



Towson University 2020 RecycleMania Case Study

1. Contact info (name, department, school, email, phone)

Angela Ober

Facilities Management-Office of Sustainability

Towson University

aober@towson.edu

410-704-3712

2. Focus of Case study

TU's evolution of waste minimization on campus over the last three years—from rebranding outdated waste signage to ensuring all catered events are “zero-waste” ready.

3. Detailed description of campaign component:

Towson University's (TU) waste minimization efforts over the past several years has been concentrated on growing Zero Waste Events and highlighting the importance of sustainable alternatives. TU piloted its first Zero Waste event in 2016. In 2017, new marketing materials, including banners, can signage, table tents and educational presentations were created to support this effort.

Black & Gold, TU's in-house caterer, originally provided an option to make each event zero-waste for an additional fee. By fall of 2019, all events on campus catered by Black & Gold became zero-waste ready for no additional charge. All larger event spaces were outfitted with permanent compost cans, and biodegradable compost liners are provided upon request for all other spaces. This past semester, TU redesigned the Zero Waste materials to further promote this initiative.

To date, TU has hosted more than 3,000 Zero Waste events. Some notable events include TU's Family Crab Feast during Family Weekend in October, TU's Environmental Conference, and Tiger Pride Day (hosted at the state capital in Annapolis). These events, along with other food waste reduction efforts, contributed to the EPA recognizing Towson University with a 2019 Food Recovery Network Regional Award.

In addition, to highlight the importance of sustainable alternatives, TU promoted a “Waste Responsibly” Campaign during RecycleMania. “Waste Responsibly” was a slogan created by a TU student taking a Graphic Design Socials Issues class that focused on environmental issues. The TU student created a beta Waste Responsibly app that showcased proper sorting of specific dining packaging. The marketing materials extended upon this concept to suggest sustainable alternatives.

None of these efforts would be possible without extensive inter-departmental collaboration and communication.

As a result, the university has seen significant reduction in both landfill and single stream recycling, and an increase in compost collection.

4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- **2017**

- Zero Waste Event requirements reviewed with Catering, Events and Conference Services, Housekeeping
- Zero Waste banner created
- Stop & Sort Waste Signage created
- Waste 101 and How to host a Zero-Waste Event presentation created by TU Eco-Reps
- Zero Waste Event Planning Guide created
- Zero Waste Event Planning language added to TU’s Events & Conference Services’ University Standards Student Guide to Planning Events Document

- **2018**

- Zero Waste Event campaign launched for 2018 RecycleMania
- Event waste signage updated
- Zero Waste event menu added to Black & Gold’s ordering website

- **2019**

- Certificate of Achievement for Zero Waste Event created for organizations that held a ZW event and performed a waste audit
 - Accompanying waste report created
- General/Dining waste signage updated; “Know Before You Throw” signs created
 - Know Before You Throw door hanger placed on all residence hall room doors along with personal-sized, blue recycling bins for each room
- Black & Gold Catering begins to automatically provide zero-waste utensils to TU catered events.
- “Take what you want, but eat what you take” decals installed on sneeze guards of dining halls.
- Sustainability’s Waste Minimization Page Updated
 - Zero Waste Event Planning Guide Updated and added to page

- Zero Waste Event FAQs added to page
 - New waste signage added to website
- Student creates “Waste Responsibly” app in ART 465, Graphic Designs Social Issues class
- **2020**
 - Waste Responsibly digital campaign created for RecycleMania
 - Permission granted from student to use phrase
 - Graphics created with “This, Not That/Waste Responsibly” message
 - Zero Waste Event banner updated and created with “Know Before You Throw” paired banner

5. Resources and stakeholders involved

ABM: trained housekeeping staff on proper disposal of green compost bags. Hired its first Zero Waste Manager to work on zero waste operations at TU.

