

SUSTAINABILITY SEMINAR

THE FRAMEWORK

Suggested time frame: Two classes per week for credit

Class 1: Informational/Lecture informing students about the topic/subject of the week

Class 2: Undertake an action relevant to topic of the week

- Planning based off of that week's lecture
- Develop an action/proposal

Course Overview

How do your every day actions impact the environment?

In this class, students become more informed and conscious of their actions through both research and interactive learning. Students are introduced to a range of crucial topics around sustainability themes, and they deepen their knowledge through research, critical analysis and project implementation. Students gain hands-on experience by accessing local resources and taking a variety of class field trips. After each lecture, students develop an action or proposal that relates to the lecture topic. While not all proposals will be carried out, extra credit will be given to students who take the extra step toward impacting their school campuses and communities.

AGENDA

The topics under each week's category may be subject to change based on student suggestions or current campus issues.

Week 1: Food

Not all foods are created equal, and what we choose to put in our bodies directly impacts human and environmental health. Food can fight disease, increase brain function, boost your mood, and unite diverse cultures; or, it can contribute to an array of diseases, including heart disease, obesity and depression. Food cultivation can be sustainable, incorporating organic, pasture-raised, grass-fed, biodynamic, and other low-impact farming practices; or, it can contribute to the pollution of our air, water and soil.

- Impact: What is the carbon footprint associated with industrial/conventional farming and how does it affect our health and the environment
- Labeling: Why are labels like Non-GMO, USDA Organic, Fair Trade, etc. important and how do we steer clear of green washing
- Organic and Local Food: Why is it important to support local and organic farming

Example Action/Proposal:

Fresh, local, organic, seasonal, non-GMO food (flosn) integrated into meals

- o Food Policy Committee
- o Meatless Monday Campaign
- o Real Food Challenge club
- o Campus Garden

Week 2: Body Care

The skin is the largest organ in the body, and it absorbs 60% of everything we put on it, including shampoo, soap, perfume and shaving cream. And yet, poisonous ingredients like phthalates, toluene, and lead are still prevalent in products made by conventional brands. What's really in your products?

- Microbeads and toxins: How are these ingredients hidden in our body care products harming both people and the planet
- Legislation
 - o Should certain ingredients be banned from body care products because they are known carcinogens
 - o What are some of the bills currently in legislation to protect consumers/environment
- Greener Alternatives: How can students opt for products that are natural and safe

Example Action/Planned Proposal:

Curate a shelf in the campus convenience store

- Start a campaign for SustainCondoms
- Create a list of key products that students use and the greener alternatives to present to store manager

Week 3: Ethical Fashion

In 2013 alone, U.S. clothing sales totaled more than \$250.7 billion. Much of that revenue was generated from conventional cotton products. Cotton is among the most pesticide-intensive crops on the planet, and accounts for 2.4% of agriculture, 11% of all pesticide use, and 25% of all insecticide use. It's estimated that one pound of cotton requires at least one third of a pound of pesticides! And it takes half a pound of cotton to make your average t-shirt. These pesticides pollute the air, water and soil, and force those living nearby to inhale toxic fumes.

- Compare organic cotton and hemp to conventional fabrics used for clothing
 - o How can the apparel industry have a positive impact on people/environment?
- Sweatshops Labor: Discuss the problems of sweatshops and how they are affecting quality of life around the world. What is the true cost of our clothing?
- Environmental Impact of Imports: What did it take to get a particular article of clothing to an American store

Example Actions:

- Create a completely eco-friendly look and wear it to class
- Plan and host a clothing swap in your class or on campus
- Set up a freecycle box in dorms to reuse items that students no longer use

Week 4: Green Clean

More than 80,000 chemicals go unregulated by the federal government, including many used in common household cleaning products. Chances are that your conventional cleaners contain substances that, when inhaled or absorbed through the skin, can cause asthma, reproductive complications, infertility, cancers, and other serious health problems.

- Chemicals in cleaning products: Discuss the poor standards implemented in the US, and the fact that ingredients are not mandated to be tested
- Greener Alternatives: Why is it better to clean with something as simple as vinegar and lemon.

Example Actions:

- Work with maintenance to assess cleaning supplies and transition to healthy alternatives
- Host a DIY workshop on campus to demonstrate how to create simple household products

Week 5: Water

Water is perhaps the most vital resource on earth. It allows us to stay clean and hydrated, it helps us cultivate our food, and it is home to an incredible array of marine life. Americans use way too much of it, more than 770,000 gallons per person per year, nearly twice the average of the rest of the world.

