

Hand in Hand

Partners in Teaching, Learning, & Assessment Clarion University

March 2009

Volume 3, Issue 4

| |
|---------------------------------|
| Teaching students to care....1 |
| Teaching green.....1 |
| Optimizing our footprints ..2 |
| Greening your course.....3 |
| It's not easy being green4 |
| Frozen.....4 |

March 2009

Workshop—Apr. 10th. *An introduction to discipline perspectives in information literacy.* 215 Carlson, 1:30-3:30pm.

Workshop—May 10th. *Promotion: Just do it!* Women Studies Center, 9am-3pm.

Informal meetings, Mar. 13, 27, Apr. 24. Michelle's at 3:30pm.

Teaching students to care

~ SUZANNE BOYDEN (BIOLOGY)

WE HAVE been teaching environmental education for over 30 years, yet I don't feel like there has been a large shift in the attitudes or lifestyle choices of many Americans. How do we explain this paradox? One difficulty is that teaching environmental topics through traditional pedagogical techniques may not be adequate to effect real change. While knowledge of the issues is important (see *Teaching Green*) there may be even greater value in teaching values. I believe that teaching green requires us to be willing to seriously engage students in discussions of ethics and environmental values across the curriculum.

Research suggests that students who grapple with environmental values,

problem-solving, or ethics in multiple disciplines—think case studies, group problem-solving, or service activities—are more likely to incorporate those values into their worldviews than those only getting traditional lectures or science courses. As an ecologist who teaches a course in environmental issues and conservation, I can attest to the fact that course content alone has very little to do with environmental ethics. I can preach sustainability or present facts on climate change until I am blue in the face, but unless the students care (in general or about the environment), my lessons may have little impact. Caring stems from our personal values and morals, which are much trickier to teach.

For many years there seemed to be little incentive to teach ethics and values in the college classroom. College professors may shy away from directly teaching ethics because we live in an age and a country where every opinion is supposed to be worthwhile, and it is considered politically incorrect to push

a social agenda. This sentiment appears to be changing, and many of us feel that it is our responsibility to help our students become moral and ethical citizens. For those faculty already dealing with ethics and values in their courses on a daily basis, and who

already use innovative pedagogies to increase student learning, it is a short step to teaching green. It is a matter of deciding that environmental



ethics are part of the discussion you are willing to have. After all, personal environmental responsibility and stewardship is, increasingly, part of being a good citizen. This may seem like a radical idea, but how much better off would our planet be if we all considered it our duty to teach environmental ethics across the curriculum, in the same way that we ideally teach gender or racial tolerance? The reality is that the biggest impact we can have on the environment is not through our transportation choices, recycling, or light bulb purchases, the biggest impact we can have is through our students. ☞

What is Hand in Hand?

Hand in Hand is an almost monthly e-newsletter published by Partners in Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Clarion University. *HiH* is dedicated to recognizing good teaching, fostering excellence in teaching, and creating an environment that fosters learning among students and faculty alike. Partners' activities and *HiH* are supported by a Presidential Advancement grant.

We encourage submissions to *HiH* that focus on general rather than discipline-specific issues in teaching, especially articles that are creative, respectful, and recognize the best in all of us. Articles can be on teaching philosophies, technology, pedagogy, or book reviews, but should be no more than 600 words. More information can be found at <http://psy1.clarion.edu/HiH/HiHguidelines.pdf>

Teaching green

~ JOHN ERNISSEE (AGES)

THERE'S BEEN a lot of talk about how to "green" the curriculum, with admirable suggestions about individual actions we and our students might take to reduce our impact on the environment. This institution has made

Myth: we have to save the earth. Frankly, the earth doesn't need to be saved. Nature doesn't give a hoot if human beings are here or not. The planet has survived cataclysmic and catastrophic changes for million upon millions of years. Over that time, it is widely believed, 99 percent of all species have come and gone while the planet has remained. Saving the environment is really about saving our environment - making it safe for ourselves, our children, and the world as we know it. If more people saw the issue as one of saving themselves, we would probably see increased motivation and commitment to actually do so. -Robert M. Lilienfeld and William L. Rathje

suggestions and taken steps to mitigate the institutional footprint on nature. Yet, as a geoscientist with a rather dire view of what I personally believe may be a looming environmental disaster, I think our environmental awareness ought to be much greater. We need a “greening” ACROSS the curriculum.

