Students will not critically question a world that seems natural, inevitable, given; instead, they will strategize about their position within it. Developing a social imagination [through service learning] makes it possible not only to question and analyze the world, but also to imagine transforming it.

-Bruce Herzberg from “Community Service and Critical Teaching”

Through the funding provided by the Sustainable Universities Initiative, this grant allowed for the creation of a pilot attempt to incorporate sustainability issues into English 101, the largest course on the University of South Carolina’s Columbia campus. The program involved 6 graduate student instructors, 9 sections of English 101, and approximately 220 first-year students, who worked for approximately 30 campus and community agencies. The students performed an approximate total of 2200 hours of community service for these agencies.

The Grant Funded Project Overview
This fall, six TAs taught nine special sections of English 101 focused on reading and writing about the environment. The senior graduate students, selected because of their interest in the project and their strong teaching records, developed and taught the 101 sections as part of a special “curriculum development group.” Each 101 section focused on a different topic related to environmental sustainability, around which reading and writing assignments were organized. Additionally, each section incorporated a ten-hour community-service component related to the environment.

The Pilot Project served SUI’s goals by
• **Promoting Environmental Literacy** among the graduate student instructors who participated in the project and the first-year students who took the courses;

• **Building positive connections** between our program and the larger community by creating opportunities for instructors and students to work on behalf of local non-profit agencies concerned with the environment;

• **Promoting interdisciplinary study** of the environment by incorporating readings from the sciences, social sciences, and humanities into the courses;

• **Developing an instructor pool** prepared to teach courses focused on environmental issues, since participating instructors can then offer the courses they have developed in future semesters in our program and after graduation when they take jobs at other institutions.

### Detailed Overview of the 2001-2002 Grant

#### Development and Planning
Instructors designed and developed the nine pilot sections during Summer 2001, working collaboratively with each other and under the supervision of Dr. Christy Friend, the Associate Director of First-Year English. The grant enabled the First-Year English program to develop the Curriculum Design Team. The purpose of the Team was to develop innovative themed English Composition courses. The theme chosen for the Fall 2001 semester was “Writing and the Environment.”

The grant challenged each of the six instructors to develop a course that incorporated at least one unit and corresponding major paper assignment revolving around the issues of sustainability and the environment. Additionally, the students in the course had to perform at least 10 hours of service learning at a selected group of agencies. The service-learning had to involve the environment and/or issues of sustainability. The instructors worked with the Office of Community Service in Student Life at USC to develop a list of appropriate service agencies and to address liability and informed consent issues.

The instructors met over the summer to plan their courses, review composition and environmental textbooks, discuss issues and ideas of sustainability and decide how the requirements of the grant could be incorporated into the classroom. During freshman enrollment, an informational flyer was distributed to academic advisors and department heads who could inform registering first-year students about the themed 101 sections. Once registration was completed, the instructors developed an informational packet and letter that was sent to students enrolled in the themed sections explaining how the section would differ from other English 101 courses. The prospective students were given an opportunity to withdraw from the courses should they object to the theme or the community service/service learning component. Every section experienced some
turnover in enrollment, though there were only three cases that could be determined to have occurred directly as a result of the grant.

Furthermore, the Department of English continued to co-sponsor the Sustainable Universities Initiative’s essay contest “Writing for Our Common Future” which encourages students enrolled in English 101 and English 102 (on all University of South Carolina campuses) to submit essays addressing issues of the environment and sustainability. This year, a description of the contest was included in the Writing At Carolina English 101 Handbook, leading to an even greater awareness by first-year students and their graduate instructors of SUI’s mission.

**Impact**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Pilot Sections</th>
<th>9</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participating Instructors</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Participating Students</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Community Service Hours Served</td>
<td>2200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Partial List of Agencies Served**

- Carolina Native Grass Society
- Columbia Historical Preservation
- Congaree Swamp National Monument
- Habitat for Humanity
- Harbison State Forest
- Harvest Hope Food Bank
- Keep America Beautiful
- Oliver Gospel Mission
- Project Pet
- Pets, Inc
- Riverbanks Zoo & Botanical Gardens
- Salvation Army
- Sierra Club
- SUI On-Campus projects

**Survey Instrument**

A questionnaire was developed to gauge student reactions to the pilot program and to gain a better understanding of the student’s response to the course and its theme. The evaluations are currently under review, but our preliminary analysis indicates that the majority of the students reacted positively to the course and indicated that the course increased their environmental awareness.

**Problems**

- Difficulties identifying and contacting appropriate service agencies and placing students in a timely fashion. Efforts to enlist the campus Office of Community Service Programs to help were only partly successful.
- Some student resistance to what they perceived as an additional workload and cost
(additional texts, etc.) of the pilot sections versus a “regular” 101 section.
- Instructors had to spend more time on course development/supervision than anticipated; stipends weren’t commensurate with the extra work load.

Program Recognition
The pilot program was presented at the Sustainable Universities Initiative 2002 Celebration (January 30, 2002) in Columbia, South Carolina in a poster session. The project has been recognized with articles in FYE, the newsletter of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience, and in Aspects, the English Department’s Annual Newsletter, as well as the University of South Carolina’s Faculty/Staff Times. Project instructors have been invited to speak to the USC Composition and Rhetoric Association in March.

Post-Grant Projects
As a result of the grant project, the Curriculum Design Team is proposing a panel presentation at the national Conference on College Composition and Communication 2003. Additionally, the success of the program for both instructors and English 101 students has prompted a pursuit of a mini-grant to help in expanding the program and incorporating more instructors and more sections of English 101.

Data gathered from student evaluations and student papers is currently under review in order to help expand and develop further themed courses in English Composition.

Selected Bibliography English 101 Writing About Environmental Issues
The following texts were used in designing the syllabi of the instructors teaching under this grant program.


