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Speech (SPC 1026)

LESSON PLAN: Focus--The Precautionary Principle in a Speech Class (SPC 1026)

Rationale: Exploring the Precautionary Principle will allow students to wrestle with the pros and cons of certain technological innovations. Often in doing research, it is difficult to maintain objectivity, especially if the material demands a lot of technical knowledge. I propose, for this lesson plan, that students investigate genetic modification of their food. This activity would tie in with the food theme that the Earth Ethics Institute has proposed for the current academic year (2008 1- 4). Many students do not know very much about their food—from seed preserving, to soil quality and planting, to cultivating, harvesting, distributing, and then, after purchasing—to preparing, digesting, assimilating, and passing onto future generations. In SPC 1026, I often present—in the 2nd half of the term—informative speeches, which require objective research, followed by persuasion speeches, which require both objective research and argumentative strategies, and finish up these units with debating. The topic of GE (genetic engineering) could thread these SPC 1026 competencies so that students' skill level could increase while researching and presenting speeches, and at the same time, their understanding of natural systems, ethics, history, economics, & government could be enhanced.

Lesson Plan: 1) Ask students to study the Precautionary Principle—including examining Precautionary Principles—e.g. Present knowledge is not sufficient to safely and predictably...and therefore we urge a moratorium on...(scientific uncertainty) & We have an obligation to prevent harm to the commonwealth & We are a trustee for future generations. Explore the notion that people—not necessarily policies—protect the public's interest; 2) Discuss with students the concept of Commonwealth as shared wealth together with the notion that “the ecological integrity of Earth” is central to our commonwealth and requires protecting; 3) Next, look at the pros and cons of genetic engineering of food—suggesting links for students to study the issue and do their own research, discovering their own links; 4) Once students—as a class-- have amassed sufficient data on genetic engineering of food, then divide students into groups, and have them pool their information and sources; 5) Next, ask students to break into teams by which they practice their argument strategies: Do the Hazards of genetically engineered foods and crops outweigh their Benefits?; 6) Finally, introduce the class to The Universe Story, including works by Miriam MacGillis & Thomas Berry, and see how the class responds, observing whether there are any shifts in students' viewpoints on the subject of genetic engineering of food & crops after exposure to The Universe Story (does context matter here? Hopefully, yes).

Assessment: Now for some self-disclosure: I, as professor, am not without biases on the topic of genetically engineered foods & crops--I am against it, due to Precautionary Principle, personal skepticism, anti-corporate mentality, religious faith, among other reasons. I am hopeful, though, that the students, given the lesson plan, will have a chance to research the topic, and share with their student colleagues, without my biases unduly interfering, and come to their own opinions on the subject. Ultimately, I hope that

students will find that there are too many human health hazards, environmental hazards, and socio-economic hazards connected with genetic engineering to warrant their support. Nevertheless, no matter what students find, I expect students to become more proficient at research, to handle conflicting data, to determine whether the Precautionary Principle should apply, to distinguish objective research and information from persuasion strategies, and to become familiar enough with both sides of the issue that they could debate either side, no matter their personal preference on the topic. Finally, I hopeful that the College's Learning Outcomes will be advanced, especially #10, dealing with natural systems.