For example, in the course that I am now teaching (Basic Earth Science), I've already mentioned the distribution of several vital resources, and discussed a recent article noting that lithium is not abundant or widely distributed (Bolivia is the current primary source for this element). Lithium ion batteries are critical to the development of less polluting electric and hybrid cars. Two of Japan's largest battery makers are negotiating with the Bolivian government over access to that country's extremely valuable reserves. As the term continues, I will bring other resource issues to the class and discuss their direct impact on my students' lives.

But I have it easy—geology has always been about resources. But what of other departments and other courses? Resource politics cannot be ignored...witness the profound concerns over access to petroleum and natural gas...both nationally and, with the recent exploration of the Marcellus

Shale, here in Pennsylvania. That Russia has considerable oil reserves, while China does not, will be a major issue in US-Russia-China relations, especially with regard to the major oil reserves of Iran. This can and ought to be part of any serious discussion of contemporary politics – local, national or international.

Resource extraction has almost always led to serious disruption of local communities and cultures...we need only think of the quest for gold and the exploitation of Native American territory. How do societies cope with the sudden influx of exploration and development in their home turf? Deforestation is a good example, where indigenous tribes are threatened with the extinction of their traditional way of life. This problem needs to be directly connected to consumption in the developed world. Anthropology and sociology can ask serious questions along these lines, and such topics could make excellent term paper subjects.

Planet earth is too important to leave only to scientists.

The humanities can also contribute to a “greening” effect...there are countless term-paper topics that can address green concerns. For example, a review of personal energy use might have an enlightening effect (no pun intended) on the student, while providing an excellent opportunity to learn about writing. The rise of what is called “stewardship” Christianity might make a topic in philosophy or comparative religion courses. How have the various religious traditions viewed the environment...and how have these views been changing in light of the emerging environmental crisis?

Rather obviously, economics has a direct connection to this issue, and there have been efforts to ground economic analysis with the true environmental costs of resource exploitation. Herman Daly has been an important contributor to these issues.

Environmentally related discussions ought to be part of the study of economics and US business.

The dismal state of US science literacy has frequently been discussed in the media. The understanding of evolution in the general population, for example, is appalling. Alas, so also is any genuine understanding of how humans interact with and destroy our planet. The sciences alone cannot do enough to change this, though clearly we can and must do more. Simply increasing science requirements is not enough. The ecology of being human on planet earth is too important to leave only to scientists. Every area of the university needs to think about addressing our environmental connections to this planet – and soon. ☞

Optimizing our footprints

~MIGUEL T. OLIVAS-LUJÁN (ADM. SCI)

UNTIL VERY RECENTLY, leaving a “footprint” has been a very positive thing to do. To illustrate, the *Oxford English Dictionary* quotes Playford (1674), “Of which I do intend in this my Discourse to leave some foot-prints” (*Skill Mus.* I. xi. 38) and Longfellow (1839), “Leave behind us Foot-prints on the sands of time” (*Psalm of Life* vii). In other words, when this term was not used literally—as in “the footprints in the snow led to the door”—leaving a footprint has implied leaving a mark, a legacy, or a positive impact. Preface this with the adjective “Professional” and we end up with a concept that is quite desirable for any knowledge worker, especially in fields like academia, that strongly influence fellow human beings—our students, colleagues, external customers, etc.

