

## **Improving the Susquehanna/Selinsgrove Relationship: One Service Hour at a Time**

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### **Overview:**

What happens when you bring approximately 2,300 college-aged students to a small, sleepy Pennsylvania town? The town benefits from the business that the students bring. More jobs are created. There are many benefits to bringing college students to an otherwise weakly populated area; however, the addition of so many people does have its drawbacks. More waste is created, especially due to the fact that college students are characteristically more careless than other generations of individuals. Throughout the years, Susquehanna University has received many complaints referencing the trash lining the streets of Selinsgrove. While the university Department of Facilities has taken responsibility for the on-campus litter pick-up in the past, whose responsibility is it to pick-up discarded cans and bottles that line Pine and Market Streets? Often, the trash stashed in bushes in the town square is not disposed of appropriately for months at a time. It would be unfair for the borough to assume the duties associated with cleaning up after university students, as the University does not pay the appropriate amount of property taxes to the borough, considering the amount of land that is university owned. The townspeople and students alike deserve to live in a clean, aesthetically pleasing place. More often than not, students are the ones who create the mess; therefore, it would only be right for the students to be the ones who clean up. However, as a typical student will not pick up trash on the weekends for fun, an opportunity must be created for them. However, the town maintenance services that SU students can provide to the community does not end with litter pick-up.

There is a great number of elderly people living in Selinsgrove, as those sixty-five years of age or older comprised 16.4 percent of the total borough population as of July 2018.<sup>1</sup> It can be assumed that many of these older individuals are ill, disabled, or living alone, leaving them unable to be as active as they once were or without help to complete more demanding tasks. Recently, there was a call for help posted in the Selinsgrove borough newsletter: with the Fall season quickly approaching, borough officials were concerned with the safety of elderly residents. The posting asked for volunteers to help these individuals with yardwork and clearing their walking paths. With numerous community members who are not able to maintain their lawns appropriately, not only does Selinsgrove lose some of its aesthetic charm, but it becomes much more unsafe for our most vulnerable residents. While there are many middle and high school students in the area who could make a profit from completing such work, there does not seem to be any area children offering lawn care services to this population at this time. If university student volunteered their time to assist this population, perhaps the town's perspective of the lo, disrespectful college students will change. In order for a student to be a member of many on-campus organizations, service hours are required; by providing an opportunity for students to earn these service hours, the university would be able to drum up help for such lawn maintenance and clean-up efforts.

As Susquehanna students are great in number, the students should be utilized as a resource to help clean the town via cleaning up trash, raking leaves etc., as this is a low budget way to improve the relationship between the Selinsgrove and Susquehanna University communities.

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<sup>1</sup> "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Selinsgrove Borough, Pennsylvania; Snyder County, Pennsylvania; United States." *Census Bureau QuickFacts*, U.S. Department of Commerce, [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/selinsgroveboroughpennsylvania.snydercountypennsylvania,US/PST045218](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/selinsgroveboroughpennsylvania.snydercountypennsylvania,US/PST045218).

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**Background:**

Susquehanna University is home to about 2,300 students, and not unlike other college students, some Susquehanna students do engage in partying behaviors during weekends. Whether it be the upperclassmen walking down University Avenue towards Market Street or the freshmen and sophomores roaming campus trying to find any party that will let them and all 8 of their friends enter at the same time, the students create a mess. College students consuming alcohol combined with long walks to destinations and established parties around campus is without a doubt going to result in trash being scattered about campus and the surrounding area. SU's student population has grown tremendously over the last decade, as was evident in the Fall 2017 and 2018: The University's Residence Life Office did not have enough space to house all the first- and second-year students. This resulted in forced-triple rooms and residence halls that housed both first year and second year students. More students equals an increased population out on the weekends, leaving an increased amount of trash through the town. To combat this ever-increasing problem, during the Fall 2018 semester, the Student Government Association introduced a way for students to play an active role in taking care of their community, as well as a way for students to improve upon how they are portrayed to members of the community. In an effort to display students taking responsibility for their actions, the Clean Sweep was born. Since its inception, the Clean Sweep has been successful and community members have been taking notice: "Clean Sweep Sunday really helps and (that is) most important," noted once community member.

The idea for the Clean Sweep initiative was conceived due to the belief that the town of Selinsgrove could benefit from student volunteers who clean up trash and litter around the surrounding areas. Every Sunday, until weather no longer permits, the Clean Sweep takes place. Every Friday, the SGA Vice President sends an email to the entire student body with a link to sign-up for that coming Sunday. On average, 20 to 40 students sign up and clean up the lawns of the 18<sup>th</sup> Street apartments and then proceed down the streets that are directly connected to campus (i.e. Pine and Market Streets and University Avenue). The current Clean Sweep routes are based on student foot traffic patterns: as the 18<sup>th</sup> Street apartments and University Avenue houses are usually where students celebrate on the weekends, leading to increased foot traffic and therefore increased trash in those particular areas. Students also travel to the bars that are on Market Street, and usually take the Pine Street route to get there. By extending the area that is cleaned up to more downtown streets, more visibility of the students' efforts will result, leading to better Selinsgrove-SU relations. Of 109 interviews with Selinsgrove, the majority of interviewees stated that the Clean Sweep has already helped with the litter problem or agreed that such an initiative was needed. Many interviewees agreed that the surrounding areas of Susquehanna have been significantly cleaner, but many did not know who to thank for the improvement. This data leads us to believe that the Clean Sweep initiative is a success and will continue to be a success. Our recommendation is that the pre-existing Clean Sweep initiative should be used as a steppingstone towards a more complex, yet beneficial, project, only further benefitting the community of Selinsgrove. We would like to help those who need it by not just picking up trash, but by expanding efforts to include leaf raking, weed removal, and other manual labor tasks. This, in turn, will help strengthen the relations with between the town and the university, which is the ultimate goal of this project.

