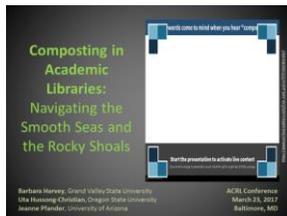


2017.03.22 ACRL – Baltimore

Composting in Academic Libraries: Navigating the Smooth Seas and the Rocky Shoals

Uta Hussong-Christian Speaking Notes

Slide 1



Good Afternoon everyone! Jeanne, Barbara and I are delighted to be here in Baltimore sharing our composting stories and hopefully talking with you about yours. As you get settled in, take a moment to respond to the poll question. It will be so interesting to learn a bit about what makes this topic interesting for you.

Sustainability is a term that is used widely, and probably defined just as broadly. In the Brundtland Report of 1987 - more formally known as the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development - sustainability (in the context of development) was addressed in three broad areas: impact on the economy, environment and human or social justice. The three of us will be focusing on that environment piece, sharing the work we've done to reduce library and campus impacts on our environment by helping divert materials from landfills to more beneficial processes. The programs we'll be discussing range from a project that is quite new to one that is well established on campus.

Some comment about poll results...

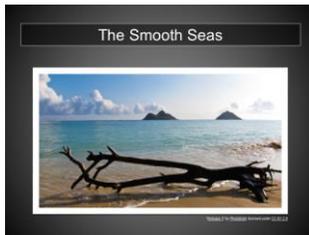
Jeanne will get us started with her work at the University of Arizona.

Slide 2



Jeanne's parting words could not be more perfect as they describe exactly the trajectory of my efforts to implement compost collection at Oregon State's Valley Library. OSU is a mid-sized school with an FTE of about 28,000. I'm located on the main campus in Corvallis, a town of about 55,000 situated in a rural part of the Willamette Valley, about 90 miles south of Portland.

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My compost journey was both smooth and rocky. So the good news first.

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Overall, it was pretty easy to make the argument for what I wanted to do. And the impetus for my efforts was this image of my library's loading dock in March of 2014, 3 years ago this week. Students were just finishing up their Winter term finals. My library director posted the image to the library's Facebook page with the caption "OSU can do better! Recycle!" I was fairly certain that I could help with that by figuring out how to divert some of the organic waste that was surely hiding in those bags of trash. I should state here that my library allows food in most areas of the library. Library classrooms and our Special Collections areas are off limits, but other than that, food makes it way to all six floors. And like many libraries, we have a coffee shop that also serves a variety of prepared food items.

Slide 5



I think it is helpful to understand the scale of the problem of food in the waste stream to provide some context for the programs we are working on. The most recent EPA report characterizing the municipal waste stream in the US shows that food waste is nearly 15% of the total municipal waste generated (38million tons per year). Some of it is pulled out with composting efforts, some of it is burned to create energy, but by the time our landfill-bound trash reaches its destination, 21% of it is food waste. So think back to that picture of the loading dock and imagine what it would look like with one quarter of those bags gone. Better, right?

Slide 5



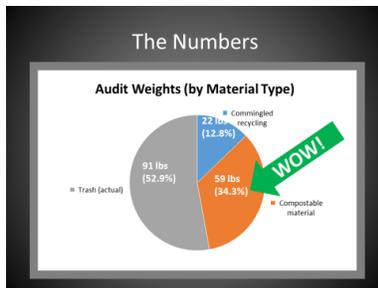
So back to the Valley Library. Did we have compostable material? You bet. As one example...pizza boxes can't be recycled with paper because of the grease and pizza remains. But they can be composted where we are. So we put out a cart and collect them during dead and finals week. As of yesterday, we had collected 53. We have collected as many as 75. All of these will go to the compost carts that now sit on our loading dock.

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As we got our compost program underway, we worked with our campus recycling office to do a waste audit to characterize our waste stream. For those of you who have never conducted one, it is actually rather fascinating. It entails collecting all the trash from your building, or a designed area, for a defined period of time and then sorting and weighing it. We collected everything that was thrown away in our Learning Commons for a 24-hour period. Back in Winter of 2015 when this occurred, it meant that our custodial folks set aside the bags from about 100 small trash bins scattered throughout the space. This did not include the materials that were already in recycling bins...just the material in the trash bins. As you can see from the image, once we had the trash collected, we went to work sorting it into recyclable items, compostable items, and true trash.

