

Green Writing Curriculum: Showing Your Students How to Make a Difference

Roger Munger

Abstract

A growing group of green writers are persuading people to change their thinking and their behaviors for the benefit of our planet and its inhabitants. Adding a green writing assignment, unit, or course to your curriculum, the author argues, is an excellent strategy for showing students how their writing can make a difference in their community. This article discusses the design of a green writing course and offers suggestions for incorporating a green writing component in your discipline-specific courses.

A half-century ago, concern for the planet and *all* its inhabitants was mostly relegated to hippies, tree huggers, bunny lovers, and a few concerned (but quickly dismissed as heretical) scientists. Although Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, a warning about the dangers of chemical pesticide use, signaled the start of the modern environmental movement in 1962, organizations such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, PETA, and Earth First! labored for decades to generate much attention and struggled to get the common person to change his or her behavior. There just wasn't much room, for example, for recycling, sustainable business practices, fair trade, and animal rights in Gordon Gekko's greed-is-good world of the 1980s. Only within the past decade have energy shortages, holes in the ozone, extinctions, melting icecaps, famine, and smuggled video documenting animal cruelty caused people to begin to realize that there is a limit to the damage from which our planet can recover and that humans might have an ethical obligation to stop the abuse and exploitation of other creatures.

Gathered under the banner of *green*, concern for (or at least a growing curiosity about) the health of our planet, the treatment of farm animals, and sustainable business practices has entered into the consciousness of mainstream society. Green is the new black, trumpets *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter (2006, 48). Green is mainstream. Green is now good. Each new trip to the store, it seems, reveals new environmentally responsible, fair-trade, cruelty-free products. More of us walk, bike, drive a hybrid, or take public transportation to work. We conduct business in environmentally friendly buildings certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. We contribute to the growing fourteen-billion-dollar organic food market (Mckay 2007). We invest our money in social and environmentally responsible companies (Serra 2006) and do business with companies that respect our planet (see, for example, Crawford 2006; Esty and Winston 2006; Kachura 2007; Savitz and Weber 2006). We reduce, reuse, and recycle in an effort to reduce our ecological footprint.

However, underlying all the green-hype is a dedicated and growing group of *writers* across the disciplines—scientists, activists, CEOs, farmers, bloggers, parents, and students—who use the power of the written word to educate the world about our obligations to our planet and its current (and future) inhabitants. Regardless of topic, whether it is the eighteen billion catalogs mailed by the catalog industry in 2004 (ForestEthics 2006) or the abuse of chickens by suppliers of a major fried-chicken chain (PETA 2008), the goal of these writers is to persuade people (consumers, CEOs, elected officials) to change their thinking and their behaviors. Helping your students understand *how* these writers persuade people to change is the key to teaching your students how they can use their writing skills to make a difference. This article outlines important components of a green writing curriculum, including course readings, writing assignments, and service-learning projects. But first, I discuss how a *green writing* curriculum might enhance metropolitan campuses.

The Potential of a Green Writing Curriculum on Metropolitan Campuses

Not surprisingly, the “writing in the disciplines” (also known as “writing across the curriculum”) movement on college campuses was another result of the social upheaval of the 1960s. As educational opportunities in higher education were provided to previously excluded groups, faculty and administrators were confronted with new challenges: How do we teach students who do not write standard written English? How do we introduce students to specialized academic and discipline-specific discourse communities? Such questions were even more relevant on urban campuses with their increasingly heterogeneous student body. As a response to these challenges, the writing in the disciplines movement developed. Over the past thirty years, writing in the disciplines has established a record of introducing students to disciplinary discourse and supporting active learning in the classroom (see, for example, Bazerman and Russell 1994; Bean 1996; Howard and Jamieson 1995). Consequently, many faculty across the disciplines already use writing as an aid to learning and as a tool for developing critical thinking skills (Kirscht and Schlenz 2002). The pedagogy of writing in the disciplines provides a framework for understanding the value of writing in the professions and for teaching writing outside the traditional English course. Disciplinary writing on social responsibility and environmental sustainability, or what I call green writing, provides an effective focus for this writing instruction.

The potential of a green writing curriculum lies in its capacity to inspire and support writing instruction not only in English courses but also in disciplines across campus. Faculty wishing to introduce students to disciplinary discourse can look to examples of green writing in their field. The breadth and relevancy of topics typically associated with green writing, which I discuss more in the next section, makes green writing an easy fit with a variety of courses on campus. In addition, the immediacy of green writing topics—ecological balance, animal rights, social justice, and sustainable economy—effectively engage students enrolled in classes at urban universities.

