

**CREATING A SUSTAINABLE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY WITH
THE GREEN RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION**



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June 9, 2005

ABSTRACT

For my senior project, I interned for the Green Restaurant Association. During this time I (a) wrote a report about green restaurants and organizations similar to the GRA; (b) worked to increase GRA membership through phone outreach to corporation restaurants and universities; (c) added the GRA to online environmental organization directories; and (d) assisted with the creation of an ideal GRA coffee shop model. While I was unsuccessful at getting any universities or restaurants to join the GRA, I was able to increase GRA awareness. I also added the GRA to two online environmental directories and compiled a list of environmentally friendly purchasing options an ideal GRA coffee shop could use. Lastly, through my experience I explored the various ways the GRA could increase membership.

INTRODUCTION

The dining industry accounts for 10% of the U.S. economy, and is the number-one electricity consumer in the retail sector. (The Green Restaurant Association, www.dinegreen.com) Accordingly, restaurants have a

significant environmental impact. The Green Restaurant Association (GRA), a national non-profit organization founded in 1990, seeks to remedy this issue by assisting restaurants to become environmentally sustainable.

For my senior project at UCSD, I interned for six months with the GRA. By working on several projects during this internship, I came to understand the approaches used by the GRA, which in turn allowed me to compare the GRA to similar organizations. Based on my experience with these projects, I recommend that to increase the number of GRA members, the GRA should decrease the membership fee by seeking support from the government and other organizations, provide partial memberships, expand to greening other businesses in addition to restaurants, and increase the public's awareness of the GRA.

THE GREEN RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION

GRA members receive on-site consulting in addition to access to a database of environmental solutions. To become a member, a restaurant must pay a membership fee and meet governmental environmental regulations and the GRA program standards. Then, with the help of the GRA, the restaurant

must implement a minimum of 4 environmental steps per year.

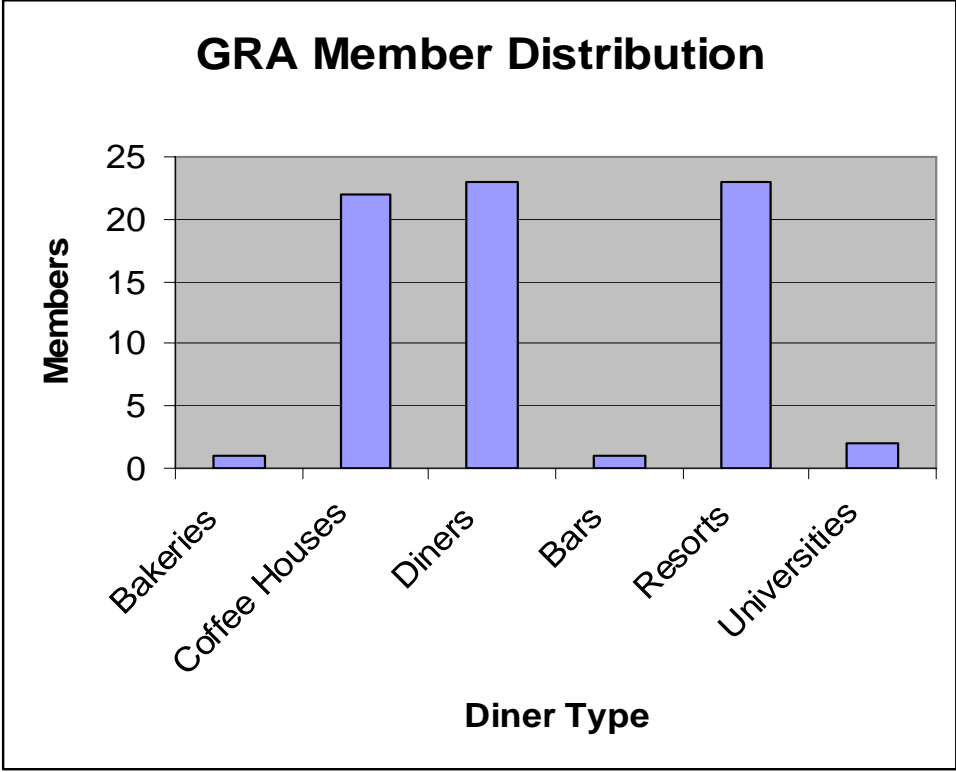
These four steps are in the areas of:

