University of Pennsylvania Campus Ecology Tour

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Student Eco-Reps 2016-2017
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Abstract

We designed an initiative in which we created a comprehensive tour to raise awareness for Penn’s sustainability efforts. First, we conducted research on the different environmental aspects of the landscape and architecture at Penn, seeking the expertise of Penn faculty from the Office of Sustainability as well as the landscaping department. Next, we compiled our research into a comprehensive guide structured around the different landmarks on campus. We partnered with Kite & Key, who was able to incorporate some of our information into their tours. We also reached out to other partners, such as the Office of Admissions and environmental fraternity Epsilon Eta in the hopes of eventually creating our own tour specific to the ecology of the campus.
Goals

When we first started the Ecology Tour project our interests and initial visions for what the tour would look like were very diverse. Whether we were driven by a personal interest in learning more about the ecology and sustainable efforts on Penn’s campus or a desire to shape the identity of Penn in the eyes of other students on campus, we all saw a use for the creation of an Ecology tour and were all motivated to making this change.

Methods

We started our project by researching what other universities were implementing at colleges with campuses similar and different to Penn’s. We looked at the websites and touring options of more rural universities such as Cornell University and more urban universities such as Columbia University. What makes Penn so unique is the combination of a rural and urban campus. The location of Penn’s campus in the middle of a city demands sustainable practices, however areas such as Penn Park and College Green give it a more rural feel where students can directly interact with nature.

The next step of the process was to become experts ourselves. We reached out to Chloe Cerwinka in the Landscape Department in the Office of Sustainability. Chloe was very enthusiastic to help out and gave us a tour from the east side of campus throughout Penn Park, to the far west end to show us the edible persimmons in front of the Veterinary school.

We compiled all of the information we had gathered from Chloe’s guided tours and extensive research online about different architecture, landscaping, and ecology. One challenge of compiling the research was coming up with a creative approach to organizing the information. In the end, we decided to split the tour format into two separate tours: one of East Campus and one of West Campus, each starting at College Hall and incorporating the same information about Locust Walk and College Green. We compiled all the research material into one document to distribute to any group interested in leading tours.

When we first considering creating a tour run by students separate from other organizations, we met with Heidi Wunder in the Office of Sustainability to gain website editing access for the Office of Sustainability website.
We attempted to conduct a mock ecology tour, but ran into a few challenges during the process. We realized quickly that creating a platform to run the tours was a difficult task. Problems arose such as when they would be held, who would run them, how the guides would be trained, and how often tours would be held. We decided that eco-reps did not have the capacity to create our own system for these tours, and reached out to the Kite and Key Society.

In order to gain more perspective on the challenges with creating and coordinating tours, the team met with the President and Training Coordinator of the Kite and Key Society, a student led club that runs tours through the Office of Admissions. The Kite and Key representatives identified the challenges of creating an entirely new tour or even extending their current tour to Penn Park or the Bio pond. However, Kite and Key was very receptive to updating their current tour content to add more facts about sustainability on campus. The meeting with Kite and Key was set up after the training of newly accepted tour guides for the Spring Semester, however the Eco-Rep team created a slide-deck to be presented at the Fall training session for new tour guides so they better understand how Penn’s identity is shaped by the sustainability efforts on campus.

The President of Kite and Key introduced us to an Admissions Representative to discuss incorporating sustainability content. The Admissions rep was open to the idea of including information on the tour as well as supplementary material to be provided in a pamphlet for in the Office of Admissions. We then prepared a Sustainability Pamphlet to be displayed in Admissions Office in College Hall.

After being contacted by members of Epsilon Eta interested in creating and leading ecology tours during Green Week and NSO activities, we sent them our compiled information guide and the PowerPoint presentation we made for Kite & Key. They are looking to run ecology tours throughout the year for students by students, and could potentially partner with Eco-Reps for any marketing and logistics in the future. We exchanged contact information so that we would be able to reach out to them in the fall to coordinate giving an informative presentation for new tour trainees.

We have successfully passed on our work to a well-established organizations such as Kite & Key and Epsilon Eta. Success metrics can be measured by how much ecological information is presented in tours given by these groups, as well as the number of attendees to each tour. Future Eco-Reps could potentially work to spread awareness about the availability of such tours.
Final Recommendations

We initially thought that if we created our own tour guide platform run by Eco-Reps it would help to have a page on the website where the public could sign up for a date and time to go on the tour. We recommend that a page eventually be created and possibly a self-guided online tour.

The Office of Admissions was not as receptive to the idea of helping create an Ecology Tour. In the future, we recommend further communication with the Office of Admissions to run a pilot tour or create a Sustainability Information Session for prospective students.

Our final recommendation is that future eco-reps work toward creating a more sustainable and permanent platform for an ecology specific tour to be led by students on campus, as well as market the tour to current students.