



January 27, 2011

To whom it may concern:

Since 2009, Furman students, faculty (including myself), and staff have been engaged in an innovative project to monitor the nature of Furman's waste stream. This student-led project to audit residential waste and monitor the amount of recyclable waste being landfilled is innovative in its breadth and its longevity (the students are now in the third consecutive year of the waste audit). I have been engaged in this project both as a faculty mentor for ongoing student research and as a member of the Campus Recycling Committee.

In the past five years, Furman has renewed its commitment to increasing recycling on campus. In 2005, our diversion rate for campus waste was less than 10% (by weight); in 2010, that rate reached 27%. However, there remains significant room for improvement. To investigate both how much and what types of recyclable materials are being disposed of in campus trash receptacles, Furman students Erika Baldwin '12 and Will Stallings '12 proposed to audit selected dumpsters on campus as a class project in the spring of 2009. Their results were striking; from the dumpsters they surveyed (primarily residential, although included two academic buildings as well) they found that 34% of the waste disposed of as trash could be recycled under Furman's current recycling program. If Furman were to expand the items it accepted for recycling to include glass and plastics #3-7, more than 60% of the items disposed of as trash could have been recycled¹.

Erika and Will (who were both first year students during their first audit) presented the results of their work at the national AASHE conference in 2009, and decided to continue to gather data on the campus waste stream in subsequent years. In spring 2010, they repeated the audit process, expanding their sample to include all residential dumpsters on campus. During the year, they worked with myself and staff from Furman's Facilities Services department to research Furman's current recycling program, assess programs at similar institutions, and begin to gather and analyze all of the information that would be critical for the development of an ambitious campus recycling plan.

Students are again this year auditing campus waste, and Furman will now have detailed data on campus waste for three consecutive years (2009 – 2011). At present, these students are working with myself, other members of the Campus Recycling Committee, and the Director of Custodial Operations and Special Events to develop a master campus recycling plan so that Furman can continue to advance its efforts in sustainability and recycling.

The student-led nature of this project, its duration over three years, and the detailed data collected across campus make this project unique and innovative, particularly in the southeastern US. This project has truly been led and sustained by the enthusiasm and commitment of the students.

Sincerely,

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¹ Furman recycles plastics #1 and 2, mixed paper, cardboard, and aluminum, along with electronic waste. Furman cannot currently accept glass or other plastics for recycling.