

Johnson & Wales University Providence Waste Reduction

Johnson & Wales University

Essay:

Johnson & Wales University (JWU) in Providence, RI, is leading the way in sustainability with a comprehensive waste reduction program. Through strategic recycling, composting, meal rescue efforts, and mindful supplier and procurement choices, JWU is actively minimizing its environmental footprint. By leveraging data collection and reporting, JWU tracks progress and reinforces its commitment to a greener, more sustainable future. These initiatives are instrumental in advancing waste reduction and making a significant environmental impact. Highlights include student-run dining waste audits, the adoption of eco-friendly to-go containers in all-you-care-to-eat dining halls, a new partnership with Bootstrap Compost with three-stream waste containers, and a longstanding collaboration with a local pig farmer who collects back-of-house food waste. Additionally, JWU's Wildcat Food Rescue repurposes surplus food from labs and campus events to help feed the JWU community. Together, these initiatives showcase JWU's commitment to innovation and responsible waste reduction.

In Spring 2024, eight JWU students participated in a Directed Experiential Education (DEE) course focused on improving the campus dining experience through research, surveys, interviews, and site visits. They toured facilities like the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Center and visited peer institutions including Brown, Bryant, and Boston University to compare sustainability efforts and gather best practices—such as BU's approach to selecting efficient takeout containers. Their final presentation on April 23 to faculty, staff, and cabinet members emphasized the university's Guiding Principles: "Practice ethical citizenship in all aspects of university life." and highlighted JWU's progress as a self-operated dining program. The students proposed new initiatives, including eco-friendly to-go containers and a bean-to-cup coffee system, both of which were adopted by May.

Simultaneously, during the Spring and Fall of 2024, a dedicated student worker from the Sustainability Office led comprehensive waste audits across campus dining halls. The waste audits were created based on student feedback stating how they'd like to see composting and other activities that were implemented in their culinary labs being done in their dining and residence halls. The audits consisted of sorting and weighing food and landfill waste, including the disposal of plates and spoons at one specific dining hall. This prompted the Sustainability Office and Campus Dining to investigate alternative ways to dispose of these items.

These audits also have continued to provide invaluable insights, allowing Campus Dining and the Sustainability Office to monitor post-consumer food waste during lunch and dinner shifts. By analyzing student preferences and consumption patterns, the initiative not only reduced waste but also ensured that more food was being consumed rather than immediately diverted to compost. Additionally, the collected data played a crucial role in refining employee training and optimizing meal preparation, cooking, and serving processes. For instance, findings revealed that after three hours, a significant portion of chicken fingers was discarded at all-you-care-to-eat locations, prompting adjustments to minimize waste and enhance food efficiency.

From July 2023 to June 2024, JWU's all-you-care-to-eat dining locations used compostable clamshells, but fiber composting wasn't available in dining areas or residence halls, making their disposal problematic. To address this, Auxiliary Services, informed by the DEE internship and dining waste audits, switched to a well-researched, multi-use, durable, and eco-friendly takeout container. This student-driven change led to significant waste reduction, validating the students' efforts and showcasing their impact. The new eco-friendly containers not only reduced food waste but also eliminated clamshells from the landfill, creating a more sustainable, efficient dining experience for JWU students.

96,600 individual compostable clamshell containers were used in the 2024 fiscal year, which equated to 11,109 lbs. Therefore, 5.55 tons of waste was removed altogether from the waste stream once JWU stopped this purchase. Furthermore, with the cost of the previous clamshells being \$23,000 for the year, JWU was given a five-month ROI, with the cost of the new takeout container decreasing to a \$9,995.94 total first year cost. On top of that, with the cost to buy-in to the program being \$4.99, the university was given a total of \$12,245.04 in revenue.

Overall, JWU has spent \$9,996, with a total of \$12,245.04 in revenue, profiting \$2,249.04 in the first year, allowing them to fund further sustainability initiatives in the future.

In November 2024, JWU procured Max R containers made from recycled materials and partnered with a nearby, well-researched composting service, Bootstrap Compost. At three dining locations, two Max Rs were installed that separate landfill, recycling, and compost waste. Bootstrap was chosen as the preferred vendor, as they are able to compost fibers, such as compostable napkins, utensils, containers, cups, and pizza boxes. Bootstrap Compost does pick-ups on campus twice a week, and since launching this partnership with them on November 15th of 2024, 5,139 lbs. of compost waste has been diverted with Bootstrap alone.

