

TO: Office of Sustainability, UMCP
FROM: Paul Haynos, Lecturer, Professional Writing Program, English Department, UMCP
RE: Chesapeake Project, Summer 2015
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Integrating Sustainability Concepts into Engl 393 (Technical Writing)

Part of the UMD's Professional Writing Program (PWP), ENGL 393 is intended to prepare students for the kinds of writing they might do in their professional careers. Whereas students typically write for academic purposes to academic audiences, in PWP courses, students are asked to write to non-academic audiences for real-world purposes.

In the past, my 393 students move through a series of linked assignments that typically culminate in proposals or recommendation reports. Students first write a brief Topic Memo and prepare an Oral Presentation in which they explore a topic of interest and brainstorm about purposes and audiences that surround the topic. During their presentations, they essentially pitch the topic to the class and receive feedback from their classmates and me. At that time, the audience evaluates the viability, exigency, and feasibility of the topic and discusses the possible associated projects. Once students topics have been selected and approved, students begin their research and the work related to their final projects. They first produce the first Annotated Bibliography 1, after which they write a Problem Paper, in which they define the problem/opportunity and explore causes and effects related to the problem. Next, they produce the second Annotated Bibliography 2, followed by a Solution Paper that, as before, defines the solution and explores the related causes/effects. Finally, after more research, rethinking, and revision, they combine the problem and solution papers to create their proposals.

In my experience, many students have difficulty selecting topics of interest that lead to viable topics. To overcome this problem, I have redesigned ENGL 393 as a theme course--all the projects in my 393 course must relate to sustainability.

I begin the semester by introducing sustainability concepts and examples of projects, proposals, and opportunities related to sustainability. The students read a few short pieces on the topic (Sustainability Big Ideas, a link to UMD Sustainability Office, and links to grants related to sustainability). To prime their thinking, I ask students to write freely about how sustainability relates to their fields, drawing on the Big Ideas. This exercise allows students to demonstrate their grasp of the sustainability concepts and introduces them to the sustainability challenges/opportunities in their disciplines. Additionally, this exercise will serve as the first step in the topic selection process.

The remainder of the assignments will follow the trajectory outlined above: topic memo and presentation, annotated bibliography, problem, solution, and final project. Throughout the semester, I ask my students to conduct research, think critically about the sources they gather, construct logical arguments supported by strong evidence, think deeply about the needs/attitudes/level of knowledge of their audiences, and to write with purpose. The overarching purpose throughout the semester will be to advance a sustainability related goal.

To succeed in their work, students must demonstrate an understanding of key sustainability concepts and provide evidence that their proposed actions will solve/mitigate a problem or advance their objectives and that those actions are feasible. By the end of the course, the students will have shown that they understand how their fields or professions relate to sustainability, gathered strong evidence about that relationship and about possible solutions, and developed an understanding of how to persuade audiences to adopt new and improved practices or technologies.

ENGL 393 is an ideal course to explore the topic of sustainability, for it offers the students the opportunity to research important topics and to persuade audiences to take positive steps toward more sustainable living.

NOTE: I ran my summer 2015 ENGL 393 course as described above, and I intend to run my Fall 2015 ENGL 393 section similarly.