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## Paper Recycling and Academic Libraries

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# GOING WHITE PAPER

## Paper Recycling and Academic Libraries

by Jack R. Fisher II and Elaine Yontz

Academic libraries, as centers for print materials for their campuses, have much to offer to paper recycling activities. A successful paper recycling program can enhance the morale of the library staff, reduce waste handling fees for the institution and strengthen the relationship between the library and other units in the campus community.

This study reviews the literature on recycling and libraries, describes a feasibility study of a public-private partnership between a medium-sized academic library and a local vendor and discusses the outcomes of a study compared to the experiences of other libraries. The feasibility study focused on identifying cost-effective measures for making outdated serials, deselected books and office paper available for recycling.

### Review of the Literature

The published literature on paper recycling and libraries includes results from surveys and descriptions of activities at individual libraries.

Alpi<sup>1</sup> surveyed the subscribers of STS-L, an electronic discussion list for science and technology librarians. She had 65 responses, for a return rate of 6.4 percent. Results indicate that 94 percent of respondents were recycling office paper, 80 percent were recycling mixed paper and 61

percent were recycling cardboard. Alpi's recommendations include maintaining strong communication with other campus units and investigating local options for materials that cannot be accommodated on campus.

Briscoe surveyed large academic law libraries in 1987<sup>2</sup> and repeated the survey to the same libraries in 1990<sup>3</sup>. She found significant increases in paper recycling. Recycling of newspapers grew from 21 percent in 1987 to 59 percent in 1990; computer paper, from 20 percent to 73 percent; and loose-leaf pages from 17 percent to 62 percent.

Calloway and Callahan<sup>4</sup> surveyed a random sample of academic libraries from each of the former Carnegie classifications. [Editor's Note: The classifications, designed by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, provide a means of evaluating higher education institutions.] The survey was sent to 328 libraries. The return rate was 36 percent. For public institutional areas, 92 percent of respondents reported collecting white paper, 60 percent reported collecting newspapers and 59 percent reported collecting colored papers. A wider variety of paper materials was recycled from staff areas: 92 percent for white paper, 72 percent for newspapers, 69

percent for colored papers, 62 percent for cardboard, 49 percent for magazines and 31 percent for books.

Rickert<sup>5</sup> surveyed 115 academic libraries in Wisconsin and Minnesota, with a 65 percent return rate. She found that 88 percent of respondents were recycling both office paper and newspapers.

Descriptions of projects at individual academic libraries include Briscoe, Calloway and Callahan, Le Ber and Gregory, and Wagner. Briscoe reports that she began recycling as a one-person effort at the University of San Diego Law Library and "gradually persuaded the management to institutionalize the process."<sup>6</sup> The current web site of University of San Diego indicates that "mixed paper bins are located in all classrooms and offices."<sup>7</sup> Calloway and Callahan assert that one impetus for recycling at Southern Illinois University Carbon-dale is the Talloires Declaration, an international statement of commitment to environmental sustainability in higher education.<sup>8</sup> Le Ber and Gregory of the University of Utah identify paper recycling as one part of the effort by the Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library to become "green and sustainable."<sup>9</sup> Wagner<sup>10</sup> describes the early years of Emory University's Library Environmental Action Force (LEAF), whose members

spearheaded what has become an extensive recycling program.<sup>11</sup> The web site of Emory University acknowledges the members of LEAF as the originators of a program in which the university now "takes great pride."<sup>12</sup>

Themes that emerge from this literature survey include:

- ▶ Electronic materials have generated a new layer of recyclable paper, due to ubiquitous and wasteful printing.<sup>13</sup> This is a particular problem when students do not pay for printing by the page. Rickert found in her survey that "nearly all libraries reported an explosion in paper consumption."<sup>14</sup>
- ▶ Recycling can be easily integrated into staff routines.<sup>15</sup> Ellis predicts that "eliciting cooperation from the staff

should require no more than some publicity."<sup>16</sup> Le Ber and Gregory state that "a minimal commitment of staff time" is sufficient.<sup>17</sup>

- ▶ A partnership with a local vendor can work.<sup>18</sup> In cases where the partnership was not sustained over time, the libraries report finding other ways to continue recycling. When Bricosco's original vendor went out of business, institutional recycling efforts were able to take over.<sup>19</sup> When Le Ber and Gregory found that their first partner could not continue at the negotiated price, they located a new vendor with a better rate.<sup>20</sup>

### Feasibility Study

Valdosta State University (VSU) is located in the city of Valdosta in southern Georgia. The population of

the metropolitan area is approximately 123,000. VSU has approximately 10,000 students and 500 faculty. Odum Library holds more than 467,560 bound volumes, more than 1 million volumes of microform, and 2,815 current subscriptions to print newspapers, magazines and journals.

