UCLA Sustainability Action Research

THE FUTURE OF
SURPLUS GOODS
AT UCLA

Solutions for Sustainable Durable Goods Management

SAR 2025 FINAL REPORT

TEAM LEADS: KILEY LARKIN & LUCIA METCALFE
Team Members: Dayna Coates, Isabelle Tandradinata, Rebecca Kam, & Mathew Ye

STAKEHOLDER: BONNY BENTZIN

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Abstract

UCLA currently lacks a standardized procedure for managing surplus durable goods, resulting in avoidable waste, budget inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for community support. Many universities have effectively addressed this issue by implementing some form of centralized surplus management system, which redistributes durable goods effectively within the university and community. This report presents the research conducted by UCLA's Sustainability Action Research (SAR) Surplus Goods Team. The team sought to design a management program to increase waste diversion and reuse of surplus on campus on a systemic level while prioritizing practicality and strengthening community ties. The team conducted surveys of campus departments, visual audits with Facilities Management, and interviews with stakeholders and peer institutions to map UCLA's current system and develop a scalable, equity-centered model. The proposal emphasizes accessibility, student and community involvement, and integration with existing sustainability goals. Preliminary findings reveal key opportunities to divert waste and redistribute goods to under-resourced schools and nonprofit partners like AltaSea. This project highlights a pathway for UCLA to reduce environmental impact, support equity, and serve as a model for other UC campuses.

Introduction

The management of surplus durable goods at universities has become an increasingly important topic in championing campus sustainability initiatives, especially as these institutions strive to reduce waste, adopt sustainable practices, and construct a circular economy. Surplus goods, including bulky items such as furniture, electronics, and lab equipment, often end up in landfills or are left to accumulate in basements and storage spaces, leading to significant environmental costs and wasted resources. This mismanagement not only impacts the environment but also reflects a missed opportunity for universities to reduce financial expenditure by reusing and repurposing these items. By implementing effective surplus goods management systems, universities can enhance their sustainability initiatives and foster a culture of responsible consumption and waste reduction. A recent review of waste management practices in higher education institutions highlights the crucial role of comprehensive waste policies - especially those that incorporate surplus goods management - in achieving zero-waste goals (Rodríguez-Guerreiro et al., 2024). The study indicates that while higher education institutions generate considerable amounts of waste, they frequently lack cohesive frameworks for managing surplus goods, resulting in inefficiencies and missed opportunities for resource reuse. Additionally, the research emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and administrative commitment in the success of waste reduction initiatives.

In this context, UCLA stands to benefit significantly from developing structured policies and practices that address surplus goods management to enhance its sustainability efforts. Currently, these surplus goods are often discarded and left to accumulate in corners and basements of departmental buildings. The absence of a centralized surplus goods management system hinders UCLA's ability to effectively divert waste and maximize reuse potential. The

primary goal of this project is to address these challenges by focusing on three key aspects. First, the project team will research the current surplus goods management processes at UCLA as well as successful systems implemented at peer institutions. Second, the team aims to propose a best-practice framework to assist UCLA in developing its first centralized surplus goods management system. Together, these efforts align with the overarching objective of the project, which is to contribute to UCLA's Zero Waste Goal of increasing the campus waste diversion rate from 56% in 2022 to 90% in the near future.

Methods

To address the issue of managing surplus goods on UCLA's campus, we needed to first gain a comprehensive understanding of the current systems in place. This involved conducting site visits, interviewing members of various departments, and sending out surveys on the types of goods that are disposed of across campus. In order to propose a better system, it was also necessary to look into what strategies are successful at other universities. To do this, we interviewed surplus project leads at several universities and conducted research on six existing systems. Each method is designed to inform the development of a model surplus stop that prioritizes sustainability, equity, and community impact at UCLA and in the surrounding areas.

Campus and Site Tours

Our research began with a two-part tour process. First, we sought to catalogue the types and quantities of durable surplus goods across various UCLA facilities to establish a baseline of available materials and develop an understanding of what types of goods were most frequently discarded. We conducted several visual audits, touring areas of campus where excess goods were stored and capturing images of the goods and storage facilities. Key sites included "The Yard"

and the "Hall of Wonders," informal names for locations used to store or discard used, and often unusual, items. We collected images of areas of the UCLA Lab School in addition to these unofficial "storage" areas on campus.