Art Services: updated the graphics and created the signage and banners

Black & Gold Catering: provide compostable utensils + serveware at all TU catered events; incorporated additional costs automatically into catering costs. Provided bulk options and reduced “portion container” items. Reduced proportion of extra food provided from 1.25 to 1.1.

Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility: sponsors the TU Eco-Reps Program, which conducted Waste 101 and How to Host a Zero-Waste Event PowerPoints. Worked with SGA to hold the first zero waste event in Maryland’s state capital, Annapolis, on Tiger Pride Day.

Dining Services: provided feedback on waste graphics in the first phase of the signage rebranding. Updated sneeze guard signage to include “Take what you want, but eat what you take” messaging.

Events & Conference Services: provide composting bags and trained staff on Zero-Waste events. Included zero-waste events language in student event planning guide.

Housing & Residence Life: coordinated placement of blue bins and door hangers for residence halls

SGA: Worked with the Office of Civic Engagement & Social Responsibility to make Tiger Pride Day a zero-waste event

Student Volunteers: (Mainly from: TU Eco-Reps, TU Student Environmental Organization, Food Recovery Network, and TU’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute’s Green Team) assisted with waste audits at larger zero waste events. Eco-Reps provided presentations to student organizations and offices on campus on topics such as Waste 101 and How to Host a Zero-Waste Event.

Student Affairs: Hosted TU’s largest zero-waste event, the TU Family Crab Feast, on TU Family Weekend

Sustainability: worked with TU Eco-Reps to create Waste 101 and How to Host a Zero-Waste Event PowerPoints; worked with volunteers to audit larger-scale zero waste events (so many audits). Worked with catering to convert to compostable and bulk alternatives. Supports other offices in zero waste initiatives.

TU Free Food Twitter Account: run by a GA from the College of Health Professions. Tweets events weekly with free food being served to address food insecure students and prevent extra catered food from being thrown away.

Costs for the 2019-2020 Academic Year

2019-2020 Academic Year	
Description	Amount
CRL Event Box Signs	8.25
CRL Event Signs	83.40
Crab Feast Tarps	56.26
Waste Posters- Know Before you Throw	1,074.75
HRL Know Before You Throw Posters- Overnight	958.07
Recycling Signage	208.65
Recycle Landfill Compost banners	346.60
2020 RecycleMania digital signage	502.50
Total	3,238.48

Note: the banners used existing hardware from the old Zero-Waste Event banners, which cost 416.80 to produce in 2017.

6. Describe the Results of this campaign component

a. General results

- TU articles that highlighted Tiger Pride Day and mentioned it being a zero-waste event:
 - <https://www.towson.edu/news/2019/tiger-pride-day-2019.html>
 - https://www.towson.edu/news/2020/tigerprideday_2020.html
- TU and EPA articles on 2019 EPA Award:
 - <https://www.towson.edu/news/2020/epa-award.html>
 - <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/marylands-towson-university-earns-regional-award-reducing-food-waste-america>

- Specific measurable impact figures:

Over 3,000 zero-waste events held on (and off campus). Notable events:

- **2016 Game Day during RecycleMania:** first zero-waste event at TU with a diversion rate of 91.86%
- **2017-2019 Environmental Conferences:** the 2017 Environmental Conference was not marketed as zero-waste. However, swag was to-go bento boxes and leftover food from catering was encouraged to be taken by attendees at the end of the conference. 2018 launched the first zero-waste Environmental Conference at TU

with a planet-friendly menu (all vegetarian/vegan). The 2019 Environmental Conference was also zero-waste and vegetarian/vegan.

