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## Students' old gear gets a recycling push

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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10 COMMENTS



KAYANA SZYMCZAK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Students Avdit Kohli, Yan Olshevskyy, and Yajur Gulati carried mattresses down Commonwealth Avenue to their new apartment in Allston Monday.**

Every spring as students move off campus, dormitory hallways, quads, Dumpsters, and the streets of surrounding neighborhoods are strewn with lightly worn but unwanted futons, lamps, textbooks, minifridges, kitchenware, and laundry supplies. Most of it winds up in a junk yard.

A few months later, college students and their families arrive on campus hauling truckloads of newer, shinier versions of those same items.

For years, the wastefulness of this cycle has garnered little more than a shrug.

But recently, student-led initiatives have sprung up at a growing number of local colleges, including at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and Northeastern University, to collect departing students' reusable gear and sell the leftovers at low

prices to incoming students at on-campus yard sales.

Spearheaded largely by volunteers of student activists, the programs intend to discourage wastefulness and promote recycling, which also can mean less work for campus and municipal cleanup crews. And, the sustainability efforts can be a boon for cash-strapped students and families looking to minimize back-to-school bills.



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“Thousands of reusable items clog up streets and sidewalks and are sent to landfills every year, and this is a problem campuses, towns, and cities have been seeing for 20 or 30 years, so they love to see students taking initiative and solving the problem,” said 23-year-old Alex Freid.

When Freid was a student at the University of New Hampshire in 2011, he and his classmates created “Trash 2 Treasure,” which last summer evolved into a startup called the [Post-Landfill Action Network](#). The nonprofit aims to spread the initiative to other campuses by teaching students about the approach and offering advice and other resources.

With the network’s backing, groups at a half-dozen schools launched their own programs this past year, including UMass, the University of New Haven, and Colby-Sawyer College in New Hampshire.

A few other schools that already had similar initiatives in place, including Northeastern University, also teamed up with the organization to access the fledgling network's support services, including discounts on truck rentals, signs, T-shirts, and other expenses.

This year the organization expects it will help about 30 more campuses across the country start a program to collect and resell students' reusable college gear.

Leaders of the network also hope to draw about 200 students to the University of New Hampshire in October for a national conference about efforts to eliminate waste on college campuses.



KAYANA SZYMCZAK FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

**Nicholas Qiao (left) and Dan Monahan carried a mattress into their new apartment, while Steve Man grabbed a box, Monday in Allston.**

“Our goal is to help campuses achieve zero waste, and move-out waste is a really great way to start,” said Freid, director of the nonprofit he founded with his high school friend Brett Chamberlin, a New York University alumnus. “What we’re trying to do is to build universities as microcosms of how the world can and should function in the future.”

During the University of New Hampshire program's first three years, it diverted about 100 tons of waste from

landfills, saved the school an estimated \$10,000 in disposal fees, saved students and families an estimated \$250,000 on back-to-school shopping, and donated five tons of food and clothing to local charities, Freid said. The group made about \$26,000 in profit, which has been reinvested into the program and other sustainability projects around campus, he said.

At UMass, crews collected their first batch of student hand-me downs in May as the dorms emptied. The items were organized, cleaned, and stored in two large spaces, a classroom and a laboratory, for the summer. They were unloaded and sold at a well-attended tag sale over the Labor Day weekend, as students move back in.

“The campus has been pretty good about reducing the amount of landfill waste we create, but it’s always just been recycling or trash,” said campus sustainability manager Ezra Small. “So having our students going around collecting items, and saving stuff from trash cans and Dumpsters, it’s made a huge difference.”

“As more people see this going on, it’s going to change the culture and students will start thinking twice about throwing out random stuff that might still be us able,” he added.

The tag sale, which the university promoted with an e-mail blast to students, Facebook, and signs around campus, was expected to feature an estimated five tons of goods.

“A lot of times, international students get here and they have nothing and they don’t have a car,” said Small. “New students will forget things; even returning students forget stuff.”

Typically, items are priced at one-fifth of their original retail value.

Items that are not sold to students are donated to thrift shops, shelters, and food pantries.

While some fear recycled goods may not be sanitary or would harbor insects, including bed bugs, Freid said crews are advised to be diligent about inspecting items and take steps to rid them of pests.

Some programs choose not to deal with certain items that might be problem prone, such as furniture and bedding, he said.

During her final few years of college, Sarah Sanchez helped lead Northeastern’s six-year-old “Trash 2 Treasure” program, which recently joined the Post-Landfill Action Network.

In the past, “there were definitely things I ended up throwing out at the end of the semester because I didn’t know about this program,” said Sanchez, 22, of Newton, who graduated last spring.

“I’ve seen it happen with a ton of friends and family where you’re moving out, and you can’t keep it all, and don’t know where to donate or how, or you don’t have the time, so your immediate instinct is just, ‘Well I’ll throw it out.’ ”

But, “even if it you didn’t pay that much for it, as long as it’s still in good condition, someone else could probably

really use that.”

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