- 1) Energy efficiency and conservation
- 2) Water efficiency and conservation
- 3) Recycling and Composting
- 4) Sustainable Food
- 5) Pollution Prevention
- 6) Recycled, tree-free, biodegradable and organic

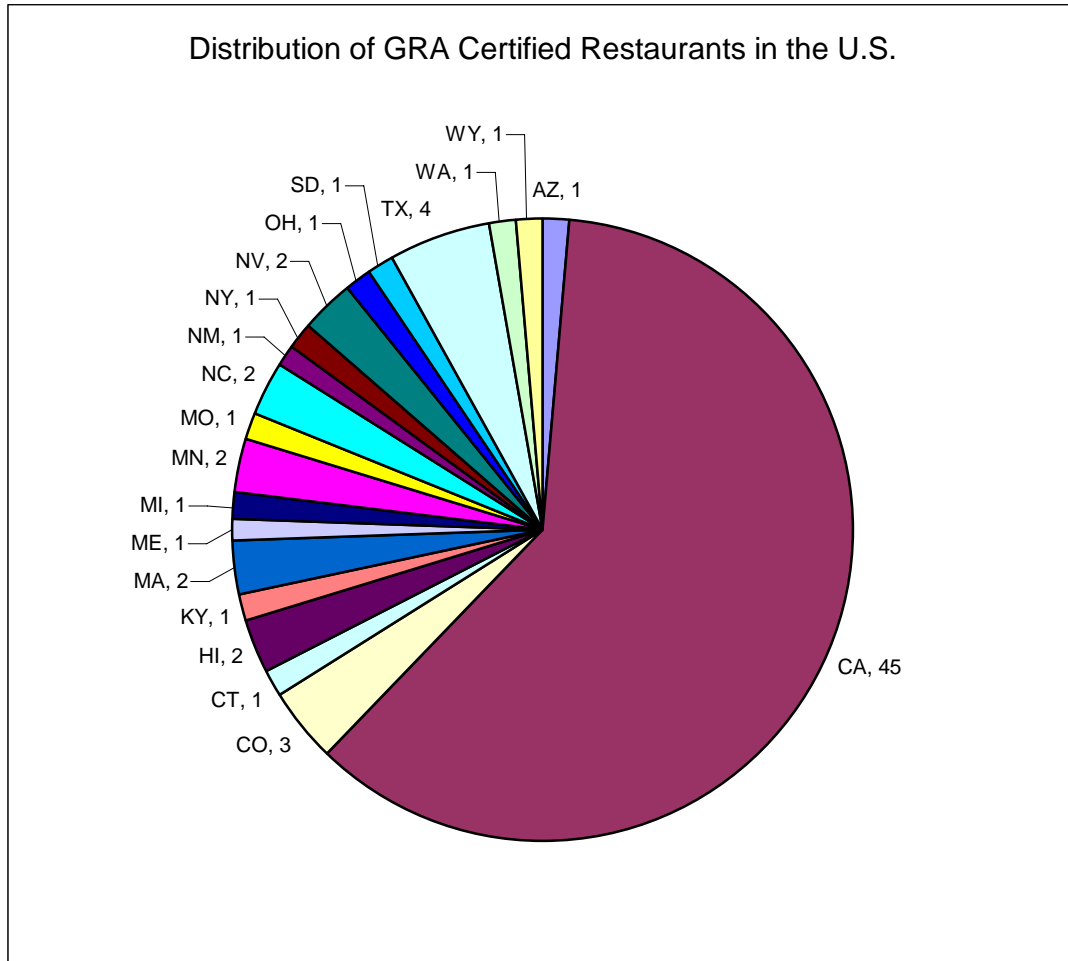
products

- 7) Chlorine-free paper products
- 8) Nontoxic Cleaning and Chemical products
- 9) Renewable Power
- 10) Green Building and Construction

Currently 74 restaurants, coffee houses, bars, resorts, and colleges from all over the country are GRA members. Graph 1 and 2 below display the GRA distribution among diner types and throughout the United States.



Graph 1: GRA member distribution among various diner types.



