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***Laudato Si'* and the *Consumption Challenge*: Giving Students a Visceral Exercise in Saving Our Planet**

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Abstract

Laudato Si' is arguably the most comprehensive, powerful, and influential manifesto in the canon of environment stewardship. Pope Francis calls for nothing short of upending our consumer culture in the service of saving the planet. Gandhi's plea to "live simply so that others may simply live" is the Pope's ultimate admonition in his encyclical and the essence of his call to action on behalf of human survival. The following discussion highlights an innovative and powerful classroom experience pioneered in one of Regis University's capstone interdisciplinary seminars. The transformational learning outcomes of this *Consumption Challenge* (the name of the assignment) eclipsed all reasonable expectations and delivered to its students a visceral connection to what Pope Francis is asking from us in *Laudato Si'*. Furthermore, the basic structure of this experiential course assignment can be used across all disciplines in Jesuit higher education. The authors offer this exercise as a tested and proven vehicle for bringing to our students the critical hopes, expectations, and personal challenges of the Pope's historic encyclical.

Introduction

Every now and again we try something new in one of our courses, are satisfied with the results, and begin adding modified and enhanced versions to future class offerings. On the rare occasion we try something new, we are overwhelmed by the proliferation of outcomes and learnings — mostly unplanned and unexpected — that keep flowing from what started as a modest experiment, and evolve to an overflowing fountain of awakening and transformation.

The latter happy discovery is how we would modestly categorize the impact of assigning the *Consumption Challenge* to a class of juniors and seniors in one of the required interdisciplinary seminars that capstone their learning experiences at Regis University. Inspired by the release and widespread dissemination of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* in May of 2015, the *Consumption Challenge* asks each student to focus on and contemplate the most daring and challenging

mandate in the Pope's encyclical: the necessity of changing human behaviors as a condition for saving the planet. Before presenting the rather simple and economical frame for this powerful exercise — its results and its applicability across the curriculum — we discuss how the students tackled this rich text as the foundation for this exercise. Then we reflect on the role of rampant consumerism in our current economic culture as voiced in *Laudato Si'*. Following that we review the numerous and substantive references in *Laudato Si'* where the Pope's eloquence and repetition make his call to "live simply" the clarion message of the encyclical.

Tackling the Text

Laudato Si' can seem daunting to undergraduates and even to their professors. Our experience, using the text each semester, is that more and more of it becomes underlined and annotated. There is a lot there. So, how do the students not get lost in the details and the quotable phrases in

every paragraph? We start by asking the students to consider why the Pope was moved to write this encyclical. What is the message? What is the tone? How does the language contribute to the message? Then we ask whether or not it is reasonable for the Pope to address “every person living on this planet.”¹ This discussion is lively. Students, both Catholic and not, generally decide that the Pope is a respected world figurehead whose writings are worthy of consideration and whose message is urgent. Then we proceed to pull out the themes of the document by asking the students to write a one-word theme on the board. Each student then illustrates, by reading from the encyclical, the content defined by her theme. Finally she shares why she chose this theme rather than another. This is a good way to pull out the important ideas — consumerism, climate change, the economics of greed, and the call to action — that support the *Consumption Challenge*. Finally, the students discuss a newsreel filmed shortly after the release of the encyclical to highlight both its importance and its controversial nature, in the U.S. in particular. This illustrates to the students that this document is not just a dusty academic treatise for the leaders of the Catholic Church, but an important element in the lively discussion of “how ought we to live.”

Consumer Culture and its Consequences

At its very essence *Laudato Si'* is a condemnation of the culture of greed and materialism, a culture that has been developing over the decades. We live in a shopping culture. As early as 1955, Victor Lebow argued that economic productivity made it necessary to “make consumption our way of life,” going even so far as to say that “the very meaning and significance of our lives today” are defined by consumption.² Indeed, we often engage in material pursuits as a way to signal our identities and status, which can lead to “conspicuous consumption,” or the purchase of unnecessary luxuries.³ Statistics show that we have embraced this “way of life” without thinking much about the cost of “conspicuous consumption” to our natural environment. Fien, Neil and Bentley tell us: “In fact, humankind has consumed more natural resources in the past five decades than in all previous human history.”⁴ Still, many economists consider shopping the key to economic health. A recent article in *The Denver Post* reported that “President Obama met with Federal Reserve

