

How to Increase Recycling at Universities



The world has changed quite a bit in the past century. From individually packaged food servings to disposable diapers, more waste is produced now than ever before. The average American discards [7.1 pounds](#) of waste each day. This garbage mostly ends up in landfills, where it's compacted and buried. As the waste stream continues to grow, so will the pressures on our landfills, our resources, and our environment.

A large public university could easily produce over one-hundred tons of solid waste each year. For many universities carrying out a successful [recycling program](#) is both an economic imperative as well as a smart PR move. A comprehensive campus recycling program can significantly cut operating costs, save energy, and help universities solidify a reputation for environmental responsibility.

Challenges

Universities face unique challenges when it comes to launching and carrying out a campus recycling program. Unlike most businesses and corporations who take on recycling, universities have multiple stakeholders who may or may not see the value in recycling. Some adjunct employees may not be on campus enough to properly absorb campus norms and expectations around recycling. Universities are also challenged by the sheer size and variety of recycling needs. Trying to tackle everything from food waste to electronics is no small task.

Set a Goal

The first step to implementing a successful campus recycling plan is to set some realistic goals. While you may be tempted to shoot for net zero waste your first year, this isn't likely to happen. Aim for steady improvement over time. For example, if your recycling rate was 45% this year, look to increase to 50% next year and aim to increase 5-10% each year.

Strategies that Work

Reduce

Reducing waste in the first place should be a major part of your recycling initiative. A simple campaign to spread awareness to students and staff can go a long way. Successful university recycling programs suggest:

- Utilizing electronic communication to reduce paper usage
- Choosing economy size items that use less packaging
- Discouraging the use of bottled water
- Donating unneeded equipment and furniture

Single Stream Recycling

Universities with successful recycling programs have adopted a single stream approach in order to increase participation. Without the need for sorting, students and staff are much more likely to recycle. Many universities have seen their waste diversion rates double after [adopting the single stream system](#).

Marketing

Develop a marketing plan designed to reach as many stakeholders as possible. Since simple awareness plays a large role in recycling rates, successful recycling programs utilize good old fashion print collateral, email messaging, and social media campaigns. It is also helpful to participate in nationwide events such as [Recyclemania](#) and [Earth Day](#).

Dining Services

Food waste from dining halls is a major issue for universities, therefore composting must play integral role of your recycling program. Sending food and kitchen waste to an off-site composting facility is one common way to dispose of this waste responsibly. Many schools are also reusing fryer oil and replacing polystyrene take out containers with biodegradable alternatives.

E-Waste

Determine a process for collecting televisions, computers, printers, ink toner, batteries, and light bulbs. Not only are these items expensive to dispose of, they can also contain hazardous materials that can be quite damaging to the environment. Placing e-waste bins in residence halls and near computer labs can help encourage proper disposal of these items.

Get Started Today

Creating an effective recycling program takes time, commitment, and often a significant monetary investment, but the benefits far outweigh the challenges your school will face. Successful recycling programs cut operating costs and increase your school's positive image. In addition to these benefits you are also helping to create a positive impact on public health, climate change, and fossil fuel consumption. [Start and grow a recycling program](#) at your university today.



Trashcans Unlimited | www.trashcansunlimited.com | sales@trashcansunlimited.com | P: 800-279-3615