In July 2004 paper recycling activities within the library were minimal. Bins for office paper could be found in public areas, but library staff observed that custodial staff usually threw this paper away with other trash. Staff reductions during the economic downturn following September 11, 2001, had disproportionately affected the Plant Operations Division, and recycling activities had been reduced as a result. Lack of consistent help from custodial staff had stymied recycling.



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A new librarian at VSU realized how much recyclable paper was being discarded and wanted to work for change. During fall semester 2004, that librarian was appointed to the Recycling Subcommittee of the campus-wide Environmental Issues Committee. The librarian helped to write a waste management policy, including recycling, that was approved by the Faculty Senate in April 2006. Shortly thereafter, the subcommittee was informed that any changes that increased cost could not be implemented for at least a year due to campus budgeting cycles.

Another subcommittee member knew about a local company, Southeastern Records Management. The owner of the company had expressed willingness to pick up recyclables at no charge to the university. With the support of the other subcommittee members and of library administration, the librarian decided to find out if Southeastern would use the library as a test site for a partnership with the campus. The owner visited the library in May 2006. Southeastern Records Management has been in business for 12 years and has handled recyclable materials for the past two years; the owner, an alumnus of VSU, explained that his company became involved in recycling as an outgrowth of their records management activities, which generate much recyclable paper. They are willing to pick up recyclables at no charge because they can sell what they collect. They sell recovered paper to mills that are offering the best price at the time of sale. Southeastern discerned that the library is an ideal pickup point due to the quantity of paper and because the building has a loading dock. They offered to schedule a pickup of office paper, colored paper, junk mail, cardboard, magazines, journals, newspapers, file folders and books. Sorting would not be necessary. Papers from food packages, envelopes with windows,

waxed paper, and paper towels were to be excluded.

The first pickup was on May 12, 2006, and the second on June 8, 2006. On May 12, the volume was approximately 8,500 pounds. By June 8, another 2,500 pounds had accumulated. At \$36 per ton for waste dumping, we estimate that these two pickups have saved the university \$195.

On June 27, 2006, Southeastern met with the VSU Vice President for Finance and Administration, the coordinator of Environmental Health and Safety, the director of Plant Services and members of the Recycling Subcommittee. VSU emphasized that the Plant Services office is supportive of recycling but does not have enough staff to maintain consistent pickups. Southeastern offered to pick up paper recyclables from multiple campus locations at no charge. The company would commit to keeping a regular schedule and would hire additional staff if necessary, as long as the activity was not a net loss. The owner also expressed his desire to become involved in recycling of other kinds of materials, including some that would produce higher revenue for his company, at fees competitive with what VSU now pays for those services. Some of the pickup companies currently being used are not local, and the benefits of working with a local company were discussed. Southeastern's staff had been reliable, efficient and courteous during the test. The consensus was that having Southeastern more involved with VSU's recycling efforts would be positive for all parties. The dormitories during move-in week were identified as a target for cardboard pickup.

### *Discussion*

The paper recycling project at Odum Library has worked very well so far. Student assistants, support staff and

librarians are enthusiastic and cooperative. Some staffers are still discarding office paper, but this seems to be a habit that will change over time. Because Southeastern does not require sorting, the impact on staff time has been minimal. Due to attentive cooperation from Southeastern and to the fact that the company is local, the time spent by a librarian to schedule and oversee the pickups has been negligible. Library staff members are gratified to see that they have blazed a trail that may result in a significant increase in recycling across the campus.

Paperrecycles.org<sup>21</sup> reports that "every ton of paper that is recovered saves 3.3 cubic yards of landfill space." We estimate that 18.15 cubic yards of landfill were saved through the first two pickups at Odum Library. We are encouraged to know that we need not have an extensive nor perfect program to make a difference.

Like other libraries, we have found that collecting and storing most paper recyclables have been easily integrated into existing routines. Newspapers, outdated serial issues and weeded books were already being collected and handled by Acquisitions and Serials staff. Depositing them in holding areas was a simple change. Since library staff are accustomed to handling materials within defined procedures, it may be that our staffers are more likely than other campus workers to adjust to a recycling process with ease.

VSU is repeating a pattern seen in other libraries, where librarians are leaders in campus recycling efforts. In the highly interactive community of a university campus, activities that create bridges between the library and other units have cascading benefits. The librarian will continue to play a proactive role on the Recycling Subcommittee and will look



for opportunities to lobby for changes that will promote recycling, including the addition of staff or reassignment of existing staff to specific responsibilities for recycling. Closer examination of recycling programs at universities comparable to VSU may increase insight into how to effectively nurture recycling on our campus.

Did we investigate using recycling as a stream of income for the library? Are we concerned about Southeastern's obvious interest in cost recovery for paper recycling and in future profit from expanded contracts with VSU? Each party in a partnership must have an incentive to motivate continued involvement. This arrangement gives Odum Library what we want: to see the voluminous paper recyclables recovered with no additional expense to the library and negligible impact on library staff time. Southeastern needs the incentive of income, and the university administration needs the incentive of cost savings. We suspect that earning money would involve library staff in burdensome bureaucratic procedures. Attempting to negotiate for transfer of saved funds to the library would pit us against other units and would distract from the effort to establish recycling as a unifying priority. For these reasons the library decided that the current partnership fulfills our objectives and is sustainable by the library.

