

"To Go" Containers: Improving Boston College's Carbon Footprint through Dining Services

Boston College GE580 Environmental Seminar
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Background. As Boston College Dining Services (BCDS) operates as an independent organization within the university framework, costs and process efficiency are crucial to ensure smooth business performance and customer (students, faculty, staff) satisfaction. BCDS discovered the disproportionate use of "To Go" containers over dining china, posing environmental and economic issues. This project aims to educate consumers on proper disposal methods and to evaluate BCDS waste management practices and Boston College's carbon footprint.

Methods.

1. Online Survey

GOAL: identify the rationale for preference of "To Go" containers over dining china

METHOD: collected 98 responses to online database; in-person interviews and BCDS Facebook page link; questions involved "one-click" or "multiple-click" choices

2. Observational Surveys

GOAL: determine the proportion of dining china to "To Go" containers usage and if diners stay or leave dining hall

METHOD: tallied the number of students with "To Go" containers or dining china, and number of students leaving dining hall during two dinner sessions

3. Research of Other University Dining Operations

GOAL: identify alternative practices to reduce waste tonnage, and encourage the use of reusable products

METHOD: online research of sustainable "To Go" systems at other universities

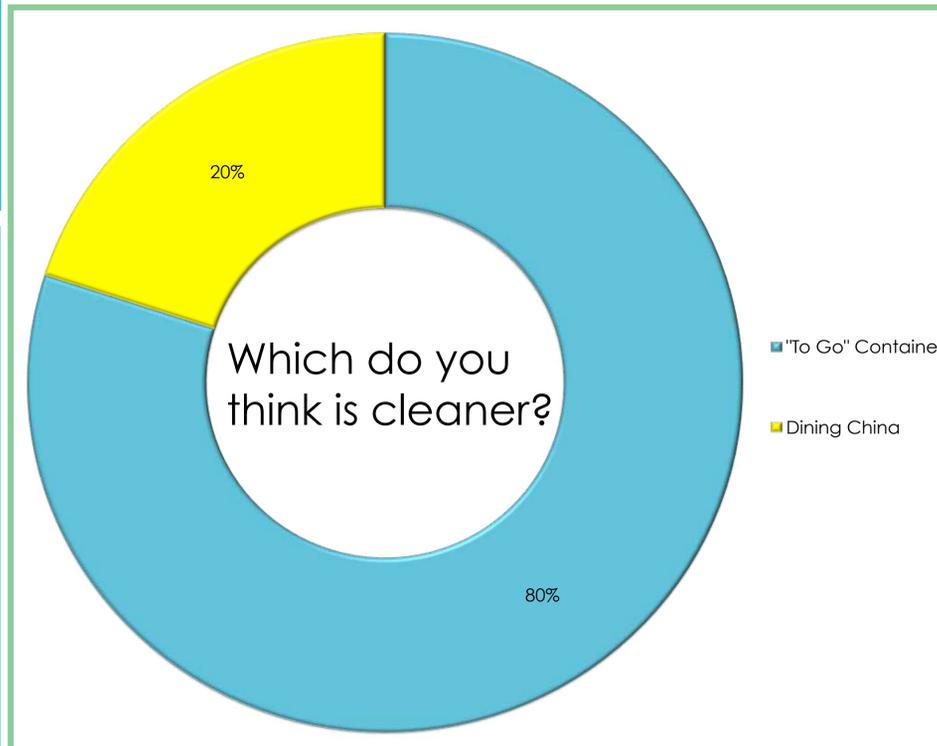


Figure 1. Assessment of Sterility of Dining China vs. "To Go" Containers

Results. The data from the online survey, team observations, and dialogue with BCDS convey five contributing factors to rationale of "To Go" container usage:

- More convenient (69.39% of respondents)
- Better suits student lifestyles (48.98%)
- More sterile (26.53%)
- Diners not offered dining china (20.41%)
- Many students unaware of BCDS waste management practices behind "conveyor belt"

The results indicate a strong preference for "To Go" container usage over dining china, contributing to BC's carbon footprint.

Discussion. BCDS and diners encounter nonalignment in their respective needs, costs, and conduct of operations. Diners typically opt for a "To Go" container at high frequency, while BCDS strives to minimize its waste tonnage and costs. Both agents can improve sustainability measures by promoting the use of dining china and investing in alternative, sustainable "To Go" products (e.g., biodegradable containers). These short term and long term goals would be consistent with the current missions of BCDS and the broader BC community, which already endorse sustainability measures and innovative kitchen operations and technologies.

Recommendations.