Leaving an intellectual or spiritual footprint may be positive, but leaving a physical one can be a negative thing. “Building footprints” describe the amount of space a structure occupies, and “aeronautical footprints” describe the environmental disturbance (noise,


wind, etc.) that an aircraft generates when it takes off or lands. More recently, the sibling concepts of a “carbon footprint,” an “ecological footprint” and a “human footprint” are becoming increasingly popular to describe the rate at which humans consume resources and generate waste—often faster than the earth can sustainably renew those resources. An ecological footprint is the amount of biologically productive land, —in acres or hectares—required to sustainably support the lifestyle of a single human being. Having a large footprint in this context is anything but positive: if humans worldwide were to eat, drive, and control our living environment the way an average American does, we would need between 1.5 and 5 times our planet’s resources. Combine this with our recent economic problems worldwide, and I believe it is time to take individual action.

You might say, “Well, there is not much in my profession that will make a strong impact on the environment. I am already recycling and saving energy at home!” Congratulations! But I challenge you—and myself! — to identify creative ways to lower our environmental footprint at home and work. Could we print our documents on both sides of the page or use the back of used pages? What about increasing our use of a “paperless office” in administrative matters or using the stairs instead of the elevator? Can we turn off computers, printers, lights, heaters, air conditioners, and unplug chargers? Can we look for energy-efficient appliances or keep our current devices longer? Could we try to use more items made with recycled or reused materials?

There is also growing awareness that air travel is one of the worst things we can do to the planet, and we, academics — who frequently travel for conferences or research—can be among the worst culprits. According to our colleague, ecologist Suzie Boyden, for every 10 hours spent on an airplane in a given year, we need a half hectare of the

Earth’s livable landmass to offset the resources used. In contrast, the average ecological footprint of a citizen in most third world countries is less than a single hectare. Giving up one trip a year does more than a very sizable amount of recycling!

I believe it is time to take individual action.

I trust you will be able to find creative ways to reduce the negative environmental impact of our profession. I believe that we can find ways to leave a large “professional footprint” along with a really tiny carbon footprint. 

Use The Nature Conservancy's carbon footprint calculator to measure your impact. The US average is 27 tons of carbon dioxide per year. What's yours?
www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator/

Greening your courses


–Marilyn Harhai (Library Sci.)

WE ALL KNOW that being environmentally friendly is important but today saving money while saving the environment can be even more vital. This list of tips will save on printing but as an added bonus can save you time and can keep you more organized. These tips can be used in completely online classes and in face-to-face classes.

1. Rather than providing print copies of the syllabus to students, use the syllabus feature in Blackboard. Find the syllabus building element in Blackboard under control panel, syllabus. I use the portion of the syllabus building tool called “lessons” to add the parts of my syllabus that are the same for all my courses: academic honesty policy, University Turnitin language, disability support statement and the like. I can export the syllabus into all my Blackboard shells saving me time in adding these elements to each syllabus. It is important for class management that

students have easy and continued access to the syllabus. Building the syllabus in Blackboard means that your students always know where to find it. It might even bring up that score on the “a syllabus was provided” question on the student evaluations!

2. Instead of having the students print and turn in assignments, use the Turnitin Grademark feature to submit assignments. You can use this for face-to-face classes and online classes. It is not necessary to use the plagiarism detection part of the program (Turnitin) if you do not need it. I only use the Grademark part of the program. Grademark is an online grading program. It allows you to make comments online, use rubrics that you load, and you can make short cuts for often made comments. The feature requires no uploading and downloading of papers. The papers are stored online and can be accessed from anywhere via the Web. No separate software is needed. It is all web based. No keeping track of piles of papers or having the papers at home when you find you have a few minutes to grade at the office. This is a phenomenal way to accept, manage, and grade assignments with no paper involved.
3. If you give quizzes in class consider using the test feature in Blackboard. You can save paper by not printing quizzes. You could save in class time by having students take the quiz prior to class. In addition, Blackboard will score multiple choice and true/false questions you grading time. Students can receive immediate feedback.
4. Use course reserve—either the paper version stored in the library or online course reserve. Encourage your students to read the material in the library or online and not to print out or to copy the articles to save paper.
5. Give alternative types of assessments using the blog or wiki features in Blackboard. If you have your students journal or write reflections,

consider using the Blackboard blog tool rather than a paper journal. Students can create web pages using the wiki tool which can serve as an alternative to paper reports. This has the added bonus of keeping these assignments online so that you can access them to grade them from anywhere via the web. 

