

Motion for Implementation of the Middlebury To-Go Containers Plan

Purpose:

The purpose of this motion is to show the support of the student body, helping to push for the implementation of the "Middlebury To-Go Containers Plan" at Colby for the following academic year. Over the past year, to-go food has gained considerable support from the student body. Unfortunately, the college is planning to terminate to-go food options this upcoming fall. The SGA Sustainability Working Group is pushing for the continuation of to-go food options in a more sustainable manner. Successful implementation of a pilot program for next year could ultimately lead to a campus-wide, long term to-go program at Colby. This program would help to reduce food, plastic, PLA, and paper waste. Furthermore, it would allow students to continue sustainable eating practices at Colby and encourage students to eat outdoors and off-campus.

The What:

Middlebury's to-go container plan is very successful amongst their student body. Students buy into the system with the purchase of a \$5 carabiner. Throughout the year, students can trade in the carabiner at any dining hall for a clean, reusable container. After eating their food, the used containers are returned for either another clean container or a carabiner. Dirty containers are washed by dining hall staff and redistributed for use. This process continues throughout the entire year. At the end of the Spring Semester, students return the carabiner and are refunded their \$5.

For next fall, we plan to implement a pilot program of Middlebury's model to Dana or Bob's Dining hall for about 300 students. It would help to sustain the to-go food option post-COVID at Colby while helping to reduce food and plastic waste.

The How:

1. Work with Rich Backstrom, Stephanie Sylvester, Doug Terp (and any other administration staff as necessary) to purchase 300 eco-clamshell [containers](#), [drying racks](#), and carabiners, as well as to coordinate a pilot program in one dining hall (most likely Bobs or Dana) during the Fall 2021 semester.
 - a. Costs
 - i. Drying racks: \$719 each
 - ii. Containers: \$5.69 each
 - iii. Carabiners: depends on which are purchased, but they are not too expensive. [Here's](#) a pack of 20 for \$10
 - b. Overall cost should be around \$5000 or less
2. Advertise the pilot program via email and enroll the first ~300 students who sign up (will need to retain some extra containers in case people lose/break theirs and need them replaced).

3. During move-in, distribute carabiners to students enrolled in the pilot program; also provide education to these students about what dining halls they can use them in.
4. Throughout the fall semester, keep track of any students requesting new containers or reporting any issues.
5. At the end of the semester, ask students to fill out a survey reporting how often they used the container, convenience, any issues, general impressions of the program.
6. Report to the administration the results from the survey (hopefully students will find this program beneficial and we can push administration to implement it for the whole school).

Strength and Importance:

As an elite institute of higher education in the Global North, Colby advertises itself as carbon neutral. However, this is largely achieved through the purchase of carbon credits. While Colby College claims to hold environmental sustainability as a core value, the current to-go containers do not reflect this belief. Instead of remaining complacent with existing sustainability measures, the College should actively attempt to reduce its carbon footprint and environmental impact. COVID has drastically increased waste generated by dining due to the implementation of disposable to-go containers. Students across campus are enjoying the increased flexibility of taking their meals to go, but trash cans are overflowing with disposable containers at the end of each meal. Reusable to-go containers would allow students to keep taking their food to go, while combating the excessive waste caused by disposable containers.

Possible Risk Areas:

It is likely that we will receive pushback from some of the college administration. Their concerns may include the following...

- **Problem 1:** Increase in Food Cost and Waste.
 - The college is worried that if students have the ability to take food to-go, they will take more food than they would typically eat in a dining hall. In theory, this would increase the expenditure on our dining plan.
 - Similarly, the college is worried that students will be taking more food than they will eat. Thus leading to an increase in food waste (counteracting sustainability efforts).
- **Solution 1:** Education, Dining Pledge, Unlimited Swipes.
 - Students will be educated on the importance of their choices. A short video will help to convey the negative environmental and financial impacts of taking an unnecessary amount of food.
 - Students will sign a Dining Pledge, stating that they will commit to only taking as much food as they anticipate they will finish.
 - Currently, with 4 swipes per day, students take an excess amount of food to-go, fearing they will not be able to return to the dining hall without wasting another swipe. Inevitably, this results in some excess waste, since students cannot

perfectly predict the amount of food they will eat. The reintroduction of unlimited swipes will allow students to re-enter dining halls to get more food. Therefore, students will no longer have to predict how much food to take.

- **Problem 2:** Students losing/not returning their reusable containers/utensils.
 - The college has expressed concerns that students will not return their reusable materials. The loss of product would force the college to buy more materials. Thus increasing costs and putting the success of our program at risk. Furthermore, loss of containers and utensils would counteract the *reusable* nature of the program.
- **Solution 2:** Carabiner System, Accountability.
 - Students will buy into the system for \$5. This introduces some financial accountability. Students will "cash-in" their carabiner for to-go materials. They will only receive another carabiner once they return their dirty to-go materials. Therefore, students will not be able to continue with the system if they lose their containers.
 - We will also implement a formal system of accountability. Of course mistakes happen and some students will inevitably lose a container. We will have some "loss-forgiveness" built into the system. Students who lose 1 or 2 containers can buy back into the system. However, repeat offenders, losing 3 containers, would not be allowed to buy back into the system.
- **Problem 3:** Financial Equity.
 - There is concern over financial equity. The \$5 buy-in may create an unfair burden on low-income students.
- **Solution 3:** Financial Aid
 - In order to ensure equity, students will have the opportunity to apply for financial aid. If accepted, the \$5 dollar cost will be waived and covered by the Student Government Association.

Intuition and Questions already asked:

- How would this plan influence the food cost?
- How can one ensure students do not take more than they will eat with the to-go option?
- What to do if students lose their materials?
- How to ensure students are using materials that are part of the program, and not their personal items?
- What accountability measures can be ensured with excess food waste?
- How can this plan promote financial equity?
- What company would we use for to-go containers and drying racks?
- How would this impact logistics in the dining halls?

Other Universities with Similar Programs

1. Middlebury
2. Dartmouth
3. Harvard
4. Oberlin
5. Columbia
6. Princeton
7. Tulane
8. Xavier ([Video](#))

Administration, Faculty and Staff already consulted:

We have consulted various staff and faculty members, including Sandy Beauregard, the former Director of Sustainability, and Rich Backstrom, the new dining hall manager following Marietta Lamarre's leave. Dean Karlene was also supportive of the idea. We have also deliberated amongst the SGA Sustainability Working group and with Ashlee and Sam - the current SGA President and Vice-President.

Contact Information for questioning, clarification, or pre-meeting critiques:

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