Background: As universities work to increase pro-environmental behaviors on campus, such as waste prevention and use of sustainable transportation, understanding how engagement in sustainability-related activities can influence the relationship between awareness and pro-environmental behaviors is critical. To address this need, this project examines two research questions: 1) Does awareness about sustainability result in an increase in sustainable behaviors? and 2) Is the link between awareness and behavior change conditioned by engagement in sustainability-related activities?

Methods: Using web-based survey data from 2012 and 2015 on student awareness, behaviors, and engagement, from the University of Michigan (UM), we used multiple linear regression analyses and a panel of undergraduate students who entered the University as freshmen in 2012 were conducted in SPSS.

Results: The association between waste prevention awareness and behavior was statistically significant. Specifically, students reporting greater awareness of UM’s efforts in waste prevention in 2015 were significantly more likely to report an increase in waste prevention behaviors from 2012 to 2015. In contrast, the association between awareness and sustainable transportation behavior was not significant. The findings also show that engagement does not impact the link between awareness and behavior for neither waste prevention nor sustainable transportation.

Conclusions: The results of this study show that awareness is linked to increases in sustainability-related behaviors. Prior literature highlights the significance of engagement in the adoption of sustainable human behaviors, however such findings were not supported by this study. Understanding how sustainable human behaviors are influenced by factors of awareness and engagement can help facilitate the allocation of resources aimed at increasing sustainability behaviors.

Abstract

Research Question #1) Does awareness about sustainability result in an increase in sustainable behaviors?

Significant main effect: Those who reported more awareness about sustainability prevention (WPA) efforts on campus in 2015 reported a significant increase in sustainable waste prevention behaviors (WPB) over time from 2012 to 2015.

Non-significant findings: a) Awareness of sustainable travel and transportation options (TTA) was not associated with changes in travel/transportation behaviors (TTB) over time. b) Having taken a course that covered sustainability-related topics was not associated with either changes in WPB or TTB over time.

Research Question #2) Is the link between awareness and behavior change conditioned by engagement in sustainability-related activities?

Significant interaction effect: Those who reported more engagement in waste prevention (WPA) efforts on campus in 2015 reported a significant increase in sustainable waste prevention behaviors (WPB) over time from 2012 to 2015.

Non-significant findings: None of the engagement measures were found to moderate the association between WPA and WPB as well as the link between sustainability-related coursework and both TTB and WPB.

References