Contact Marilyn Harhai at mharhai@clarion.edu if you are interested in learning more about any of these ways to go green.

It's not easy being green

-Valerie A. Bennett (Biology)

AS MUCH AS I am a proponent for doing my part to reduce my impact on our planet, I have to agree with Kermit the Frog: it's not easy being green. Within this issue are many suggestions for how to bring more environmentally friendly practices into our teaching. However, there are also some challenges and competing pressures and values to consider. Here are some cautions from my own experiences.

Although I have converted many of my paper handouts and documents for students into electronic versions and posted them on Blackboard (to save some trees), I have to wonder how many more computers are eating up power, and how much longer they are running, so my students can view these documents....or how many students just print those documents anyway, defeating the purpose of my green efforts (but maybe shifting the printing cost and environmental guilt).

The internet allows us to provide our students with a wealth of information and teaching aids, but is the open access to this information a reality or an illusion? We have an ever-expanding collection of new technological tools for creating and posting audio, video, etc. The document sizes and bandwidth needed to access them seems to grow exponentially as we get excited by the teaching tools we can create for and provide to our students. However, keep

in mind your student population. As much as computer and internet access have become an integral part of our everyday lives as faculty, and something we tend to take for granted, this is not the case for some of our students. Students from lower-income families may not own their own computers, and may depend on campus computer labs or their local public library at home for computer access. Is it always appropriate (or allowed) to listen to audio or video on a computer in a public space? Students from rural areas of Western Pennsylvania may still have dial-up or no internet access from home. Once you post your teaching technology on Blackboard, where it is available 24/7, ask yourself, is it truly accessible to *all* students?

How many more computers are eating up power, and how much longer they are running?

Finally, I wonder about the toll being green has taken on me as a teacher. Last year, I required all writing assignments for one of my classes to be submitted via Turnitin.com, and used Grademark to evaluate them....all 100+ of them over the course of the semester. I was not able to squeeze in those few precious minutes of grading while waiting for a meeting to begin, or in the waiting room at the dentist, or anyplace else without computer or internet access. After many hours in front of my computer, my shoulder, neck, and back became a painful mess of knots and muscle cramps. A year and a half and many chiropractor visits later, I am still suffering the physical consequences of my desire to practice a new pedagogy, save paper and be green. I was also left wondering whether my students actually logged

The Poet's Corner

Frozen

*Splintering veins of frost crackle up my window,
Multiplying like bacteria under a microscope and
Framing my fuzzy view in intricate patterns
That would rival stained-glass windows*


*Of ancient cathedrals.
There is nothing beyond but a stale and frigid grey
Shroud pulled taut over the icy blades of grass, over the
Naked branches of trees, over the muddy sun.*

*My breath advances and recedes on the frozen glass
As I strain my eyes across the wasteland,
Seeking out one tiny morsel of beauty sunken deep
within
The dry, hollow fog of winter.*

*I put my palm to the glass, melting away a tiny portal,
and
Then I see it, the world in a dazzling shimmer:
Flickering bolts of platinum light darting
From one icy facet to the next.*

~ Trista Alexander (English, 2010)

back on to view my PAIN-stakingly made comments ...nobody that semester ever asked a single follow-up question or for clarification on my comments. This year I went back to paper. I get better feedback on my feedback when I can watch students' faces as they flip through the pages of their paper as I hand it back....dripping with the *green* ink of my hand-written comments.

As a biologist, a teacher, and resident of Planet Earth, I will continue to search for ways to provide both a high quality and environmentally friendly educational experience for my students. Although it's not easy being green, "...It's beautiful, and I think it's what I want to be." (Kermit the Frog) 

Editors: Jeanne M. Slattery
Suzanne Boyden
Melissa K. Downes
Debbie Ciesielka
Phil Terman

The opinions expressed in these articles reflect those of the authors themselves and may or may not reflect the views of the *HiH* editorial staff or those of Clarion University as a whole.