Graph 2: Distribution of GRA members throughout the United States

Joining the GRA is an easy and efficient way for a restaurant owner to make his or her restaurant greener. Increasing the sustainability of a restaurant without becoming a GRA member would involve an extensive amount of time researching and implementing environmental options which are effective and economical. The GRA makes this task easier for restaurant owners by providing on-site

consulting and access to a database full of environmental solutions.

In addition, following GRA guidelines can save restaurant owners money by increasing energy and water efficiency. For instance, the estimated savings of certified Green Restaurants are 10-20% on energy bills. (The Green Restaurant Association, www.dinegreen.com)

Also, GRA restaurants receive positive publicity. GRA restaurants are permitted to display the GRA logo (figure 1) in their storefront window and on items such as menus, advertisements, and apparel. Also, GRA restaurants can display in their storefront window a sign explaining the environmental achievements of the certified GRA restaurant (such as the number of trees the restaurant has saved by using recycled products), and a sign showing the four environmental steps the restaurant is implementing that year. Certified restaurants are listed in the *Certified Green Restaurant Guide*, which is published in the *Green Consumer News* and available online at the GRA website. The print version of the *Certified Green Restaurant Guide* is distributed to universities, supermarkets, community groups, GRA restaurants, and to Green Consumer Union members. Additionally, GRA restaurants receive positive media coverage in newspapers and in television news. For

example, GRA members have been featured for their ecological responsibility in the San Diego Union Tribune, Fox News, CNN Headline News, KPBS and more. These forms of media coverage provide member restaurants positive advertising.



Figure 1: The Green Restaurant Association Logo

MY INTERNSHIP PROJECTS

I worked on my assignments from home on my personal computer and telephone. I never physically met my supervisor, Executive Director Michael Oshman; however, we did have weekly phone conversations, and I turned in weekly reports describing the progress of my assignments. I never corresponded with any GRA employees besides Michael Oshman.

Project #1: Green Restaurants and Programs Report

My first project was to write a report describing restaurants that strive to be environmentally sustainable

and other organizations that have similar goals of the GRA. I was given a week (10 hours) to accomplish this.

In order to obtain information, I used Google as a search tool, read online newspaper and magazine articles, and called organizations similar to the GRA and green restaurants.

I found two organizations similar to the GRA. One is the Green Business Program (GBP) whose focus is to green private and public businesses and agencies in the Bay Area. All of their services are free because they receive donations from the local governments, water companies, Pacific Gas and Electric, and other organizations that have similar goals to the GBP. (Evans, Personal Communication)

To be certified by the GBP, businesses must be in compliance with all environmental regulations and meet program sustainability standards. A GBP certification lasts three years, and for a business to be recertified after this time they must make additional efforts to reduce their environmental impact. Certified green businesses may display the Green Business logo in their property and in their advertising. (The Green Business Program, <http://www.abag.ca.gov/bayarea/enviro/gbus/index.html>) Since 1996, over 500 businesses have been certified as members in the Bay Area. (Evans, Personal Communication)

The other organization similar to the GRA is the Green Table Program (GTP). This organization is administered by the local government of Dover, Delaware, and is a voluntary program for restaurants in this area that are seeking to become more environmentally friendly.

(The Green Table Program,

<http://www.kentcountypw.com/Green%20Table%20Program.htm>)

Being a relatively new organization, there are currently only two members. (Newton, Personal Communication)

Participating restaurants may display the Green Table logo in their establishment and advertising, and are subject to random inspections and audits to ensure that they are correctly following the principles of the program.

Restaurants are not charged to become members because the GTP receives governmental financial support. (The Green Table Program,

<http://www.kentcountypw.com/Green%20Table%20Program.htm>)

The second part of my report was about green restaurants. Environmentally friendly restaurants often receive positive publicity. For instance, some of the restaurants I researched were written up in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Restaurants and Institutions*.

Of the restaurants I researched, many boasted about serving organic and vegetarian food. Few restaurants aimed

to green every part of their business, from purchasing recycled products to using non-toxic cleaners.

This report was a good way to introduce me to green dining. Additionally, I was able to share some of my insights Michael Oshman.

