

ENGL 121B: Composition Social Issues (Environment)

Autumn 2016 • University of Washington

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Overview

This composition course will focus on current environmental issues and the myriad ways in which people choose to respond to those issues. Through a combination of reading, writing, and public service in environmental organizations, I aim for my students to develop their own understandings of their place within both environmental problems and potential courses of reparative action. In their service placements, students will observe various strategies for identifying, analyzing, and responding to environmental crises. The writing assignments will allow students to reflect on these strategies, and I hope that students will come to regard writing as a valuable tool for productive thought and communication about the environment that can be used to effect change both within and outside the classroom.

Role of Service-Learning in the Course

In addition to working 3-5 hours per week at their chosen organization, students will research their organization's background, mission, and methods of written and oral response to environmental issues. Students will also research and reflect on the roots of the specific problem(s) that their organization addresses, as well as the most effective ways of raising public awareness of and active involvement in those problems. It is my hope that hands-on experience at an environmental organization will provide students with ideas of how to discuss and combat environmental issues.

Assignments Related to Service-Learning

: Students will complete two assignment sequences in this class. In the first sequence, students will investigate and consider their organization's strategies for addressing environmental issues. They will look at the various media produced by the organization (flyers, websites, Facebook pages, etc.) and they will listen closely to the ways that staff and/or volunteers talk about their involvement in the organization. To that end, it would be productive for students to conduct a group interview with at least one member of the organization; this would be followed by a reflective assessment on the rhetorical choices that the staff member employs, consciously or unconsciously, when speaking about the environment and their work within the organization. For their final writing task of the first sequence, students will produce an artifact to meet "if possible" a writing need at their organization. In compliance with the University of Washington's public writing policies, student writing about their experience in service learning would only be made public with the consent of the organization to which the student refers.

The second sequence will allow students to build off of the model provided by the organization to consider their own potential strategies for enacting environmental change. Drawing upon their experience at the organization, they will produce a paper that focuses primarily on the rhetorical strategies that they find to be the most effective for communicating about and responding to environmental issues. In the end, I aim to provide my students with ideas on how to communicate most effectively about environmental issues and what the public can do to get involved.

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