A need for improved recycling on campus, particularly in Norris University Center, was identified by Engineers for a Sustainable World (ESW) Summer Fellows during the summer of 2013. Pura Playa, a plastic waste reduction team that is part of ESW, felt this opportunity was a good fit for problem solving and thus designed a recycling station for the ground floor of Norris after consulting with various stakeholders and researching effective recycling station designs.

Construction took place from winter quarter of 2014 through fall quarter of 2014, not without difficulties. The team spent time over nights and weekends going into the shop whenever feasible to work on the station and troubleshoot design and aesthetic issues. The team cut and stained the wood, put the station together, and collected and installed materials illustrative of each waste category. Recently, after receiving feedback from Dan Foley, the Assistant Director of Facilities for Norris, wheels were attached to the bottom of the station as well, to increase station mobility.

The group has been granted clearance to test in the Norris University Center from Norris administrative officials, after a series of collaborative meetings. Preliminary surveys of student recycling awareness have been conducted as well. Currently, the group is waiting for response from Student Affairs Marketing to complete the educational component of the recycling station.

Moving forward, the team plans to complete educational materials and place the completed recycling station in Norris during Winter Quarter 2015. The first two weeks of the quarter will be used to work with Student Affairs Marketing in order to finalize the accompanying educational materials. The recycling station will be installed in Norris for a two-week trial period as soon as the educational materials are completed. During these two weeks, more interviews will be conducted in order to gain user feedback and determine if any component of the recycling station needs to be changed or updated. The remainder of the quarter
will be used for analysis of user feedback and planning and ordering materials for a reiteration of the station.

Given that the team has been unable to test the recycling station to date, largely due to administrative delays, the extent to which this funding has advanced the team’s research in sustainability and energy cannot be exactly determined. However, the team believes that the funding has allowed the pursuit of an innovative and effective recycling station that will promote sustainability on campus, make it easy for the entire Northwestern to engage with sustainability, and conserve energy through increased recycling instead of increasing demand for energy-intensive virgin materials. The team would be happy to provide an updated report once testing has been completed.