

UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

SURVEY SAYS...MAPLE MANOR RESIDENTS USE PLENTY OF RECYCLABLES, BUT WHY AREN'T THEY RECYCLING?

April Ortiz

Fulbright College of Arts & Sciences,



UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

The Problem

The concept for my project originated from the development of the City of Fayetteville Apartment Recycling Program. This program offers recycling bins once a week to different apartment complexes across the city. The purpose of the program was to provide convenience for apartment residents that already recycle, provide encouragement to start recycling for residents that don't, and to reach out as well as educate the community as a whole on the importance of recycling. The Recycling Program being able to continue is dependent upon the participation of residents. The problem at hand was the participation of residents was much lower than anticipated, but there wasn't an understood reason why. After meeting with the City of Fayetteville, they allowed me to participate in this new task of figuring out why apartment residents were not participating as expected. They agreed that the best place to start would be with the residents themselves of a complex that had been eager to join, Maple Manor.

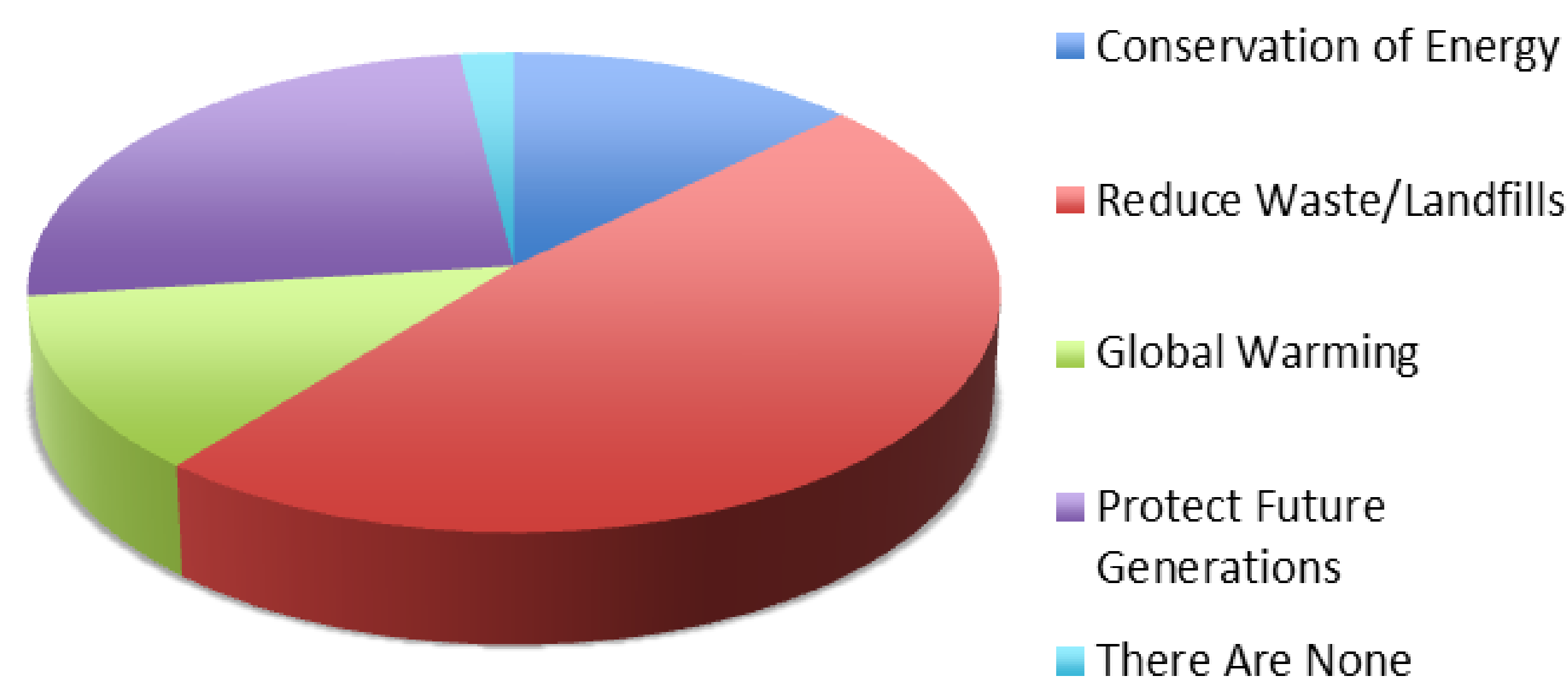
The Outcome

By conducting my survey at the Maple Manor apartment complex, I was able to collect important to help the City of Fayetteville better understand the current condition of their Apartment Recycling Program. From my research I can conclude that residents of Fayetteville are definitely aware of the benefits of recycling, but don't yet have the concern to change their habits. In the case of Maple Manor residents, I conclude that recycling participation is low because the once a week recycling bins are needed for more days than that as a majority of the complex is taking out trash several times a week, including all their recyclables. As already expected, my results also proved that convenience is a key factor that contributes to the lack of recycling participation. The distance to the dumpsters from most of the complexes as well as the desire of resident's to have their own recycling bins indicate that if it was made more convenient more people would more than likely be participating. Overall, I hope that besides gathering data for future planning of the Recycling Program, I was also able to educate and encourage some of the Maple Manor residents to reconsider their position on recycling.