Project #2: Calling Corporation Restaurants

My second assignment was to expose restaurant chains to the GRA. To accomplish this, I was instructed to choose a few corporate restaurants and call their customer service phone numbers. I chose Rubios, Starbucks, In-N-Out Burger, Panda Express, Jamba Juice, and Round Table Pizza to be my targeted restaurants. When I called these restaurants, I told the customer service representative that I was a customer of the given restaurant and an intern for the GRA, and was interested in learning about what their business was doing to become more sustainable. Usually, the customer service would say that they were not accustomed to such an inquiry, they weren't sure what their restaurant chain was doing, and they weren't familiar with the GRA. I would then give them the GRA's website address and tell them how the GRA could assist their company to reduce their ecological impact and how becoming certified would boost

their restaurant's public image. Last, I recommended that they encourage their supervisors to consider joining the GRA.

The second part of this assignment was to invite nine of my friends and family to call the same restaurants. I invited 9 people to call; however, only two friends and my Dad actually ended up calling. My very supportive Dad and friends who called told the customer service representatives that they were a customer of the given restaurant and that they would like to see them practice more environmentally sound practices, and encouraged them to do so by joining the GRA.

None of these restaurants joined; however, this wasn't the ultimate goal of this assignment. Instead, the purpose of this project was to publicize the role of the GRA among restaurant operators, and to make these restaurants aware that customers are concerned about the environment. This project also gave me practice calling people on the phone, which appropriately led me to my next assignment.

Project #3: Increasing GRA Campus Membership

As shown on graph 1, there are only two campuses that are GRA members. To increase GRA campus membership, the

bulk of my internship was spent encouraging campuses to join the GRA. To accomplish this goal, I was instructed by Michael Oshman to call sustainability coordinators (someone hired specifically by a university to deal with environmental issues) from campuses and introduce them to the GRA. The main purpose of these conversations was to spark interest in GRA among sustainability coordinators, and then to set up a phone conversation between them and Michael Oshman so that he could discuss with them specifically how the GRA could help green their dining commons. I used Google as my main means of finding the names and phone numbers of the sustainability coordinators.

When I first began calling these campus sustainability coordinators, I was incredibly nervous and I didn't know how to approach my conversation with them. I would stumble over my words, and because I wasn't comfortable I did not make a very good case for the GRA. So, I developed a "rap" that I would go through when I called people. This really helped me feel at ease and confident when I was making my phone calls. First, I introduced myself as an intern from the GRA. Second, I asked them if they had heard of the GRA. No one I spoke to had heard of the GRA, and so I then explained that the GRA was a national non-profit organization founded in 1990 that is helping the food

industry achieve ecological sustainability and that I was heading a program which is trying to develop environmentally-friendly dining practices on campuses. Third, I asked them if they had time to answer a few questions, and if they were busy, I asked when a good time to call back would be. Fourth, I talked to them about what they were doing currently to reduce their dining commons environmental impact. I would always do background research in this area so I knew as much as I could about the environmental activities of the campus I was calling. Fifth, I asked if they felt they needed help greening their dining commons, and if they thought that their campus could benefit from GRA's services. Last, I asked if they would be interested in having a phone conversation with Michael Oshman. Even if the person I was speaking with was totally disinterested in the GRA, I would insist on giving them the GRA web address. Once I got comfortable with this "rap" I was well composed when speaking to Sustainability Coordinators over the phone, and my conversations were much more productive.

Unfortunately, I ran into some difficulties as I was doing this internship project. First, it was difficult to find the names and numbers of Sustainability Coordinators. I spent a lot of time doing searches on Google trying to

find their contact information. Sometimes, to find their names and numbers, I would call other persons who might be affiliated with Sustainability Coordinators. I would also ask Sustainability Coordinators that I contacted if they could recommend that I call any other coordinators that they knew from other campuses. Many supplied the names and numbers of other persons in their profession, but some were less inclined.

