

General Description

Beginning in December of 2009, Brian orchestrated and built a food waste composting facility at U of L. Since July, the U of L composting project has diverted more than 33,000 pounds of pre-consumer food waste and coffee grounds from landfills into the production of rich, fertile soil that will enhance not only the UoL Garden Commons, but many other landscape projects around the university. He has implemented similar programs at Bellarmine University, Americana Community Center, and The Chance School. Several of these locations are also developing facilities for organic, sustainable gardening using the rich soil created from the food waste composting process with the goal of providing healthy foods to the communities they serve.

Brian takes his students to several of these composting sites as part of his Business Ethics courses. As part of his emphasis on sustainability and healthy food, he teaches students how to build these systems themselves, to connect with community organizations, and to challenge existing paradigms as they relate to food as a social justice issue. Brian also takes students on tours of Louisville's "food deserts," helping them to realize in an immediate way the lack of healthy food availability in many urban markets. Alongside showing them this need, he is able to present sustainable systems and the efforts of the community organizations he works with as powerful solutions for addressing that need.

What is the service start date. Is the project on-going?

The University of Louisville Food Waste Composting project was proposed in December of 2009 and began picking up pre-consumer food waste and coffee grounds from the University of Louisville's Sodexo food service facilities in July of 2010. The project is ongoing.

How did this activity impact students learning?

Students are introduced to realistic models for sustainable solutions to pressing ethical and social issues via the U of L composting project and related projects. Through a variety of in-class projects, students confront challenging issues about trash, personal responsibility, and our impact on our environment. Students collect their personal trash for a period of one

week in order to gain an appreciation for the volume of trash we generate. Some classes tour areas of Louisville, known as ‘food deserts,’ where access to healthy food is minimal. As a counterpoint to these experiences, they are exposed to alternative solutions to trash and food through text and in urban settings via U of L’s composting project and related projects such as the one at Breaking New Grounds, a community-based composting and urban gardening non-profit (where Barnes was a founding board member, and continues as head vermiculturist). Students are able to and encouraged to volunteer at the U of L, Breaking New Grounds or other composting sites. For example, one student from one of Professors Barnes’ courses (Critical Thinking, PHIL 211, F10) began volunteering during the fall semester after a presentation Barnes made in class about the composting process and its relationship to thinking critically about trash. After having become a consistent and dedicated volunteer, the student began composting at home and taught the process to several different neighbor families. This student has joined the Garden Commons Project (recently featured in *The Cardinal*, 3/28/11), and she has been asked to assist the new Student Director for Sustainability Initiatives here at the university.

How did this activity enhance your teaching, if any?

Barnes offers students alternative ways to think about the systems and values that surround each of us in society. The attitudes and cultural activities surrounding food and trash are important for Barnes because it’s an easy link with the students; we all eat food and we all create waste. Barnes uses the U of L composting project as a central example in Critical Thinking (Phil 211) and Business Ethics (Phil 225) of how we can rethink the cultural paradigms in which we participate each day. Barnes also offers the composting system, from trash to soil, as an entrepreneurial activity for which he provides all the training on the chalk board and to any students who want to explore more deeply by a visit to a site run by Barnes. It is important, particularly in Business Ethics, that students see a working model of how to think outside the box. This project shows not only how to turn a waste project into a useful commodity, but it shows how little it takes in terms of resources to make it happen. Barnes

wants his students to see that one dedicated person and a little awareness can make a huge impact.

What has been the benefit to the community, if any?

The U of L Composting Project, along with the other projects Professor Barnes spearheads at Bellarmine University, and the Americana Community Center, provide a working model of environmentally sound, sustainable, natural, organic urban composting systems. In addition, the composting segment of each project keeps considerable quantities of trash out of landfills (33,000 pounds since July at the U of L facility alone), and provides rich, natural, fertile soil. At U of L, this soil is incorporated into the Garden Commons Project, which Brian also helped plan and construct. At Americana Community Center and at Bellarmine University, the project has not only helped reduce trash, but also will provide soil to help with growing fresh healthy organic vegetables. The availability of such fresh produce benefits all those served by these organizations.