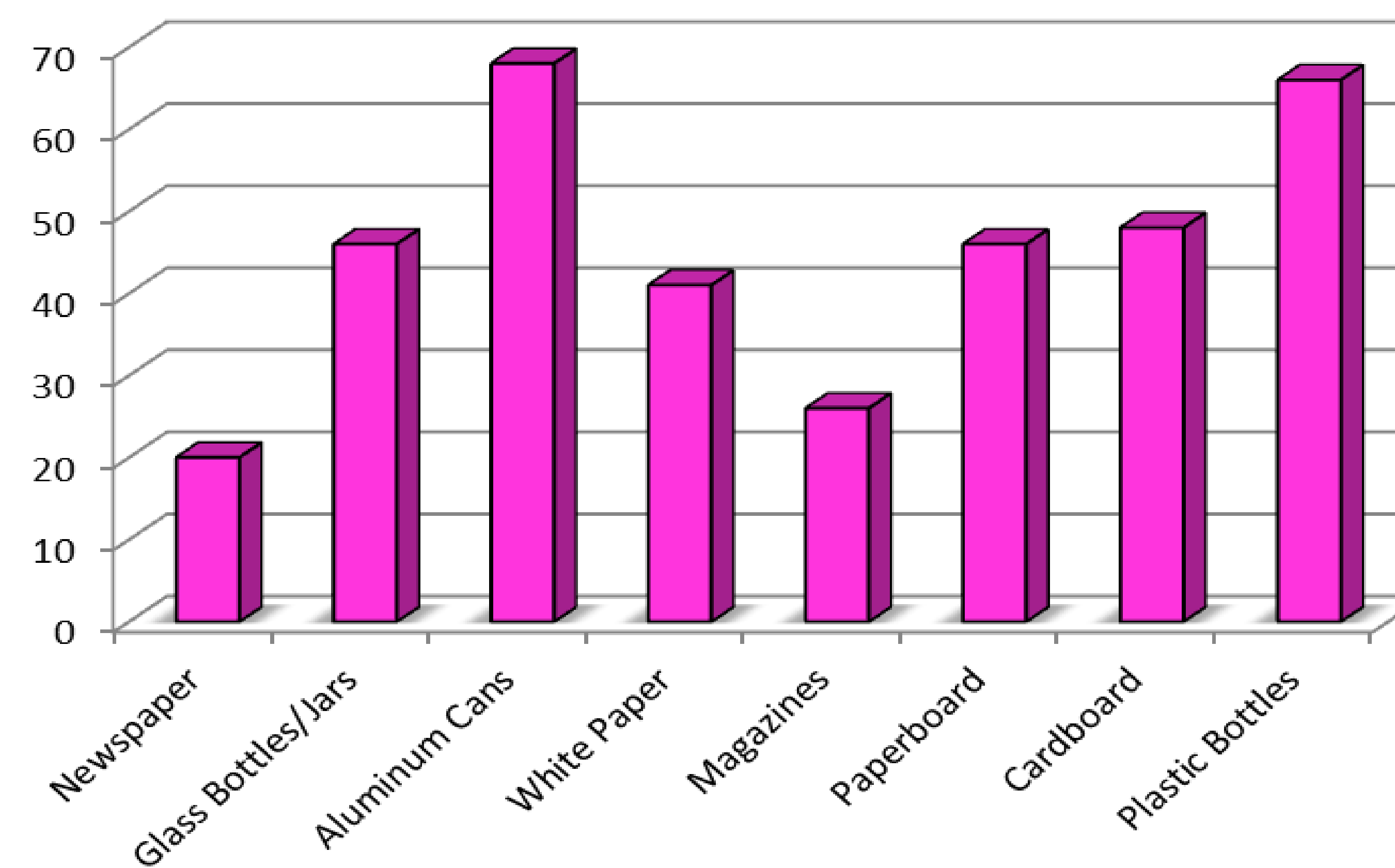
Sustainability

I feel that my project was able to connect to all four systems of sustainability. From a social standpoint, I saw first hand the attitude behavior approach, as residents would describe their concern for recycling, but then follow it up by saying they had never participated. In addition, I saw that realistically minor challenges, such as not enough room to hold onto recyclables or the location of the recycling bins, were keeping people from recycling, however if incentives were involved this attitudes very well could have changed. It connected with Natural and Managed systems because these recycled items all have a cost beyond their product price that residents were unaware of