

UC Merced's Earth Day an educational event

BY THADDEUS MILLER - TMILLER@MERCEDSUNSTAR.COM

04/22/2014 9:09 PM | Updated: 04/22/2014 10:39 PM



Student Jared Zisser, 21, plays the recycle game during the Earth Day event at UC Merced in Merced Tuesday. (4-21-14)
BAHBECK@MERCEDSUNSTAR.COM

Earth Day brought clubs, organizations and other green groups to UC Merced on Tuesday to talk about sustainability and being better stewards of the planet.

Groups from on and off campus shared ideas, gave recycling tips and used games to remind students of the importance of conservation and sustainability, especially on campus.

The university's Energy Service Corps talked to students about joining the group, which takes part in installing weatherization, teaching classes on sustainability and helping homeowners reduce their power bills. Amanda Lee, the club's vice president, said it organized a nighttime acoustic concert.

Dorm dwellers were encouraged to turn off all their electronics and attend the concert outside for an hour. Lee, 21, said students on campus sometimes forget that they don't live in a bubble and that resources are finite. "This is a nice time for us to remind them that just because we're on campus doesn't mean we should continue using so much energy," the human biology major said.

The Energy Service Corps is a club at UC Merced, but is working on being recognized as a chapter of the national organization run by California Public Interest Research Group and AmeriCorps.

Also on campus was George Pena, a falconer employed by the university to help keep small pest birds away. Pena brought his 2-year-old peregrine falcon, Katniss, and 3-year-old prairie falcon, Rio.

The raptors are a natural way to keep pigeons and other birds from hanging around and leaving droppings all over the campus. "It doesn't hurt the environment at all, but more than that it's absolutely effective," Pena said.

Many booths offered games, which awarded prizes such as T-shirts and tacos. Among the attractions was a giant version of the board game Operation, which was used to teach about electronic waste, three basketball hoops where students tossed waste into the correct receptacle and a ring toss that used empty glass bottles.

Conservation is a big deal at UC Merced, which has committed to reaching "triple net zero" by 2020. The goal is to consume zero net energy through efficiency and renewable energy production, produce zero landfill waste and prevent as much carbon emissions as it produces.

"In order to do that, we have to have the students understand what that means and how they can help," said Jill Foster, a waste management intern who organized much of the day's events.

Foster, a 21-year-old junior, said she and a couple of other students have begun an assembly line effort to separate trash that has been improperly mixed in receptacles. They spend about 20 hours a week making sure compostable materials are separated from other waste.

Food waste and paper products are included in the school's pile, which is shipped to the city of Modesto's solid waste division.

Nathan Gorth, Modesto compost facility supervisor, said he's been to several UC Merced Earth Day celebrations and has found that many students on campus are educated about practices such as composting. "UC Merced is actually pretty good at informing students about the different types of recycling programs," he said. "A lot of students do kind of know what's going on."

This week, UC Merced was included in The Princeton Review's Guide to 332 Green Colleges. The guide chose schools based on a survey it conducted in 2013 of administrators at hundreds of four-year colleges to measure the commitment of each to the environment and sustainability.