The future of a private company, and thus the future of any public-private partnership, cannot be predicted with certainty. Southeastern's status as a local company owned by an alumnus and one that has expressed strong willingness to partner with VSU may bode well. Odum Library is encouraged by the examples of libraries that were able to adjust when finding new recycling outlets became necessary. An unpredictable future is no reason to ignore the

advantage that this partnership can supply now.

The strongest benefit to Odum Library has been the effect on staff morale. Most students and staff are convinced of the contribution that recycling can make to a sustainable environment. Seeing recyclable materials being discarded is distressing and the opposite is uplifting. Since our ability to reward staff members is limited, the library is grateful for this affordable opportunity to enrich their quality of life.

Librarians who are interested in initiating a project can begin by identifying local businesses or groups who handle recyclable materials. The telephone yellow pages might have useful leads under "Recycling Centers." Colleagues in biology or plant operations departments should have relevant technical knowledge and may be able to suggest potential community partners.

Paper recycling offers opportunities for an academic library to contribute to a sustainable environment, enhance staff morale, cut costs for the university and cement relationships across the campus. Public-private partnerships should be investigated as a way to make recycling feasible and affordable. Paper recycling is recommended as a positive focus for any academic library. ►►

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Kristine M. Alpi, "It's Not Easy Being Green: A Survey of Staff Experiences with Environmental Issues in Sci-Tech and Other Libraries," *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* Spring 2000.

<sup>2</sup>Georgia Briscoe, "Recycling: What's In It for Libraries," *American Libraries* 18, December 1987, 954-56.

<sup>3</sup>Georgia Briscoe, "Reuse, Reduce, Recycle: Waste Reduction Tips for Concerned Librarians," *Library Journal* 116, October 15, 1991, 43-44.

<sup>4</sup>Michele Calloway and Daren Callahan, "Paper Use and Recycling in Academic

Libraries," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship* 4, no. 2-3, Fall 2003.

<sup>5</sup>Kathleen Rickert, "'Greening' Our College Libraries: Complete the Cycle of the Three Rs," *College & Research Libraries News* 62, no. 8, September 2001, 825-28.

<sup>6</sup>Georgia Briscoe, "Reuse, Reduce, Recycle: Waste Reduction Tips for Concerned Librarians," *Library Journal* 116, October 15, 1991, 44.

<sup>7</sup>University of San Diego. Recycle Services, <http://www.sandiego.edu/residencelife/recycle.php>

<sup>8</sup>Calloway and Callahan. See also Association of University Leaders for a Sustainable Future. Talloires Declaration, [http://www.ulsf.org/programs\\_talloires.html](http://www.ulsf.org/programs_talloires.html). Signatories of the Talloires Declaration include Morehouse College and the University of Georgia.

<sup>9</sup>Jeanne Marie Le Ber and Joan M. Gregory, "Becoming Green and Sustainable: A Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library Case Study," *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 92, no. 2, April 2004, 266-68.

<sup>10</sup>Elaine Wagner, "Emory University Libraries' Environmental Action Force," *College & Research Libraries News* 53, no. 9, October 1992, 579-80.

<sup>11</sup>Emory University. Emory Recycles, <http://www.fm.emory.edu/recycling.html>

<sup>12</sup>Emory University. History of Emory Recycles, <http://www.fm.emory.edu/recycling/about.html>

<sup>13</sup>See Alpi, Calloway and Callahan, and Rickert.

<sup>14</sup>Rickert, 826.

<sup>15</sup>See Briscoe 1987, Ellis, and Le Ber and Gregory.

<sup>16</sup>Claudia B. Ellis, "Where Have All the Forests Gone?" *Technicalities* 1, no. 6, May 1981, 16.

<sup>17</sup>Le Ber and Gregory, 267.

<sup>18</sup>See Benemann, Briscoe 1987, Briscoe 1991, Le Ber and Gregory, and Wagner.

<sup>19</sup>Briscoe 1987, Briscoe 1991.

<sup>20</sup>Le Ber and Gregory, 267.

<sup>21</sup>Paper Industry Association Council. Paper, the Everyday Wonder, [http://www.paperrecycles.org/paper\\_everyday\\_wonder/index.html](http://www.paperrecycles.org/paper_everyday_wonder/index.html)

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include reduced costs to the university, librarians' involvement in a cooperative campus-wide project and improved staff morale throughout the library.

Paper Recycling and Academic Libraries

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**Abstract:**

Paper recycling is a fitting endeavor for an academic library. A literature review and a feasibility study revealed that the benefits can

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