did not feel relevant. By choosing to not recycle they are increasing their carbon footprint and also degrading the natural environment. From a built systems perspective, the layout of the apartment complex seemed to discourage some people from making the extra weekly trip to the recycling bins and the apparent kitchen size was also cited by several residents as what kept them from keeping up with their recyclables. The inclusion of all 4 of these systems really helped to depict how interconnected they really are especially in this scenario of studying human behavior in recycling habits.

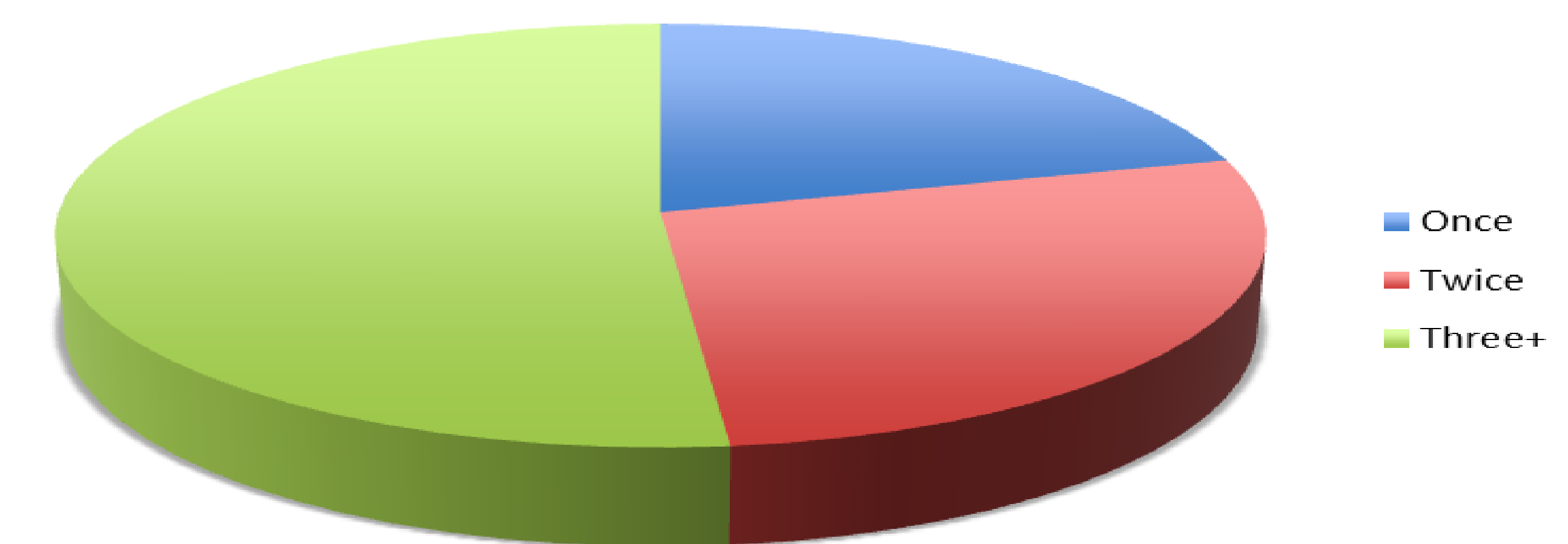
What Are Benefits of Recycling?



Recyclables Used Regularly



Frequency Of Trash Taken Out (Weekly)