The second part of our tour process involved exploring AltaSea, a nonprofit located at the Port of Los Angeles, as a potential off-campus surplus distribution site. AltaSea is "dedicated to accelerating scientific collaboration, advancing an emerging blue economy through business innovation and job creation, and inspiring the next generation, all for a more sustainable, just and equitable world" (AltaSea, n.d.). A crucial issue that UCLA faces when looking to institute a surplus stop is the space. At the start of our project, we wanted to begin establishing a relationship with those at AltaSea to determine if this would be a feasible location for UCLA's surplus stop in the future. In March, we toured AltaSea to better understand the organization's mission and assess how our project might align with its goals and existing infrastructure. Throughout the course of our project, we continued to meet with members of the AltaSea team who specialized in various areas, from education to facilities. Our stakeholder, Bonny, will work with the AltaSea team and the respective parties at UCLA to continue this discussion beyond the completion of our research project.

Best Practices Research

To inform the design of an effective surplus stop, we analyzed systems at six other universities, identifying successful strategies and common challenges. These universities included UC San Diego, University of British Columbia, Arizona State University, University of Washington, University of Southern California, and Oklahoma State University. Our research focused on several key factors: inventory tracking methods, oversight and department responsibility, campus-wide access policies, on-campus vs. off-campus models, emphasis on

reuse versus disposal, logistics and transportation, and financial structure. These insights have guided our development of a UCLA-specific model that is both feasible and impactful.

Informational Interviews

Given the absence of a centralized surplus management system at UCLA, we identified Facilities Management as a critical source of institutional knowledge. We spoke with members of the Facilities Management team along with Capital Programs Management (CPM), one of UCLA's moving vendors. Both groups provided context into the history of surplus goods at UCLA and informed us of what they believe to be the most pressing issues of the current system. We also developed tailored interview questions for facilities and surplus staff at UC San Diego, UC Riverside, the University of Washington, the University of British Columbia, and Arizona State University to compare management approaches across institutions. These interviews focused on system structure, sustainability objectives, barriers to implementation, required technologies, and stakeholder perspectives on long-term improvement. Both series of interviews were used to inform our system proposal.

Surveys

To further understand surplus management from a departmental perspective, we distributed surveys via Google Forms to key campus units. Respondents included the Business Services Director at ASUCLA, the Access Services Manager at UCLA Library, and facilities leadership from the Anderson School of Management. From their responses, we gathered information on the most frequently disposed of items, individual disposal processes, and their perspectives on improving surplus systems. All three departments reported frequent disposal of heavy furniture such as couches, desks, conference tables, and filing cabinets. Other significant items include durable goods like food service equipment (e.g., server racks). These insights offer

a ground-level view of current inefficiencies and departmental needs, helping us tailor our recommendations to reflect operational realities.

EDI and Community Impact

To embed equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles into our research process, we intentionally designed methods that prioritize accessibility, transparency, and responsiveness to community needs. In April, we circulated a shared spreadsheet where UCLA departments could input both the surplus items they had available and the items they needed. This participatory tool allowed for cross-departmental collaboration and helped us identify patterns of material availability and demand. To inform future outreach strategies for surplus redistribution, we also explored different communication channels, such as social media, websites, email campaigns, and signage, to evaluate which methods might most effectively reach local educators and community members. A goal of our proposed surplus model is to dedicate a portion of the surplus stop as a "free zone" where local educators can access items such as filing cabinets, desk chairs, and school supplies, which are resources they often have to purchase themselves. The University of Washington served as a model for these outreach strategies, as they have an established social media presence for their surplus stop. These steps ensured that our data collection and planning processes were grounded in EDI considerations from the start.

Challenges

Over the course of this project, our team encountered several challenges that influenced our research process and proposed solutions. One major challenge was the lack of standardization across departments regarding surplus disposal. While some departments had informal systems or relied on ASUCLA's internal processes, others defaulted to Facilities

Management pickups with minimal tracking or reuse attempts. This inconsistency made it difficult to construct a baseline and required our team to interpret a wide range of departmental experiences. Another barrier was the urgency of surplus removal. Several departments reported that they typically had less than two weeks to remove surplus goods from their space, which significantly limited the feasibility of reuse or donation efforts. This short turnaround often led to goods being recycled or sent to landfills, even when they were still functional. We also faced limitations in data collection. While our department survey was informative, the sample size was smaller than anticipated due to limited responses. In addition, Facilities Management did not have centralized data on surplus volume or item types, requiring us to rely on a small number of visual audits and interviews to characterize the current system. Storage constraints were another obstacle. Many staff members expressed interest in reuse or donation but cited a lack of space to hold surplus goods while waiting for pickup or redistribution. Without a centralized holding area or consistent coordination, many items were removed before alternative arrangements could be made.

