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Context: The Spaceship Earth assignment comes in the middle of a semester in my upper division Writing Arguments course. The way I structure the course is inspired by Paulo Friere's critical consciousness concept, or conscientização, which refers to "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality." The first assignment in the course is designed to introduce new critical thinking skills that can develop conscientização. With this new critical consciousness in place we transition to the Spaceship Earth assignment. The philosophical thinking experiment element of this assignment allows students to recognize and question inherited assumptions, compelling them to look at given structures of both a personal and social nature in new and exciting ways. One of the results of the assignment is that students take agency for ideas in ways that avoid the regurgitation of common arguments that have been made *ad infinitum*. The assignment stipulations, with their encompassing values of sustainability and human flourishing, make it nearly impossible to simply make the standard arguments ubiquitous in college composition classes. The fruits of this assignment continue to produce in the third and final assignment as the questions and answers asked and discovered in the Spaceship Earth Assignment transition with us to the semester's final assignment as we ask the question, "If this is how we should live on a spaceship to attain sustainable and flourishing lives, both individual and social, then why are we not living this way on earth?" The answer to this question provides the course of action for the third assignment, the goal of which is local advocacy that argues on behalf of sustainability and flourishing in the realm of social, cultural or environmental oppression.

Assignment 2: Sustainable Spaceship Argument

Overview: We have volunteered for a grand experiment. We will be leaving soon on a spaceship capable of sustaining a small society, the size of a major American city, for at least three generations. The primary goal of the experiment is to live on the spaceship **sustainably** so future generations born on the spaceship can return to earth, 150 years later, with a **flourishing** society. Obviously we will be dead, so we are tasked with the responsibility that our choices going up onto the spaceship must ensure future generations return to earth healthy. As part of our responsibility as volunteer leaders, it is up to us to argue that certain choices must be made on our spaceship.

Purpose: To convince your classmates and fellow experiment volunteers that your argument for a particular way of life on the spaceship should be adopted.

Audience: Your audience for Assignment 2 is your peers and fellow spaceship volunteers. You should consider your classmates as the spaceship's organizing committee, who are tasked with making major decisions about life on the spaceship with

the **overall goals of sustainability and flourishing in mind**. Thus we should be concerned, as rhetors and decision makers, with our “best selves,” that part of us that is worthy of such important responsibilities. In other words, we are not “just students” in this scenario but the very leaders whose decisions will determine whether our society will succeed and thrive. To help us analyze and understand our audience, as well as make informed rhetorical decisions with them in mind, we will use Kenneth Burke’s theories about Terministic Screens, Consubstantiality, and Cluster Criticism (Foss).

Topics and Issues: A nice place to look for ideas for this assignment is in your own disciplines, your majors and interests. What will you bring to the spaceship? What are you good at? What do you want to be good at? What do you know? What do you want to know? How can your interests, expertise or inquiry help us to flourish? Be sure to bring the advanced critical and analytical abilities that you developed in Assignment 1. As always, we should start with questions and inquiry in our topic areas of interest before we decide on arguments. The following is a general list of possible topic areas to raise questions and determine debatable issues for the spaceship.

- ❖ Questions of ethics: quality of life, how we want to behave, what kind of lives should we live?
- ❖ Questions of epistemology: knowledge, understanding, education, pedagogy.
- ❖ Questions of organization: community development, social organization, politics, democracy, anarchy, other; who, if anyone, is going to be in charge?
- ❖ Questions of health & nutrition: what should we eat? How will we nourish ourselves? How will we care for the sick, treat and prevent disease? How will we create food, dispose of waste?
- ❖ Questions of economics: how will we organize work, create and distribute goods and services, create and distribute a surplus?
- ❖ Questions of justice: how will we define justice in our society? And how will we attempt to attain justice? Questions of law, equality and fairness.
- ❖ Questions of culture: should we keep it loose, tight, traditional, new?
- ❖ Questions of technology and design: how will we use tools and innovation to sustain ourselves? Which technologies are worthy? Which are not?
- ❖ Questions of aesthetics: art, beauty, entertainment.

Spaceship Parameters: We will keep these loose to allow many possible approaches in your argument.

- The spaceship can hold a population the size of a major American city.
- The spaceship occupants will be representative of a diverse American city in terms of race, gender, religion, education, and natural ability. We cannot select the population.
- While the assignment is essentially a philosophical thought experiment, our parameters are determined by the best available science, and NOT science fiction. We will not be fighting any aliens.

