MOST GOOD, LEAST HARM: THE POWER OF CONSCIOUS CHOICE-MAKING

A Six-Week Online Undergraduate Introductory Course in Humane Education

A Thesis Presented by:

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To

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts in Humane Education

Valparaiso University

Valparaiso, Indiana

April 2013
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is the direct result of the noble work pioneered each and every day by a handful of strong, devoted, empowered, and insightful women at the Institute for Humane Education. Their collective vision and tenacious spirit exemplifies the compassion, wisdom, and nobility that emerges when women come together to lead.

A special thank you to Mary Pat Champeau, whose extraordinary talents and grace are unsurpassed, and whose passion and warmth left me inspired from the very first time I heard her voice.

And finally, to David, for being what every man should be for a woman: her cocoon.
ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to address the absence of undergraduate humane education courses in American colleges and universities by developing an online undergraduate introductory course in humane education. Through scholarly research, it first examines the most effective online instructional methods and course curricula while focusing on three critical areas: effective framework, the emotional considerations of students, and retention and attrition rates. It then examines the use of music as an educational tool to encourage student learning, especially when it comes to introducing students to difficult topics such as those found within humane education.

The online undergraduate humane education course *Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making* is then developed with these effective course curricula and instructional methods incorporated into its framework. An in-depth syllabus is presented covering course/participation requirements, weekly assignments, course materials, writing, research, and referencing guidelines, grading assessments, technology requirements, and a list of helpful resources for students. Finally, a brief summary and a look at the challenges/surprises faced during the undertaking of this thesis project are covered along with my hope of how this course will help to expand the presence of humane education in the American educational system in the future.
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CHAPTER ONE

Goal

The goal of this thesis project is to develop an online undergraduate introductory course in humane education. In addition to more traditional methods, this course will introduce the use of art forms including music and film as a means to explore humane education themes. This will be a six week online course to be offered at the undergraduate level and will be piloted in the 2013 summer semester through Valparaiso University.

The field of humane education is made up of several components: the interconnectedness between animal protection, human rights, and environmental ethics; a focus on making daily decisions that do the most good and the least harm (MOGO) to other humans, animals, and the planet; raising awareness about how even the most mundane personal decisions have global consequences; empowering people to step up and become “solutionaries” to solve problems in the world; and the belief that helping the planet and all of its inhabitants thrive should be the very purpose of education.

In developing an undergraduate course that will first be offered as an elective, I will be researching the best materials for conveying humane education to students who are younger than graduate students and who are not specifically pursuing a degree in humane education. As such, I will be searching for materials that seek to inspire and motivate undergraduate students who do not have a background in humane education.

The primary goals of this course will include the following:

1. Students will become knowledgeable about the four main elements of humane education:
   - providing accurate information (so they have the knowledge to face challenges)
• fostering the 3C's: curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking (so they have the tools to meet challenges)

• instilling the 3R's: reverence, respect, and responsibility (so they have the motivation to confront challenges)

• offering positive choices and tools for problem solving (so they will be able to solve challenges)

2. Students will learn about the interconnectedness between human rights, animal protection, and environmental ethics.

3. Students will understand and begin to explore the far-reaching effects of their decisions (both conscious and unconscious) and their true impact on the world around them.

4. Students will begin to explore the far-reaching effects of their choices.

5. Students will develop the capacity and desire to live with compassion, integrity, and wisdom.

6. Students will learn what it means to make MOGO (most good/least harm) choices and how to be a “solutionary.”

7. Students will practice making MOGO choices and acting as solutionaries in their own communities.

8. Students will learn that music can/does play a role in educating, motivating, and inspiring cultural change.

9. Students will challenge their own biases as well as the biases within popular culture.

10. Students will become motivated to practice conscientious choice-making and engaged change-making to create a better world.
Rationale

The two main problems that my thesis will address are:

- the need for major action to address a variety of global challenges through education
- the lack of undergraduate humane education courses that would help to prepare students to address these challenges

We live in a world that is in desperate need of humane education. The continued presence of violence against women and children, environmental exploitation and degradation, overpopulation, corporate greed, pollution, racism, discrimination, oppression, animal abuse and slaughter, species endangerment and extinction, poverty, illness, worldwide slavery, climate change, and war are just some of the complex challenges that we face as a global community. Americans in particular, with our consumer-driven, throw-away culture, contribute disproportionately to many of these global concerns. For example, while we make up only 5% of the world’s population, we consume 20% of the world’s energy (“Population and Energy Consumption”). If everyone in the world were to mimic the American lifestyle, it would require the resources of four earths to support (Weil).

What is even more distressing is that these complex challenges, for the most part, are not being acknowledged by our current American system of schooling, the ultimate goals of which are limited to preparing children for citizenship, cultivating a skilled workforce, teaching cultural literacy, preparing students for college, helping students to become critical thinkers, and helping students compete in a global marketplace (“School: The Story of American Public Education”). Students are not expected to understand and become knowledgeable about the current
unsustainable systems in place and they are not supported, encouraged, and given the opportunity to craft, create, and offer solutions to solve real world problems.

What is so disheartening is that on a certain level, students understand this ineffective and unproductive cycle. They begin to observe this disconnection every time they step off of the streets and into a classroom and realize that the “life cycle” of their course work is restricted to the study of abstract intellectual concepts and a teacher generated transcript of “earned” grades. This undeniably leads to feelings of powerlessness, cynicism, frustration, anger, and finally, apathy as years of schooling pass by without the opportunity to draw critical real world connections, thereby resulting in the perpetuation of these unsustainable systems that keep our world in a state of peril generation after generation.

But humane education offers a solution. As pioneered by co-founder and President of the Institute for Humane Education, Zoe Weil, humane education is a lens through which we come to understand the positive and negative impacts of our own choices on other human beings, nonhuman animals, and the environment at large. Developing an awareness of the far-reaching effects of our daily decisions and learning to draw a web between ourselves and the injustices that we see in the world can empower and motivate us to become solutionaries through conscious choice-making. When we take part in making decisions that do the most good and the least harm for other humans, animals, and the environment, we create a more just, compassionate, and humane world for all (Weil).

One of the revolutionary goals of humane education is to bring this concept into educational institutions across the globe, thereby elevating the goal of schooling from merely generating a competitive work force to graduating generations of solutionaries; individuals who use their creativity, knowledge, passion, and talents to offer viable, sustainable solutions to the
unique problems of their time. When graduates apply this new-found knowledge of solutionary thinking to their chosen field (business, medicine, law, politics, music, art, etc.) and begin their personal journeys as agents of change, our world will begin to reflect the deep-seated values inherent to all of humanity.

Since 1996, the Institute for Humane Education (IHE) has been promoting humane education and training humane educators in the field. There are currently three graduate programs in humane education (M.A., M. Ed., and MALs), a certificate program, workshops, presentations, and publications. IHE has trained thousands of humane educators and reached hundreds of thousands of individuals and communities across the globe. This pioneering movement has already inspired and motivated countless people from all walks of life to step up and become solutionaries in their own lives and communities.

However, as many advances as IHE has made one critical component remains absent: an undergraduate program in humane education. Currently, there is not one undergraduate course in humane education that is being offered anywhere in the world. While there are undergraduate courses that deal with independent issues within humane education such as animal welfare, human rights, and environmental sustainability, these courses are not based on the most good, least harm framework and therefore students are not being trained to look at how their own lives are impacting the world or how to become solutionaries after being introduced to these problems. This thesis will be the first undergraduate humane education course to be offered that uses this MOGO framework and will awaken undergraduate students to their own power as change-makers using the four elements of humane education.

I first noticed the problem while enrolled in the M.A. Humane Education program through Valparaiso University. This graduate program became so transformative and
empowering for me as an adult that I began to wonder whether there were undergraduate programs in human education. When I found out that no such undergraduate programs existed, I realized that this was an opportunity for me to become a solutionary by designing and teaching an online undergraduate introductory course in humane education.

While this course will start out as an elective, my hope as a humane educator is that it will one day become a requirement for all degree programs because it teaches students empathy, compassion, and the knowledge and motivation to become real change-makers. Humane education should be viewed as a form of literacy that is a requirement in all educational curriculums in order to prepare and teach every generation how they can take part in creating a better world. This thesis is a small step toward that ultimate goal.

If I do not create an undergraduate course in humane education, the opportunity to formally engage undergraduates in humane education work will be lost. It is critical that we begin engaging undergraduates in a way that fosters empowerment and gives them the confidence and motivation they need to become solutionaries and make the world a more just, humane, and compassionate place. Without humane education, many of these undergraduates will go on to perpetuate the behaviors and mentalities that are responsible for the problems that we see in the world.

**Problem Statement**

As mentioned earlier, even though the Institute for Humane Education has reached hundreds of thousands of people since its founding in 1996, an enormous information gap still exists. Most of our current educational systems in America are without humane education despite the pioneering effort that so many are currently making to bring its message and values into the
lives of individuals, schools, communities, and businesses. In a world where we face so many challenges, including the suffering of humans, animals, and destruction of our environment, it is critical that efforts are made to continue spreading the messages of holistic humane education, especially to young people who can implement these values of empathy and compassion early on and build their lives around these principles. My thesis will help to fill this information gap by opening up an additional avenue that will introduce undergraduate students to the power and promise of humane education.

**Population**

The goal of humane education is to help the planet and all of its inhabitants thrive, thereby creating a just, compassionate, peaceful world for all. By spreading this message to undergraduate students and motivating and empowering them to become solutionaries who will address and confront the challenges of their time, this thesis has the potential to benefit all who live on this planet. But more specifically and immediately, the following people will be able to benefit from my thesis: current and future humane educators, undergraduate students who participate in the course, other institutions who decide to implement humane education courses into their curriculum, and anyone who may wish to develop humane education courses of their own will be able to use my course as a reference. In addition, environmentalists, human rights activists and advocates, animal protection workers, and educators involved in social justice will benefit by seeing how humane education focuses on the systems that link these areas and on the power of collaboration to solve problems. People in the arts community will also benefit as students will learn how the arts can play an important role in shifting consciousness and spurring cultural change.
Methodology

My scholarly research will include the following:

1) Research peer-reviewed journal articles regarding the most effective forms of online course curricula and instructional methods in a virtual undergraduate education environment.

2) Research peer-reviewed journal articles on the use of music as a tool for educating undergraduate students.

Other research will include:

1) Survey IHE graduate students to gather qualitative research about firsthand experiences with online assignments including Blackboard discussion boards, essays, phone salons/Google hangouts, field trip assignments, etc.

2) Review more main stream examples of humane education messages that undergraduate students may be more comfortable relating to such as music, art, and films. The examples that I choose will be those that not only inspire and educate students about certain issues, but more importantly, will show them how to be solutionaries and how to effectively relate humane education messages to others in ways that will empower and motivate.

