

Sustainability Exercise for Sociology 202 Fall 2014

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Exercise

This class is an introduction to sociology as an intellectual field of study. It is an opportunity for students to learn about the world around them. Often students, when learning about global culture, view it as something “out there”. In effort to build on micro-macro connections, I created this class exercise to encourage a better understanding of sustainability and the individual’s impact.

Implementation

I handed out the following exercise to be completed by each student during our Friday class period. I told them there would be a second exercise they would need to complete on the following Monday. I informed them it would be worth 2 Bonus Points that would add directly to their grade.

In an effort to sensitize ourselves to the relationship between globalization, culture and the individual please complete the following questions. The purpose of this exercise is to explore the interactions of our individual choices and how it impacts the Earth.

1. List five items that you use each day.
2. Choose one of the items. Why did you choose this item rather than the others?
3. Identify where it is produced and who makes it. Is it one location? Many? Who do you call if you have a problem?
4. Research the industry, their relationship with the environment, the treatment of workers and other relevant information.
5. What does the company not talk about on their website? Why? Do you want to critically analyze the company? Why or Why not?

6. Be prepared to discuss information that you learned from the activity with the class. **You must bring this to class on Monday to receive bonus credit. No exceptions.**

During the class on Monday, I had students form six-eight person groups to share what they found individually. In addition, I asked that they complete the following questions:

1. What items were chosen by other group members?
2. What did you learn by exploring other group members' research?
3. If you could do the exercise over, what would your group do differently?
4. What did you learn from this exercise?
5. Will it impact what you purchase in the future? How many think, yes? No? No change?

Evaluation

After the students completed the questions as a group. We had a class discussion. The students were able to identify that:

- Companies generally provide information that consumers find favorable knowing that most will want to confirm they are using sustainable products.
- It is difficult to hold multi-national corporations accountable for behavior

However, even after identifying that working conditions of employees and toxins were prevalent in many of the products, students stated they would not stop using them. Even after students identified how toxins can spread through water and air, the majority said it would not change behavior. As a group, students thought it was a useful intellectual exercise. I will need to think of another way, perhaps through visual aids, that could make this more meaningful.