

Rethinking Carleton's paper use policies

BY MATT KIRBY

How many times have you printed off twenty-five or more pages from online articles in a single night at the library? How many times have you neglected to throw excess paper in the blue bins and opted for the trash? Or the converse: how many times have you dug through the trash to retrieve fistfuls of paper and transfer them to the proper receptacle? If you fit either of these categories, most likely the former, you are not alone.

Paper use at Carleton essentially involves two aspects: what is the paper made from and how much of it do we use? The first question is simple: as of last year, the vast majority of paper on campus switched to 30% post-consumer. This is not to say that virgin paper isn't still available, since it is. But it is highly discouraged, must be specifically requested, and to most knowledge is rarely requested. And currently Chris Petit, the fifth-year ENTS intern, and Julia Burmesch, Post Office Manager, are in the preliminary stages of

working toward making all paper on campus 100% post-consumer.

But then there is the much

“But then there is the much more difficult question to answer: just how much paper do Carleton students use? Or would waste be a better word?”

more difficult question to answer: just how much paper do Carleton students use? Or would waste be a better word? What is known is that over the past six years the recycling bins in Burton, Sevy, Davis and Musser have increased

in their paper contents by 300%. And in only the last two years there has been a 300% increase in paper use at the library. Part of this has to do with the implementation last year and the enormous expansion this year of eReserves. Gone are the days when students had to pay to make copies of articles. And come are the days of free and mindless printing from sites scattered around campus.

So what are the options? Aside from students taking a more active role in their personal consumption there is the possibility of a print management program. This would be an option that would be incorporated into the forthcoming “one-card system.” For those of you who don't know, this would be a super ID of sorts that would double as your laundry card, copy card, and possibly printing card. The ethical question remains as to how much, if anything, students should be charged for printing. As Chris Petit says, “We don't want to make it a financial burden, but just make students aware that when they

print, there are consequences.”

Senior Lizzy Shephard is also tackling the problem, albeit from her own direction. Starting next term she will begin implementing

“Gone are the days when students had to pay to make copies of articles. And come are the days of free and mindless printing from sites scattered around campus.”

paper reduction strategies as part of her ENTS capstone project, with the goal of reducing paper usage by 30% by the end of spring term. Part of her implementation strategy will be a top-down approach that includes

working with Chris, Julia, Printing Services, and campus publications to encourage use of a higher percentage of recycled paper, as well as a print management program. But another major aspect of her campaign will be more grassroots-based. She plans to target students and departments through meaningful conversations and a tool she's working with, called ‘community-based social marketing.’ When asked why paper consumption and recycling interested her so much, she responded, “Recycling doesn't work unless you fulfill the loop. One must also buy recycled products, not virgin products. Carleton College should set an example and help to close that loop for paper consumption.”

Matt Kirby is a member of the class of 2007.