Chair Janet Yellen on Monday to discuss the U.S. economy amid signs that growth may be slowing as consumers retreat from spending.”⁵ In an economy that is 70 percent consumption (as the U.S. economy is), consumer spending to economists is simply a surrogate for economic growth; it is decidedly not a moral issue. Jesuit social teaching sees things differently. In his celebrated address to American Jesuit colleges and universities in 2000, Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. (then Superior General of the Society of Jesus), dismissed the amorality of contemporary economic thought: “Every discipline, beyond its necessary specialization, must engage with human society, human life, and the environment in appropriate ways, cultivating moral concern about how people ought to live together.”⁶ And Pope Francis quotes Benedict XVI in *Laudato Si'*, “Purchasing is always a moral — not simply economic — act.”⁷

In an age of climate change, consumption *is* a moral act. Economics as usual is a call for more consumption-driven economic growth. Economists must begin to acknowledge that this system, driven by an insatiable grasping for more, is killing the planet. In addition, contemporary psychological research documents that the quest for more is also poisoning our souls and choking out our capacity for flourishing. Although some individuals believe that the acquisition of material goods will help them achieve major life goals, success, and a state of happiness, psychologists and economists now have reams of data showing that our continued quest for status in a material world does not satisfy.⁸ For example, materialistic pursuits may adversely affect relationships and long-term well-being.⁹ Such findings have important implications because they confirm that reduced consumption is good for the health of the planet *and* positive for psychological health. Taking care of the planet is not a sacrifice; it is an opportunity.¹⁰

Now we turn to the Pope’s explicit and forceful call to reject this frenzy of consumption.

The Pope’s Call to Live Simply

If there is one caveat that Pope Francis restates with abundant clarity, it is his forceful assertion that we human beings must change if the earth is

to survive as a habitat for human life: “Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change.”¹¹ He further suggests what change must look like: “Christian spirituality ... encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of obsessions and consumptions. We need to take up an ancient lesson ... ‘less is more.’”¹² And he offers this mandate in a positive light — not as a great sacrifice of our happiness, but rather as a source of greater fulfillment: “Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full.”¹³ Pope Francis questions economic and political systems that glorify growth and consumption above all else, noting that it is time for “politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life,” which will entail a “rejection of the magical concept of the market.”¹⁴ “The rhythms of nature” have been “gravely upset” by a system where “profits alone count.”¹⁵ Finally, Pope Francis asks why “economic interests easily end up trumping the common good,” why “economic powers continue to justify ... the pursuit of financial gain” without considering “the effects on human dignity and the natural environment?”¹⁶ And he calls us to “decisive action” that rejects “rampant individualism,” “instant gratification,” and “impulsive and wasteful consumption.”¹⁷

We close this section on a positive theme. Living simply is not, by any means, the end to living with joy. Indeed, Pope Francis implies the opposite may be true. To begin with, “our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart.”¹⁸ Happiness and contentment are neither achieved nor elevated by one’s propensity to consume with reckless abandon, or even to consume beyond the realm of satisfying the means to enjoy the simple blessings of life. In our Pope’s words, “There is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dew drop, in a poor person’s face.”¹⁹ The simple life, unblemished by ravenous cravings, may be the only road to contentment and to enjoying life with the same quiet resignation as do the “lilies of the field and the birds of the air.”²⁰

The *Consumer Challenge*: Asking Students to Stretch and Change

The *Consumer Challenge* calls upon students to contemplate the profound essence of *Laudato Si'*, to think about where they personally fit in this culture of waste and environmental degradation, and to choose a step or steps that they can take over the course of the semester to lessen their personal negative impacts on the environment. In this section we present the formal assignment for the *Challenge* (taken from the course outline), the learning objectives of the assignment, the innovative features of the program that we believe were instrumental to its success, and the applicability across the curriculum.

Assignment for the *Consumption Challenge*

“Each student will pick one way to reduce her/his consumption this semester. There are a number of ideas to get you thinking about this in paragraph 211 of Pope Francis’s encyclical. Also, changing your diet, specifically reducing or eliminating meat consumption, can make a big impact on your carbon footprint. You may also take on a challenge of your own choosing that’s equally difficult for you personally given your current habits. If you are already a vegetarian, it obviously isn’t in the spirit of the challenge to choose a moratorium on meat. Think about your weaknesses and yet what you think is achievable for you. Write an essay explaining which challenge you are choosing and why you are choosing it.”

