



Brandeis
UNIVERSITY

College & University Case Study

Brandeis University

With an enrollment of approximately 5,000 students, Brandeis University's campus spans 100 buildings, including two dining halls, five food retail locations, and 19 campus residence areas. Brandeis University is a research institution located 9 miles west of Boston. To further enhance the institution's recycling and composting program, their waste hauler suggested contacting RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts (RecyclingWorks) for support with dorm and public space recycling. During the same year, Brandeis also began planning a strategy to incorporate sustainability goals into a new food service contract. The steps taken by Brandeis University to implement its programs offer a learning opportunity for other businesses and institutions.

At A Glance

- **Brandeis University** is a research institution in Waltham. Their 235-acre campus includes two dining halls.
- Through a focus on food service contracting, the university established a performance plan for their third-party food service provider focused around eight key sustainability goals.
- Waste diversion priorities at the institution include recycling and composting education, reuse during student move-out, food waste reduction, expanding compost access, and eliminating recycling contamination.
- Through these initiatives, Brandeis University has reduced waste, engaged students, staff and faculty, and garnered positive press for its efforts.



info@recyclingworksma.com | recyclingworksma.com | (888) 254-5525

RecyclingWorks in Massachusetts is a recycling assistance program funded by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and delivered under contract by the Center for EcoTechnology that helps businesses and institutions reduce waste and maximize recycling, reuse, and food recovery opportunities.

Program Logistics

Dining Services

In 2019, the institution proactively incorporated considerations for recycling, composting, reducing waste, and minimizing contamination into their new contract with a dining services provider. This initiative had support from many stakeholders, from students up to the Vice President of Operations. Mary Fischer, the university's Sustainability Programs Manager, led the effort by developing request for proposal (RFP) language articulating the intent to address triple bottom-line goals through procurement practices and waste reduction in operations.

After selecting a service provider, a team at Brandeis developed a performance plan to incorporate sustainability goals into the contract, drawing on research about existing sustainable dining programs and incorporating elements that were aligned with the university. Throughout the process, the team's decisions were

informed by collected data. For example, in considering food purchases, Mary and a group of students benchmarked current purchasing practices to create a baseline, as well as a list of possible attributes related to sustainability. Together with their dining provider, Brandeis also identified a data collection strategy for measuring success, while engaging students in data analysis.

The university's performance plan encompasses eight metrics, four focused around food, and another four focused around waste. Metrics associated with the latter include aims to reduce waste in the dining halls, minimize recycling contamination, increase diversion rates, and reduce single-use disposable items.



Brandeis University's Sustainable Dining Metrics:

- Reduce the carbon footprint of food purchases by 2% annually
- Increase the quantity of food purchases that were produced in New England by 2% annually
- Increase the procurement of foods with sustainable attributes by 2% each year
- Increase the annual consumption of plant-based foods to reduce the ratio of meat-based to plant-based protein purchases
- Reduce waste generated by weight or on a per-meal-served basis
- Eliminate rejected loads from the waste hauler due to contamination in the recycling
- Increase recycling and composting in dining halls
- Reduce the distribution of single use items from the dining halls



While shifts in operation due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the institution's goals in 2020, Brandeis reduced disposable service-ware by offering the ability to opt-out when ordering meals to-go, and by installing individual on-demand utensil dispensers instead of providing full utensil packets to every student by default. Additional plans to reduce single-use items include continuing a pre-COVID-19 initiative to reduce bottled water sales in retail locations on campus, and to investigate innovative ways to encourage more reusable mugs at retail dining locations.

In January 2020, the institution also began using [Leanpath](#), a wasted food tracking system, in the kitchens to analyze quantities of waste generated. The data has supported informed decision making, such as adjusting menus and food preparation to eliminate waste before it is created.



BOXED MEALS: SEPARATE THE WASTE

A: RECYCLE empty box, empty clear plastic container, empty water bottle
B: TRASH chip bag, condiment packets, plastic utensils & plastic wrappers

NO FOOD IN RECYCLING BIN

RecyclingWorks Resources:

- [Colleges and Universities](#)
- [Source Reduction of Food Waste Guidance](#)
- [Single Stream Recycling, Mattresses, and Textiles Materials Pages](#)
- [Business and Institutional Furniture and Office Equipment Reuse Guidance](#)
- [Resource Management Contracting](#)

Brandeis University joined hundreds of businesses, institutions, non-profits, community groups, and municipalities by becoming a [Recycle Smart Partner](#).

Sign up today to play an active role in promoting better recycling in Massachusetts.



