

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,

Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect (2004)

“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

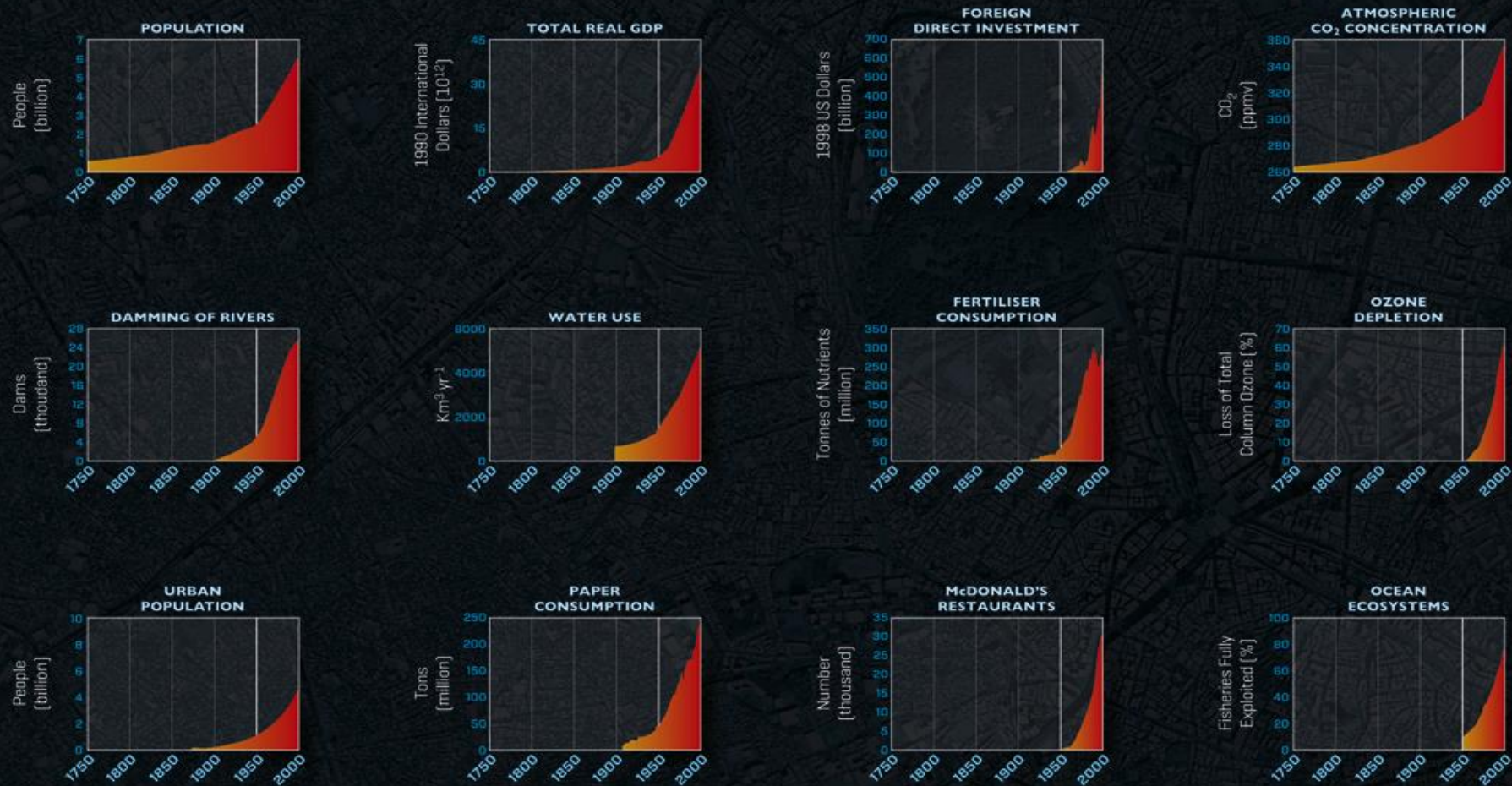


THE ANTHROPOCENE

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

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 *compōnĕre* - 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/>