
Plastic Usage Habits at Northeastern University

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Literature Review

- 90% of plastic is not recycled
- 13M tons of plastic end up in the ocean
- Plastic don't break down
 - Micro/nano plastics
- Plastic waste is detrimental to live
 - Cancer, Heart Disease, Liver Disease
 - Starvation and Suffocation



Plastic on college campuses

- Single use plastics particularly damaging
- Common Examples:
 - Plastic bread tags
 - Plastic bottles
 - Styrofoam takeout containers
 - Straws
 - Plastic packaging materials
 - Plastic cutlery
 - Plastic shopping bags
- All of these common plastics are highly prevalent on college campuses



Research goal

Our team set out to gather data on what the regular plastic use habits of a Northeastern student look like. This information could then be used to inform HEAT campaigns and sustainability initiatives on campus.

Methods:

Survey: N = 46

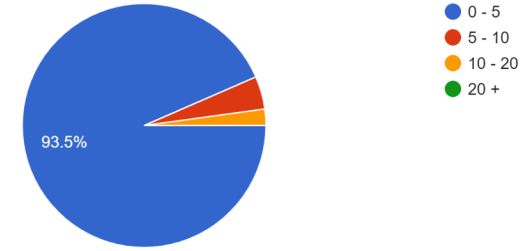
1. Year?
2. Gender?
3. On a scale of 1-5*, how often do you use a reusable water bottle?
4. How many plastic bottles do you use in a week?
5. On a scale of 1-5*, how often do you use plastic utensils if you get takeout?
6. On a scale of 1-5*, how often do you use your own grocery bags?
7. On a scale of 1-5*, how often do you separate trash and recycling at home (dorm/apartment)?
8. Does your apartment have recycling accommodations?
9. Do you know what this recycling number means (1)?
10. On a scale of 1-5**, how important is recycling to you?
11. Do you think Northeastern is doing enough to help students recycle? Why or why not?
12. Do you know about HEAT's plastic free week?

Interviews: N = 3

1. Do you think Northeastern is doing enough to help students recycle? Why or why not?
2. What suggestions do you have?
3. Why do you want to recycle/be sustainable?
4. When were you first exposed to recycling/sustainability?
5. Do you have any interesting ways you reuse single-use plastic?
6. What single-use plastic(s) do you use most frequently?
7. How do you feel about the amount of single-use plastic you use?

How many plastic bottles do you use in a week?

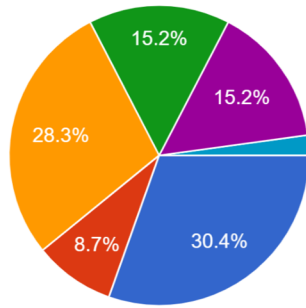
46 responses



Demographic Data

Year?

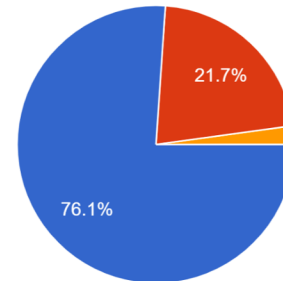
46 responses



- Freshman (1st)
- Sophomore (2nd)
- Junior (3rd)
- Senior (4th)
- Senior citizen (5th)
- Graduate (old)

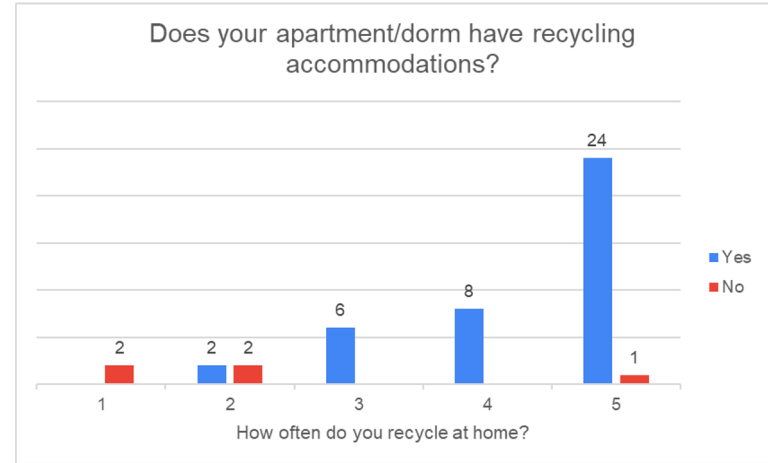
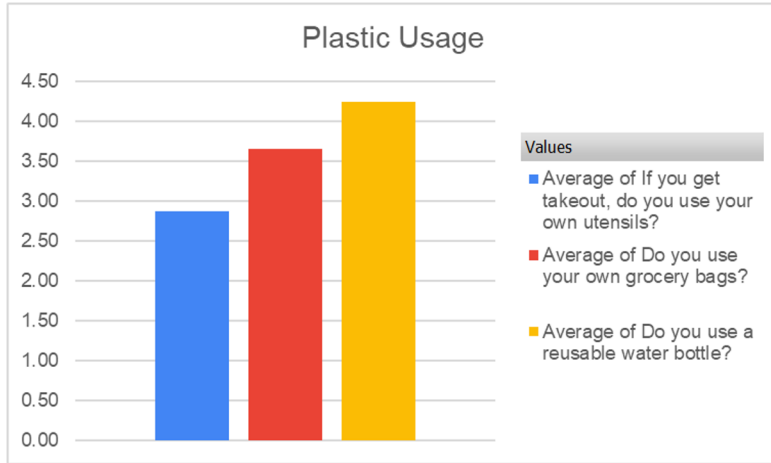
Gender?

