Advertising Gone to the Recycling Bin?
Paper Use on the Campus Center Bulletin Boards

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Abstract

The Smith College Campus Center bulletin boards generate a large amount of paper waste. Fliers, advertising community and campus events, cover the boards and are removed every week. Although the fliers are reused and then recycled, reducing the amount of paper used initially would have a positive environmental impact. This project was designed to find a way to reduce the paper waste associated with the bulletin boards, as well as find out the best ways to communicate information about campus events with students. A study done on the two bulletin boards on the main level of the Campus Center showed that multiple copies of fliers were the largest contributor to the excess paper use. A survey of Smith students showed that Facebook and department emails were the preferred sources of information about campus events, but the bulletin boards were used occasionally. This suggests that students respond to information targeted at them, as well as posters that catch their eyes. Recommendations for improvement include phasing out the bulletin boards in the downstairs of the Campus Center and enforcing a limit of one flier per event on the upstairs bulletin boards by requiring people to turn in their fliers to be posted. This would ensure that each flier would be seen and duplication would not be necessary. Along with strengthening alternate methods of communication, especially online resources, within the college community, changing the bulletin board system would heighten people’s mindfulness about paper use and make it easier to find interesting events.

Introduction

Every week the Smith College Campus Center’s bulletin boards are covered with posters for upcoming events sponsored by the college, fliers about Northampton events, advertisements from student organizations, and fliers from community members. The bulletin boards are an effective and easy way to communicate with a large number of Smith students—all that is
needed is a flashy poster and people will consider coming to an event. However, the fliers on the Campus Center bulletin boards, along with bulletin boards in academic buildings and student houses, and pamphlets stuffed into student mailboxes all contribute to Smith’s paper trail. Most of this paper gets recycled after only a few days.

Seeing the bulletin boards covered in layers of paper made me curious if they were an effective source of information at all. Who used the bulletin boards and how did they use them? Did students use the bulletin boards to find information on campus events or were they looking to sources directed specifically at their interests? Targeted advertising has been shown to be more effective than general advertising when used to market products, so perhaps it would also be more effective as a method of advertising events to students (Iyer, Soberman, and Villas-Boas 2005). Or perhaps an online bulletin board, like the Plasma Poster, would be a better option (Churchill, Nelson, and Denoue 2003). This project was designed to look closely at the bulletin boards in the Campus Center and the way students get information about events to see if the bulletin boards were functional, if they could be changed in some way to be more effective, or if they should be redesigned completely.

**Methodology**

**Bulletin Board Analysis**

The first part of this project was to look at the bulletin boards in the Campus Center to see who was using them, how much paper was being used, and how the paper was being recycled. I looked at the two bulletin boards on the main level, which get the most traffic, for two weeks. I chose to count and categorize the fliers on two Sunday mornings, just after the Campus Center staff had cleared the bulletin boards completely as they do every week. This way I ensured that I counted every flier that had been posted in the past week.
I divided the fliers into four categories, based on who had put them up. These four categories were: Smith College sponsored events, including department events; events sponsored by Smith College students or student organizations; events located at one of the other Five Colleges; and fliers from businesses or Northampton community members.

I also broke the fliers down into types of paper because I was interested in finding out if there was a difference in the recycling process for the different paper types, and whether the college needed to rethink what types of paper it offered to students. The categories I created were: white, color, thick, large and thick, and large and thin.

The last way I looked at the fliers was by the number of fliers per event. I divided the fliers up and counted all of the fliers used to advertise each event. I also counted the total number of fliers and the total number of events. I then tallied the results by category.

Information Source Survey

The second part of this analysis of the bulletin boards was to see how many students actually used the bulletin boards. In order to get a better understanding of what sources students used to find out about campus events, I created a short online survey asking students whether they used a variety of sources rarely, occasionally, or often, what their primary source of information about campus events was, and how we could better advertise events around campus (see Appendix for details). The source options I listed were: the Campus Center bulletin boards, Smith E-digest, Facebook, the Campus Center televisions with ads running through them, department emails, mailbox fliers, and the option to add an alternate source.

