RETHINKING THE MARKETING OF RECYCLING
OLIVIA CURRY, KELLY FUNK, SOPHIE LOCKE, TERESE RUTKOWSKI.
Background

Since Boston College began recycling in 1991, it has only improved. In 2012, Boston College ranked 2nd in Recyclemania, a competition of 600 colleges and universities, in the per capita category. This placement, largely due to the behind-the-scenes sorting of waste at Corcoran Commons (Lower Dining Hall), went unnoticed. This accomplishment was only one of many extensive efforts made by various departments to improve BC’s recycling and sustainability. However, students are unaware and misinformed due to a lack of promotion and inconsistent marketing. If students do not believe that BC cares about recycling, why should they? As Boston College invests in streamlining signage and recycling bins, they must make efforts to improve the other component of recycling: student habits. Our project was designed to gather information and opinions from various administrators on campus and propose ways to better communicate with students.

Our research focused on the following questions: First, what recycling methods are already in place at BC? What technologies and processes are being used on campus? Is the department upgrading waste receptacles and signage? To this inquiry, we found that the Office of Sustainability was already aware of that these methods are not uniform across campus. BC was dedicated to recycling but students were not aware. We saw that we needed to “break the cycle” and improve student awareness, education, and understanding. Finally, our recommendations focused on how we can better market and advertise BC recycling methods and efforts. We found room for improvement in the ways the administration engages prospective and first year students as well as the ways in which Dining and Residential Life inform students.
Methods

We used three primary methods to gather information: interviews with administrators, an anonymous student survey, and a comparative analysis of other universities’ websites. We spoke with Boston College administrators at the Office of Sustainability, Residential Life, the Office of First Year Experience, and Dining Services.

At the Office of Sustainability, we spoke with Robert Pion, members of custodial services (Gerry Boyle) and grounds (Scott McCoy). This meeting directed the course of our investigation, giving us an overview of the various contexts students recycle: dining halls, residence halls and academic building.

At the Office of Residential Life, we spoke with Jessica Graf, a Resident Director and advisor for the Residence Hall Association. She gave us information on which initiatives Res Life works on, especially the Sustainable Living Learning in Edmonds for sophomores. She believed that this was the biggest sustainability initiative that Res Life engaged in.

At the Office of First Year Experience, we spoke with Paul Chiozzi, the Assistant Director for Programs & Student Engagement. Mr. Chiozzi gave us information on the types of skits that are presented to freshmen and the message that FYE is hoping to convey. He also told us how FYE works with Dining Services during the orientation barbeque in order to teach students the differences between recyclable materials, compostable food waste, and garbage.

We also met with Michelle Guiney from Waste Management Inc to see areas for improvement. Waste Management Inc recently conducted an audit of Boston College’s waste habits and had suggested ways to improve the bins. Following this audit, Boston College selected blue to represent recycling.

In regards to admissions, Robert Pion (Sustainability Project Director) provided comments on the project initiative ideas as well as further recommendations regarding the advertisement and marketing of Boston College’s recycling and sustainability efforts. This sector focused strongly on the survey results (explained below) to analyse student’s opinions on how sustainability and recycling was presented to prospective audiences, in addition to the wider community. Pion provided further information of how to further promote this aspect of the College through it’s online website, whilst also explaining possible College Commitment programs that may be another valuable asset to the school’s pledge for sustainability.
We conducted an anonymous 10 question survey to gauge student knowledge of Boston College recycling and sustainability efforts. A total of 62 students were surveyed: 20 seniors, 27 juniors, 8 sophomores and 7 freshmen (please see survey questions on page 6).

