The City College Waste Stream, Part II: Removing Barriers to Paper Recycling

Objective: Investigate and analyze the persistent barriers to satisfactory paper-recycling at City College, and draft a report that recommends specific practical solutions.

Background: New York City currently generates approximately 13,000 tons of solid waste per day, and pays approximately $68 per ton ($884,000/day) to transport it to landfills. The cost is a burden on the taxpayer, and the disposal process is a burden on the environment. Consumers Union has filed a report to the Mayor emphasizing the urgency of this situation, and the New York City Department of Sanitation has begun implementing a recycling program for many components of the waste stream, including paper. However, the City College of New York—an institution supported by New York State and New York City—has been ineffective in this recycling effort. City College paper waste, in substantial quantities, is mixed with non-recyclable waste and carted off to landfills. How can we explain the College’s lack of motivation to recycle its paper? Issues of cost, logistics, and psychology present themselves as potential barriers. Another plausible contributing factor is the relationship of the New York City Department of Sanitation with the College and its neighborhood. We need to thoroughly understand the barriers to recycling College paper waste, and to devise a plan for surmounting them.

Suggested Approaches: Interview relevant College administrators to gather perspectives on the problem, and to obtain information on, e.g., the costs of separating paper and completing the recycling process. Survey faculty, staff, and students to determine the extent to which they dispose of paper waste in the designated containers. Investigate their reasons for complying or failing to comply with the requirements of the recycling process. Solicit suggestions that would help raise the rate of compliance. Identify problems in the City system of trash collection that may make it difficult for the College to comply with paper recycling regulations. Taking a broad view of the recycling program at the College, search for any additional obstacles and further investigate as called for. Draft a comprehensive report on the College paper recycling effort that outlines the major obstacles to successful implementation and suggests ways to overcome these obstacles.