Lastly, while we incorporated Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) considerations in our recommendations, we recognized the need for more formal communication and partnership channels with community recipients such as underfunded K-12 schools. Without a designated point of contact or platform for donation outreach, the logistics of implementing an equitable redistribution model remain a future challenge for campus partners to address.

Despite these limitations, the project provided valuable insight into the systemic gaps and opportunities for UCLA to launch a pilot surplus program that is both practical and equity-centered.

Successes

Despite the challenges we faced, our project achieved several key successes that laid a strong foundation for surplus goods management reform at UCLA. First, we were able to conduct a comprehensive landscape analysis of UCLA's current surplus disposal system. Through surveys, field visits, and interviews with staff across multiple departments-including Facilities Management, project managers, and ASUCLA-we gathered firsthand accounts of how surplus durable goods are currently handled. This helped us identify inconsistencies, system gaps, and opportunities for improvement. We also leveraged best practices from peer institutions. By conducting interviews and independent research on surplus programs at universities like Arizona State University, UC Riverside, and the University of Washington, we were able to identify common elements of successful systems-such as centralized intake, inventory tagging, and redistribution partnerships-that informed the structure of our proposed pilot. Another major success was the development of a detailed, scalable proposal for a centralized surplus goods program tailored to UCLA. This included a process flowchart, intake and redistribution stages, inventory tracking suggestions, and a vision for departmental collaboration. The proposal is designed with flexibility in mind so it can be piloted within one department or scaled up campuswide over time.

In addition, we placed strong emphasis on community and equity impacts. By engaging with external partners like AltaSea and proposing donation pathways to underfunded K-12 schools, we ensured our project aligned with UCLA's sustainability and DEI priorities. The potential to support creative reuse, educational access, and environmental justice through surplus redirection was one of the most meaningful outcomes of our work. Finally, our team raised awareness of surplus as a sustainability issue. Many staff were unaware of the waste implications

tied to current disposal practices. Through interviews and department conversations, we were able to elevate the topic and generate interest in more sustainable, efficient, and community-oriented solutions.

Results

To better understand and curate recommendations for UCLA's surplus goods system, we conducted departmental surveys, visual audits, and informational interviews. These research methods provide insight into how we can identify and bridge the gap for creating a centralized system.

Campus and Site Tours

As mentioned in our methods section, during Winter Quarter, the Surplus Goods team toured the AltaSea facility, a potential long-term partner for surplus goods storage. AltaSea houses a range of sustainability initiatives, including kelp farming, environmental engineering research, and upcycled art displays. With AltaSea's expansive site and established storage areas, the facility is a promising location for redirecting and upcycling UCLA's usable goods. Moreover, fostering a connection with AltaSea serves to promote UCLA's greater involvement in environmental education, research, and practices.

In early spring quarter, our team toured various disposal and storage locations across campus and on the residential Hill, accompanied by our stakeholder, Bonny Bentzin. At these sites, we observed the abundance of large furniture, such as tables, chairs, and filing cabinets, left in hallways or outside with no intended usage. At the storage site near Easton Stadium, facilities management staff stated that they frequently collect salvageable goods that are no longer in use by other departments. However, these items ultimately enter disposal pathways due to the overall

lack of storage capacity. While touring the alley between the Luskin Turnaround and the

Engineering Maker Space, we encountered two dumpsters filled with discarded chairs, further

demonstrating UCLA's storage limitations. Ultimately, our campus and site tour highlighted the

challenges that arise out of inconsistent departmental compliance and limited storage capacity.

Survey Data

Departmental surveys, collected via Google Form, were answered by the ASUCLA's

Business Services Director, UCLA Library's Access Services Manager, and the Anderson School

of Management's facilities management leadership. From their responses, we have collected

information on what usable items are disposed of the most frequently, their individual

departmental disposal processes, and their outlook on improving the current systems. Starting

with the items disposed of frequently, all three departments reported the disposal of heavy

furniture such as couches, conference room tables, desks, and filing cabinets. Other notable

durable goods include food service equipment, for example, server racks. Drawing from our

visual audit form, approximately 86% of goods reported in the survey entered recycling

pathways and the other 14% went to storage.

