**Incorporating Environmental Justice as Part of a Holistic Approach to Environmental Science Courses**

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**At the beginning of my professional career, I worked for an environmental consulting firm investigating hazardous waste sites throughout the Midwest. I subsequently worked for the Illinois State Geological Survey investigating human-induced and natural environmental hazards. During more than eight years of work as an environmental professional, I observed the impact a general lack of awareness regarding human activities could have on the environment. This lack of awareness resulted in poor containment of hazardous substances and, ultimately, the release of those substances into the environment. Some of the most egregious instances I observed impacted low income and minority communities where developers emphasized the need for jobs and minimized discussion of negative impacts in order to ensure placement of facilities.**

**I sought a position at a community college, initially as an adjunct and then full-time, in order to raise students’ awareness about environmental issues that would impact their lives. I developed a course in environmental geology wherein students research the area around their home and report their findings as a capstone project. In my environmental science course, we begin the semester by investigating what science can and cannot address and proceed to discussions of how ethics, economics, and politics impact environmental decision-making. We then analyze specific environmental issues that are in the news or impact our local area, and we use science, ethics, economics, and politics to develop an understanding of each topic and to evaluate possible solutions.**

**Environmental justice is a thread that runs through many of the issues we explore in both environmental geology and environmental science. While science courses often focus on how the natural environment works, the “environmental” sciences must include discussions of ethics, economics, and politics in order to develop a more holistic understanding of human interactions with the natural world. I see environmental justice as the complex intersection of those three areas and its incorporation into my courses as a way to develop students’ appreciation of the intricate web surrounding many environmental issues.**

**Science helps us understand the nature of environmental concerns from flooding to groundwater contamination. An examination of environmental justice aspects shed light on why low income and minority communities are more likely to be subject to those concerns. Combining science with environmental justice encourages students to think critically about those concerns and their impacts on people who may lack the means to deal with them effectively.**