Garbology Project Extension

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Given that the sample of stats of the summer's waste sorting show us that the introduction of the solar bins are not currently producing a marked improvement in sorting habits among the campus body, we can make a preliminary determination that these bins are as ineffective as the original "smart bins" in separating trash from non-trash. But why are they ineffective? I hypothesize that there are significant communication issues that are leading people to avoid placing of questionable items in the recycle or compost, which then means more bio-degradable and recyclables in the trash. On top of a seeming lack of clarity, the variety and inconsistency of containers on campus could also be a major hindrance in the successful disposal of waste. So, as an extension of this summer's Garbology project, I propose to ask: Would developing an alternative, succinct form of solar bin labeling, consolidating the types of waste permitted, and then standardizing all of those features and making them more available campus-wide, encourage a greater amount of people to sort their own solid waste more efficiently? Before UW Facilities Services invests further funds into the current solar bin designs, productive revisions can potentially be made in terms of bringing more clarity, simplification and consistency to the sorting process on campus.

The confusion about what belongs where could stem from a number of factors. So, in order to gain insight on the origins of campus peoples' seemingly misguided disposal choices, some survey research could be done on the campus body. I would compose a questionnaire to be distributed on campus strategically near the various forms of waste containers, with the goal of collecting provisional data from at least 100 people. The questions could begin simply, starting with general habits: "Do you throw away anything while you are on campus?", and "do you buy food on campus?" Then, there should be more pointed questions asked to help establish a

bottom-line for what the average sampled individual's currently does or does not know about sorting, if they use the new bins or not, and if they find the new bins' signage to be readable or unclear. It would also be important to ask even increasingly direct questions like, "if you do buy school food, did you know that both the frozen yogurt utensils and Gretchen's food containers are compostable?", and "if there were a catch-all recycling bin for paper, cans, plastics, and glass, would you be more inclined to use it?", "Do you find color-coded bins confusing or helpful/do you think there is enough clarity surrounding what the colors represent?", and, finally "How would you change or better the system?"

As a way of addressing the issue of availability, it would also be helpful to know if people within the sample group regularly choose a type of container based on their daily proximity to it. For instance, outside of the art and music buildings only the older smart cans are available, so people who spend most of their campus time in that area will likely not be composting any waste, unless they are taking their banana peels to Parnassus (which has a small hole for compost in their microwave/condiment island). Furthermore, inside in the art building hallways, there are trios if waste containers, but rather than including compost as one of the options, there are slots for "mixed paper", "cans and bottles", and trash. Even *more* limiting are the plain old, giant aluminum trash cans in the art studio classrooms, which offer nothing for recycling, and definitely no place for compost. This seems illogical since so much of the materials we use are paper-based. Also, a *lot* of eating is done in the studios as well. I have witnessed this discrepancy between types of containers force people to make decisions based upon convenience rather than a mere lack of knowledge about what is and is not "trash". If, after the survey of the campus sample group is complete, any kind of pattern emerges, that data can then be considered within the larger scope of UW Facilities Services' design plan, and assist in approximating a new budget. Perhaps, if it appears that people will recycle more if they can put

everything in one place and don't have to make determinations about paper items vs. non-paper items, a compromise may lie in allotting funds for more intensive post-depositional sorting of campus recyclables. This would mean more costs for the university so that they can comply with the limitations of city regulations, but it would simplify the sorting rules for campus-dwellers directly at the source of waste deposition. Another possible problem-solving entails working with campus cafeterias to more distinctly spread the word about how "Gretchen's" brand meals and the frozen yogurts are in bio-degradable containers. Also, if it is clear that the sample group members on the whole are not fans of the current labeling system, a step in the editing process could be mocking up some refreshed signage using suggestions from those surveyed. Then, this could then be a part of a visual, follow-up survey on a new sample group, which would be asked to pick the system, the original or the mock-up, they find is clearer to follow. Also, to make disposal more convenient, there would need to be more of the actual disposal sites on campus, which heightens availability, but also the cost of maintenance.

Since much of the responsibility of whether or not an environmentally-friendly, cost-effective campus waste disposal system can succeed lies on the producers of that very waste, at this point I think it is necessary to glean further insights from them. The rest of the responsibility then lies on the university to listen and to find areas where compromises can be implemented so that the future system can balance both cost and clarity.