What durable goods in usable condition has your department/facility disposed of?
3 responses

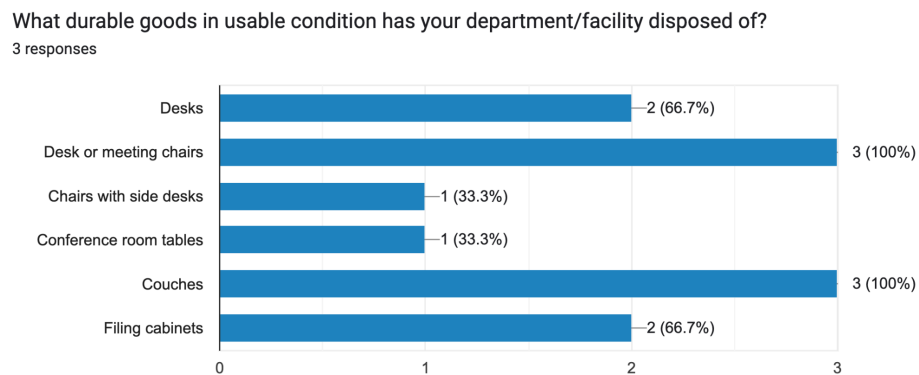| Category	Value
Desks	2 (66.7%)
Desk or meeting chairs	3 (100%)
Chairs with side desks	1 (33.3%)
Conference room tables	1 (33.3%)
Couches	3 (100%)
Filing cabinets	2 (66.7%)

Figure 1: Responses to Departmental Survey on Usable Waste

According to ASUCLA management, the department follows a different set of policies from the rest of the school. Considering ASUCLA's extensive presence on campus, management will first reach out to see if any other ASUCLA department or branch is in need of the item. If the item is unwanted within ASUCLA, managers will offer the item to all departments on campus. However, if the item is in relatively good condition, ASUCLA will consider selling to auction houses or donating. If none of these prior steps are completed, the department will dispose of the item. ASUCLA's Business Services Director places strong emphasis on diverting and repurposing the waste before opting for the disposal route.

After conducting the same survey with the Access Services Manager at UCLA Library, we've gathered that the department fills out a pick-up form when an item is no longer in use. However, UCLA Library notes that usable furniture is not disposed of often unless there is a major library renovation, which remains uncommon. Based on this department's usage, couches and chairs are disposed of every 5–10 years. However, there are no specific guidelines for determining whether an item is worth throwing away or salvaging. An item can show visible signs of wear, but still not be replaced. This ties back into how furniture disposal depends greatly on whether the department has the budget for furniture replacement. Moreover, the UCLA Library's budget does not include furniture replacement, making it difficult to track incoming and outgoing furniture.

For the UCLA Anderson School of Management, the processes for handling surplus furniture and goods also vary. This department reaches out to the school's Facilities Service Request to call for removal. Around 4-5 filing cabinets and 6-7 desks are disposed of annually within this department. According to Anderson's Building Services Manager, items are removed based on how worn out they appear. But, items that are in usable condition but no longer needed

follow this same path of disposal since the department lacks storage space. As a result, Anderson prioritizes chairs and small cabinets, items that are frequently used. If the item is requested, the department will try to repurpose the item at a low cost.

Despite the structural challenges of an ununified disposal system and lack of storage area, each of these three department systems management leaders maintain an optimistic lookout for the future of a more sustainable and closed-loop surplus system. These leaders point out that they also hope to support a less wasteful system, whether it is the implementation of a life cycle guideline, increased storage facilities, or increased awareness of the issue throughout campus.

Best Practices Research

Understanding UCLA's growth potential and suggesting recommendations is only possible through evaluating successful systems at other universities. Our research analyzes the surplus management processes at six universities, where they mainly operate the system through a central Asset Management department. Here, the items are individually assigned numbers for tracking lifecycles, department ownership, and cost. When an item is ready for removal, a pick-up form is filled out, and the Asset Management team will be notified to pick-up. To incentivize departments to send their items to be reused instead of disposed of, many schools offer a percentage of profits back to the department.