Limitations:

The most obvious limitation that I will face in this information gathering process is the novelty of humane education. Since there are currently only three graduate programs and one certificate program in humane education, I will have fewer students to survey and they will all be at the graduate level. Graduate students, especially those in a dedicated humane education program, may be more receptive to materials that have detailed descriptions and depictions of issues surrounding animal welfare, environmental destruction, and human rights abuses.
Undergraduate students may be less responsive and more likely to become depressed by these materials. As such, the graduate student surveys may not exactly match the opinions that undergraduates – who have not chosen to pursue an entire degree in humane education – would give.

Additionally, I will have no other humane education undergraduate course to use as a reference or template. If there were multiple humane education programs around the country there would likely be more research concerning the most effective materials for delivering the humane education message to undergraduates. Since this is the first undergraduate course in humane education to be developed, my research will have to draw from a variety of areas rather than simply looking at what has worked for this exact type of course in the past.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, published scholarly research on the following topics will be discussed: 1) online course curriculum and instructional methods that are the most effective and provide the best possible outcomes for participants and; 2) the use of music as an educational tool by teachers to encourage student learning. The first eight articles are grouped under the following three categories: effective framework, emotional considerations, and attrition and retention as they relate to online learning. The last three articles focus on music as an educational tool, specifically when attempting to teach difficult topics to students. The research on these two topics will provide the information and insight needed to complete the development of my online undergraduate course in humane education.

Literature Review

A. Effective Framework

In the article “Approaches to Effective Online Instruction” Crawford-Ferre and Wiest point out that not only is online instruction growing, it is different from traditional instruction in a variety of ways, thereby making it critical for online instructors to be well versed in particular methods used in online teaching. Through meta-analysis, they discuss three critical areas that must be addressed in order to provide effective online teaching: course design, interaction between class participants, and instructor preparation and support. In each of these areas, they cite studies detailing the methods that have proven effective as well as those that have proven to be ineffective in online education. They stress the importance of further research on preparing and supporting online instructors as well as student experience, motivators, etc. (11-14).
As a meta-analysis, this article has drawn on more than a dozen studies and presented the major patterns found among other researcher’s results. These patterns are well supported and are highly applicable in that the findings give scientific evidence for the assumptions based on anecdotal evidence. The general findings within the categories of student interaction, course design, and instructor preparation provide the framework needed to design an effective online course in humane education.

In the article “Evaluating the Quality of Interaction in Asynchronous Discussion Forums in Fully Online Courses” by Nandi, Hamilton, and Harland, the authors conducted a case study into the nature of quality interaction between students and the ideal role of instructors while interacting with students in asynchronous fully online courses. The case study focused on two different classes in information technology that were each offered over the course of two semesters, totaling four individual groups of participants. The courses were offered through Open Universities Australia and had large numbers of participants (from 299-406 students in each course) from countries around the world.

The results of the qualitative analysis allowed the researchers to create a framework for evaluating the quality of the interaction between students. Their main conclusion was that online courses should neither be fully student-centered nor fully instructor-centered but instead, a combination of both; a setup which encourages both students and instructors to take responsibility and share ideas, thereby resulting in meaningful online interactions and improved learning (5-30). The results of this study are quite relevant to my thesis project given that the basis of the case study was to provide instructors with actual recommendations to improve the quality of their instruction and also that of student interaction.
In “Interactive Assignments for Online Students,” graduate students enrolled in the Master of Educational Technology Program at Lawrence Technological University participated in an elective course designed to assist them in learning “how to identify, implement, and utilize various tools to enhance teaching and learning processes online” (Lowry 7-10). Two essential elements in this online course were a high degree of interactivity and a teaching style that was engaging to a wide variety of learning styles. Because the students in this course were studying to become teachers and the guidelines from the state of Michigan require that new teachers have experience with online education, the assignments in the course gave the students experience in designing and teaching an online course themselves including: developing their own course, teaching a synchronous lesson, and evaluating other course designs and learning products. The conclusions reached from this informal qualitative study were based on study performance and comments received throughout the course by the participants. Students reacted positively to the variety and interactivity of assignments as well as to the student driven/directed, hands on nature of the assignments.

This case study provides important insights into the types of practices that will result in the best possible outcomes for online students. The instructor/researcher took particular steps to ensure that the assignments were clearly stated, including using audio recordings to deliver assignments. She maintained an active presence throughout the course but gave students the flexibility to complete interactive assignments independently. One aspect that Lowry does not explicitly mention is that the assignments had some real world applicability for the students in that they were practicing to become teachers. In other words, the engagement and motivation of the participants in this course could be attributed to the fact that their assignments had direct relevance and meaning to their lives. This article applies to my thesis because it shows several
aspects of successfully engaging students in an online learning environment including:

interactive student-centered assignments, clear explanations not only of expectations but also of the actual details of each assignment, and applicability of the assignments to the students’ lives.

B. Emotional Considerations

In “Me and My Computer: Emotional Factors in Online Learning,” authors Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak and Killion point out that although much emphasis has been placed on cognitive domains when it comes to student learning (especially in Western culture), research is now showing more complexity between student learning and the affective/emotional domain. Positive emotions can help to stimulate interest and motivation while negative emotions can impede learning and emotions of all kinds can enhance memory by serving as “mental Post-It notes” (100-105). Researchers used qualitative analysis to determine the types of emotions commonly felt by online students. Telephone focus groups were used to gather descriptions of online learning environments from 18 nursing students enrolled in a Wisconsin state university online RN completion program.

The results allowed researchers to identify five main themes of emotional responses to online learning: aloneness, anonymity, nonverbal communication, trepidations, and unknowns, all of which were described in both positive and negative terms by participants. Since emotion is so strongly interwoven into online learning, “instructors need to recognize the emotional processes that students experience in online courses and design strategies to buffer the negative affective experiences that can impair learning” (Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak, and Killion 100-105).

While the researchers do mention limitations since the sample was limited to white, mostly female nursing students, they also point out that cross cultural research does show consistency in emotions felt and the ways in which those emotions are expressed. Therefore, the
themes identified in this study will likely be corroborated in future studies involving more diverse samples of online learners. This study is absolutely crucial to any investigation of most effective practices in online learning; emotion must be taken into account when designing courses, selecting materials, communicating with students, etc. as a way to improve student learning outcomes and retention.

C. Attrition and Retention

In “Chickering’s Seven Principles of Good Practice: Student Attrition in Community College Online Courses,” authors Tirrell and Quick researched reasons for the nearly 50% attrition rate among students enrolled in online courses through the Virginia community college system. Despite the fact that the attrition rate for similar courses taught in traditional classrooms was only 15%, the authors began their research with the assumption that the extraordinarily high rates of attrition in online courses was “not a function of online courses but, rather, the education paradigm driving these courses” (580-590). In the opinion of Tirrell and Quick, the problem is that educators are merely moving their traditional in-person courses to an online format with little or no alterations. In other words, some faculty seem to view online courses as just a more flexible way to deliver the same assignments, content, and interactions that have proved successful in traditional classrooms. The authors also make the assumption that online courses will only be successful if they become interactive, participatory (with the students in control of their own learning), and with the faculty as a facilitator.

In an effort to determine the extent to which the active learning approach known as constructivism was being applied in online courses offered through three campuses of the Virginia Community College system, Tirrell and Quick relied on the framework “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” developed by Chickering and Gamson.
The seven principles are 1) encourage student-faculty contact; 2) encourage cooperation among students; 3) encourage active learning; 4) give prompt feedback; 5) emphasize time on task; 6) communicate high expectations and; 7) respect diverse talents and ways of learning. The researchers surveyed 47 faculty members who had taught at least one online course and had them answer on a scale of 1 to 5 thirty-five questions that measured the degree to which each faculty member was implementing each of the seven principles into their online courses.

A regression analysis was conducted to discover whether any of the seven principles had a statistically significant correlation with student attrition rates. The results showed that principle number three (encouraging active learning) had the highest correlation, followed by principles one (student-faculty contact), five (emphasizing time on task), and seven (respecting diverse talents and learning styles). Principles two (cooperation among students), four (giving prompt feedback), and six (communicating high expectations) had no statistical correlation with student attrition rates. When compared with the faculty questionnaires, researchers discovered that faculty were most likely to have implemented principles four and six and were least likely to have utilized one, three, five, and seven. They concluded that faculty members were emphasizing the wrong aspects of Chickering’s seven principles and were most likely failing to engage students in active learning at appropriate levels. This research bears directly on my thesis as it seems to indicate that those assignments and interactions that emphasize active learning, student-faculty contact, and an understanding and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning should result in better outcomes overall in online courses.

In “A Review of Online Course Dropout Research: Implications for Practice and Future Research,” authors Lee and Choi examined 35 peer reviewed empirical studies relating to student drop out in postsecondary online courses that had been produced over a ten year period (1999-
After excluding demographic factors (since they proved contradictory among the studies), they identified 69 dropout factors, 44 of which were non-overlapping from the 35 studies. Using a qualitative data processing approach, Lee and Choi categorized the factors into nine groups which they then reduced to three main sections: 1) student factors; 2) course/program factors; and 3) environmental factors.

They then identified 52 strategies to reduce dropout rates in online courses and grouped those into the same three sections. Student dropout factors included: students with lower academic aptitudes, previously poor academic performance, no previous online course experience, minimal computer skills, and a low level of self-motivation. Course/program dropout factors included: students who were unhappy with course design, did not feel like they had a systematic support system, and had fewer interactions with classmates and faculty within the online classroom. Environmental dropout factors included: work commitments and lack of supportive study environments (Lee and Choi).

Strategies to improve students’ persistence in online courses were classified to correspond with these same three sections: 1) understanding of each student’s challenges and potential; 2) providing quality course activities and well-structured supports and; 3) handling environmental issues and emotional challenges (Lee and Choi). The researchers pointed out that “these factors are not independent but influence each other” and “it is the interaction of numerous factors that eventually lead a student to complete or not complete a course” (593-618). This research is pertinent to my thesis because it provides recommendations as to the type of course curriculum and support that instructors can implement to help students persist in an online course instead of dropping out.
Park and Choi find similar reasons for dropout rates in their article “Factors Influencing Adult Learners’ Decision to Drop Out or Persist in Online Learning.” The researchers used quantitative data collected by a survey questionnaire from a sample of 147 adult learners who had either completed or dropped out of one of three online courses offered at a Midwestern university between the fall of 2005 and summer of 2007. They examined whether those who persisted and those who dropped out showed differences in individual characteristics, internal factors, and external factors. While the results showed that there was not a significant statistical difference with individual characteristics of persistent versus dropout learners, the two groups did show differences in internal and external factors including: their perceptions of family and organizational support as well as motivation in terms of relevance and satisfaction with the course.

Park and Choi concluded that an online adult learners’ decision to persist or to dropout is associated with whether they think the course is relatable to their own lives and if they feel supported in their learning by the organization as well as within their own social network of family, friends, co-workers, etc. This research emphasizes aspects that are important to my thesis, in particular the fact that a course which is more relatable to the student’s life is a course that the student is more likely to complete and that support from the educational institution, including the instructor, is a key factor in student success.

