



## **Sustainability mini-grant proposal**

### **The environment and you – applying psychological principles to sustainability**

Applicant: Karin Elisabeth Anell

Position: Adjunct Faculty, Social Sciences, Bunker Hill Community College

Courses taught: Principles of psychology (PSY-101)

Contact information: [kanell@bhcc.mass.edu](mailto:kanell@bhcc.mass.edu)

**1. Title:** The environment and you – applying psychological principles to sustainability

**2. Abstract:** This project will integrate sustainability as a key component of an introductory psychology class. In line with this principle, all course material will be posted on the electronic blackboard, using myBHCC, and all students will be instructed to sign up for, and use, their BHCC e-mail account, to receive important information pertaining to the course.

The concept of sustainability will be mainstreamed throughout the course, to help students think critically about how psychological concepts can be applied to explain an individual's willingness to contribute to a better environment. Students will also be asked to think about what kind of factors stand in the way of environmental conscientiousness. Aspects such as learning, motivation, thinking and learning, personality and social psychology will be applied to encourage students to think critically about our propensity to act, even if the immediate personal benefits are not clear (applying the Prisoners' Dilemma at the individual level). Students will be encouraged to apply different aspects of psychology to sustainability throughout the course, and produce tangible results in the form of:

- A research paper
- Four discussion papers
- Extra credit (optional)

**3. Project significance.** The project has a direct connection to Bunker Hill's goal of sustainability. By streamlining the concept of reducing our carbon footprint throughout the course, students will gain a greater awareness of the environmental challenge we are facing. By applying principles of psychology, students will become aware of how they can contribute on an individual level and how social psychology can be applied to encourage sustainable thinking in the larger community.

The entire class will also reduce its carbon footprint in a concrete way, by using electronic means to communicate course material (using electronic blackboard instead of paper copies, referring to articles on-line instead of printing them out, communicating via e-mail) and by students' individual actions to contribute to sustainability (according to the five ways they will identify at the beginning of semester).

#### **4. Project plan**

**a) Project manager:** Professor Karin Anell

**b) Participants:** All students in introductory psychology class (PSY-101). One class will be assigned the pilot test of the study in the fall semester, 2011.

**c) Methods and resources.** The following methods and resources will be used in the sustainability project:

- i. **Evaluation and student suggestions.** At the beginning of term, students will take a survey to assess their attitudes about sustainability. They will then be asked to name at least **five** ways in which they can reduce their carbon footprint. Throughout the term, they will be encouraged to carry out the activities they have identified. At the end of the term, their attitudes about sustainability will be retested.
- ii. **Curriculum enhancement.** Throughout the term, the professor will include articles, information from the web and other sources, to integrate sustainability in the current course.
- iii. **Research project.** 60 points, or 15% of total grade. Designing a psychological research project to discover what motivates people to behave in ways that contribute to sustainability.
- iv. **Personal reflections.** Students will be asked to write four personal reflections throughout the term, analyzing how different psychological aspects influence an individual's propensity to reduce his/her carbon footprint.
- v. **Extra credit.** Students will be encouraged to complete an extra credit assignment on the theme of climate neutrality. They will be asked to contact a local environmental agency and interview a key person about suggestions to make individual citizens more responsible about the environment. They will also ask why it may be hard to make people adhere to principles of climate neutrality. Students will be asked to summarize their findings, applying concepts from the course and their research project (see above) as appropriate. ***They should include five recommendations on how we can best encourage each individual student at BHCC to reduce his/her carbon footprint.*** All reports of high quality will be posted on the BHCC website, under the Office of Sustainability Management site (to be confirmed by that office). Max 30 points extra credit.

**d) Time line:**

- i. Development of plan and researching extra material to be included in curriculum: February-March 2011.
- ii. Curriculum and syllabus completed: April 30 2011
- iii. Complete project submitted to Office of Sustainability Management: May 15, 2011

iv. Pilot test: Fall semester 2011

v. Project integrated in all of Professor Anell's PSY-101 classes as of Spring 2012.

**5. Enhancement of Student Outcomes.** By streamlining the concept of sustainability throughout the term, students' ability to apply psychology to the real world will be enhanced. They will be able to connect theory with practice with an increased chance of learning at a deeper level. They will be encouraged to reflect upon their own contribution to the environment and how their actions are affected by the society around them. Attitudes, norms, conformity and other aspects from social psychology will be effectively demonstrated. Applications of theories of personality and motivation will be shown to have practical significance. The practical aspects of designing a research project on the theme of sustainability as well as the real-world characteristics of the extra credit assignment will reinforce the notion that psychology can be applied in society at large. It might also inspire students with ideas on potential future vocations.

Students' reflections on how they can contribute to sustainability will stimulate critical thinking around the environment and how we can all help reduce our carbon footprint, even by small measures. If students who write outstanding extra credit assignments are allowed to post their reports on the web, this will serve as an incentive to create outstanding reports, and should encourage students to do thorough research.

## **6. Statement on assessment plan**

The project will be launched as a pilot test in Fall 2011. Professor Anell will assess the project's success as follows:

- Quality of reflection papers and research papers. Do they seem to be of higher quality than average? Did the real world aspect of the assignment seem to improve students' outcome?
- Evaluations and grades at end of semester. Assessing students' opinion of the class as well as overall performance. Attrition of students – more commitment due to theme of course?
- Sharing student reports with the Office of Sustainability Management to assess their value to the overall goal of sustainability at BHCC. Choosing high quality work to be posted on the website (if agreed by Office of Sustainability Management).
- Survey at end of semester to assess students' attitudes about the environment. Have attitudes changed since the beginning of term? (Compare results of survey to attitudes assessed at beginning of term).

## 7. Budget worksheet

ITEM	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
<b>Total budget:</b>	<b>\$ 2,000</b>	
<b>Components:</b>		
Course material	1,500	Developing new course material and syllabus: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designing research project</li> <li>- Designing extra credit</li> <li>- Choosing and integrating environmental research into course material</li> <li>- Developing student surveys</li> <li>- Developing evaluation tools</li> </ul>
Instructor training	\$ 500	Attending workshops on sustainability (including managing blackboard on web) and integrating curriculum.
Material for students	\$ 500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accessing scientific articles</li> <li>- Honorarium for guest speaker</li> <li>- Web enhancements</li> </ul>