After choosing a challenge, the students were instructed to blog regularly about their progress. This reflective practice, a model of Ignatian pedagogy, gives students the opportunity to “get in the habit of linking and constructing meaning from their experience.”²¹ This is critical to establishing conscious habits rather than having this challenge be simply a game of sorts — just meeting a challenge for the sake of the challenge. Here is that part of the assignment:

“As we go throughout the semester, blog at least once a week about your

temptations, successes, and failures with respect to your challenge. What are you learning? Why is your challenge easy or difficult? How often do you think about your challenge? What would make sticking to your challenge easier? How are the people you associate with responding to your challenge?”

Finally, students were told that they would have regular opportunities to debrief their experiences with other members of the class, thereby learning from the perspectives of others and helping process their own personal challenges through an open sharing of successes, frustrations, and revelations. Both the blogging and debriefing exercises helped to keep the goals salient and hold students accountable both to themselves and to their peers. As social beings, we care deeply about how others perceive us, and if we've made a commitment in public, we're more likely to follow-through.²²

Learning Objectives of the *Consumption Challenge*

While we did not codify explicit learning goals, we know that reflection can be a powerful tool. In hindsight, using qualitative content analysis of the students' blogs, we uncovered major themes that suggest several learning objectives based on our experience with the assignment:

1. To become aware of the impact of major lifestyle choices on the environment, notably on global warming, carbon footprint, and resource scarcity.
2. To become knowledgeable about the relative impacts and threats that specific lifestyle choices have on the environment, including the impacts from diet, transportation, lodging, packaging, water usage, and profligate consumption in all its forms.
3. To gain visceral experience in making changes to reduce adverse impacts on the environment.
4. To raise broad awareness around both individual and societal lifestyle choices in the context of environmental sustainability.

Innovative Aspects of the Program

We were surprised by the enthusiasm and commitment with which students embraced the *Consumption Challenge*. We believe this eager reception to the challenge derives from several features of the assignment that engendered ownership and commitment:

1. Students were offered choice. According to Deci and Ryan, students are more motivated to participate in their education when they feel that they are autonomous and have choices.²³ While all of the students read the same inspiration for change in *Laudato Si'*, they were invited to select steps that were isomorphic with their personal circumstances and sensibilities. If a student decided to eschew eating meat, that decision was personal and was informed by personal interest, personal assessment of the challenge, and personal commitment to follow through.
2. Everyone was encouraged to stretch. While motivation is enhanced when students believe that they can succeed in an activity, students often find assignments most intrinsically rewarding and learn the most when they are simultaneously challenged and believe that they can overcome that challenge.²⁴ Thus, students who were already seasoned vegans were expected to stretch in a non-dietary category of sustainable behaviors, such as in transportation or water conservation. Students who were already commuting by foot or public transit were expected to choose a non-transportation category, such as diet or product packaging. Everyone could select a stretch challenge that was appropriate for where they were on the scale of sustainable behaviors.
3. Everyone was given a common foundation of information (all read *Laudato Si'*) and encouraged to reflect on that common knowledge and go from there. The call to “live more simply” meant different things to different people, but everyone understood the Pope's general plea to walk a bit more lightly in our “common home.”

4. Reflection was central to the learning milieu. The *Consumption Challenge* was ultimately a model assignment in experiential education. The depth and breadth of learning from experience (from an experiential education assignment) evolves from reflection — both written and oral reflection. The regular blogging brought out many of the deepest discoveries from this written reflection process, and the oral debriefs helped individuals synthesize their experiences and make them deeply personal. Hearing oneself say out loud “I am changed by this experience” gives that statement a truth far more powerful than thinking it or even writing it. The combination of written and oral reflection led to the *Consumption Challenge* being a transformative and life-changing experience for many if not most of the participants. Indeed, experience, reflection, and action lie at the core of Ignatian pedagogy.

