My Triple Bottom Line: painlessly developing two courses with sustainability in mind

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Syllabus Development for Sustainable Goods Course
Dr. James Hagan
Earth & Environmental Science Department

Course Description
The study of sustainability—the long term viability of humans in harmony with the environment—has been identified as a critical issue to society and industry and is evolving to examine how society should conduct itself in order to survive. This issue impacts the consumer goods that we use in our lives, the processes that are designed to make these goods, and the raw materials that we extract to create these goods. The questions that we will examine will be: can these goods be obtained, made, and consumed in a fashion that allows the current quality of life to be maintained (or enhanced) for future generations? Can these processes be sustainable?

Course Design
We will first examine the essence of the triple bottom line of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. The most visible and discussed component of sustainability is that of the impact on the environment—end us. Each student will choose a product to examine in detail. She will examine the product for its impact due to production, use, and disposal...

Central questions of course presented explicitly.

Sample Course Outline

- Week 1: Impacts of Consumer Goods
  - Social Impacts
  - Health Impacts
  - Environmental Impacts
- To Complete Before Class:
  - Our Common Future: Ch. 3
  - "The Story of Cosmetics" YouTube Video
  - Limits to Growth: Ch. 5
  - Industrial Ecology & the Automobile: Ch. 1
  - Sustainability Revolution: Ch. 4
- Supplemental Reading:
  - "Brominated Flame Retardants" article
  - E-Waste Fact Sheet
  - "U.S. EPA Topics Release Inventory: Summary"
- Assignment:
  - Write a short paper that identifies the health, social, and environmental impacts of your product.

Small papers and mini research assignments are dispensed throughout the semester, all intended to contribute to the final project while giving students the opportunity to earn grades on small assignments.

Knowing Available Resources
From academic journals to recently published "how-to" books, sources abound: the most difficult task consisted of weeding through the superfluous. Taking the time to sit down with a research librarian proved to be invaluable for me, as they are pros at pointing me directly to the resources I did—and didn't—need.

Endless Digging
After the accumulation of myriad sources, it was time to start digging through my sources. I read books, skimmed journal articles, and reached out to individuals to tap their knowledge of the relevant topics. As I became acquainted with the fields I was researching, I began to see parallels and overlaps—and many of the sources I utilized ended up being relevant to both courses.

Research Methodology — the Critical Steps

Communication and Revision
Each step of the way, I met with and emailed Professors Paxton and Hagan. We discussed changes, shared feedback, and worked together to overcome hurdles—such as when I reached an absolute dead end researching the Styrofoam Hey Day hats for Dr. Paxton. I broadened my research to include a broader "Life Cycle Analysis" of Styrofoam as a product itself—I skill I had already learned from researching for Dr. Hagan’s course.

Consult with Professors
initial meetings with my two assigned professors—Dr. Felicity Paxton and Dr. James Hagan—was critical to understanding their conceptions of their courses. We then continued to converse throughout the summer to sharpen the focus of my research, redefine their curriculum proposals, and determine the ways in which my research would ultimately fit into their courses.

Integrating Sustainability Across the Curriculum
Developing Reading Assignments, Executing Curriculum Development

Course Two
Sustainable Goods

Wedding Industrial Complex

most recent companies, associations, ppt slides sustainability problems

Enhancing Critical Approaches to Popular Culture
Course
Dr. Felicity Paxton
Communications Department

Course One
Critical Approaches to Popular Culture

Wedding Industrial Complex

initially, Dr. Paxton wanted to show her class the impact of Penn’s annual order of Hey Day hats on the environment—but the supplier refused to offer the needed information. Thus, I expanded my research to conduct a broader analysis of Styrofoam’s impact on the environment.

Environmental Impact of the Wedding Industry

The final project—an analysis of the sustainability of a particular good—will give students the opportunity to utilize the food and knowledge they acquire over the semester.

A combination of books, scholarly journal articles, and even YouTube videos are used as required homework.

Hey Day Hats
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The Jewelry: The Dry Goods Industry

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