

2022 Sustainable Solutions Challenge

Stakeholder Interview Summaries – Prepared by Suraya Souidi

DAVID DONALDSON

David Donaldson is the University's Rethink Waste Manager. This position was created in the Fall of 2021 to accommodate a growing need for a position which oversees the education and operations of waste management, especially composting. It directly links to Goal 3 of the University's Sustainability Plan in its waste diversion targets.

Before serving in this role, Donaldson was a part of the University's Event Planning department, and because of his passion for sustainability, he volunteered to assist with the Office for Sustainability's composting rollout in the 2020-21 academic year. He quickly became an integral part of Rethink Waste, hiring and managing the first group of Rethink Waste Reps to educate the campus community on how to properly dispose of items. His role now includes recycling, composting, and donation. However, Donaldson states that he would like to focus on reduction and reuse of waste, which will make waste management easier in the future. Too often, we do not fully understand the waste we create on an individual level: "We don't think about the packaging, or the upstream production and how it gets [transported] to you, or the downstream [emissions]. There's a whole shift in the way of thinking [about waste] that needs to happen, and we're going to keep chipping away at that."

While the goals for his role hadn't yet been set when he was interviewed, he believes that outreach and education will play an integral role in Rethink Waste. From his experience with the Rethink Waste Reps during the composting pilot, he understands that peer-to-peer interactions are more impactful than staff-to-peer interactions regarding sustainability initiatives.

Overall, the students are the driving force behind any initiative on campus, with Donaldson stating that these initiatives happen because students want them. However, what can be more difficult is keeping the attention of the campus community—since students are the force behind an initiative beginning, they must also be present to keep the momentum going, at the risk of the success of the initiative. This is important for students to keep in mind as they create their projects.

One of the largest issues Donaldson faces in his role is the constant changing of supply chain due to the pandemic. "One day we have compostable utensils at Tyler's... and then two weeks down the line, it might [not be the case]." Without consistency, it can be difficult for the Rethink Waste Team to get their message across and not confuse student diners.

Although his position is new, the initiative that led to the creation of his role shows how committed the university is to launching sustainable initiatives on campus. It also shows how important it is for an initiative to "belong" to a certain group of people or office for it to be continued successfully.