1. Student Education

TARGET broader undergraduate audience, particularly freshmen (e.g., orientation events)

PLACE informative posters in dining halls/dormitories regarding food waste, explaining proper disposal of "To Go" containers

2. Focused Dining Employee Training

TRAIN all individuals serving food to use dining china as the default, "To Go" containers on request

TRAIN employees in general sustainability efforts (e.g., importance of using china and silverware, reducing waste stream)

3. Research Alternative "To Go" Products

PERFORM a pilot program for reusable "To Go" containers

RESEARCH financial feasibility of using sustainable cutlery and containers in all dining halls

INVEST in more dining china for items that currently have "To Go" container as the default serving vessel

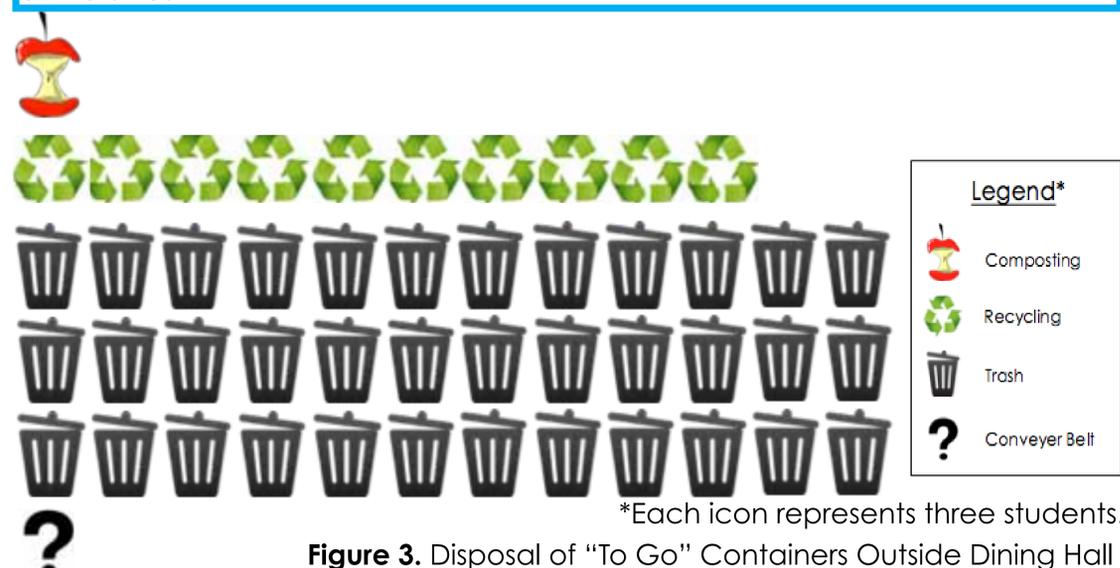


Figure 3. Disposal of "To Go" Containers Outside Dining Hall

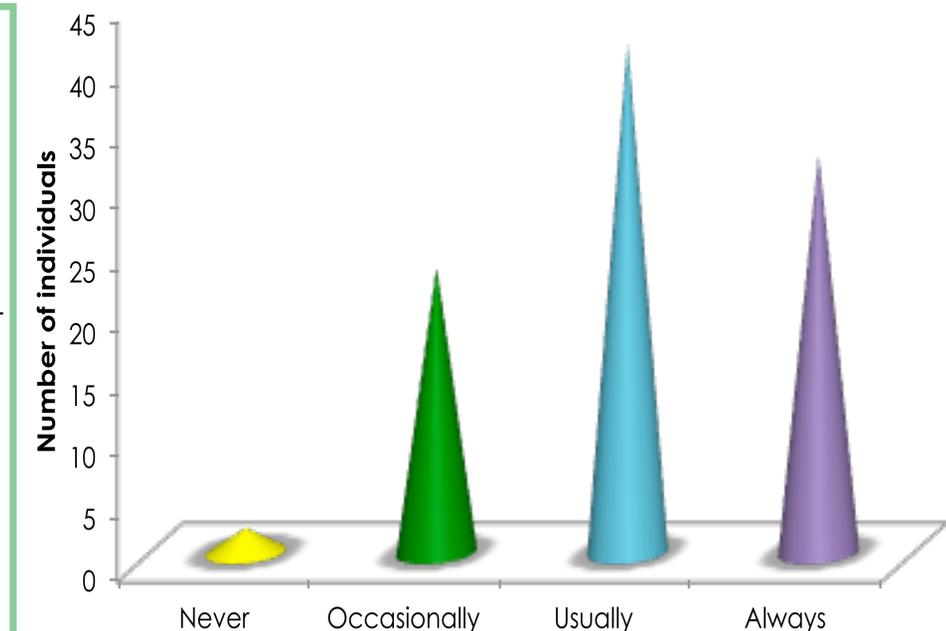


Figure 2. Frequency of "To Go" Container Use

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