In addition, we compared websites of other colleges that were included on a list of “11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others To Shame” to see what programs they have implemented and use them as suggestions of programs that could be implemented here at BC.
Survey Questions

1. What year are you?
   - 2014, 2015, 2016 or 2017

2. How environmentally conscious do you think you are?
   - Not environmentally conscious
   - Somewhat environmentally conscious
   - Environmentally conscious
   - Very environmentally conscious

3. How much do you think BC focuses on being sustainable (ie. recycling?)
   - Not at all focused
   - Somewhat focused
   - Considerably focused
   - Very focused

4. Have you ever looked for/at BC’s sustainability page upon the website?
   - Yes
   - No

5. Did you learn about any of BC’s sustainability efforts on a campus tour?
   - Yes
   - No

6. Do you know where you can recycle in your building (trash/recycling room)?
   - Yes
   - No

7. Do you know what Recyclemania is?
   - Yes
   - No

8. Do you actively sort your trash into the right bins in the dining halls (Mac, The Rat, Eagles Nest, Lower, Hillside etc.)?
   - Yes
   - No

9. Are you aware that BC has single stream recycling on campus?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don’t know what single stream recycling is

10. Are you aware that BC sorts the trash from the conveyor-belt in Lower dining hall for recycling and composting?
    - Yes
    - No
    - I don’t eat at Lower Dining Hall
Results
The results from our survey demonstrate that students are largely unaware of the various ways the administration attempts to encourage and promote recycling. Students have a generally negative perception of the school’s sustainability efforts (See Table 3). Students know what they need to know about recycling on campus. Almost all students surveyed know where they can recycle in their residence halls (see Table 6)

Table 1: Survey results for “What Year are you?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Survey results for “How environmentally conscious do you think you are?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not environmentally conscious</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat environmentally conscious</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmentally conscious</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very environmentally conscious</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Survey results for “How much do you think BC focuses on being sustainable (ie. recycling)?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat focused</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>61.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considerably focused</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very focused</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Survey results for “Have you ever looked for/at BC's sustainability page upon the website?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>88.71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Survey results for “Did you learn about any of BC's sustainability efforts on a campus tour?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>45.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've never been on a tour</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42.62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Survey results for “Do you know where you can recycle in your building (trash/recycling room)?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>91.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Survey results for “Do you what Recyclemania is?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.06%</td>
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</table>
Table 8: Survey results for “Do you actively sort your trash into the right bins in the dining halls (Mac, The Rat, Eagles Nest, Lower, Hillside etc)?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>66.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30.65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Survey results for “Are you aware that BC has single stream recycling on campus?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know what single stream recycling is</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29.03%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Survey results for “Are you aware that BC sorts the trash from the conveyor-belt in Lower dining hall for recycling and composting?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>54.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t eat at Lower Dining Hall</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Survey response of how aware students were of the single stream recycling systems at Boston College. Almost half of students surveyed did not know that the system was on campus or didn’t know what the system was entirely.
Discussion of Results

Based on the survey, we identified four areas for potential improvement the marketing of recycling: Admissions, Office of First Year Experience, Dining Services and the Residence Halls. Admissions engages prospective students and the Office of First Year Experience manages freshmen. Dining Services and the Residence Halls work with students throughout their four-year term at Boston College. These four sectors were deemed the most important areas for improvement in regards to increasing recycling efficiency.

1) Admissions

One aspect of this project that was brought to attention was the lack of promotion and inconsistent marketing of recycling and sustainability efforts at Boston College. Firstly, students at Boston College appear to be unaware of the systems and methods currently in place at Boston College, let alone it’s high ranking amongst other universities in regards to sustainability efforts. Within the conducted survey, a question asked students to rank their opinion on how focused they believed Boston College was with sustainability efforts such as recycling (Table 3). Zero students chose the highest ranking option out of four, which was that Boston College was very focused. The majority chose the second ranking out of four, showing that students believe Boston College is somewhat focused on sustainability efforts such as recycling.

