Group Sustainability Project
Overview

The Problem: Scientists widely agree that our environment is approaching crisis. Ice caps are melting, sea levels are rising, and our climate is warming. We live in a way that is not sustainable. We also know that human behavior is a major contributor to the increasing environmental problems we face today. Yet, only a small percentage of North Americans have made major lifestyle changes to protect our environment. Most of us look to the experts to fix the problem, but our environmental problems are too complex and vast to be solved by a few individuals or even new technologies.

Such approaches also do not account for the fact that environmental problems are really behavioral problems that stem from the beliefs, attitudes, values, and global perspective upon which humans act. In order to improve our environment and our future’s outlook, then, we must change our behavior.

The Role of Social Psychology: The field of psychology has much to contribute to the understanding of environmental degradation and can help solve these problems. In particular, social psychology (the study of how people think about, evaluate, and respond to others) includes a number of concepts that are highly relevant in furthering sustainable behaviors. These include self-concept, self-regulation, attributions, expectations, attitudes and behavior, decision-making, persuasion, group influence, and helping behavior. Applied social psychology refers to the application of psychological principles, typically to change human behavior.

The Purpose of this Class Assignment: Although environmental sustainability is only one issue that can be impacted by social psychology, it is highly relevant to students, our campus, and our world. It is my hope that this group project will:
1. Contribute to students’ awareness of environment sustainability;
2. Provide students with an opportunity to apply social psychological concepts to solving an actual problem;
3. Provide students with an opportunity to apply research methods in testing their intervention;
4. Offer experience interacting with professionals to address a real world problem (i.e., Office of Sustainability, UMD Housing Staff) to facilitate their work;
5. Experience and apply many of the group processes described in your course.

The Project: Students will each be assigned to a small work group consisting of approximately 3 students. You will work together in your team to develop a behavior change campaign (lasting approximately 4 weeks) designed to reduce energy and water use among student residents of Ianni Hall (one of UMD’s dormitories).

Ianni Hall is the newest of UMD’s campus residence halls and is equipped to monitor light, electricity from electrical plugs, and heat use from each wing. These data are collected constantly and will form the basis of the outcome for your interventions.

Each team will be assigned to a wing of Ianni Hall, and teams will compete to have the most impact on reducing student residents’ energy use. Points for your project will be assigned based on the quality of your intervention and completed assignments, though there will also be some bonus points/prize given based on the ultimate effect.

The group project component of this class will account for a total of 70 points. Below is a brief description of the project components. Specific details will be provided in each of the individual assignment instructions.
1. **Week 3: Group Introductions.** This group discussion is designed to help you get to know your teammates and to develop strategies for working together as a group. (5pts)

2. **Week 6: Project Proposal for Attitude-Behavior Change:** As a team, you will submit your project proposal, which will incorporate the individual ideas generated in Assignment 3 (Based on chapter 4). You will describe your initial plan for the following 4 weeks, as well as submit the actual materials you intend to use. In addition, you will meet with the Resident Advisor (RA) assigned to your wing in order to gather information and develop a collaborative plan to work on this campaign. After receiving feedback and approval, you can revise and begin to implement your program (Sunday of Week 8). You are expected to document your intervention with pictures. (20 pts)

3. **Week 8: Proposal for Incorporating Persuasive Communication into your Campaign.**
   As a team, you will submit another proposal to add additional persuasive messages into your campaign (based on Chapter 7) as well as the materials you intend to use. After receiving feedback and approval, you can revise and begin to implement these additional components (Sunday of Week 10). You are expected to document your intervention with pictures. (20 pts)

4. Weeks 8-11: Implementation of project; energy use outcome data collected.
5. Week 12: Final outcome data available.
6. **Week 13: Final group report** submitted (20 points)
7. **Week 14: Submit evaluation** of group project and group members’ contribution. (5pts)
8. Week 15: Incorporate Group Process experience into Individual Assignment #7

**Available Resources:** Each group will have a budget of $20 for use at the UMD Print Shop and Bookstore (to be used for printing materials or other needed supplies). You will be given instructions for this and are expected to submit receipts.

Groups are also expected to communicate with the Office of Sustainability in order to access their resources (materials, pledges, expertise of staff). Please contact Mindy Granley (Coordinator) at mgranley@d.umn.edu or Brian Bluhm (bluh0020@d.umn.edu). They are involved with this project and highly interested and motivated to help you find the resources you need.

Groups are also expected to work with the Resident Assistants at Janni Hall. UMD Housing is collaborating on this project and may have additional resources. Talk with your wing’s RA about possible resources, such as meeting space, photocopying, or other supplies.