Trash Talk
Analyzing Disposal Streams in Ann Arbor

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MBA/M.S. Candidate 2017

DCA Winter Meeting 2017
St. Louis, MO

- Major: Economics in the Olin Business School
- Minor: Environmental Studies
- Introduced to the concept of composting
- Worked at a Human Capital tech firm after graduation
Back to School

- Joined the Erb Institute in 2014
- 3-year MBA/MS at the Ross School of Business and the School of Natural Resources & Environment
- Began my Environmental Masters Practicum in 2nd year
- Intended to focus research on environmentally sustainable urban growth in developing nations
Ross Business School Waste

- Waste stations included post-consumer compost and single stream recycling
- Changes in school’s café’s disposable packaging caused diversion confusion
- Bins appeared highly contaminated
- Classmates’ anecdotes indicated confusion, labeling, and access were issues
- Administration reluctant to implement change without evidence of need and desire
Ross Waste Audit & Education Day

Student Waste Sort | Measuring Stream Contamination

Student Waste Sort | Activities & Educational Games
Ross Results

- **250 lbs.** Waste Sorted
- **51%** Contamination
- **>350** Participated in Events & Data Sharing
- **>2,000** Awareness Raised with Public Sort

“I take pride in the fact that my school cares about composting and sustainability.”
School of Natural Resources Demands Compost

- Student interest in organics diversion
- Audited waste to assess diversion potential
- Coordinated with school’s facilitates and custodial staff to pilot a compost bin

Dana Compost Crew | Waste Audit to Evaluate Potential Impact of Implementing Compost Stream
Compost Bin Pilot

- Introduced locked compost bin in communal kitchenette in 2014-2015
- Piloted unlocked compost bin in 2015-2016
- Began zero waste policy for all food events in the school’s building in 2016-2017
Increasing Diversion 40%* by 2025

- Long way from meeting U-M diversion goal
- Interest in diverting organics met with road blocks and challenges
- University-wide incentives need to be aligned to encourage collaboration towards diversion & reduction goals
- Waste diversion options not readily accessible

*Below 2006 level
Localizing My Research Focus
Ripe with Opportunity

- Progressive history – lauded for being a sustainability leader
- U-M community influencer and dedicated to improving diversion initiatives & fostering sustainability culture
- Dedicated Solid Waste Fund collected through city millage
Ecology Center starts Michigan’s first recycling program in Ann Arbor with Drop-off Center.

1970

1978

City of Ann Arbor offers first curbside recycling contract.

Recycle Ann Arbor begins curbside recycling.

1981

Ann Arbor lauded as recycling leader.

1991

Curbside recycling expanded to weekly collection for all residents.

2000s

Ann Arbor lauded as recycling leader; 7 City Staffers in Solid Waste.

2008

Food Scraps added to seasonal compost service.

2009

Single stream recycling launched.

2010

City compost site opens to operate curbside vegetative organics collection.

2011

2014

All food scraps accepted in municipal compost bins.

1 City Staffer in Solid Waste.

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“Michigan becomes seventh state to outlaw bag bans”

- Waste Dive
Practicum Proposal: Recommend Opportunities to Improve Diversion

- Survey existing commercial sector businesses’ waste practices, concerns & challenges, and interest in diversion practices

- Develop tools for businesses to identify opportunities to reduce waste created

- Benchmark sustainability leaders and comparable cities
Benchmarking

- City organics programs & implementation
- Diversion enforcement
- Legislation
- Education & behavior change strategies
- Public space diversion infrastructure & strategies
- Diversion of other wastes like grease and bulky items
- Metrics & monitoring processes
MRF Emergency

“What in the World Is Going on with Ann Arbor's Recycling Facility”
- The Ecology Center

What happens to recycling after Ann Arbor fires plant operator?
- M Live
Business Waste Findings

100% Of businesses surveyed interested in municipal compost

2 Businesses pay a private hauler to collect compostables

>85% Believe pick-ups schedules do not meet need

>25% Of business not able to divert 25% of standard recyclables

~50% Of avg. restaurant trash contents estimated to be compostable

>85% Of businesses mention space constraints
“Expensive, dirty trash areas, people not properly disposing garbage in shared compactors, missed pickups, overflowing containers/dumpsters.”

“Our business has been active and supportive of recycling since the pre-commercial-recycling days.”

“Our city recycling dumpsters are often filled to the brim.”

“All of our food scraps end up in the trash instead of being composted. This greatly increases the amount of trash we are producing.”

“Pick up on Sundays!!!!!!”
Thank you!

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