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Environmental State of the College Report
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Paper Usage

Introduction

Recently, an ad aired on local television stating that Minnesota has double the number of trees that it had in 1930. Why, then, are the environmentalists on campus making such a fuss about reducing paper usage? The reasons are more varied than you might think. Paper that is not recycled ends up in landfills, and can account for up to 40% of the municipal solid waste in some countries, including the United States. Additionally, paper manufacturing is the 5th largest consumer of energy in the world, and uses the most water of any industrial process in the world. Air pollution also results from paper production. (Worldwatch institute URL)

As this paper reports, Macalester College is and has been a large user of virgin paper materials. There are many ways that Macalester has lessened its impact on the environment and landfills, but there are still better strategies that would reduce Macalester's environmental footprint.

Data

Past data for Macalester's paper usage has been reported differently each year since 2000, when the first studies were made. Some reported very clearly the paper amounts, and some did not. Also, many of the reports included notes about how paper was being wasted.

In 2000, it was reported that the purchasing office, which is responsible for all paper used on campus (except for document services), used paper that was 30% post-consumer recycled fibers, 30% total-recovered fibers, and 40% unknown fiber source. Information was not gathered from document services. It was also noted that the network was very slow, and print jobs were

sent multiple times due to frustration and large print jobs were eventually printed and left unused. Also, double-sided printing was generally unavailable, unknown of, or discouraged. (Crawford 2000)

The survey in 2001 was conducted as a follow-up to the 2000 survey. They came up with a lot of positive information as well as more suggestions. For instance, the number of *Today's* printed since 2000 had decreased from 400 daily to 300 daily, and was expected to drop to 200 by 2002. Also, Jim Jeffers, formerly director of purchasing, reported that paper demand has decreased from 1 pallet per month (or 200,000 sheets), to 11 pallets per year. They also included a survey portion where they asked students to what degree they recycled, and most at least were partially aware and recycled at least sometimes. Document Services was interviewed for the first time, and a figure of 300,000 sheets of paper per year was reported. Also, purchasing switched paper types to one that was still 30% post-consumer recycled content, due to availability. (Reuling 2001)

The 2002 report did not report any significant data, but the 2003 report did. They reported that the library used 600-650,000 sheets per year, and that document services used 200-250,000 sheets per year. The report stated that 30% post-consumer content was still being used for campus-wide needs, but it was unknown what type of paper document services used. (Aargyridou 2003) According to records provided by Danise Dembouski, paper use per student has not shown a significant trend over the past 4 years.

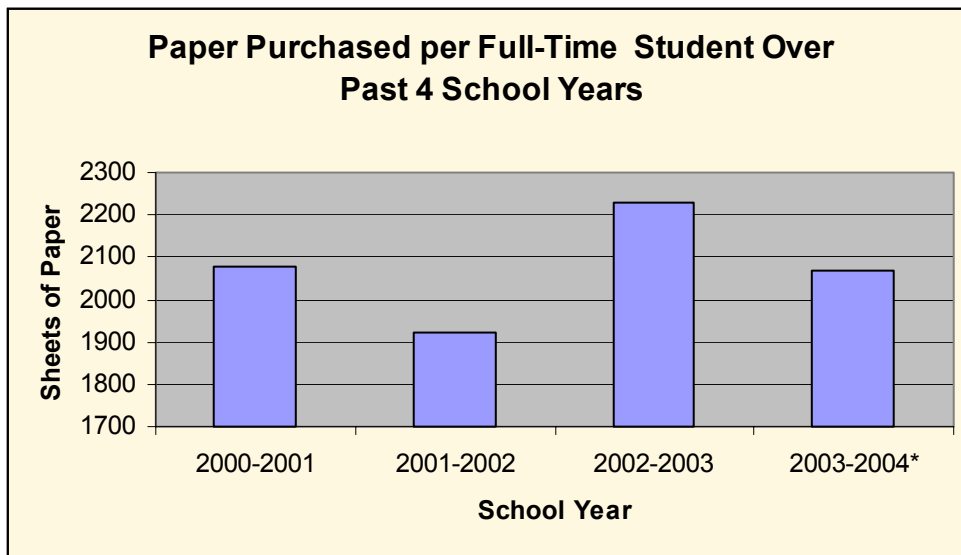


Fig. 1-This shows the amount of paper bought by purchasing divided by the total number of full-time students for each of the past 4 school years. The 2003-2004 total numbers are projected. Source: Danise Dembouski, Purchasing, Macalester College.