Informational Interviews

After researching best practices inspired by various schools with established surplus management systems, our team reached out to the managers of these departments of each respective school to learn about the processes in greater detail. Starting with our informational interview with John Ishii, the Assistant Director within Arizona State University's Supply Chain department, key takeaways include the significance of having a singular campus-wide set of

policies to increase clarity, an accessible database of department inventory, and financial incentives like rebates. Interviewing University of Washington's Amanda Harryman, the Surplus Program Coordinator of Online Sales and Inventory, emphasized social media and online marketing presence to increase student and staff awareness and participation. Next, our interview with University of British Columbia's Leigh Clark revealed the benefits of having multiple redistribution channels of online, in-person, and warehouse options. Finally, we spoke with Michael Gonzales from the University of California, Riverside's surplus goods department. From this interview, we learned to prioritize visibility through marketing and collaborating with sustainability teams and student organizations. Additionally, ensuring departments and staff are educated on the topic, whether through an onboarding module or course, can significantly increase staff engagement for properly diverting unused materials towards a reuse pathway. Pricing goods reasonably and being flexible to negotiations is key to maintaining the flow of goods in surplus storage. Ultimately, being able to harness support and action on the student and departmental level are key to implementing an effective surplus management standard.

Deliverables

In order to solidify this step towards greener campus surplus practices, the Surplus Goods Team has created a detailed set of steps, combining best practices, survey feedback, and visual audit conclusions. Our proposed system, as outlined by the flow chart, represents the guidelines and pathways that surplus items may take once a department no longer needs it. Along with our team's recommendations, the second component of our deliverable includes a mock form that departments will fill out for item removal. The form, which categorizes item wear, serves to increase organization and promote the reuse of items from different departments. When streamlining the disposal and removal of goods, ensuring that staff and leadership are aware of

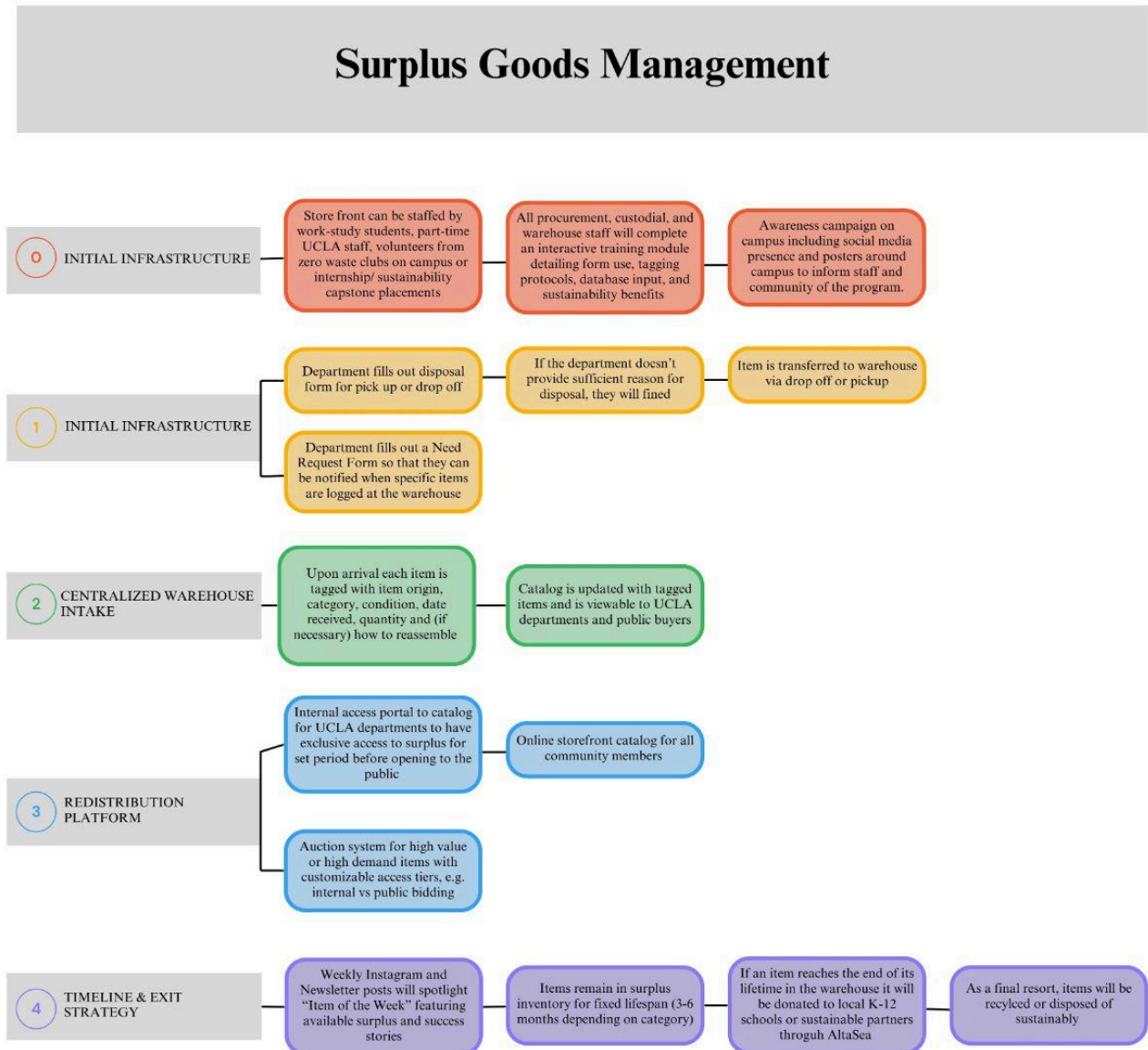the unified system and its proper practices is key for a successful and efficient transition. Therefore, our team created a mock training module that can be part of mandatory staff training. With access to storage spaces being a significant barrier to a centralized disposal system with an emphasis on reuse, we hope to harness our partnerships with off-campus groups such as AltaSea to create a meaningful impact.

