

**The Graduate Student Assembly
The University of Texas at Austin**

Authors: Samantha Fuchs, GSA President
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Resolution: J.R. 19 (S) 3 - Endorsement of UT Sustainability Master Plan and Goal of Zero Waste Campus by 2020

Executive Summary: The University of Texas produces a significant amount of waste per year. In some ways, our policies align with our goals in the Sustainability Master Plan, but in other ways, we are falling behind our goals and the success of peer institutions. We seek to reduce waste on campus through education on composting and recycling, resource recovery programs, and the conversion to BPI certified compostable-only products for food packaging.

FAQ:

1. Why is this initiative coming from students?
 - A. This is a combined effort of the Office of Sustainability and Facilities Services, but requires additional support and outreach. So much of the waste on campus is produced by students, so students seeking change have a responsibility to educate our peers.
2. How can we afford more sustainability efforts?
 - A. Many different sustainability practices have different costs and benefits. For an example, the same number of transportation trucks for waste will be used, just only a portion will go to a landfill, a fuller truck will go to a recycling center, and a different portion will go to the composting center, so the cost is approximately the same. Additionally, efficient waste recovery costs less than exporting to a landfill and is a viable practice for the University and custodial staff. This is done by reducing the number of waste containers, reducing total waste, and using bins instead of garbage bins with plastic liners, saving money.

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WHEREAS (1): The University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) produces a significant amount of waste per year. The current waste diversion rate is 60% landfill, 22% recycling, 13% compost, and 5% reuse.¹ By using sustainable disposal of wastes through resource recovery, waste can be diverted to 48% compost, 33% recycling, 14% landfill, 4% liquids, and 2% surplus²; and,

WHEREAS (2): According to waste audits by Resource Recovery in Facilities Services, “Approximately 40% of waste from education and general use buildings is compostable.”³ For example, paper towel composting alone could eliminate more than 100 metric tons of landfill waste annually from UT Austin’s campus.⁴ A pilot project to compost paper towels is currently underway through Resource Recovery within Facilities, but without outreach and additional financial support, the project will have slow implementation and not reach the 2020 goal; and,

WHEREAS (3): Another issue is contamination between products in composting and recycling, with 20% of recycling containing non-recyclable products.⁵ Contaminated bins have to be sorted before recycling or composting, increasing the cost of resource recovery, or cannot be recycled or composted at all. This requires education of students and staff as to what materials can be recycled; and,

WHEREAS (4): A number of organizations on campus have successfully transitioned to more sustainable practices. University Athletics employs students for sorting waste after games, and successfully reached a 67.27% diversion rate of waste, with 94,746 pounds of material recycled, composted, or donated during the Texas Football season.⁶ University

¹ Beverage, M., Moddrell, B. “Zero Waste Initiatives at UT.” Feb 2019.

<https://utexas.app.box.com/s/jlmm4dlf7sazwyx2a5ebfh7j1grfme97>

² Ibid.

³ “Zero Waste Program.” Facilities Services. (2017). The University of Texas at Austin. Accessed 23 Mar 2019.

<https://facilitieservices.utexas.edu/divisions/support/zero-waste.php>

⁴ Ibid. “Zero Waste Program.”

⁵ Ibid. Beverage.

⁶ “Texas Athletics places third in 2018 Game Day Recycling Challenge.” 22 Jan 2019. TexasSports.com.

<https://texassports.com/news/2019/1/22/texas-athletics-places-third-in-2018-gameday-recycling-challenge.aspx?path=general>

Housing and Dining has multiple sustainability initiatives, including increased recycling and use of recycled product in housing and increased composting in kitchens⁷; and,

WHEREAS (5): A number of organizations on campus still have problems with sustainability. University Unions contracts with Aramark for finding external vendors for food products on campus. These vendors produce significant amounts of food service packaging, particularly cups, containers, condiment packages, and plasticware, which are non-recyclable and must go into a landfill⁸; and,

WHEREAS (6): Both Housing and Dining as well as University Unions are within the division of Student Affairs, but have inconsistency in their sustainability policies and directives; and,

WHEREAS (7): UT Austin committed to a Sustainability Master Plan in 2016. One of the general goals is to become a leader in reduction and diversion of waste, with a specific goal of becoming a zero-waste campus by 2020⁹; and,

WHEREAS (8): The master plan also calls for all UT food vendors to “participate in a food recovery program by 2020”¹⁰ - where edible but non-sellable food is donated (such as to the UT outpost) to people, to animal feed, or non-edible food to composting; and,

WHEREAS (9): STARS (The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) assesses higher education institutions for their sustainability on campus.¹¹ Currently, UT has a STARS rating of silver and Texas A&M has a higher STARS rating, at gold. We should be a leader in urban sustainability, and match our peer institutions in sustainability rating; now,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT (1): The GSA endorses sustainability efforts at the University of Texas at Austin regarding reducing waste and increasing recycling and composting education and support; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (2): The GSA calls upon the Office of Student Affairs to enact consistent sustainability policies across Housing and Dining and University Unions in order to reduce waste; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (3): The GSA calls upon the University Unions, University Housing and Dining, Texas Athletics, Rec Sports, the

⁷ “Sustainability Initiatives at the University of Texas University Housing and Dining.” (2015) University Housing and Dining. Division of Student Affairs.

http://housing.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/dhfs_sustainability_initiatives.pdf

⁸ Ibid. Beverage.

⁹ “Sustainability Master Plan.” Fall 2016. The University of Texas at Austin.

<https://sustainability.utexas.edu/leadership/masterplan>

¹⁰ Ibid. <https://campusplanning.utexas.edu/masterplan/documents/SustainabilityMasterPlan2016.pdf>, p. 52

¹¹ “The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System.” (2019.) AASHE.org. Accessed 23 March 2019.

<https://reports.aashe.org/institutions/participants-and-reports/>

AT&T Conference Center, O's Café, and other contracting offices to use only compostable products for food packaging. They must also require external vendors, upon their next contract negotiation, to use compostable products for food packaging. These products must all be BPI certified to comply with composting facility standards. If multiple vendors are competing for the same bid on the UT Austin campus, an assessment should be made of their sustainability practices to determine which vendor should receive the contract; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (4): The GSA calls upon contracting offices to include food recovery and composting strategies as a requirement of food vendors upon contract negotiation, as consistent with the sustainability master plan; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (5): The GSA calls for educational outreach to the student body to encourage students' awareness toward recycling, composting, and the potential contamination of those containers; this would include consistent signage across campus above recycling and composting bins; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (6): The GSA supports the continued work of Resource Recovery in their efforts to achieve Zero Waste at UT Austin, which includes composting paper towels, as well as other initiatives; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (7): The GSA supports efforts within the Office of Sustainability to change our policies and improve our reporting to STARS in order to be a leader in sustainability; and,

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT (8): This legislation be sent to the Office of Sustainability, the Office of Resource Recovery, the Office of Housing and Dining, Texas Athletics, Rec Sports, the AT&T Conference Center, O's Café, the Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs, and the University Unions.

PASSED by the GSA Assembly on April 10, 2019.

Signature of the GSA President: 