



Macalester College 2023 Campus Race to Zero Waste Case Study

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Focus of Case study:

We encouraged basketball game attendees to correctly sort their waste and redistributed Macalester swag items, which we diverted from the landfill and accepted as donations.

Detailed description of campaign or effort:

Our case study occurred on February 11th, 2023. The idea came from seeing the overwhelming pounds of Macalester “swag” we see end up in our Macalester free store, which we call The Free Swap. Every year Macalester-themed give-away items such as mugs, t-shirts, lunch boxes, water bottles etc., are brought to The Free Swap. These items are often purchased by campus departments to be given away at on-campus events or to incoming students. However, a significant amount of these give-away items are donated to the campus free swap. Some of it is donated from students and some of it is from offices and departments across campus. Many current students do not take these items from The Free Swap to match the rate of the amount of swag that is donated. They often sit there and take up space that could be used to give out more donated items students want. These swag items would either end up in the landfill or donated to organizations, such as Goodwill or The Epilepsy Foundation.

However, because they are Macalester specific items they often end up not being purchased from the organizations and still end up as waste. Because of the location of The Free Swap we struggle to get a high number of visitors in a short period of time. The Gameday Basketball Challenge provided the perfect opportunity to have a free swag pop up event. At the event we invited attendees to consider their purchasing habits of buying new and provided them with useful and applicable Macalester items we diverted from landfills. We discovered that the alumni and families of Macalester students that attended the basketball game were very enthusiastic to take these items. Because they already had a personal connection to Macalester, Basketball game attendees were more likely to want the Macalester-branded items compared to current students or the general public.

Planning steps & timeline to implement:

- May 2022: Began gathering Macalester swag materials from students and departments during move out and at the end of the academic year

- August 2022: Began sorting and organizing swag based on the items (ex: lunchboxes, clothing, mugs, accessories). Checked the basketball schedule to select a men or women's game that has good attendance and a good rivalry.
- Early January 2022: Reached out to the athletics department (coordinator, director, manager) to see if we could get space to hand out items and promote sustainability and waste diversion.
- 3 weeks prior to the event: Requested 3 tables for the event to display items for the giveaway, created signs to set out at the event and inform attendees about waste diversion, the free swap, and free swag
- 2 weeks prior to the event: Recruited 4 student staff to run the free swag giveaway, verified the space and set up for the free swag giveaway
- 1 week prior to the event: Packed items to be transported to the arena, shared an announcement about waste diversion to be read to attendees prior to the basketball game
- February 11, 2023: Showed up 1 hour prior to the event to set up tables and present items in a visually appealing layout.

Resources and stakeholders involved:

This event required coordinating with the athletics department and facilities department. The budget for the event was relatively low and our only cost was paying student staff. We had 4 student staff who helped host the event for three hours at a rate of \$13.50/hour. The Assistant Athletic/Facilities director was very supportive of our efforts and helped us find the perfect location for the pop up and promoted the event at the game.

Describe the Results of this campaign component:

- **General results:** Through this event our Sustainability Office bridged a relationship with our Athletic Department, which had not been there previously. We also heavily engaged with alumni and current students and staff/faculty. In addition, we were able to successfully divert reusable Macalester-themed items from the landfill. There were many alumni who began asking about our sustainability initiatives across campus and waste diversion goals.
- **Specific measurable impact:** The Free Swag Pop Up Event at the basketball game allowed us to give away around 90 lbs. of Macalester items. These items were successfully diverted from the landfill. In addition, the event allowed us to promote campus zero waste initiatives to 1,192 individuals that attended the three-hour game.

What would you do differently in the future?

This event was a very successful means of re-homing Macalester-themed reusable items. The event also allowed us to develop positive relationships with the athletics department, alumni, and community members. We plan on continuing to collect Macalester-themed SWAG from free swap donations to give away at athletic events and other public/alumni facing events on campus.

In the future, we will bring more items and a large sign to inform people items are free. We realized many people who approached our table felt very uncomfortable taking nice items for free. This is most likely them being used to societal norms where many things come with a price attached. Many people offered to pay or did not want to approach the table if we were standing right there, but would come and grab items for free if we stepped away. As people observed others starting to take items and walk away, then they seemed more comfortable.

These events are also an excellent opportunity to educate on-campus departments about the quantity of items that they are purchasing as "give-away" swag that end up in the campus waste stream. While we are happy that

we are able to divert these items from the landfill or incinerator through the free swag pop up event, we also recognize that the most sustainable products are those that are never produced. These pop-up events provide an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of reducing the overall quantity of swag items that are purchased on campus in order to prevent them from entering the waste stream in the first place.

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

The advice we would give to another college would be to start as early as you can to build a positive relationship with your athletics department and facilities. Also, begin as soon as you can to separate swag from other donated items. Work with departments/offices across campus to find out what they have left over and want to donate from prior academic years.

Photos and Graphics:

Photo Credit: Ellen Gurrola