Students and faculty learning about sustainability in the context of their discipline need to look no further than their local community to examine real-world examples, explore consequences, and find opportunities.

A green writing curriculum provides metropolitan universities an opportunity to reach those of our students who might be apathetic, juggling too many responsibilities, or too narrowly focused on career skills. Engaging these students in the critical issues facing our planet and our neighborhoods often moves the apathetic to take action when confronted with the stark realities of a world in rapid decline. Overworked students are given opportunities to find balance in their lives and to reconnect with their communities. Career-focused students are introduced to alternate green career options within their fields. All benefit from the transformative power of giving back to their communities. Also, showing students how they can use their writing skills to make a difference empowers them to be agents of change. If we are to reverse the damage to our planet and its inhabitants, we need to engage the next generation, to give them the tools for change, and to give them hope. A green writing curriculum does just that.

Even if you do not plan to teach a semester-long course on green writing or if you teach in a different discipline, you can likely use the information that follows to incorporate a green writing unit or assignment into one of your existing courses. In fact, you can show students studying subjects such as engineering, nursing, or finance how professionals in their field use writing to persuade people to change their thinking or behavior for the benefit of the planet, as an excellent teaching strategy to reinforce the important and positive role written communication plays in their discipline.

The Purpose and Topics of Green Writing

Getting a handle on what exactly constitutes green writing is a bit tricky—it is definitely not just writing printed with green ink (although the color green often does play a prominent design element in green writing). Likewise, when I wrote the catalog description for my 2008 course, the fifty-word limit did not provide much space to define green writing:

Green writing promotes a socially responsible and environmentally sustainable society through print and electronic documents. Incorporating commonsense arguments, numbers, images, examples, expert testimony, real-world impact, and descriptive passages, students will write about a green issue with the goal of publishing it. Includes analysis of efforts by authors to bring about change.

Although its roots can be traced back to nature writing (e.g., Henry Thoreau, John Muir, Mary Austin) and environmental writing (e.g., Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey), green writing has evolved to include more than an interest in nature or a concern for the environment. As an emerging and broad genre, green writing can best be identified by its rhetorical purpose (to change a reader's beliefs and behaviors) and its most common topics: ecological balance, animal rights, social justice, and sustainable economy.

When asked, “What do I want this document to accomplish?” a person writing a press release on a pesticide opt-out program might respond, “I want my readers to opt out of the abatement program, or at least know they have options other than pesticides for controlling the threat of West Nile Virus from mosquitoes.” Likewise, a person writing about eco-friendly exercise tips might respond, “I want my readers to lessen their impact on the Earth through various parts of their life, including their fitness routine.” Green writers want people to change, to act in new ways: use compact fluorescent light bulbs, drive fewer miles, use soy-based inks, drink fair-trade coffee, stop buying fur-lined clothing. Moreover, green writers try to persuade people with more than just essays and books. They also use media such as brochures, articles, product packaging, blogs, posters, case studies, Web pages, and cartoons.

Although persuading people to change is the purpose of green writing, green writers do not always explicitly ask readers to change. Sometimes, especially with emotionally charged topics such as animal cruelty or a person’s diet, green writers must try a *soft-sell* approach. In these cases, the real purpose of a document differs from its express purpose (which is often revealed in the title of the document). A green writer, for example, might want to convince readers to switch to a vegan diet (no animal products or animal by-products). Many readers would resist being overtly persuaded to change their diet but might be more willing to learn about a plant-based diet. At first glance, the document might suggest that the writer’s express purpose is to merely communicate (i.e., explain, describe, review) the advantages of eating a plant-based diet. However, the real purpose of the document is to persuade readers to change their eating habits.

Green writers typically persuade people to change their beliefs and behavior in relation to four common topics. First, green writers try to convince people to make changes that will benefit the environment. Green writers, for example, persuade people to use recycled paper, use phosphate-free soaps, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Second, green writers try to convince people to protect animals, especially farmed animals, which account for more than 97 percent of the animals killed by humans in the United States (Marcus 2005). These writers’ purpose is to change the way corporations raise animals for food and, ultimately, to change people’s food choices. Third, green writers try to convince people to treat each other equally. These writers’ purpose is to provide equal opportunities to groups traditionally exploited or excluded. Finally, green writers try to convince business decision-makers to adopt sustainable business practices. These writers persuade business leaders (and the consumers who invest in and support their companies) to transform the bottom line from profits to social responsibility and environmental leadership. Although it is possible to further subdivide these four topics or introduce other worthy main topics, I have found that these four topics cover the majority of texts people wish to categorize as green writing. These four broad topics also represent a manageable and flexible way to introduce a green writing assignment in a course outside the English department or to organize an entire 10- or 16-week course on green writing.