**Music as an Educational Tool**

Educators have found music to be a useful tool in encouraging student learning, especially when it comes to teaching difficult topics. In the article “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier: Ideas and Strategies for Using Music from the National Jukebox to Teach Difficult
Topics in History,” Moats and Poxon point out that music can provide students with a fascinating record of cultural shifts, societal trends, and historical events. The National Jukebox, an online collection of over 10,000 historical recordings between 1901 and 1925 and launched by Sony Music Entertainment in 2011, is being used by teachers to do just that. “Music can provide a powerful entry point for students to begin investigating difficult topics from the past that may still be controversial in the present” (291). For example, there were many popular and influential songs written during the Great War Era (World War 1) including “Mammy’s Chocolate Soldier,” “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to be a Soldier” and “The Rose of No Man’s Land.” Each of these songs provides historical and cultural insight about the thoughts, feelings, perspectives, attitudes, etc. of those living during that era. The authors offer ideas for incorporating historical recordings such as these into classroom exercises as a way of introducing students to difficult topics such as war, poverty, substance abuse/addiction, etc. in more unique and intimate ways.

Stevens and Fogel make a similar recommendation in their article “Using Music to Teach about the Great Depression.” During the Great Depression, African Americans were especially at risk since many of them were already on the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. As the authors point out: “Americans who suffered the deprivation of the times sang lyrics that reflected their plight” (15). African Americans used music as a form of expression and social commentary, making the songs a rich, deep, and personal account of experiences and attitudes held during this particular time in history. Early recordings of famous blues musicians such as William Ledbetter, Robert Johnson, John Lee Williamson, and Tampa Red reveal the troubling and desperate reality faced by so many during the Great Depression with lyrics touching on the erosion of morality, the miserable and unstable working conditions for Blacks, the increase in racial violence, the constant burden of dislocation and migration, and the hope that one day their lot would improve.
Stevens and Fogel conclude by sharing a teaching activity that involves listening to and analyzing several of these Depression-era songs and lyrics for range of musical styles/diversity as well as the socio-economic circumstances being depicted.

Finally, in “Denmark 1943: Using Music to Teach Holocaust Rescue,” Lindquist discusses the use of the song “Denmark 1943” as a learning tool for educating students about the remarkable Danish rescue operation where 98% of Denmark’s Jews were safely ferried to Sweden where they lived in comfort and safety during the remainder of the Holocaust. The song “focuses on real people and portrays historical events and the implications that may be drawn from them” (318). As the author further points out, “the song allows the listener to learn what happened while sensing why it happened” (318). This is yet another example of how music can be used as a powerful educational tool, especially when it comes to teaching students about challenging and/or difficult topics both historically and in modern times.

**Summary**

After reviewing the research on effective online course curricula and instructional methods, it is easy to identify some overlapping themes. As pointed out by Crawford-Ferre and Wiest, course design, interaction between students, and instructor preparation and support are critical components for effective online teaching. Within the area of course design, Nandi, Hamilton and Harland as well as Tirrell and Quick, and Lowry all stress the importance of active, student-centered assignments in online course curriculums. Reilley and Killion point out the importance of designing courses that take into account the emotional processes of students so that negative emotional experiences do not impair their learning. Lowry and Park and Choi also conclude that student motivation and persistence can be influenced by the relevance of the course
work to their lives. Within the area of student interaction, Nandi and Hamilton and Harland agree that student communication provides an opportunity to interact in meaningful ways and therefore results in improved learning. Finally, within the area of instructor preparation and support, Lee and Choi and Park and Choi claim that whether students decide to drop out or persist can also be influenced by the amount of support they feel from instructors and by the institution in general. Each of these potential areas of concern should be considered when designing further research to determine which course curricula and instructional methods support diverse learning styles and offer the best possible outcomes for participants.

Finally, after reviewing research on the use of music as an educational tool to encourage student learning, it is easy to see how song lyrics can touch students on a personal and heartfelt level that can open them up to learning in ways that a textbook or lecture alone often does not. With resources like the National Jukebox where thousands of historical recordings can be accessed for free as well as more popular sites such as iTunes, YouTube, and National Public Radio stations, there are countless opportunities for educators to engage, motivate, and reach students through the timeless, artistic, and intimate narrative of song. As a humane educator, I can’t think of a more beautiful and poignant way to raise awareness about human rights, animal protection, and environmental preservation and awaken students to their own role in breaking through social constructs and unsustainable systems to create a better world.
# CHAPTER THREE: THESIS PROJECT

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I. COURSE TITLE AND DESCRIPTION:

Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making

An introduction to the study of humane education, and how making daily choices that do the most good and the least harm (MOGO) to the environment, humans, and nonhuman animals has the power to turn us all into solutionaries and create a better world. Through readings, music, films, critical and creative thinking, self-reflective learning and research, students will develop an understanding and awareness of the global effects of their decisions and will discuss whether these impacts accurately reflect their own personal values. Course content will focus on the interconnectedness of human rights, animal protection, and environmental ethics. No prerequisite required. Online.
II. BACKGROUND AND REASONING

A. The Desperate Need for Humane Education

1. A World in Peril

As difficult as it can be to accept or even acknowledge, we live in a world of increasing complications and uncertainties. The continued presence of violence against women and children, environmental exploitation and degradation, overpopulation, corporate greed, pollution, racism, discrimination, oppression, animal abuse and slaughter, species endangerment and extinction, poverty, illness, worldwide slavery, climate change, and war are just some of the complex challenges that we face as a global community.

Americans in particular, with our consumer-driven, throw-away culture, contribute disproportionately to many of these global concerns. For example, while we make up only 5% of the world’s population, we consume 20% of the world’s energy (“Population and Energy Consumption”). If everyone in the world were to mimic the American lifestyle, it would require the resources of four earths to support (Weil). American companies spend more than $200 billion every year on advertising while the world’s poorest could be provided with adequate food, clean water, and basic education for less than $50 billion (“Consumption Fast Facts”). The average American’s ecological footprint is twelve times larger than the average footprint of one Indian, which means that “the 4.1 million babies born in the United States this year will have almost the same impact on the earth as the 27.6 million babies born in India” (Consumption Fast Facts”). These unsustainable practices have only furthered the growing environmental, social, emotional, and spiritual deprivation suffered by all.

What is even more distressing is that these complex challenges, for the most part, are not being acknowledged by our current American system of schooling, the ultimate goals of which
are limited to preparing children for citizenship, cultivating a skilled workforce, teaching cultural literacy, preparing students for college, helping students to become critical thinkers, and helping students compete in a global marketplace (“School: The Story of American Public Education”). Students are not expected to understand and become knowledgeable about the current unsustainable systems in place and they are not supported, encouraged, and given the opportunity to craft, create, and offer solutions to solve real world problems.

What is so disheartening is that on a certain level, students understand this ineffective and unproductive cycle. They begin to observe this disconnection every time they step off of the streets and into a classroom and realize that the “life cycle” of their course work is restricted to the study of abstract intellectual concepts and a teacher generated transcript of “earned” grades. This undeniably leads to feelings of powerlessness, cynicism, frustration, anger, and finally, apathy as years of schooling pass by without the opportunity to draw critical real world connections, thereby resulting in the perpetuation of these unsustainable systems that keep our world in a state of peril generation after generation.

So the question remains: if we as a culture are not teaching future generations to confront the growing challenges of our time, then where do we expect the solutions to come from?

2. How Humane Education Can Help

Whether student, parent, professional, or citizen, we can all look to humane education as the answer to this disconnect between the work that we engage in everyday and the escalating problems in the world. As pioneered by co-founder and President of the Institute for Humane Education, Zoe Weil, humane education is a lens through which we come to understand the positive and negative impacts of our own choices on other human beings, nonhuman animals, and the environment at large. Developing an awareness of the far-reaching effects of our daily
decisions and learning to draw a web between ourselves and the injustices that we see in the world can empower and motivate us to become solutionaries through conscious choice-making. When we take part in making decisions that do the most good and the least harm (MOGO) for humans, non-human animals, and the environment, we create a more just, compassionate, and humane world for all (Weil).

One of the revolutionary goals of humane education is to bring this concept into educational institutions across the globe, thereby elevating the goal of schooling from merely generating a competitive work force to graduating generations of solutionaries; individuals who use their creativity, knowledge, passion, and talents to offer viable, sustainable solutions to the unique problems of their time. When graduates apply this new-found knowledge of solutionary thinking to their chosen field (business, medicine, law, politics, music, art, etc.) and begin their personal journeys as agents of change, our world will begin to reflect the deep-seated values inherent to all of humanity.

Although educators at all levels work hard to introduce discussions concerning the major problems plaguing our world, they are often bound by the constraints of the conventional educational system and cannot devote the time that is necessary to foster deep reflection and discussion among learners – educators may even be prohibited from telling students the truth about their impacts on the world. As a result, students are rarely taught how to draw critical connections between the products that they purchase and the destruction of wildlife habitat and ecosystems worldwide, or between the food that they eat and the abuse and slaughter of farmed animals on a massive scale, or between the garbage and waste they produce and the widespread polluting of our rivers and oceans. Even more discouraging is that individuals are not motivated
or empowered to stand up and become solutionaries thereby interrupting these current cycles of injustice and unsustainability.

Without these critical components, students all too often resort to feelings of despair, indifference, cynicism, and inaction. Far from making people feel empowered or necessary, our current schooling system leaves many feeling powerless when exposed to the major challenges that we face. But when the wisdom and insight of humane education is shared and students are given the opportunity to put their creativity, passions, natural talents, and unique skills to work in creating a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world, we can change the nature of our legacy overnight.

3. My Own Experience with Humane Education

When I began the Master of Arts in Humane Education program through Valparaiso University and the Institute of Humane Education in May 2011, I soon realized that I had been unconsciously taking part in a lifestyle that did not actually reflect my deepest values. In fact, my initial reaction after learning about the impacts my daily decisions were having on other beings and the planet was one of extreme anger and disbelief. In all of my years of learning, from elementary through undergraduate, these holistic, social, emotional, and spiritual philosophies of doing the most good and the least harm were tragically absent from my education and as a result, from my overall outlook.

It wasn’t until I began drawing connections between my daily decisions and the problems in the world that I began to realize my own role in perpetuating these unjust systems. For example, purchasing a t-shirt at the mall used to be a fun and simple way to spend a Saturday afternoon. But when I learned to look at this decision through the lens of humane education, I soon realized that the impacts of my consumer habits were not that simple. On the contrary, my
habits had far-reaching effects that were hidden from my view. Research into the life cycle of a cheap department store t-shirt reveals that it is often sewn together by women and children working in sweatshop conditions in textile factories. The cotton used to make the shirt is grown using heavy amounts of pesticides that pollute soil and local waterways and is devastating natural ecosystems. Finally, cotton grown in places such as India and Uzbekistan is picked by child slave laborers who suffer from illness as a direct result of exposure to the toxic chemicals found in pesticides as well as from the inhumane working conditions they are forced to endure.

