

University of Winnipeg: Case Study of a Campus Bottled Water Ban

In March 2009, the University of Winnipeg announced that it will be the first university in Canada to end the purchase and sale of bottled water on campus. How did students at the U of W organize to make this possible?

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University of Winnipeg Students' Association (UWSA)

www.theuwsa.ca

Canadian Federation of Students – Manitoba (CFS-Manitoba)

www.cfsmb.ca

Polaris Institute

www.polarisinstitute.org



For more info, visit: www.insidethebottle.org

University of Winnipeg WATER campaign: Action Timeline

January 2008-	UWSA opens "Soma Café" at UW. Café is immediately bottled water free
March 22 nd 2008 -	Polaris Institute launches <i>Campus Bottled Water Free Zones Campaign</i> with Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) and Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC) for World Water Day with over 40 zones on 15 campuses, including "Soma Café"
May 2008 –	Canadian Federation of Students Annual General Meeting - Campaign Resolution to support bottled water bans on campus
Summer 2008-	Coalition meetings with local environmental groups to build city-wide action plan
October 22 2008-	CFS Students for Sustainability tour stop, University of Manitoba Over 600 students from UW/UM attend. Suzuki & Maude Barlow speak
October 2008 -	City of Winnipeg votes NOT to ban bottled water in municipal facilities Citizens, Student Unions and Unions speak at City Hall
November 17 th 2008 -	Day of Action on seven campuses for <i>Campus Bottled Water Free Zones</i>
November 19 2008 -	City of Winnipeg announces potential privatization of City Wastewater management; Students speak against the motion (UWSA, CFS)
January 30 2009-	Tony Clark (Polaris Institute) presents at University of Winnipeg. Discussion on water security/public access to water well attended by students. Clark encourages students to take action
February 10, 20, 27 2009-	UWSA, CFS meet with EcoPIA (student environmental group), Campus Sustainability Office; Bottled Water working group established, meetings to discuss campaign
February/March 2009-	Working group distributes information from Polaris Institute to students on campus, gauges student feedback. Regular call-ins with Polaris for support
February 26 2009-	Working group meets with UW Administration. UW Admin agrees to principles of banning bottled water sales, establishes Water Safety Audit through Canada Research Chair and expert on Water Toxicity.
March 11 2009-	Campus Sustainability Office provides brief report to Admin and Working Group
March 16-20 2009-	EcoPIA tables on campus, providing information to students. Solicits 500 signatures to implement a referendum question; UWSA Board of Directors votes to ban bottled water sales from all UWSA facilities
March 19 2009-	UWSA created a referendum question to students during the UWSA general Election Referendum passed with 74.8% in favour, with the highest voter turnout in a decade.
March 23 2009-	University of Winnipeg announces bottled water ban as part of World Water Day (March 22)

Key campaign notes from CFS-Manitoba and UWSA

- We worked with many local community environmental groups to gain support. Groups in Winnipeg included the Manitoba EcoNetwork, Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, Oxfam, Council of Canadians, Canadian Union of Public Employees, and Public Service Alliance of Canada. Alliances with these groups were essential for building awareness on campus, especially when tabling. Many of these groups were able to also come on campus and distribute water-related materials.
- We met with on-campus environmental groups who were willing to take the issue on. EcoPIA and University of Winnipeg Physical Plant met with the UWSA and CFS to discuss strategy and implementation early on. These groups also took the lead in the education campaign using research materials from the Polaris Institute.
- Following an understanding of student support levels for the initiative, we met with the Campus Sustainability Office (an administrative function of the U of W). The director supported our initiative.
- We then sent a letter to Dr. Axworthy, President of the U of W, for a meeting.
- For this meeting, we prepared a list of like-minded organizations to show broad based support. We cited Washington University's success. We also highlighted the implications of bottled water on the environment. We discussed the gradual elimination of bottled water sales, while ensuring corresponding upgrades to existing water infrastructure. The University set up a water safety audit to examine water infrastructure. Since we understood Dr. Axworthy's background with the United Nations, it was not difficult to discuss with him that water is a basic human right, and the environmental aspects of bottled water.
- Following the meeting, the Administration outlined that student support would be a good idea. A referendum question was submitted to the UWSA General Election and students voted in favour of the question. The University also collected data on how many bottled water units were sold on campus, and student consumer habits.
- Three days after the vote, the University announced the progressive elimination of bottled water sales on campus.
- An awareness campaign was launched to inform students of the ban, and to answer questions and concerns that arose following the announcement. Contacting the local municipality with respect to a municipal public water quality report was very helpful in creating awareness on campus of public water. See: "Bottled Water and YOU of W" poster.

