

FootprintForward

a handbook for low-impact living in NYC



BRONFMANCENTER

The Bronfman Center for Jewish Student Life at NYU

Selma Ruben Distinguished Lecture Series

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Introduction: Putting Our Best Footprint Forward

We are surrounded by excess. Nearly all of the day-to-day acts we take for granted – watching a movie, say, or buying lunch – are now a part of massive globalized processes, ones which more often than not are devastating our land, water and climate. Meanwhile, the lives we live are unhealthy for ourselves, as well: every day, we breathe in polluted air, eat overprocessed foods and distract ourselves with cheap thrills.

We seem to be drowning in stuff. And yet we've lost the connections that give our lives real meaning: connections with the people around us, with the seasons, with the other plants and animals that survive even the concrete canyons of Manhattan.

This disconnection isn't our fault – this is the world we were born into. But it doesn't have to be the world we create. To quote green business owner John Abrams, "If we don't insist on the future we want, and commit ourselves unquestionably to it, we'll be stuck with the future we get."

Footprint Forward is about insisting on the future we want, and making it become a reality. It's about a new way of relating to the world around us, and acting in accordance with what we believe. It's about a million little choices that add up to enrich our bodies, our minds, and the biosphere, our shared home.

As Colin Beavan, the original "No Impact Man," put it: "We have this feeling that we're gonna be deprived... maybe we're already deprived." A new, sustainable future awaits us. Join us in putting our collective footprints forward.

What's an Ecological Footprint?

Everything we do, no matter how insignificant, has an impact on the planet. These days, unfortunately, that impact is more likely to be harmful than helpful. Ecofootprinting is a common way to measure environmental impact - the effect that a given activity has on the earth - by estimating the amount of land necessary to sustain it indefinitely. A roundtrip flight from New York to L.A., for example, generates 1.7 tons of CO₂ per person, which would take 3/4 of an acre of trees to absorb.

While it's not a perfect measure, the ecological footprint makes it easy to conceptualize the degree of environmental destruction that different lifestyles incur. The average American's footprint is 24 acres, or about 2.5 times the size of Washington Square Park - yet the world only contains 4.5 acres of biologically productive land per person. In other words, if everybody lived the way we did, we would need about five Earths to sustain us.



US average:
24 acres/person



Global average:
6 acres/person



Land available:
4.5 acres/person

Clearly, some great changes are needed in order to live within the Earth's natural limits. To shrink our footprints to the extent necessary to become sustainable, an awareness of environmental impact needs to inform every choice we make.

My Footprint

To calculate your own ecofootprint, take the quiz at www.myfootprint.org. Make sure to click “take action” to see which choices will reduce your footprint the most. For a more in-depth discussion of eco-footprinting, attend the “What’s an Ecological Footprint?” workshop on November 5th.

Food

____ % of the food I eat is local (within 200 miles)

____ % of the food I eat is organic

____ % of the food I eat is unpackaged and unprocessed

____ of my 7 meals a week are vegetarian

Mobility

I spend ____ miles per week riding in a car, with an average of ____ people in the car. The average fuel efficiency of the cars I ride in is ____ miles per gallon.

I spend ____ miles per week riding on a bus, train, or other public transportation around town

I spend ____ miles per year riding on a long distance bus or train (Greyhound, Amtrak)

I fly ____ hours per year.

I walk or ride my bike ____ miles per week.

Housing

There are ____ people in my house/dorm room.

Cumulatively, we put ____ loads of laundry in the dryer per month.

____% of the lights in my home are CFL (compact fluorescent) bulbs.

My home/dorm room is air conditioned ____ days per year, and heated ____ days per year.

I watch TV or use the computer at home ____ hours per day.

I spend ____ minutes per day in the shower.

Living the Green Life

The average American uses 100 gallons of water every day - before leaving the house in the morning. Making smart choices in your daily routine can add up to cut your footprint substantially. We've listed some of the biggest ones here; check out treehugger.com's "how to go green guides" for more tips.

Cut Your Energy

- Always **turn your lights and A/C off** when you leave the room.
- **Unplug those gadgets.** Appliances, TVs, computers, and other electronics draw energy even when they're turned off. Use a power strip so that everything can be turned off with one switch.
- Too hot? Opening the window will only make your thermostat go up higher. If you're in a residence hall and can't control the heater yourself, report the problem to Housing (or FCM) right away: [\(212\)998-1001](tel:2129981001), or FCMhelpdesk@nyu.edu.
- Try to **work by natural light** whenever you can. Besides reducing the need for artificial light, studies show that sunlight makes you happier and more productive.
- **Switch those light bulbs.** Fluorescent bulbs use 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer.
- **Keep your fridge and freezer full.** Food helps retain the cold temperature. Also be sure to keep the fridge door closed as much as possible.

