s initiatives to sustainably interact with and enjoy the natural environment are also easily noticeable because of the DOC’s popularity among undergraduates.

I was slightly surprised to find out that many of the interviewees were thoughtful about recycling on campus. This thoughtfulness surprised me because I usually notice non-recyclable waste in the recycling bins in both public and dormitory recycling bins. This observation made me believe recycling is not a priority in the daily decision-making processes of burnt-out college students. Although some students mentioned Dartmouth's use of renewable energy in my conversation with them, very few students indicated this knowledge in the survey. The presence of negative outliers also reduced my trust in the survey results. The survey showed that some people did not know of any sustainable initiatives on campus; however, they considered Dartmouth more sustainable than their home. This thought process confuses me because one must be aware of sustainability practices on campus to compare with their homes in the first place. As a result, I can say that there is some noise in the data, and results from this survey are not absolute/concrete. For a better understanding of sustainability on campus, a survey of individuals who are more focused/committed to the survey integrity will be needed.

Some possible next steps for surveying sustainability awareness on campus would be to talk to the administration and faculty about it and ask them about behind-the-scenes operations. Since they help run and carry out sustainability drives, the administrators and faculty would better understand the topic than undergraduate/graduate students on campus here for a few fleeting years. My presence while people filled out the survey could have affected the survey outcome since the respondents might have felt more self-conscious with me judging their answers. This phenomenon is known as the observer effect, which states that even looking at something changes it. For future surveys, we could have respondents take the survey unobserved to give us "truer data." Another issue we faced in the survey was the low response rate for the question about suggestions for sustainability efforts Dartmouth could improve on or currently does better than the respondent's hometown. We included a table in this section to help keep the responses organized. However, the multiple rows and columns of the table could have intimidated the respondents by making them think they needed to fill it out completely, which could have led to them not filling it out at all. Looking back, I think a text line would have gotten more responses when compared to the table since the writing space is smaller, or we should have explicitly stated that the respondent did not have to complete the table.

In conclusion, this was a valuable learning experience for me and one that I truly enjoyed. I learned about the survey-making, data collection, and analyzing processes. By creating a survey, I finally understood the efforts and time that go into data collection. This experience has made me more appreciative of the field and the people who work to collect data and make sense of it for us regular civilians.

#### Works Cited

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