The Project

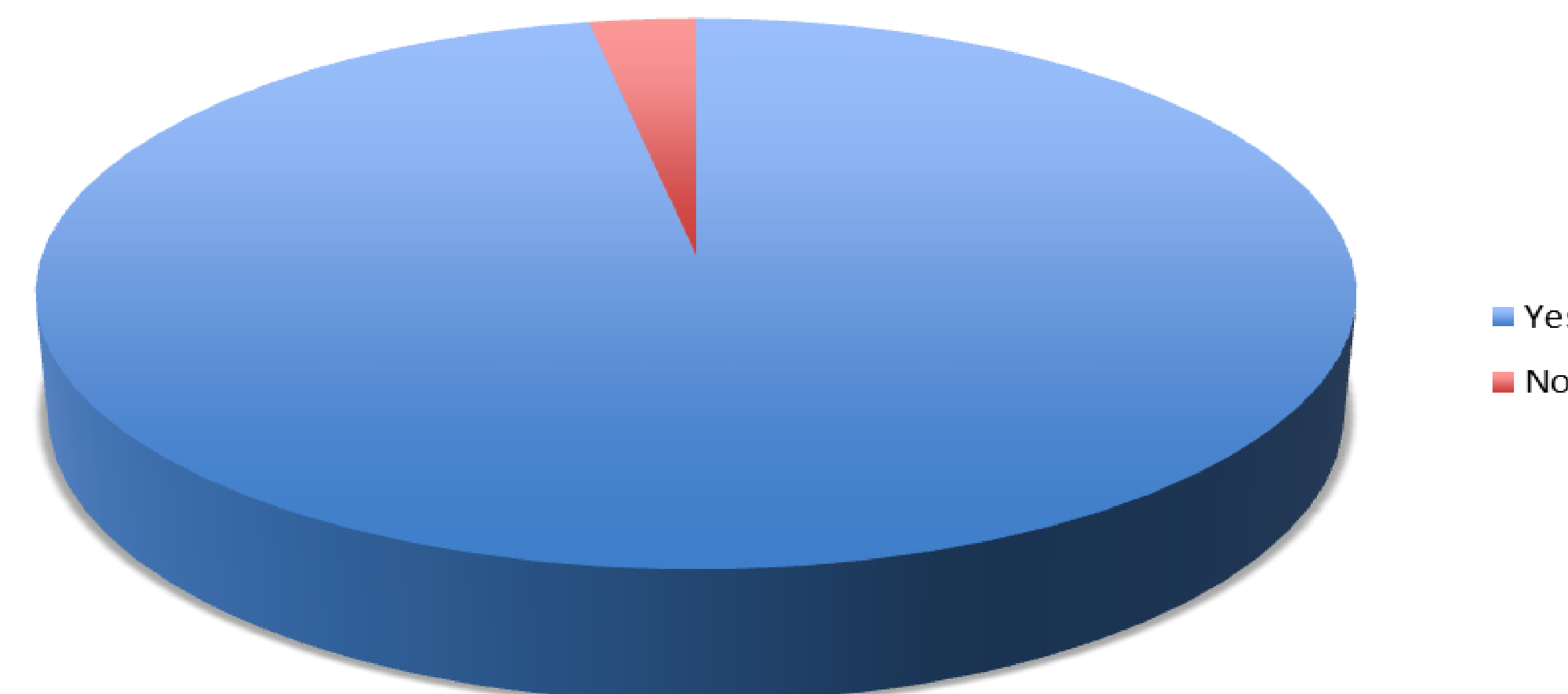
Based on communication studies research, I learn that doing one on one surveys with face-to-face contact provides the most reliable data and results in the most participation. I hoped the interaction with residents would allow me reach out to them and better understand their point of view on the recycling program

My first task was to create an easy to understand survey that would gather as much information as possible, while not taking up too much of the resident's time. My survey was made up of multiple choice, yes or no, and a few open ended questions. My primary focus was to find out first and foremost if people were aware of the program being offered and then to try and figure out what aspect of the program made it unappealing or inconvenient to participate in.

I used a map of the buildings to keep track of which apartments I had visited and color-coded the map according to each resident's response. If they participated in the survey their apartments was highlighted blue, if they declined to participate yellow, and if I was never able to reach them in my trips to the complex they were pink. This is allowed to me keep track of the residents and proved to help me be time efficient.

To each resident I would bring a copy of the survey, ask them the questions verbally if they agreed to participate, and then record their responses as we went along. I also tried to make note of any comments or concerns they said that might be useful later when analyzing data.

Residents' Awareness of Recycling Program



Impact on Current and Future Students

By taking part in this project, I was able to see first hand the challenges advocates of recycling and sustainable living face when reaching out to the community. It was a memorable experience for me because it involved issues that I sincerely care about and allowed to do something to potentially help for the first time. I not only learned a lot for my data collection, but also learned a lot from meeting all the different residents at Maple Manor. Working with the City of Fayetteville managers and Energy Corps team also gave me insight into what all is being done behind that scenes that we as citizens might never know about in order to make recycling and sustainable living more convenient. I feel that future students can benefit from the connections I made with those two organizations. Both groups were very enthusiastic about working with a U of A student that shared similar interests as them and they also treated me as an equal and trusted me with important responsibilities from the beginning. I feel that future students will be able to work with these groups more extensively and perhaps even continue what we started with the project as the journey has really just begun. In general, I feel like students can take away from my study the importance of really thinking about your consumer habits and realizing that each of us are just one of many people on this planet. This means that while we can try to influence human behavior, the only person's actions we truly have control over are our own. I hope my study encourages students to recycle even if others don't understand the importance because even just one person making a change matters.