“In India, child workers in the cottonseed industry are often in a state of debt bondage and work at least nine hours a day. Pesticides used during production cause health problems for the children and they report experiencing headaches, convulsions and respiratory problems” (“Stop Child and Forced Labor”). While this list may seem overwhelming, these are just a few of the negative impacts and unsustainable practices that are involved in the production – to say nothing of the distribution and disposal – of cheap clothing for American consumers.

After drawing a web of connections between this one “simple” choice of purchasing a department store t-shirt and its reverberating impact on other humans, animals, and the environment, I became passionate about making conscious and deliberate lifestyle choices with these impacts in mind. As a result, my life has turned into one of purpose, empathy, and empowerment. Suddenly, I became aware of and accountable for my own contribution to unjust and unsustainable systems that are currently in place. This level of insight and wisdom as a result of humane education is what I want to help cultivate in others so that they can experience the fulfillment that comes when the global impacts of one’s lifestyle choices truly reflect their deepest values.
4. The Importance of Spreading the MOGO Message

It is critical that we begin engaging students in a way that fosters empowerment and gives them the confidence and motivation that they need to become solutionaries and make the world a more just, humane, and compassionate place. Without humane education and the MOGO principle, the majority of students will go on to perpetuate the behaviors and mentalities that contribute to the social, economic, and environmental injustices occurring worldwide.

One of the most important concepts in humane education is drawing connections between one’s daily decisions and the way in which those decisions impact other people, nonhuman animals, and the environment at large. It is imperative that individuals have an understanding of what exactly they are supporting as consumers every time they put down their money and vote “yes” to a product or service. Without this knowledge and insight, we risk perpetuating devastation to the environment, human rights abuses, and the unnecessary pain, suffering, and death of nonhuman animals on a massive scale. If this is the destructive power of unconscious choice-making, just imagine the power we could harness with collective conscious choice-making across the world.

B. Why An Online Undergraduate Course in Humane Education?

1. Making History

Since 1996, the Institute for Humane Education (IHE) has been promoting humane education and training humane educators in the field. There are currently three graduate programs in humane education (M.A., M. Ed., and MALS), a certificate program, workshops, presentations, and publications. IHE has trained thousands of humane educators and reached hundreds of thousands of individuals and communities across the globe. This pioneering
movement has already inspired and motivated countless people from all walks of life to step up and become solutionaries in their own lives and communities.

However, as many advances as IHE has already made, one critical component remains absent: an undergraduate program in humane education. Currently, there is no undergraduate course in humane education offered anywhere in the world. While there are undergraduate courses that deal with independent issues within humane education such as animal welfare, human rights issues, or environmental sustainability, these courses are not based on the most good, least harm framework and therefore students are not being trained to look at how their own lives are impacting the world or how to become solutionaries. Without this critical component, discussion of these problems is more likely to lead to despair, inaction, or indifference because students are not presented with opportunities to offer solutions of their own.

This thesis will be the first undergraduate humane education course to be offered that uses this framework and will awaken undergraduate students to their own power as conscious choice-makers and engaged change-makers. While this particular course will start out as an elective, my hope is that one day humane education courses will become a graduation requirement for all high school and college students.

2. Undergraduates: Natural Solutionaries

There is something special about the passion, life energy, and desire for change that is innately found within the undergraduate age group. Youth have the gift of seeing the world through fresh eyes and questioning the cultural and social structures currently in place. As we have seen throughout history, when students are given the right tools, opportunity, and motivation to stand up and make a difference, truly incredible changes invariably take place.
While it may appear that the level of activism among youth isn’t what it once was in earlier decades, it is important to understand that the methods of activism are changing with the times: “…the current form of activism is less about protests and drawing media coverage and more about organized, formal and even legal responses to the injustices of the world” (Sparks). Students are participating in more subtle, organic, grassroots movements that are awakening their inner drive to stand up against injustices they feel passionately about, both locally and globally.

Some recent examples of this include: the student-led organization STAND (Students Taking A Stand: Darfur) at Georgetown University which raises awareness, supports relief efforts, and lobby’s policymakers regarding the ongoing genocide crisis in the Sudan (Strauss); the non-violent march and sit-in of two hundred and seventy students at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania in protest of campus sexual assault policies which resulted in the instituting of the “Red Alert” system and the expelling of students found to have committed rape (Pitz); the College of the Atlantic in Bar Harbor, Maine adopted a policy that prohibits the school from doing business with companies that have ties with Burma as a direct result of student activism; Spellman College in Atlanta, Georgia has a student-led mentoring program that pairs freshman with first graders from Atlanta housing projects for the duration of their four years at college; and student activists involved in Students Against Sweatshops at Duke University helped implement a school policy that prohibits the licensing of Duke’s logo with manufacturers who operate sweatshops (Wieczorek). Again, these are just a handful of examples that demonstrate the tenacity of college-age students when their hearts and minds are awakened and stirred by injustice.

If these are the types of changes that students are instinctively cultivating on their own – with minimal expectations and support from the academic institutions and culture in which they
work and live – imagine what the world would look like if activism and solutionary thinking along with messages of compassion, empathy, reverence and respect for the earth and all of its inhabitants were instilled at every level of education. How much more activism would we see from youth all across America? How many lives could be changed by this collective energy and altruism? What level of personal fulfillment and joy would rise up within the hearts and minds of the students themselves as a result of engaging in attitudes and lifestyle choices that foster personal integrity, confidence, courage, love, peace, acceptance, team work, and a strong sense of community? How many problems could we then solve with their innovative, creative, inventive, inspired, ethical, sustainable, and insightful ideas?

An undergraduate course in humane education introducing the concept of self-empowerment and solutionary thinking which inspires undergraduates to develop and unleash the change-making potential that lies within each one of them is, without question, a momentous start in our culture’s shift toward replacing unsustainable and unjust systems with communities that foster equality, compassion, and peace for all.

3. Online Education: Flexible and MOGO!

There are a number of reasons why this introductory course in humane education was designed to be offered online. First, since this is the very first undergraduate course in humane education, it is critical that it be in a format that is accessible to all students, regardless of their location. Limiting this course to only the campus-based students of a college or university compromises the opportunity to universally spread the humane education message.

Second, online education is growing exponentially and thought by many to be the future of education. The number of online courses is “increasing at a faster rate than traditional course offerings, with online higher education courses nearly tripling between 1995 and 2003, and
almost 100% of public institutions report online instruction as a critical part of their long-term plans” (Crawford-Ferre and Wiest 11). It is vital for grassroots movements like humane education to stay at the forefront of these shifting trends in education by creating/designing/producing instructional methods that keep up with the times.

Third, due to its flexibility and convenience, online education opens doors for a variety of learners in addition to traditional undergraduate students. “It provides educational opportunities to individuals with geographic, time, or other constraints that make postsecondary education difficult or impossible to pursue and another option to those who prefer online learning’s flexibility and instructional delivery method” (Crawford-Ferre and Wiest 11).

Finally, the eco-friendly nature of online learning resonates with the core messages of humane education: online education reduces the amount of oil and emissions expended in commuting to classes, it limits the energy, materials and resources required to build and maintain college campuses, and reduces the amount of paper consumed in the educational process. As pointed out by Roy, Potter, and Yarrow in their 2008 study of the environmental impacts of higher education (HE) on campus-based versus distance learning systems: “Distance learning HE courses involve 87 per cent less energy and 85 per cent lower CO2 emissions than the full-time campus-based courses” (116). Therefore, it is most appropriate to choose an educational platform that does the most good and the least harm to the environment when offering humane education courses.
III. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED MATERIALS AND ASSIGNMENTS

A. Conveying the Humane Education Message

1. Empowering Versus Depressing: A Fine Line

One of the biggest challenges that humane educators face is the ability to convey the humane education message in a way that fosters inspiration, motivation, and empowerment as opposed to depression, anxiety, and/or hopelessness. When students suddenly become aware of the complex, unjust, and sometimes horrific realities of our treatment of animals, humans, and the environment on a global scale, it can be tremendously overwhelming. As Zoe Weil points out in her groundbreaking book *Most Good, Least Harm*: “If our hearts are open to seeing suffering, they can easily break under the weight of so much pain in our world” (42).

Students are especially in danger of despair when they are inundated with course materials that focus on dismal facts, figures, and gruesome details. Students participating in Valparaiso University’s graduate programs in humane education, responding to a 2013 survey, indicated some of these emotional challenges. After being exposed to certain course materials (such as animal protection films showing graphic images of animal suffering and death), 70% of respondents reported feeling one or more of the following: angry and cynical, helpless, more hopeless than hopeful, more overwhelmed and depressed than motivated and inspired, and one student even reported suffering an emotional breakdown after viewing such a film (Newland). It should be noted that these emotional challenges were experienced by individuals who have specifically chosen to pursue graduate work in humane education. Therefore, instructors should consider the possibility of undergraduates being even more susceptible to adverse emotional reactions and design courses accordingly.
Consequently, it is of the utmost importance that educators seek out course materials and assignments that serve to motivate and empower students to develop solutions to these overwhelming problems in addition to informing them of the destructive systems in place. Educators must emphasize that “action is the antidote to despair” when dealing with this paradox of educating students about immense suffering while simultaneously inspiring kindness, compassion, and non-judgmental attitudes (Weil 42).

2. Why Films and Music?

Educators have found films and music to be useful tools in encouraging student learning, especially when it comes to teaching difficult topics. These art forms have the power to touch students on a personal and heartfelt level that can open them up to learning in ways that a textbook or lecture alone often does not. As pointed out by D’Sa in the article “Social Studies in the Dark: Using Docudramas to Teach History” (2005), “…because film engages the visual senses of the students, more senses are involved than with the traditional lecture…Retention is also stimulated by the viewers’ emotional involvement in the film. When our emotions are activated, information is more likely to be retained” (10).

An example of the power of film as an educational tool for awakening and engaging students is found in the article “Environmental Education Through Narrative Films” (Bahk). The author describes a shift in undergraduate student attitudes toward forest preservation after viewing Medicine Man, a narrative film portraying deforestation. Bahk reports that the students who viewed the film became more favorable toward the preservation of forests than students who did not view the film. As further noted by the author: “There are some important implications of these findings for environmental educators and practitioners regarding the potential role of narrative films in shaping public opinions regarding environmental issues” (9).
Music is equally valuable in its ability to reach students on a deeper, more impactful level. In the article “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier: Ideas and Strategies for Using Music from the National Jukebox to Teach Difficult Topics in History,” authors Moats and Poxon point out that music can provide students with a fascinating record of cultural shifts, societal trends, and historical events. “Music can provide a powerful entry point for students to begin investigating difficult topics from the past that may still be controversial in the present” (291). This can be especially effective when introducing students to ongoing and psychologically challenging topics in humane education such as animal cruelty, human rights abuses, and environmental destruction.