Because of this result, it is obvious that there is a gap between faculties, offices and departments initiating these sustainable practices on campus and student awareness. In regards to admissions, this project focused on producing recommendations for this sector that is a key communicator to prospective students and incoming students, in addition to the public. Two areas within admissions were targeted: Firstly, Boston College receives a substantial amount tour requests for prospective students and the public. Tours at Boston College are coordinated by SAP (the Student Admissions Program) and aim to project an a glimpse into campus life for prospective students. However, results from the survey depict that only 11.48 percent of responders recollected tours mentioning current sustainability programs, recycling efforts or any College achievements in regards to sustainability efforts and rankings (Table 5).
Considering the marketability of ‘green’ and sustainable initiatives, the results reflecting the lack of awareness was surprising. It is our recommendation that a summary or brief insight into Boston College’s sustainability and recycling efforts should be including into campus tours. After researching the methods currently in place at Boston, in addition to the College’s high ranking status amongst sustainability efforts, a proposed summary should include both these variables. A template is provided below:

- When touring Dining facilities, summarize the methods and technologies installed to these facilities in regards to recycling. Specific emphasis should be placed on the ‘behind-the-scenes’ methods, for example the recycling conveyor belt located in Lower Dining Hall. This method has been an immense factor in boosting the efficiency of College dining recycling, however almost fifty-five percent of students that undertook the survey claimed they didn’t know what this system did (Table 10).

- Explain the various recycling methods briefly, explaining the College’s continuous persistence to find out what will work to improve efficiency and recycling success.

- When covering topics regarding student involvement, tour guides should cover and advertise to prospective students how to get involved in sustainability competitions such as Recyclemania and NRG Games contest (energy conservation competition). Approximately ninety percent of students we surveyed were unaware of Recyclemania (see Table 7).

The aim of including these summaries into tours on campus led by SAP is to enhance student’s perceptions of how Boston College communicates these ideas to them as well as the wider community. In addition, prospective students who decide to apply for Boston College will hopefully enter the institution aware of it’s goals and dedication to sustainability. Moreover, commitment to sustainable programs such as the recycling systems on campus is an attractive feature of a College to both students and the wider public community.

This observation leads to the second recommendation this project has initiated. Marketing recycling and sustainability on campus is helpful in setting the standard for what is expected. Schools such as Pepperdine University, College of the Atlantic, and University of
California Davis include a link to their sustainability initiatives from their main website so that prospective students and the wider community are aware that it is a priority on their campus ("11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame"; Figure 2, 3, 4). While Boston College does have a web page informing students about sustainability, it is hard to find and it must be searched for. Survey results depict that almost ninety percent of students have never seen or actively searched for Boston College’s sustainability page.

Figure 2: The College of the Atlantic homepage

Figure 3: University of California, Davis homepage

Figure 4: Pepperdine University website
The idea of having a more prominent link to the sustainability practices page was supported by Sustainability Director, Robert Pion. Pion recommended this initiative to be put forward with the Office of Marketing and Communications or the Office of News and Public Affairs, which would be a potential action this project could follow through with in the future. Pion also provided insight into many of the above listed colleges, expressing how many have signed the ACUPCC (American College and University President’s Climate Commitment). This would again be another action this project could push to the College to ensure a continuous development of marketing and projecting their sustainability efforts.

2) First Year Experience

The first year experience is important for setting behaviors that the students will follow during their four years and encouraging sustainability and recycling during this year could have a large influence on their actions. The Office of First Year Experience (FYE) at Boston College is responsible for implementing programs such as Orientation, 48 Hours, Conversations in the First Year, and Cornerstone. These programs are designed to introduce new students to life at BC and to ease the transition between high school and college. FYE is also responsible for running the orientation seminars for freshmen in the summer prior to their first year, giving them the first taste of life at Boston College. These orientations include skits regarding how recycling and sustainability are managed on campus, and how important it is that students develop good “green” habits. Students are also introduced to sustainability at BC at the “Welcome-Week” barbeque. Students are shown how their meals break down into garbage, recycling, and compostable food waste. Students are also informed that BC takes great care to ensure proper separation in dining halls.

We have several recommendations for improving the first year experience in regards to recycling and sustainability.

First, FYE could take a more active role in promoting recycling and sustainability to freshmen at BC by developing a Cornerstone class concerned with sustainability and college life or possibly sustainability and religion. Please see the sample syllabus on page 15.
Second, FYE should take a more active role in enforcing and teaching sustainable behavior in freshman dorms. Possible solutions include promotional contests, follow-up classes or presentations, and monthly floor meetings.

