

# Socio-environmental issue activities assignment

## ENVS 381 Intro to Env. Education

Environmental education is premised on the existence of solutions to environmental problems and therefore environmental educators need an up-to-date and well-informed understanding of environmental issues. So, class members will form groups to research and then educate and engage the whole class about an environmental problem and the issues spawned by it. We'll generate a diverse list of current or/or enduring socio-ecological challenges, winnow these to a smaller number, and then form groups to research and prepare educational activities in which they will lead the rest of the class who will have the roles of participants. The goal of this is to learn about the issue, and to create an environmental education activity for your peers that will promote their environmental citizenship understanding and skills.

In your group, you will first need to research the problem itself, using a *systems perspective*, including:

- the parts and dynamics of the natural systems affected (ie, ecosystems).
- the human systems that are impacting these, including accurate quantitative information (what behaviors and actions, and how much... and related beliefs, values, policies, economics, institutions)
- the chains of effects by which these human activities have their impacts. Be accurate and precise!
- the solution attempts that have been made, and the effects back on human and natural systems that come (or may come) from solution attempts
- don't ignore the uncertainty and unknowns in all of the above!

Problems become *issues* when there is disagreement among human parties over the existence, nature, causes, and solutions to the problem. The humans typically have different values, interests and power to influence the outcome of the issue. For this class, the question is how do environmental educators relate to the contested terrain we cross in struggling toward sustainability? The question concerns citizenship, including preparing learners to take actions – individual and collective - which they have studied and chosen.

So the second step is to research:

- What is the history of the *issue*?
- What are the policies, laws, treaties, regulations, standards, etc. (if any) involved?
- Who are the players or stakeholders (actual individuals and groups with a stake)? Who is affected by the problem, involved in the solutions, affected by the solutions? Almost always, there are more than two “sides.”
- How do each of these players define and view the problem and what is their *position* on what to do? Underlying their position, what are their *interests, beliefs, and values*? What are their resources, and in what specific ways have they tried to influence the outcome?

Next, your group will employ all this information to generate a unique and engaging activity for another part of the class. This culminating part of the assignment should achieve the goal of giving everyone an experiential “taste” of how to educate FOR democracy and the environment. It also calls for some risk-taking and creativity.

- Working as a group, create a simulation activity plan for a 40-minute in-class activity based on this issue, which your large group will lead part of the rest of the class in doing. The activity should use a high-involvement format such as:
  1. role-playing the parties
  2. negotiating an agreement between the parties
  3. Congressional investigation hearing
  4. a debate

5. a solution-oriented design charrette (*what's that?*)
6. vying campaign situation-room scenes
7. a dramatic re-enactment or improvisation based on some real or fictional event involving the stakeholders.

You will need to prepare materials for this that will guide class members in the activity (ie, for each stakeholder group, role; or a script, etc.)—i.e., background information for the participants.

- The activity write-up should include a statement of its goals, background on the problem and issue, a plan showing the explaining each part and how long each part will take (totaling 40 minutes), a wrap-up component, and instruction / background sheets for participants.
- We will de-brief each of these in a free-ranging discussion of how environmental education may contribute to solving the problems. And we'll provide constructive feedback to the team on their activity.
- At the conclusion of each of these in-class activities, you'll be asked: What roles can and should EE play in helping solve complex socio-environmental *issues*?

*We will do 2 of these per day during days late in the term; the write up is due the day your group presents*

Criteria used in evaluating this assignment include:

- Use of a systems perspective
- Completeness of *relevant* components and accuracy in description of natural systems, human systems, solution attempts, based on research
- Accounting for scientific uncertainty in understanding systems causality
- Completeness and accuracy of the history, human policies and institutions involved
- Insight and accuracy of descriptions of player's positions and explanations of these by reference to interests and values and beliefs
- Creativity in design of the large group activity
- Engagement and effectiveness achieved by large group activity
- Usefulness, accuracy and appropriateness of materials for group activity
- Articulation of educational goals of group activity
- Citation of sources used in researching background and activity
- Grading will be individually-based but will include group members evaluating each others' contributions