But perhaps even more remarkable is the way in which music has the power to touch and unite a diversity of people, making it an especially effective tool for engaging, motivating, and inspiring undergraduate students with varying backgrounds and learning styles. Reading about the desperate need for social change in a textbook tends not to evoke the same emotional response as listening to singer/songwriter Chris Daughtry sing “What About Now?”; a powerful song asking us all to put our judgments and self-centeredness aside and take action now to make a difference in the world before it is too late. Indeed, there are few things as poignant as a meaningful message conveyed through music or through powerful visual images such as those found in films. *Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making* takes advantage of these art forms as educational tools by assigning students weekly song selections that correspond with themes in course content as well as requiring weekly film festivals for students to view in an effort to awaken awareness and critical thinking about pressing issues within animal protection, environmental preservation, and human rights.
B. Effective Online Instructional Methods

1. Learning Styles and Interactive Assignments

When developing an online course, two essential elements can make a difference when it comes to engaging and motivating students: providing for a variety of learning styles and interactive, student-centered assignments. As researched by Tirrell and Quick in “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” assignments and interactions that emphasize active learning, student-faculty contact, and an understanding and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning should result in higher retention and better outcomes overall in online courses. Lowry reported similar findings in “Interactive Assignments for Online Students” which observed that online graduate students reacted positively to the variety and interactivity of assignments as well as to the student driven/directed, hands on nature of the assignments within the online course curriculum. This is why a deliberate effort has been made in this online undergraduate course to offer a variety of interactive assignments including field trips, interviews, and journal entries as well as supplementing traditional course materials with film festivals and music in an effort to nurture a creative and inspiring online environment for students with varying learning styles.

2. Emotional Considerations

In addition to developing online course curricula that provides opportunities for a variety of learning styles and interactive assignments, it is also critical for instructors to consider the emotional factors involved in an online learning environment. In “Me and My Computer: Emotional Factors in Online Learning,” authors Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak and Killion point out that although much emphasis has been placed on cognitive domains when it comes to student learning in general (especially in Western culture), research is now showing more complexity
between student learning and the affective/emotional domain. Positive emotions can help to stimulate interest and motivation while negative emotions can impede learning and emotions of all kinds can enhance memory by serving as “mental Post-It notes” (100-105). Since emotion is so strongly interwoven into online learning, “instructors need to recognize the emotional processes that students experience in online courses and design strategies to buffer the negative affective experiences that can impair learning” (Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak, and Killion 100-105).

As mentioned earlier, this is especially relevant in an online humane education course where students are already at risk of feeling isolated when reading or viewing difficult materials, thereby making it imperative for instructors to consider the emotional well-being of their students both in terms of the challenging nature of the course content as well as the distance learning environment.

3. Instructor Presence & Support

While class participants also engage with one another through discussion board correspondence, the most important relationship invariably lies between the student and the instructor. In fact, instructor presence, demeanor, and support can be the overriding factor between student attrition or retention. Recent studies by Tirell and Quick, Lee and Choi, and Park and Choi all showed strong correlations between adult online student retention and the presence of student-instructor contact and support as well as higher incidences of student attrition when this was lacking in online course environments. Additionally, 100% of online humane education graduate students at Valparaiso University responding to a 2013 survey indicated that having an instructor with a strong, supportive presence was one of the most important factors associated with their online learning experience (Newland). This moral
responsibility to provide encouragement and mentorship to online students to ensure their success should not be overlooked by instructors.

This is why a conscious effort has been made in *Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making* to provide students with mentorship and instructor support throughout the semester. Examples of these efforts include: responding with encouragement and positivity to student postings on the discussion board, sending weekly “check-in” emails to students to monitor their progress, posting weekly audio recordings outlining materials and assignments to students to provide a more personal online atmosphere, and offering optional virtual mentoring “chats” between instructor and student to address any challenges, concerns, or questions they may have during the course. The combination of these efforts should provide students with a more personal connection with the instructor and a greater sense of community overall, thereby lowering feelings of isolation and disconnection as online participants.

**C. Making Humane Education Relevant to Students’ Everyday Lives**

One of the greatest advantages of humane education is its undeniable relevance and direct connection to each and every individual. While traditional course work can leave students feeling powerless and indifferent, humane education is specifically designed to unlock a student’s potential to create solutions to real world problems while simultaneously developing their spiritual, emotional, and mental growth through living consciously and purposefully, thereby making course content student-focused and student-centered by its very nature.

For example, it is common practice in American education to reprimand undergraduate students for using words such as “I” or “me” when writing and submitting papers. However, humane education challenges this practice by encouraging students to continuously reflect on
their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors while examining their impacts on the world around them. Indeed, recent findings by Lowry and Park and Choi assert that student motivation and persistence can be influenced by the relevance of the course work to their own lives. Consequently, when students are encouraged to personalize assignments it can awaken and inspire creativity that may otherwise lay dormant and unrecognized (both by themselves as well as their instructors) and ignite a passion to continue learning.

Finally, the overwhelming consensus in humane education is that education should be the most relatable and personal facet of one’s life. The epidemic of apathy, depression, anxiety, aggression, consumerism and commercialism, spiritual and emotional starvation, the ongoing objectification of humans and nonhuman animals, and overwhelming destruction to the environment can be linked to failing educational systems that leave students feeling disconnected from themselves and each other and ill-prepared to face personal, local, and global challenges. But these challenges can be acknowledged and resolved in holistic and sustainable ways by every generation if they are provided the knowledge, skills, motivation, and empowerment to meet, face, and solve these challenges (Weil). Once humane education is implemented into every level of schooling and students are encouraged to channel the altruistic power that lies within each one of them, make no mistake, the world will explode with positive change overnight.
IV. COURSE GOALS/LEARNING OUTCOMES

The primary goals of this course will include the following:

1. Students will become knowledgeable about the four main elements of humane education:
   - providing accurate information (so they have the knowledge to face challenges)
   - fostering the 3C's: curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking (so they have the tools to meet challenges)
   - instilling the 3R's: reverence, respect, and responsibility (so they have the motivation to confront challenges)
   - offering positive choices and tools for problem solving (so they will be able to solve challenges)

2. Students will learn about the interconnectedness between human rights, animal protection, and environmental ethics.

3. Students will understand and begin to explore the far-reaching effects of their decisions (both conscious and unconscious) and their true impact on the world around them.

4. Students will begin to explore the far-reaching effects of their choices.

5. Students will develop the capacity and desire to live with compassion, integrity, and wisdom.

6. Students will learn what it means to make MOGO (most good/least harm) choices and how to be a “solutionary.”

7. Students will practice making MOGO choices and acting as solutionaries in their own communities.

8. Students will learn that music can/does play a role in educating, motivating, and inspiring cultural and social change.

9. Students will challenge their own biases as well as the biases within popular culture.
10. Students will become motivated to practice conscientious choice-making and engaged change-making to create a better world.
V. SYLLABUS

A. Welcome/Overview

Hello and welcome to this introductory course in humane education! What is humane education you might ask? Humane education is a lens through which we come to understand the positive and negative impacts of our choices on ourselves, other human beings, nonhuman animals, and the environment at large. Once we develop an awareness of the far-reaching effects of our daily decisions, we can choose to live in ways that more accurately reflect our values. As stated by Zoe Weil, co-founder and President of the Institute for Humane Education: “…the issues of our time are complex and require research and effort to understand; and the daily choices we make, while seemingly insignificant, have hidden effects that we will never see or understand if we don’t make an effort to make connections” (32). Once we begin drawing a web between ourselves and the injustices that we see in the world including human rights abuses, animal suffering, and environmental degradation, it can empower and motivate us to make more conscious choices, thereby reducing suffering and creating a more just and humane world for all.

Over the next six weeks, we will be using films, books, self-reflection, research, field trips, and music to awaken our awareness and fuel our critical thinking, curiosity, and creativity. But probably the most exciting part about this course is that it is all about YOU and the difference that you can make when you draw connections, model your message, and work for positive change. I encourage all of you to approach this course with an open mind and a willingness to self-reflect. Together, we can create a learning environment where everyone feels respected, supported, and safe enough to share their own experiences so that true growth can occur.
Each week, the assignments are broken down into three parts: A, B, and C. You can find more detail about weekly assignments and course materials in the syllabus, but here is a brief overview of topics and assignments over the next six weeks. Please note that Week Two requires a fieldtrip and Week Six requires some type of “real-world” service for your final project:

WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO MOGO

Part A: Short Research Essay (1-2 pages)
Part B: Self-Reflection Essay (1 page)
Part C: Music Exercise!

WEEK TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

Part A: Fieldtrip to Local Environmental Organization
Part B: Journal Entry (1 page)
Part C: Music Exercise!

WEEK THREE: ANIMAL PROTECTION

Part A: Short Research Essay (1-2 pages)
Part B: Create a List
Part C: Music Exercise!

WEEK FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

Part A: Conduct an Interview
Part B: Self-Reflection Essay (1 page)
Part C: Music Exercise!

WEEK FIVE: CULTURE & CHANGE

Part A: Personal Experience Essay (1 page)
Part B: Self-Reflection Essay (up to 1 page)
Part C: Music Exercise!

WEEK SIX: BE A SOLUTIONARY!

Part A+B: Final Project (solutionary work of your choice)

Part C: Just Enjoy Music! (without analysis)

B. Course and Participation Requirements

This course includes a variety of materials and assignments that include the following elements:

- books
- films
- articles
- music selections
- weekly Blackboard (BB) assignments
- weekly BB posts responding to peers

In order to complete the course, you must read the required books and articles, view the required films and music selections, complete all assignments/projects to the satisfaction of faculty, and fulfill the participation requirements on the BB discussion board. These participation requirements include the following:

- part A, B, and C of weekly assignments must be submitted on BB
- students must post a response to at least two peers each week
- responses to peers must be substantive (at least one four-sentence paragraph) and should clearly separate opinion from fact by referencing course materials and/or outside resources
students must make postings on at least three separate days each week, the first of which should be posted by no later than Wednesday at midnight EST to ensure adequate discussion throughout the week

C. Assignments

1. List of Assignments

    a. WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO MOGO

A) This first week is about introducing you to the field of humane education and the idea that nearly every decision you make impacts you, other beings, and/or the planet in some way. Unfortunately, these impacts are often hidden from view and have far reaching effects on the environment, animals, and human beings. For example, how is a cotton t-shirt connected to the respiratory problems of child slaves in India? What does a take-out container from Kentucky Fried Chicken have to do with dwindling numbers of Sumatran tigers? How are household cleaning products contributing to the depletion of clean drinking water? How are certain cosmetics and personal hygiene products connected to the suffering and death of millions of animals every year?