Application Across the Curriculum

In order to be truly influential, pedagogical tools should be adaptable to a range of courses and disciplines. Given the centrality of the Pope’s encyclical to Jesuit values more broadly, and given that blogs provide a modern way for students to engage in the Ignatian practice of reflection, we believe that the *Laudato Si'* gives almost every Jesuit university faculty member a license to bring a *Consumption Challenge* into their courses.

The Pope explicitly challenges us to engage in interdisciplinary solutions: “The fragmentation of knowledge ... often leads us to a loss of appreciation for the whole... these problems cannot be dealt with from a single perspective or from a single set of interests.”²⁵ To engage students in all disciplines in this reading and challenge may be a way to begin to bridge the gaps between disciplines. “Biblical wisdom” in section II sets the stage for Christians. But, the Pope clearly lays out the science behind the urgency of climate change (e.g., sec.15) and discusses the moral and philosophical implications of our actions (e.g., sec.160). He exposes the global consumer economy as a psychological malady (e.g., sec. 43), and discusses politics (e.g., sec. 165) and our institutional frameworks that support the

consumer economy (e.g., sec. 190). Finally, Pope Francis emphasizes the need for education (e.g., sec. 211). So, whether the Pope is using material from religious studies, science, philosophy, economics, psychology, politics, history or education, the call to act, to change the way we behave, is the same.

The assignment can also work to inform work in other classes. For one student, the *Consumption Challenge* dovetailed nicely with a project assigned in a Values-Centered Marketing course also taught at Regis. The marketing project asked students to identify a social or environmental issue about which they are passionate and then design a marketing campaign that could shift their community’s behavior around that issue. One student designed a marketing campaign to persuade her peers to use reusable water bottles in order to reduce packaging waste from bottled water. This prompted her to expand her *Consumption Challenge* beyond food waste to waste more generally. In her final *Consumption Challenge* blog post she noted that she had not only reduced her food waste but also, she had stopped drinking bottled water. Thus, the *Consumption Challenge* served as a catalyst for environmentally-focused projects in other classes, forming symbiotic relationships across disciplines.

Observations and Conclusions

In the appendix to this article we offer a representative sampling of blog excerpts that informed our understanding of the learning, growth, and transformation that students achieved by participating in the *Consumption Challenge*. As we implied at the outset of this discussion, we were more than surprised by the thoughtfulness, maturity, and wisdom that flowed from the students’ reflections, especially when they were able to share candidly with their class colleagues. If we were to identify the category of most change and arguably most importance, that category of growth would come under the umbrella of awareness. Growing awareness is foundational to all change, and observing the growth in awareness during the semester was eye-opening and gratifying. This growth came from several important perspectives:

1. Awareness of the relative impact of lifestyle choices on the environment. Students, in general, were surprised that choice of diet trumps all other lifestyle choices, even transportation choices, in its impact on environmental sustainability.
2. Awareness of the personal challenges that change entails. Probably the most common expression was surprise at how difficult specific changes were, and how entrenched and ubiquitous were specific unsustainable behaviors. Humans are programmed to develop habits, and once formed, those habits, which become imprinted in our neural pathways, are very difficult to change.²⁶ Common paraphrases included: “I didn’t realize how dominant meat was in my diet!”; “I thought it would be easy to cut back on my showering time. I didn’t realize I was spending that much time in the shower!”; “So much of my resistance was just due to habit — and habits are hard to break!”
3. Awareness of one’s individual capacity for adaptation and change. Prior research has found that as students observe their own satisfactory goal progress, their perceived self-efficacy increases, and they tend to set new challenging goals.²⁷ We observed a similar phenomenon with the *Consumption Challenge*. As surprised as students were at their initial difficulties in adopting new behaviors, they were even more surprised by how far they had come in a short period of experimentation. Having experienced and reflected on how far they had come, many students were ready to take on new and more arduous challenges by the end of the semester. There was a general sense of personal accomplishment and personal progress.
4. Awareness of personal efficacy beyond the demands of the *Consumption Challenge*. A number of students commented on an overall growth in personal efficacy, having had the experience of selecting stretch goals they weren’t sure they could meet and then meeting them: “I didn’t think I could cut meat from my diet for 2 days a week, let alone from every meal for several weeks. I’m now questioning what else I don’t think I can do.”