The Elusive Pepsi Contract

Challenging beverage exclusivity contracts is an important part of resisting the commercialization of post-secondary institutions. Gaining access to the contract can be a difficult and lengthy process - it can and has been done by filing Freedom of Information requests. In the case of the University of Winnipeg's bottled water ban, CFS-Manitoba and UWSA worked with the administration to discuss aspects of the contract. It was noted that regardless of the contract, the University has the ultimate say in what products are purchased and sold on campus.

Useful Documents

- Resources at Polaris Institute's **Inside the Bottle** campaign website:
www.insidethebottle.org see: *Building a Bottled Water Free Campus Toolkit* and *Student Awareness to Action Kit*
- **City of Winnipeg Water Quality Report, 2006**
<http://www.winnipeg.ca/WaterandWaste/pdfs/water/waterQuality2006.pdf>
- Information on **Washington University's Bottled Water Ban**

Motion to Terminate UWSA Water Cooler Contract

Motion to Terminate UWSA Water Cooler Contract

Whereas the University of Winnipeg Student's Association is committed to and directed by bylaws and policies that declare sustainability as a priority and;

Whereas the UWSA has embraced a campaign to eliminate the sale of bottled water on campus to lead by example by encouraging the use of clean, safe and free tap water;

Be it resolved that the UWSA terminate its current water cooler contract with Trainor Artesian Water.

University of Winnipeg Students' Association General Election: Referendum Question

Would you be willing to support an initiative led by the University of Winnipeg and the UWSA to gradually eliminate sales of bottled water on campus with increased access to clean and free drinking water?

Yes/No

Letter to Lloyd Axworthy, President of the University of Winnipeg

To Dr. Lloyd Axworthy,:

In the past year municipalities, schools and universities have stood up for Canada's public water services by phasing out the provision and sale of bottled water on campus, while at the same time taking a principled stance against the commodification of a basic human right.

The University of Winnipeg, despite being a leader in sustainability is still currently selling and promoting the use of bottled water on campus. Water is widely recognized as a human right, and the University of Winnipeg must act now to ensure that our campus supports the international movement for water security by taking the initiative against bottled water.

The University of Winnipeg Students' Association and the Canadian Federation of Students- Manitoba would like to request a meeting to discuss bottled water on campus, ideas for moving forward on phasing out bottled water, as well as alternatives on campus to provide access to clean, public drinking water.

Please let me know your availability for a meeting with UWSA representatives in the coming week.

Thank you,

Vinay Iyer
President
University of Winnipeg Students' Association
Local 8, Canadian Federation of Students

cc'd

Dan Hurley (Senior Executive Officer and Advisor to the President)
David Jacks (Chairperson, Canadian Federation of Students-Manitoba)
Laurel Repski (UW Vice-President Human Resources, Audit and Sustainability)
Mark Burch (Director, Campus Sustainability Office)

Top 3 student concerns about the bottled water ban at U of W

“Consumer choice: if you ban bottled water, it limits my right to choose what to drink.”

