

## **Eco-Olympics builds on success and seeks new leaders**

*A blog post written by Delaney Lawrence*

Eco-Olympics is a competition focused on bringing hall residents together to make environmental changes that make a lasting impact on the community. Hall-based teams compete with each other in energy reduction efforts. Teams get points for energy reduction per resident as well as the number of residents that sign up, number of events held, social media posts, and how many people attend each event.

The Campus Conservation Nationals competition was introduced to the University of Illinois in 2013 by F&S Energy Services professional Gerard “Paul” Foote. He was a member of the team of students and staff who created Eco-Olympics, a program responsible for saving and reducing energy and decreasing utility rates campus-wide. In 2015, the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign won first place in the ‘Big 10 Unplugged Competition’ by reducing its energy use more than any other school in the competition.

Recent grad Jessica Mondello, Eco-Olympics Director and former Allen Hall resident, was responsible for tripling the participation and campus involvement in spring 2017, ultimately making last year’s competition one of the best so far.

“As Director,” Mondello said, “I had to recruit students, advertise the competition, secure funding, meet with each hall’s team, hand out shirts and posters, and plan the awards banquet. A lot of everything, really.”

Foote attributed much of the competition’s success to Mondello’s contributions over the past four years. “Jessica experienced and defined the competition from every aspect. Leadership is natural for her. Her experience as a resident advisor (RA) at Allen Hall provided insight and understanding with how to navigate housing operations and organize events and special functions.”

For her part, Mondello says she learned patience through serving in this role, especially in regards to communicating with other students. But her passion for the environment is what continued to motivate and inspire her.

“We recruit students to change how residents behave and think when it comes to conserving energy. In recruiting those students, they themselves are affected by that behavioral change. We’re trying to instill a lifestyle into students that they can carry with them after they leave the residence hall.”

Eleven residence halls (Allen, Busey-Evans, LAR, Nugent, Oglesby-FAR, Taft-Van Doren, Townsend-ISR, Trelease-FAR, and Wardall-ISR) and 183 students participated in the 2017 competition. Together they saved more than 54,000 kWh of energy, enough to power 5 homes for one year.

Taft-Van Doren hall won the competition with the most reduction in energy (5.4%) between March 27 and April 17. They received the coveted Eco-Olympics trophy, a catered banquet, and bragging rights. Trelease Hall-FAR won the participation award and received \$500 to buy two water bottle filling stations for their hall.

Although she graduated in the spring, Mondello will continue apply her passion for the environment and energy-reduction in all parts of her lifestyle. She will be greatly missed by the Eco-Olympic program, which is currently searching for new director volunteers to lead the competition.

“Jessica exemplifies leadership in environmental stewardship and shares her passion for making a difference in the world graciously,” said Foot. “No doubt, she will create success in her life, sharing her positive attitude and continue making a difference throughout her journey. She will definitely be missed!”

If you are interested in learning more about volunteering with Eco-Olympics or getting your hall involved in the 2018 competition, fill out an interest form at [go.illinois.edu/eco](http://go.illinois.edu/eco) or send an email to [EcoOlympics@gmail.com](mailto:EcoOlympics@gmail.com).