

# Environmental Change Project

## About the Project

Morality is not meant to merely be studied. It is meant to be *lived*. Add to this the reports of disastrous consequences if we do not cut our greenhouse gas emissions in half [by 2030](#), and it is clear: Regarding climate and the environment, the time to act is *now*.<sup>1</sup>

So, while you are taking this course, in addition to *learning* about our impact on the environment, and our moral obligations toward it, I would also like you to be *doing* something positive for the environment. This will reinforce, in a very real and vivid way, that Environmental Ethics is not just a thing that you have to study for an exam in. It's not just a bunch of academic articles. Rather, these ideas are meant to be embodied. They are meant to affect how you interact with the world around you.

So, your task for the semester will be to alter one lifestyle habit in a way that positively affects your relationship to the environment. For instance, you might consider one of the following:

- Give up meat  
*(livestock are a major contributor to climate change, and use far more water and land than alternative sources of nutrition such as lentils, beans, chickpeas, etc. – not to mention all of the animal death and suffering associated with the meat industry ; [source](#))*
- Stop driving and bike or walk instead  
*(transportation is the #1 source of greenhouse gas emissions in the U.S.)*
- Reduce your waste  
*(e.g., avoid disposable water bottles, paper towels, shopping bags, cups, utensils, etc.; avoid items with bulky or excess packaging, or online shipping boxes ; buy used at thrift shops; mend old clothing; repair rather than replace old devices ; compost ; etc.)*
- Reduce your water consumption  
*(Americans use more water per capita than every country in the world except the United Arab Emirates; source [here](#) ; [and here](#))*
- Get involved with a local climate activism or environmentalist group.  
*(I recommend joining W&M Citizens' Climate Lobby's [Carbon Fee & Dividend Movement](#), founded by my former student)*
- Volunteer at a local park, or river, etc.  
*(for instance, for [James City County](#) ; at [Waller Mill Park](#) ; or the [James River Association](#) ; etc.)*
- Simply spend a few hours a week in the forest, walking, or just sitting doing nothing.  
*([studies show](#) that even 2 hours of immersion a week can benefit health and well-being—and, I suspect, one's view of nature)*
- For the *really* adventurous, consider a vasectomy or tubal ligation. Kidding! ([sort of](#))

## Getting Started

The first thing to do will be to select an activity or lifestyle change that sparks your interest. Once you have done so, you will want to begin actually *doing* it. Since your final report requires you to state what impact upon the environment your efforts have had, you will probably want to keep some sort of record or journal of your efforts. If at all possible, try to quantify the changes you have made. For instance, if you give up driving in favor of bicycling, you could keep a record of how much gasoline you have saved, how many fewer emissions you have emitted, and so on. Also, keep in mind that there are three written assignments for this project (see below).

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<sup>1</sup> Or, rather, 30 years ago, but, barring the invention of time travel...

## Written Assignments

You will turn in three short, informal written assignments related to this project:

1. Project Proposal: By the beginning of class on Friday, 2/2, please turn in a very brief project proposal, explaining your plan. The proposal should be no more than a single paragraph, and should accomplish two things: Clearly state (a) what it is that you will do for the project, and (b) what sort of benefit or positive impact you expect your actions to have on the environment.

2. Progress Report: One month into your project, on Monday 3/4, you will turn in a very brief progress report, describing how your efforts are going so far. The proposal should be no more than a paragraph or two, and should accomplish three things: Clearly state (a) what you have achieved so far, (b) how you feel about how well things are going, and (c) whether or not you feel that any changes or adjustments to your efforts are needed, and why.

3. Final Project Report: At the end of the semester, you will turn in a final report, detailing your project (due Monday, 4/29, the last week of class). This final report should be approximately one page and should describe (a) what you did during the semester in order to positively affect your relationship to the environment, (b) what sort of impact this had on the environment (this should include, if possible, a quantitative calculation of your impact), (c) what environmental impact this would have if you personally kept up this behavior for the rest of your life, and (d) what impact on the world this same behavior would have if *everyone* made this change in their lives. Finally, (e) provide some assessment of your project. Was it a worthwhile effort? Why or why not? Feel free to include some personal remarks about your experience. Was it easy? Difficult? Fun? Terrible? Would you recommend this change to others? And so on.

## Grading

This assignment is worth 5% of your grade. Grades will be assigned primarily based upon whether or not the three written reports were turned in on time, and written in a clear and thoughtful manner. While I cannot check for honesty, please do be honest. This is, after all, an ethics class. Lying on an assignment in a course on how to live morally would pretty much indicate some sort of complete moral bankruptcy on your part.