Results

Bulletin Boards
In my analysis of the bulletin board fliers, I found that the largest source of bulletin board fliers was the Northampton community, with 42% of the 424 fliers. Next came Smith College, with 26% of the fliers, then Smith College students with 20%, and finally Five College fliers at 12%. Figure 1 shows the distribution of fliers in a graph.

Figure 1. This graph shows the proportion of fliers put up by each of the four sources. The Northampton community is the largest contributor, followed by Smith College.

On average, Northampton community members used 3.7 fliers to advertise each event, the College used 3.2, Smith students used 2.6, and Five College students used 3.4. The comparison between the number of events advertised and fliers used by each of the sources can be seen in Figure 2.
Figure 2: This graph compares the number of events advertised by each source next to the number of fliers used to advertise the events. The community used significantly more fliers per event than any of the other sources.

The majority of the paper was standard eight and one half by eleven white paper, followed by standard color paper, as seen in Figure 3. Larger and thicker paper made up about one third of the total paper.

Figure 3: This graph shows the types of paper used on the bulletin boards. Nearly half was white paper, and almost a quarter color paper. Another quarter was large paper, divided between thick and thin, and the last 12% was thick standard sized paper.
Four hundred and twenty-four fliers were used to advertise 132 events over the course of two weeks. Seventy-eight of the events were advertised using one or two fliers, accounting for 119 of the fliers. Twenty-seven events were advertised with three to four fliers. The remaining fliers, more than 200, advertised only 24 events with five or more fliers per event. Figure 4 shows the number of events advertised next to the number of posters used at each interval.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 4:** This graph breaks the fliers into categories based on how many fliers were used to advertise one event. The blue and red columns compare the number of events advertised with the number of fliers used in each category.

**Survey**

Of the 28 students who took the online survey, 50% noted Facebook as their most frequently used source of information on campus events. Another 32% used department emails most frequently. No other source was listed more than twice.

Students were asked to rate their use of each source as rarely, occasionally, or often. I awarded each response of rarely zero points, occasionally one point, and often two points. With this rating scale, as seen in Figure 5, Facebook received 49 points, the most points by far.
Department e-mails followed with 36, then the bulletin boards, 23, mailbox fliers, 20, and Smith E-digest, 17. The Campus Center TVs and the Other category received only eight points each.

Figure 5: This graph shows the results from the online survey about sources students use to find campus events. The numbers represent the total number of points awarded based on a scale where each category received a different amount of points. Each response of “rarely” received zero points, each “occasionally” received one point, and each “often” received two points.

Of the eight suggestions for improving the advertising of campus events, two students suggested that mailbox fliers were unnecessary, and four responses suggested that announcements from faculty were effective.

Discussion

Bulletin Board Users
I went into this project unsure if the bulletin boards were a necessary form of communication. Initially I began thinking of alternative methods that could be used in the Campus Center which involved little or no paper, thinking to overthrow the entire system. However, the results of my analysis of the two main level bulletin boards showed that the bulletin boards play an important role in communication in the college. The most striking example of this was the communication between Smith College students and Northampton community members, as more than 40% of the fliers were from Northampton businesses and community members. This is not surprising, as the Northampton community does not have access to e-mail listserves, Facebook groups, or the Smith E-digest as ways to inform students about events. During my presentation, someone noted that bulletin boards provide the reverse service to community members interested in finding out about events happening at the college. Bulletin boards are an excellent way for these people to find out about upcoming lectures. This informational exchange across campus and town lines is valuable on both sides and should be maintained.

The bulletin boards are also clearly utilized by the College, as Smith College sponsored fliers made up more than a quarter of the fliers. While offices and departments of the college do try to communicate with students via the Smith E-digest and listserves, the bulletin boards are still a viable way to get the attention of students who read their emails selectively. Some departments stood out as especially large contributors to the bulletin boards, including Religious Life with 38 of the 111 College fliers and, ironically, the Environmental Science and Policy Department with 20 fliers.

While, on average, advertisers did not use more than the suggested two fliers per bulletin board, Smith students were the least reckless with their flier use, using 1.1 fliers less on average
than the community members. Perhaps Smith students are more aware about conserving paper, or they are also advertising through other sources, like Facebook, house emails, and chalking, and are less dependent on communicating through the bulletin boards.

Five College events were advertised with the second highest proportion of fliers to events, perhaps because, like the Northampton community, they do not have access to online resources.