- **2018-2019 Crab Feasts:** first zero-waste crab feast at TU. Diverted 1800 lbs. of crab waste in 2018 and 2019. Approximately 750 people attended each year.
- **2019 & 2020 Tiger Pride Days:** first zero-waste event held in MD's state capitol, Annapolis. 95% of waste was diverted from the landfill in 2019. The 2020 Tiger Pride Day diverted 93% of waste from the landfill (not including catering trash and TU swag boxes, which were not included in the 2019 data). Approximately 120 TU students attended Tiger Pride Day each year.
- **2019 Student Orientation:** this was TU's first zero-waste orientation. Each morning began with a quick zero-waste introduction and a light catered breakfast. Event cans were placed during breakfast to ensure food scraps and utensils were properly composted. Lunch was served in dining halls to prevent additional "event waste." There were 26 sessions total with approximately 5000 students and 3000 family members in attendance. During this time, about 3 tons of food scraps and compostable materials were diverted from the landfill. Before the new students and their family members came onto campus, "Take what you want, but eat what you take" decals were installed on the sneeze guards of the dining halls where lunch was served.
- **2018 – 2019 Waste Stat Impacts:** between 2018 and 2019 TU has seen a 207 ton reduction in landfill weights, an 87 ton reduction in single stream recycling and a 50 ton (35%) increase in compost collection.

7. What would you do differently in the future?

- The general and dining signage are both the same, and not specific to dining hall packaging. They are good in the sense of getting the overall message of what can be composted, recycled, and landfilled when packaging changes. However, it would be more beneficial to see packaging from vendors like Chik-fila, Panda Express, Einstein Bagels, and other companies that have compostable packaging.
- Have more buy in from all departments/offices. Everyone supports zero-waste events on campus, but there are issues with consistent messaging (signage at events, hosts addressing that an event is zero-waste, etc.), and accountability. Zero-waste events need to be an "everyone" responsibility.

Next steps would be to focus on wasted food reduction at events and instilling the "take what you want, but eat what you take" mentality. Another opportunity is finding more cost effective ways to display printed waste signage for events.

8. What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?

- If you're in need of updated waste graphics, now is the time to incorporate those graphics and messaging for zero-waste events.
- If you have in-house catering, ensure they can provide materials for "zero-waste ready" events and incorporating the costs automatically into the catering costs. Don't make it an "optional" add-on.
- Give the organization hosting the event incentive like an award certificate, or a waste report (example in Photos and Graphics section).
- Educate them when they are freshmen! Implementing orientation as zero-waste was a perfect opportunity to introduce composting on campus to new TU Tigers.

9. Photos and Graphics



Zero Waste Event Award

Zero Waste Event Audit
Tiger Pride Day
February 27, 2019
General Assembly Annapolis

Table 1. Relationship between compost, recycling and landfill reported weights after zero waste event.

Waste Stream	Unsorted (lbs.)	Sorted (lbs.)
Compost	63.1	60.82
Recycling	24.26	24.18
Landfill	3.84	3.84
Total	91.2	88.84
Diverted (%)	95.78%	95.67%

Very few outside items such as coffee cups or snack wrappers were observed as landfill items. The only materials provided by catering unable to be diverted from the landfill were plastic wrapping from bulk packaging, black plates and utensils that weren't compostable. These were utilized when the compostable plates and utensils brought on site for the event ran out. The caterer on site re-used all serve-ware such as plastic salad bowls, aluminum catering trays, and salad dressing containers.

Table 2. Accuracy of waste material found in respective waste bags after the event.

Waste Stream	Bag Accuracy (%)
Compost	98.52%
Recycling	99.74%
Landfill	100%

The event generated 91 lbs. of overall waste of which 95.67% was diverted from the landfill. Accuracy was attributed to volunteers stationed at waste locations. Only one compost bin was left unsupervised. Over 120 students were in attendance for Tiger Pride Day. The food ordered was planned to accommodate 400 people; between state delegates, staffers, Towson University faculty, staff and students. Little food was leftover— one large bowl of salad, about one catering tray of the entrée dish, and some desserts.