By the end of the semester students had become markedly more knowledgeable about the causes and concerns surrounding the care and survival of our “common home.” They left the *Consumption Challenge* changed in many ways: certainly with a more sobering view of the future, certainly with more introspection as to their personal contributions to global fragility, and certainly with a more realistic perspective on what has to change if the earth is to continue supporting human life. And, they left the challenge with a new sense of self-efficacy — a new appreciation for what they are capable of achieving and what they can reasonably ask from themselves.

Final Thoughts

Finally, it is especially difficult for the authors to generalize about the outcomes of this experiment, because we have each found ourselves extrapolating enormous meaning and possibility from the student reflections. One particularly poignant expression of growth and introspection can justify the experience many times over. And, we have each read a number of entries that fit this standard. This is one of those course assignments where we cannot project in advance what any particular participant will learn from the experience, but we can project that the lessons will be numerous, will be varied, will be both modest and momentous, and will, in the end, be transformative. It will change some students in simple and yet meaningful ways; it will change other students in ways that are dramatic, transcendent, and life-changing.

We cannot guarantee that adopting the *Consumption Challenge* to make real and visceral the lessons of *Laudato Si'* will yield a particular outcome from any particular student. We can guarantee that the overall impact on your students will be profound and transformative. We stand ready to assist any of our Jesuit school colleagues in implementing this powerful experience. HJE

Notes

¹ Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for Our Common Home” (2015), sec. 1, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

² Victor Lebow, “Price Competition in 1955,” *Journal of Retailing* 31, no. 1 (1955): 5-10, <http://classroom.sdmesa.edu/pjacoby/journal-of-retailing.pdf>

³ Russell W. Belk, Kenneth D. Bahn, and Robert N. Mayer, “Developmental Recognition of Consumption Symbolism,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 9, no. 1 (1982): 4-17; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: The New American Library, 1899).

⁴ John Fein, Cameron Neil, and Matthew Bentley, “Youth Can Lead the Way to Sustainable Consumption,” *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* 2, no. 1, (2008): 51-60, http://econpapers.repec.org/article/saejousus/v_3a2_3ay_3a2008_3ai_3a1_3ap_3a51-60.htm

⁵ “Obama Is ‘Pleased’ with Yellen as Economy Shows Signs of Slowing,” *The Denver Post*, April 11, 2016, http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_29753968/Obama-is-pleased-yellen-economy-shows-signs-slowing.

⁶ Cf. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education” (address given to the Conference of American Jesuit Colleges and Universities on “Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education,” at Santa Clara University, California, October 6, 2000), <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Kolvenbach/Kolvenbach-SantaClara.pdf>

⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 206.

⁸ Marsha L. Richins, “The Material Values Scale: Measurement Properties and Development of a Short Form,” *Journal of Consumer Research* 31, no. 1 (2004): 209-219.

⁹ Todd B. Kashdan and William E. Breen, “Materialism and Diminished Well-Being: Experiential Avoidance as a Mediating Mechanism,” *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 26, no. 5 (2007): 521-539.

¹⁰ Tim Kasser, “Materialistic Values and Goals,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 67 (2016): 489-514.

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 202.

¹² *Ibid.*, sec. 222.

¹³ *Ibid.*, sec. 223.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, sec. 189; sec. 190.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, sec. 190.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, sec. 190; sec. 54; sec. 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, sec. 161; sec. 162.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, sec. 209.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, sec. 223.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, sec. 226.

²¹ Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick, eds., *Learning and Leading with Habits of Mind* (ASCD book, 2008), accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108008/chapters/Learning-Through-Reflection.aspx>.

²² Robert B. Cialdini, “Harnessing the Science of Persuasion,” *Harvard Business Review* 79, no. 9 (2001): 72-81.

²³ Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, 2nd ed., (New York: Plenum Press, 1985).

²⁴ *Ibid.*; Thomas W. Malone and Mark R. Lepper, “Making Learning Fun: A Taxonomy of Intrinsic Motivation for Learning,” in *Aptitude, Learning, and Instruction*, vol. 3, ed. R. E. Snow and M. J. Farr (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1987), 223-253.

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, sec. 110.

²⁶ Ann M. Graybiel, “Habits, Rituals, and the Evaluative Brain,” *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 31 (2008): 359-387.