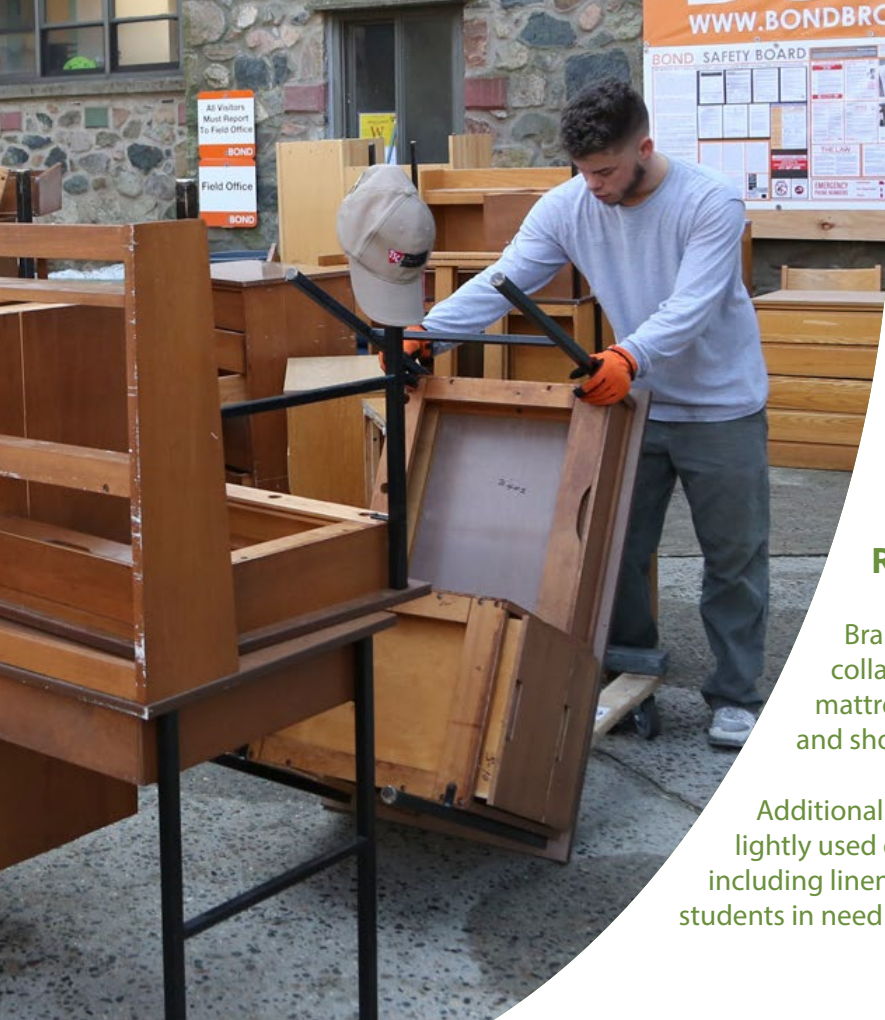
Education & Awareness

In the summer of 2019, the university contacted RecyclingWorks for support in updating trash, recycling, and compost collection signs used across campus. New signs were developed to include current images of items that can be placed in compost and recycling collection containers. Additionally, recycling education was incorporated into student and staff orientation to institutionalize recycling at the university. Brandeis is also developing a new online training for anyone on campus, featuring student-made videos that teach how to separate items into trash, recycling, and compost bins.

Reuse

Brandeis University has several initiatives to promote furniture and textile reuse. Through collaboration with [IRN: The Reuse Network](#), the school donated surplus furniture and mattresses in 2017 and 2019 for reuse as opposed to disposal. Brandeis also hosts clothing and shoe donation bins that are serviced by a local thrift store.

Additionally, the institution has partnered with the non-profit organization [Grad Bag](#) to upcycle lightly used dorm room essentials that are generated during student move-out. Recovered items, including linens, pillows, rugs, storage containers, and hangers, are then redistributed to both students in need in the Boston area and incoming Brandeis students.



Program Evaluation

Sustainability efforts at Brandeis have resulted in positive attention for the University, including a [Recycle Smart MA Partner Spotlight](#). Highlights of these diversion initiatives include:

- **2017: 29 tons of material recovered for reuse, including surplus furniture donated to IRN and student items collected during move-out**
- **2018: 12 tons of material donated for reuse during move-out and during a campus book donation drive**
- **2019: 33 tons of material donated during move-out**
- **2015-2021: increased composting rate from 2% to 12% of campus waste**

Visit the university's new interactive sustainability dashboards for more information about its [waste diversion](#), [dining](#), and [carbon footprint](#).

The benefits of these efforts go beyond diversion metrics. Incorporating sustainability or waste diversion goals into contracts can be a beneficial way to articulate and collectively work with a service provider. These initiatives have been well-received on campus, and positive feedback about waste reduction has been shared with the university's dining services program. Overall, the program has resulted in positive attention, a reduction in materials disposed, and an opportunity for student education. This approach laid the groundwork for supporting sustainability goals far into the future.



Connect With RecyclingWorks:

Contact RecyclingWorks to learn more about [free technical assistance](#) opportunities.

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