

Creating and Promoting Griz Give-and-Get: Spring Semester 2024

Although one may think that it would take only a few steps to create an online platform for UM students and faculty to give stuff away, the creation of Griz Give-and-Get has involved many steps. This section of my paper describes the actions that I have taken to make Griz Give-and-Get a reality. I divide the creation and promotion of Griz Give-and-Get into three phases: First, the logistic phase. Second, the construction phase. Last, the marketing phase. I will start by describing phase one. Then I will move on to describe the other phases.

Before I could launch Griz Give-and-Get, I needed to establish the logistics of the platform. This required me to address many questions: What platform should Griz Give-and-Get be on? How would students exchange items with one another? How could I convince the University to support this endeavor? If they do not, then how should I continue with a project that attempts to reduce waste outside of the confines of the University? I had already begun asking some of these questions during the fall semester of 2023. As I stated in my introduction, I was inspired to pursue this project because Climate Response Club expressed concerns about the amount of waste that residents in the student dormitories and villages produced. During this time, I, along with Climate Response club, met with UM housing's Jayce Whittacker and Hilde Huseby. We also met with UM Sustainability director Eva Rocke and Sustainability Coordinator Tayli Hillyard. From these meetings, we learned that due to a lack of available space and staff, the only way to try to reduce consumer waste on campus was to create a digital platform.

The first step was to determine which digital platform I would use to make Griz Give-and-Get. One of the key features that I wanted from a website was the ability to use the University of Montana's Shibboleth single-sign on system. The sign-on system allowed students to use the same username and password to login to any website that was used by the University

(e.g. Microsoft 365, Moodle, and Grizhub). Anyone with a University email could use the single-sign on system. As a result, by using a platform that could use the University's single-sign on system, I could allow any student or faculty member from the University to use Griz Give-and-Get and exclude anyone from outside the campus.

The first website I tried to build Griz Give-and-Get on was Wix website builder. However, after working with IT, I learned that Wix could not support a single-sign-on function. IT directed me to their website builder called Cascade. As fall semester closed, I assumed that I would start using Cascade in the Spring. However, as I started the project, I learned that Cascade had many issues.

Although Wix had problems, it at least had a function that allowed for students to engage with one another (albeit in a limited way). Meanwhile, Cascade lacks any ability for students to engage. This made it impossible to facilitate exchange; and by extension, made it incapable of what I needed it to do for Griz Give-and-Get. This issue was first brought to my attention in a February 1st meeting with Hillyard. Thankfully, Hillyard has had experience with Cascade and explained to me Cascade's limitations. Hillyard then gave me some alternative options. The two options that she presented were either a social media page or Microsoft Teams. I decided to use Microsoft Teams since students could use UM's single sign-on feature to login. After I chose to use Microsoft Teams, my next step was to enter into phase II (constructing the website).

As I began this new phase, I had become very lucky. I had thought that I would have to fight the University to gain approval for the website. To my surprise, UM sustainability embraced the program with open arms. Hillyard was essential to Griz Give-and-Get's successes. Although I had access to Microsoft Teams, I learned from IT that students cannot create their own "team" without permission. To create Griz Give-and-Get on Microsoft Teams, I needed to

create a new team for it. Thankfully, Hillyard, being a faculty, created the team “Griz Give-and-Get” and made me co-admin. We then started to give away items on the platform. Within the first two weeks, some people had started to accept what we gave.

In the third phase, I had planned to make posters and a video to promote Griz Give-and-Get. However, as someone who had no experience in marketing, I was unsure how best to approach this. I ran into additional luck when Hillyard connected me to UM’s marketing brand experience manager, Karen Schlatter. Marketing loved Griz Give-and-Get and assigned me a student who was working for UM marketing, Kyle Wonders, to assist me. I met with Wonders in March and started to develop a plan to market Griz Give-and-Get. Wonders thought it was a good idea to still make posters and a video. He gave me tips on how to make the posters and video successful that I would have failed to consider. For instance, he told me that if I wanted students to see the video on social media, it was critical that I make the video less than ninety seconds. Otherwise, the algorithm would not recommend people to view it. He also helped me to gain approval from UM housing to put the posters in the resident halls and university villages. I learned that housing can be rather strict about what can be put in their halls. Before I could get permission, I needed to make changes to Griz Give-and-Get’s instructions to make it clear that students in the residence halls could not leave anything outside their doorway for another student to take.