- Pollution: What is the water quality in nearby water sources? How has it changed throughout the years? What is the leading cause of water pollution and how can students address that?
- Conservation: Less than 2% of Earth's freshwater is available for consumption. Discuss the possible methods for conserving water and also how humans use much more water than necessary.
- Mercury in seafood: How has water pollution led to declining fish ecosystems

Example Action:

- Take-Back-The-Tap Campaign

Week 6: Waste

Every piece of plastic ever created still exists. Plastic may leave your home when you take out the trash but once it's out of sight, it doesn't just disappear. All of that trash ends up in landfills, and every year this pile of plastic grows more and more massive. In 2012, 32 million tons of plastic waste ended up in the U.S. municipal solid waste stream; only 9% was actually recovered for recycling.

- How does your school sort and dispose of waste, is recycling easily accessible. How is that information conveyed? Can the system be improved? What steps?
- Consumerism: Watch Annie Leonard's "Story of Stuff" followed by a class discussion
- The Sharing Economy: Discuss the importance of sharing and different ways in which the sharing economy has grown

Example Action:

- Collect and re-sell items that otherwise would have been thrown away on campus
- Place freecycle boxes in dorms
- Work on zero waste initiatives on campus

Week 7: Transportation

Sustainable transportation considers the social, environmental and climate impacts from how people are traveling from here to there. Campuses are a great palette for exploration around this topic.

- Air pollution from transportation
- Greener alternatives to driving: bikeshare, walking, public trans, etc.

Example Action:

- Create a rideshare group (could be online) on campus to eliminate the number of cars on the road

Week 8: Technology/E-Waste

Have you ever thought about the impact of your gadgets? The global mountain of e-waste (cell phones, computers, video games, televisions, and other electronics) that only continues to grow. What is e-waste? Discarded, obsolete, broken, or surplus electronic devices - a large portion of which can be reused, repurposed, or recycled. The U.S. creates over 3 million tons of e-waste annually, accounting for 2% of all municipal waste or about 60 landfills. The fastest growing segment of the waste stream has huge environmental and social justice ramifications as well. According to a recent report from the United Nations, over the next ten years, there will be a 500% growth in computer waste just in India alone.

- Watch the Story of Electronics by Annie Leonard followed a class discussion
- How has technology grown to dominate our lives and what does that mean for the environment?
- What is the impact of gadget disposal on people and the planet?
- What can be done to educate people to demand safer products

Example Action:

- Host an E-waste drive

Week 9: Wellness/Health

Everything on the planet is interconnected. This means that caring for the planet starts with caring for yourself! In order to meet life's daily challenges head on, it's vital to set yourself up to be healthy and content. This isn't always easy; the academic and social pressures of school can wreak havoc on sleep, moods, diet and overall well-being. That's why it's so important to make time to just chill, go for a hike, to the gym, read a book, have tea, hang with friends, or meditate in a relaxing place. If your body is drained from late nights, mid terms or junk food, try to give it the time and space it needs to recharge.

- The importance of exercise
- Using nature as a tool for learning and medicinal healing

Example Action:

- Plan an adventure with the class to relax and commune with nature

Week 10: Climate Change

Sometimes, the facts and figures associated with climate change can be too overwhelming to truly internalize. But here's what all the scientific evidence indicates: we must reduce the amount of CO₂ in our atmosphere in order to sustain life on earth and avoid further environmental catastrophe. The CO₂ content in our atmosphere, measured in parts per million (ppm) must be below 350 ppm to sustain a healthy planet, but it has already reached the dangerous heights of 400 ppm, according to 350.org.

- What are the impacts of climate change globally
- How is that effecting biodiversity?
- What is your carbon individual footprint? How about as a class?

Example Action:

- Create a plan to reduce the footprint of your class and share it with the entire school to have them pledge to do the same
- Assess the impact that your campus' practices are having on the earth
 - o make a list and suggest an alternative
- Work on policies around these actions that will reduce the school's carbon footprint

Weeks 11 / 12: Topics selected by the students

Weekly assignments

- Share a book, article, website, video, or infographic on the weekly topic and post on class Pinterest resource board
- Each week one student will give a 5 minute talk about the topic that is of most interest
- Proposal/plan of action for a project relating to each topic that impacts would impact your own life, school campus or local community

Community-based learning

- Each student is asked to identify one local organization focused on an issue/topic of interest. The assignment is to interview a staff member and write up their interview including photographs.

Field Trips

- Determine as a class two field trips that will take place during the semester
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Grading

- Grade based on effort and thoroughness of projects submitted throughout the semester