



## 2021 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study Competition

### *Lehigh University*

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

Dan O'Brien  
Associate Director Facilities, Custodial, Grounds  
and Athletic Buildings  
LU Facilities  
Lehigh University  
[djo318@lehigh.edu](mailto:djo318@lehigh.edu)  
610.758.3972

Katharine Targett Gross  
Sustainability Officer  
Office of Sustainability  
Lehigh University  
[kat516@lehigh.edu](mailto:kat516@lehigh.edu)  
610.758.3976

**2. Focus of Case study**

Pilot a pre-consumer composting program in one of Lehigh University's campus dining facilities.

**3. Detailed description of campaign or effort:**

Composting has been a hotly pursued project at Lehigh University for years. What appears to be a rather simple way of reducing waste on campus is, in reality, quite a complex system that must be carefully planned and managed to be effective. Effective February 1, 2021 a pre-consumer composting pilot began in the kitchens of the University Center, the main student hub on campus. Pre-consumer composting systems are simpler to launch than post-consumer composting systems due to a lowered probability of contamination. The goal is to expand this pre-consumer composting pilot to all dining locations across campus and, eventually, pilot post-consumer composting as well.

**4. Planning steps & timeline to implement:**

- Work with Sustainable Waste Solutions (Waste Management) to identify a composting vendor where they can haul the compost (Winter 2019)
- Purchase compost buckets and bins (Winter 2019)
- Revisit plan during Winter 2020 after putting the pilot on hold due to COVID-19
- Develop and print composting signage for the bins (January 2021)
- Train kitchen staff on what can and cannot be composted and the process for removing the composting from the prep areas to the loading dock bins (January/February 2021)
- Develop a pick-up schedule with Sustainable Waste Solutions (Waste Management) (January/February 2021)

**5. Resources and stakeholders involved**

**Budget or in-kind resources:**

Bins/toters: \$950.18

Composting Bags: \$90

Cost of Composting: \$1,342.92

\*Sustainable Waste Solutions charges to haul to American Biosoils

\*breaks down to roughly \$192/pickup over 7 weeks (\$165/stop, \$81/ton, 1/3 ton/week)

16 Compost Bin Labels: \$77.44

20 Composting Signs: \$55.20

75 Composting Hand Guides: \$16.96

**Total: \$2,532.70**

**Campus Partners:**

ABM Industries

Lehigh Dining

LU Facilities

Office of Sustainability

Sustainable Waste Solutions (Waste Management)

**6. Describe the Results of this campaign component**

**a. General results (ex: attracted attention of campus president, campus paper did a news story on the event, etc.)**

- i. Accomplished the first phase of the composting goal in [Lehigh's Sustainability Strategic Plan 2030](#). (See goal 19, under "Waste", on page 14)
- ii. Dining staff in the University Center were trained in pre-consumer composting.
- iii. Developed partnership with a composting vendor that Sustainable Waste Solutions contracts directly with.
- iv. Determined what worked and did not work through the pilot so that we can best expand it to other locations across campus.

**b. Specific measurable impact figures, if applicable (Ex: Reduced contamination rate 13%, Gathered 316 pledges to recycle more, etc., 250 people engaged, etc.)**

- i. 7 compost pickups with roughly .33 tons per pickup. This equated to 2.32 tons of compost total. This was lower than usual due to COVID-19 and having fewer students, faculty, and staff on campus.

**7. What would you do differently in the future?**

- a. Try to select a standard, more representative year as opposed to a pandemic year (limited occupancy on campus).
- b.
- c. Have a detailed cleaning plan in place for the toters prior to starting the composting program.
- d. Have a clear communications plan if there are issues with the compost not being picked up on time.

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

- a. Review all your options to seek out potential composting vendors as it can be difficult to find a partnership that complements your needs.

- b. Work closely with your food service provider to ensure buy-in and proper training to reduce contamination.
- c. Have a clear and concise pickup and cleaning schedule from the beginning.
- d. Start out small. Pilots are designed to be scalable. Every effort helps and is a step in the right direction.

## **9. Photos and Graphics**

*Please include photos and other visuals below, examples could include social media posts, posters or other graphics related to the project. Include captions where necessary. Please include credit information for all photos.*

[Outdoor bin setup](#) (Credit: Paul Rinaldi)

[Pre-consumer Compost poster](#)

[Pre-consumer Compost Do's and Don'ts Signage](#)

[Pre-consumer Compost Pocket Guide](#)