Persuasive Strategies of Green Writing

The foremost goal of green writing is to persuade readers to *change*: to change their beliefs and to change their behaviors. Consequently, at the heart of a green writing course (or assignment) is the close examination of how green writers persuade their readers. Once students begin to notice and think about persuasive strategies, they can begin to incorporate these strategies into their own writing. To help students focus on the persuasive strategies a writer uses, I ask them to use simple plus and minus notations (+/-) in the margins as they read. When they come across a sentence, passage, or graphic that is particularly convincing to them, I ask that they mark the element with a plus. Conversely, unpersuasive elements are marked with a minus sign. Then, I ask students to reflect on the elements they marked and what made them persuasive or unpersuasive. After reading a few different pieces of green writing, students can identify a half dozen or so rhetorical strategies that most readers find persuasive.

The most common strategies green writers use to persuade their readers include commonsense arguments, numbers, images, examples, expert testimony, real-world impact, and descriptive passages. Below I provide an example of each persuasive strategy and briefly discuss the appeal of each.

- **Commonsense arguments.** Such arguments are persuasive because they appeal to the commonly held beliefs and knowledge of most people. If a writer's beliefs closely match a reader's thinking, this strategy is likely to be very persuasive. The following presents a commonsense argument that a company should adopt green business practices:

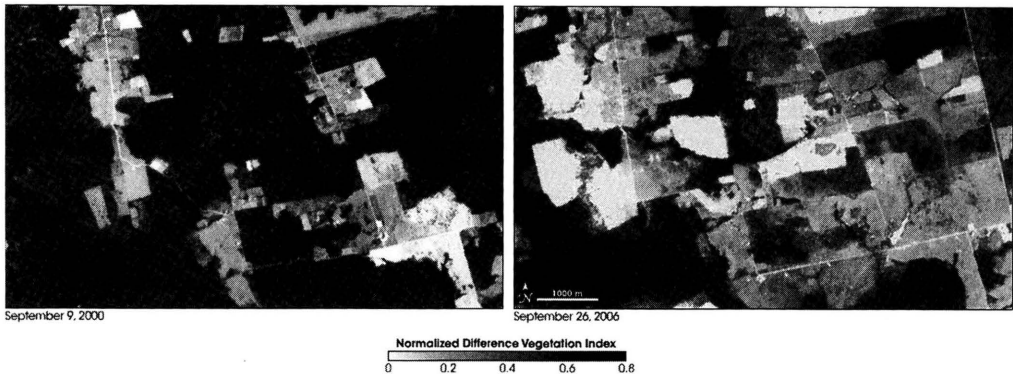
Most people want their children to inherit an environmentally healthy and socially just planet. I don't have all the details, but it seems our company could be doing more to ensure that this happens.

- **Numbers.** Numbers are persuasive, especially large, impressive numbers (Brase and Stelzer 2007). Numbers (even if those numbers were arrived at using faulty methods) have the appearance of objectivity and precision—both qualities are highly persuasive to readers. Numbers, including statistical data, dollar amounts, and percentages, allow readers to understand the scope of a problem, compare items, prioritize, and arrange events in a sequence. The following sentence (Institute for Local Self-Reliance 1997) uses a large number to demonstrate the environmental impact of commercial printing practices:

In 1995, more than 41 million pounds of toxic compounds were transferred or released into the environment by the printing industry.

- **Images.** Images include photographs, tables, charts, and maps. Images are persuasive because they concisely communicate at a glance more information and, often, more emotion than words alone. It is one thing, for instance, for students to *read* a description of animal agriculture or the fur trade, it is an entirely different

experience *seeing* images of animal cruelty. The following images by NASA's Earth Observatory (Lindsey and Simmon 2007) show tropical deforestation:



- **Examples.** Examples make abstract concepts concrete as well as more memorable. Examples also help writers describe how organizations and people have changed. With examples, writers can argue, “See, if they can do it, you can also do something like they did.” The following passage (Kachura 2007) presents an example of a goal one company set for reducing its ecological footprint:

Dell Computers, for instance, set a goal two years ago to move 50 percent of its print materials to 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper by 2009. The company is already 90 percent of the way there.

- **Expert Testimony.** Persuasion lies in the authority of the voice. Writers lacking credibility themselves in a topic and looking to bolster their claims often enlist the help of people with the credentials to offer expert testimony in the form of quotes and research findings. Readers find expert testimony persuasive because the experts have specialized knowledge or skills from education, training, or experience that the readers do not possess. Just as expert testimony in a trial can sway jurors, it can also sway readers. The following statement appearing on the Union of Concerned Scientists' Web site (1992) establishes the credibility of a statement entitled “The World Scientists' Warning to Humanity”:

Some 1,700 of the world's leading scientists, including the majority of Nobel laureates in the sciences, issued this appeal in November 1992.

