Student Drivers Improve Western Michigan University’s Ability to Recycle

Introduction

I started my student driver position at the beginning of this term. After the first couple of weeks of getting to know where everything was, it felt like I was already contributing to making Western’s campus much more sustainable and more visually appealing. When I started this job, I simply saw recycling as trash that goes into one dumpster. Soon after I started this driver position, I quickly learned that there is a GPM (Glass, Paper, Metal), P/C (Paper/Cardboard), and regular trash dumpster.

Methods & Results

I now have three different bins in my apartment for each dumpster to help the sustainability around campus. The bins in my apartment consist of a GPM bin, a P/C bin, and a bin for regular trash. I have been able to share my knowledge with others around campus, explaining to them that there are two dumpsters for recycling and one dumpster for trash. This may seem trivial, but most students, from what I have noticed around campus, need an expansion of knowledge of which recyclable material goes in which dumpster. Thus, less contamination will fill up dumpsters, making them easier to recycle. Simple methods of removing contamination, sorting what is recyclable from what is not recyclable, from dumpsters and clusters around campus have helped tremendously for keeping the campus clean and sustainable. Whenever I encounter a student around campus who asks about recycling, I always tell them more about recycling then they ask for. I do this because the more public outreach and general knowledge known around campus about recycling, the better!

Commentary

As a driver, part of my job is to empty clusters, these are the stainless steel recycling centers on campus. I also perform dumpster checklists every Monday to make sure none of the dumpsters are overflowing on campus. I also pick up recycling from numerous buildings. This includes Styrofoam, glass, plastic, cardboard, ink cartridges, and various types of trash. We leave the Styrofoam in a trailer, when the trailer gets full, Dart Recycling comes to pick it up and they proceed to make picture frames, baseboards, rulers, clipboards and park benches from the Styrofoam WMU recycles! Since Styrofoam is very hard to break down, using

Styrofoam as pictures frames is extremely ideal. Without these tasks being done every week, dumpsters and clusters would overflow, and without sorting the recyclables, Western Michigan University's renown recycling abilities would most likely plummet. The numerous outreach projects within the Office for Sustainability only improves Western Michigan University's ability to recycle more efficiently.

Next Steps

Further public outreach will improve students' knowledge on how to recycle. This will ultimately lead to less contamination, because more students will know what recyclable material goes where; leading to a cleaner and more sustainable campus.

Pictures

An apron in a box for Styrofoam

A cluster in need of emptying

Styrofoam collected from campus that is used for multiple purposes as stated above

Extreme Contamination
References