

The truth about campus recycling

By IIT OCES

On April 19, at noon, in the MTCC Ballroom, the Office of Campus Energy and Sustainability will present the Campus Sustainability Annual Report, which will detail IIT's performance pertaining to its seven main sustainability goals for 2020.

In one of those goals, IIT plans to reduce per capita waste by 75% by 2020, and we as a university have made steady progress over the past couple of years towards accomplishing that goal.

That said, recycling/reuse/waste reduction presents one of the most contentious issues in the campus environment.

The Facilities Department, responsible for managing the custodial and waste hauling contractors, hears complaints about "trash and recycling being mixed together."

Conversely, the staff in the Sustainability Office hears regularly that students, faculty and staff need to stop throwing trash in the recycling containers because once they do, the custodians must throw the whole container in the trash.

Some students, faculty and staff say they have no faith in the program, so they do not want to waste their time separating, which only contributes to a downward spiral: More contamination, more material into the trash, less confidence in the program, more contamination.

This vicious cycle ignores one important fact about the recycling program.

The recycling program is people.

The members of the community are people; the custodians who handle the materials are people; the truck drivers who handle the materials are people; the sorters at the recycling facilities are people.

It is understandable, and easy, to blame an institution for screwing things up, what is hard is finding ways to not only talk about how it can be solved, but become a part of the solution. One of the easiest ways to start that process is with facts.

1) On average, a little over 1/3 of all material thrown into trash and recycling bins is recycled.

2) Approximately 98% of all material thrown into a recycling bin ends up in a new product.

3) Based upon a waste audit from last August, about 70% of all material in trash and recycling bins can be recycled.... So, we are only about halfway to what we can accomplish.

4) Custodians have, and continue to, mixed our trash and recycling streams—sometimes due to inexperience, sometimes due to lack of training, and sometimes due to a lack of supervision.

5) Members of the IIT community continue to throw recyclable material into the trash mostly because of being unsure, sometimes due to apathy, and sometimes intentionally.

When IIT revitalized the waste management program back in 2008-2009, we recycled about 15% of what we threw out, and we took major steps in our waste hauling and custodial contracts to improve the performance.

For the custodians, whose primary goal remains maintaining a safe and healthy environment, the increased responsibility of maintaining source separation took training.

Over the past month, based upon feedback from students, faculty, and staff, the Facilities Department and the custodial contractor have innovated new ways to increase the training and knowledge base of the staff without sacrificing their core responsibility of community health.

We acknowledge that we cannot assume good performance will remain constant without attention from all sides.

We ask, at the same time, that the community as a whole help us to make it easier to process and handle the waste. If you have questions about a product's recyclability, contact us at campus.sustainability@iit.edu and ask.

The more questions we get, the better we can adapt our signage and outreach.

Also, realize that although everyone involved in the process, from the person throwing away the item all the way to the separator for the waste hauling company, needs to pay much more attention to their responsibility.

We as a university perform in the top 25% of all universities in the country who measure and report their progress. We can do much better, but we are also building on a good foundation.

A couple of other things that we as a community should know when we throw things out:

1) Recycling is treated differently depending where you are on campus: the west (academic) end places a premium on paper, so non-paper goods are bagged separately and sorted out at an off-site facility. On the east (residential) and south (rental) ends, all recyclable materials go into one dumpster—known as a single-stream process—and are separated from one another at an off-site facility.

2) Organic waste in the form of kitchen scraps are now recycled at the MTCC and Hermann Hall through either our on-site composter behind MTCC or through Waste Management. We currently have not figured out an effective process to collect the post-consumer organic waste, so that gets mixed with trash for now. We are currently looking for students to work on this idea and come up with a viable system.

Students from the Office of Campus Energy and Sustainability have put together a "picture journey" highlighting the path of some of our waste products.

I encourage you to review these both in TechNews and online at www.iit.edu/campus_sustainability and ask questions.

We know that programs such as the recycling program can only succeed when the whole community participates, and when we must make the choice to work together to make it succeed.

Exit counseling for student loans

By IIT Office of Financial Aid

This is an exciting time of year for graduating seniors and grad students alike. However, before you celebrate your success, it is important to address two issues: your bill and your federal loan exit counseling.

If you still have an outstanding bill with the university, please get in touch with the Bursar's Office as soon as possible.

If you do not clear your balance, you will not receive your diploma on graduation day. The Bursar's Office has specialists ready to talk your options over with you, so please stop by Main Building 207 today or call 312-567-3794.

For students who have taken out federal loans at any point during their time at IIT (or any other university if you transferred to IIT), you are legally obligated to complete an exit counseling session prior to leaving the university. The purpose of exit counseling is to provide you with important information regarding debt management strategies and loan repayment, including deferments, grace periods, loan consolidation, and loan default.

The Office of Financial Aid will not be conducting a live exit counseling session this year so this requirement must be fulfilled online. You must complete your exit counseling online prior to graduation. You may complete your exit counseling online at olds.ed.gov.

Please note that if you received both Federal Stafford Loans and Federal Graduate PLUS Loans, you will need to complete an exit counseling session for both loans. In addition, for all students with any federal loans, you will not be able to receive your transcript or register for any future classes at IIT until you successfully complete exit counseling.

If you have any questions, or want to further discuss your loan repayment options, please visit the Office of Financial Aid in Room 104 of Main Building to speak with a financial aid counselor. Specific questions regarding exit counseling can be directed to Kelli Goers, Federal Compliance Officer and Assistant Director, at goersk@iit.edu or by phone at 312-567-5724.

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