Cut Your Water

- **Turn the water off** when shaving and brushing your teeth. Instead, you can use a cup of water to brush, and fill the sink bowl to rinse your razor.
- **Get clean quicker.** You can still savor that shower - but try shortening it by a few minutes. Every minute can save up to 5 gallons. If you want to go all out, try taking a "navy shower," where you turn the water off to lather up, or turning down the temperature to save energy.

- **Report leaky faucets and faulty toilets** to your building's maintenance immediately (if you live in a dorm, that means calling **(212)998-1001**, or emailing **FCMhelpdesk@nyu.edu**.)
- **Fill 'er up.** Do laundry only when you have a full load. Same goes for dishwashers.

Clean up Cleanly

- **Wash your clothes in warm/cold water** and you'll use 80 to 85% less energy compared to using hot water. Only use hot water if you are washing out oily dirt or stains.
- **Use green laundry detergents.** In particular, look for ones that are non-toxic, biodegradable, and phosphate-free. Use oxygen or hydrogen bleaches instead of toxic chlorine bleach.
- **Save old towels and t-shirts** for cleaning to replace store-bought rags and paper towels.
- **Go to green dry-cleaners**, which use nontoxic chemicals. An updated list of green dry-cleaners is available at **www.well-building.com**.

The Three Rs

The USA is among the most wasteful of any country in the history of the planet: the average American produces 1,609 pounds of waste each year, and close to 98 percent of the materials extracted every year can be classified as a waste product. While **recycling** can help make a small dent in your waste footprint, it's far more effective to focus on the other two Rs, trying to **reduce** the amount of goods you consume, and finding creative ways to **reuse** the things you already have.

Reduce

Think before you buy. Before you approach the register, make sure to ask yourself: "do I really need it? How much will it improve my life in the long run?" From toothpicks to laptops, most things we buy today entail numerous forms of environmental destruction on their way

from the factory to the store.

Clean out your closet. Thrift and vintage stores will always take old clothes in good condition – and if you're lucky, you might just net a few bucks in the process.

Take it from the trash. Dumpster diving, or “freeganism,” might sound really gross, but if you're feeling adventurous, it can be a completely hygienic way of getting everything from bananas to furniture for free. Learn all about it at www.freegan.info.

Reuse

Do it yourself. The more you look for creative ways to use stuff you have sitting around instead of spending money on new products, the more you'll find. A packing envelope can find new life as a laptop case, while an old Snapple bottle is better for the environment than either buying bottled water or using a Nalgene. Check out www.readymademag.com and www.instructables.com for cool DIY ideas.

When you do need to buy something, try to **buy it used**. You won't be responsible for the manufacturing and transportation footprint of a new item, and you'll be reducing landfill waste, as well. See www.craigslist.org and www.freecycle.org.

Invest in reusable shopping bags. If you haven't gotten around to buying reusable cloth shopping bags, reuse your paper or plastic bags several times. *Hint: old tank tops also make great cloth bags when they're sewn up at the bottom.*

Recycle

While it might not make as much difference as many seem to think, recycling everything you can is still part of being an eco-conscious citizen. Here's what NYC recycles:

Paper

- white, colored, and glossy paper (staples OK)
- mail and envelopes (window envelopes OK)
- smooth cardboard (food boxes, shoe boxes, cardboard tubes, cardboard from product packaging)
- paper bags
- cardboard egg cartons and trays
- newspapers, magazines, and catalogs
- phone books, softcover books
- corrugated cardboard

Metal, plastic and glass

- glass bottles & jars
- plastic bottles & jugs marked (#1 or #2 only)
- milk cartons & juice boxes
- metal cans (soup, empty aerosol cans, dried-out paint cans, etc.)
- aluminum foil wrap & trays
- household metal (wire hangers, pots, tools, curtain rods, small appliances that are mostly metal, etc.)
- bulk metal (metal furniture, cabinets, large appliances, etc.)

Make sure recycling bins are clean. If the smallest bit of trash makes its way into a recycling bin, everything in it is considered contaminated and none of it gets recycled. Here's what to make sure *doesn't* end up in the blue bin:

- hardcover books
- napkins, paper towels, and tissues
- dirty paper cups, plates, and plastic
- paper with a lot of tape and glue
- plastic- or wax-coated paper (candy wrappers, take-out containers, etc.)
- photographic paper
- any plastic other than bottles and jugs (deli and yogurt containers; plastic toys, cups, bags, wrap, etc.)

- any glass other than glass bottles & jars (mirrors, lightbulbs, ceramics, glassware, etc.)
- styrofoam

For more info on New York City's recycling program, head to www.nyc.gov/html/nycwasteless. Info for recycling at NYU can be found at www.nyu.edu/fcm/recycling.htm.

