

## JLH Waste Audit Summary Report Spring 2016

The waste audit of the Jarecki-Lacks Center and Grace Hauenstein Library (“JLH”) measured the waste collected from Friday, April 15, 2016 at 10am to Wednesday, April 20, 2016 at 10am, 5 days in total. The waste was weighed in its original bags (trash, recycling, composting, and special collections) and then each bag was sorted into the aforementioned categories. (“Special collections” represent an assortment of specialized waste streams including Terracycle, Goodwill, E-waste, ink cartridges, batteries, and Styrofoam). The audit strived to determine the contamination rate in recycling, composting, and special collections, and opportunity rate in trash.

Prior to sorting, the total waste weight was 156.35 pounds, with an impressive diversion rate of 80.7%. The actual weights of the categories pre and post-sort can be found in Figure 1. If everything was properly sorted by occupants, JLH could have achieved a final diversion rate of 91.9%, 11.3% greater than the original. Based on the Zero Waste International Alliance definition, the building could be labeled “zero waste” with a 90% or higher diversion rate.

Waste Category	Trash	Recycling	Composting	Special Collections
Pre-sorted weight (lbs)	31.65	64.41	44.73	15.56
Sorted Weight (lbs)	12.62	66.48	59.74	17.51

*Figure 1: Waste audit weights by category*

### Details of the contamination/opportunity

Only 32.4% of what was in the trash bags was actually trash. The opportunity for diversion was largely compostable paper, food, recyclable plastics, recyclable paper, and Terracycle. The majority of the opportunity was food or beverage containers/wrappers, revealing that trash weights could be greatly reduced if all food containers were placed into their proper bins. Contamination in recycling was much lower, as only 8.7% of the waste in recycling was not a recyclable material. Most of the contamination was compostable paper and non-recyclable plastic, revealing that people grasp the concept but don’t pay enough attention to the type of paper or plastic they are recycling. There was a 6.5% contamination rate for composting, most of which was recyclable paper and plastic, once again showing some don’t understand the differences between compostable papers and plastics, and recyclable papers and plastics. Special collections only had a 0.32% contamination rate, which was in Terracycle (compostable food wrappers).



*Campus Sustainability Interns Sorting Waste (From left: Greta Baragar, David Paquet, Malory Maletic)*

## Takeaways

The trends from this audit show that the AQ community still relies greatly on the convenience of just throwing everything in the trash. They also show a continued misunderstanding of what makes a paper/plastic compostable or recyclable. However, it is suspected that contamination levels of JLH are far less than other buildings, based on anecdotal evidence. The findings above represent opportunities for getting us closer to zero waste and creating targeted educational messages in buildings.

Opportunities for improving our diversion rate include:

- Providing education on the benefits of sorting trash (cheaper for the school, etc.),
- Hosting trainings specifically focused on composting and recycling paper/plastic and why it's important to understand the differences.
- Making the trash less convenient to access. (This strategy could potentially increase the contamination in other categories, however).