

Using Digital Pedagogy to Navigate Ethics in Technical Communication Classes

Background

For USF's ENC 2210 Technical Writing for Health Sciences Majors courses, we developed a website to house a project that involves the global issue of electronic waste and focuses on the more localized issue of federal prison labor in electronics recycling programs. The UNICOR system was involved in a scandal concerning safety hazards in their e-recycling prisoner work program. The Basel Action Network "has identified a range of potential occupational hazards including silicosis, toxic exposure to dioxins, mercury and other metals and carcinogens through inhalation of fumes while processing e-waste or from local drinking water and food sources contaminated by e-waste processing by-products" (qtd. in Lepawsky and McNabb, 2010). Using a variety of sources, such as the Department of Justice's report on its investigation and official EPA guidelines, students act as consultants to UNICOR to improve the program. Students navigate complex ethical issues to improve the working conditions of prisoners and staff while ensuring the continuation of the recycling program, which helps keep e-waste out of landfills and overseas dumping grounds.



SCAN ME

Website: <http://tracemyewaste.weebly.com/home.html>

Purpose and Methodology

The implementation of the companion website results in more clearly organized instructions and resources and enhances students' awareness of global citizenship, digital media, and the public value of their ideas. It facilitates communication between classmates and instructors and provides a space for students to showcase their work for interested stakeholders and potential employers.



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Results

Through their research, students learn about the hazardous materials used to create personal computing devices and other electronics, as well as the magnitude of their ecological footprints. They also learn about other issues, such as prison labor, workplace safety standards, and risk communication. This multi-faceted approach encourages students to consider many different social and physical ramifications of the production and disposal of their personal devices.

Enhances Critical Thinking Skills

By collaborating online, students see the visual map of their work and, therefore, how each aspect of the case project is connected. They can more easily navigate the complex issues of environmental and healthcare ethics and technical and professional communication, which can help them make sound judgments in their proposed solutions. They have a digital space with which to engage the public and present to future employers, as well as a semi-permanent artifact of their work and the opportunity to follow new developments. Students feel more invested in the project and become more willing to think critically.