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Food, Water, Shelter, Song

What Makes Recycling Work on Campus?

Many people in the United States have chosen to go to college to enhance their learning and skills. This leads to a lot of waste at a concentrated area. Wouldn’t it make sense for colleges to try to make a difference in climate change and sustainability? There is already a large number of students that enrolled to learn. Why not teach them about higher sustainability goals? A great way to achieve sustainability is by recycling. There are already great amounts of garbage that landfills are not able to keep up with. Simply by one person putting their recyclable waste into a blue bin, they are helping to save the world. Imagine if every college student and faculty began to recycle. So many more products would be able to be reused, and the waste in landfills will be reduced tremendously. I know that most, if not all, college students have heard of recycling and has seen recycling bins around their campus. So, in theory, everybody should already be participating in their schools recycling efforts. In reality, this is not the case. People don’t feel as much urgency to recycle as they should in some schools. This is the reason why some schools’ recycling programs work a lot better than other schools.

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The Pennsylvania State University’s Beaver Stadium in the past diverted for nearly 30 tons of recyclable per year from local landfills. A new initiative to promote recycling in the stadium’s tailgating area has helped Penn State more than triple its old recycling record. They offer fans several convenient options for handling their recyclable materials. There is an office that oversees the day-to-day operation of the stadium’s recycling program, but a number of other organizations helped design and implement it, including Penn State’s Office of Physical Plant and Department of Athletics, the Centre County Solid Waste Authority, Joe Krentzman & Son, Inc., and Centre County United Way (sustainability.psu.edu). Inside the stadium, the major recyclables are beverage containers, cardboard, and program booklets. The majority of the tonnage is derived from the tailgating areas, where fans are encouraged to separate plastic bottles, aluminum cans, and glass from their waste. Each fall, staff members place the recycling carts and dumpsters in their designated spots in the parking lots, where they will remain until the end of the football season in November. One staff member sets out the carts while two or three put the dumpsters in place. Stadium staff developed a map indicating where dumpsters would be placed, establishing consistency in location so fans know where to expect them from year to year. Also, the university is constantly reminding spectators to recycle their waste products with the huge jumbotron in the middle of the stadium.

In the previous year, the University of California diverted 76% of their waste away from landfills, and instead it was recycled, composted, or reused. The campus focus on reducing waste can be traced back to at least 1975, when Aggie Reuse opened in an effort to more

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responsibly dispose of surplus equipment, furniture and supplies (Sustainable2ndCentury). Now, the college sells 8000 times the amount it did back then and recycles about 120 tons 0f electronic waste every year. They say that, “reducing campus waste requires rethinking daily operations for most campus units.” The Waste Reduction and Recycling program coordinates many campaigns on campus using a team of student staff, interns, and volunteers. The University of California plans for the entire campus the reach the goal of zero waste, which means avoiding sending trash to landfills. To help achieve this goal, the university is hosting events on campus that come with compostable or recyclable materials. Residence halls have also taken initiative by providing reusable plates and utensils for students so that the need for single use materials is decreased (Sustainable2ndCentury). The University also hosted the Plan Green conference to help conference and event planners learn how to plan low impact events (sustainability.psu.edu).

Brown University’s Office of Sustainability works to achieve sustainability in energy and the environment. They plan to minimize its energy use, reduce negative environmental impacts, and promote environmental stewardship. They know that many things are required to achieve sustained energy and environmental performance. They need to have an “ongoing, integrated and systematic approach to energy management including assessing performance, setting goals, creating an action plan and tracking and communicating results” (Office of Sustainability, Brown University). Goals have been set by the university to increase waste diversion by 50%. To do this, there are a lot of student initiatives that Brown students work on. Every year, EcoReps hosts their Game Day Recycling event, which serves to teach students, parents, and community

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members about proper recycling practices and the importance of the sustainability movement (Office of Sustainability, Brown University). In this event, people are informed on what products are able to be recycled and what products are considered to be trash.

According to MIT, “One of the first steps in creating a sustainable environment is to recycle” (Department of Facilities, MIT). People should know what their community accepts for recycling. They should also know if the materials can be collected together, or if they should be separated. MIT believes that communicating the recycling information to members of the community so that they can participate in the programs is essential. Using these tactics, MIT has improved their recycling on campus. MIT’s Recycling and Materials Management Office is on the forefront of the institute’s efforts to reduce its carbon footprint (Department of Facilities, MIT). Through educational initiatives and infrastructure improvements made by the Recycling Office, recycling has increased, and trash waste has decreased drastically. MIT also has signs around campus to let people know that materials such as single-use gloves, animal bedding, and pipettes cannot be recycled.

I believe that we need a stronger recycling system here at Gettysburg College. A lot of students and faculty do not recycle and it I s probably because of the lack of emphasis that the college puts on it. There should be a lot more signs about recycling around the entire campus. People that walk on campus should feel the need to participate in recycling and the recycling programs that we have. There should also be signs around campus and recycling bins that let people know what product are able to be recycled. Many people who do recycle are putting items that belong in the trash into recycling bins. This actually does more damage than not

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recycling that product. When I see students trying to recycle non-recyclable objects, I try to explain to them that when those types of products are with recyclable ones, the whole batch can’t be recycled anymore. Signs can also be put up about different recycling programs that are available on campus. Gettysburg College has many recycling programs on campus that the majority of students do not know about. I didn’t know about them until I did my own research on the Gettysburg College website. We need people to take advantage of these recycling programs if we want to increase recycling. Putting signs up around the school will seriously increase the recycling on this campus. People will feel more urgency to try and recycle instead of throwing everything away into trash cans.

Another reason why recycling may not be as successful on this campus compared to others is because people don’t know why recycling is so important. The college should make an environmental class mandatory for students to graduate. In these classes students will study about climate change and what is happening around the world as a result of it. They will also learn about ways to try and fix this problem, one of which will be recycling. This will improve recycling rates drastically. Having a cause for your actions is important for individuals. People on campus will come together and recycle as a whole to save the planet. Usage of recycling programs will increase, and the students will have what they learned in class forever. Hopefully, they spread their knowledge to others, and get people who aren’t even in the school to participate in saving the planet.

Work Cited

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