

RecycleManiac:

One Man, One Dog, and One Grocery Bag Respond to the Challenge

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[Note: An asterisk () in the text indicates a slide change.*

At last month's Faculty meeting, we the faculty were challenged to take part in Recyclemania. I decided to accept that challenge--in fact, I was pretty sure I could win. Let me back up a little bit...

*The story begins with my dog. His name is Dylan. Dylan was born and raised in an urban area without a yard, and to this day, he has to go on a walk to do his business. So, everyday, couple times a day, we walk for 20-30 minutes. We live close to campus, so we often walk here. You may have seen us.

Now, a few years ago, I developed a certain habit. Any time I am walking, and I am about to step over a piece of trash*, instead, I bend down and pick it up.* It is a little bit of life philosophy I call "if everybody did this, the world would be a better place." As a result, I often return home from our dog walk with *one or two or three pieces of trash.

In recent months, however*, I have been returning home with an armload*. This has been bothering me, and I have been wondering what to do about it.*

So at our last meeting, when we received the Recyclemania challenge*, I had an idea: I would keep all the recyclable material I collected during Recyclemania (which just ended on Saturday, by the way) and see what I came up with. I put a trash can by my door*, and dumped my armload of recyclables* into after each dog walk. I filled the can pretty quickly.* and I got tired of carrying dirty bottles and cans in my arm. So one day I grabbed a humble grocery bag on my way out the door.* In that 20 minute dog walk, I filled it.* I filled a second one the next day*. and the day after*. and every day for a week***. And just for fun, I made a note of the routes Dylan and I took. Here they are. Monday*. Tuesday*. Wednesday*. Thursday*. Friday*. Saturday*. I took Sunday off. Somebody did that a long time ago, and it seemed like a good idea. This is what I collected in just one week*: 2 large trash bags filled with 27½ pounds of recyclable material (which doesn't include the trash I threw away). One man, one dog, one grocery bag on one 20 minute walk a day.

I didn't stop there. Roughly once a day until the end of Recyclemania I left the house with an empty grocery bag and returned with a full one. In the end, 5 large garbage bags full; 117½ pounds.*

I have two points to make here: (1) The winners of last year's Recyclemania recycled an average of 81.75 pounds per student.* This year, I win. and (2) Here in our beautiful town, we have a problem*. Or rather, we have several related problems. And it is time we did something about them. The reason I say WE is that we are professors and these* *are* OUR students. What is more, I believe that we have both the responsibility and the ability to change this.*

Before I go further, I want to be clear about two things I am NOT saying. I am NOT saying this* is the Physical Services' fault. They have a tough job, and frankly, they shouldn't have to run around picking up this kind of trash. And, I am NOT saying this is every student. Certainly there are a lot of good students and good people here at PSU, but I think the evidence is clear*: there IS a significant population of our students who think it is OK to trash the campus and the town.

Therefore I issue two challenges to you: First, we need to start a serious conversation that involves the entire university community. I believe the problems here are deeper than simply a lack of environmental awareness and a bad drinking habit. There is a culture among our students that says this* is OK. Well, I'm here to say "IT IS NOT!! and it MUST change!" We need to talk about it, and we need to implement real solutions.

That brings me to my second challenge, which is a little something I call Plymouth PickupPalooza*. It works like this: Sometime before the end of the semester, grab a grocery bag, and go for a walk around campus. If you live near campus, do it on your walk in. If not, take off one of the beautiful spring afternoons we will hopefully be having soon. You NEED to see this problem with your own eyes, and I am asking you to join the solution. Go for a walk, and just see how long it takes you to fill a grocery bag. Save your bag. Show it to people. Bring it to the next faculty meeting. Just this morning I filled this bag: 10 cans, 12 glass bottles, 3 plastic bottles, 1 sauce cup, 1 lid and with straw, and 1 lighter. Plymouth PickupPalooza has this goal: before the students and the faculty leave for the summer, we will clean up the town. I have started a Facebook page. I am going to organize some events. I might make tee-shirts. Get involved. Tell your students about it, and get them involved.

I am already doing this. Yesterday, I gave the students in one of my lab classes some GPS units, garbage bags, and instructions to return in an hour. Whenever they found

trash, they marked it with the GPS. Here is what they found.* In one hour, 6 students collected 39 pounds of recyclables and 19 pounds of trash.

I know this sounds crazy, but I'm serious. We tout the beauty of this place*, and we congratulate ourselves when we receive environmental accolades*, but this* is the reality on our streets. Please, find me on Facebook and join Plymouth PickupPalooza: One grocery bag at a time, we can leave Plymouth cleaner than we found it.