Once I had changed my instructions and UM housing accepted my request to put posters in the residence halls and villages, Hillyard printed fifty of my posters and I gave twenty three of them to UM housing to distribute. I only gave them twenty three since this was the amount they said they would take. After I delivered these posters, I spent about two and a half hours walking from the north end of campus to the south end of campus in an effort to spread the remaining

posters across the entire campus. Wonders sent me a map where marketing recommended putting posters. For the most part, my poster placement decisions followed this map.

The next step was the promotional video. This video took much longer to actualize than I had hoped. Wonders took the first step towards initiating the video by writing a draft script. After I gave the script heavy revisions, he gave me small feedback. After I applied them, we were ready to film. However, to find a date that worked for the both of us was a challenge. After about two weeks, we had decided to film on Friday, April 19th. As soon as a date was set, I reached out to a first-year student in the philosophy masters program named Lucille. Thankfully, Lucille agreed to be an actress in the Griz Give-and-Get promotional video.

On the 19th, we met at my apartment to film. Wonders filmed while Lucille and I acted. While the final video was less than the ninety second limit, it took about ninety minutes to film. This is because we had to experiment with how we wanted everything to look, Lucille and (especially) I messed up our lines approximately one trillion times, and we decided to make small edits to the script to make the video sound slightly better. Once we had finally finished filming, Wonders took the footage to edit it.

It took Wonders about four days to connect the fragments of the video and merge it into a unified product. However, the video was not complete since we both felt it needed background music. He wanted me to choose the song. I chose to look through a selection of songs on “Youtube’s Audio Library” since these songs were in the public domain and easy to download. It took me only two days to choose the audio, however, this was too late. Unfortunately, I had learned that Wonders had just quit working for UM marketing since he was graduating in two weeks. Consequently, he no longer had the time to add music to my video. Nevertheless, I have had experience editing videos in the past. I knew that adding sound was not very difficult. It took

me about forty minutes to add the soundtrack I wanted. Finally the video was done.

The original plan for the video was to promote it this semester. However, a central goal of the Griz Give-and-Get project was to give it a permanent home at the University of Montana. I thought that a good way to give it a permanent home would be to have UM Sustainability promote it at the start of next fall semester. My hope is that this will help to keep Griz Give-and-Get alive by reminding returning students of its presence, and teaching new students about its existence.

The final action I took to promote Griz Give-and-Get was to table for the platform at the University of Montana's Sustainability fair on Tuesday April 23rd. Wonders and Hillyard helped me to reserve a table for the platform. While my original plan was only to spread the word about Griz Give-and-Get's existence, I decided the night before the fair that I wanted to make my booth more engaging. That night, I posted on Griz Give-and-Get that I planned to have a twenty four hour competition that lasted throughout Tuesday the 23rd. This competition had three prizes: a used fitbit, activity tracker, and a pickling kit. The competition asked participants to guess a number between 1 to 10,000. Whoever guessed the number closest to the number that I had written down (which was 6,372) would get the first choice of a prize. The next closest would get the second choice of a prize and the third closest would get the last prize. I then encouraged people at the sustainability fair to sign-up onto Griz Give-and-Get and to make a guess in the comment section of my post. Unfortunately, only two people participated in this competition.

Challenges to Making and Promoting Griz Give-and-Get

There were two major challenges Griz Give-and-Get faced. I indicated the first one when I referenced the low participation during the sustainability fair competition. Although people have used Griz Give-and-Get, participation on the website has been very low. Only about five

exchanges have happened. I am unsure why few people are using Griz Give-and-Get; however, I have some theories. One of Griz Give-and-Get's great strengths is that in theory any student can use the website. However, students and faculty have reported that they have had difficulty accessing the team page. While I suspect these difficulties have detracted from participation, I also think the fact that Microsoft Teams is unpopular at the University further detracts from participation. Since most students and staff never or infrequently use Microsoft Teams, people often never see new content that appears on Griz Give-and-Get. Without regularly seeing this content, what might be available to Griz Give-and-Get remains only in the periphery of student's minds at best.

The final reason I suspect that Griz Give-and-Get may have a low turnout rate is cultural. In a society where a person of economic privilege can buy anything at any time, little incentive exists for some students to check Griz Give-and-Get to see if anything they want is on the platform. Similarly, due to the ease that one can dispose of an item by throwing it in the trash can, it is much easier for a busy student to get rid of their items by throwing it away than waiting for another student to claim it on Griz Give-and-Get. Unfortunately, these are systematic and cultural problems that Griz Give-and-Get has very little ability to control.

