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Greener Challenge

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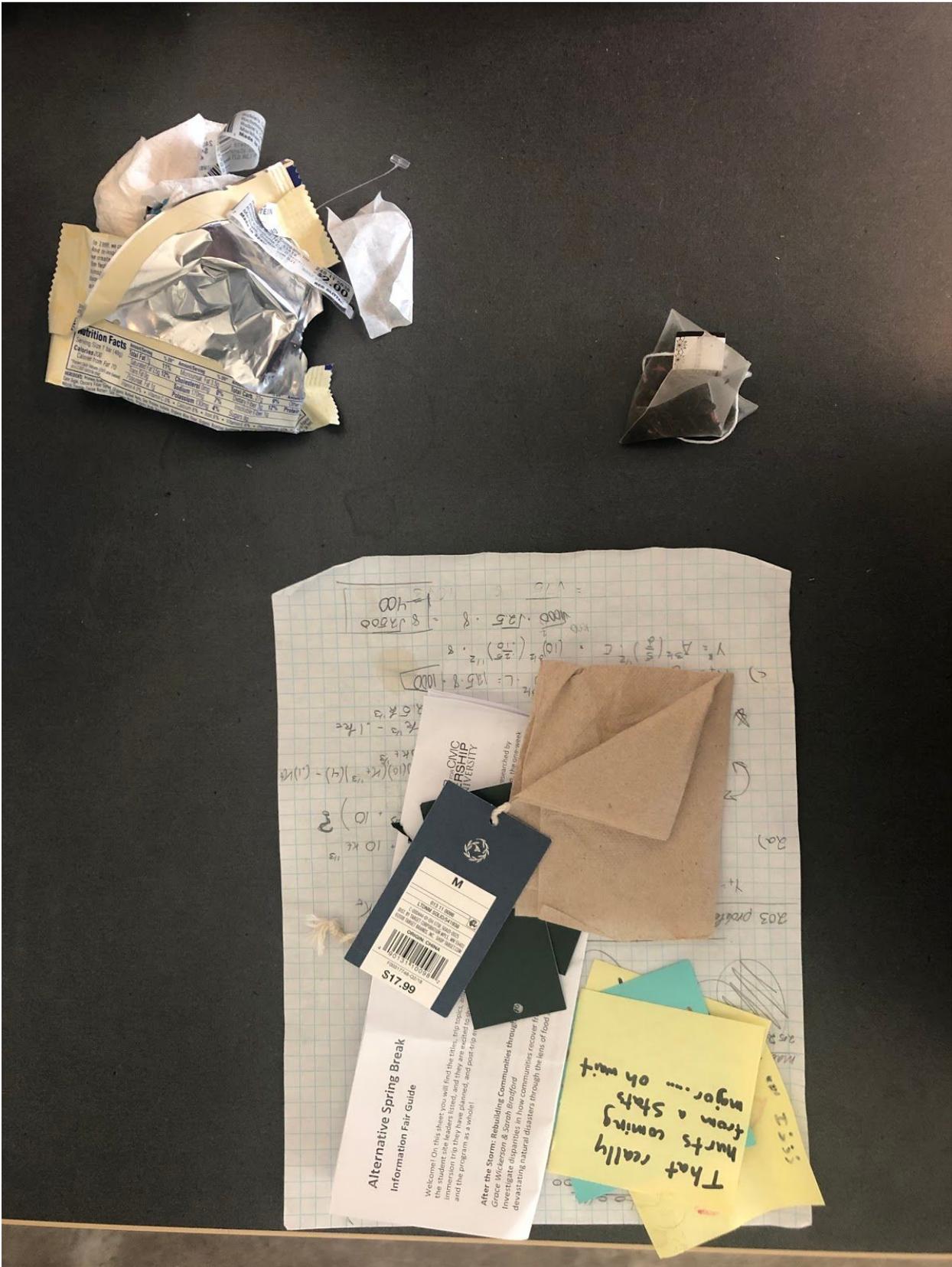
Carrying a bag of trash for an entire day seemed strange and a little daunting when I first looked at this challenge. But I was ready, and with my reusable grocery bag in my arm I went about my day around campus.

One of the first things that I noticed was that I changed my habits because I was carrying everything I would normally throw away with me. I would avoid eating individually packaged items since I was more cognizant of the waste associated with them. I was thinking more about the individual items I was using and the amount of waste associated with each one. I made sure to bring my reusable water bottle with me for the day, and stayed away from the consumables I could avoid. It probably helped out my wallet for the day too!

I had a conversation with a friend early in the day. He asked what the bag was for, and I explained it to him. His first reaction was, "Isn't that a lot of work? To remember to put everything in the bag?" This surprised me slightly, because I had not thought of it from that point of view. It made me realize that one of the biggest barriers that we often associate with "living green" is purely the amount of effort. Modern society makes it so easy to go about life without even thinking about the impact of your actions; but merely carrying around a bag of trash for a day can provide insight to both you and those around you. His reaction was mostly skeptical, but he seemed to understand the meaning behind it.

Other than that, the day was more or less normal. I got a couple of friendly comments from people I had told about Project Green Challenge. Overall I would call it a positive experience, mostly because of the greater awareness it provided to me about my own habits.

One of the things I did not include in my bag were the tampons I used. The act of throwing those away while I was collecting all my other trash also made me more aware of the sheer amount of personal hygiene products we go through in the course of a year. It seems wasteful, but we have prioritized personal sanitation and reusable options are often not marketed as well or are more difficult than the disposable.



I didn't end up producing any food waste, other than a tea bag. I think living on a college campus with a meal plan contributed to this, since I don't have to worry about making my own food. The tea bag has components (such as the packaging and staple) that are non-recyclable, and there is not an easy way to avoid this ending up as waste. One option that I've done in the past and might restart is using loose leaf tea, which isn't individually packaged and would cut down on the waste associated with the product.

Of the recyclables, the main two avoidable items were paper (from doing homework problems) and clothing tags. One reusable option for paper is to use an online notepad app. Some of my friends have gone to this option, mainly for convenience as opposed to environmental health. It's an option I would like to explore, especially after seeing the amount of paper I used in just one day. It's hard to avoid the clothing tags, except for buying second hand clothes (which is a good option!).

Of the non recyclables, the main two items were wrappers and tissues. Wrappers are more easily avoidable, although for items such as granola bars, the eco-friendly options are often more expensive and difficult to manage on a tight budget. Tissues are more difficult to avoid, although again there are eco-friendly options that can be purchased for a bit more money.

One thing that I could change in my own lifestyle today that will contribute to a zero waste world is to use a menstrual cup instead of tampons. It's something I have considered, and this project has inspired me to do more research into the idea.