Figure 1 shows that there is no significant trend in paper usage over the past 4 years, but data from previous years were unavailable. Additionally, data from document services were unavailable, except for an estimate that an additional 1143 sheets of paper will be used per student for this school year (Paul, Personal Communication). The total number of sheets that will be used for the 2003-2004 school year is estimated at 5,900,000 sheets.

Purchasing still uses Great White 30% post-consumer content paper (International Paper URL). The paper that document services uses does not contain post-consumer content paper (Boise Cascade URL). Both types of paper are elemental chlorine free, but still use a chlorine compound whose environmental impacts are unclear.

Changes

Some positive changes have been made since the 2000 report was published. The network has become considerably faster, and the printing program has become more user-friendly. This, presumably, has led to fewer accidental printings. Newer software and printers also allow for 2-sided printing, as well as an option that allows for pages to be shrunk to fit 2

pages on the same side. Many professors offer course readings online rather than printing them off, which may lead some students to not use paper at all for these readings (whether they read them online or don't read them at all is another issue). The usage of these options is currently unknown. In addition, the library has installed a second printer that reuses paper that has been printed only on one side.

Recommendations

Many of the previous reports made recommendations for how to curb paper usage at Macalester. One popular option is to charge students for every sheet of paper they print off. While this has become feasible from a software perspective, it would generally not gain much support from students. It would certainly make students conscious of their paper usage, and hopefully lure them into the habit of printing double-sided, reusing paper, or reading materials off of the network without printing at all.

Another recommendation is simply to make students, faculty, and staff more aware of their printing options. This could help more students who may not know how to access materials off-campus or faculty/staff who are not familiar with how to put materials online. It would also help everybody accept materials that may be printed more efficiently (single-spaced, double-sided, etc.), or convert more correspondence to electronic means. The standard paper format for most professors has always been 12 point font, double-spaced, with large margins, and often single-sided. However, reducing to 10 point font, 1.5 spacing and smaller margins printed on both sides could save thousands of sheets of paper and still leave room for professors to comment on papers. This option will garner support from most of the college because it will actually save the college money.

Computers should be set up to print in an efficient, but still readable fashion. If computers defaulted to double-sided, many people would just start to accept it as the norm. If this is not an option, the computers should contain easy-to-follow directions to allow double-sided printing. Additionally, the feasibility of centralized copiers to be used as printers should be looked into because they are easy to print double-sided and actually print cheaper and faster than the current printers used.

A slightly more political campaign would be to lobby document services and purchasing to buy paper with a higher recycled content. The contract with Document Services is to be renewed in 2005, and the contract should be changed to require a high-content recycled paper product. Additionally, Purchasing is bound by the Talloires Declaration, and should at least be open to the option of increasing recycled paper content, even if it means a slight increase in price.

Aspirations

While Macalester has done a lot over the past few years to reduce paper usage, there are still colleges setting a higher curve and using less paper. While most colleges are on par with the 30% post-consumer content recycled paper, Lakeland College only allots 150 sheets of paper per student per year. This would help the implementation of a per-sheet charge because it would seem more like a guideline for number of pages to use, and students could avoid monetary penalties for over-use by efficiently printing, and convincing professors to accept efficiently printed materials. Bates College has purchased paper that is 80% post-consumer recycled. Red River College reduced its paper usage by 8% despite an increase in student body simply through a program of raising awareness of paper usage. Manuals that were formerly printed were transferred to a CD format, along with general paper usage awareness across the campus.

Sources

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