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**Recommendation:**

Based on the evidence collected and interviews conducted with community members, we conclude that it necessary for Susquehanna University to improve upon their clean-up efforts. This could take the form of university facilities department employees taking to the streets of Selinsgrove to pick up the litter; however, not only would this result in the creation of more jobs in an area that already struggles to fill vacant positions, but would also result in an increased cost to the University, and in turn, an increased cost to the students. In order to keep costs low we recommend that Susquehanna University develop an extensive clean-up program built upon the previously established efforts of SGA Clean Sweep. One interview respondent noted, "I sometimes find that during the school year there is a lot of trash down University Ave. after a weekend. I think it could be beneficial to have SU students either not litter or have the same students go back either on a Sunday or Monday and pick up the trash that was left. This is also apparent near BJ's." Through expanding the pre-existing initiative, SU student could more effectively meet the individual needs of community members and seasonality. This will primarily take three forms; expanding the geographic area of cleaning in Selinsgrove, offering more services, and providing cleaning directly to town residents.

In the current state of Clean Sweep, the areas of coverage include 18<sup>th</sup> Street until the end of campus, Kurtz Lane through campus, Pine Street into downtown, and in both directions ending at the Sunoco gas station and the Selinsgrove Hotel. In our proposed plan, we recommend that the cleanup distance would be based upon the number of students involved. Routes would be determined the day before clean-up and could be altered to accommodate the size of the group. In one possible route, volunteers would begin at the North Hall parking lot and toward and walk North until West Spruce Street. They would then cross East through residential homes. Therefore, the contained area between W. Sassafras Street, W. Spruce Street, 18<sup>th</sup> Street, and the Isle of Que are viable for cleaning projects.

The second component is offering cleaning directly to town residents that request help with their properties. As one resident noted in an interview, "No one notices the clean sweep because it isn't advertised to the town. Put something like that in the newspaper or Facebook groups or town bulletin. That is something we want to thank SU for." Advertising this initiative to the town through flyers posted in downtown businesses, adding a blurb to the borough newsletter, and posting about the initiative in community Facebook groups is imperative to the success of such an initiative. As this service is particularly beneficial to elderly or disabled residents who may have limited physical mobility, it is important that those who need it most are made aware of the initiative. Our services provided include weeding, leaf raking, sweeping, and trash pickup. Once a resident discovers that students are willing to help, he or she can indicate interest by placing our custom flag in their lawn. This will function as an indicator for our volunteers when walking by the contained area.

Our project relies heavily on student volunteers and we need to be able to count on at least 15 students to show up each week. We plan to accomplish this by taking the volunteering opportunity straight to the organizations who would be most willing to help. Internally, the initiative will be sustained by the VP of SGA as is stated in its constitution. Additionally, the first lady, Lynn Buck, who is already a strong advocate of the Clean Sweep program, will serve as an advocate to the program, bringing the initiative to the attention of the students year after year. Potential groups that could be assigned Clean Sweep weekends would include sports teams, religious organizations, Greek life, and others. One campus organization will be assigned to each cleaning event so that each weekend is filled for the entire semester, without one single organization bearing the burden of the event. We will also market our mission to the overall

student body of SU by way of periodic emails and digital posters. The volunteer list will be accounted for by SGA, as is the Clean Sweep policy currently in place. Emails will be sent out once a week, which will include a Google forms sign-up link.

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**Cost-Benefit Analysis:**

The university and its students have much to gain from the recommendation. The students would gain service hours, something that is either needed or wanted for resumes and future prospects. In this, the university would gain more recognition of its service efforts, in line with its motto, Achieve, Lead, Serve.

The positive outcomes of the above recommendation are that students will give back to the community through service acts and meet new people, perhaps making new friends in the process. The community will get to be cleaned weekly and more presentable, therefore adding value. This will help keep Selinsgrove's image positive for community members and potential residents. The people in the town will also see students giving back and this will help foster good relations between the two groups.

The recommendation is mostly beneficial. For this project to be successful, there are financial costs that are required for materials to make this possible. It is predicted that it is necessary to have a budget of a minimum of \$1000.00 to fund tools that will be used to clean up the community such as rakes, brooms, trash bags, gloves and other cleaning supplies and aid in providing marketing materials. This amount would also cover the replacement of flags needed for individual residents over the course of the Clean Sweep initiative. This cost could be covered through the already-established Student Government Association and community sponsorships.

There could be a possible cost benefit to forming a partnership with a local tool supply shop, like Cole's Hardware Inc., who could then sponsor the Clean Sweep and donate tools to the cause. Another cost benefit through sponsorships is having various local businesses sponsor the Clean Sweep for the week, like food from a restaurant or space to relax for the volunteers after the Clean Sweep in the Kind Café. With these sponsorships, the \$1000.00 budget could be adjusted somewhat.

Since this project is organized around a volunteer basis, there are very little potential negative outputs. The people that are volunteering are not being paid, therefore they want to be there and are volunteering their time to be there. Additionally, this project's goal is to better the relationship between the university and the community and there is no part of it where the costs would outweigh the benefits.

To deviate from the cost-benefit structure, the community needs to be cleaned up and the students are passionate about volunteer work. Since this is a volunteer-based project and the community needs the act, there are not costs besides the \$1000.00 in monetary value that would hinder the benefit of the university students volunteering their time to help the community.