

Student-Supported Initiative Creates Reusable Bag Program at Bookstore

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Starting July 1, the Bookstore will significantly reduce plastic use and will be offering a variety of reusable bag options.

The Syracuse University Bookstore, in conjunction with the Student Association (SA), Students of Sustainability at Syracuse University and the Energy Systems & Sustainability Management Department, will be launching a reusable bag program starting this summer. The goal is to reduce usage of plastic bags, which can be harmful to the environment.

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bag options.

Some of the bags will feature artwork from student designers as part of an open contest, with the winning design featured on bags beginning in the fall semester. An incentive program to purchase and reuse the bags will be announced this spring.

“The bookstore has long been concerned with the amount of plastic bags it gives out year-round,” says Bookstore Director Roger Hailstork. “The numbers are significant; we distribute on average more than 153,300 bags per year and during the last combined five year period the number is in excess of 766,500 bags. We are excited to partner with like-minded student groups and campus offices that are equally concerned about the impact of these bags on our environment. It’s a win-win for the store and the campus.”

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“SA is very excited for this program and is certain that the reusable bags will help promote sustainability,” says Caitlin Smith '19, a student in the College of Arts and Sciences and a representative of SA.

Smith has been working closely with the Sustainability Management and the Bookstore for the past year on implementing a reusable bookstore bag initiative in hopes of reducing the use of plastic bags and ultimately moving toward a more eco-friendly campus.

In a survey conducted of nearly 500 Bookstore customers, including University students, faculty and staff, 77 percent indicated that they are looking for ways to reduce their environmental impact.

This helps in a tangible way, according to Dana Wakeley '17. Wakeley, a student in the Newhouse School, is with the group Students of Sustainability at Syracuse University. Wakeley and other students have worked with Sustainability Management in researching how the Bookstore could implement a reusable bag program.

“Students of Sustainability is excited to be a part of the Bookstore’s proactive effort to become more sustainable,” says Wakeley. “We’re very optimistic the program will provide an outlet for students to take action in reducing their environmental impact.”

The initial leg work and supporting research for this innovative partnership between the Student Association and the Bookstore was conducted by SU alumnus Elizabeth Hayes' '16 BA (Geog/CCE) for her senior Capstone Project “Action Plan” — a requirement of the Citizenship and Civic Engagement’s degree in which candidates must design and implement a project to improve social, economic and/or political conditions at the local, state, federal or global level. Says Hayes, “It is amazing, of course, to see something I worked on for a year come to fruition. It is even more gratifying to know it is something that will help SU become more sustainable and subsequently make the world a little better! I am happy to have been able to leave my mark at Syracuse University and give back to my Alma Mater.”

Anne E. Mosher, Chair of Citizenship and Civic Engagement, adds, “When the Maxwell faculty created the CCE program in 2011, this is exactly the kind of Action Plan outcome we hoped for. It is really pleasing to be able to point at Elizabeth’s engagement work and academic research as having been instrumental in making this important campus innovation a reality.” (Please visit the CCE website to learn more about the CCE program and to read about other SU students making an impact https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/citizen/Student_Profiles/).

All of this is very positive for the sustainability activities on campus, according to Sustainability Coordinator Melissa Cadwell.

“It is great to see the University Bookstore move forward to eliminate plastic bags and introduce reusable bags in their store,” says Cadwell. “With the research behind us, we know that plastic never fully breaks down—it only degrades. Keeping plastics out of the environment is a monumental task. This one action the bookstore is taking will help to decrease the environmental impact of plastic bags.”