²⁷ Dale H. Schunk, “Goal Setting and Self-Efficacy During Self-Regulated Learning,” *Educational Psychologist* 25, no. 1 (1990): 71-86.

Appendix: An Edited Sample of Student Blog Entries from the *Consumption Challenge*

We have arranged the following sampling of blog entries under four categories of challenge that students chose for their *Consumption Challenge*. There was a number of worthy challenges that were outside of these categories. Our choice of these four was merely an expedience for organizing samples of hundreds of blog entries into a discreet number of categories that captured at least the majority of the action steps selected. These categories include: Eating Lower on the Food Chain, Moving About with a Lighter Footprint, Wasting Less H₂O, and Packaging Not. Within every category students chose a variety of challenges, some more difficult than others. A few students opted to take on more than one challenge.

In the interest of conveying the essence of the blogging reflections into a readable appendix, we have condensed and paraphrased some blogging into composite entries, while retaining as much of the original, verbatim writing as possible.*

Eating Lower on the Food Chain

“For Pope Francis to point out that food wasted is ‘stolen from the table of the poor’ made me realize not only how lucky I was to have access to good food but that in order for me to have this life of convenience and consumerism, millions of people have to live in the filth our lives generate. That is why for my consumption challenge essay, I’m going to make better decisions regarding my food purchases!”

“A couple months ago I read an article . . . titled, ‘If you want to save water, stop eating burgers.’ The article stated how many gallons of water would be reduced per person if they became vegetarian and it was unbelievable — many, many more than if you took shorter showers. I had never considered this before. It was a real eye opener.”

* Please note that we cannot cite each blog independently. Students signed consent forms. Their comments were harvested. But these blogs, written in spring 2016, are no longer available online.

“I don’t think I could have ever given up meat without making it a course assignment — I mean, that made it both a requirement and a possibility (you wouldn’t ask us to do the impossible, would you?). I was surprised to hear my classmates talk about how hard it was, because it was pretty easy for me. I don’t crave it — in fact, I think I’m done with meat.”

“I know of the harm that is done to animals in order to have the meat, but also the harm that is done to the environment in the process. By taking meat out of my diet I can help to reduce the impact of climate change, rainforest destruction, and pollution while saving water and other resources in the process. We are faced with this challenge three times a day.”

“So far, I have been really struggling with my consumption challenge! I did not realize how much meat I eat!

The idea of not eating meat sounds much easier than it really is.”

“It was difficult to have to eat something different from the rest of my family on days when I couldn’t eat meat, especially when they were eating something that smelled or looked better. But after a while, I got in the state of mind that I already knew I was going to eat something vegetarian and I didn’t think about the other food.”

“I also found out that I have more control than I thought. I was really tested. Not only did this challenge make me feel like I accomplished something important, it also really made me think about the decisions we make on a daily basis that have a direct impact on our planet.”

“Before this challenge, I had never even thought about how much I consume, how much we consume as a population, or how we are impacting our planet.”

Moving About with a Lighter Footprint

“This change of transportation (by not driving) would have great benefits for the environment as well as for my own health.”

“I feel like it will be the most difficult to adapt to, but also the most rewarding. Walking to school takes time and effort, something that can be very limited for college students. So my goal is to aim for 3 days a week of walking to school and maybe after a couple weeks if I get used to it, I will walk to school all 5 days.”

“Since Regis gives out free bus passes, I see it fitting that I could reduce my gasoline consumption and the number of times I come to Regis back and forth via my car. I think I have chosen this plan because it is something that I have tried doing for a long time and failed to do well.”

“But most of the time it was involuntary, and once I got into a routine, it just seemed like that is what I was supposed to be doing ... I want to continue to strive to do more. I hope that I don't regress...”

“After telling my friends about my challenge I saw many of my friends starting to follow along. Even though in the beginning they kind of laughed and said okay whatever you say.”

“I wish everything was reasonably distanced so that I could walk everywhere or take the bus” ... (I have managed) “about a 30% decrease in my carbon emissions, which I think is hugely successful in terms of what we've been working on ... this is the first time I have ever been challenged in this sort of manner, a more physical, habit changing adaptation that really made my life better.”

Wasting Less H2O

“I am going to have to ignore the satisfaction I get from showers.”