- The spaceship must be a self-sustaining system. We will not be landing on other planets to extract resources.
- The spaceship is sovereign, meaning that it is unaffiliated with any particular country on earth, thus not subject to any laws other than our own making.
- The **veil of ignorance** (original position): As part of the spaceships organizing and decision making team, we will make arguments behind the veil of ignorance, meaning we will not know our position on the spaceship. As the philosopher John Rawls put it, “...no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like.”

Requirements:

- A focusing inquiry question: such as *what will the best form of government be for our spaceship?* Or, *what is the most efficient form of agriculture?* This will provide you the initial spark to get started.
- An explicit exigency: something must be at stake for your audience, some urgency behind your argument. What’s at stake if your audience is not convinced? Why is this conversation warranted above all other conversations you might have chosen?
- A research-based approach: including the use of best available information and science about your topic area. Opinions (beliefs that are unsupported or detached from reasonable premises) are not welcome here. Challenge yourself to inquire, research, decide, and execute, rather than decide first to avoid confirmation bias.
- A theoretical framework from your topic area: in the first assignment you used ideological criticism, a type of rhetorical criticism, as a theoretical framework. In this assignment look to the theories subscribed to by the experts in the field of inquiry. You may challenge an existing theoretical framework, but you should use other credible experts and theory to make that challenge.
- A historical framework: ideas are not born in vacuums; they always have a history both idealistic and material. Your argument, or the idea you have for the spaceship, should have clear connections to its history.
- An interview with a contemporary expert in your field of inquiry. You must research and choose a worthy interview subject. You will use the interview to help support your argument.
- Effective Logos Appeals: a clear thesis drawn from reasonable premises and supported with logical reasoning, strong warrants and coherent evidence.
- Effective Ethos Appeals: including a sincere, fair-minded, knowledgeable voice that conveys a thoughtful, well-researched, credibly supported stance, concedes to opposition when appropriate, uses language, vocabulary, and grammar appropriately. Be sure to include opposing ideas when necessary.
- Effective Pathos Appeals: that shows your intimate understanding of the values, beliefs, emotions, needs, constraints, and fears of your audience.

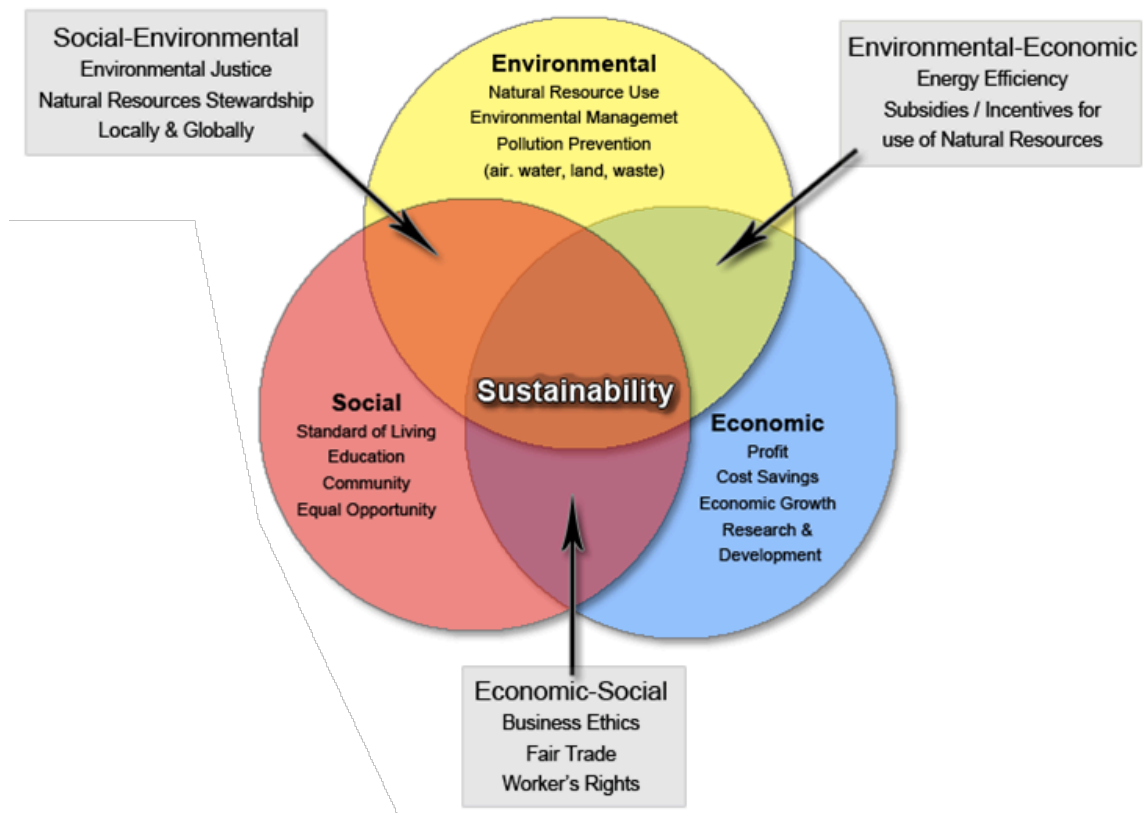
- Organize your essay so that the paper is unified and focused. Use clear transitions to guide readers between your ideas.
- Avoid hindrances and fallacies.
- Format your argument and document your sources according to your discipline's conventions.
- Type your essay in a readable, 12-point font and double-space it.
- Submit your final, polished draft to me by uploading it onto the Assignments folder. Turn in workshop drafts in class along with supporting materials (audience analysis) in class on 10/2.
- Include a Works Cited Page (minimum ten sources)

