

“A Sustainable Future for New Orleans”

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Overview

I’ve designed this assignment to fit within the framework of my existing ENGL 102 course (Research Writing). One of the learning units within my course syllabus is an investigation of the underlying causes and wide-ranging effects of the Hurricane Katrina disaster with the goal of students understanding the event’s long-term implications for citizens across the United States.

An objective in English 102 is for students to create an argument that addresses the complexities of an issue beyond a simple “pro and con” style of argumentation. In addition, students should practice using evidence to support the specific solutions they are arguing for a given problem. An imperative result of this investigation is the ability to determine the validity of sources and potential bias on the source’s author(s).

Because the theme of my 102 sections is “Humans and Nature,” we study the events preceding Hurricane Katrina, both human and natural, that led to a situation that was—if we borrow the Brundtland Commission’s definition of sustainability as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”—indisputably unsustainable.

This assignment will integrate many of the “Big Ideas” of sustainability, including but not limited to: “good governance,” “interconnectedness,” and “social justice.” The idea of “good governance” is especially relevant to the assessment portion of this assignment, as students will be charged to investigate and evaluate attempts at urban renewal within New Orleans. Their investigation will focus on evaluating successes and failures among the private (business), public (government), and civic (community/non-profit) sectors.

Assignment/Activities/Assessment

1. This assignment sequence begins with a definition of sustainability, and an investigation of the history of human interference with the Atchafalaya River and the Mississippi Delta.
 - a. Students will read an excerpt of “What is Sustainable Development?” (Kates, Parris, Leiserowitz) to help define and understand the concept of sustainability.
 - b. Students will read excerpts of “Rebuilding Urban Places After Disaster” and John McPhee’s essay, “Atchafalaya,” in order to understand the context of human and natural history in the Mississippi Delta.
2. Class discussion will include primary sources related to the historical debate of whether or not New Orleans should be rebuilt. Students will then look at the current state of

rebuilding New Orleans, investigating what percentage of the population has returned and determining the progress of growth, education, basic services, etc.

3. Outside of class, students will research existing programs (both government, community, and business-based) to rebuild the city.
4. In-class discussion will focus on a comparison of the different programs students have investigated.
5. Homework assignment will be a brief essay (2-3) pages that provides an opportunity for students to report their findings on rebuilding efforts with an eye towards what type of development is sustainable for the long-term benefit of the people of New Orleans. An ancillary objective for the assignment is to give students practice with MLA source documentation prior to their final research essay.