Second, once I found their names and numbers, they were very difficult to contact. I would spend a great deal of time calling Sustainability Coordinators again and again until finally they answered their phone. Sometimes I would speak with multiple persons from each campus and other times I was unable to make contact with anyone. The following is a list of campuses with sustainability coordinators that I tried to contact.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (NC)

UC Santa Barbara (CA)

UC Santa Cruz (CA)

Appalachian State University (NC)

Duke University (NC)

North Carolina State University (NC)

Middlebury College (VT)

University of Vermont (VT)

Portland State University (OR)
The State University of New York at Buffalo (NY)
College of Charleston (SC)
University of British Columbia (Canada)
University of Washington (WA)
Cal Poly San Luis Obispo (CA)
Harvard Green Campus Initiative (MA)
Indiana University (IN)
Tufts University (MA)
University of Victoria (Canada)
Tulane University (LA)
Michigan University (MI)
Emory University (GE)
Brown University (RI)
University of Illinois (IL)
MIT (MA)
UC System (CA)
University of South Carolina (SC)

Of these colleges I was able to contact persons from:

University of Illinois (IL)
Michigan University (MI)
Emory University (GE)
Brown University (RI)
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (NC)

Appalachian State University (NC)

Duke University (NC)

Middlebury College (VT)

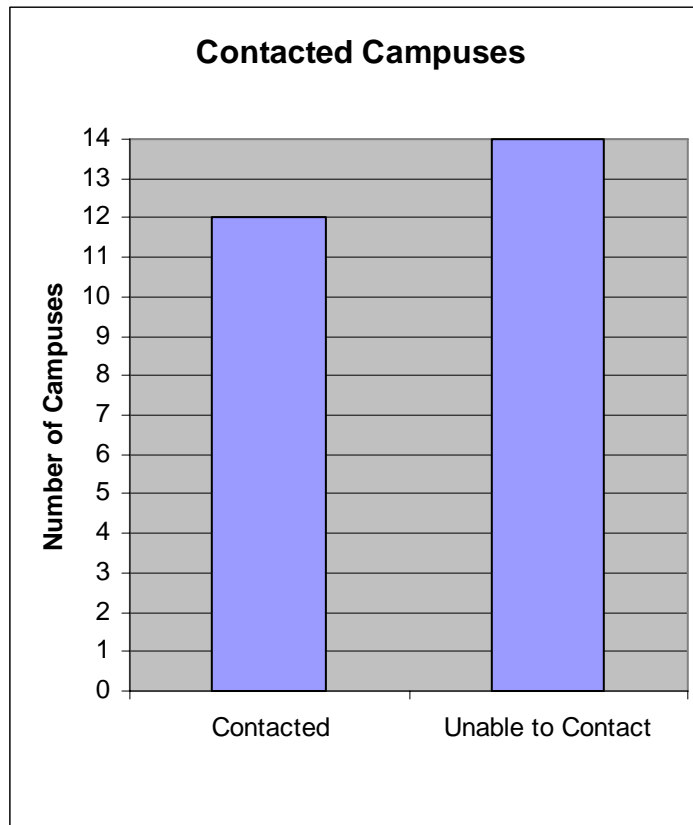
Portland State University (OR)

The State University of New York at Buffalo (NY)

UC System (CA)

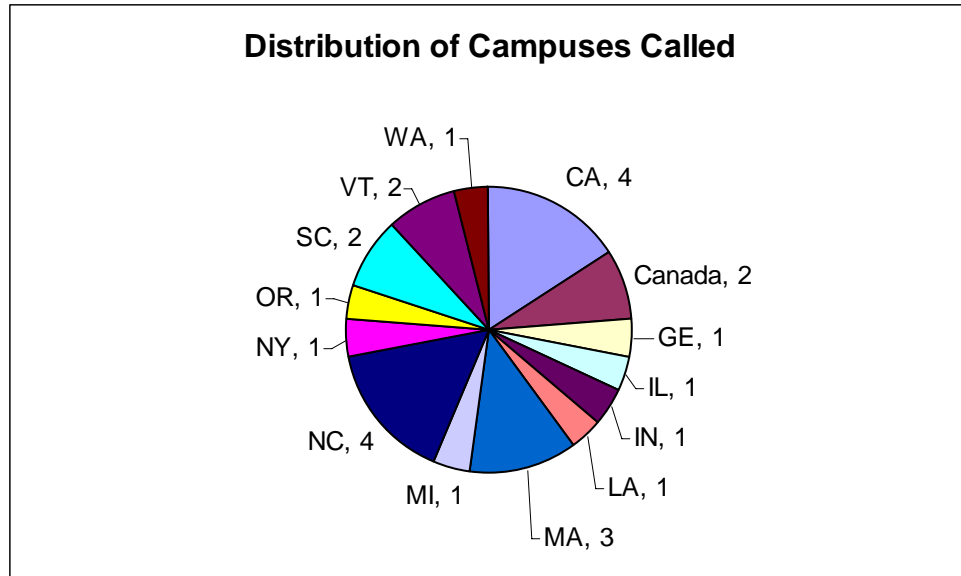
University of South Carolina (SC)

Graph three shows the ratio of campuses I was able to contact in contrast to the campuses I was unable to contact.



