



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: ACTIVE LEARNING APPROACHES

Active learning may take many forms, from lecture and discussion to service learning, but it intends to have students apply what they are learning. Faculty members across the curriculum at Pensacola Junior College (PJC) engage students in active learning every day. How two faculty members have applied active learning to the district-wide theme of environmental and economic sustainability will be described here.

First, English instructor and co-chair of the PJC District-Wide Sustainability Project created a website, 60 Seeds (<http://60seeds.blogspot.com>), describing PJC students, faculty, and staff activities related to the project. He incorporates these activities into his English composition courses and challenges his students to incorporate personal experiences into their writing.

He implements this pedagogical position in regards to economic sustainability through “adbusters,” asking his students to analyze a contemporary media campaign critically and write about the inherent logical flaws and disingenuous stances presented in mainstream media commercials. Students create an advertisement of their own that follows the same theme of the professional ad, but exposes the logical jumps. In creating an original version of an advertisement, students come to grips with the way media campaigns are structured to limit critical thought. From the target audience to the physical branding that media campaigns impose, students see firsthand the conscious decisions that go into the creation of even simple ideas. In this way, they move past a literal reading of a text (e.g., simple commercials) into a deeper understanding of the way arguments are presented. Students become familiar with text and implicit arguments from active engagement, and they use this critical literacy to structure arguments, based on this genre, in composition classes.

Another class project is Coastal Cleanup Day. Pensacola is located near a number of beautiful public beaches, and every year the community is invited to

participate on a Saturday morning in Coastal Cleanup Day events. His students participated in this event and wrote about their experiences, incorporating the environmental sustainability theme into their writing. Their personal experiences increase their engagement in the project and make what might otherwise be a purely academic affair more meaningful.

Second, a communications instructor has devoted communication courses to the theme of sustainability. Students practice course-specific skills within the authentic context of the larger project. During the project process, the students are able to take advantage of the knowledge and experience of one another, the instructor, and members of the institution who have expertise in specific project areas. As the students complete their projects, they invite the community to participate. “Publicizing the students’ performance grounds academic coursework in the real world, offering the students authentic experiences and résumé boosters,” she observed.

Sustainability Conferences

Public Speaking students have created mini-conferences, open to the public. Past conferences include the “Sustain to Maintain 2008” conference and a session on how to reestablish the sustainable cycle. The programs include informative and persuasive presentations on topics as diverse as Kudzu, cooperatives, consumerism, backyard farming, and saving the zoo. A “Just Green It!” conference was designed to inspire participants to think green, live green, stay green. The community was invited to participate. These events were attended by members of the college and the community. In addition, the PJC student newspaper, *The Corsair*, set up a live stream of the events available through www.eCorsair.com.

Virtual Media Events

Communications students worked together to produce a variety of online events and publications. One class invited the PJC community to read and interact with *Saving Grace eZine* (<http://www.pjcsustainability.wordpress.com>). This online magazine



contained student-produced content on ways to live a more sustainable life during difficult economic and environmental times. Coverage ranged from global to local issues, including “Dreaming of a Green Christmas,” “Sustainable Living in Greece,” and “Junk to Art.”

Students in the face-to-face Survey of Mass Communication created radio-style podcasts (<http://www.thegreencast.wordpress.com>) that they shared with the public. Their slogan was “Don’t be lame; it’s time to sustain!” Programming included original music, a unique “Harper Report” with a local economics expert, sustainable business practices, and the global warming debate.

Conclusions

Faculty members are implementing new and exciting forms of active learning into their classes. PJC’s focus on sustainability has been an excellent stimulus for these activities. Students are working collaboratively and building their knowledge, skills, and abilities in a number of diverse fields.

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