

Kirk Greenwood
Fall 2015
ENGL101C 0209
Description of Syllabus Changes

Since beginning teaching English 101 to first-year students at University of Maryland two years ago, I have been gradually adapting the standard syllabus provided me by the Academic Writing Program to include topical readings and activities on social justice issues that are important to me and have tie-ins with content students may be exploring in other humanities and social science courses. Adjustments I have made to the standard syllabus in the past include readings and activities based on issues of civil rights for gender and sexual minorities, persistent race- and class-based discrimination in housing, and substance abuse and sexual assault on college campuses. I applied to participate in the 2015 Chesapeake Project because I was interested in adding more sustainability-related readings and activities to this battery through which I teach course concepts including rhetorical theory, critical reading, research methods, and academic and expressive writing. To that end, the *Choices for Sustainable Living* reader our cohort utilized as an anchor for Friday's discussion has proved an invaluable resource in imagining a sustainably committed writing pedagogy; I plan to incorporate activities based on number of its readings into my course.

One of the first in-class activities I ask students to complete is a summary of remarks given by ecological economist Herman Daly at a meeting of the National Council for Science and the Environment. The goal of this assignment is for students to assess which information from a dense and jargon-heavy text is worth including in a brief summary. A secondary learning outcome is for students to practice techniques of quotation, paraphrase, and citation, experimenting with different styles of re-presenting challenging content. In the past, I have noticed that students who lack a solid foundation in the economics sometimes fail to grasp some of the specialized terminology, particularly the innovative concept of "uneconomic growth," Daly develops in his speech. I was pleasantly surprised to find that one of the readings from *Choices*, "Off the Pedestal: Creating a New Vision of Economic Growth" by James Gustave Speth, not only cites Daly and his work, but also elucidates "uneconomic growth" and some of the other difficult vocabulary and concepts advanced in the speech. I expect that pairing the Speth and Daly readings will improve students' comprehension of conceptual aspects of the speech, allowing them to better identify which information should be included in their summaries through quotation and paraphrase. Following the summary activity, the class will discuss the problem of unrestrained economic growth and consumerism in the developed world from angles of environmental and social justice, as well as alternative visions of the good life.

Another aspect of the English 101 curriculum that I find students often struggle to comprehend is the distinction between academic and popular sources. Distinguishing between these two genres of texts is crucial for success in a course that requires students to compile, evaluate, and incorporate evidence from both types of sources in their semester-long research projects. I plan to supplement instruction students receive in research methods at a two-day tutorial provided by library staff with an in-class discussion that uses the work of political philosopher Michael J. Sandel to illustrate some of the generic differences between academic and popular sources. Sandel's status as a public intellectual who addresses both scholarly and lay audiences across a variety of genres and media makes him a useful figure on which to hang this kind of instruction.

Sandel's article "What isn't for Sale?" appears in the same chapter of *Choices* as the Speth article and will provide a useful point of comparison to the contemporaneously published academic work "Market Reasoning as Moral Reasoning" from the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. In both texts, Sandel deals with the marketization of American public life and the resulting corruption of civic values. In addition to using the texts to propel a topical discussion of the environmental and social costs of consumer capitalism, I propose to highlight the formal differences entailed in translating similar ideas to different audiences. At the conclusion of our course's first Library Day session, I will assign students "What Isn't for Sale?" to read for homework. Rather than excerpting the Sandel reading from *Choices*, I plan to provide students with a scan of the article from its original publication in the April 2012 issue of *The Atlantic*. Studying the article in its original format will enable students to identify formal features such as page layout, font style, graphics, and ads; as well as rhetorical features such as exigence, tone, diction, logical enumeration, and ethical and pathetic appeals, which mark the text as a popular source. I will also give students the title of Sandel's academic work and ask them use the library database to search, access, and read the article. In a follow-up discussion during the next class session, students will be prompted to identify features of the academic text, including footnotes, citations, literature review and methodology sections, list of references, which mark it as academic. In our follow-up discussion, we will address the rhetorical choices involved in appealing to scholarly and lay audiences and the stakes of publishing in different venues.

In addition to activities designed to meld sustainability themes with major learning outcomes for my course, I plan to take a couple of positive steps to increase student awareness of sustainability work being done elsewhere on campus. I will request classroom visits from Sustainability Advisors for all three of my English 101 sections. Furthermore, because I teach a version of English 101 specially designated for students in the CIVICUS living-learning program—whose mission is to integrate civic-minded action learning into members' educational and residential experience—I have been in discussion with CIVICUS program directors Sue Briggs and Julie Randolph about brokering a partnership between CIVICUS and the National Center for Smart Growth's Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability. I look forward leading a service project involving first-year CIVICUS students in the work of PALS.

This course is committed to sustainability, defined as "[m]eeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Source: Brundtland Commission Report, "Our Common Future," 1987). During the course of the semester we will periodically visit themes of economic, environmental and social justice in our coursework and readings. We will be visited by representatives of the Campus Sustainability Office and there will be the possibility of joining me in taking part in recurring sustainability-related service project partnering CIVICUS with the National Center for Smart Growth's [Partnership for Action Learning in Sustainability \(PALS\)](#) for service credit. I encourage you all to visit the University of Maryland's [Campus Sustainability](#) website, or speak with me, to learn more about the exciting work being done across campus to preserve our collective future through sustainable practices.