- **Real-World Impact.** Unless a problem exists in a reader's own backyard, it is often difficult to grasp the scope of a problem and who actually is affected. Understanding and caring about, for example, *dead zones* in the oceans (places in which bottom water has very low or completely zero concentrations of dissolved oxygen) might be difficult for a reader in a landlocked location. However, by educating the reader about the impact of a problem in terms that he or she can understand, a writer can add a persuasive human dimension to a seemingly faraway issue. The following statement from ForestEthics (2010) shows the impact of U.S. junk mail on a distant (for most of us) forest:

The Boreal Forest has been threatened over the past several decades by industrial logging. To date, only 12 percent is protected. Over 30 percent has already been designated for logging, energy extraction, and other development, much of it within the last decade. Millions of acres of the Boreal are clear-cut each year. The US consumes more than half of all the trees logged in the Boreal—many in the form of catalogs and junk mail. As the forest disappears into these disposable products, the habitat for species like woodland caribou disappears as well.

- **Descriptive Passages.** Although images can communicate much in just a glance and can certainly evoke strong emotions in viewers, some images, especially tables, charts, and maps, can be a bit impersonal. Descriptive passages are persuasive because they offer readers not only a vivid picture in their mind's eye but also a sense of the writer as a human being. The following passage (Stegner 2008) adds a human dimension to a description of a prairie and, thus, makes a more persuasive argument for its preservation:

On our Saskatchewan prairie, the nearest neighbor was four miles away, and at night we saw only two lights on all the dark rounding earth. The earth was full of animals—field mice, ground squirrels, weasels, ferrets, badgers, coyotes, burrowing owls, snakes. I knew them as my little brothers, as fellow creatures, and I have never been able to look upon animals in any other way since. The sky in that country came clear down to the ground on every side, and it was full of great weathers, and clouds, and winds, and hawks. [...] A prairie like that, one big enough to carry the eye clear to the sinking, rounding horizon, can be as lonely and grand and simple in its forms as the sea. It is as good a place as any for the wilderness experience to happen; the vanishing prairie is as worth preserving for the wilderness idea as the alpine forest.

Not every piece of green writing includes all seven of the above rhetorical strategies nor are these strategies the only ways green writers try to persuade their readers. These seven strategies are just some of the most common. In addition, these strategies are not equally persuasive for all readers. Some readers (my students refer to them as *quantoids*) are most persuaded by numbers. Other readers are most persuaded by expert testimony. Ultimately, I tell students they need to use their understanding of their readers when choosing which rhetorical strategies they will use.

Texts for a Green Writing Course

Although writing is clearly the focus of a green writing course, students spend time getting grounded in the basics of common green issues, with particular attention to understanding the varied forms and aims of green writing. Consequently, the course is organized around the four themes associated with green writing: ecological balance, animal rights, social justice, and sustainable economy. Students read to understand the topic (e.g., animal rights) as well as to closely analyze the textual and visual strategies used by the writer to achieve his or her purpose in writing. If you only wish to integrate a green writing assignment or two into your course, the texts I discuss below

can serve as supplementary material for you as you plan your green assignment, discussion starters (i.e., relevant excerpts), and student resources.

Four texts formed the core readings for the course (see Table 1), each focusing on one or more green themes. Shorter readings were drawn from texts such as *Bitter Harvest* (Cooper 2000), *Raising the Bar: Integrity and Passion in Life and Business* (Erickson 2006), *An Inconvenient Truth* (Gore 2006), *Organic, Inc.* (Fromartz 2007), *Cadillac Desert* (Reisner 1993), *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (Pollan 2007), *Fast Food Nation* (Schlosser 2005), *Mad Cowboy* (Lyman and Merzer 2001), and *The Sustainable Company* (Laszlo 2005). Readings from anthologies focusing on nature (e.g., *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*) and environmental writing (e.g., *The Future of Nature*) provided some additional context for green writing. Some readings came from articles published in popular-press magazines such as *Solar Today*, *Permaculture*, *The Ecologist*, *Scientific American*, *Vegetarian Times*, *Nature*, *Earth First!*, *VegNews*, and *Organic Gardening*. Students also visited Web sites maintained by organizations such as ForestEthics, New Leaf Paper, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), Sustainable Communities Network, EcoGeek, and the U.S. Green Building Council.

