Title of Project: Psychology and the Environment Course

Key Players & contact information:

Irina Feygina
irina.feygina@nyu.edu
347.628.7661
NYU Department of Psychology
6 Washington Place, Rm. 461
New York, NY 1003

Objective:
What was the original objective of the grant (from your initial proposal)? Was it met? Did it change? If it changed, why did it change?

The original objective for the grant was to develop a new course that brings psychological knowledge to bear on understanding people’s responses to environmental problems and climate change. While these issues have been approached from many perspectives, the psychological approach is rarely taught, though it is powerful and enlightening. The aim of the course was to introduce students to the disciplines of social, environmental, and conservation psychology and to direct the knowledge generated by these fields towards a greater understanding of the human-environment relationship.

This objective was met. The course was developed and taught.

Summary Description:
Briefly describe (one or two paragraphs) what the grant involved. In one or two sentences, state the outcome or findings of the grant. This description will likely be used in press releases and in executive summaries to the Sustainability Task Force and other relevant offices or departments in the University.

On the basis of the current green grant, I was able to develop a novel undergraduate curriculum that introduces students to the disciplines of social, environmental, and conservation psychology and directs the knowledge generated by these fields towards understanding the dynamics of the human-environmental relationship, the social and psychological causes and consequences of contemporary ecological challenges, and the personal processes, such as health and well-being, that directly stem from the ideologies that we hold about the natural world, within and outside of ourselves. The grant was used towards acquiring materials necessary for the preparation of the course, as well as its implementation.

Previous State and Final Outcomes:
What was in place before the grant began, and what is in place now? Was a certain problem at NYU the impetus for the grant- if so, how was it addressed?
Prior to the Psychology and the Environment initiative there were no courses in any of the NYU schools that addressed issues of conservation psychology, and the intra- and inter-personal dynamics of the human-environment relationship. I felt this was a very notable lack, which must be addressed. It is imperative that we understand the roots of our current environmental crises, and without accounting for the psychological dimension our understanding is incomplete. NYU students go on to become influential innovators and decision makers, and it is imperative that they are armed with the most complete understanding possible as they set out into the world.

Data and/or Impact Estimates:
This should include data about who, what, and how your grant affected the larger NYU community. All research analysis should be listed here. Use subheadings if necessary.
If it was an event, workshop, or class what was the amount interest (how many people came, what happened as a result of the event, include outro surveys or feedback)? If it was operational, what environmental and/or economic impacts occurred (cost or labor savings, energy savings, water conservation, etc)? If a new object, software or class was created, how will it be used in the future? Include or attach all relevant syllabi, curriculum, posters, spreadsheets, surveys, and images.

The Psychology and the Environment course was offered during the Winter 2011 semester. From the beginning, there was a great deal of interest in the class. At first 20 places were open to enrollment, but they were quickly filled and expanded to 30, which were also filled within a couple of days. The class was highly engaging, and students expressed a great deal of interest throughout the three weeks of the semester. The class met almost every day, for three hours, which allowed for continual and growing involvement. Although the students had come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines, we were able to thoroughly cover the theoretical bases, and delved into each area of social, environmental, and conservation psychology, as planned. Moreover, the course included several facets designed to encourage students to connect the knowledge they were gaining with current events, media publications, personal experiences, and various facets of the topic in the world. The students found these exercises to be interesting and relevant, and enjoyed them a great deal. The exercises served as starting points for our class discussions, which were lively and in which, to my surprise, every student participated (including one who had come to me the first day to apologize for her fear of speaking in front of people and usual silence in class). The class also included several guest speakers and the showing of a film, followed by a discussion with the director. The students expressed particular interest toward these events. Finally, the students completed final projects, in which they applied the knowledge gained in the course towards understanding and improving a real world solution to a social-ecological problem. The presentations were very impressive – well researched, beautifully presented, and completed with care. Overall, I found the students in this course to be more engaged, personally interested, and invested than any course that I have taught or for which I was a teaching assistant at NYU.

Please find attached the evaluation forms for the CAS and the SCPS students, as well as a PowerPoint file with slides of the final presentations for the course.