Lastly, schools such as Chatham University and American University give reusable bottles to first year students so that they do not have to sell disposable plastic bottles on campus (“11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame”). While BC recently started to give out reusable bottles, it still sells disposable plastic bottles. BC could stop selling the disposable plastic bottles and stress the importance of using the renewable bottles.
UN245 Cornerstone Topic Seminar: “Environmentalism and the College Student; Living Sustainably in a College Setting”

Purpose of the course: This course is intended to help you make the transition to life as a college student as we explore a topic of current public interest. Each week we will have a roundtable discussion that focuses on a different aspect of the difficulties of living sustainably while learning to support yourself. Each student will have a different background, perspective and experience concerning the idea of living sustainably, and we will use our class discussions to discern how such a variety of viewpoints can shape the discussions on this important topic. In one sense, no one in the discussion is an expert on this topic, but in another sense everyone in the seminar has knowledge and opinions that are relevant to the discussions.

We also will have class discussions on a number of topics that are important to college students, as you make the transition to college life. While living sustainably is important, it is just one of the myriad of issues that you will face in your first year of college. We will talk about the purpose of college, what expectations the university has of you, problems you may face, and how to get help in all of your academic and personal endeavors. Since this an academic advising section, I will be your academic advisor during this and next academic year when you choose a major. By all of us getting to know each other during our weekly sessions, we will create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere that should help make your freshman year productive and rewarding.

Readings: There will be short weekly reading assignments that will form the basis of the class discussion. Different students will be assigned different readings, meaning that everyone in the room will have a different background on the topics being discussed.

Assignments: There will be three short writing assignments that will be due at different times during the semester. These assignments will focus on your college experience and the investigation of different methods of presenting sustainability strategies to students and how best to implement them.

Tentative Schedule of Topic Discussions and Activities

Week 1: What does living sustainably mean to you?
Week 2: Examples of unsustainable resource use and behavior and the potential consequences
Week 3: The economic costs and benefits of sustainability
Week 4: Marketing sustainability to different generations
Assignment 1: How has your behavior changed since coming to college? Have these changes been harmful or beneficial? Identify possible causes or reasons for these behavior changes.
Week 5: Sustainability initiatives at BC and other colleges
Week 6: Developing environmentally friendly living habits in College
Week 7: The challenges of implementing green initiatives in large-scale settings
Assignment 2: In your opinion, what are some of the main difficulties in initiating policy changes across large settings? What are some possible solutions? How do your opinions affect the way you view the administration at BC?
Week 8: What am I buying? Organic vs. Non-Organic
Week 9: The Problem of Food Waste
Week 10: Balancing convenience and sustainability
Week 11: Measuring your Carbon Footprint
Week 12: Why does it matter?
Assignment 3: Give an example of a time that a desire for convenience outweighed your desire to be sustainable. Is it possible to make sustainable behavior more convenient than any other type of behavior?
Week 13: The future of sustainability in the U.S.
3) Dining

In Boston College dining halls, recycling policies differ by location (See Figure 6 and 7). In Eagle’s nest, the bins indicate that sorting should occur between Newspaper/Trash whereas in Lyons Dining Hall, the bins are for “Newspaper/Mixed Paper” and “Commingled Glass, Plastic, and Tin”. In the largest dining hall, Corcoran Commons, on Lower campus, trash is transported by a conveyor belt and recycling and food waste are sorted. Smaller dining halls use labeled bins and encourage students to pre-sort recycling and food waste before disposing of their trash. The labeling of these bins differs and causes confusion regarding Boston College’s single-stream recycling as most students surveyed did not know what single stream recycling is and if they did, they did not know that was Boston College’s policy. 29.03% do not know what single-stream recycling is and 20.97% did not know about the policy (Table 9). Even with this confusion, when asked if they recycle in dining halls, 66.13% of students say “yes” and 30.65% say “sometimes”(Table 8).

Figure 5: Survey response depicting that over half of students are unaware of the recycling technology located at Lower Dining. This system is very influential in regards to Boston College’s recycling success and efficiency.
As noted in our earlier discussion of recycling, especially in the dining halls, should be included during tours for prospective students.