- The real choice is between bottled water (and all its environmental, health, social and economic impacts) and safe, clean and affordable publicly - delivered tap water.
- You cannot get cola or any other beverages (often produced by the same companies that make bottled water) from the tap.
- There is a role for bottled water where potable tap water is not available or in emergency situations such as when municipal waters systems are interrupted - but bottled water should not be a long-term solution to people’s daily hydration needs. Safe, clean and accessible drinking water should be a basic human right, not a commodity for companies including Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to profit from, and that people should have to pay for.
- In many cases, water fountains are lacking in repairs, removed altogether and/or not built in new facilities. What are the implications if this trend continues, and accessible public tap water is not prioritized? There will be no choice but to pay for bottled water from a vending machine.

At the University of Winnipeg:

While the university phases out the sale of bottled water, it will be improving campus water infrastructure to ensure safe, healthy drinking water. The university plans on adding more water fountains and water bottle re-fill stations and will clearly indicate their locations through clear signage. This water will be completely free, making it the best consumer choice available!

“Tap water is unhealthy.”

- Under provincial regulations, put forward through Canada’s Drinking Water Guidelines, Canadian municipalities are required to test drinking water multiple times daily. On the other hand, bottled water is regulated under the Canadian Food and Drugs Act as a low-risk product and bottled water plants are inspected on average every one to three years.
- Bottled water industry representatives claim that they have a strong voluntary testing regime; however, there have been 29 bottled water recalls in Canada in the last 8 years due to various forms of contamination.

At the University of Winnipeg:

According to the City of Winnipeg’s most recent water quality report, the City tests public water every hour, 24 hours/ day, 7 days/week, 365 days/ year. It also tests water pipes every week in various locations throughout the city. The University will be testing and upgrading water infrastructure on campus prior to eliminating bottled water sales, ensuring the safest water available for students!

“Won’t students just turn to unhealthy soft drinks if they can’t buy water?”

- There is no evidence to suggest that without bottled water, people will consume unhealthy beverages such as colas. Again, the real choice is between the environmental, health, social and economic impacts of bottled water, and safe, clean and affordable publicly – delivered tap water.

At the University of Winnipeg:

Students seldom debate whether or not to choose water over soft drinks. The University of Winnipeg Students Association along with the University will be providing every first-year student with a reusable water bottle to use throughout the year. Students can easily refill those water bottles at the new fountains or refill stations that the university is planning to develop. Students will have increased access to safe and FREE drinking water.

University of Winnipeg Bottled Water Ban: Press Release, Commentary and Press Coverage

- UWSA, CFS-Manitoba, Polaris Institute Press Release
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/university-winnipeg-bans-bottled-water>
 - Commentary, “University of Winnipeg Becomes a Bottled Water Free Campus”
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/university-winnipeg-becomes-bottled-water-free-campus>
 - University of Winnipeg Press Release: “Water: Not for Sale”
<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/release-090323>
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- Winnipeg Sun. “U of W bans bottled water”. March 23rd
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/canada-u-w-bans-bottled-water>
 - Winnipeg Free Press. “U of W bans sale of plastic water bottles.”. March 23rd
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/canada-u-w-bans-sale-plastic-water-bottles>
 - CBC News. “University of Winnipeg set to ban bottled water sales”. March 23rd
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/canada-university-winnipeg-set-ban-bottle-water-sales-campus>
 - Canadian Press. “University of Winnipeg first in Canada to ban sale of bottled water on campus”.
March 24th
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/canada-university-winnipeg-first-canada-ban-sale-bottled-water-campus>
 - Winnipeg Free Press. “Bottled-water ban at U of W, Part of overall green strategy: Axworthy”.
March 24th
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/canada-bottled-water-ban-u-w>
 - CTV Winnipeg. “Downtown university bans bottled water sales”. March 24th
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/canada-downtown-university-bans-bottled-water-sales>
 - Wawa-news. “University Bans Bottled Water – Will Others Follow?”
http://www.wawa-news.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2437&Itemid=99999999
 - The McGill Tribune. “University of Winnipeg Bans Bottled Water”. March 31st
<http://www.insidethebottle.org/education-university-winnipeg-bans-bottled-water>
 - The Concordian. “U of W moves to Ban Water Bottles on Campus”. March 31st
<http://media.www.theconcordian.com/media/storage/paper290/news/2009/03/31/News/U.Of.W.Moves.To.Ban.Water.Bottles.On.Campus-3690212.shtml>