    After watching *The Story of Stuff*, think about some of the products that you use on a regular basis such as clothes, shoes, food items, soda, cosmetics, deodorant, toothpaste, etc. Choose one of these items and conduct some preliminary research about its “life cycle.” Where did this product come from? How was it made and by whom? What natural resources were used to produce it? What happens to it once you dispose of it (is it biodegradable, recyclable, reused in some way, landfill, etc.)? In what ways do the making/transporting/distributing/disposing of this product affect humans, animals, and/or the environment (pollution, slave labor, animal suffering, etc.)? How do you feel about
the product after learning about some of these impacts on other beings and/or the environment? Will you make any change in your choice of purchasing this product again based on what you learned? If so, what will you change? If not, why not? (1-2 pages, single spaced)

B) Making it a priority to make choices that do the most good and the least harm (MOGO) to humans, animals, and the planet means that we must widen our circle of empathy and compassion. After viewing Sam Richard’s TED talk “A Radical Experiment in Empathy,” please reflect on the following questions: How wide is your current circle of empathy? Who does it include? In what ways can you challenge yourself to expand your circle of empathy and compassion? How could widening this circle make a more positive impact on both YOURSELF and the world? (up to 1 page)

C) Please listen to the following song: “Where is the Love” by the Black Eyed Peas (please listen to this song with the video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc).

While listening to the lyrics, please keep the following questions in mind to share on BB:

- What do you think this song is about?
- How does it relate to the themes found within humane education?
- Do you think this song is effective in awakening people to some of the unjust cultural/social/economic/political systems currently in place? Why or why not?

Please feel free to share with the class any additional songs you may know that have humane education themes.

*Note: The song and lyric analysis each week is informal and does not need to be in essay form. It is merely a short exercise that you are meant to have fun with!
b. WEEK TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

A) Find a local environmental organization that is working to preserve nature in some way in your own community. Visit their organization and learn about the people and their efforts/cause (if visiting the site is somehow impossible for you, research their website and email/phone the organization to ask questions and find out more about their work/goals/mission). Then, in 1-2 pages, tell us about it! Was this an environmental concern in your community that you were unaware of? What did you learn about the problem? What interests you the most about the work that this environmental organization is doing? What connections can you draw between this particular environmental cause/issue and your own life?

B) After learning about some of the harmful effects of mass consumerism, waste/pollution, and industrial agriculture on the environment in the films and readings this week, what connections can you draw between your own daily choices and environmental degradation? Does the environmental impact you are currently making/taking part in reflect your true values? If not, what steps are you willing to take to change this? Feel free to format this assignment as a journal entry or as a letter to yourself. I encourage you to be creative in your self-reflection! (1 page)

C) Please listen to the following songs: “Big Yellow Taxi” by Counting Crows (listen to song with lyrics at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVD6_BGV8mM) and “Gone” by Jack Johnson (listen to song with video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XRNpI37kHU). While listening to the lyrics, please keep the following questions in mind to share on BB for each song:
• What do you think this song is about?

• How does it relate to the environmental preservation themes we are studying this week?

• Do you think this song is effective in raising awareness about human impacts on the environment? Why or not?

Please feel free to share with the class any additional songs you may know that have environmental preservation themes.
c. WEEK THREE: ANIMAL PROTECTION

A) Making MOGO choices for all nonhuman animals requires us to become knowledgeable about the current systems in place that are impacting the lives of animals on a mass scale.

Please choose one of the following subjects to research:

- factory farming
- animal experimentation/vivisection
- the fur trade
- canned hunting
- animals in entertainment

Then, in 1-2 pages, report on what you have learned. Please be sure to include your own personal reactions, philosophy, and perspectives regarding your culture’s relationship with and treatment of animals as you become more knowledgeable about the current systems in place.

B) After completing assignment “A” and watching/reading all of the required films/articles for this week, draw upon the connections that link animal suffering to food, clothing, entertainment, medical research, consumer products, etc. What choices can you make so that your impacts on nonhuman animals reflect your personal values? Write up a list of situations in your daily life where you could be a conscientious choice-maker in reducing animal suffering and share this list on the discussion board. Please try to be as specific as possible so that we can all benefit and be inspired from each other’s ideas.

C) Please listen to the following song: “Lite a Flame: The Animal Liberation Song” by Laura Nyro (please listen with corresponding video at:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u3sAJcrQFY). While listening to the lyrics, please keep the following questions in mind to share on BB:

- What do you think this song is about?
- How does it relate to the themes within animal protection that we are studying this week?
- Do you think this song is effective in raising awareness about the use of animals in your own culture? Why or why not?

Please feel free to share with the class any additional songs you may know that have animal protection themes.
d. WEEK FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

A) After reading the chapters from *Privilege, Power, and Difference* by Alan Johnson and considering the hidden forms of oppression and power in the culture in which you live, interview someone who has experienced one or more of the forms of bias/prejudice/oppression that Johnson talks about. For example, this could be someone who has been discriminated against due to disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, social class, etc. Share the results of your interview with the class along with your thoughts/reactions/insights after learning of their experience. (1-2 pages)

B) After watching the films for this week and learning about some of the human rights abuses being inflicted on people of all ages around the world as well as how others are stepping up and acting as solutionaries to minimize these abuses, consider the ways in which you could become a conscious choice-maker and engaged change-maker to help those being exploited/abused/oppressed. Which human rights abuses have the deepest effect on you? What steps, if any, are you willing to take in your daily life to minimize human suffering? (1 page)

C) Please listen to the following songs: “The Way It Is” by Bruce Hornsby (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOeKidp-iWo) and “Don’t Drink the Water” by Dave Matthews Band (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFbFwmIKlqM). While listening to the lyrics, please keep the following questions in mind to share on BB for each song:

- What do you think this song is about?
How does this song relate to the human rights themes we have been studying this week?

Do you think this song is effective in raising awareness about human rights abuses? Why or why not?

Please feel free to share with the class any additional songs you may know that have human rights themes.
A) After watching Jean Kilbourne’s *Killing Us Softly* and *Tough Guise*, discuss your own personal experiences of being “branded” and/or influenced by corporations. How does advertising influence the way you view/judge/assess yourself and the people around you? Do these influences keep you from thinking/feeling/behaving in ways that reflect your true self and/or values? Finally, what connections can you draw between the effects of advertising on our culture and harm to the environment, animals, and humans? (1 page)

B) After reading Chapter 5 of *Creating a World That Works for All*, reflect on the keeper-breaker-mender stories that Abdullah describes. Does this perspective hold value for you when considering your own current priorities, goals, values, purpose, direction, etc.? What can you take away from these insights in regard to your own role in shaping the future for our planet and all of its inhabitants? (up to 1 page)

C) Please listen to the following songs for this week: “I Would Love” by Lee Coulter (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL8rpym_OO8) and “What About Now” by Chris Daughtry (with corresponding video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roDXSHSEuoo). While listening to the lyrics, please keep the following questions in mind to share on BB for each song:

- What do you think this song is about?
- How does it relate to the culture and change themes we have been studying this week?
- Do you think this song is effective in raising awareness about the need for all of us to take part in changing our world for the better? Why or why not?
Please feel free to share with the class any additional songs you may know that have culture and change themes.
f. WEEK SIX: BE A SOLUTIONARY!

A+B) This final week is your chance to practice being a solutionary. As we have learned throughout this course, we have opportunities every day to be conscientious choice-makers and engaged change-makers, taking small actions that change the world and make it a more just and humane place. I want you to think about an issue, problem, or injustice that you feel the most passionate about and spend some time this week acting as a solutionary toward this issue. The what, where, how, and when are all up to you. The most important thing is that you let your creativity, your passion, your inspiration, and your desire to create a better world guide you. You may record and present this project using any one (or a combination of) the following:

- 2-3 page paper
- A short film
- PowerPoint presentation

Whichever format you choose, I encourage you to include photos of your experience for all of us to see! As a general guide, please include in your final project:

- the subject/topic of the cause/issue that you chose
- the location of where you conducted the work
- details about the work or service you provided
- what the outcome was
- your personal feelings/reactions during and after the experience

C) For this final week, please listen to the following song as a source of inspiration for the work that you will be taking part in: “With My Own Two Hands” by Ben Harper (with corresponding video and lyrics at:
There is no analysis of the lyrics this week; just enjoy the song! Please feel free to share with the class any additional songs you may know that have solutionary themes.

D. Course Materials

1. Books

The following books are broken down and assigned by chapter throughout the semester.

Please note the required schedule of readings below:

  
  WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO MOGO: Chapters 1 and 2
  WEEK TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION: Chapter 4
  WEEK FIVE: CULTURE AND CHANGE: Chapter 5
  WEEK SIX: BE A SOLUTIONARY: Chapters 7 and 8

  
  WEEK FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS: Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9

  
  WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO MOGO: Chapters 1 and 3 and Relevant Facts and Statistics (p. 169-175)
  WEEK THREE: ANIMAL PROTECTION: Chapter 4
  WEEK FIVE: CULTURE AND CHANGE: Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8
WEEK SIX: BE A SOLUTIONARY: Chapter 9 and Recommended Resources (p. 177-199)

# Films

## WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION TO MOGO

  
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGCJ46vyR9o
  
  A student-produced film about college education.

- **The World Becomes What You Teach.** (2011). TEDx talk. 17 min.
  
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5HEV96dIuY
  
  IHE president, Zoe Weil, presents her vision for the solution to all our problems: humane education.

- **The Story of Stuff.** (2007). Documentary. 20 min.
  
  www.storyofstuff.com
  
  Explores the impact of our stuff on people, animals, and the environment.

- **A Radical Experiment in Empathy.** (2010). TEDx talk. 19 min.
  
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUEGHdQO7WA
  
  Sam Richards’ TEDx talk on understanding different perspectives and educating for conflict resolution and peace.

## WEEK TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

- **Cost of Cool: Youth, Consumption, and the Environment.** (2001). Documentary. 26 min. Part 1, 2, and 3 can be found on YouTube starting here:
  
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ZzEfHe6vY
A look at teenage consumption and impacts on the environment.

- **Captain Charles Moore on the Seas of Plastic.** (2010). TED talk. 7 min.
  www.ted.com/talks/capt_charles_moore_on_the_seas_of_plastic.html
  Charles Moore draws attention to the growing, choking problem of plastic debris in our seas.

- **The True Cost of Food.** (2005). Documentary. 15 min.
  www.sierraclub.org/truecostoffood/video/tcof_hi.mov
  What are the hidden costs in the food we eat?

- **Photos of Species Closest to Extinction 2013.**

- **The Gathering Storm Film Series: Africa & Asia.** (2013). Documentary Film Series.
  www.irinnews.org/film/4123/3/The-Gathering-Storm-Africa/Highland-Malaria
  Click on short videos along bottom of screen (each one is between 2-5 min.) List of videos under Africa include: “Highland Malaria,” “Harvesting Rain,” “Drip Irrigation,” “Coastal Erosion,” “Shifting Sands,” “Charcoal Forests,” “Creeping Deserts,” “Flooding Rivers,” “Escaping Floods,” and “Mountain Drought.”
  A series of short films revealing the impacts of climate change on poor communities in Africa and Asia.
WEEK THREE: ANIMAL PROTECTION

  
  Explores our current use of animals.