Table 1. Core Green Writing Texts

Title	Green Theme	Description	Source
<i>Silent Spring</i>	Ecological balance	Considered by many as the start of the modern environmental movement; describes the dangers of chemical pesticides.	Rachel Carson, Mariner Books, 2002 (40th anniversary edition)
<i>The Food Revolution</i>	Ecological balance/ Animal rights	Discusses how changes in our diet can help save our lives and our world.	John Robbins, Conari Press, 2001
<i>Meat Market: Animals, Ethics, & Money</i>	Animal rights	Examines animal agriculture's cruelties and its social costs. Includes eight essays providing advice for personal activism.	Erik Marcus, Brio Press, 2005
<i>Business as Unusual</i>	Sustainable economy/ Social justice	Telling the story of Anita Roddick and The Body Shop, addresses human rights, the environment, and activism within the context of corporate behavior.	Anita Roddick, Anita Roddick Books, 2005

Finally, three DVDs were shown in class as well as a series of short Web-based cartoons (see Table 2). A fourth film, *Born into Brothels*, was planned but a scheduling

glitch prevented me from showing it. Underscoring the important role that images (and sound) have in persuading people, these films served as starting points for class discussions on the strengths and weakness of audio and video compared to the written word alone. Students considered, for example, the impact of graphic images of animal agriculture compared to written descriptions and at what point images become *too graphic*, working against the writer’s purpose. Likewise, students examined how images supported the points being made in the film and discussed how they might also use persuasive images in their own writing.

Table 2. Green-Themed Films

Film Title	Green Theme	Description	Source
<i>Who Killed the Electric Car?</i>	Ecological balance	Using a who-done-it format, documents the demise of the electric car developed by General Motors in the late 1990s.	Sony Pictures Classics, http://www.sonyclassics.com/whokilledtheelectriccar/
<i>The Witness</i>	Animal rights	Story of one person’s mission to bring his message of compassion for all animals to the streets of New York City.	Tribe of the Heart, http://www.tribeofheart.org/wit1.htm
<i>The Meatrix I- II½</i>	Animal rights	Three award-winning animated movies about the problems with factory farming.	Sustainable Table and Free Range Studios, http://www.themeatrix.com/
<i>Green is the Color of Money</i>	Sustainable economy	A case study of one of the world's most sustainable, energy-efficient, high-performance buildings.	Shedd Productions, http://www.deepgreen.tv
<i>Born into Brothels</i>	Social justice	An Oscar-winning documentary focusing on children who live in the red-light district of Calcutta, where their mothers work as prostitutes.	ThinkFilm, http://www.kids-with-cameras.org/bornintobrothels/

If you already have an interest in green topics, you are probably thinking to yourself, “But, how could you not include [insert here your favorite piece of green writing]?” Five years ago, you would have had to hunt for green-themed texts among the books on shelves labeled, perhaps, *social commentary* or *current interest*. Today, if you don’t

bump into a green-themed display when you enter a bookstore, you can quickly find dozens of green-themed books, enough for some retailers to devote whole shelves to all things green. Bottom line: there are dozens of worthy books, articles, and essays being written each year, not to mention the many texts written in the past century and a half. Pick the books, product packaging, Web sites, articles, and films that make sense to you and will be meaningful to your students. Often, you can find green writing specific to your own discipline by using a search engine to search the Internet for “green” + name of your discipline (e.g., green engineering, green nursing).

Readings not only provide students with necessary background information on ecological balance, animal rights, and sustainable economy but also serve as examples to imitate in their own writing. In addition to identifying and analyzing the persuasive strategies writers used, students can also examine, for example, how the writers include the research and voices of others as well as how the writers signal logical relationships between ideas. For instance, when students quote (either from a primary source such as an interview or a secondary source such as a scholarly article), they often just drop a quote into a paragraph without preparing their readers for the new voice or students repeatedly use a single, basic style of quoting a source: source’s name + verb, “quotation” (e.g., Carson argues, “We stand now where two roads diverge.”). However, relying on just one or two styles of quotation makes writing monotonous (and, thus, less likely to persuade). To help students develop their repertoire of ways to integrate quotes into their writing, I ask them to keep a list of different ways to quote, summarize, and paraphrase, adding to it each time they find a new variation in their readings. Then, when integrating information from a source into their own writing, students have a list at hand with dozens of ways a writer can integrate information from a source. This list also serves as discussion material when we discuss the rhetorical impact of, for example, including only a source’s name versus including a source’s name *and* additional information establishing a source’s credibility (e.g., “William Castelli” versus “William Castelli, M.D., Director, Framingham Health Study, the longest running study of diet and heart disease in world medical history”). Likewise, students highlight in their readings and keep in a notebook examples of transitional words and phrases that the writers use to clearly and logically link together their thoughts. This material leads to discussions of how to maintain coherence *within* and *between* paragraphs.

