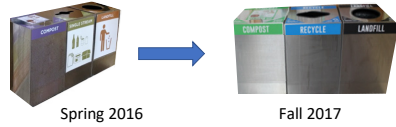


Waste Disposal Behaviors of University Students: Measuring the Impact of Intervention Efforts

Student Researchers: Betty J. Walter, Ashley E. Thompson, Samantha J. Kleich, Richard J. Mataitis, Nathaniel McFarland, Katrina G. Kawak, Alexandra E. Cook - Mentor: Scott K. Clark
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire: Departments of Geology & Biology

Introduction:

Keeping recyclables and compostables out of the landfill is a major step toward nurturing a sustainably-minded community. This research focused on collecting data for student and faculty waste-disposal habits. Using our data we collaborated with other sustainability-minded stakeholders to take steps towards increasing environmental awareness.

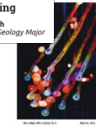


Intervention Efforts:

- Banners
- Bin labels changed to standard colors
- New Marketing Kickstart
- Signage in Napkin Holders
- Flipside Articles
- Informational Video featuring Blu, the UWEC mascot & Website (uwec.ly/responsiblu.edu)

Greenwashing

Samantha Kleich Undergraduate: Geology Major



Garbage Mountain

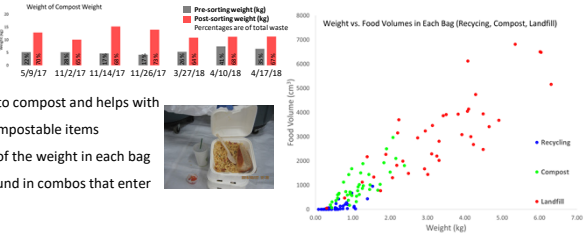
Samantha Kleich Undergraduate: Geology/member of the UWEC waste reduction initiative



Methodology for Waste Data Collection:

For the past two years, we have collected waste data for the waste disposed of in the Davies Center: compost, recycling, & landfill. We collected data on seven Tuesdays over four semesters during the lunch period (11:30 – 1:30). Individual bin waste was separated into four categories: compost, recycling, landfill, and mixed-waste combos. Every single item in each waste stream is accounted for including food and liquids.

Food Waste

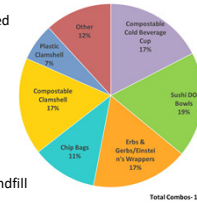


- Food waste is the easiest item to compost and helps with the biodegradation of other compostable items
- Food waste accounts for most of the weight in each bag
- 48% of overall food waste is found in combos that enter the landfill

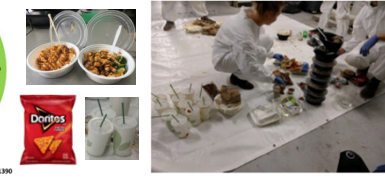


- A mixed-waste combo contains two or more waste streams combined into one item
- Combos are created because of convenience
- 15% end up in the recycling
- 10% end up in the compost
- 75% of combos end up in the landfill

Types of Combos- All Dates



Mixed-Waste Combos

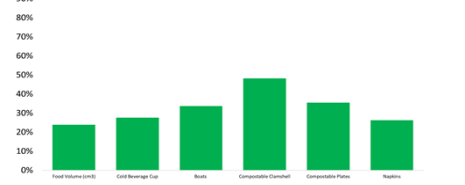


Compost

Items that belong in the Compost bin:
Food, Napkins, Cold Beverage Cup, Chopsticks, Straw Wrappers, Wet Paper, Compostable Clam Shells and Plates, Green Mountain Beverage Cups, Boats, Compostable Bread Stick Sleeves

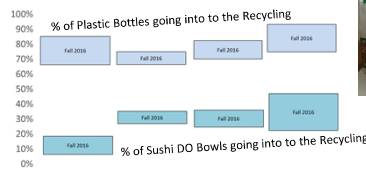


% of Items Correctly Placed in the Compost

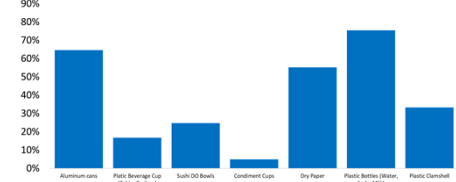


Recycling

Items that belong in the Recycling Bin:
Aluminum Cans, Plastic Cups, Sushi DO Bowls & Lids, Plastic Condiment Cups and Lids, Glass Bottles, Dry Paper, Plastic Bottles (water, soda, milk), Yogurt and Fruit Cups, Plastic Clam Shells

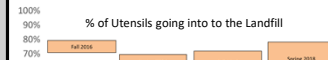


% of Items Correctly Placed in the Recycling

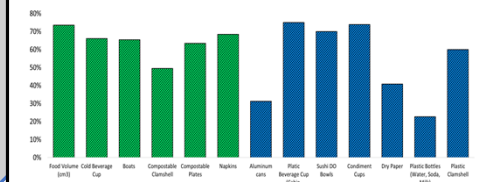


Landfill

Items that belong in the Landfill Bin:
Straws (blue and clear), Utensils, Chip Bags, Coffee Cups (Caribou from the Cabin & Einstein's), Condiment Packets, Erbert & Gerbert's / Einstein Bros. Wrappers, Milk Cartons, Soup Container Lids, Misc. Wrappers (candy, cookie, fruit rolls)



% of Items Incorrectly Placed in the Landfill



Potential Future Initiatives

- We have Blugold Fridays, how about Trashy Tuesdays?
- Trays and Hard Dishware
- Laminated Placemats
- Clean Consistent Messaging
- Reduce Greenwashing
- Early Interventions
 - Ambassadors
 - 1st Year Experiences
 - Orientation



Conclusions:

Our findings suggest that multiple efforts at intervening in students' waste disposal habits over the past two years have struggled to succeed. Changing behaviors is challenging. To normalize sustainable behaviors, we recommend prioritizing interventions that connect with incoming freshman (e.g., ambassadors and orientation activities) and the use of numerous information sources (e.g., posters, social media, instructors, and Resident Assistants).