Batteries and electronics are called “e-waste”. They contain toxic substances and shouldn't be thrown in either the trash or the recycling. To donate your cell-phone to charity, check out www.collectivegood.com. To find out about e-waste recycling in NYC, go to www.nyc.gov/html/nycwasteless/html/recycling/electronicrecycling.shtml.

Sustainable Eating

The food you choose to eat makes a tremendous difference, both in your health and that of the planet. Most conventional food is grown on large factory farms, thousands of miles away, with toxic pesticides and antibiotics. But a revolution is underway in the way we grow and eat: local and organic are fast entering the mainstream, proving that “slow food” isn't just a thing of the past.

Buy local. On average, US supermarket food travels 1,500 to 2,000 miles before it reaches the family table. Buying local food can reduce the amount of petroleum consumed to transport your dinner by as much as 95%. It's true that farmer's markets can be a little pricey for student budgets, but here's a hint: it makes much more of a difference to buy local produce than local dry goods, because produce is often air-freighted. To learn about the benefits of becoming a “locavore,” go to www.100milediet.org. To find farmer's markets and community gardens near you, see www.localharvest.org (all USA) and www.justfood.org (NYC only).

Buy organic. Organic foods are grown without the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics or added hormones. Organic farmers work to improve the ecology of their soils, resulting in food that's healthier for you and better for the earth. You can read about the USDA's organic guidelines at www.ams.usda.gov/nop

Buy unprocessed. Food that isn't packaged or pre-cooked is often cheaper, and reduces waste, as well. Find a grocery near you that has bulk bins, and bring your own bags when you use them.

Cut the meat. Regardless of the ethical or health-based reasons for vegetarianism, a meat-free diet is unquestionably greener. Even rice, the most water-consuming grain, requires only one-tenth of the amount of water per pound compared to beef. For a nifty article on the carbon footprint of a cheeseburger, check out www.openthefuture.com/cheeseburger_CF.html

Reduce food waste. Make sure to buy only the food you think you'll be able to eat. When you're getting takeout, only accept the items you actually need (e.g. napkins, flatware, etc.). If the food is being delivered, ask your order-taker to write "NO NAPKINS, FLATWARE OR CONDIMENT" directly on the order ticket.

Bring your own. Find a plastic container and silverware set that you like and get into the habit of carrying them around with you - you never know when you'll end up using them.

Studying and Work

It's all too easy in college to start feeling like your future depends on working as hard as you possibly can to get that A. But remember: grades aren't the end of the world, and being happy in the present is just as important as being successful in the future. In fact, the two aren't mutually exclusive: taking a break every once in a while actually improves your retention when studying.

Printing

- **Think before you print** or photocopy. Use the print preview feature to select only the pages that you need to print. Edit work on the computer rather than on paper, or print your drafts on scrap paper.
- **Send e-mails instead of printing hard copies** when it's professional and acceptable to do so.
- When you do hit ctrl-p, make sure to **print double-sided** whenever possible. Encourage your professors to do the same. Find out how to configure your printer at www.nyu.edu/fcm/autoduplex.htm.

Computers

- **Use laptops** instead of desktops. They are now less expensive, and use 50% less energy.
- **Set your computer to sleep** or hibernate mode when it's not in use, and shut it down if you aren't going to use it for more than three minutes. Go to www.nyu.edu/fcm/cesfaq.htm for help configuring power-saving settings on your computer. *Hint: screen savers don't save any energy at all!*

Reading

- If it doesn't give you a headache, **read on the computer**. You can purchase access to many textbooks online instead of buying a physical copy, saving both trees and cash. Also, bring your laptop to class instead of printing out everything on Blackboard.
- If you do choose to buy a textbook, **buy it used**. They're less expensive, reduce the demand for new books, and prevent all that paper from ending up in the trash.
- **Sell your books back** at the end of the semester. Cutting demand for brand new books we will be saving the many resources it takes to make them.

Ecological Handprints: Giving Back

Eco-awareness isn't just about decreasing your negative impact: it's about increasing the things you do that are good for the planet, as well. If ecofootprints are a measure of our negative impact on the planet, then our positive impact can be measured in handprints. From cracking a book to cracking down on pollution, there's a million ways to begin giving back to the earth. Here's a few ideas to get you started.

Get educated

NYU offers dozens of classes related to environmental issues - in fact, it just started an Environmental Studies major this semester (environment.as.nyu.edu). Among the courses open to undergrads are **Urban Environmentalism** in the department of social and cultural analysis, **Ethics and the Environment** in the philosophy department, and **Environmental Risk and Society** in Gallatin.