JWU's commitment to composting dates back to 2014, when the university began a longstanding partnership with Izzo Brothers Pig Farm in Johnston, RI. Through this collaboration, a local pig farmer works closely with the dining team, collecting food waste an average of five times per week from three dining halls. Throughout the past year of this partnership, Izzo Farms has done 516 pickups from the three dining hall locations specifically, with 440 pounds per pick-up, with an estimated total of 227,040 lbs. Along with these locations, they also do pick-ups at one culinary facility on campus. The composting in the culinary lab teaches students to properly separate food waste and scraps, driving home the importance of keeping this waste out of the landfills well beyond their college years.

Throughout FY24, it was identified that removing the one-time use plastic k-cups from the waste stream would be another easy win for JWU. This would allow JWU to remove not only the pesky plastic from the waste stream but also the majority of the one-time use disposable paper coffee cups being used with them. By making this change, JWU switched to a bean-to-cup program, giving campus community members a fresh ground cup of coffee and the ability to use a reusable mug in-house.

Overall, these changes have reduced 328 cases of k-cups equaling 152.5 pounds of waste and 43,000 of the paper cups equaling 940.5 pounds of waste from ending up in the landfill. Making these changes cut a cost of \$22,323 with bean-to-cup start up costs of \$6,208, saving the university \$16,115 in FY25 so far.

Additionally, single-use cups in Snowden Dining Hall are now provided only upon request at the front desk, instead of being freely available, to prevent in-house use of cups that were intended for takeout. There is also work being done toward transitioning from plastic bottles to aluminum cans—and eventually to fountain dispensers—in the grab-and-go markets, a shift that will involve coordinating with Pepsi on available options. Plastic bags have also been removed from campus stores, with reusable JWU Wildcat logo tote bags now widely available.

JWU reduces waste in other ways, including the conservation of water and reduction in plastic water bottles. JWU's Fill it Forward program encourages the use of reusable tumblers and reusable water bottles. Filling stations can be found in all residence halls and almost every academic space and building, on multiple floors, with more being installed. This greatly reduces plastics in the waste stream and the need for the campus community to purchase or distribute plastic water bottles. On top of these filling stations, the university utilizes single-stream 23-gallon recycling bins in every campus building on multiple floor levels as well.

JWU Campus Dining also partnered with the organization Fork Farms, where a "Flex Farm" was purchased and utilized to grow greens for salads and meals at the dining hall, which played a big role in Dining's "Radius" program, a section of meal service that provides students meals with ingredients from within 200 miles of campus (these greens being grown right in-house at Snowden Hall, where students walk by every day to witness the process!)

Another waste renewal initiative includes JWU's collaboration with Mahoney Environmental Restaurant Cooking Oil Recycling, where the back of house sorts used cooking oil, fryer oil, and grease trap materials that are then picked up by the company and converted into raw material. This material can be used to manufacture new products such as renewable diesel and sustainable aviation fuel.

Not only is JWU Providence committed to sustainable dining through its reduction in single-use products and its initiatives to combat food waste, but the university is also passionate about food rescue and ensuring food security throughout the campus community. Wildcat Food Rescue is a JWU organization that collects leftover food from JWU culinary labs and repurposes it to give free meals to JWU students. This not only keeps usable food out of the waste stream, but also provides students with an extra, free resource to eat. In 2024, one of JWU's dining locations, Harborside Cafe, donated 1,120 lbs. to Wildcat Food Rescue. Furthermore, Campus Dining donated 350 lbs. of food to a local non-profit organization, We Share Hope, in 2024.

There were numerous opportunities for both internal and external marketing of these initiatives that took place. In the weeks prior to i

Another way that social media campaigns were used in a creative way to promote an initiative on campus was for the new 3-bin Max R containers. The bins were put in their permanent locations in advance of the program being rolled out with signs on them saying, "Coming Soon". Once they were ready to be unveiled, the JWU ECO students did a ribbon cutting and used social media to market the rolling out of the program and get the campus community excited.

