

HNR 455 Capstone Project Reflection

A: Articulate a personal understanding of the value of interdisciplinary thinking and then develop the ability to ask and pursue interdisciplinary research questions.

My Honors project was particularly interdisciplinary. I revisited the question I posed in my freshman year - how does the media affect sustainability practices? To advance my topic, I incorporated aspects of my German Study. The leading question for this project was, "What motivates Germans to be more sustainable than Americans?" In this project, I read psychology research papers to determine pro-social behaviors. To connect the personal and the political, and to give a complete comparison of the United States and Germany, I also researched international political science. A specific example of interdisciplinary research in my project is the communication analysis of speeches by Trump and Merkel I read. I compared Trump's inefficient COVID-19 speeches to his inefficient sustainability policy, uniting political science and communications. I also united Environmental Science and Communications through this project, by opening my presentation with scientific statistics that backed up my claims about Germany's recycling programs.

B: Express an understanding of the value of civic engagement, both at the local level and within the larger global community.

This project analyzed the motivations of people to separate their trash, drive electric vehicles, and purchase organic goods. I used research on COVID-19 about the motivations of Pro-Social behavior to explain these motivations. The conclusion I came to was that Americans are just as likely to behave pro-socially as Germans (or any other country) on average. However, the German infrastructure is built to motivate these behaviors and American infrastructure is not.

Similarly, the government of Germany encourages independent sustainable activity more than the US government. Behaving sustainably helps both the local and global communities, and I am hopeful that I can continue spreading this message to my community after I graduate.

I completed my service learning project in the same semester as my senior capstone. I got to conduct my own personal observations by working with the Salvation Army and Hopes Landing asking the question: what motivates people to bag up their belongings and donate rather than trash them, and why will people pay higher prices for a locally-made candle? What I observed was that emotional/sentimental value plays a major role in Pro-Social behavior. This is concurrent with the COVID-19 research, which indicated that people do good things when there are good feelings associated with their actions.

C: Build intellectual confidence, empathy, and creativity through engaging in intellectual risk-taking.

This was the first major independent project that I felt I had complete control over in my career. I worked closely with Professor Kamatali, who encouraged me to explore the ideas I was passionate about. She set an example for me on how to research with empathy for Germans and Americans by providing her perspective on our cultural differences. She was initially doubtful of the connection between COVID-19 and Sustainability, but she had confidence that I could narrow the scope of my project and be successful in it. A risk I took with this project was using it to receive a German language credit as well as a honors credit. That meant that in addition to my research paper and presentation, I had to prove that I learned significant German vocabulary and grammar. I accomplished this by using the “Digital Wanderbus,” and online program for German Children that provided sustainability research in understandable German. Without the Wanderbus,

the research paper would have lacked significant cultural context. I am grateful I took that risk, because my research now feels complete.