- **PBS Nature: The Emotional World of Farm Animals.** (2004). Documentary. 51 min. www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5qDloKW7vM
  
  A film about the thinking and feeling side of animals used as food.

  
  A presentation about the ethical issues confronted by animal agri-business.

  
  A wonderful TED talk that draws connections between the environment, humans, and nonhuman animals.

  
  Government biomedical research chimps experience the outdoors for the first time.

WEEK FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

  
  An introduction to modern day slavery worldwide.

The title says it all.

• Aaron Huey: America’s Native Prisoners of War. (2010). TEDx talk. 15 min.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nv7n5jhrHGQ

Aaron Huey’s haunting photographs intertwine with a shocking history lesson of native Lakota people.


Please watch the first seven stories at: http://heroicimagination.org/resources/video-library/stories-of-heroism/

Stories of people who are working as solutionaries and practicing everyday heroism.

WEEK FIVE: CULTURE AND CHANGE


www.ted.com/talks/chris_jordan_pictures_some_shocking_stats.html

Artist Chris Jordan presents an arresting view of some Western culture statistics.


A look into the portrayal of women in advertising.

• Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity. (1999). Documentary. 85 min. www.youtube.com/watch?v=np2PP76_PxQ

A look into the impact of American media on masculine identities
WEEK SIX: BE A SOLUTIONARY

- **Wangari Maathai: I Will Be a Hummingbird.** (n.d.). Short film. 2 min.
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWMW6YWjMxw
  An inspiring message from Wangari Maathai about facing challenges.

- **The Junky Car Club.** (n.d.). OWN Original Short Film. 1 min.
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLneSQtfUhY
  Mike Foster explains how he is making a difference with the car he drives.

- **Craig Kielburger: Free the Children Project.** (2010). Short Film. 7 min.
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0ky-VMHi9fI
  A network of children helping children through education and development projects around the world.

- **Majora Carter: Greening the Ghetto.** (2006). TED talk. 18 min.
  www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_s_tale_of_urban_renewal.html
  Majora Carter details her fight for environmental justice in the South Bronx.

- **Kartick Satyanarayan: How We Rescued the Dancing Bears.** (2009). TED talk. 4 min.
  www.ted.com/talks/kartick_satyanarayan_how_we_rescued_the_dancing_bears.html
  How hundreds of bears in India were rescued from illegal captivity and forced entertainment.

3. Articles

**WEEK TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION**

WEEK THREE: ANIMAL PROTECTION


WEEK FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

  18 April 2012:
  http://gleaner.rutgers.edu/2012/04/18/sweatshops-and-child-labor-the-price-of-fashion/

WEEK FIVE: CULTURE AND CHANGE

  http://ecologist.testing.net-genie.co.uk/investigations/society/83793/born_to_shop.html

4. Songs

WEEK ONE: INTRO. TO MOGO

- Black Eyed Peas: “Where is the Love” (with corresponding video at:
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc)

WEEK TWO: ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION

- Counting Crows: “Big Yellow Taxi” (listen to song with lyrics at:
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVD6_BGV8mM)

- Jack Johnson: “Gone” (listen to song with lyrics at:
  www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XRNPi37kHU)
WEEK THREE: ANIMAL PROTECTION

- Laura Nyro: “Lite a Flame: The Animal Liberation Song” (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3u3sAJcrQFY)

WEEK FOUR: HUMAN RIGHTS

- Bruce Hornsby: “The Way It Is” (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOeKidp-iWo)
- Dave Matthews Band: “Don’t Drink the Water” (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFbFwmIKlqM)

WEEK FIVE: CULTURE AND CHANGE

- Lee Coulter: “I Would Love” (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL8rpym_OO8)
- Chris Daughtry: “What About Now” (with corresponding video at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=roDXSHSEuoo)

WEEK SIX: BE A SOLUTIONARY

- Ben Harper: “With My Own Two Hands” (with corresponding video and lyrics at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1LchBxn0pw)

E. Assignment Guidelines

1. Submitting Assignments
Please submit all assignments on the Blackboard discussion board by the appointed date and time each week. All assignments should follow MLA referencing style (in-text citations and Works Cited) and be in Times New Roman, 12 point font, and single spaced. If you have any additional questions about submitting assignments, please contact me directly via email.

2. Late Assignments & Incompletes

All work must be submitted by the appointed date and time each week for proper credit. However, if you have an emergency that threatens your ability to submit an assignment on time, please contact me directly (in advance if possible) so that we can work out a solution. It is always a good idea not to wait until the last minute to submit work just in case you have technical problems such as internet connectivity or a power outage.

If you are unable to complete the course due to an illness or an extended emergency, please contact me immediately to request an Incomplete. Since this course is only six weeks long, you must notify me by the end of Week Five, or your final grade will be an F. Please know that my goal is to see everyone succeed and I will support you in any way that I can throughout the semester. If a problem/challenge arises that is impacting your ability to participate, contact me so that together, we can find a solution.

3. Deadlines

As noted earlier, all assignments must be submitted on Blackboard by the appointed day and time each week. This course begins on a Monday which means that all postings must be submitted by midnight EST on the following Sunday (six days later). Any assignments that are not submitted by the appointed deadline each week will receive a zero unless prior arrangements
have been made with the instructor. Please email me directly for any questions or concerns regarding deadlines for this course.

F. Writing, Research, and Referencing

1. MLA Referencing

All assignments must be submitted using MLA referencing. Using and citing reputable references will help ensure that your work is one of precision and intellectual integrity. If you use a direct quote, paraphrase, or cite specific information that is not common knowledge, please provide the source, whether it is from one of the course readings or from another source. In-text citations as well as a Works Cited list should be included at the end of all assignments. You can find more information about MLA referencing at: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/.

2. Plagiarism

All students are expected to uphold the Honor Code in this course. Please visit Valparaiso’s honor council webpage for more information on the honor code, plagiarism, student resources, frequently asked questions, and tips on how to use citations correctly: http://www.valpo.edu/student/honorcouncil/index.php.

G. Sexist/Speciesist/Biased Language

While sexist and speciesist language is commonly considered legitimate usage in the English language, I would like to encourage your awareness of it during this course. For example, the words “mankind” and “man” are used routinely to mean “humankind” and “humanity.” So, too, is the pronoun “he” used regularly to refer to individuals whose sex is
unknown. Speciesist language is also ubiquitous and tends to exclude and/or objectify nonhuman animals by referring to them as “it,” “that,” or “thing” instead of “she,” “he,” or “they.” Another common bias in language is assuming that people are of the dominant ethnicity, religion, and race when referring to them in the abstract and only identifying these categories when they are in a minority group. I invite you to recognize the power of language and how it can shape and impact perceptions and behaviors, especially when used in sexist, speciesist, and biased ways.

H. Building Community Online

This introductory course in humane education covers a variety of sensitive and controversial topics that may generate strong emotions and reactions. When posting on the discussion board, please practice MOGO (most good/least harm) communication by using kind, respectful, and non-judgmental words. Any comments that fall below this standard may be edited or deleted by the instructor. We can create a rich and inviting discussion forum for everyone this semester by making positive and supportive communication our goal!

I. Assessment of Student Work

1. Guidelines for Grading Student Work

   All writing is expected to be college level: clear, well thought out, and well-articulated. Please make certain that you edit your assignments for organization, grammar, spelling, and by clearly distinguishing opinion from fact and avoiding generalizations. In addition, specific examples are very useful in supporting and clarifying your points. The following questions provide a guide for faculty when determining a student’s grade:

   • Did the student complete the work as requested?
• Did the student show evidence of critical thinking and deep reflection?
• Did the student show evidence of reading and referencing the course material?
• Did the student tie in outside resources and draw connections between issues?
• Did the student demonstrate college level writing skills?

2. Grading Rubric/Assessment

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS:

• Part A: 25%
• Part B: 25%
• Part C Music & Lyric Analysis: 10%
• Responding to Peers: 20%

FINAL PROJECT: 20%

TOTAL: 100%

DISCUSSION FORUM GUIDELINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>SATISFACTORY</th>
<th>BELOW STANDARD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contribution to the Learning Community</td>
<td>assignment postings make thoughtful references to the course materials, connections to personal experiences, and demonstrate critical thinking in response to the guiding questions appropriate MLA referencing is used in all work (in-text citations and works cited list)</td>
<td>postings include some reference to course materials but lack critical reflection and connection with personal experiences appropriate MLA referencing is used in all work</td>
<td>postings do not reference or communicate understanding of the course materials, MLA referencing is not used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Responses to Peers

|                      | contributes thoughtfully, meaningfully, and respectfully to the learning community by responding to two or more peers with specific reactions, posing thoughtful questions, and engaging others in course material | contributes to the learning community by responding to at least two peers with specific reactions but lacks thoughtful questions and engaging others in course material | does not contribute to the learning community by responding to peers |

Promptness

|                      | both original post and responses to peers are on time | the original post is submitted on time but responses to peers are past the deadline | both original post and responses to peers are past the deadline |

J. Instructor/Course Assessment

The following instructor/course assessment will be available for each student to complete during the final week of the course:

- What was your favorite aspect about this course?
- What is one way that the materials in this course could be improved?
- What assignment did you like the most in this course?
- What assignment did you like the least in this course?
- Would live phone/internet salons where an assignment is discussed among classmates and instructor (in replace of an essay) be a positive addition to this course?
• Did you feel that the BB discussion forums were a safe, respectful, welcoming and helpful community in which to express your thoughts, feelings, and questions?
• Did you feel that the instructor was knowledgeable, understanding and fair?
• Did you feel supported by the instructor during this course?
• Would you recommend this course to others? Why or why not?

K. About Instructor Stacey Newland

1. Brief Biography

I live in the picturesque Northeast Kingdom of Vermont with my partner David and our two rescue cats: Sir Timothy and Nuttah. I have a Master’s degree in Humane Education from Valparaiso University and a Bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Johnson State College. In addition to teaching online undergraduate courses, I am the co-founder and executive director of Old Stone Orchard: a community pick-your-own orchard currently under development that will supply the local area with organic fruits (apples, pears, plums, blueberries, golden raspberries, and heirloom tomatoes) that are grown using the permaculture principles of sustainability, thoughtful planning, and integration into nature. In my spare time, I love to bike, kayak, sing, rollerblade, and Nordic ski. I also enjoy volunteering for various MOGO causes any chance that I get! Whether it is organizing donations at a local food shelf, picking up trash along the road while I exercise, or using my voice to sign petitions to help animals or raise awareness about environmental issues, I love to practice acting as a solutionary in small but meaningful ways every single day.

2. Contact Information
The quickest way to contact me is via email. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have throughout the semester. Whether you are confused about an assignment, concerned about a deadline, or have questions about the course material, I am here to help and support you!