Stop & Sort Campaign signage from 2015 that led to current circular graphics for recycling, landfill, and compost



Zero-Waste Banner from 2017 & new rebranded banners consistent with new Know Before You messaging

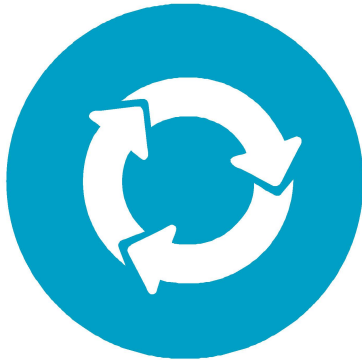
KNOW BEFORE YOU THROW

ZERO WASTE EVENT



2020 Throw

RECYCLE



**EMPTY
BOTTLES + CANS**



COMPOST



**FOOD SCRAPS
SOILED PAPER
PLA 7**



LANDFILL



**WRAPPERS
PLASTIC FILM
NO FOOD
NO BOTTLES / CANS**



LANDFILL



**PLASTIC PLATES
AND UTENSILS**



Event can signage created in 2018, with landfill customized for zero-waste events

The signage is divided into three columns. The first column is for 'RECYCLE', featuring a blue circular icon with three arrows forming a triangle. Below it, a collection of items including glass bottles, plastic bottles, paper, and cardboard is shown. The second column is for 'COMPOST', featuring a green circular icon with a leaf and a circular arrow. Below it, a collection of food scraps, biodegradable packaging, soiled paper, and compostable cutlery is shown. The third column is for 'LANDFILL', featuring a black circular icon with a white truck. Below it, a collection of wrappers, packets, and non-recyclables is shown. To the right of these columns is a grey triangular graphic with the text 'KNOW BEFORE YOU THROW' in large white letters. Below this, the website 'TOWSON.EDU/RECYCLING' is listed for more information and recycling locations. At the bottom right, the text 'RECYCLE UNIVERSAL WASTE!' is displayed in green, with a note that bins are located throughout campus. An image of a laptop, a smartphone, a lightbulb, and a recycling bin is also present.

RECYCLE

GLASS & PLASTIC
PAPER & CARDBOARD
METALS & CANS
NO PLASTIC BAGS

COMPOST

FOOD SCRAPS
BIODEGRADABLE PACKAGING
SOILED PAPER
COMPOSTABLE CUTLERY

LANDFILL

WRAPPERS & PACKETS
NON-RECYCLABLES

KNOW BEFORE YOU THROW

TOWSON.EDU/RECYCLING
FOR MORE INFORMATION &
RECYCLING LOCATIONS

RECYCLE UNIVERSAL WASTE!
Bins are located throughout campus

Know Before You Throw digital ad created in 2019. Messaging consistent with new dining signage



WASTE RESPONSIBLY

FEBRUARY 2 - MARCH 28

RECYCLE EMPTY BOTTLES, CANS, CARDBOARD AND CLEAN PAPER
COMPOST FOOD SCRAPS, NAPKINS, AND PAPER TOWELS



↪ **THIS** **NOT THAT**



CLEAN RESPONSIBLY
WASTE RESPONSIBLY



↪ **THIS** **NOT**
THAT



↪ **THIS** **NOT**
THAT



HYDRATE
RESPONSIBLY

WASTE
RESPONSIBLY



EAT
RESPONSIBLY

WASTE
RESPONSIBLY





SHOP RESPONSIBLY
WASTE RESPONSIBLY

TU
TOWSON UNIVERSITY



Digital campaign for 2020 RecycleMania featuring “Waste Responsibly” messaging



A 2018 zero-waste event held by sorority Phi Mu Phi Theta during the 2018 RecycleMania



Sorting at the 2019 Zero Waste Crab Feast



New updates to the TU Dining signage in 2019



A 2019 Orientation session



2019 Orientation's catered breakfast with compost bin available—drinks were served in bulk juice jugs, and all utensils, cups, and plates were compostable



2019 Tiger Pride Day with the old Zero-Waste Event banner



New Zero-Waste Event banner at the 2020 Tiger Pride Day



“Know Before You Throw” banner at the 2020 Tiger Pride Day