Appendices

Appendix A: Surplus Goods Management Flow Chart

Surplus Goods Management

0 INITIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Store front can be staffed by work-study students, part-time UCLA staff, volunteers from zero waste clubs on campus or internship/ sustainability capstone placements
- All procurement, custodial, and warehouse staff will complete an interactive training module detailing form use, tagging protocols, database input, and sustainability benefits
- Awareness campaign on campus including social media presence and posters around campus to inform staff and community of the program.

1 INITIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

- Department fills out disposal form for pick up or drop off
- If the department doesn't provide sufficient reason for disposal, they will fined
- Item is transferred to warehouse via drop off or pickup
- Department fills out a Need Request Form so that they can be notified when specific items are logged at the warehouse

2 CENTRALIZED WAREHOUSE INTAKE

- Upon arrival each item is tagged with item origin, category, condition, date received, quantity and (if necessary) how to reassemble
- Catalog is updated with tagged items and is viewable to UCLA departments and public buyers

3 REDISTRIBUTION PLATFORM

- Internal access portal to catalog for UCLA departments to have exclusive access to surplus for set period before opening to the public
- Online storefront catalog for all community members
- Auction system for high value or high demand items with customizable access tiers, e.g. internal vs public bidding

4 TIMELINE & EXIT STRATEGY

- Weekly Instagram and Newsletter posts will spotlight "Item of the Week" featuring available surplus and success stories
- Items remain in surplus inventory for fixed lifespan (3-6 months depending on category)
- If an item reaches the end of its lifetime in the warehouse it will be donated to local K-12 schools or sustainable partners throguh AltaSea
- As a final resort, items will be recylced or disposed of sustainably

Appendix B: Mock-Up - Item Removal Form

Disposal Form

UCLA Sustainability Action Research

Name [   ]
Phone [   ]
Email [   ]
Department [   ]

Please briefly describe the reason for disposal.
[   ]

Please select which items you wish to donate.
- [ ] Chairs
- [ ] Desk chairs
- [ ] Stools
- [ ] Desks
- [ ] Filing cabinets
- [ ] Couches
- [ ] Conference room tables
- [ ] Desks with chairs
- [ ] Other:

Please describe the quantity of each of the items you listed.
[   ]

Please describe the condition of each of the items you listed.
[   ]

Do you plan to order a pick up or drop off ?
- ( ) I will require a pick up
- ( ) I will be dropping off

Please attatch quality photos of the items you wish to donate.

Intake Form

UCLA Sustainability Action Research

Describe the condition.

Item

Date

Origin

Quantity

Describe assembly if applicable.

