

Penn Green Fund Final Report



Project Name: Penn Closet Thrift Store
Project Leader(s): Zoe Weissberg, Damien Koussis, Anna Balfanz, Emily Yao, and Claire Williams
Semester Grant Was Awarded: July 12, 2017
Semester Completed: Spring 2018
Amount Awarded: \$5,000.00

PROJECT OVERVIEW

A short description of project objectives and sustainability benefits

The objectives of launching the Penn Closet thrift store were to:

1. divert usable items disposed of by Penn students from landfills,
2. create conversations about sustainable habits in students' daily lives,
3. foster a circular economy on campus,
4. provide low-cost options to students on a budget.

The purpose of the thrift store was to facilitate the same process as the Penn Free and For Sale page on Facebook that students could take advantage of at any time. The Penn Free and For Sale page addresses some of the project objectives, but it only matches buyers and sellers on an instantaneous basis. The buyer must be in the market at the same time the seller is looking to get rid of the item, and buyers and sellers must coordinate a convenient time and place to exchange the item. Establishing a physical thrift store would address this issue.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

A list of all major project participants and a short description of their responsibilities or involvement

- Penn students, Zoe Weissberg and Damien Koussis created the business plan for a thrift store through Kinetic @ Penn: a student-led social innovation incubator that researches, designs, and sets up innovative and sustainable projects within Philadelphia. Their goal was to have the thrift store be one of Penn Student Agencies' student-run businesses.
- Penn Student Agencies accepted the business plan, and became the home department for the Penn Closet thrift store.
- The VPUL Facilities department supported this new venture by providing PSA with the U-Lounge in Williams Hall for the storefront location.
- PSA consulted the Post-Landfill Action Network and the Clark University Community Thrift Store to determine the most effective ways to start a thrift store on campus and anticipate potential challenges.
- This project was supported by the Green Fund Grant from Green Campus Partnerships, and Penn Sustainability helped with advertising the launch date of the thrift store.

IMPLEMENTATION

A detailed explanation of the steps taken to reach intended outcomes and important actions or events

Zoe Weissberg and Damien Koussis presented their business plan to Penn Student Agencies in April 2017, which PSA accepted as their newest student-run agency. To learn effective ways to create a thrift store on campus, Penn Student Agencies consulted the Post-Landfill Action Network, an advisory group that provides students with the necessary skills and information to implement Zero Waste initiatives on their respective campuses, and the Clark University Community Thrift Store. These points of contact were helpful in identifying how donations should be sorted and processed, as well as the pricing structure for selling the donations at affordable prices.

Finding a location that was affordable and accessible was the most significant and time-consuming challenge. The VPUL Facilities department generously offered the U-Lounge in Williams Hall for free for three years. An additional benefit is the U-Lounge is located right next to Williams Cafe, which is one of Penn Student Agencies' most lucrative student-run businesses. Customers getting their coffee would see the store while waiting for their order, and either look through the racks after receiving their coffee or return at another time.

A goal for setting up the store was to furnish it with thrifted furniture or equipment as much as possible. We were unable to find the clothing racks we needed at thrift stores, but the cashier desk, dressing room mirror, display bookshelf, and large display cubby were all second-hand items that were either purchased for under \$20 or acquired free of charge.

Establishing a financial account for the thrift store and the register and credit card reader for the store involved several months of meetings and proposals with the Penn Card Office and the VPUL CFO. Penn Student Agencies also needed to conduct thorough research on the regulations that thrift stores need to abide by on the local, state, and federal levels. Penn Risk Management needed to approve the thrift store operations in accordance with these regulations before we could move forward with opening the store.

For a student-run business to be successful, it needs students interested in its success. Zoe was graduating in May 2018 and Damien was a junior planning to study abroad in the fall semester. They needed to open the thrift store before the end of the 2018 spring semester, and ensure that the store had a team of student employees and student managers who all shared the same mission and vision for the thrift store. Zoe and Damien spent a lot of time constructing the operations manual, the organizational structure of the team, the job descriptions, the process for vetting applicants, and their training procedure for new hires. This helped form a team that was just as committed to the success of the thrift store as Zoe and Damien were. After Zoe and Damien left their positions with Penn Closet, the Penn Closet student leadership roles were offered to Anna Balfanz and Emily Yao who shared Zoe and Damien's commitment to the thrift store mission and vision.

The Penn Closet team held a launch party the evening of March 12, 2018 where students were invited to hangout, listen to music, talk about Penn Closet's journey, and shop. There was a great turnout, and student attendees were excited about the store's sustainability mission. The store officially started its normal business hours the next day.

RESULTS

Relevant data (charts and tables) and an explanation of the outcomes of the project

A year after opening the thrift store, Penn Closet was able to measure outcomes of the project. Penn Closet found that:

- 2,700 liters of water, 15.4 pounds of CO₂, and 1.3 square meters of land are required to produce and transport one cotton shirt
- 2,912 liters of water, 40 pounds of CO₂, and 10.3 square meters of land are required to produce and transport one pair of jeans
- 8,543 liters of water and 30 pounds of CO₂ are required to produce and transport one pair of shoes

Within the first year of being open, Penn Closet sold 72 cotton shirts, 6 pairs of jeans, and 17 pairs of shoes. Therefore, the Penn Closet store facilitated the resale of goods that required a total of 357,103 liters of water, 1,858.8 pounds of CO₂, and 561.6 square meters of land to manufacture and transport. Additionally, one year after opening, Penn Closet had roughly 650 donations available in the store for resale instead of those items sitting in landfills.

