
# Boston College Recycling: A System in Review

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## Introduction

In this study, the researchers are assessing the state of the Boston College recycling program. In particular, the researchers are focusing on campus behavior towards recycling and what actually happens to our recycling after it is discarded. Through survey collection and analysis of national and university recycling reports, the researchers have been able to analyze the effectiveness of the recycling program.

The researchers hypothesized that:

1) The population of Boston College is not keenly aware of recycling procedures and does not care to fix their mistakes.
2) The university makes an effort to properly recycle, but most of the recycled products are not actually recycled.

## Methods

The researchers collected two different types of data in this study: primary and secondary. To collect primary data, the researchers sent out a survey to the student body about personal recycling behavior. The secondary data came from conversations with Erik Levy (Founder and President of Save That Stuff), Julianne Stelmaszyk (Manager of Regional and Sustainable Food Systems, BC Dining), and Bruce Dixon (Sustainability and Energy Specialist, Boston College), government reports, previous campus studies done on university recycling, and other gathered literature

## Discussion

Nationwide, we know the United States is currently using a fundamentally counterintuitive system: we're generating massive amounts of plastic for convenience and tradition sake, but we lack the capacity to properly store and manage said plastic. Boston College is limited by these broader systems, but it still seems as though it can improve. The waste diversion rate, which measures how much waste a given facility ends up recycling, is relatively low at BC. The rate on campus is 38.3% (Figure 1), as compared to our national average of 67.8% (Figure 2). Recent changes in international trade agreements have changed recycling practices and shrunk markets, which has led to a large supply of plastics to build up with few places to sell it, thus rendering it single-use.

Based on the survey that was filled out by 73 people on campus, people consider themselves a "recycler," according to Figure 4. A "recycler" is someone that takes the time to make sure their waste is properly disposed of. While the population may be enthusiastic about disposing their waste properly, they are not as enthusiastic to buy goods made with recycled products, as seen in Figure 3. The system of recycling was created to be a somewhat closed feedback loop of plastic to limit future production of more plastic, with little space to dispose of it. If those who consider themselves "recyclers" are not looking to buy a recycled good, the system will be inundated with plastics doomed for a landfill.

## Results

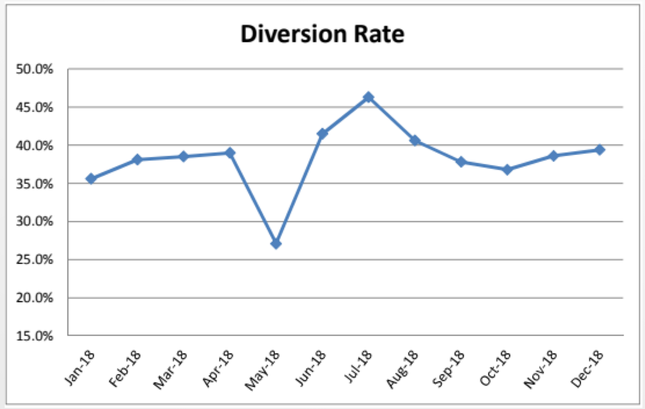


**Figure 1:** This graph depicts the diversion rate for Boston College during the 2018 year. The diversion rate for 2018 is 38.3%.

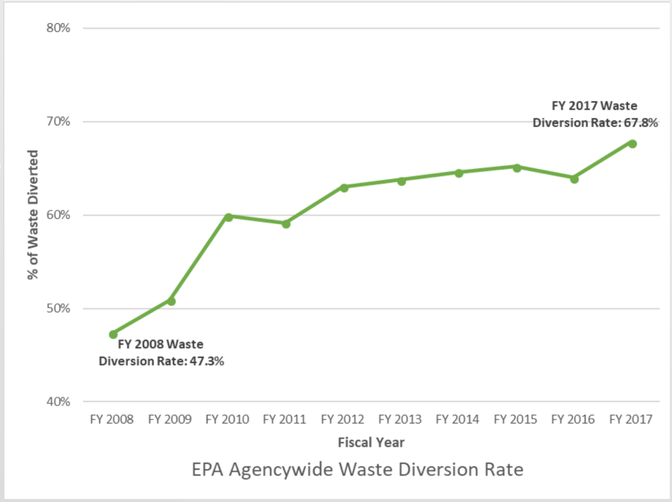


**Figure 2:** This graph depicts the diversion rate for the United States from 2008 to 2017, according to the EPA. The 2017 diversion rate is 67.8%.


**Figure 3:** This graph depicts the answers to one of the survey questions sent to the population of Boston College. The sample size was 73 people.

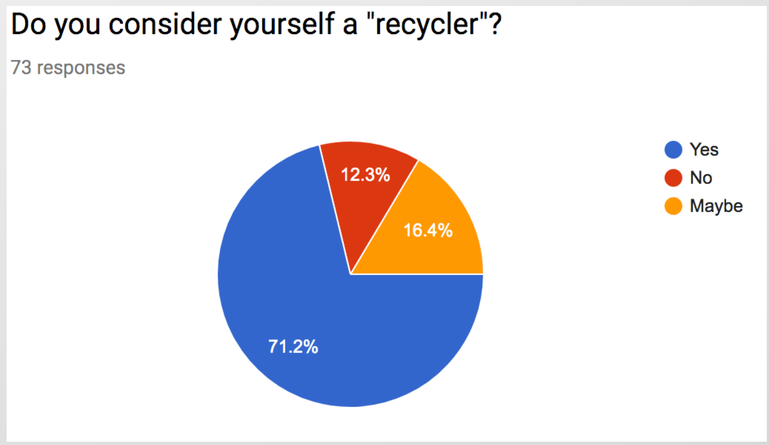


**Figure 4:** This graph depicts the answers to one of the survey questions sent to the population of Boston College. The sample size was 73 people.

## Recommendations

- Switch to multi-stream recycling from single-stream recycling
- Incorporate education on recycling within natural science classes to help people understand the system as a whole
- Have Boston College purchase recycled goods to stimulate recycling market and habituate campus behavior of using recycled goods
- Replace any disposable plastics, especially in the dining hall, with compostable products
  - Example: compostable bowls instead of the current plastic salad bowls used in Eagles Nest
- Place single-use plastics near a recycling bin to stimulate recycling

## Bibliography


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