

To the Zilkha Center,

We, Sophia Sonnenfeldt '22 and Sang Hwan Lee '19, are addressing you in the hopes that our recommendations will be adopted into future programming for the Zilkha Center. For a project for Professor Kohler's "Our Planet's Plastic Plight" class, we investigated the scale and cause of contamination of our campus' recycling and composting systems. After researching the impact of signage on the way students dispose their waste over the course of two months, we learned that the majority of our student body does not act sustainably. This is not because of a lack of information but because of apathy to the greater cause. As our classmate, Lina Velcheva, highlighted in her final project, greater cultural change comes from redefining the standards that guide the behaviors of a group<sup>1</sup>. For us, this knowledge has shifted our view of sustainability away from wanting to add to already existing information – like the waste guides above trash cans – towards harnessing the power of institutional programming as a way to shift the larger culture of this campus. However, while our main focus is reaching out to other entities on campus like the Sustainability Working Group of the Williams Strategic Planning Effort, Junior Advisor Advisory Board (JAAB), and the administrators of First Days and Ephventures, we would also like to work with you to help solve some of the more informational issues that we have identified around campus.

Throughout this whole semester, one challenge that we faced was trying to get in contact with someone who was deeply knowledgeable about recycling on this campus. Because of this, we ended up reaching out to various interns and other Zilkha center staff members to ask questions about our recycling process and materials. We think it would be greatly beneficial to the larger campus if there was someone appointed to be the point person for all questions related to recycling on the Williams College campus. This streamlining would both make recycling more accessible to the general campus because there would be a clear entity to reach out to with questions, and for students or members of our community looking to work on projects related to recycling. After the Earth Day table in Paresky, we have had numerous students reach out to us about proper disposal of items and we think that an intern or point person would be a wonderful resource. We have also worked on planning a sustainability themed game night, co-hosted by ACE, and we believe this point person could be a great resource to coordinate with for this event.

Additionally, another issue that we have identified is a confusion about what items are recyclable and compostable. Because of this, we would like to work with you to design a cheat sheet with information about commonly misunderstood items: pizza boxes, bottle caps, and batteries, just to name a few. This cheat sheet will subsequently be placed on strategic locations throughout campus, akin to the "how much can I drink" posters, to further increase engagement with the student body. With an easily accessible cheat sheet like this, we would hope to clarify much of the confusion about proper waste disposal and also help to publicize the aforementioned point person for waste disposal. We have reached

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<sup>1</sup> Steinberg, Paul F. *Who Rules the Earth? : How Social Rules Shape Our Planet and Our Lives*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

out to the planners of First Days and we hope to implement an activity for all entries in which they have a meeting about proper waste disposal and a larger conversation about sustainability on campus, and we think this would be a great time to distribute these cheat sheets to incoming first years. We do not expect these cheat-sheet posters to be a success overnight. However, due to the different nature of the type of information this poster conveys, we believe that implementing these cheat-sheet posters will complement efforts by the Zilkha Center to address issues of sustainability.

The last main change we would like to propose is related to the collection of items that need special disposal. While there has been an effort to set up special collections for batteries, the collection points are scattered throughout campus, hard to find, and inconvenient for many students. We therefore propose that there be a central collection area for special items in Paresky Student Center for the convenience and ease of students. To that end, we also propose collecting glasses in Paresky as well for the same reasons – currently, there is one receptacle for glasses located at Jesup Hall. Additionally, there are many items like plastic bags, pens and pencils, and board markers that if collected could be recycled and reused instead of thrown away. Because TAM has limited resources they throw away plastic bags and other common plastic writing utensils. If we set up special collections for these items and coordinated with larger recycling facilities we could begin to recycle much more of what we now count as trash. Regarding plastic bags, establishing a central collection point would enable a campus wide program where the college can return plastic bags to points of origin for reuse. With a new centralized location – specifically the mail room in Paresky - for special drop offs, our campus would be much more efficient and these special items could be properly disposed of with much greater ease. The logistics of this endeavor would fall under the purview of the new intern/point person for all things recycling.

We also wanted to inform you about other aspects of our project that may be of interest to either some of your staff members or of the Zilkha center as a whole. We have reached out to the leaders of First Days activities to try and incorporate sustainability into Ephventures and the Fire and Safety meeting, and also to JAAB to try and start an entry competition around proper waste disposal. We are trying to implement all of these projects during the first week that first years arrive because these programs define what it means to be a Williams student in the eyes of the first years: if we emphasize sustainability and dedicate time to this value, it sends the message that sustainable living is an integral part of campus life. We are also reaching out to ACE to try and plan sustainability themed programming where students play games centered around sustainable living and receive rewards for doing well.

Our main goal is that these three recommendations will help make your mission of sustainability more accessible to much of the campus. We look forward to hearing back from you and hopefully working with you to develop our ideas!

All the best,  
Sang Hwan Lee '19  
Sophia Sonnenfeldt '22