There's no limit to the amount of eco-education you can do **online**. The biggest environmental sites on the web are treehugger.com, worldchanging.com, grist.org and greenoptions.com. There are also thousands of blogs covering more specialized topics, from eco-psychology to green architecture to urban gardening. For an NYC-centric take on sustainability, check out noimpactman.com and thewildgreenyonder.com, the blogs of Footprint Forward organizers Colin Beavan and Adam Brock. Newdream.org is a great resource for finding out about greener products, and you can watch free lectures by amazing green thinkers at ted.com/talks.

Of course, nothing beats the feeling of printed paper, and there are a ton of great **green books** out there. Some of the most popular:

- **Deep Economy** by Bill McKibben makes the case for localizing economies and rebuilding community.
- Michael Pollan's **The Omnivore's Dilemma** gives a fascinating look into the world of factory farming and its alternatives.
- **Cradle to Cradle** by William McDonough and Michael Braun-

gart lays out a “zero-waste” future, where all the materials we use are endlessly recycled.

- **Garbageland** by Elizabeth Royte exposes the incredible journey our stuff takes after we throw it “away”.

Get natural

Studies show that humans have an innate need to **experience nature** – something that won’t happen in NYC unless you go out of your way. Try to spend a few hours every week at a park or community garden, strolling along the river, or if you’re ambitious, on a hike upstate.

Meet the neighbors (human and non)

Reconnecting with the world around you means playing an active role in the communities you’re a part of, whether it’s your residence hall, your neighborhood, or the biological community of the NYC area. Say hi to people you pass on the floor. Attend a community board meeting (www.nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb) to see what’s going on in your ‘hood. Get a field guide and start identifying the trees on your block.

Get involved

There are dozens of organizations on campus and around town that could use your help in making the world a little greener. Through its annual Green Grants program, NYU’s **Sustainability Task Force** (www.nyu.edu/sustainability) funds community-generated campus greening projects. **Earthmatters** (www.nyu.edu/clubs/earthmatters) is NYU’s premier environmental club, hosting speakers and launching advocacy campaigns, while **NYU Green Arch** (groups.google.com/group/nyugreenarch) builds the green community at NYU by connecting organizations with each other and helping plan events.

My Footprint Forward Week Goals

Living the Green Life

The Three Rs

Sustainable Eating

Studying and Work

Ecological Handprints

Be sure to post questions, thoughts, and responses to your experience on the FF blog: www.footprintforward.wordpress.com. To log in, go to wordpress.com, type in the username “**nyufootprintforward**” and the password “**n0impact**”. Then click “new post” at the top of the page to start writing.

Footprint Forward Week Calendar

Sunday, 11/4:

Footprint Forward Opening Workshop: “No Impact Man” Colin Beavan will be on hand to explain the philosophy of living impact-free and answer questions.

2-4 PM, Bronfman Center, 7 E 10th St

Monday, 11/5:

What’s an Ecological Footprint? Learn about the science of ecofootprinting and calculate your own with Adam Brock from NYU Green Arch and Jeremy Freidman, coordinator of the NYU Sustainability Task Force.

5-7 PM, Bronfman Center, 7 E 10th St

Tuesday, 11/6:

Green Eats at Hayden: Join head NYU chef Jeramie Garlick and Kerry Trueman from Eating Liberally for a discussion of sustainable food at NYU and beyond.

7-9PM, Hayden Dining Hall, 33 Washington Square West

Thrown Away: A panel with “Garbageland” author Elizabeth Royte and members of freegan.info, to be followed by a dumpster-diving expedition in the Village.

8:30-10 PM, Kimmel room 906

Wednesday, 11/7:

Greening the Green: Cleanup and bulb planting in Washington Square Park.

10AM-2PM, Washington Square Arch

Post-Carbon Cities: A talk by peak oil activist Daniel Lerch on what city governments should be doing to prepare for life after fossil fuels.

6-7:30PM, Vanderbilt Hall room 204, 40 Washington Square South

Thursday, 11/8:

Water: The Real Deal: A panel presented by the Gallatin Consciousness about the way we use water personally, on campus, and in the city at large.

7-9PM Kimmel room 406

Zero-Footprint Party: Hang out with other Footprint Forward participants - and remember to bring your own cup. **9-11PM, Think Coffee, 248 Mercer St**

Friday, 11/9:

Marking the Territory: Help Green Maps NYC plot the eco-landmarks in Greenwich Village. **11AM-2PM, Washington Square Arch**

Sunday, 11/11:

Footprint Forward Forum: discuss your week of low-impact living with other participants, and talk about continuing to take your footprint forward after the week is over. **2-4 PM, Bronfman Center, 7 E 10th St**

Monday, 11/12:

No Impact Lecture: Wrap up your Footprint Forward week with an inspiring talk by Colin Beavan, part of the Bronfman Center’s Selma Ruben Distinguished Lecture Series. **7-9PM, Cooper Union Great Hall, 7 East 7th Street at 3rd Ave**