Holistic HIPs: Integrating Local Environmental Awareness, Community-Engaged Learning, and Student Research in American Environmental History

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Community of Practice
- In the May 2015 Community of Practice, I developed and refined an assignment that I have called the Place Project.
- Students will conduct the Place Project for HIST 3345: American Environmental History in fall semester of 2015.
- The Place Project incorporates multiple high-impact practices (HIPs). The assignment will:
  - be writing intensive.
  - include service learning.
  - integrate student research.

Program Building
- Fall 2015 will be the first time that environmental history has been offered at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.
- A relatively new field of historical inquiry, environmental history examines the ways in which humans transform nature and, in turn, how the environment has shaped societies over time.
- In building an environmental history class and program, my goals are:
  - to create a better understanding of human interactions with nature over time.
  - serve the needs of the History department.
  - promote conservation, especially in South Texas and the Gulf of Mexico.
  - make interdisciplinary connections across campus.

Student Learning Outcomes
- Upon successful completion of HIST 3345, students will:
  - learn more about the role of the environment and space and place as well as transnational (across nations) and comparative factors in American history.
  - gain a better understanding of human interactions with nature over time on a variety of geographic scales.
  - demonstrate information retrieval skills required for historical research.
  - be able to place the present in a historically-based context.
  - improve writing skills.
  - become familiar with the Chicago Manual of Style.

The Place Project
- I believe teaching history should foster both academic and civil skills by illustrating the relevance of history in the real world. I am therefore committed to creating meaningful projects for students. Additionally, the concerns over space and place and transnational history in my own scholarship shaped the assignment.
- The assignment has three related components:
  - group presentations
  - a community-engaged learning project
  - individual student research
- Each part builds on the next to examine the place in which we live and our relationships to nature over time.

Group Presentations
- Over time, the modern world has obscured our basic connections to the natural world. The purpose of this aspect of the assignment is to discover our everyday dependence on the environment. It is also designed to help students "read" landscapes as sources.
- Each group will take a different topic (water, food, drink, recycling, trash, energy, clothing) and follow the topic from the island, tracing the different sources.
- They will then develop 10-minute presentations for the class. The presentations will provide the foundation for developing the Community-Engaged Learning Project.

Student Research
- In the final piece of the Place Project, students will examine how local places are shaped by larger forces over time and create their own environmental history. Using both primary and secondary source research, they will find the national and transnational connections to a topic of their choosing. In doing so, they will be contributing to cutting-edge scholarship on the use of geographic scales (local and regional to national and global) to more fully understand environmental change over time.
- Their task is to discover how local places are shaped by larger forces over time. Among others, they will be considering the following questions:
  - Did mercantilism or industrial capitalism shape the topic?
  - Did the production and consumption of nature in far away locales transform local places?
  - Did ideas from elsewhere influence environmental change?
  - Did international commissions or national regulatory bodies regulate aspects of the topic?
  - In what ways do geopolitical borders matter?
  - In what ways are borders arbitrary lines?
  - Have migrations (human or otherwise) influenced land and resource use?
  - Was the topic linked to imperialism, militarization, industrialization, or other processes that move across places and borders?
- Upon successful completion, students will have produced a polished, well-researched practice journal article. Their target audience is an online undergraduate research journal.
- The assignment is designed to practice the standards of the history discipline. Students will learn and improve through the scaffolding built into the assignment. They will turn in the following components:
  - topic
  - tentative bibliography
  - annotated bibliography
  - thesis and outline
  - rough draft
  - final draft

Community-Engaged Learning
- The community-engaged learning portion of the Place Project will address a local environmental issue here on the island or in the surrounding area. It is designed to supplement classroom knowledge by illustrating that learning extends beyond the classroom.
- Each group will create a proposal, then as a class, we will vote on the best one and implement it. After the volunteer day, students will then write individual reflections.

Conclusions
- Participating in the Community of Practice allowed me to create a clear and creative assignment for students.
- Specifically, I was able to:
  - more thoughtfully connected Student Learning Outcomes to assignments.
  - improve the language in assignment directions.
  - add more scaffolding to assignments.
  - expand my strategies for assessing student writing.