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Molly Bressers  
Program and Outreach Coordinator  
Campus Sustainability Office  
Portland State University

Dear Ms. Bressers,

I am excited to share with you some information about a unique sustainability effort that was developed this year at Portland State University. *No Scrap Left Behind* (NSLB) is a food waste diversion program designed and piloted at PSU to engage students in active learning around food waste and food diversion skills. The program engages students in food diversion in relation to its economic, social, environmental and health impacts. The program also seeks to help students develop some basic skill around food portioning and food diversion through in-person interactions, informational posters, napkin dispenser signs, and handouts.

NSLB partners with four Freshman classes who conduct waste audits on campus that are specifically looking at the amount of food waste that ends up in the landfill-bound waste. This creates two separate populations for analysis. First, students who are receiving specialized curriculum about food waste and who are conducting the waste audits and, second, the students who are only exposed to the educational campaigns in the dining hall that were created by the first group of students in the classroom. Besides the posters, pamphlets, etc., NSLB uses “food waste buffets,” or the curated display of uneaten food in the plate return area of the cafeteria to illustrate the amount of food waste that’s generated during the busiest two hours of lunchtime each day during the week.

Other universities have either pioneered or incorporated specific elements of our program such as food waste buffets or targeted poster campaigns, prior to PSU doing so. However, what makes PSU’s NSLB program both *unique* and *innovative* is the comprehensiveness of the program and how robust the data being collected is regarding student behavior change on campus. For example, the students who are in the classroom creating the cafeteria campaigns are crafting components of their efforts over the course of months. These months end up being for an entire academic year, in fact, during their entire Freshman year. These students are being administered the same survey twice, once before any word is made of either “food” or “waste” in the classroom and again 9 months later in their last collective classroom time. This survey was designed to gauge both the factual awareness of students regarding the food waste issue and its possible solutions. It also served to catalog students’ personal behaviors involving consumption and food waste. One of the big ideas driving NSLB is that in attempting to make change, we often change ourselves.

Students participating in the program were surveyed (convenience/snowball sampling) about knowledge and behaviors around food waste, both to open the discussion and assess the program. The weight in pounds of the "food waste buffet" is also a crucial component in gauging the success of both the outreach effort itself and the types of strategies used. The program success is further calculated by measuring the amount of student generated food scraps composted during the same lunch period (11am-1pm) the week prior to and after the week of the intervention each term. Thus, the effect of the program/volunteer presence in the cafeteria was assessed, as well as whether students change their behavior in response to that presence. Initial results showed in some instances almost a 50% reduction of food waste when representatives from NSLB were present in the dining hall, surveying diners and intercepting plates with uneaten food scraps. However, this reduction was not maintained in a week when no one was present.

Sincerely,

Anthony D. Hair  
Waste Management Coordinator  
Portland State University