Penn Closet created conversations about sustainable habits by engaging students via social media and pop-up events. There were 74 Facebook posts by Penn Closet that communicated items for sale, pop-up events, and articles related to sustainability habits. On average, the posts received engagement from 174 people or 62% of

page likes. Penn Closet hosted five pop-up events for selling store products at various locations on campus. These events were promoted on the Penn Closet Facebook page, which reached 9.1k people reached in total and received “interested” or “going” RSVPs from 480 people.

- Pop-Up Shop with Penn Environmental Group on 2/26/19
 - 1,262 reach, 44 reaction/comment/share, 162 post clicks
- Pop Up Shop on College Green on 10/16/18
 - 356 reach, 18 reaction/comment/share, 140 post clicks
- Free Rack Announcement on 4/3/18
 - 234 reach, 23 reaction/comment/share, 110 post clicks
- Free Rack Refill Announcement on 2/12/19
 - 469 reach, 37 reaction/comment/share, 95 post clicks
- Shoe Sale on 2/21/19
 - 123 reach, 3 likes/comments/shared, 67 post clicks

Penn Closet also facilitated conversations about sustainable habits through conference presentations. Penn Closet presented on their thrift store at the following conferences:

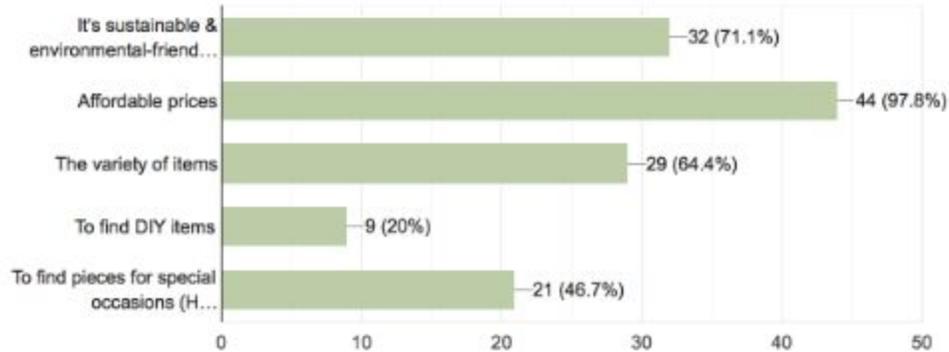
- Post-Landfill Action Network (PLAN) Students for Zero Waste Conference at Penn’s Houston Hall on November 2, 2018
 - Workshop collaboration with University of Thriftsburgh, UPitt’s student-run thrift store, about how to start and run an on-campus thrift store
 - Attendance: Over 500 attendees to conference total, at least 70 to workshop.
 - Takeaways: Lot of students seriously interested in starting a thrift shop on their campus!
- Student-Run Business Association Conference at Harvard University on March 29, 2019
 - Workshop Title, “Eco-Entrepreneurship: Facilitating a Circular Economy Through a New Thrift Store”
 - Attendance:
 - Takeaways:

To increase engagement with the Penn community and better meet the needs of the customer base, Penn Closet received feedback from 45 responders on what would encourage them to visit the store and what Penn Closet events they would like to see. The results are as follows:

Market Survey

What are some reasons you would shop in a thrift store? (Select all that applies)

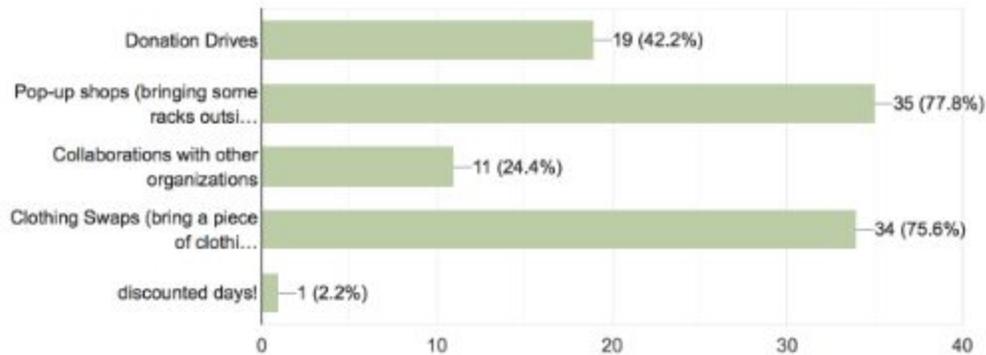
45 responses



Market Survey

What kind of events would you want to see from us?

45 responses



LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

Reflections on the project (what went well and what could have been improved) as well as suggestions for future projects

The Penn Closet team has two main areas of focus going forward: expanding on our environmentalist mission and increasing our customer base via its diversification. After a year of being open, we are ready to take on the full weight of our founding mission. This year, we want to go beyond just diverting items from landfill and take on an active, more political role in pushing for a global culture change toward a more sustainable relationship with stuff, be that clothes, shoes, kitchen supplies, room appliances or random knick-knacks. Secondly, we want to expand our customer base to reach all members of the Penn community, and hopefully Philadelphia at large.

PRESS

Links to articles that feature the project, if applicable

34th Street Article: “Shopping Sustainably at Penn Closet” by Shinyoung Hailey Noh -

<https://www.34st.com/article/2018/04/penn-closet-student-business-sustainability-second-hand-used-clothing?fbclid=IwAR0VzpDQYLWIAVC-ESp0rHhSeVJNYVTWBhcboixPy8V5nijhOe9Wqu27bEk>

Penn Today Article: “As good as new at Penn Closet” by Michele W. Berger -

https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/giving-clothes-second-life-Penn-Closet-thrift-shop?fbclid=IwAR2rHx6bMEBVUWgFoVPkoO0u6tMsYh3FjSCP_0j9ClyHS9kwRS3YSQFajVE

PROJECT PHOTOS

Relevant pictures of the project and/or participants