L. Technology

1. Computer Requirements

The Valpo minimum computer requirements are intended to ensure that the equipment you are using to access your online class and other technology services meets any software requirements for the current academic year. Computer equipment recommendations represent what Valpo considers to be the ideal system configuration for a computer that is expected to support you through your academic program. For the most recent minimum computer requirements please go to: valpo.edu/it/techsvc/recommendations.php.

As an online student, you will be required to have an Internet connection to access class materials. Additionally, you should have a back-up plan in case your Internet connection goes down. Make sure you know of a local library, friend, or coffee shop that can serve as your connection in a pinch.

2. Blackboard

Most online courses at Valpo are supported by Blackboard courseware. In order to gain access, you will need a computer set up that meets minimal requirements, an internet connection, browser, software, and Valpo Mail. More detailed information about the required hardware and software is available online at the Information Technology Blackboard instructions page. All of your course materials, assignments, and interactions with your instructor and classmates will take
place in Blackboard. You can access Blackboard Learn using a web browser at https://blackboard.valpo.edu. You will need to know your ValpoNet login and password. For more information on the Blackboard Learn course management system visit: valpo.edu/it/current/blackboard/student.

3. IT Help Desk

   The IT Help Desk is your first point of contact for any technology related issues or questions you may have. The Help Desk can assist with most challenges you may encounter on your personal computer, either Mac or PC. They can solve many different technology related problems, and can help you get connected with the right people if you have more advanced technical issues. You will find information on how to reach them under the Valpo Resources listed below.

M. Valpo Resources

- DataVU / WebAdvisor

   DataVU is the web interface for students, faculty and staff to access the campus Student Information System. Students can register for classes, view final grades, access student account information and more.

   http://datavu.valpo.edu/

- Information Technology / Help Desk

   IT.Helpdesk@valpo.edu

   Phone: (219) 464-5678

   Fax: (219) 464-5056

   http://www.valpo.edu/it/index.php
• Campus Directory
  http://www.valpo.edu/about_valpo/people.php

• Department of Education
  http://www.valpo.edu/education/index.php

• Email / GroupWise Web Access
  GroupWise is the email system for students, faculty and staff.
  http://www.valpo.edu/it/current/groupwise/

• Financial Aid
  1700 Chapel Drive; Valparaiso, IN 46383
  finaid@valpo.edu
  Phone: 219-464-5015
  Toll Free: 1-888-GO.VALPO
  Fax: 219-464-5012
  federal school code: 001842
  http://www.valpo.edu/financialaid/

• Registrar
  Office of the Registrar
  Kretzmann Hall, Rm 102
  1700 Chapel Drive
  registrar@valpo.edu
  Phone: (219) 464-5212
  Fax: (219) 464-6684
  http://www.valpo.edu/registrar/index.php
• Virtual Tour of Valparaiso University
  Photos and descriptions of campus buildings and facilities.
  http://www.valpo.edu/virtualtour/

• Writing Center
  Help is available for distance learning students!
  http://www.valpo.edu/writingcenter/index.php

• Library Services
  http://library.valpo.edu/index.html
VI. WORKS CITED


Pitz, Marylynne. “Dickinson College to Change Sexual Assault Policy After Sit-In.”


CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This thesis project, *Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making*, addresses the need for spreading the humane education message to undergraduate students by producing the first online undergraduate elective course in humane education. Since the principles that make up humane education focus on making daily decisions that do the most good and the least harm to the environment, humans, and nonhuman animals as well as preparing and empowering people to step up and become solutionaries to solve the local and global challenges of their time, this course is a critical step in the direction of awakening young adults to their own role in creating a more just, compassionate, and humane world.

In order to create the most productive and efficient online undergraduate course in humane education, I researched the characteristics of online course curricula and instructional methods that have proved the most effective and provided the best possible outcomes for online participants. The results show three critical areas that must be addressed in order to provide effective teaching in an online environment: course design, interaction between class participants, and instructor preparation and support (Crawford-Ferre and Wiest).

Within the area of online course design, researchers stress the importance of interactive, student-centered assignments (Lowry), course designs that take into account the emotional processes of students so that negative emotional experiences do not impair their learning (Reilly, Gallagher-Lepak and Killion), and making course content relevant to students’ lives in order to maximize their motivation and persistence (Park and Choi). Within the area of student interaction, research shows that when courses are a combination of instructor-centered and student-centered, it encourages both student and instructor to take responsibility for the success of the course and to share ideas through meaningful online interactions, thereby resulting in
improved learning (Nandi, Hamilton, and Harland). Finally, within the area of instructor presence and support, student attrition and retention can be influenced by the amount of support they feel from instructors as well as by their educational institution in general (Park and Choi).

I then researched the use of music as an educational tool in teaching difficult topics (such as those found within the field of humane education) and found that music can indeed be a powerful entry point for students as it can affect them on a more personal and heartfelt level than a textbook or lecture alone. It can also provide students with a more intimate and fascinating record of cultural shifts, societal trends, and historical events through the thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and attitudes of those living during a particular era (Moats and Poxon).

The introductory course in human education *Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making* was then developed with these research findings in mind. The course offers a variety of interactive assignments including field trips, interviews, and journal entries as well as film festivals and music in an effort to nurture a creative and inspiring online environment for students with varying learning styles.

A conscious effort was also made to provide students with mentorship and instructor support throughout the semester by including weekly audio recordings outlining materials and assignments to provide a more personal online atmosphere, optional virtual mentoring “chats” between instructor and student, and weekly “check-in” emails from instructor to offer support. These efforts should provide students with a more personal connection and a greater sense of community overall, thereby lowering feelings of isolation and disconnection as online participants.

Finally, the course content itself has an undeniable relevance and direct connection to each and every individual. Humane education is specifically designed to unlock a student’s
potential to create solutions to real world problems while simultaneously developing their spiritual, emotional, and mental growth through living consciously and purposefully, thereby making course content student-focused and student-centered by its very nature. This in turn, will limit student attrition by maximizing student motivation and persistence.

**Challenges/Surprises**

There were several personal challenges that I faced during the creation of this thesis project. First, I was completely naïve to the amount of time, focus, and energy that is required to design an online undergraduate course. Perhaps the development of this particular course was especially challenging due to the expansive view within the field of humane education; creating an undergraduate course that encourages awareness of an individual’s role in perpetuating unsustainable and unjust systems that impact the environment, humans, and nonhuman animals on a local and global scale is no easy task. What’s more, the main goal of this course was simply to present an introduction to humane education, an objective which left me struggling on many occasions to rein in substantial numbers of course materials, simplify discussion topics covering extremely complex issues, and peel back layers of ideas and concepts to settle on weekly assignments that stay true to the core principles of humane education.

Second, due to the psychologically challenging material found within humane education which covers both human and animal exploitation and suffering as well as environmental degradation and destruction on a mass scale, I was sometimes left torn in my decision of which films, articles, and books I wanted to expose students to. My understanding of this fine line between empowering and motivating versus depressing students comes from personal experience. During my time as a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Humane Education...
program through Valparaiso University, I was often overwhelmed and severely emotionally taxed by some of the disturbing images and content found within required course materials. For example, gruesome depictions of animal suffering and death for the purpose of human gain, be it factory farming, experimentation/vivisection, or entertainment, can be a traumatic reality to accept. There was even a point when I considered quitting the program because hopelessness and despair began to take over any feelings of inspiration and motivation to create a better world.

This is why a concerted effort has been made throughout the development of this thesis project to raise awareness about unjust and unsustainable systems with course materials that seek to awaken, motivate, and inspire while simultaneously providing examples of individuals who are working as solutionaries to tackle these overwhelming challenges worldwide, with the intention of instilling hope instead of fostering despair. I now realize after designing this undergraduate course and taking into consideration my own experience as a student of humane education, that this will continue to be one of the greatest challenges I will face as a humane educator moving forward.

Conclusions

As the first online undergraduate humane education course in history, Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making is a tremendous accomplishment. I am excited to announce that I will be piloting this thesis project in the summer of 2013 through Valparaiso University as an online undergraduate elective course. Upon completion of this, I will then propose the course to local Vermont colleges in an effort to incorporate humane education into their undergraduate curricula and broaden my own career opportunities as a humane educator. Additionally, it is my hope that this course will initiate the launch of an entire undergraduate
degree program devoted to the study of humane education. I would truly love to be a part of this endeavor by designing additional undergraduate courses in humane education relating to animal protection, human rights, environmental preservation, and/or culture and change. Ideally, my future career will be teaching online undergraduate humane education courses that are informative, inspiring, motivating, supportive, creative, and life-changing for students.

As stated earlier, we live in a world of increasing challenges and complications, most of which are not being addressed by our current system of schooling. Students must be encouraged to develop an awareness of the far-reaching effects of their daily decisions and learn to draw a web between themselves and the injustices that they see in the world. This in turn will empower and motivate them to become solutionaries through conscious choice-making and allow them the opportunity to create, offer, and implement positive, viable, and sustainable ideas to solve the urgent challenges that we face as a global community. College-age students especially, with their passion, life energy, and innate desire for change, are natural solutionaries and when given the tools, knowledge, and opportunity to stand up and make a difference, can accomplish truly remarkable achievements. This passion, creativity, and energy cannot continue to be ignored and/or squandered. It must be lifted up, encouraged, fostered, and even expected in order to begin reversing the harmful effects of unsustainable and unjust systems currently being perpetuated by every graduating class.

Indeed, this is the power and promise of humane education which is why it is my hope that *Most Good, Least Harm: The Power of Conscious Choice-Making* will become a resource and a reference point for educators in a variety of fields so that the concepts and values found within humane education can be implemented into every college classroom. Again, when undergraduates apply this new-found knowledge of solutionary thinking to their chosen career
field in business, medicine, law, politics, social work, music, art, etc. and begin their personal journey as agents of change, our world will begin to reflect the deep-seated values inherent to all of humanity.

In closing, whether we realize it or not, human beings have the opportunity right now to change the story of who we are and what our legacy will be on this planet. We can do this by sharing in the vision that helping the planet and all of its inhabitants thrive should be the very purpose of education. As far-reaching as it may seem, this vision is not impossible, far from it. We need only the perspective, the belief in ourselves and each other, and the passion and willingness to make it so. In the words of Sharif Abdullah, author of *Creating a World That Works for All*:

> People always enact the story given to them by their culture, whether the enactment causes benefit or harm to themselves and others. If the story is beneficial and sustainable, people will enact it. If the story is or becomes dysfunctional, they will still enact it, at their peril and the peril of others. People will enact any story, including a dysfunctional one, until given a better alternative.

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This thesis project is a small but crucial step in the direction of turning our current dysfunctional story into one of sustainability, compassion, and peace for all.
WORKS CITED


Reilly, Janet, Susan Gallagher-Lepak, and Cheryl Killion. “Me and My Computer: Emotional
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