

To: [REMOVED]

From: Bonnie Morton, English 3005 Student

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Subject: Proposal for Research on Plastic Bag Alternatives for the MLK Jr. Student Union Food Court

## Overview

Currently, the Food Court at the Martin Luther King Jr. Student Union provides plastic bags so that students may take meals home. These bags inevitably end up in landfills, creating waste that takes a long time to biodegrade. Instead of using these bags, this project proposes to research four alternatives and compare the costs with the benefits. This would allow the University to choose a more environmentally responsible type of bag to provide at the Food Court and reduce the amount of waste produced. The Office of Energy and Sustainability would be responsible for paying the difference in cost of the newer type of bags so that Housing and Dining Services is more willing to attempt the project. The Office of Energy and Sustainability and Housing and Dining Services will be able to promote their efforts towards making Eastern Illinois University a more environmentally friendly campus, which would strengthen the association between "EIU" and "Green" for the community. The research team would provide the Office of Sustainability with regular reports detailing the results of their research and with a final report to be presented to Housing and Dining Services.

## Introduction

The Martin Luther King Jr. Student Union Food Court on campus provides students with the option to take plastic bags to carry meals home if a student does not wish to eat at the Union. While this is convenient for busy students, it unfortunately generates waste. Currently there is no clear plan for recycling these bags on campus. These bags are then thrown away and left to degrade in landfills, which could take hundreds of years.

In an effort to reduce waste of plastic bags from the Food Court, this project will focus on researching plastic bag alternatives. This will include finding out what kind of bags are currently used, the cost of these bags, and the cost of a more environmentally friendly type of bag for use in the Food Court. The project aims to find the best possible way to reduce plastic bag waste and compile a report for the Office of Energy and Sustainability to present to Housing and Dining Services in order to implement more responsible use of plastic bags. Changing the Food Court plastic bags to a more environmentally-friendly alternative would be another item for the long list of things the Office of Energy and Sustainability has done to improve Eastern Illinois University's status as a "green" campus.

## Plan of Action

The project team would first contact Housing and Dining Services to learn about how many plastic bags are purchased for use in the Food Court. For the purposes of this study, the plastic Subway bags would not be included so as not to infringe upon any franchise rights Subway may have with the Food Court. The team would also find the current cost to the University for the purchase of plastic bags. The team would then spend time researching four alternatives to the current plastic bag use.

1. Newer biodegradable plastics, which will break down in 12-18 months in a landfill instead of several hundred years.
2. Paper bags, which would biodegrade quicker than the current type of plastic used.
3. Reusable bags, which students could buy and bring with them for meals they plan to take to go.
4. Implementing a recycling program for the current type of plastic bags, which may include placing additional recycling bins in the Residence Halls.

Following research, the team would then look at the difference in cost between current plastic bags versus the cost of a newer, more sustainable type of bag for the Food Court. The team would compile a report and a proposed plan of action for making the Food Court bags more sustainable for the Office of Energy and Sustainability (or instead, if time permits, for the team) to present to Housing and Dining Services. The report will cover the benefits of switching to the most responsible type of to go bag environmentally. To prevent cost from being the sole issue for Housing and Dining Services, the report could also include methods for the Office of Energy and Sustainability and the Office of Energy and Sustainability to advertise the change to more eco-friendly bags, which would create a stronger association between Eastern Illinois University and its strategies for becoming a green campus.

## **Funding the Project**

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## **Impact on Campus**

The proposed program would allow for Eastern Illinois University to either limit the amount of waste produced from plastic bags at the Food Court or to make it so the waste generated is more environmentally responsible, with quicker biodegradability. The University could choose one of the more eco-friendly bag types other than the reusable bags for the time being, but eventually move to only using reusable bags for meals taken from the Food Court and eliminating the waste of bags entirely. If successful in the Food Court, the same procedure could also be implemented in the University Convenience Stores as well. The University would be able to promote its move towards sustainable bags as another of its methods of creating a green, sustainable campus.

## **Evaluation**

The research team would be able to provide the Office of Energy and Sustainability with regularly-scheduled progress reports throughout the semester. These reports would summarize the research progress made regarding each of the four possible current plastic bag alternatives. These reports could include the benefits of each alternative and cost to the Office of Energy and Sustainability or cost to the University.

At the end of the semester, the team would be able to present the Office of Energy and Sustainability with a report detailing the benefits and costs of each type of plastic bag alternative. This report would include the research team's recommended course of action and methods of advertising the positive effects of this course of action around campus so that prospective students, students, faculty, and the community better see Eastern Illinois University as a green, environmentally-responsible campus. The

success of the research project would depend on whether or not any of the researched plastic bag alternatives are deemed feasible based on funding concerns.

## Appendices

### Approximate Schedule of Tasks

Task	Dates of Tasks								
Identify cost of current bags and amount purchased									
Research benefits of each proposed alternative bag									
Research cost of each proposed alternative bag									
Compile final research report									
Present research report									
	Week of 3/2/15	3/9/15	3/18/15 (Spring Break)	3/23/15	3/30/15	4/6/15	4/13/15	4/20/15	4/27/15