“I can now consistently take 4 minute showers... I would say I've established a new habit that I won't be getting rid of any time soon.”

“As the semester winds down to an end, I feel less and less like this is a challenge. I feel like everything I am doing is 'normal'.”

“Honestly, this class (reducing shower time) has been tough for me. An epiphany came to me towards the end of the semester. The day was

when we watched the beginning of *Conspiracy* in class. People ... feel better about their 'commitment to save the earth' when they hear the real truth and make drastic changes to their lives to truly make a difference.”

“In the end it doesn't make a large difference by cutting down my shower time but it makes me feel like I'm doing my part. It's not enough to just live my everyday life and cut back in a few places. More drastic changes need to be made to really create meaningful change. I am officially challenging myself to start living more sustainably.”

Packaging Not

“I despise plastic bags and will stop using them through this challenge.”

“Cost and convenience are two of the largest driving forces of technology in our modern society. Technology has aimed to make products that are cheaper and also more convenient for consumers. Often times though, these new products have an adverse effect on the environment. One such product that meets all of these criteria is the plastic bottle.”

“What I have not been considering in my cost benefit analysis is the extreme cost of plastic bottles on the environment. Plastic bottles are mainly petroleum based which ... cause high pollution to the environment. Furthermore, plastic does not biodegrade and thus it often ends up in the ocean causing an extremely negative effect on delicate sea ecosystems. Overall, these negative factors on the environment far outweigh the convenience that plastic bottles provide me and I must attempt to stop using them for the semester.”

“I was inspired to take on this challenge after reading an article that showed projections that predict that the weight of the fish in the ocean will be equal to the weight of the plastic in the ocean by 2050. This was a shocking revelation and one that struck a particular cord with me. I grew up in California where the ocean served as my escape.”

(I will) “not be allowed to get a drink at a coffee or tea or book shop unless I bring my own reusable cup ... While this challenge may not have

as much of a direct impact as reducing my showers to 3 minutes would, I believe that this is a very reasonable, and appropriate challenge for me.”

“Yet over the course of a semester I was able to stop using plastic bottles because I figured out that saving the environment was worth more than a few seconds in convenience that using plastic water bottles provides.”

“Most importantly, I think this challenge made me realize just how easy it is to cause harm to this planet without even thinking. It is easy to get into the ‘just one can’t hurt’ mentality ...”

“And they joked around about it and made fun of me. Yet, I stood firm on my decision. Then came time for check out and my friends did what I did not expect. They asked that we not be given bags. ... It was then that I saw that despite the hour long joking about how I was trying to save the world, they did see my point after all. In fact, they respected it and wanted to help. It was a big moment of assurance for me especially since I had begun to doubt myself.”

Uncategorized Final Entries

“Finally, thank you for this experience. Funny how doing a course assignment motivated me to make changes I’ve long wanted to make — to do what I knew and felt I should be doing. And — I’m not going back.”

“My consumption challenge has made me think about changing other things in my life. I’m trying to think of another little consumption challenge I can do after this class is over.”

“I was a pretty loud mouth when it came to global warming and conservation and all issues in the Pope’s document. It brings home to me that talk is cheap — especially my talk. I won’t save the planet with my BS — I have to actually do something, to ‘walk my BS.’ What a great assignment!”

“A little progress was made with my parents regarding their climate change denial... my dad spoke to my grandmother and ... she told him about a speech the Pope gave... addressing climate change. ... So I told them about his

encyclical and how committed he is to bring awareness to this issue and my mom actually listened. ... It left her thinking.”

“I’ve been thinking a lot about what it would look like to really live sustainably. Eat at the bottom of the food chain — i.e., plant food, all of the time. Live in a small space — maybe share a small apartment. Commute on foot, on bike, or on public transit. After this semester’s experience, I think I can do all of that. And I want to.”

“What else am I capable of? Do I need to shower every day? Can’t I easily carry a grocery bag in my backpack? And a reusable water bottle? And do I ever need to waste food?”

“I just read some of my blogs from early in the semester — funny and embarrassing! I am capable of so much more than I thought. How much I was controlled by mere convenience and apathy — and pretending to not know the damage I was doing! I hope I never go back to being so small and helpless.”