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Today's challenges were announced just as I was finishing up a Cumberland Farms coffee and breakfast sandwich. As soon as I read the challenge, my eyes turned to the meat-touched tissue paper wrapping for my sandwich and my styrofoam coffee cup. I knew right away that today would be a powerful learning experience.

I took care to go through the day as I normally would, without limiting my consumption or changing my behavior because of the challenge. The only difference between today and any other day was that instead of taking my waste to trash, recycling, or compost bins, I put it in my bag. Champlain College does a fairly good job of minimizing students' waste by using reusable plates and utensils at the dining hall, but behaviors outside of on-campus mealtimes can accumulate a surprising amount of waste.

In one of my conversations today, my supervisor mentioned that she had just talked to somebody else who was participating in the challenge when she saw me enter the room carrying my bag. I invited her to join the challenge since she's also a student at my university, but she responded that the Project Green Challenge would be too time-consuming for her. In the end, though, what matters isn't that everybody participates in the challenge, but that the challenge is noticed. With multiple people carrying these bags around my campus, I think that goal was achieved quite well here at Champlain.

Later in the day I was sitting in the library with a friend, telling him about the trash that I've accumulated throughout the day. He said that I was doing really well and not producing nearly as much waste as he'd expect. We then agreed that Champlain College does an excellent job at minimizing students' waste. It's still each individual's responsibility to consume mindfully, but the university is extremely supportive of zero-waste lifestyles and takes great strides to ensure that zero-waste students don't run into unnecessary roadblocks here in their life as a residential student.

At the end of the day when I finally got back to my dorm for the night, I poured out my trash and sorted it. This is what I found:



All of my waste could be sorted as either trash or compost, and the only trash items were my coffee cup, sandwich wrap, a Pop Tart wrapper, and (although it can't be seen in this picture) a Jolly Rancher wrapper that I found as litter on the side of the road and picked up. The compost pile completely consisted of napkins from my lunch and dinner (I'm a *very* messy eater).

Looking at my trash pile, I see two very simple ways that I can further minimize my waste. First, I can purchase a reusable coffee cup to use rather than disposable ones that add up very quickly and are toxic to the environment. Additionally, instead of having Pop Tarts as snacks, which are wrapped in plastic, I can look for snacks that are sold in more environmentally sustainable containers.

I honestly expected to accumulate much more trash today than I did, and I'm pleasantly surprised to see the minimality of my waste. However, this is far from perfect and even small amounts of trash that are produced repeatedly quickly add up to something much bigger. I now see clearly two more steps that I can take to live a more sustainable lifestyle.

I've already used some of my prize points from the Day 1 challenge to get a reusable coffee cup, which will be arriving sometime next week. I'm excited to use it to continue to reduce my ecological footprint!