Sample Green Writing Assignments

Overall, I wanted my green writing course to help students to do the following:

- Recognize and evaluate rhetorical strategies used by green writers
- Incorporate commonsense arguments, numbers, images, examples, expert testimony, real-world impact, and descriptive passages into a persuasive document
- Format, market, and publish their green writing
- Use their writing skills to provide a service to the community

To achieve these goals, students were given the opportunity to discuss and analyze

readings asynchronously in an online forum as well as face-to-face in class. They also completed four major written assignments (see Table 3) during the semester. The general trajectory of the assignment sequence was the following: read widely about a green topic of interest to you and write up your findings, use this new knowledge to address a need in the community, write a manuscript on your topic, research where and how to publish your manuscript, and submit your manuscript for publication.

Table 3. Sample Green-Themed Assignments

Assignment	Goals	Description
Green summary	Identify key sources of information on topic. Learn what has already been written about your topic and what are the key issues and concepts.	After some readings introducing students to the major topics of green writing, students identify a specific topic (e.g., efforts by ski resorts to reduce their carbon footprint or xeriscaping) within one of these broad topics to research. Students then write up their findings in the form of a summary.
Service-learning project & reflective essay	Create documents that help address community needs. Collaborate with community leaders on a persuasive document.	Working alone or with one or two classmates, students partner with green-minded organizations in the local community to create documents to be used by the organization and/or the people it serves. (The service-learning component of the course is described in the next section.)
Green manuscript	Persuade a specific audience to change their beliefs and behaviors. Craft a manuscript that follows the author guidelines of a specific publication.	Based on their prior research and, in many cases, their service-learning experience, students write a manuscript targeting a specific audience. For example, after researching “green pregnancy” practices, one student wrote an article persuading women to take specific steps before they become pregnant to avoid chemicals known to harm fetuses.
Market analysis	Identify a likely publishing venue for your green manuscript. Learn strategies for improving your chances of getting your manuscript published.	Visiting Web sites to read the “Notes to Authors” of a publication and using resources such as <i>Writer’s Market</i> , students identify a publication likely to be interested in their manuscript, research submission requirements, and then write the instructor a detailed memo arguing for a specific publication as the best place to submit the manuscript.

Following this assignment sequence, students at the conclusion of the semester already had one or more documents ready for their portfolio and several community contacts (for future internships, jobs, or references) from the service-learning projects. In addition, they had a polished manuscript on a green topic ready for submission to the editor of a publication likely to accept their manuscript. They also left knowing how to query an editor, submit a manuscript, and, if their first choice rejected their submission, research a new market for their manuscript. Such skills helped students leave the course ready to make a difference: “there are many easy things one can do to make the world a better place, but people are still just not doing them ... my resolve to do more to change these views and practices only strengthened.”

A Service-Learning Component

Tying together the readings and assignments is the students’ opportunity to practice green writing in a real-world context. Reading and analyzing other people’s discussions of animal rights, for example, helps students become grounded in the basics of a green issue. However, students develop a much richer understanding of the complex rhetorical context in which green writers work when they have an opportunity, for instance, to help staff at a no-kill animal shelter develop a brochure on feral cats or help a coalition of concerned citizens to promote organic farming practices.

The essence of a service-learning (SL) experience is the organized linking of academic study, community service, and reflection. An SL experience is thus ideal for students who wish to apply course principles to a community project, meet a need in their community, gain valuable workplace experience *before* they graduate, and better understand how their writing skills can help them engage their community (Munger 2002). Going through your university’s SL program is one way to connect students with green-minded community organizations and receive support for planning and teaching your course. The SL program, for example, provided \$500 for course materials (books and DVDs) as well as a teaching assistant who helped facilitate the online discussions.

A course on green writing easily lends itself to a pedagogy based on SL. In a green writing course, students collaborate with classmates and with leaders from local community organizations. Students partnered, for example, with the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, Northwest Animal Companions, and Idaho GemStars (a statewide pollution-prevention and public-recognition program) to help them persuade their audiences. Students researched, designed, and wrote case studies, brochures, press releases, newsletter articles, and profiles. Along the way, they had a number of opportunities to reflect on what they were studying in the course and how it applied to their SL project.

Reflection at the start of the SL experience helps students express concerns, articulate their expectations, and otherwise prepare themselves for the work ahead. Reflection during a project helps them apply what they are learning in class to what they are doing outside of class. Reflection after a project is completed enables students to make

sense of their experience and connect course principles to real-world practice (Munger and Gutowski 2008). Reflection at all stages of the SL experience can take the form of online and face-to-face discussions as well as journal entries. Table 4 lists sample discussion questions and responses.

