

IWMA Strategic Plan: Higher Education Stakeholder Engagement Meeting (Round 1)

Thursday, February 19, 2026, 9:30 AM – 10:30 AM

📍 IWMA Office, 555 Chorro St, Ste. D2, San Luis Obispo, CA

Attendees:

- *Lucy Stanus, Deputy Director, SLO IWMA*
- *Michael Williams, Program Manager, SLO IWMA*
- *Ashley Kuder, Program Coordinator, SLO IWMA*
- *Janet Weldon, Clerk of the Board, SLO IWMA*
- *Amy Unruh, Sustainability and Waste Specialist, Sustainability Office, Cal Poly*
- *Colleen Twomey, Professor, Graphic Communication Dept, Cal Poly*
- *Nazli Yesiller, Director, Global Waste Research Institute, Cal Poly*

Notes:

1. Introductions

Colleen Twomey discussed the existing partnership between Science Discovery (SD) and her Graphic Communications course. Science Discovery provides a guest lecture to her Consumer Packaging course, which has proven to be a great resource for students. Topics covered in this presentation include waste management, behavior change marketing, and extended producer responsibility, and the role of packaging design in waste reduction. She expressed that many students are not familiar with waste topics but are concerned about the environment. Most students come to CalPoly from out of the area and live off campus. Colleen stated that the IWMA website has been a great resource for her and her students.

Amy Unruh discussed the Sustainability Office's efforts for waste diversion and reduction. The current approach has been to conduct outreach to small, targeted groups. There are around 23,000 students at CalPoly. Outreach is not currently conducted during *Welcome Week* but is included during *SLO Days* reaching approximately 70-80 people. CalPoly has a reuse cup program with minimal success currently. There is an opportunity for more refill options on campus; currently, *Mr. Turtle* supplies a refill option for laundry detergent.

Nazli Yesiller described the role of the Global Waste Research Institute, which is funded by the State of California. Landfill research used to previously be the primary focus; that has now shifted to oil and gas emissions. The Institute's expertise is in field investigations. She commented that a prior CalPoly professor who lives in the County wrote a course textbook on solid waste management and could be worth engaging in the future.

2. Opportunities for Collaboration and Feedback

Guiding Questions: How can the IWMA support adult education? How can the IWMA and Higher Education institutions better collaborate? How would adult education and improved collaboration contribute to the IWMA's mission and bring value to communities across SLO County?

Participants stated that the level of contamination at CalPoly is around 25% in the blue bin and around 2% contamination in the green bin. They expressed that there has been an increase in contamination in the blue bin, and that there could be better collaboration with dining services and student housing. Distribution of the IWMA compost pails was identified as an opportunity as well as improved signage. Property managers are required to provide training annually per SB1383; participants agreed that this should also be pursued.

Additional collaboration with the Consumer Packaging course was identified as an immediate opportunity, including a focus on behavior change marketing and project-based learning for a campaign tailored for use by the IWMA.

Suggestions for other courses that the IWMA could engage with include food science, industrial technology and packaging, environmental and civil engineering, and pollution prevention. It was suggested that IWMA or other waste industry representatives could be invited to relevant thesis defenses in the future. While there is currently a pollution prevention course at CalPoly, the university does not act as an EPA Pollution Prevention (P2) technical assistance hub. Last year, pollution prevention students analyzed the university's food services delivery and developed creative new approaches.

Videos (either in short form for students, or long-form for professors) were recommended as a way to engage professors who may not have expertise or immediate interest in solid waste. It was recommended that videos focus on local infrastructure, local context, and local stories. Guest lectures are also highly encouraged at CalPoly.

Magnets with IWMA information deployed through student housing, and in-person or virtual tours of both the MRF and Digester were expressed as impactful strategies that could be further pursued. It was expressed that many people question how waste management systems function, so more visibility of solid waste facilities would be beneficial. It was also expressed that the IWMA map for recycling end markets was a great resource to combat distrust in the system. More outreach community-wide was identified as a recommendation. Magnets were previously disseminated by the IWMA in collaboration with Waste Connections to off-campus student housing at the *Mustang Village* complex as outreach during green-cart roll out.

A challenge that was identified was that bags and food-ware labeled “compostable” were unable to be processed at our local anerobic digester. Amy was curious why the digester facilities for San Luis Obispo and San Diego had such differences in acceptable materials. She also recommended that de-packaging equipment may resolve contamination concerns for CalPoly and suggested pursuing grants for this equipment.

Other opportunities for collaboration identified included cross-branding (“tagging each other”) of social media content, improved collaboration on messaging to ensure consistency, and IWMA participation in the CalPoly internship program. Finally, the IWMA was encouraged to continue providing input to CalRecycle and the State on behalf of the community regarding anticipated and upcoming regulatory changes.

IWMA Strategic Plan: Higher Education Stakeholder Engagement Meeting (Round 2)

Thursday, March 12, 2026, 1:00PM – 2:00PM

📍 IWMA Office, 555 Chorro St, Ste. D2, San Luis Obispo, CA

Attendees:

- Coby Skye, Executive Director, SLO IWMA
- Lucy Stanus, Deputy Director, SLO IWMA
- Kendra Foley, Temporary Program Coordinator, SLO IWMA
- Erin Pearse, Director, Initiative for Climate Leadership & Resilience, Cal Poly

1. Introductions

Erin Pearse is a math professor at Cal Poly and the Director of the new Initiative for Climate Leadership and Resilience. The initiative’s goal is to complement the work of the Sustainability team, which is housed in the Facilities Department, by focusing on academic integration of sustainability and climate concepts into CalPoly coursework.

Cal Poly has an ethos of *learning by doing* and welcomes guest speakers from outside the university. Many courses are capped at 40 students, offering small sizes. Undergraduate students are required to complete a capstone experience in the form of either a senior project or capstone course. Erin is also working to establish a *Certificate of Sustainability* which would provide students with a pathway to demonstrate competency in sustainability concepts such as waste reduction.

2. Opportunities for Collaboration and Feedback

Guiding Questions: How can the IWMA support adult education? How can the IWMA and Higher Education institutions better collaborate? How would adult education and improved collaboration contribute to the IWMA's mission and bring value to communities across SLO County?

Erin identified several opportunities for touchpoints with the SLO IWMA and the academic arm of CalPoly, with the intention of expanding solid waste education and outreach to the Cal Poly student body and increasing awareness of careers in waste management.

CalPoly has compiled a course catalog which is a curated list of courses with a sustainability focus. This is in alignment with STARS (Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System) standards developed by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education and could be utilized as a resource for identifying potential courses and professors that the IWMA could collaborate with.

Potential strategies for collaborating with professors included providing guest lectures to either a specific class or as a special event. Additionally, many professors utilize project-based learning and would be open to project or research pitches where students could work on real-life application of course objectives. For example, Erin's students recently collaborated with the PFL foundation on a Compost Application Scouting Tool which identifies ideal locations for compost applications.

Other identified opportunities included the establishment of a mini-course, but this would take more coordination with the university. Additionally, *Instructionally Related Activities* (IRAs) are extension opportunities available to students and are tied to specific courses. IRAs generally have funding available for them. Finally, collaboration with student extracurricular groups, such as the Green Campus Team or Zero Waste Ambassadors, was identified.

One challenge identified was that many Departments require courses to be taught by different professors each quarter which could pose challenges for long-term, consistent collaboration. Next steps determined at this meeting included organizing a guest lecture in the Fall, pitching a project idea to the professors of the Environmental Design course, and connecting with the professors of the Global Climate Change courses.