Paper Length: 6-8 pages, double-spaced

Due Date: 11/18/14

Worth: 20%

The Three Spheres of Sustainability



3-Legged Sustainability Stool

Sustainability

Economic Leg

Good Jobs
Fair wages
Security
Infrastructure
Fair Trade



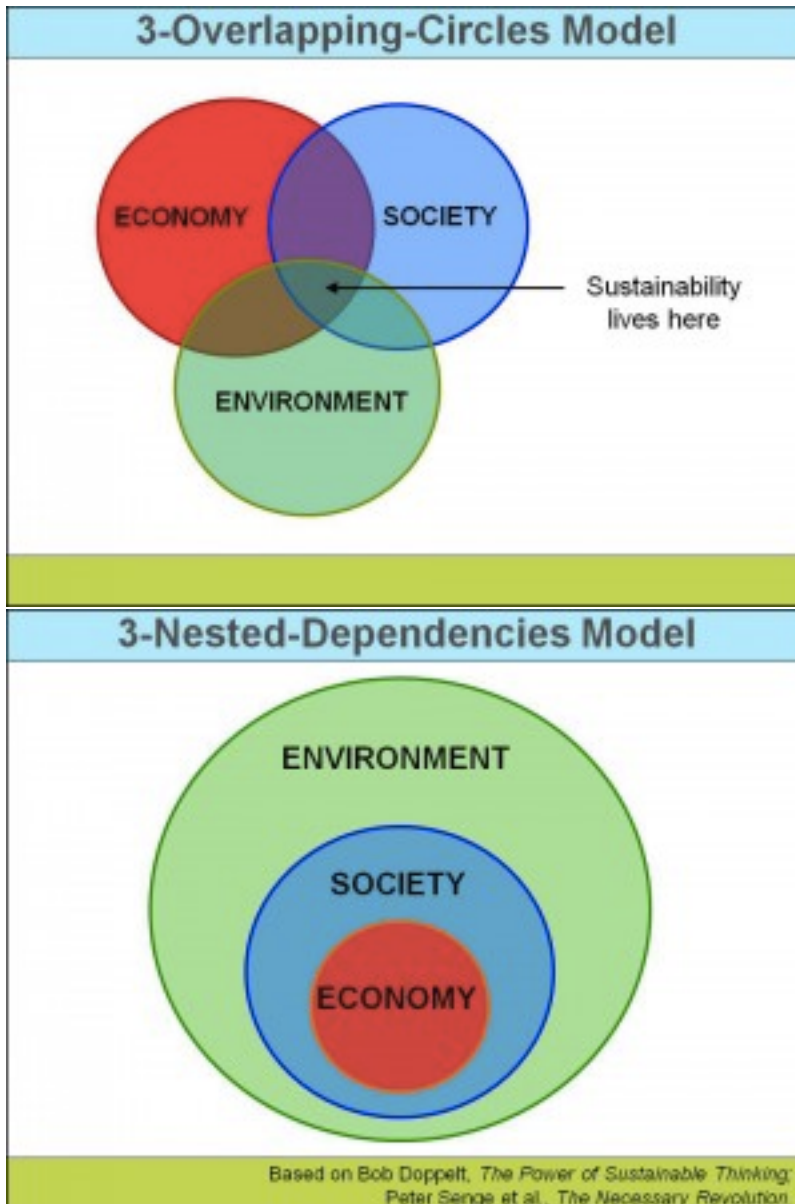
Environmental Leg

0 Pollution & Waste
Renewable Energy
Conservation
Restoration

Social Leg

Working conditions
Health services
Education services
Community & Culture
Social justice

Quality of Life / Genuine Wealth / Genuine Progress



Sources:

The first image is Adapted from the 2002 University of Michigan Sustainability Assessment

3 Models for Sustainability slides courtesy of Bob Willard at Sustainable Advantage.