Table 4. Selected SL Discussion Prompts and Student Responses

Discussion Prompt	Excerpts from Student Responses
What are your expectations of (1) the people that you will serve and (2) the professionals or other volunteers you may come in contact with in the conduct of your service experience?	While serving this organization, I would expect them to respond to questions I might have as promptly as possible, although it is important to remember that they are all volunteers, they are understaffed, and most likely, they are not used to dealing with students.
How might your service-learning experience help you achieve the learning objectives described in your syllabus?	I feel like this project is a great way to put the aims of the course into practice. Because we are writing materials for organizations with specific goals in mind, we will have to be mindful of the rhetorical strategies we have been discussing. Knowing that our projects will be seen by the public, we will have to think about ways to market our writing to both the organization and the potential readers.
How might your attitude and beliefs affect the collaboration between you and your community partner?	I think it is hard to really put yourself into a project when you have no interest in it. I feel that my excitement for the project and for the chance to work with the community will make my work on this project more enjoyable and therefore more productive.
Describe one experience that has affected you the most or sticks out in your mind the most so far. Why did you choose this experience?	I think the most memorable part of that conversation was the enthusiasm we sparked out of each other for my project.... I've done lots of research on school children and the benefits of healthy food and proper exercise for other [English] classes, and I'm able to integrate that research into this project.
What are some of the ways your SL experience reflects what you are learning in this course? How does the experience increase your understanding of the course material?	For me, the SL project is sort of like the lab component of a science class. It is a chance to take all of the information we've gathered in class and see how it actually works. It is also a chance to figure out how all of the techniques we've discussed fit together into a cohesive whole.

How have your own writing skills improved as a result of your SL project?

I think the major improvement to my writing skills as a result of my SL project is really tailoring my writing to a specific audience and with a specific purpose in mind. It wasn't just about presenting my findings but sharing them in a way that people agreed with and listened to. It will be beneficial to keep [in mind] audience and purpose in my future writings.

Describe your favorite part of your SL experience.

I wrote about the real-world interaction as being my favorite part also. I agree that classroom learning is quite different than seeing first hand how the issues affect people. I finished my project feeling hopeful as well. Meeting people who are doing something to make a change makes it harder to make excuses.

A more formal opportunity to reflect occurs after students submit their projects to their community partners. In addition to completing the SL project, students submit a reflective essay in which they address questions such as the following:

1. How does the combination of course materials and the SL experience relate to your personal life and how you might approach similar situations in the future?
2. In what ways did the SL experience contradict and reinforce course material?
3. In what ways was your involvement with the SL experience challenging?
4. What can you do with the knowledge you gained from the SL experience to promote change?
5. How do your lifestyle choices affect the issues confronted in your SL experience? Is there anything you are doing/not doing that perpetuates the situation?
6. How has your orientation to or opinion about issues raised in this course changed through your SL experience?
7. In what ways has this SL experience helped clarify your career goals?

Spending a few class periods (or sixteen weeks) reading about and discussing issues such as global warming, pesticides, deforestation, pollution, worker exploitation, and animal cruelty can be, as you might guess, a bit of a downer some days. However, this formal opportunity to reflect on the SL project helps students regain their sense of humor and realize that they *can* make a difference:

Once upon a time, I woke up thinking not about how my breakfast cereal could adversely affect me or someone else, but only about how it tasted. Organic was a scientific term, and pesticide was just a fancy word for bug spray. Happily, those days are behind me. Actually, I may be off in saying happily. Eating good food is hard work.... But, knowing what I know now, I will trudge on, searching labels and continuing to convince myself that I don't

need Cheetos to survive. I don't want to paint myself as a saint here; I have not gone completely green, but I am making great strides.

Conclusion

At its most simple, green writing is about change, and including a green writing unit or teaching a green writing course is about showing students how they can use their writing skills to make a difference. The readings, discussions, and assignments discussed in this article introduce students to writers across the disciplines who are making a difference and to strategies that they can use to persuade others to change their behaviors for the benefit of the local community and the larger global community. One student wrote, "I can now act on what I have been researching and been so passionate about in the past." Another student wrote, "This class and my service learning project have led me to become increasingly aware of the importance of good writing for the advancement of activist causes ... and I feel this area represents a career path I had not previously considered, though it suits me in many ways." Service-learning projects move students beyond abstract concepts and theoretical discussions and partner them with people in the community already making a difference. Such projects allow students to apply their classroom learning and to see how writing, *their* writing, can be an tool for change: "I have also seen that change is possible" and that "writing is an effective way of moving people to action." In the end, students will leave our campuses better able to participate in their communities, to make their voices be heard, and to be advocates for our planet.

