

Background

The UW Garbology Project, a student organization collaborating with the UW Department of Anthropology and UW Recycling, is working to address waste issues on campus by using the scientific study of UW waste as a basis for local advocacy and outreach. Earlier work by our project has shown that the majority (60%) of what UW sends to the landfill is compostable. As such, the largest single improvement we can make to UW's waste system is to find ways to compost more efficiently. If this is done, the UW will save hundreds of thousands of dollars annually while taking a major step towards creating a more sustainable campus.

In recognition of this fact, UW Recycling is pursuing initiatives to increase composting on campus, including the MiniMax system, which helps facilitate additional composting and recycling in campus buildings. About 29% of campus currently participates in this system, which encourages composting in two primary ways. First, it provides indoor compost bins throughout participating buildings. This might sound trivial, but our research shows that compost bins are absent from most campus buildings, making composting extremely difficult for most campus users. Second, by requiring faculty and staff to empty their own waste bins, this system enhances users' awareness of their waste.

As a complement to this system, UW Recycling is also preparing to promote systematic composting of restroom paper towels, although this program has yet to be implemented. Since the UW currently throws away 87 tons of compostable restroom paper towels annually, UW Recycling sees huge potential in this program's implementation, especially in conjunction with the MiniMax system itself. In fact, UW Recycling sees these twin initiatives as an ideal model for the future of waste at UW.

Progressing towards comprehensive participation in these programs is therefore a priority for UW Recycling. Because these programs are voluntary, this progress will hinge on our ability to convince building administrators to adopt them. This progress will also hinge on our ability to convince students, faculty, and staff to actively participate in these programs by composting more. To help convince these groups, we must procure concrete evidence of the compelling benefits of participation, and we must publicize this evidence to the wider UW community.

Project Goals

Our project will meet these needs through direct investigation, advocacy, and education. Our investigation will directly measure the benefits of implementing these systems through a detailed case study. The study will be a "before and after" examination of the trash from Denny Hall, which currently holds no compost bins despite housing multiple academic departments, food preparation areas, restrooms, and classrooms. This study will first sample Denny Hall's baseline trash for several weeks to document how much of this trash is potentially compostable. Next, we will implement the MiniMax system and restroom paper towel composting throughout the building. This will be followed by a period of trash re-sampling to document any changes in composting efficiency resulting from the implementation of these two programs. From this data we will estimate the annual savings in both landfill waste and monetary cost due to implementing the MiniMax system and restroom paper towel composting in Denny Hall, allowing the benefits of these programs to be expressed to building administrators in terms of concrete and practical incentives.

Our advocacy efforts will be aimed at using these practical insights to argue for substantive change in UW systems of waste. We will undertake this advocacy at the administrative level by submitting a report detailing our findings to Emily Newcomer, Manager of UW Recycling, who will then use our findings to inform her policies. If our findings show that these systems are effective, Ms. Newcomer will also use our results as evidence to help convince administrators of the benefits of participation in these programs. We will also undertake advocacy at the level of the UW student body in two ways. First, we will push for discussion of our results as part of UW first-year orientations, and we'll produce a short video for this purpose. Second, we will give an extensive series of 5-minute

presentations to large UW lecture classes so that the actual costs and benefits of landfilling and composting are made plain to large numbers of current UW students. In this way, we hope to use our findings to help move towards a system in which our campus-wide policies encourage comprehensive composting and our campus community is universally aware of the incentives of participation.

Our educational efforts will be aimed at fostering the direct engagement of the UW community with our investigation and advocacy efforts. We will achieve this in several ways. First, we will continue to involve student volunteers in all phases of the project. Second, we will recruit additional students through collaborative partnerships with UW instructors, including courses offered through both the Program on the Environment and the Department of Anthropology. Third, we will hold more public “trash-ins” on campus to help raise awareness of our work and of campus trash issues in general. Lastly, we will continue to work with the Burke Museum, the local news media, and our project website to disseminate our initiatives, results, and findings to the wider public.

Project Needs

We already possess the facilities, expertise, core personnel, and institutional connections to successfully undertake this project. Still needed, however, is approximately \$9000 to pay for materials, supplies, and wages, since the scale of the intended project’s investigation, education, and advocacy efforts will require an investment of money and managerial effort well beyond those currently available to the UW Garbology Project. We therefore ask the Campus Sustainability Fund to support these essential dimensions of our project, as we believe our project aims and scope to be fully congruent with those of the CSF.

We hope the CSF will find us worthy of such support, and we look forward to working with the CSF on this project. In addition, we are happy to provide any further information which might aid the CSF committee in evaluating our project and in considering our request.