Incorporating Sustainability Projects into Business and Technical Writing Classes: A Workshop for Faculty and Project Clients

Summer Smith, English Department, Clemson University
Mary Haque, Horticulture Department, Clemson University

Overview
A grant from South Carolina Sustainable Universities Initiative supported the launch of a Client-Based Program in Clemson University English Department business and technical writing classes. In spring 2003, the program matched eleven writing classes with sustainability-related writing projects requested by campus and community clients. A workshop in November 2002 brought together the writing faculty and the clients, allowing them to learn about each others’ needs and about sustainability, and to plan the integration of the projects into the classes. By the end of the spring 2003 semester, the eleven classes had produced 192 deliverables, ranging from posters to lengthy reports to web sites. Response to the program from teachers, clients, and students has been overwhelmingly positive, and the program will continue in 2003-4 thanks to continued SUI funding.

Program Outcomes
Eleven sections of English 304 (Business Writing) and English 314 (Technical Writing) participated in the new Client-Based Program in Spring 2003. Business Writing and Technical Writing are required by many majors at Clemson University, and students in other majors use them to fulfill the University’s writing requirement. Majors represented in the classes primarily include fields in agriculture, the sciences, engineering, and business. The courses are intended to prepare students for the types of writing tasks they will encounter in the workplace.

Six faculty, six clients, and about 260 students were involved (see table, below). All of the faculty and clients attended the November 11, 2003 workshop that launched the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Client</th>
<th>Classes</th>
<th>Overall Goals of Deliverables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Megan Black</td>
<td>Calhoun Field Labs (Geoff Zehnder)</td>
<td>Three Technical Writing</td>
<td>Report and promote the sustainable agriculture research at the field labs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teddi Fishman</td>
<td>Clemson Dining Services (David Raiger)</td>
<td>Two Technical Writing</td>
<td>Reduce waste and increase recycling associated with on-campus dining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan Gresham</td>
<td>Clemson Elementary School (Gina McLellan)</td>
<td>One Technical Writing</td>
<td>Facilitate maintenance of outdoor learning environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renee Love</td>
<td>Clemson Farmers Market (Peter Skewes)</td>
<td>Two Business Writing</td>
<td>Attract customers to the new farmers market and promote products to be sold there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chantelle MacPhee</td>
<td>Clemson Housing Services (Gary Gaulin and Donna London)</td>
<td>Two Technical Writing</td>
<td>Recommend “green” designs for new dorms, and raise environmental awareness among resident students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Neal</td>
<td>Code Elementary School (Wilene Cohen and Andrew Inabinet)</td>
<td>One Technical Writing</td>
<td>Raise funds for the development of outdoor learning environments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The eleven classes that participated in the program in Spring 2003 produced 192 deliverables for the clients. Copies of a selection of the deliverables are included with this report. The deliverables represent a wide range of written documents:

- 66 poster signs
- 43 flyers and brochures
- 22 instruction manuals
- 18 white papers and reports
- 14 poster presentations
- 6 radio, TV, and print ads
- 5 web sites
- 2 PowerPoint presentations
- 16 letters, forms, logos and other materials

The written products that the students produced for the clients will advance the clients’ goals to improve the environmental sustainability and awareness of the Clemson campus and community. In addition to these tangible products, the projects also led to significant changes in the students’ own environmental awareness. Teachers of the classes report that students:

- changed their habits to become more sustainable by reducing their use of clothes dryers, printing drafts of their documents on recycled paper, making efforts to recycle glass and plastic products, and so forth
- became more aware of the volume of waste on campus and the costs of disposing of it
- began to understand the complexity of environmental policies and practices
- saw themselves as agents of change in the university and community.

The students were clearly engaged in learning about both the environmental issues and the writing skills that they needed to understand in order to complete their projects. The teachers felt that their students were more motivated to learn writing skills because they wanted to complete effective deliverables. The teachers of the classes said their students were “excited about the projects,” “worked hard to meet every deadline,” “took on more responsibility for their learning,” “wrote much better than students in previous semesters,” and “moved way ahead of where I envisioned them to be on such large projects.” In short, one teacher said, “The class atmosphere was exciting and a joy to come into every Tuesday and Thursday.”

The projects that produced these benefits were launched by a workshop on November 11, 2002 that brought together the writing faculty and the clients. Prior to the workshop, we had identified and held discussions with the clients and teachers, and then matched those participants based on their needs. The workshop provided an important opportunity for the clients and teachers to meet, learn, and plan. The workshop began with an introduction to sustainability definitions, issues, and information resources, presented by SUI representatives. This introduction helped the teachers and clients understand basic sustainability principles, their importance to the world, and their relevance to the writing projects that would be used in the classes. Next, the teachers attended a session on integrating client-based projects into writing courses, presented by Dr. Smith. The session provided guidance on developing a syllabus, maintaining coverage of required course content, teaching collaboration skills and other skills especially necessary to project work, working with clients, and helping students work with clients. An extensive set of teaching materials was provided to the teachers to assist them in planning their courses. Meanwhile, the clients attended a session on working with teachers and students, presented by Professor Haque. This session included guidance on working within the constraints of the semester schedule, communicating expectations and needs, helping students find information without spending too much time and energy on the process, and giving feedback on student work. The workshop concluded with one-on-one meeting time for teacher-client pairs. The pairs used this time to discuss goals and expectations for the projects and to begin planning the integration of the projects into the courses. We facilitated these discussions as needed. The teachers’ and clients’ anonymous assessments of the workshop indicate that the workshop prepared and motivated them to take action:

- “I feel excitement and optimism from having met the teacher and knowing along with the students we will be a team working to make our project a reality.”
“I arrived neutral about the possibilities and left very excited! You did a great job matching me (client) to my teacher. I believe in the value of service learning. This workshop made it easier to force myself to move to the next level and actually do what I believe.”

“I look forward to, I hope, a long working relationship. Thanks for having the workshop and including me.”

“The presentation on sustainability was most useful, as was meeting with the teacher assigned to my project and meeting with other clients interested in sustainability.”

“The examples were really inspiring and encouraging. Wonderful to hear about various projects going forward on campus.”

“Honestly, I found this entire day to be one of the most useful workshops I’ve attended. All of the information was relevant and the sessions were well-timed. I feel much more prepared and excited to take on this project after today. Thanks!”

“I found the packet of teaching materials incredibly thorough. I know I will use it in the future.”

Dissemination
The first year of the Client-Based Program has produced not only the deliverables for the client, but also a substantial body of teaching and programmatic materials as well as a set of presentations that can be used to encourage faculty in other departments and universities to develop similar programs.

In addition to the large binder of teaching materials developed for the workshop, the program now benefits from a client recruiting packet that includes a booklet about how the program works as well as samples of deliverables produced by students.

The faculty involved in the Spring 2003 program also created a PowerPoint presentation about the spring projects. All six faculty, together with one student from each faculty member’s classes, delivered this presentation collaboratively at the April 2003 meeting of the Corporate Advisory Board of the Pearce Center for Professional Communication at Clemson and at the April 2003 campus-wide Communication Across the Curriculum event at Clemson.

Dr. Smith and Prof. Haque are also disseminating ideas from this program to the national academic community. Dr. Smith presented her strategies for the management of client-based projects in June 2002 at the national Writing Program Administrators Conference in Park City, Utah. The presentation was titled “Managing Teacher-Client Relations in Client-Based Projects.” In September 2003, Dr. Smith and Prof. Haque will present a paper titled “Learning from and With the Campus: Incorporating Sustainability Projects into Business and Technical Writing Classes” at the September 2003 Greening of the Campus Conference in Muncie, Indiana.

Continuation of the Program
Thanks to continued funding from SUI, this program will continue in 2003-4. We will again offer a workshop in November, and projects will be integrated into spring classes. We hope to increase slightly the number of classes involved in the program in the spring, and we expect that some returning faculty will include client-based projects in their fall classes as well. To date, about 20 potential clients have been in touch requesting information about the program, so we expect our client base to grow.
**What is the Calhoun Field Laboratory?**

The mission of the Calhoun Field Laboratory (CFL) Sustainable Farming Project is to create an experiential learning environment useful in developing ecologically, economically and socially sustainable farming practices and strategies.

The CFL Project was established in 2000 and currently occupies approximately 15 acres of the “Bottoms” on the Clemson University Campus. This location has a rich heritage of agricultural research going back to the days of John C. Calhoun, and it provides a perfect setting for agricultural research, teaching and public outreach programs.

Students and faculty involved in the CFL Project come from a variety of disciplines, but all are dedicated to exploring more profitable and environmentally friendly farming enterprises through research, education and public service.

**What is the CFL’s Role in University Education?**

The CFL Project is interdisciplinary and involves faculty and students from a variety of colleges and departments. The CFL relies heavily on student involvement in all aspects of farm management, production and marketing. It offers research opportunities for graduate students, and also provides undergraduate students of any discipline with hands-on experience in organic production systems. For instance:

- **Agricultural economics classes** utilize the lab for various teaching purposes.
- **The Horticulture Department** uses the lab for organic farming instruction.
- **Clemson architecture students** are working on a design for an outdoor classroom at the Bottoms.
- **Classes interested in utilizing the CFL** can contact the sustainable agriculture department to schedule an appointment.

**How Does the CFL Educate the Community?**

The Calhoun Fields Laboratory also plays a major role in educating the local community about the potential benefits of sustainable agriculture.

The Clemson Sustainable Agriculture Program has been awarded a grant from the Southern SARE Professional Development Program to provide agent training in sustainable/organic farming practices. These agents are then able to advise producers who are interested in moving towards more sustainable production practices and/or diversifying into high value and niche-market commodities, including organic.

On a smaller scale, local garden clubs can arrange instructional sessions on how to generate a successful organic garden. The laboratory is capable of accommodating the needs of other small groups if needed. Additionally, the SC Organic Growers School is held each fall at the CFL in collaboration with the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association. There is even a composting demonstration site.
Dedicated to exploring more profitable and environmentally friendly farming enterprises through research, education and public service.