Moving Forward:
This section should include lessons you learned while completing the project, including recommendations for implementing the project again or on a larger scale at NYU.
Would you do something differently next time? What worked particularly well? What recommendations do you have for implementing the grant on a larger scale or to repeat it, if any? What recommendations do you have for other grantees pursuing similar projects in the future? What are the next steps, if any?

I believe that the project should, given the interest and positive response, most definitely be implemented again. I plan on teaching the Psychology and Environment course again during the Summer 2012 semester, and I hope that this course will continue to be taught by other instructors. I hope that the curriculum and materials developed on the basis of the Green Grant will contribute towards the successful offering of this course in the future.

There is, of course, room for improvement. The first is administrative. I offered the course through the SCPS school, and it was co-sponsored by the Environmental Studies program, and thus was open to CAS undergraduates. It would be ideal to have the course sponsored by Environmental Studies directly, as well as by the Psychology Department, and be offered on a regular basis, so that it would be used towards fulfilling aspects of the major in these programs, and gain more attention. Moreover, it would be better to offer it during the regular semester (Fall or Spring), which is covered by financial aid, while the Winter semester is not. In addition, I had planned on taking the students on a field trip to a site which actively uses psychological knowledge toward improving understanding, connection with, and action towards the environment. However, this proved impossible during the dead of winter - a field trip would be easier to implement during the other semesters.

Second, the class used a discussion format, which is best implemented in a slightly smaller class. I was happy to have so many eager participants, but in the ideal it would be a smaller class that is offered more frequently. This would permit a more organized format where there is time for each voice, as well as the many other facets of the course. As this was my first discussion based class I also had much to learn about the best practices of keeping an open forum while maintaining a clear structure – these are lessons I hope to implement the next time I offer the course.

What I found worked the best in the course was its interactive format. Most of the material was presented by students, and followed by in-depth discussion. This format kept the students involved, avoiding the disengagement that often happens in a purely lecture format. It also permitted the students to bring in their own experience, to reflect on it and come to novel insights and conclusions about their own lives, motivations, and behaviors, and to connect it to the larger forces in their social and natural worlds. Moreover, having guest speakers, and a film screening, also helped in bringing the material to life, and the students often referenced and included information that they had learned in this way in their final projects. At the end of the course several students told me that this was the most relevant, eye-opening, and important course that they have taken. They shared that they were amazed at how little they knew about processes which surround them on a daily basis and determine many facets of their lives. They insisted that I should definitely keep teaching it, and even that maybe we should make it a required.

Overall, I feel that this is a great course to teach – informative and enjoyable for the students, really interesting for the instructor, and so important for our world. I feel that I could have a fascinating time teaching this class over and over, because of the vast amount of material there is to uncover, the amazing discoveries the students make in their assignments and projects, and the profound relevance of the subject matter to all our lives.
Financial Summary:
Provide a budget of how/where money was spent. This can be copied from the GG budget system if you use it. Excel sheets, tables, or typed word docs are also fine.

Please see the attached excel sheet: Psych&Env Green Grant Final Budget

Citation and Credits:
Who was involved in the grant? Which staff or NYU departments were involved?
If outside information was used, please include a bibliography or relevant websites.

The grant was carried out by Irina Feygina. Lily Chiu had generously offered to assist me in using the budget system, but this was not necessary in the end.

Media:
Include photos, videos, surveys, syllabi, maps, data tables and/or calculations, feedback forms, press, pamphlets, drawings or architectural plans, menus, etc., produced during the grant. While some of these are likely embedded in your report, please also attach them in an email separately.

Please find attached a PowerPoint file with slides of the final presentations for the course, as well as the evaluation forms for the CAS and the SCPS students. Since this was a class, there were many assignments and written documents generated. If any of these are of interest I am happy to share them, if this is permitted given students’ rights to privacy. The final presentations were created to be shared publically, and were presented in class in front of all the students, so I feel it is fine to share them here.

Additionally, if there are newsworthy project updates for us to share on the NYU Green Grants website, please let us know and we will update your listing.