I found the second major challenge of this project was planning when to take the next step. There were two main reasons for this. First, during every phase of the process, coordination between multiple people was needed. This coordination meant that I had to plan deadlines around the schedule of other people and organizations. Sometimes, it was entirely unclear whether someone would even take the action that I needed from them. This was particularly true in the first two phases of my project. Although I stated in chapter 2 that I planned to complete making and promoting Griz Give-and-Get by March, in reality I lacked any knowledge about

when I would be able to complete this project. In practice, this caused me to stray away from making many hard deadlines. For example, I did not know when or if I would be able to get approval from the University to use Griz Give-and-Get on their websites. As a result, I found it difficult to commit myself to a deadline of when the platform should be made.

While this was a problem at the start, it was also a problem in the promotional phase. For example, I was unsure if or when UM Housing would approve my posters. Nevertheless, I waited to print all my posters until they had approved. This prevented me from spreading posters across other parts of campus earlier than I could have.

In part because I was often unsure when others would act, I had failed to set deadlines at dates that would have best promoted Griz Give-and-Get. When the platform first launched, I was completely unprepared to promote it. Nevertheless people had begun sharing it. This caused Griz Give-and-Get to grow. I think that Griz Give-and-Get grew faster during its first two weeks than at any time since. Although I should have used this momentum to capitalize Griz Give-and-Get, my lack of preparation meant that I could not. Consequently, Griz Give-and-Get's small spark of enthusiasm burned out rather quickly. By the time spring break ended, any momentum Griz Give-and-Get may have had at first never returned.

I believe Griz Give-and-Get demonstrates a challenge with many projects that require the approval and coordination of many people: it seems difficult to know when to set deadlines if it's unclear whether the project will even be approved. If I redid the project, I would have been better about setting and keeping deadlines that aligned with when it was best to promote. Nevertheless, I am unsure whether I could have known when it would have been best to set deadlines at the start of this project due to my inability to know when everything would align. Nevertheless, it may be prudent to anyone who attempts to create a similar project as Griz Give-and-Get to make

a more detailed plan that allows them to plan around events they can feel confident will happen (i.e. in the case of Griz Give-and-Get, spring break). Despite these challenges, I was able to promote Griz Give-and-Get in more ways than was in my initial plan. What this shows me is that even if one cannot set hard deadlines, they can continue to make progress if they are persistent and continue to work towards one's goals.

Achievements

As I indicated in the above section, I exceeded the expectations that I had for this project. I had three main goals: start Griz Give-and-Get, promote it with posters and a video, and have some University entities, students, and/or staff who want to keep the project alive after I graduate. I am happy to say that many people have worked to make these goals a reality.

As I already made clear in the last section, Hillyard made it easy to complete the first goal. She took Griz Give-and-Get into the care of UM Sustainability and granted me access to create a Microsoft Team to build the platform. She and her intern, Zoe Belinda, also created a shell for Griz Give-and-Get on the UM Sustainability webpage. This shell has provided students and faculty with a link to join Griz Give-and-Get, details the rules of Griz Give-and-Get, and the instructions for how to use it. Hillyard allowed me to write Griz Give-and-Get's rules, instructions, and mission statement.

The promotional phase was much harder. However, Hillyard made it easier for me by connecting me with UM Marketing. Both Hillyard and Wonders made the posters that I distributed across campus. Wonders made a QR code that allowed students to join the platform. This made it much more convenient for students to open Griz Give-and-Get on their phone. While the posters took longer to complete than I had hoped, I achieved my goal of putting up posters across the University, and particularly, in UM resident halls and villages.

When I presented the promotional video to UM Sustainability and my peers, it received positive feedback. Although I originally wanted to post the video this semester, I was happy with the decision to wait to promote it until Fall Semester. This ensured that Griz Give-and-Get would receive at least one more ounce of promotion before I leave. In addition to the promotional video and posters, I also shared Griz Give-and-Get with many students at the Sustainability Fair. Even if the sustainability fair failed to revive Griz Give-and-Get, this additional opportunity to promote the platform seemed to put it on the radar of more students.

Finally, and most importantly, there is a support group in place to help Griz Give-and-Get remain after I graduate. UM Sustainability has said that they want to keep the program. Hillyard promised to release the promotional video next fall on social media. UM Climate Response Club President, Alena Flocchini, said she would be willing to help keep Griz Give-and-Get alive next semester. And UM Marketing seemed to like the project. My hope is UM Marketing continues to be supportive of Griz Give-and-Get.