**Environmental Justice as a Strategy for Student Engagement**

During the past six years, I have taught introductory Environmental Science at an urban public university in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Metropolitan State University was founded with a mission to make higher education available to students from low-income, first-generation, and under-served minority populations. Most of the students in this course are adult learners, often first-generation college students, often from low-income areas of the Twin Cities. Many (37%) identify as racial and ethnic minorities, with large representation of recent immigrant groups from Somalia, Laos, west Africa, and eastern Europe.

My pedagogic approach to this course has always included the introduction of Environmental Justice as a through-going theme, and treatment of Environmental Justice has become one of my key criteria in textbook selection. Following an introduction to Environmental Justice and a sampling of issues and examples, the rich diversity of my students becomes a primary resource for the EJ content of this course. The final class sessions of the term are devoted to student presentations on term projects of their choosing. Students can opt for solo or small group presentations. Typically, one third of each section (sections are capped at 24 students) will develop a presentation topic that touches on the intersections of environmental quality with race, class, gender, or international policy. The majority of these will have a personal connection to the region or the people that their cases describe.

Each semester’s student presentations add to my knowledge of global EJ cases and concerns, enriching future semesters’ learning outcomes. Student-researched topics for this course have included:

* Niger Delta Oil Development
* Shoshone Land and Nuclear Contamination
* Uranium Mining on Navajo Land
* Native Americans and Yucca Mountain
* Illegal dumping and toxic Wastes on the Somali Coast
* Inuit Lives and Arctic Melting
* Trash Incinerators, Low -Income Neighborhoods, and Asthma Rates –Minneapolis and the Bronx
* Acid Mine Drainage in Romania.
* Chernobyl –Health Outcomes for Radiation-Exposed Ukrainians
* Bangladesh and Rising Sea Level
* Indigenous Land Rights and Jamaican Bauxite Mining
* Australian Bauxite and Aboriginal Land
* Ojibway Food Sovereignty – an example from Ontario
* Air Quality Surrounding a 10,000 Unit Hog Farm, SW Minnesota

In course evaluation forms, students frequently cite learning about these cases as some of the most important content in contributing to their sense of being well-informed global citizens.

In large part as a result of my students’ interests in Environmental Justice, I have been developing additional materials for students in other environmentally-themed courses I teach, which include Environmental Geology, Global Climate Change, and Earth Surface Processes.

This curriculum development has in turn led me to become a far more engaged citizen-scientist in a specific Minnesota case involving the Prairie Island Indian Community and Xcel Energy’s Prairie Island Nuclear Generating Plant (PINGP). Prairie Island is a low-lying floodplain island in the Mississippi River, 60 km from the Twin Cities (55km from Northfield). The Nuclear Generating Plant is in close proximity to homes and schools of the Prairie Island Indian Community (PIIC). Although the PIIC originally partnered with the power company (then Northern States Power) as a stake-holder in the PINGP, more recently the Community has protested both the re-commissioning of the plant in 2011, and more recently, the expansion of on-site spent waste storage from 17 to 98 casks.