

Project Goals

This initiative's primary goal has been to sustainably dispose of the food waste produced by Ex Libris Café, Harper Café, Hallowed Grounds Café, and Cobb Café, reducing the university's carbon footprint. Introducing composting at all four cafés has had a major positive environmental impact on the university. Because we already had the framework of composting at Ex Libris, Harper, and Hallowed Grounds, expanding to Cobb Café has proven to be a simple transition for members of the cafe team, as well as members of the Phoenix Sustainability Initiative (PSI). This program reduces the amount of university-produced food waste in Chicago-area landfills; tens of thousands of pounds of organic material have been composted from the program. Secondly, it has augmented awareness of sustainable practices for the university community, increasing pro-climate actions at the university beyond composting. The Urban Canopy in collaboration with PSI facilitates pickups and dropoffs for the used coffee grounds, and the grounds are then turned into compost, reducing the University's greenhouse gas emissions. The expansion of this program has scaffolded the existing infrastructure of the successful café composting program, including training guides, partnerships with building managers, and marketing. The expansion of this initiative is vital in augmenting the university's waste management practices and carbon reduction goals.

Implementation

The Urban Canopy (TUC) has continued to partner with the campus cafés to coordinate pickup and dropoff of materials. All three cafés have requested larger bins than previous funding cycles due to the success of composting implementation. Thus, TUC has brought Hallowed Grounds and Harper Cafés a 35-gallon bin every Friday. Ex Libris Café uses a 35-gallon bin and a 7-gallon bin every week. As estimated by the employees of Cobb Café and the other three student cafés, Cobb Café has used two 7-gallon bins every week. These bins will continue to be stored in the barista-only section of the cafés, preventing contamination by those not trained on composting practices. Parker McWatters has offered his continued support in program management. Employees have continued to use existing pickup locations; Cobb Café shares a pickup location with Harper Café. Baristas are responsible for bringing back the newly swapped-out, clean receptacle that Urban Canopy leaves behind; these tasks are already in training manuals.

Outcomes

This quarter, the student cafes have diverted nearly 5,000 pounds of coffee grounds in total. All cafe members have been trained and have vocalized their appreciation for the program. Beyond the consistent diversion of coffee grounds from the landfill, Campus Composting has partnered with Student Cafes to celebrate diverting a total of over 50,000 pounds of coffee grounds through a promotional drink and the promotion of other Campus Composting initiatives. The cafe composting program continues to be a success, and we will continue to look for permanent funding for this program to establish it as an integrated part of the University of Chicago's sustainable practices.