46 responses



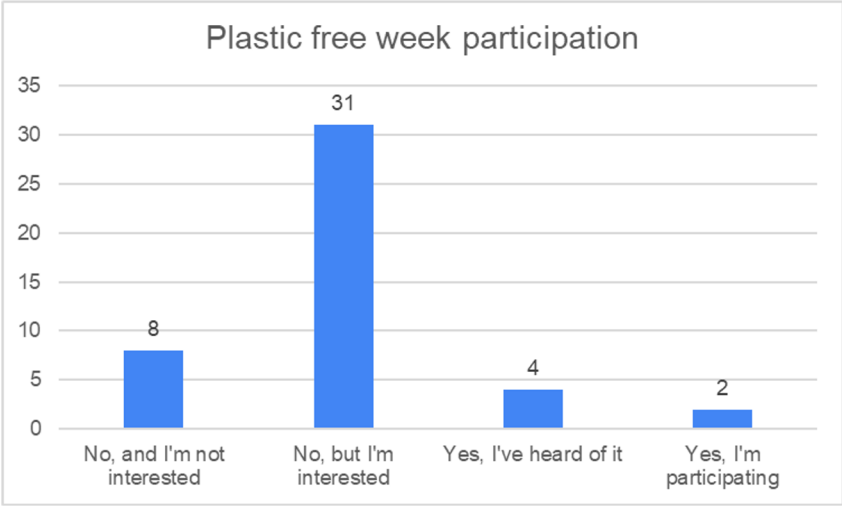
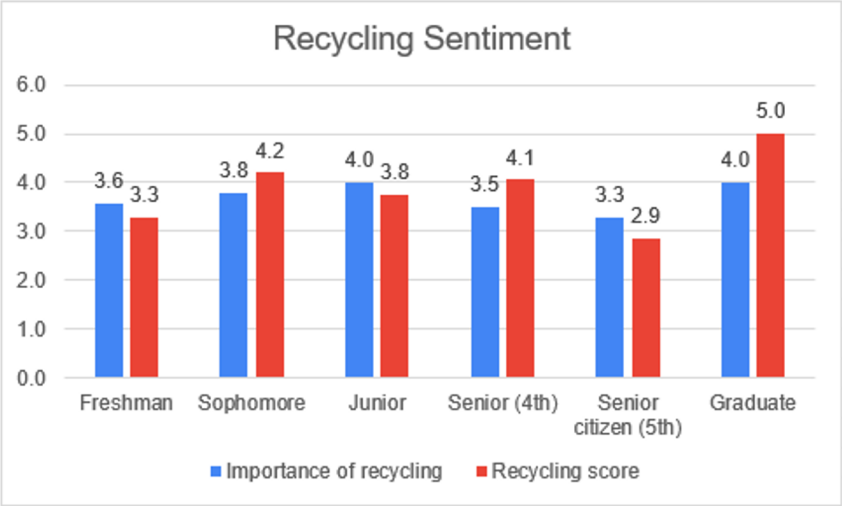
- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer

Discussion/Results



- ✚ 82.6% always or almost always use reusable water bottles
- ✚ 67.4% always or almost always separate trash and recycle at home
- 43.5% always or almost always use plastic utensils for takeout

Discussion/Results

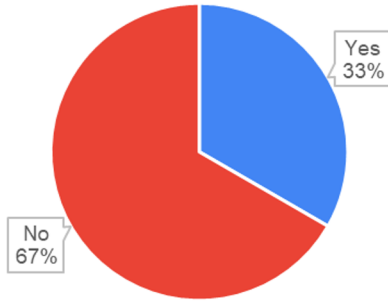


■ 86.6% Haven't heard of Plastic Free Week

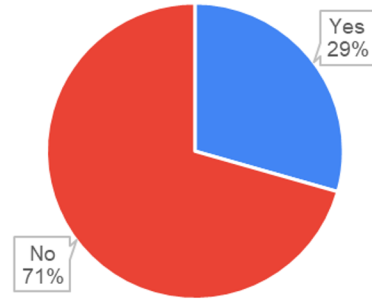
✚ 73.3% are Interested!

Discussion/Results

Do you know what this recycling number means?



Do you think Northeastern is doing enough to help students recycle?



- Despite overwhelming interest in recycling, only 67.4% of respondents knew what the recycling symbol meant

Interviews

- All interviewees expressed interest in Northeastern doing more to support recycling and minimizing plastic usage
- Shared desire to help save the planet and combat climate change
- Single use plastic use by interviewees reflects the most commonly used sources i.e. bags, utensils and food packaging
- All came up with at least two ways that they reuse plastic items in a creative way
 - Wash utensils, plastic packaging to ship items, tupperware, tortilla bags

“They’re only single-use if you use them once”

Recommendations for HEAT

- Petition Northeastern to switch to reusable amenities (utensils, bags, etc.) as they are some of the most commonly used plastics, and college students burn through them e.g. Curry
 - In addition petitions to reduce availability of single use plastics to further reduce consumption
- Advocate for Northeastern to ensure that at every garbage disposal bin there is also a recycling bin to give students the opportunity to recycle
- Advertise Plastic-Free week throughout the semester to encourage maximum participation
- Advocate for Northeastern to implement a metal tupperware system in dining halls for students to be able to take food and bring back containers to be washed and reused.

“There is almost always more to be done”