2022 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

Weigh the Waste Events at Chapman University

Contact info
Jenny Kaufman
Energy Conservation and Sustainability Manager
Office of Sustainability
Chapman University
sustainability@chapman.edu
(714) 628-7370

Focus of Case study
Increase awareness about post-consumer waste by collecting all the uneaten food from Randall Dining Commons for a lunch period and weighing it.

Detailed description of campaign or effort
The Weigh the Waste program at Chapman University was created as an educational tool geared toward promoting post-consumer food waste reduction. The program is a partnership between the Office of Sustainability and Chapman's Restaurant Services provider, Sodexo. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office of Sustainability hosted Weigh the Waste events several times a semester. On March 28, the Office of Sustainability hosted our first Weigh the Waste event in over two years. To kick off Earth Week, we hosted a second Weigh the Waste event on April 18.

During Weigh the Waste events, the Office of Sustainability collected the uneaten food off students' plates before they left the Dining Commons. After arranging the food onto trays, we calculated the weight of the discarded edible food waste. The trays of food waste were then put on display for the remainder of the day so that students could have a visual representation of the amount of food wasted in a single meal period. To increase student engagement, we posted pictures and videos of the food waste on Instagram and set up a Google Form so that students could guess how many pounds of food waste were generated. Whoever guessed closest to the actual amount won a set of reusable bamboo utensils.

Planning steps & timeline to implement

- Early March 2022: Collaborated with the Operations Manager at Randall Dining Commons to schedule the event and confirm the availability of necessary materials

- March 28, 2022: Hosted our first Weigh the Waste event
- April 18, 2022: Hosted our second Weigh the Waste event

Resources and stakeholders involved

Dining Commons staff provided all necessary materials, including a scale, trays, gloves, aprons, plastic wrap, and tables. The Office of Sustainability, which is currently composed of two full-time employees and two student assistants, hosted Weigh the Waste events with support from Dining Commons staff. The Office of Sustainability also provided bamboo utensils to students who won the guessing game.

Describe the Results of this campaign component

Both Weigh the Waste events reached their goal of raising awareness about food waste at Chapman University. Many students asked questions about the goals of Weigh the Waste and expressed interest in reducing their food waste in the future.

Additionally, Weigh the Waste events revealed which food items contributed the most to post-consumer food waste in the Dining Commons—grains, fries, and pizza. The Office of Sustainability noticed these issues and discussed potential solutions with Chapman's Restaurant Services provider, Sodexo. One of these solutions is for Sodexo to further promote their "Just Ask" program. This program encourages anyone to ask for a personalized plate (i.e., without a side) instead of taking a plate containing food that they have no intention of eating. Another potential solution is for Sodexo to display several versions of plates (with sides and without) so that students can take only what they plan on eating.

	March	April	Total
Event Participants*	914	845	1,759
Pounds of Food Waste Collected	152.5	92	244.5
Guessing Game Participants	17	8	25
Instagram Likes	83	54	137

Event participants were measured by the number of guests in the Dining Commons during Weigh the Waste events.

What would you do differently in the future?

Next year, we will set a consistent starting and stopping point when collecting food waste. During our March Weigh the Waste event, we started collecting food waste at the beginning of the lunch period (11:30 AM) and collected until nearly all students had left the Dining Commons (around 2:00 PM). For the April event, we decided to only collect food waste during the lunch period (11:30 AM-1:30 PM). Our food waste in April was much lower, but due to this difference in our methodology, we could not accurately compare our data between March and April. For future Weigh the Waste events, we have decided to consistently collect food waste from 11:30 AM-1:30 PM.

Additionally, we used plastic wrap to keep the displayed food waste from spilling or attracting bugs. However, we would like to explore plastic-free alternatives in the future to better align with our sustainability goals.

What advice would you give to another college that wanted to do a similar effort?
Some students were embarrassed about the amount of food left on their plate and were reluctant to participate. To avoid this, keep your messaging positive and emphasize that Weigh the Waste is meant to be an educational experience. Additionally, try to sort the food waste into categories. This makes it easier to see how much food is being wasted from each category or food group, allowing the dining hall to consider changes to the quantities of food they serve.

Photos and Graphics

Office of Sustainability staff at our April Weigh the Waste event (Photo Credits: Jenny Kaufman).

Instagram post for our April Weigh the Waste event (Photo Credits: Jenny Kaufman).

Google Form for our guessing game (Photo Credits: Megan Honey).