Need Request Form

UCLA Sustainability Action Research

Name

Phone

Email

Department

Item

Quantity / addiitonal notes

Appendix C: Mock-Up - Training Module Break Down
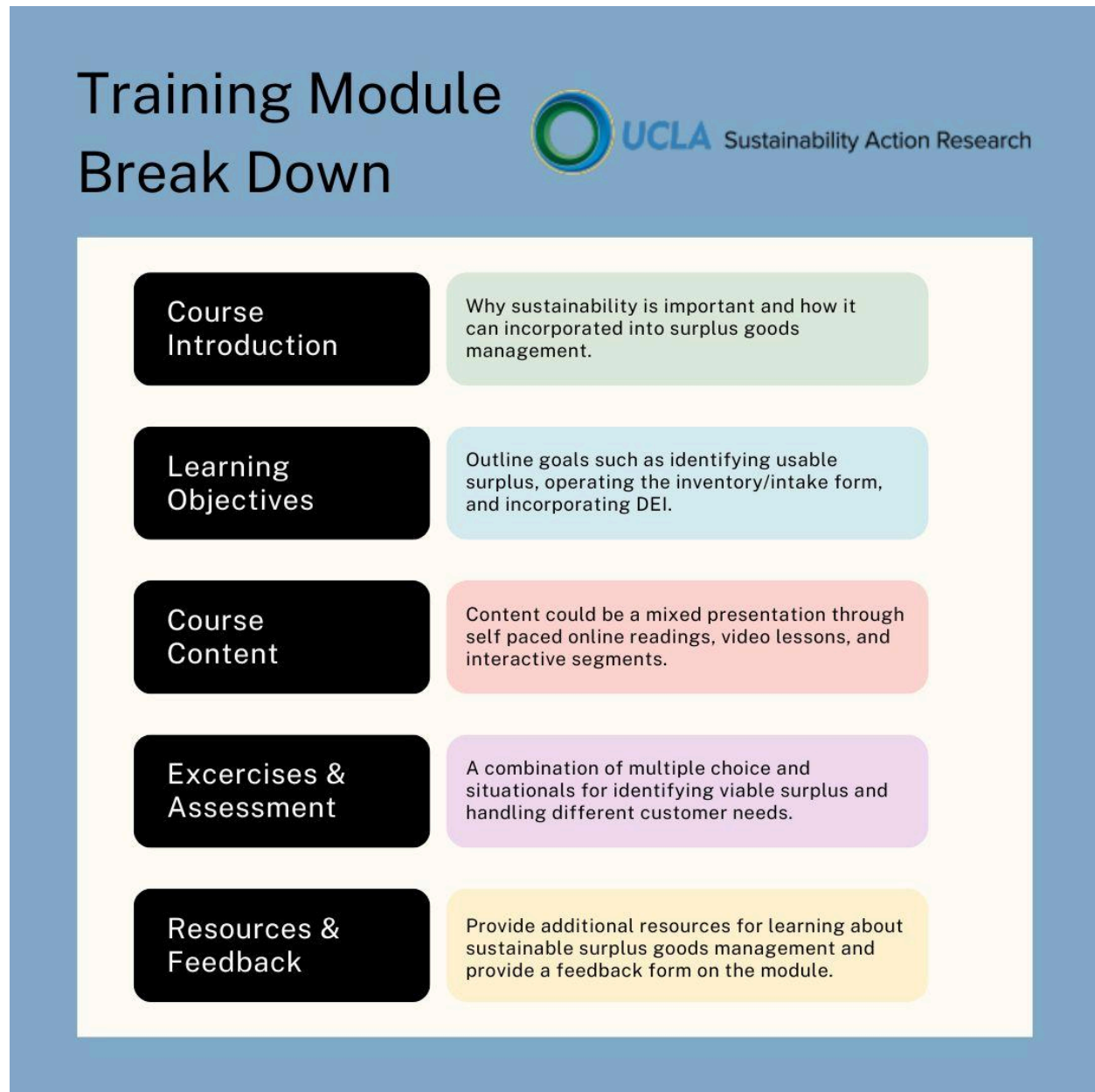
Appendix

Campus movers visual audit submissions from 4/22/25-5/13/25 with the surplus' origin and destination listed below.

Appendix D: Visual Audits

Campus movers visual audit submissions from 4/22/25-5/13/25 with the surplus' origin and

destination listed below.

James West Center Yard

Transit Recycling

Central Grounds Recycling

Arthur Ashe Recycling

John Wooden Recycling

Murphy Hall Recycling

UCLA Lab Schools Recycling

Facilities tour on 4/28/25 of various surplus build up on campus.

Lab School Visual Audit on 4/15/25.

Acknowledgements

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