

Boston College Environmental Studies Program

The Feasibility of Student-Run Composting at McElroy Dining Hall

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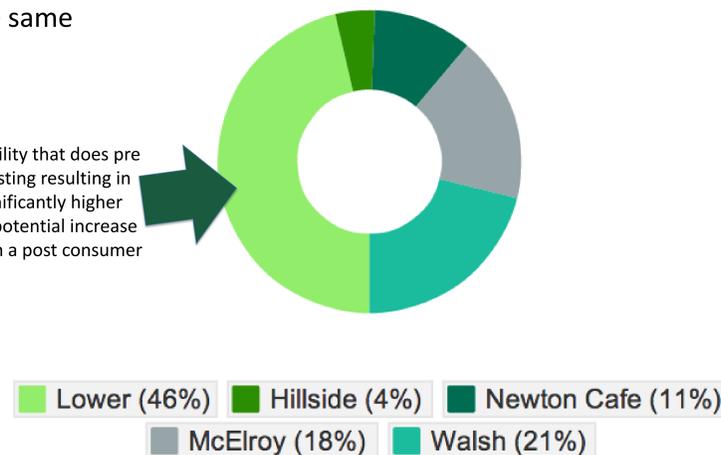
Introduction

Composting food waste is a major concern of Boston College Dining services in their efforts to be more sustainable. However, due to a failed attempt at student-run composting because of contaminated bins, Corcoran Commons (Lower) is the only dining hall that performs post-consumer composting. The infrastructure at Lower allows the dining staff to perform post-consumer composting. McElroy, the second largest dining hall on campus, lacks the same infrastructure therefore there is no post-consumer composting. Our project was to investigate the feasibility of a student-run composting system at 'Mac'.



Lower is the only dining facility that does pre and post consumer composting resulting in their percentage being significantly higher than Mac. This shows the potential increase in composting for Mac with a post consumer system.

Figure 3
Composting at BC



Food Waste

Methods

Throughout the semester we worked with Robert Pion, Director of Sustainability, and Megan O'Neill, Associate Director of Restaurant Operations to study food waste management practices at Boston College. In order to gain an accurate understanding of the student bodies awareness and knowledge of composting practices, we conducted a survey of students in McElroy dining hall, collecting 221 responses. We then began external research, comparing the food waste practices at BC with those at other universities.

Figure 1

Do you know what composting is?

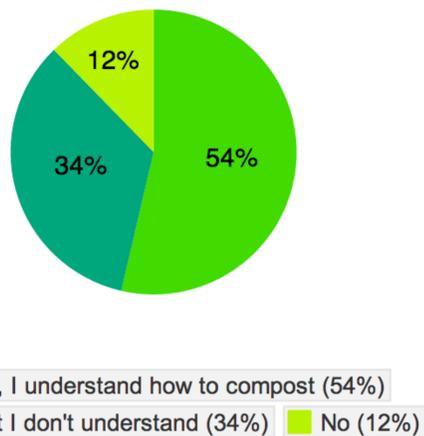


Figure 2

Do you know if BC composts?

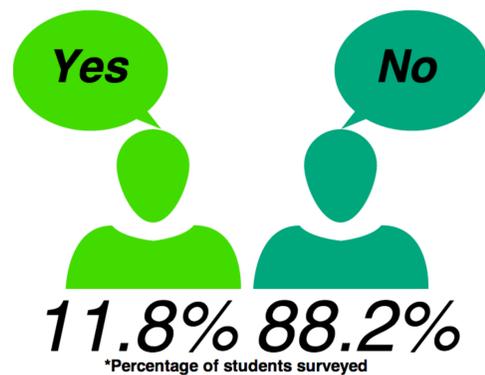


Figure 5

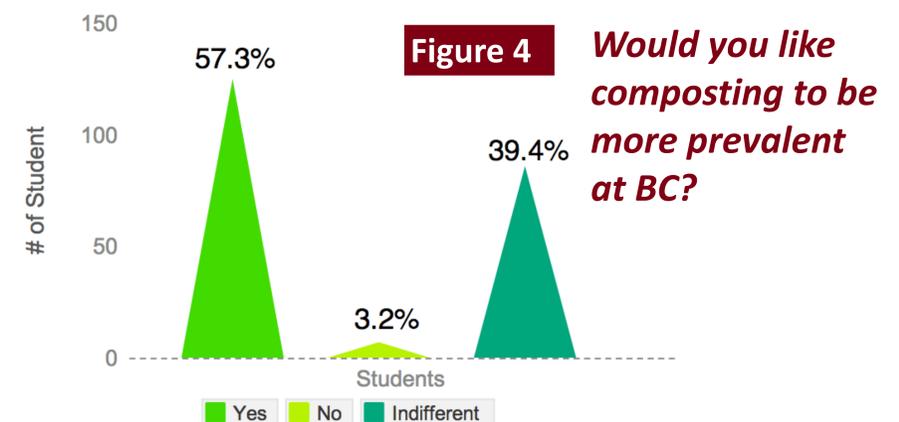


-University of Wisconsin Student Center waste disposal system

Results

The survey conducted shows the student participants' general knowledge about composting. A majority showed that they were aware of the term composting (Figure 1). Participants were also asked about composting practices at the BC dining halls. While a majority was unsure or unaware of BC's composting practices, many indicated that it should be more prevalent on campus (Figures 2 and 4). Many participants also indicated that sustainability practices should be mandatory for university education. Moreover, 50.2% responded maybe, while 30.4% indicated they would be willing to participate, resulting in a total of 84% of willingness among students. In conclusion, our research supports the claim that a student run composting system in Mac has the potential to be successful among the student body with the right amount of guidance and education.

84% of students express willingness to participate in a student-run composting system



Recommendations

We have concluded that for a student-run composting system to be successful in Mac three things are necessary: clear and appropriate signage and bins, an educational component in underclassmen curriculum and a monitor during peak hours. From our research of other large schools with successful student-run composting (UMass Amherst and UC Davis) bin monitors were integral to the success of the systems providing assistance, as well as hands on education about the importance of composting. Monitors also help to establish sustainable habits for the student body. Figure 5 provides a strong example for possible signage. Considering our focus on Mac, the freshman dining hall, we also strongly suggest that sustainable practices at BC be worked into orientation programming or the core curriculum of science classes.

References

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