Next Steps in Resisting Water Privatization at U of W

UWSA and CFS – Manitoba address questions asked by students wanting to continue moving forward against the commodification of water

1) Why is the bottled water ban an important issue for your student union? What do you hope to achieve through passing these bans?

Banning bottled water is simply a step in a broader acknowledgment that water is a basic human right, rather than a commodity. Rejecting the commodification of water by refusing to purchase and sell bottled water is a first, and important step. Putting the focus on clean, safe, healthy public water encourages our decision makers to invest strongly in public water infrastructure, and also pushes governments in Canada to extend that infrastructure to Northern communities. As students, we are in a unique situation within our institutions where there is a pool of critical minds, willing to take initiative and leadership on campus. We hope that other campuses across Canada will be willing to take the same initiative, and push back against water as a commodity.

2) What efforts is your organization currently dealing in to ban bottled water, or any other action against the privatization of water?

Following our success in banning the sales of bottled water on campus, or as we call it, the "progressive elimination of bottled water sales", we have turned our sights to public infrastructure. Beginning with our own campus, we need to make necessary improvements to campus water infrastructure in order to make public water more readily available.

While the City of Winnipeg plans to begin moving into "strategic partnerships" with private companies to administer our municipal water and waste management system, we need to push back against any notion of removing accountability for our health from our publicly elected officials to an unaccountable private board. We have already spoken at City Hall twice in the past few months encouraging the City to keep its role as a public water provider, and to reject any move to enter into public private/partnerships.

Winnipeg's Water Quality Report of 2006 outlines the levels of testing done on our public water system and is encouraging. It also lists frequently asked questions with respect to our public water system. We are not confident that a private firm will make the effort to ensure that public concerns are addressed.

3) Where did the inspiration for these bans come from?

The Canadian Federation of Students Annual General meeting of May 2008 brought about 350 student leaders from coast to coast to discuss important issues. At that meeting, it was voted on to encourage bottled water bans at our campuses. We since then have entered

into a coalition with many progressive environmental think tanks and action groups such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Polaris Institute, Manitoba EcoNetwork, Council of Canadians, CUPE, Oxfam, etc.

Taking action on the environment cannot be done alone, and building a strong coalition with community organisations is essential.

4) Is there anything else Universities should be looking at to fight against the privatization of water?

Universities should take the lead on securing the best, most up-to-date water technology. We need to prove that investing in our own campus infrastructure leads to better quality water for students, so we don't submit to the misconception that bottled water is safer..

Universities, and in particular, students need to take action on campus to create awareness of water-related issues. Through action by on-campus environmental groups to invitations to environmental coalition partners to present on campus, students need to lead the way.

But in order to do that, a strong awareness campaign needs to take place. For example, Oxfam Canada has set up tables on our campus outlining the global water deficit, the Manitoba EcoNetwork has had discussions on local water issues, the Polaris Institute and the CCPA gave presentations on municipal water issues and privatisation, while the Aboriginal Students' Associations have had discussions on water infrastructure in First Nations communities. Earlier in October, the Canadian Federation of Students brought a live webcast of David Suzuki to discuss environmental issues, and an in-person presentation from Maude Barlow of the Council of Canadians.

Stemming from all this discussion, it became clear that more needs to be done to secure water as a right, and to reduce the waste created by bottled water. Students can take action globally, or focus on local water issues, but it is up to us to ensure that this debate is in the agenda of public policy makers, beginning with our own university administrators. We will continue to meet and write letters to our public officials at all levels of government demanding action on water, at home and abroad.