References

- Bazerman, C., and D. Russell. 1994. *Landmark essays on writing across the curriculum*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press.
- Bean, J. 1996. *Engaging ideas*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc..
- Brase, G., and H. Stelzer. 2007. Education and persuasion in extension forestry: Effects of different numerical information formats. *Journal of Extension* 45 (4). <http://www.joe.org/joe/2007august/a1.shtml> (accessed June 17, 2010).
- Carson, R. 2002. *Silent spring*. New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Carter, G. 2006. Green is the new black. *Vanity Fair*, May 2006:48.
- Cooper, A. 2000. *Bitter harvest*. New York: Routledge.
- Crawford, A. 2006. Go for the green. *Vegetarian Times*, January 2006:84–87.
- Erickson, G., and L. Lorentzen. 2006. *Raising the bar: Integrity and passion in life and business*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Esty, D., and A. Winston. 2006. *Green to gold: How smart companies use environmental strategy to innovate, create value, and build competitive advantage*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

ForestEthics. 2006. Under siege by catalogs, Santa pleads for help. http://forestethics.org/downloads/santaslist_final.pdf (accessed June 17, 2010).

———. 2010. The boreal forest: The issue. <http://forestethics.org/the-boreal-forest-the-issue> (accessed June 17, 2010).

Fromartz, S. 2007. *Organic, Inc.: Natural foods and how they grew*. Orlando: Harvest Books.

Gore, A. 2006. *An inconvenient truth*. New York: Rodale Books.

Howard, R., and S. Jamieson. 1995. *The Bedford guide to teaching and writing in the disciplines*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Institute for Local Self-Reliance. 1997. *Biochemicals for the printing industry: The carbohydrate economy*. Washington, DC: Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

Kachura, P. 2007. Best practices: It's good to be green. Part 6 of the SmartReply Benchmarking Series. http://forestethics.org/downloads/SR_GreenMarketingv13.pdf (accessed June 17, 2010).

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). 2008. *Kentucky fried cruelty*. <http://www.kfccruelty.com/> (accessed June 17, 2010).

Kirscht, J., and M. Schlenz. 2002. *Engaging inquiry: Research and writing in the disciplines*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Laszlo, C. 2005. *The sustainable company: How to create lasting value through social and environmental performance*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Lindsey, R., and R. Simmon. 2007. Tropical deforestation. NASA Earth Observatory. http://eobglossary.gsfc.nasa.gov/Library/Deforestation/deforestation_update4.html (accessed March 30, 2007).

Lyman, H., and G. Merzer. 2001. *Mad cowboy: Plain truth from the cattle rancher who won't eat meat*. New York: Scribner.

Marcus, E. 2005. *Meat market: Animals, ethics, & money*. Boston: Brio Press.

McKay, B. 2007. When buying organic makes sense—and when it doesn't. *Wall Street Journal*, January 16, 2007:D1, D2.

Munger, R. 2002. Workplace-classroom collaborations: A role for service learning in proposal development. *Journal of the Association of Proposal Management Professionals* (Spring/Summer): 39–45.

Munger, R., and A. Gutowski. 2008. Preparing future leaders: Project management strategies for service learning. *Metropolitan Universities* 19 (1): 148–162.

Pollan, M. 2007. *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin.

Reisner, M. 1993. *Cadillac desert: The American West and its disappearing water*. New York: Penguin.

Robbins, J. 2001. *The food revolution*. San Francisco: Conari Press.

Roddick, A. 2005. *Business as Unusual*. West Sussex, UK: Anita Roddick Books.

Savitz, A., and K. Weber. 2006. *The triple bottom line*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schlosser, E. 2005. *Fast food nation*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Serra, D. 2006. More companies offering social(k) as part of traditional 401(k). *Idaho Statesman* (December 31): P1, P2.

Stegner, W. 2008. Wilderness letter. The Wilderness Society.
<http://wilderness.org/content/wilderness-letter> (accessed June 17, 2010).

Union of Concerned Scientists. 1992. The world scientists' warning to humanity.
<http://www.ucsusa.org/about/1992-world-scientists.html> (accessed June 17, 2010).

Author Information

Roger Munger, Ph.D. (Communication and Rhetoric, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), is associate professor of technical communication at Boise State University. His teaching and research interests include internships at socially just and environmentally sustainable companies, green writing, eco-friendly printing processes, service-learning, and publications management. He's also a vegan.

Roger Munger
1910 University Drive
Boise, ID 83725-1525
E-mail: rmunger@boisestate.edu
Telephone: 208-426-4211
Fax: 208-426-4373