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**Topic: Faculty Reflections on Teaching Earth Literacy**

I teach a number of social science courses in the Independent Studies Department. From my perspective, it seems that issues relating to earth literacy, environmental ethics, etc., are fundamentally tied in with our cultures, and our political and economic systems. The choices that we make, our views of the world, and our ideas about our relationship with the Earth and all other living things are bound up with our cultural perspectives. My courses do already include these issues.

For example, in ISS 1120, The Social Environment, I include a chapter called “Geography, Demography, Ecology and Society” which deals with the ways cultures impact the natural environment, the problem of population growth, global warming, pollution, and other related topics. Some other topics include the role of technology and its impact, development of third world countries, and economic globalization. My other social science courses, such as Introduction to Sociology, and Social Problems also deal with these issues directly. I create study questions for my students for each of the various courses I teach through independent studies. Most of the questions ask them to define terms or concepts from their assigned readings. Some are what I call “thought questions,” which do not have a right or wrong answer that can be found in their textbook, but ask them to think about various issues. For example, one question is, “Explain the concept of an optimal population. In relation to the optimum, is the population of the United State too small, too large or just right? Defend your answer.” Students have to submit their answers and I go over their responses with them, individually. This allows me to start a discussion about various issues and to make comments which lead them to see these issues in a new light.

I realize that I could add more “thought questions” that relate to the environment and the impact which our personal actions have on our Earth. As I create these study question for my students, I can be sure to include question which ask them to consider these issues from a more personal standpoint. I also encourage my students to incorporate service learning experiences. I allow my students to choose from any of the placements on our agency list. They have to submit a paper relating the experience to course concepts and the students “reflect” upon those experiences through a discussion with me. By being more mindful of Earth literacy issues, I can be sure to include that aspect in the discussion I have with my students. I am reminded of a recent experience I had. I received a note from a student saying that he had decided to work for the South Dade Palm Society. I called to remind him that he could certainly serve that organization, but that he should be thinking about how that experience relates to concepts in his Introduction to Sociology course. What can that experience teach him about society? We had a good discussion and he had, indeed, thought about some connections. He talked about the poor Mexicans he saw working in the fields in the Homestead area, some of whom were tending to the young palm trees. We had a discussion about social stratification, immigration, and minorities. Next time, I’ll turn the discussion to large-scale farming, its impact on producers, consumers, corporations, laborers – and the Earth.