For More Information:
Sustainable Agriculture Programs
114 Long Hall, Box 340365
Clemson, SC 29634-0365
864.656.6644
FAX 864.656.6863
E-mail: cfl@clemson.edu
Samples of Infocards for Clemson Farmers Market:

**Chicken and Turkey**

- Organically raised near Lake Hartwell
- Processed on a Clemson campus facility
- A variety of products: Breasts, Legs, Wings, and more
- Thanksgiving turkeys available

The Clemson Farmers Market incorporates President Barker’s vision for Clemson University by strengthening our sense of community and emphasizing Clemson’s distinctiveness. The Farmers Market also encourages practices that unite service, learning, and teaching, increasing opportunities for collaboration while maintaining a healthy environment that is safe and ecologically sustainable.

106 NEWMAN HALL
FRIDAY 12:30-4:30
http://www.clemson.edu/meatlab/pricesnew.html

We Hope You Enjoy!

**Ice Cream**

- Made with milk from Clemson’s own cows
- Processed on a Clemson campus facility
- Made with sugar cane to give the ice cream its sweet flavor
- Remains a favorite of many different Clemson generations

The Clemson Farmers Market incorporates President Barker’s vision for Clemson University by strengthening our sense of community and emphasizing Clemson’s distinctiveness. The Farmers Market also encourages practices that unite service, learning, and teaching, increasing opportunities for collaboration while maintaining a healthy environment that is safe and ecologically sustainable.

106 NEWMAN HALL
FRIDAY 12:30-4:30
http://www.clemson.edu/foodscience/icecream.htm

We Hope You Enjoy!

**Blue Cheese**

- Aged in caves located on Stump House Mountain
- Salted, waxed, and aged for 6 months
- Scraped and packaged by hand to assure our quality and care

The Clemson Farmers Market incorporates President Barker’s vision for Clemson University by strengthening our sense of community and emphasizing Clemson’s distinctiveness. The Farmers Market also encourages practices that unite service, learning, and teaching, increasing opportunities for collaboration while maintaining a healthy environment that is safe and ecologically sustainable.

106 NEWMAN HALL
FRIDAY 12:30-4:30
http://www.clemson.edu/foodscience/bluecheese.htm

We Hope You Enjoy!
Clemson Elementary School
Maintenance Manual for Outdoor Learning Environments

Introduction

Clemson Elementary School, the new elementary school in Clemson, opened its doors in August 2001. Long before the building process began, the students and parents had a vision of what the school would include. The mission was to turn the thirty-six acres of land into an environment that would incorporate the outdoors into a hands-on learning experience, an excellent supplement to traditional learning. The students were also included in the design process. By submitting their ideas through drawings, they expressed their dreams for the garden project. Now that the school has been open for a year, the outside environment includes gardens, nature trails, and playgrounds. In the future, other projects will be developed around the school such as a barn, an amphitheater, and several courtyards. Because there is a large amount of time and effort involved in the maintenance of the gardens and these nature areas, a system must be intact to recruit volunteers to care for these areas and increase community support. Furthermore, these volunteers will need guidance and assistance in maintaining the outdoor environments.

Clemson Elementary School has successfully worked with Clemson University students in the past. So far, over 750 of the university’s students have given their services. These students have designed gardens, built bridges, and created trails. Clemson students have already had great success in creating brochures, web pages, and illustrative guides for the outdoor environments. We recognized that these outdoor environments need additional technical documents, and our technical writing class, instructed by Dr. Morgan Gresham, offered to create documents for the parents, community members, and faculty, who volunteer to take on the duties required for maintenance of the outdoor environments. We created a manual for the twenty-two different outdoor environments and it contains information on the proper maintenance of plants, equipment, and other specific information necessary to keep the Clemson Elementary Outdoors (CEO) growing. Aside from the creation of the manual, we also prepared letters and flyers for the parents of the students and members of the community. These documents were designed to encourage their participation, request their adoption of the different outdoor environments, and thank them for their efforts.

We are excited about the opportunities available to help Clemson Elementary. Our class has twenty-one students, representing seventeen different majors including life sciences, landscape architecture, education, and forestry. We have a great deal to contribute to the project, ranging from different skills to new ideas...

2 “Clemson Elementary Outdoors” <http://www.pickens.k12.sc.us/clemson.es/ces/clemsonelemoutdoors/ceomain.htm>
3 “Clemson Elementary Outdoors” <http://www.pickens.k12.sc.us/clemson.es/ces/clemsonelemoutdoors/ceomain.htm>
Got a Second?

Think About This

◦ In South Carolina we deposit 10 million tons of trash into landfills every year.

◦ That’s equivalent to the number of General Motors automobiles produced in 1 year.

◦ By simply choosing products that have less packaging or plastic bags, instead of paper, at the grocery store you can reduce the amount of trash going into our landfills.

Why? If we are able to reduce and reuse items we can save money and conserve resources. It also reduces production costs which will save you money.

Do your part!
Conserve Resources By Reducing Waste