

The Earth Charter in Ethics Classes at Villanova University

Ted Nunez is incorporating the Earth Charter in his undergraduate introductory ethics course at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. He introduces the Earth Charter after the class studies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and couples it with a discussion of three sustainable development policy agendas to show students what the Charter might look like in practice.

Taking the Earth Charter as an educational and organizational tool, the students work in groups of two to consider the Charter within the context of Neo-Liberal, Ecological Modernization, and Globalization From Below policy agendas. Thus far, the undergrads have found that the Charter challenges the Neo-Liberal position, is not as radical as Globalization From Below, and is a good fit with the Ecological Modernization agenda. Although some students always resist the Earth Charter, arguing that it is too idealistic and vague, Ted has experienced a generally positive response when he asks students if they would sign the Earth Charter, and what lifestyle changes they would be willing to make if they did.

In the spring, Ted will be using the Earth Charter with his "Caring for Earth" course. He will integrate the Charter with a semester of studying short stories, the history of ecology, environmental philosophy, environmental politics and the environmental justice movement. In addition to his classes, Ted plans to have an Earth Charter table as part of Villanova's Earth Day events. His hope is to involve his students, who will by then be familiar with the Earth Charter, in education and outreach to the campus.

For more information on incorporating the Earth Charter in philosophy and ethics curriculum, please contact Ted Nunez at theodore.nunez@villanova.edu