

## Integrating Sustainability in Writing about Health & Medicine

English 395: Writing for the Health Professions, Fall 2014

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As a Foundational Studies course required of all undergraduates, each Professional Writing Course has the same broad pedagogical objectives. Perhaps most important are developing skills at producing texts tailored to the needs of diverse audiences, and using critical thinking to develop arguments. In English 395, these skills are developing through a myriad of writing assignments, which involve thinking about issues in health-related professional fields.

In earlier iterations of this course, I had individual class sessions devoted to creating various genres of professional writing in the health fields—such as popular health-related websites, scholarly review articles, or a proposal for a public health campaign. While these sessions were informative, the course (as a whole) needed a clearer thematic focus; there was a sense in which each individual class was a “stand alone” entity. This fall, I have revised the course so that the theme of sustainability provides that thematic coherence.

Two sustainability themes that I will emphasize are the need for systems thinking in contemporary health care delivery and the ecology of disease. What unites both of these concepts is that they ask us to look beyond disease (and its treatment) as an individualistic phenomenon; rather, it has to be looked at as an interconnected systemic process. These themes are developed most explicitly in the second module of the course, which is based on the collection of readings *A World of Health: Connecting People, Place, and Planet*. As a capstone exercise for this module, each student must design a website on some aspect of health or medicine in which he or she analyzes and critiques a “popular” understanding of a health-related issue through the lens of sustainability concepts. Pedagogically, this exercise provides a unique opportunity to integrate many of the learning outcomes of Professional Writing Program courses with sustainability. To complete this exercise successfully, the students will have to:

- Research the health-related issue using appropriate professional sources
- Analyze the credibility of the evidence in light of sustainability themes (i.e., use critical thinking to produce cogent arguments)
- Recast the relevant technical information so that it can be understood on a “popular” website (i.e., tailor how the information is presented to meet the needs of a diverse audience).

Prior to completing this exercise, there will be multiple sessions in which students write about and discuss issues at the nexus of sustainability and health in both online and face-to-face formats (this course is being taught in a blended format). Finally, I will encourage the students to incorporate sustainability themes into a final group project, which will take the form of a proposal for a public health campaign.