First, Boston College should improve the signage near the conveyor belt in Lower Dining Hall (see sample Sign in Figure 8). Students should be made aware of the efforts being made
behind the wall. Figures 9 and 10 give other examples for signage in dining halls.

**Figure 8:** Sample Sign for Conveyor Belt in Lower Dining Hall

**Figure 9:** Sample Sign for encouraging to-go containers to reduce waste.

**Figure 10:** Sample sign to increase awareness of which objects can be recycled
Second, Boston College has already adopted programs such as the elimination of trays to decrease waste, which is also implemented at Chatham University and American University (“11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame”). However, many students at BC still choose to take the to-go containers and utensil, even if they are staying in the dining hall. The College of the Atlantic has dealt with this by buying compostable flatware that can be disposed of without more plastic waste entering into the trash (“11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame”). Other recycling programs that have been implemented in dining halls at schools include the recycling of the kitchen grease and cooking oils into electricity and biofuel. This can be seen at American University, Chatham University and Purdue University (“11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame”).

4) Residence Halls

Boston College Residential Life (Res Life) is responsible for managing the residence halls on campus and facilitating the Residence Hall Association (RHA). Res Life is involved with the Sustainable Living Learning Community and RHA’s Eco Reps Program. Resident Assistants (RAs) assist with facilitation of the NRG Games and Recyclemania.

Schools such as University of California Davis, Brown University and Georgia Institute of Technology have programs on move-in/move-out days to help encourage recycling on these days which generally involve high volumes of waste (“11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame”). Boston College has a move-out day recycling program, however it is not mentioned on the BC sustainability page and many students we spoke to were unaware of this program. Like other recycling projects at BC, if the students are not aware of it, then they are less likely to participate in it.

Other programs that have been implemented at other schools include recycling centers where students can get rid of items that they no longer want so that other students could make use of them instead of them ending up in the trash. This program is called “Bargain Barn” at the University of California Davis and the “Resource Exchange Program” at Kalamazoo College (“11 College Recycling Programs That Put All Others to Shame”).

Our survey found that students are aware of where they can recycle in their buildings (Table 6). However, Boston College should increase the publicity of the move-out day recycling
program as well as increase their presence so that more students are aware of it and can take advantage of it. They could also implement a move-in day program to prevent the waste of recyclable objects such as cardboard boxes. Boston College could also implement a program similar to the “Bargain Barn” or the “Resource Exchange Program”. This would encourage the reuse of items that are still good rather than them unnecessarily being disposed of.

Conclusions

Based on our survey, most students are not aware of recycling initiatives at BC. Efforts such as Recyclemania (an inter-collegiate competition), the sorting of waste at Lower Dining Hall, and the switch to single stream recycling have been very helpful in improving the sustainability efforts here on campus. However, many students are not aware of these initiatives and do not believe Boston College is working to improve recycling and other sustainability projects on campus.

Boston College could improve student attitude toward recycling by improving the marketing of recycling. Marketing to prospective students could be improved by making the sustainability page more accessible by including a link from the homepage. Improvements of the signage in both the dining halls and the residence halls would help students to better understand the single stream recycling and consistent messaging would eliminate some of the current confusion about recycling. For prospective students, recycling measures should be mentioned during the school tour to demonstrate that it is an issue that is significant to BC and that BC is making an effort to be sustainable. For First-Year students, Boston College could offer a cornerstone class about the importance of recycling and sustainability at Boston College. While Boston College has made considerable strides in improving the recycling effort on campus, particularly with the revolving wall in Lower, there is always more that can be done. Boston College should look at the examples set by other universities for initiatives to improve recycling efforts and awareness and increase overall recycling. This shift in awareness of recycling at Boston College will help to encourage students to make the effort to recycle and will instill in them the habit of recycling that they will take with them after they graduate from college.
References


Office of First Year Experience, Boston College
Paul Chiozzi, Assistant Director for Programs & Student Engagement, BC FYE
