



Utilities Challenge

Objective

The Utilities Challenge will provide students the unique opportunity to gain access to the data about the residence halls here at Texas A&M. Students will use this information, and draw upon the expertise of the staff from Utilities & Energy Services (UES) and the Department of Residence Life, to learn about the current proficiency of buildings and propose ways to increase the buildings' efficiency and student engagement to a panel of staff, faculty, and administration. All majors and classifications are highly encouraged to participate in this unique program.

Goal: Facilitate a learning experience for students to understand the internal systems at A&M.

Program Outcome

At the end of the project, teams will give a 15 minute presentation about their findings. The presentations will discuss the utility systems of the halls (HVAC, water, etc.) and methods for improving those systems. Strong presentations will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the utility systems in addition to habits students can adopt to make a difference. Suggestions from these presentations have the potential of being implemented, impacting the operations of the largest university in Texas.

Skills students will utilize during this project includes, but is not limited to:

- Research
- Critical analysis of information
- Creative problem solving
- Professional presentation experience
- Persuasive speaking experience
- Teamwork experience
- Proposal writing
- Coordination with various departments

Process

Applying:

Students who wish to apply will fill out the application on the Residence Life Sustainability page (<https://reslife.tamu.edu/living/sustainability/>) **NO LATER THAN 5 pm on Monday, February 3rd.**

Students' applications will be reviewed by the U-Challenge committee members for selection to compete in the challenge. Participants and teams will be announced via email by 5 pm on Friday, February 8th. Students have the option of signing up as an individual or with a set team in mind. More information regarding creating teams is listed below in the 'Creating Teams' section.

NOTE: Be aware that the U-Challenge will only have 5 teams for each level of the competition. A waitlist will be created for those who sign-up after the initial 10 team slots are filled. We encourage those who know they want to participate in the challenge to sign-up as soon as possible to increase the likelihood they will receive a spot. The U-Challenge committee reserves the right to close the application period prior to the February deadline.



If applying for course credit:

Students will need to confer with their instructors about deadlines to earn credit as a part of their degrees. Please note that research proposal deadlines for degrees will likely have deadlines separate from the deadlines presented here. Confer with your academic advisor to learn about those specific dates. Staff of Residence Life and Utilities & Energy Services would be willing to discuss the desired outcomes of the project and how it will be a valuable addition to your education.

Creating Teams:

Teams of 4-6 students will be created for each residence hall. Duties of team members will be assigned within the group to meet the research objectives of the group. Each group must have a team leader who will be responsible for contributing to research while also directing the efforts of the team and ensuring that the group meets submission deadlines. The team leader will be responsible for communicating with Residence Life and UES about what meetings they need to set-up and for submitting the drafts and final version of their project. It is up to the discretion of the group how they select a team leader.

If more students join the group than is necessary, then the U-Challenge committee members reserve the right to shift extra team members to another hall/team. When choosing teams/which halls students are assigned to, the principle of “first come, first serve” will apply. **If you are applying to be with a specific team, we require that all team members sign up on the same day.**

Teams Formed/Initial Meeting:

Once students have applied and been accepted, they will attend an initial meeting on February 10th hosted by Residence Life and Utilities & Energy Services. At this meeting, students will have the opportunity to meet members of their team (if they did not previously sign-up with a team) and establish roles. This meeting will also show students where and how to access the information they will need and what people will be useful for them in researching and creating solutions. We will discuss the rubric by which their projects will be evaluated. Residence Life will explain the rules and deadlines for this program and UES will provide a brief description about the utility systems in the residence halls and how to interpret data.

NOTE: After this meeting, teams will create their own schedules; they will decide the frequency of their meetings, where, etc. in order to meet the requirement and deadlines for this project. Teams will be required to submit weekly feedback and progress reports to the Graduate Assistant Sustainability Coordinator, Ms. Kristianna Bowles, at kristiannab@reslife.tamu.edu.

Initial Findings/Presentation:

We encourage students to submit their projects’ preliminary findings and outlines to sustainability@reslife.tamu.edu to receive feedback early in the process. There will be a pre-presentation on these initial findings and work on March 2nd for undergraduate teams and March 4th for graduate teams. Work presented before the first round of presentations will not factor into a team’s final evaluation but instead provides a good opportunity for teams to gauge their progress and to make any necessary edits and updates.



1st Round of Presentations:

In this first round of presentations, teams will deliver their findings in a business casual setting to staff of Residence Life and UES. The staff of these departments will serve as judges in this first round. They will confer in the days after the presentations and select four teams (two from each level) that will advance to the final round. They will receive comments from the judges on how to improve their presentations.

Teams who do not advance will be given feedback on how they could improve and will be invited to the U-Challenge Banquet for their hard work and contributions to energy/utility conservation in the residence halls. They will need to RSVP through a link that will be provided at a later time.

Final Round of Presentations:

In the final round of presentations, teams will deliver their revised projects. They will then present to a panel of TAMU administration and staff from Residence Life and UES. The panel of judges will confer to discern which team is most deserving of the grand prize. In recognition for the excellent work of the teams, UES and our partners will host a banquet immediately following the presentations to highlight the outcomes and contributions of the students. At this banquet, the winners will be announced and congratulated. The finalists will also receive prizes and recognition for their outstanding work.

NOTE: Just because a team did not win the U-Challenge DOES NOT mean their recommendations will not be examined for implementation. Recommendations from all teams will be examined each year for feasibility and applicability when Residence Life is preparing Aggie Green Fund grant applications.

Sources of Information

Students are encouraged to access the data provided by UES. UES staff will be willing to consult with students to interpret the data. However, students can also interview staff and students residing within residence hall as they search for solutions to the findings they discover. Students are encouraged to creatively seek sources of information such as the utility services of other universities, the United States Department of Energy, and the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE).

Timeline - Please be aware that these dates and times are set and cannot be changed.

Applications Open Online: January 13, 2020 (Monday) at 8 am

Application Deadline: February 3, 2020 (Monday) at 5 pm

Teams Announced Via Email: February 7, 2020 (Friday) by 5 pm

Initial Meeting for Teams: February 10, 2020 (Monday) from 4 pm – 6 pm

Initial Findings/Presentation (Undergraduate Teams): March 2, 2020 (Monday) from 4 pm – 7 pm

Initial Findings/Presentation (Graduate Teams): March 4, 2020 (Wednesday) from 4 pm – 7 pm

1st Round of Presentations (Undergraduate Teams): March 30, 2020 (Monday) from 4 pm – 7 pm

1st Round of Presentations (Graduate Teams): April 1, 2020 (Wednesday) from 4 pm – 7 pm

Final Presentations/Banquet: April 13, 2020 (Monday) from 6 pm – 9 pm

If you have questions or concerns, contact Ms. Kristianna Bowles at kristiannab@reslife.tamu.edu.