

Reducing Waste: Central Washington University Regalia Reuse Program

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Introduction

Each year, hundreds of thousands of institutions across America host commencement ceremonies for graduating students, however, this time for widespread celebration also promotes increased consumption and waste of single-use garments. Over a “30-year time period, over 100 million gowns have been added to the waste stream” (Yon, n.d.). Caps and gowns are most commonly used only once for the duration of the event, meaning that after the fact, regalia is rehomed to either the garbage can or the closet to collect dust for years and later meet the same fate as many other caps and gowns that were mass-produced simultaneously: in landfills outliving their original buyers. To reduce this waste, a Regalia Reuse Program was developed.



Figure 1. Textile waste.

Project Planning

- Programs at other universities were researched to learn how to develop a Regalia Reuse Program for CWU and implement it smoothly
- Each step of the program was planned, including bin locations, bin sourcing, volunteer help, regalia transfer, organization after collection, and ideas for the future.
- Funding was requested from the Environmental Studies program to fund publicity costs for advertisement.

Benefits

- Help reduce consumption of manufactured single-use plastic garments.
- Help reduce textile waste and increase lifespans of perfectly useful regalia.
- Donated regalia will be provided for future students, with a priority given to students who may struggle financially or are experience emergencies that may hinder their ability to purchase a \$75 regalia package.
- Reduce the amount of plastics in circulation in our waste stream.

RETHINK THE FUTURE



Figure 2. Graphic on sustainable consumption and waste management.

Implementation

- The program was advertised through flyers, posters, social media, and an announcement on 88.1 The Burg.
- Signage was created to identify the regalia donation bin, which was located in the SURC near the Info Center from June 8-16th.
- Donated caps and gowns will be transferred to the Wildcat Pantry.



Figure 3. CWU’s 2022 procession of graduates.

References

- Figure 2. *set of reduce reuse recycle element concept. easy to modify*. Retrieved April 29, 2024, from: https://stock.adobe.com/images/set-of-reduce-reuse-recycle-element-concept-easy-to-modify/227310361?prev_url=detail
- Figure 3. CWU [CentralWashU]. (2022, June 11). *This year, we had the honor graduating 3,338 students. Congratulations to you all! We can't wait to see what you do next.* #CWUGrad #CWUProud [Images attached] [Tweet]. X. <https://twitter.com/CentralWashU/status/1535813816205791232>
- United Nations. (n.d.). *THE 17 GOALS*. Retrieved April 30, 2024, from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- Yon, Seth. (n.d.). *Greener Grads Biz Takes Graduation Gowns Back for Reuse*. We Hate To Waste. <https://www.wehatetowaste.com/green-graduation-gowns-reuse/>
- Figure 1. *Clothes Piled in Landfill*. Retrieved May 6, 2024, from: https://stock.adobe.com/search?k=landfill+clothes&asset_id=651023293

Recommendations

While I have conceptualized the foundation of the Regalia Reuse Program, there is still a long way to go before it is a full-fledge functional program from start to finish. My recommendations for the future:

- Create a webpage through CWU Sustainability or Commencement to provide year-round information on how to donate or request loaner regalia
- Create permanent regalia donation bin(s) in locations on campus such as in the SURC and the library
- Advertise to alumni that they can donate their regalia and make donation bins available for alumni events
- Create a subsidized shipping system to allow past graduates to ship their regalia. This may remove barriers from donation such as proximity to campus or costs of shipping
- Expand the regalia donation program to Kent ceremonies!
- Develop a regalia laundering system, in which regalia is cold washed using a gentle cycle and detergent, then air dried
- Create a system for donated gown organization including iron-on tags that include size information and year donated or graduated (to date and circulate older regalia out as needed), and an inventory of the number of gowns
- Create a regalia reservation system that includes questions that can gauge financial need of graduates, and inform student if they will receive a donated gown

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The Future of the Regalia Reuse Program

Following my graduation in June 2024, the Regalia Reuse Program will be passed on to Brady Smith and the Wildcat Pantry.

Stakeholders

- Brady Smith, The Wildcat Pantry
- Lily De Young, Sustainability Office Americorps Member
- Lauren Zeutenhorst and Alexis Andrews, Commencement Organizers

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