Teaching Sustainability in the Introductory Writing Classroom

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“The worth of education must now be measured against the standards of human decency and survival—the issues looming so large before us in the twenty-first century.”
– David Orr,

“All education is environmental education”
– David Orr,
*Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (1992)
Overview and overarching questions

- How might sustainability issues be integrated into an existing course or program in which the learning outcomes do not explicitly emphasize sustainability?

- Why might composition/writing courses be ideal locations for students to engage with sustainability issues?
Overview of University of Oregon Composition Program, 2014-15 academic year

- 177 sections of WR 121 offered last year (between 15-20% of these were sustainability themed).

- In a given year, about 500 students take a sustainability-themed composition course.
The Sustainability Casebook: Goals

- Current
- Accessible
- Diverse
- Affordable
- Skill-driven
- Model argumentation & inquiry
The Sustainability Casebook: Contents

- Foundations
- Place and Community
- Social Justice
- Transportation and Energy
- Green Consumerism
The Sustainability Casebook: Approaches to Teaching and Learning

- Sustainability as a lens
- Framed as a conversation
- Social sustainability
- Transformative learning
WR 123: College Composition III—Written Reasoning in the Context of Research

- Developing multiple skill sets
- Student-driven research
- Thematically focused
Exploring the Anthropocene
THE ANTHROPOCENE

The Anthropocene defines Earth’s most recent geologic time period as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic, based on overwhelming evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans.

The line corresponding to 1950 highlights the Great Acceleration, the post-World War II worldwide industrialization, techno-scientific development, nuclear arms race, population explosion and rapid economic growth.

These graphs were compiled in a publication of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP).
Thinking like a species
Thinking about power, justice, and history
Goals for students

- Discuss the ethics of knowledge production in context of sustainability
- Enter into a larger community of scholars, expanding who counts as an expert
- Practice multi-disciplinary inquiry
- Bring own interests, passions, experiences to the topic
- Engage in theoretically complex but also practical, problem-focused research
- Compose the world
Sustainable Composition

Latin *compōnēre* - put together; assemble

“What is nice is that composition underlines that things have to be put together while retaining their heterogeneity. Also, it is connected with composure; it has clear roots in art, painting, music, theater, dance; it is not too far from ‘compromise’ and ‘compromising,’... it carries with it the pungent but ecologically correct smell of ‘compost,’ itself due to the active ‘decomposition’ of many invisible agents”

- Bruno Latour, “Compositionist Manifesto”
Where do we go from here...

- Connection
- Community
- Commitment
Thank you!

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Resources for teaching *The Sustainability Casebook* blog:
http://blogs.uoregon.edu/sustainabilitycasebook/