Paper Types

Interested in finding out the different types of paper that were used and the different ways they were recycled led me to divide paper into several different categories which I learned were fairly irrelevant. Tamra Bates, Director of the Office of Student Engagement, told me that the fliers are recycled internally (Bates 2011). The white paper is cut into quarters and made into memo pads used by the Campus Center staff. The colored paper is used to make bright letters for the banners that hang in the Campus Center.

Still curious if there was a difference in the final fates of color or white or thick paper, I e-mailed the Five College Recycling Manager, Roger Guzowski. Mr. Guzowski told me that, at Smith, the use of color, thick, white, or glossy paper will not have an impact on how the paper is recycled (Guzowski 2011). Smith College sells its recycled paper as a Sorted Office Paper (SOP), which requires that at least half of the paper be white. This is a higher quality paper mix than Mixed Paper, which can have a higher proportion of color paper but sells for about one quarter of the price of SOP. The only suggestion that Mr. Guzowski made about choosing which paper to use was to avoid astrobright, neon, papers, which are difficult to bleach out.

Because of the way paper is already reused in the Campus Center before it is recycled, I did not feel the need to address the life of the fliers after they are taken down from the bulletin
boards in my recommendations. As paper type is not a factor in how the paper gets recycled, I felt comfortable leaving out suggestions for which types of paper are appropriate on the bulletin boards.

**Survey Findings—Where to Advertise**

My survey results showed that, while the Campus Center bulletin boards were not the primary source of information, they had the most occasional users, with 17 of the 28 participants. This occasional usage is not surprising given the nature of the bulletin boards which exist to attract attention from passersby. The fact that so many of my survey participants used the bulletin boards occasionally shows the importance of their unique ability to draw people in unexpectedly.

Facebook and department emails were listed as the two main primary sources of information. These sources both target specific audiences: on Facebook, students are invited to events by their friends and groups they have decided to join, while department emails share information about a subject in which the student has already shown interest. Along with the comments from students suggesting that they will go to events that professors suggest, these results show that students appreciate being informed about events that will interest them.

In my presentation, there were several questions about why students do not read the E-digest. The idea of the bulletin board as an occasional or random information source and Facebook and department emails as information targeted at an audience might help to explain why the Smith E-digest was listed as a rarely used information source by more than half of the participants. The E-digest is not flashy in a way that will catch your eye. It sits unnoticed, like a flier covered over by other fliers, in the email inbox. The E-digest is not specific towards
particular students, or even students at all, with the student notices listed after faculty and staff notices.

The E-digest could be made more accessible to students by incorporating the two ideas above into it: targeting an audience and catching the eye. First, the name would be changed, so that students would not carry over their bias against the E-digest as it became a better information source. Next, it would contain more student events. Although students can submit their events to the E-digest now, few do so or are aware that they can. Sending out information to organization leaders at the beginning of the semester about how to advertise in the new weekly email could jumpstart student submissions. The new E-digest would not contain faculty and staff notices, or they would be at the bottom rather than the top. Bright colors, pictures, or different fonts would help make things jump out from the page.

Another alternative to the E-digest and a move away from bulletin boards would be an online listserv or bulletin board, like the student-run “TuftsLife” for Tufts University. The homepage of this website has, among other things, the week’s events listed by time, announcements from students and community members, and important links. While this is not an alternative to the E-digest or the bulletin boards, it might be more effective than the online calendar, and be an online addition to the bulletin boards. It would also allow community members to advertise events and jobs online rather than relying solely on the bulletin boards.

Initial Suggestions and Tamra Bates’ Concerns

With 424 fliers used to advertise only 132 events on two of the seven bulletin boards in the Campus Center, duplication of fliers was the biggest contributor to excess paper use on the bulletin boards. The duplication of fliers comes from a desire to ensure that each flier will be seen. As fliers build up throughout the week, more and more fliers are lost underneath the
thickening mass of paper. Putting up more fliers is an attempt to make an event stand out in the
sea of paper. My goal became to create a solution where duplication would not be necessary to
advertise effectively.

I met with Tamra Bates to talk about my initial suggestions for reducing the amount of
paper waste generated by the bulletin boards. In thinking of these solutions, I wanted to find the
simplest ways to reduce the number of fliers used without making the bulletin boards a less
effective communication source. Ms. Bates and I discussed possible solutions and the problems
that might come with them.