Graph 3: Campuses With Sustainability Coordinators I Attempted to Contact.

Graph four shows the distribution of the campuses I called throughout the United States and Canada.



Graph 4: Geographic Distribution of Campuses.

Third, when I finally reached coordinators, they were not always eager to speak with me. They sometimes were very busy and did not have time to talk. Other times they were just disinterested in the GRA.

Fourth, most coordinators were already working on greening their dining commons. While many were having problems dealing with some parts of this process, they did not need to hire the GRA to green their dining commons in entirety. Instead, many were interested in consulting

services without the full membership where the GRA could help them with areas they were having issues with. For instance, environmental coordinator Cindy Pollock Shea from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was interested in any ideas the GRA had about finding organic food in the area she was in. Unfortunately, the GRA does not offer partial memberships.

Last, even those that were interested did not have the power to decide whether their campus should or should not become members. Many would say that they would be enthused if their campus became members, but they didn't believe it possible to convince the university they worked for to pay money to become members.

Despite these problems, I managed to set up phone conversations between Michael Oshman and two persons affiliated with sustainability issues on campus. The first conversation was with Trish Jerman, who is the manager for the Sustainability University Initiative which is a South Carolina network of universities interested in implementing environmental considerations into their campuses. The second conversation was with Greg Andek, who is an intern for the Sustainability Coordinator at Duke University.

However, no universities have yet joined due to my efforts. Many sustainability coordinators I spoke with

seemed very interested in what the GRA had to offer; however, they did not have time to have a phone conversation with Michael Oshman at the time we spoke. Hopefully these positive conversations will lead to possible GRA membership in the future.

To determine how I could have been more successful at encouraging campuses to join, I considered if I should have targeted colleges that were more similar to the two colleges that are currently GRA members, Antioch College and Bates College. Both colleges are small, private, expensive, liberal arts universities; and neither college has an environmental coordinator. (Bates College, <http://www.bates.edu/>) (Antioch College, <http://www.antioch-college.edu/>) In fact, Antioch College has no environmental organizations or initiatives and does not mention that they are GRA members on their Dining Commons website. (Antioch College, <http://www.antioch-college.edu/>)

To further investigate the reasons why campuses would join the GRA, I called the Directors of Dining at Antioch College and Bates College. However, I was only able to speak with David Radkey, Director of Dining at Antioch College. He informed me that he heard about the GRA through a postcard that Michael Oshman had sent him, and

that he was motivated to join because he was interested in making the dining commons socially responsible and thought that the GRA would be a good resource to assist with this process. Further, he felt that having the campus pay the GRA dues would motivate him and his colleagues to green the dining commons. Also, it wasn't difficult for him to convince the Antioch University to pay the GRA fees.

(Radkey, Personal Communication)

If a future intern continues this project, it might be useful for him or her to target small, private, expensive, liberal arts schools that are similar to Antioch College and Bates College. With a smaller campus, there is less bureaucracy to work through to get the university certified by the GRA. For instance, a larger campus often has more than one Director of Dining and numerous privately owned restaurants on campus. If a large campus was to become a GRA member, all of the Directors of Dining and owners of the privately owned restaurants would have to agree that joining the GRA and paying the fees was a good idea. Conversely, at a smaller college there is most likely only be one Director of Dining to transact with. Also, an expensive, private, liberal arts school might have more money and be more forward thinking than a large public

university and consequently be more interested in becoming a GRA member.

Furthermore, future interns should consider calling Directors of Dining instead of the Sustainability Coordinators. The Director of Dining might have more input in deciding if the campus should join the GRA. Also campuses that have Sustainability Coordinators are most likely already greening their dining commons and do not need the full assistance of the GRA.

Last, a future intern should consider sending out GRA postcards in addition to calling campuses, similar to how Michael Oshman sent a GRA postcard to David Radkey, Director of Dining at Antioch College. Calling and sending postcards would be a double reinforcement of the positive ways the GRA could help green campus diners and would increase GRA awareness.

