College of the Holy Cross

CrossWorks

Reducing Paper Usage Through Monthly Printing Reports: A Case Study from the College of the Holy Cross

Office of Sustainability

Background

The College of the Holy Cross is a coeducational, Jesuit liberal arts college in Worcester, Massachusetts. The College enrolls approximately 3,000 undergraduate students and is highly residential, with more than 90% of its students living on campus. Holy Cross offers free printing to students in its libraries (Dinand, Science, and Music) as well as other locations on campus (e.g. O'Kane Labs). In 2019, Holy Cross began tracking the number of pages each individual prints per month and sending each individual a monthly report. In this personalized report, Informational Technology Services (ITS) informs each campus community member of the number of pages that they printed as well as how they compare to their peers. This includes a ranking of how much they printed, as well as a percentage of how much more or less they printed than their classmates or colleagues. In addition, the report tells campus community members what percentage, more or less, they printed compared to the month prior.

Goals

This project had several main goals:

1. To decrease the number of pages printed on campus each month, initiated by seeing an increase in printing from 2017 to 2018. ITS estimates that this printing increase was likely a result of more students and faculty using online chapters from the College's learning management system.

2. Advance Holy Cross's goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2040. The College signed the Carbon Commitment in 2007, a pledge in which Holy Cross aimed to decrease its carbon emissions in the coming decades.

Implementation

1. ITS, in consultation with the Presidential Task Force on the Environment, conceived the printing report initiative.
2. ITS selected digital printing reports, rather than other behavioral nudges, to address excessive printing because the reports promote voluntarily sustainable action.
3. ITS tracks printing data through the printers themselves, the Holy Cross internet network, and a printing application that has tracking abilities.
4. After gathering data, ITS sends out monthly reports to community members using an internally made program.

Results

1. From April 2018 to April of 2019, Holy Cross printed 207,283 fewer pages, or a 25% decrease, than the previous year. This paper savings equates to 24.87 trees.
2. April 2019 marked the least among printed (for the month of April) at Holy Cross on record.
3. The top 5 physical printers account for 42% of the total page difference from April 2018 to April 2019.

Lessons Learned

1. Sending digital monthly reports to each Holy Cross community member successfully encourages less printing usage than without the reports.
2. Some individual reports are not completely accurate because some employees print on behalf of their supervisors.
3. When used properly, behavioral nudges can effectively encourage sustainable behaviors among members of the campus community.