My first solution was to eliminate the bulletin boards as they are and to construct one
large bulletin board to go on the main level of the Campus Center. This bulletin board would be
monitored by the Campus Center staff, who would be responsible for putting up the fliers that
people brought to them throughout the day. The fliers could be dropped in a box and put up
every few hours so that the staff would not be responsible for constant management. While this
solution would create a different type of work for the Campus Center staff, it would eliminate
much of the work taking down hundreds of fliers each week.

My second solution was to simply reduce the number of bulletin boards in the Campus
Center, eliminating the bulletin boards downstairs so there would be simply less room to put up a
large number of fliers for each event. The remaining bulletin boards could have a layout
instructing people where to put their fliers so that each flier could have its own spot and be seen.
If this worked, the need to put up multiple fliers would be reduced.

Ms. Bates was very receptive to the idea of reducing the paper used on the bulletin
boards, but she had several concerns with my suggestions. The first was that if there do not
appear to be enough spaces to advertise, people will put fliers in places where they do not
belong. This applies to both of my suggestions for the reductions of bulletin board space. Ms. Bates said that she already has to tell people not to tape fliers to bathroom stalls, and take fliers off of windows and walls. Although the limit of two fliers per bulletin board is posted on the boards, this limit is not enforced or followed strictly.

Another of Ms. Bates’ concerns was the constant management of the bulletin boards if the fliers were to go through the Campus Center staff. Ms. Bates said that previous conversations about reducing the number of fliers had included the idea of getting each flier approved before it went up. This kind of constant management, she said, would be a lot of work and could lead to legal issues. If the Campus Center staff becomes more involved in the bulletin board process, they will run the risk of being targeted for over-management.

Ms. Bates also suggested that even if the Campus Center has a strictly enforced flier policy, the campus does not have a policy that is cohesive enough to keep people from posting in the wrong places or with too many fliers. Finding a way to educate the Smith community about the College’s poster policy would promote posting in the correct places and would also create an opportunity for community members to think about their flier use and alternate options like chalking.

**Final Recommendations: Bulletin Boards**

In light of Ms. Bates’ concerns about fliers being posted in the wrong places, I modified my recommendations about the bulletin boards slightly. While removing the downstairs bulletin boards completely and turning the upstairs bulletin boards into one large, managed bulletin board would be a noticeable change to advertisers, phasing the bulletin boards out would allow advertisers to modify their habits slowly. My suggestion is that the upstairs bulletin boards should be managed by the Campus Center staff, as outlined previously. Along with this, bright
signs should be placed around the bulletin boards downstairs and upstairs directing people to turn in their fliers if they want them on the upstairs bulletin board. The downstairs bulletin boards could be left in place at first. Then, one at a time, they could be quietly removed as the semester progressed. This way, the Campus Center staff could monitor if fliers were being placed inappropriately and remove the boards more slowly or quickly depending on the progress. The bulletin boards at the counters in the post office could be left, as few fliers are posted on them.

Conclusion

A slow reduction of bulletin board space and a more effective bulletin board system, paired with strengthening online resources by making them better targeted at students and creating an online resource where community members and students can interact, would enhance communication within the College and between the College and the community. Simple changes to the layout of the bulletin boards and the E-digest could have a large impact on the amount of paper that leaves the Campus Center each week and make students, faculty, and the community more aware of paperless, targeted ways to get their events noticed.
Appendix

Survey Questions
1. How often do you use_________ to find events around campus? Choices were: Rarely, Occasionally, and Often
   a) Bulletin boards in the Campus Center
   b) Smith E-digest
   c) Facebook
   d) Campus Center TVs with ads
   e) Mailbox fliers
   f) Other

2. Which source do you use the most often?
   a) Bulletin boards in the Campus Center
   b) Smith E-digest
   c) Facebook
   d) Campus Center TVs with ads
   e) Mailbox fliers
   f) Other

3. Do you have any suggestions for how events hosted by the college and student organizations could be advertised more effectively?
**Literature Cited**


Guzowski, Robert. Email. April 25, 2011.


TuftsLife: https://www.tuftslife.com/