

2017

The Secret Lives of Stuff Project Report

University of Northern Iowa. Center for Energy & Environmental Education.

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UNI Conservation Corps Capstone Course students reduce environmental impact (Fall 2016)

For the Environment, Technology & Society community engagement course, Instructor Susan Salterberg engaged 35 university juniors and seniors from a variety of disciplines from art to information management. These students put science into action through several projects.

The course, focused on the impact of consumption on the environment, included several community engagement activities. In one instance, students came up with their own alternatives for Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving). They were inspired by outdoor gear retailer REI's #OptOutside campaign. In 2015, REI closed its doors, paid its employees, and encouraged both employees and potential customers to go outside--hike, snowshoe, breathe in the fresh air. They did the same in 2016. Students created posts encouraging Iowans to be intentional on Black Friday and this entire winter season. Here's an example:



If you can camp outside a shopping mall why not camp outside in nature? #OptOutside #BeingNotBuying

Another community engagement project involved seven students. They committed to go 30 days without shopping, and they then [blogged](#) about it. Some of the students comments were:

Where has the time gone?! I cannot believe it has been a full month already. My bank account is grinning from ear to ear. The last week of the unshopping challenge is done and honestly, I will keep going. Looking to the horizon, I think I can go a few more weeks before having to buy presents for my friends and family for Christmas. But maybe I can give gifts that are not just "things"?—Steve

This has had to be my most trying week yet. With Christmas already in full gear at retail shops the temptations are all around for me... Something I am proud of this week however is my will power in avoiding buying a new outfit for this weekend. I went out to celebrate two of my friends' birthdays, and while a few of them got caught up in the excitement of buying new top or accessory for a special occasion I simply resisted and just helped others who wanted to shop. I can see how easy it is to justify buying a top or pants here or there, and reasoning to ourselves that this is a special treat for a special day.. I can see how it we even have to convince ourselves to buy things that we don't really need.-Alli

On November 22, Charity Nebbe interviewed two of the students about their experience with this community engagement project. You can read about it here and listen to the first minutes of the podcast to get the interview: <http://iowapublicradio.org/post/un-shopping-holidays-0>

These two projects encouraged actions that reduce the impact of consumption on greenhouse gas emissions.

Other community engagement projects completed were as follows:

- 1) Gardening and promotion of the UNI Panther Plot garden to students all over campus.
- 2) Collecting used clothing for the Congolese and Burmese communities.
- 3) Collecting used toys for children of domestic violence.
- 4) Collecting used infant essentials for teen mothers.
- 5) Making a homemade gift to give to others.
- 6) Making winter hats for children living in shelters.

All of these projects built community and served others.