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We learned that over 1/3 of the trash that day could have been diverted to composting. In other words, it was food or food-related waste. Half-eaten sandwiches or other meal remains, banana peels, apple cores, wet or food-contaminated cardboard or paper, compostable cups, and napkins are all things we found. Those numbers helped me convince my library director to try to work on this issue. Sustainability is a core value at OSU Libraries and expanding our staff lounge compost collection program to include student areas was another way we could put that value into action.

Slide 8



Like Jeanne noted, partners were key to making our program work. A student volunteer with the Student Sustainability Initiative helped get the waste audit arranged. Campus Recycling staff helped brainstorm and plan and crucially, provided support and space for the waste audit. And of course campus custodial services did the work of collecting material for the waste audit. They also now empty the compost bins regularly.

Slide 9



Once the program was in place, our successes were very evident.

Slide 10



But getting up and running was not without its significant challenges.

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The conversations about removing about 100 small trash bins and implementing waste stations that had trash, recycling and compost options co-located were surprisingly difficult. It seemed like a no brainer that it would be less work to empty fewer co-located bins but making that case with campus custodial services took time.

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We also had some bureaucratic processes to get through. We use compostable liner bags in our compost bins to keep them clean. But liner bags are considered janitorial supplies and the library had to get special approval from our janitorial contractor for the library to be able to order them.

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A recent compost policy change on campus presented a significant barrier because it required trying to change “good” behavior. Due to changes at our regional compost facility, our campus can no longer send compostable plastics or non-fiber based serving ware for composting. All products that go for composting need to be approved in advance. In practice that has meant that we can no longer accept in the library bins things like compostable cups, utensils, or other serving ware. This change has led to challenges with signage and education to reduce contamination.

Slides 14



While the measures shown in this slide might seem drastic, they have worked to keep unwanted materials out of the bins.

Slide 15



Knowing that that policy change was coming, I “won” a student intern who has worked to create signage that clearly indicates what can and cannot go into the bins. The original signage on the left matched existing recycling signage across campus but proved to be difficult for students to interpret quickly. So with the new signage on the right, we tried to give a few clear examples of what can and cannot be composted.

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One final unexpected setback has been the occasional appearance of fruitflies. While we've always had all of this food sitting in our trash bins, it has never been so concentrated, and therefore so very attractive to these little pests.

Slide 17

Natural Effective (!) Remedy

Apple cider vinegar
+
1-2 drops dish soap
+
Film "lid" with holes
=
24-36 hour miracle



"Fruit Fly Trap" by Uta Hussong-Christian

But even that problem has a bright side as there are VERY effective all natural remedies. Apple cider vinegar and dish soap works miracles within 24 hours...I promise! And you can use it at home, too.

Slide 18

Campus Leaders

"The library is a heavily-used space and we are conscientious about the amount of material we send to the landfill."



FAVE CHADWELL
DONALD & GELPINK CAMPBELL
UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN
& OSU PRESS DIRECTOR

#BeavsRecycle

Oregon State
#OSURecycles

"Fave Chaddell" by Anissa Norris / OSU Recycling

All things considered, waste diversion programs have benefits. The library is now seen as a leader on campus sustainability issues. Through my connections with the Campus Recycling staff, I was able to arrange for our library director to be photographed and interviewed for a campus wide poster and social media campaign last year. It is important to leverage the work we do, to reach out beyond the library walls, and this was one way to do that.

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Parting Words

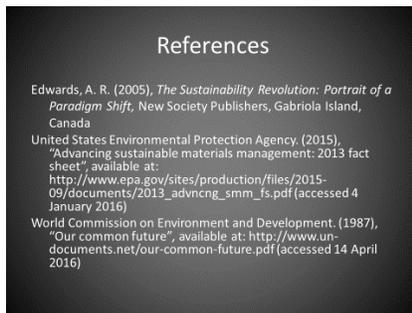
Programs such as these provide a means for sustainability to "become firmly established within the existing value structure of societies while simultaneously helping that value structure evolve toward a more viable long-term approach to system global problems."

Edwards, "The Sustainability Revolution"

Another benefit is the long-term value of this work. So I want to leave you with these parting words by author Andres Edwards. [pause]

We need to take advantage of our very public spaces and our presence on the campuses we serve. We can set expectations for how students should conduct themselves...as students and as global citizens. If we build these services, and the educational pieces that go along with it, students will change their behavior...not only today, but hopefully tomorrow and the tomorrows after that when they are long gone from our buildings. We can help sustainable practices become their default behavior...their new norm. This is how sustainability happens.

Slide 25



And now I'll turn it over to Barbara to tell us about her work at Grand Valley State University.