

# Project Blog

## Building Carbon Offsetting Awareness: Behaviour Change Strategies and HBS's C/Naught Carbon Credit Portfolio

By the 2025-2026 SSAs from sections E & H

### Project Context

Student air travel is one of the most significant personal sources of carbon emissions on the HBS campus. HBS already has a tool to help address this impact: a custom carbon credit portfolio on C/Naught, available to the entire community that allows students to offset flights at remarkably low cost, as little as \$1.98 for a Boston to Washington D.C. route. Yet since launch, the platform had received just 91 total sessions from 62 unique visitors.

As Sustainability Student Associates working with the HBS Operations team, our mandate was clear: understand why awareness is so low, and build a credible, evidence-based plan to change that. Over the past several months, we designed and executed a three-method research framework, reviewing a broad campus survey by our peers (313 responses), an information-channels audit (33 responses), and in-depth UX interviews (8 participants), to get to the root of the problem.

### What We Worked On

Our research surfaced five themes driving low engagement, each pointing to a specific fix:

- **Awareness is near zero, with demand being latent.** Only 3.8% had visited C/Naught before, yet 59.1% said they'd offset at some level. The gap is invisibility, not reluctance.
- **The blog-to-portal journey is broken.** All UX interviewees wouldn't have found the blog organically. Each step loses participants, and 1 in 3 users who reach the portal abandon their purchase.
- **Timing is the lever.** 28% of students already see emissions on Google Flights at booking. A nudge in a club trek or HBS trip confirmation email is the highest-leverage intervention.
- **Cost perceptions are wildly inflated.** "\$1.98 BOS to DC" consistently surprised every interviewee. Price is not the barrier ONCE students see the numbers.
- **Peer channels beat broadcasts.** 72% of students use WhatsApp daily. Section groups and club channels outperform email blasts for both discovery and re-engagement.

From these findings, we developed 13 concrete recommendations. Our highest-priority interventions: embed direct offset links in trek and travel confirmation emails; launch a monthly WhatsApp nudge through the E&E Club and BEI; pin a persistent "Offset Your Travel" link on myHBS; and rewrite the existing blog as a short, visual three-step gateway leading directly to the portal.

### Looking Ahead

Between December 2025 and April 2026, early momentum is visible: unique visitors rose from 62 to 69, sessions grew from 91 to 105, and CO<sub>2</sub> offsets increased by over 6,900 kg (+12.2%). The baseline remains low, but the trajectory is right.

Our roadmap runs through 2026–27: synthesise research now, design channel interventions by May, pilot with one student club trek in the fall, and scale to five or more clubs by January 2027. The deeper insight from this project is that sustainability adoption is rarely a values problem for HBS students; the latent willingness is already there. It is an access, timing, and friction problem. We are grateful to the HBS Operations and Sustainability teams for the opportunity to turn that insight into a plan.