Students from the ECO Office also took an active role in sorting waste at boxed lunch events organized by the JWU Catering team. These events, which welcomed 250 to 600 high school students, provided a hands-on opportunity to promote sustainable waste management. Waste sorting efforts focused on diverting food waste, cardboard lunch boxes, plastic water bottles, and landfill-bound materials, ensuring that recyclables and compostables were properly processed rather than discarded. Additionally, data collected from these events allowed the Sustainability Office to recommend improvements, such as identifying commonly wasted food items like specific sandwiches or salads. These events allowed for internal student engagement and one-on-one education, where students are showing JWU's priority by demonstrating proper waste management. They also allowed students to witness their efforts appreciated with their suggestions being put to action at the very next event they participated in.

There were also external marketing opportunities from these sustainability initiatives. For instance, Food Service Director wrote an article based on a JWU press release about the new partnership with Bootstrap Compost and the process of implementing composting at various dining locations. The article highlights student participation in composting and recycling efforts, giving them a key role in the university's sustainability goals.

The planning and implementation of these initiatives showcase JWU's commitment to environmentally sustainable procurement and responsible waste reduction. From launching an eco-friendly to-go container program and collaborating with Bootstrap Compost to repurpose fiber material, to supporting local food waste diversion efforts, the university remains dedicated to sustainability. Creativity and innovation have been integral, with student staff assisting in signage creation, while outreach and education efforts empower students to educate peers on waste reduction through dining audits. By identifying areas for improvement and prioritizing sustainable procurement, waste management, and student-led initiatives, JWU continues to set an example for a greener, more sustainable future.

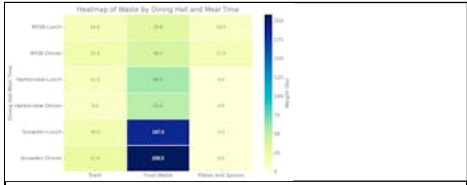
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DEE Presentatio... 4.9 MiB

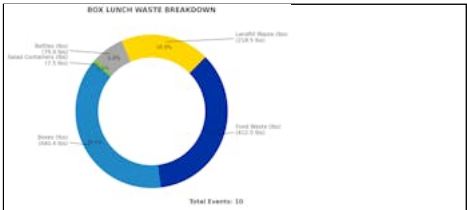


Dining Hall	Meal Time	Waste Volume
Harborside	Breakfast	100
Harborside	Lunch	200
Harborside	Dinner	300
Harborside	Snacks	400
Harborside	Drinks	500
Harborside	Waste	600
Harborside	Recycling	700
Harborside	Compost	800
Harborside	Landfill	900
Harborside	Other	1000

WASTE HEATMA... 129 KiB

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CONTAINERS.pdf 4.8 MiB



Category	Percentage
Food Waste	40%
Cardboard	30%
Plastic	20%
Landfill	10%

BOXED LUNCH... 125 KiB

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Sustainable Foo... 2.8 MiB

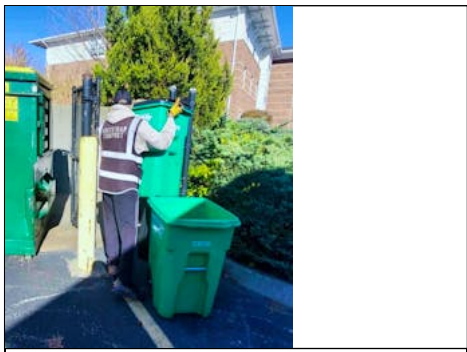
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NACUFS Infogra... 126 KiB



Category	Volume
Food Waste	100 lbs
Recycling	200 lbs
Compost	300 lbs

2.7sort(3).JPEG 665 KiB




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Reusable Clams... 126 KiB

XLSX

Izzo Brothers Pig... 11 KiB



Attachment name
JWU Dining Sustainability...

<https://dining.jwu.edu/s...>



Attachment name
Compost Article in Food ...

<https://www.foodservice...>

Attachment name
JWU Wildcat Food Rescue...

<https://www.youtube.co...>

Attachment name
Student advocated mark...

<https://www.tiktok.com/...>


Attachment name
Student advocated mark...

<https://www.instagram.c...>



Attachment name
Max R 3 Bin Waste Bin Ri...

<https://nam04.safelinks...>



Attachment name
Fill It Forward Program

<https://nam04.safelinks...>

Attachment name
Fork Farm Radius

<https://www.instagram.c...>