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Recycling race baffling Bruno again

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Brown students have five weeks left to step up their recycling rates if they want to break a record of "middle-of-the-pack" finishes in the eighth annual RecycleMania. Until April 5, colleges across the country will compete to collect the most recyclables and produce the least amount of trash, with week-by-week results posted on RecycleMania's Web site.

According to the most recent tally, Brown was ranked 69th out of 85 schools participating in RecycleMania's Whole Campus Grand Champion competition as of week four, which ended Feb. 23. That competition is one of several that make up RecycleMania, which began on Jan. 27. Coordinators at individual colleges report numbers of recycled materials every week, according to the contest's Web site.

In its fourth year of participation, Brown is one of 400 schools from 46 states plus the District of Columbia taking part in the contest, according to Andres Perez-Charneco, an assistant at RecycleMania.

Perez-Charneco said the competition is seeing record-breaking participation rates, helped in part by the use of social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook.

Perez-Charneco also said RecycleMania could expand further to take on an international scope in the near future. He said the contest was opened this year to schools in Mexico, Canada and the Caribbean, though none actually participated this year.

But Brown has plenty of competition in the United States.

Student recycling coordinator Kai Morrell '11 said the University has always ranked "in the middle of the pack" in RecycleMania contests. She said it has been difficult for Brown to excel, given the number and variety of schools involved.

"It's always hard for a school like Brown to compete with a really small liberal arts college that has a strong environmental focus," Morrell said, but added that Brown even ranks slightly below some Ivy League schools. The other Ivies that participated in the RecycleMania's Whole Campus Grand Champion competition - Princeton, Harvard, Yale and the University of Pennsylvania - all currently rank above Brown. One way to boost Brown's numbers is to improve the accessibility of recycling on campus, Morrell said.

"What we're working on right now is making sure that all faculty and staff who live on or near campus, or who work in Brown buildings, have access to recycling," she said.

Morrell said she plans to take part in an effort to raise awareness for the next five weeks by including weekly recycling tips in Morning Mail and displaying them on advertising screens around campus.

"There are a lot of recycling opportunities at Brown that I think a lot of people don't know about," she said, citing ink cartridges, batteries and used compact discs as items that tend to be overlooked. "All of

this stuff can be recycled, but it's not quite as easy as putting it in the can right outside the door."

The only official prizes at stake in RecycleMania are bragging rights and "trash art" trophies, Perez-Charneco said. But learning about recycling proves worthwhile, he said.

"I always found that to be the best experience over any sort of winning," he said.

Increased awareness, one of RecycleMania's primary goals, is a prize Brown could benefit from as a result of this year's competition, Morell said.

"It's good to get the word out there, so people can make an effort to recycle not only for the next five weeks, but all year round, as well," Morrell said.

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