Project #4: Adding GRA to Online Environmental Lists

The goal of this project was to add the GRA to online lists of environmental organizations. I was given one week (10 hours) to accomplish this. During this time, I used Google to search for websites dealing with sustainability issues. I looked at about 30 websites, and successfully

added the GRA to the environmental indices of the "Maryland Department of the Environment" and "Renewing the Countryside" websites.

This increased GRA awareness and furthered my knowledge of various environmental groups and their activities.

If I were given more time to complete this assignment, I would have become more efficient at searching for websites with environmental directories, and consequently I would have had a higher success rate adding the GRA to these lists.

Project #5: Making an Ideal Green Coffee Shop Model

Recently, 23 coffee shops from The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf became members of the Green Restaurant Association. To facilitate the entrance of these new members, I was assigned the task of assisting with the creation of an Ideal GRA Coffee Shop Model. To do this, I compiled a list of environmentally conscience purchasing options for every part of an ideal green coffee shop. I found a variety of manufacturers that sell environmentally sound flooring, furniture, countertops, coffee cups, coffee lids, paint, toilets, office paper, aerators, reusable dishware, stir-

sticks, cash register paper, office paper, envelopes, spray valves, coffee machines, shelving, paints, and sealants. For example, I found three businesses that sell reusable dishware made from recycled glass (Green Home, Fire and Light, and Green Feet), two companies that sell aerators (AM Conservation Group and Niagara Conservation), seven companies that sell eco-friendly furniture (Wooden Duck, Whit Mcleod, Staples Cabinet, Stick and Stone Studio, The Q Collection, ShetkaStone, and Canopy), and so forth.

I used Google to search for the companies selling the green products I was seeking, and then I called the companies to determine the specifics of how the item was sold.

Some products that were advertised as being green weren't always environmentally friendly. For instance, one company advertised that their stir-sticks were eco-conscience because they were made from wood that was "all-natural". However, a stir-stick that was truly environmentally friendly would be re-usable or made of sustainable wood or recycled plastic.

Researching green products for an ideal GRA coffee shop took an extensive amount of time. This helped me understand how difficult it can be to green a restaurant, and how much time and energy the GRA can save

environmentally conscience restaurant owners and managers. Lastly, I learned that there are several green options that are economical and good for the natural environment.

Final Recommendations

While interning for the GRA, I worked on numerous projects that gave me insights to the inner-workings of the GRA. My first recommendation is that the GRA should advertise more. Nobody I spoke with when I was doing phone outreach to campuses and corporation restaurants had heard of the GRA. Two ways this could be done is by adding the GRA to more online environmental indices (like I did in my internship project #5), or sending out GRA postcards to diners.

Second, seeking governmental financial assistance like the Green Business Program and the Green Table Program could reduce the GRA certification fee and make it possible for more diners to join. However, not charging GRA members like the GBP and GTP might not be an affective way to green restaurants because having to pay a fee ensures a restaurant's commitment to reduce their environmental impact. For example, David Radkey, Director of Dining at Antioch College, informed me that he wanted his campus to

pay GRA fees to make sure that his colleagues and he would be motivated to truly green their dining commons. (Radkey, Personal Communication) Similarly, the GBP coordinator for Alameda County, Pam Evans, told me that the disadvantage to not charging GTP members is that many businesses not take their membership seriously. (Evans, Personal Communication)

Third, I believe that providing partial memberships would increase the amount of diners that could use GRA services. Numerous Sustainability Coordinators expressed their desire to receive some of the GRA services but did not need all of the GRA services. Providing partial memberships would increase the number of GRA members and also increase GRA awareness.

My last recommendation is that the GRA eventually expand to other businesses as besides restaurants. This would increase the number of eligible members and significantly increase GRA membership.

Conclusion

Although my internship projects were not always successful, my experience with the GRA was extremely positive. Submitting weekly reports and conferring with

environmental professions greatly developed my writing and communication skills. Working on a variety of internship projects increased my knowledge of the environmental endeavors of various organizations. I also learned about the numerous ways a business can become more sustainability and the numerous problems that a business can face in trying to green their organization. Lastly, working for the GRA greatly increased my interest in sustainability issues, and has inspired me to continue working in environmental conservation.

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