Barnes' project has caused U of L to receive media coverage not only from the Cardinal and UoL Today, but from WHAS-11 news (aired 3/28/11), and there have been discussions between the Office of Sustainability and Whole Foods Market about volunteer support for the project. Whole Foods will host a volunteer day one Sunday in May at U of L. This will be advertised at the Whole Foods store and to its partners. There are already fliers advertising the volunteer opportunity at the Whole Foods store in St. Matthews. Barnes' composting activity at U of L has been the topic of papers presented at the Healthy Foods Local Farms Conference at Spalding, the Bluegrass Bioneers Conference at U of L, and various informal opportunities to spread the word about U of L's sustainability activities around compost.

Describe unique and/or exemplary attributes of the activity.

The spectrum of urban sustainability activities which Professor Barnes has launched represents a dynamic, creative, and positive response to multiple social issues, such as growing landfills, urban renewal, healthy food choices, and the need for sustainable systems. Barnes has no budget, and he uses recycled dumpsters decommissioned by U of L. He hauls the university's food waste in his own vehicle each week, a 1996 Volkswagen Jetta. The project

may be the only instance of using recycled dumpsters as composting bins at a university anywhere in the United States. Barnes has developed a replicable system that can be used by universities anywhere with little or no budget for food waste composting. Barnes's system can be conducted by one person, though at least four people are desired on any given work day. Barnes's project has no carbon footprint aside from the gas for his vehicle; all other labor is conducted by human beings.

How many community members were impacted?

Each project which Brian is involved impacts people on multiple levels, from those who work directly on the project, to the students and faculty who enjoy the cleaner campus and the Garden Commons, to those who are impacted when Barnes' students take their knowledge and inspiration on to projects of their own, to those whose lives are enriched by the gardens and healthy foods fed by the soil generated.

The U of L project has impacted students directly, through volunteer opportunities. To date, student volunteers have provided 387 hours of service in conjunction with the U of L composting project. In total, 2 administrators, 180 Business Ethics students, 90 Critical Thinking students have been impacted by learning about or being involved in the U of L composting project. Furthermore, fifteen volunteers, unaffiliated with U of L have contributed time and labor to the U of L project. In addition, Barnes' students from Bellarmine University are required to contribute a minimum of three hours to the U of L project as part of his senior-level course entitled Exploring Social Justice: Sustainable Action Workshop. To date, 38 Bellarmine seniors, 2 student work-study students, and an administrator have participated in U of L's project. At Bellarmine, Barnes' composting project had earned an Operation Brightside Naturescape Grant.

The Americana Community Center serves the largest immigrant population in Louisville, and the community garden served by the composting system Barnes designed, built and is expanding directly affects 30 community plots and will eventually incorporate all food waste generated through the Americana on-site meal programs. At the Americana project, 30 farmers, about a dozen community volunteers and 2 administrators have worked with Barnes

to build the project, and those farmers and their families will have access to the soil generated by the composting process.

In addition, Brian engages the both the academic community and the community at large in addressing food and urban sustainability. Barnes recently led a U of L Faculty Research Forum discussion about campus sustainability issues, and he has addressed the Kentucky Department of Education's No Child Left Inside Federal K-12 Grant Program. Together with several UofL professors and staff, Barnes was invited by Justin Mog (U of L's Director of Sustainability) to present the U of L Composting project to the April 2010 Campus Community Partnerships for Sustainability Conference in Lexington. Barnes was invited to speak as part of Hanover College's Senior Capstone series this year, he presented at the 2010 Bluegrass Bioneers Conference, the Healthy Foods Local Farms Conference, and conducted a workshop at the 2009 IdeaFest with MacArthur Fellow Will Allen. In addition, he has helped numerous local gardening and composting education outreach programs within the broader Louisville community,. Lastly, his work at both UoL and at Bellarmine were recently featured on WHAS in independent features (March 2011 and December 2010, respectively). Barnes cites bringing awareness of the possibilities for urban sustainability projects to a wide Louisville audience as one of his goals in educating students and other citizens about composting and food justice.