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Community Is Sustainable

Malequi Picazo

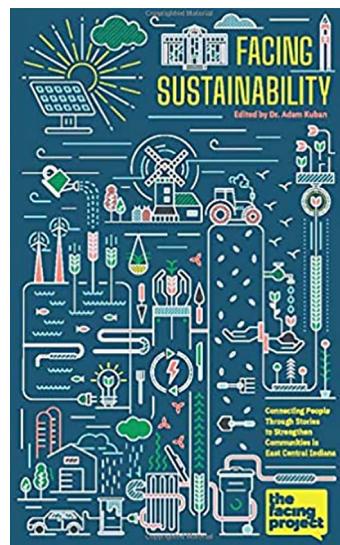
Facing Sustainability is the result of a semester-long project produced by 11 Honors College undergraduate students at Ball State University. This project was both overseen by, and was a contribution to, the larger nonprofit organization The Facing Project. Our class's goal was to meet with members of our community who are passionate about sustainability and document their perspectives, insights, and words of wisdom. With this invaluable information, we wrote first-person stories describing these accounts and compiled all of them into a single, cohesive publication. With this 44-page magazine and online e-book, we plan to spread the word that everyone can practice sustainability, and we need to protect the earth by being intentional with our decisions.

Our project was not one that threw facts and statistics about climate change into our community's lap so we could scold them to do something about it. Our project was not one to rip apart a sector of the supply chain in order to cast blame at a single source of pollution. Our project was also not one of those projects that originated, matured, transformed, and then died. Our project was different. It was one that will last and continue to have influence. The power of words, language, and stories are timeless, and that is why we chose to write about sustainability. Our project is compact, succinct, and informative. We love our planet, and we want others to learn how to love it better. This was the motivation behind the creation of *Facing Sustainability*.

I am Malequi Picazo and I am an Honors student pursuing my bachelor of architecture degree at Ball State University. During the spring 2020 semester, I was enrolled in Dr. Adam Kuban's colloquium in which our class wrote and produced the 44-page publication titled *Facing Sustainability*.

Upon consideration of time constraints and potential outreach, this literature has now taken the form of both a magazine version and a book version available on Amazon (see <https://www.amazon.com/Facing-Sustainability-Project-Exploring-Central/dp/1734558105>). My contributions to this project included authoring and co-authoring two stories, producing three graphics, and providing two pass-through edits of the book as a whole. During these edits, I was filled with a sense of pride upon seeing all of the pieces put together in a cohesive deliverable of professional quality. While my personal skills generally revolve around three-dimensional objects, buildings, drawings, and diagrams, I felt rewarded after overcoming the challenges this project produced. Never before had I conducted an interview with a stranger and walked away with not only a dozen memorable anecdotes, but pages of handwritten notes from which I would eventually write a piece of published material.

Figure 1. *Facing Sustainability*, written by undergraduate students at Ball State University



Facing Sustainability, the project, also taught our class to interact and connect with people outside of our social and academic bubbles. We left the comfort of our classroom on the Ball State campus to meet with sustainability advocates, experts, leaders, professionals, teachers, and professors. Each one of us conducted at least one interview, gathered information pertinent to sustainability, and then proceeded to write a first-person story. This formula worked incredibly well because our end product was a collection of unique perspectives and approaches to sustainability that covered the whole gamut. Our project is only one publication under the umbrella organization called The Facing Project.

An excerpt from our project reads:

The Facing Project has spread to over 75 communities nationwide, resulting in more than 20,000 books centered on hyperlocal issues such as cancer, depression, autism and poverty.... Facing Sustainability represents the alliance between The Facing Project and the Honors College at Ball State University.

The element of collecting stories from our diverse community was crucial to the project because I learned the concept of sustainability is not an easy one to decipher and explain right away. As one would find after some quick searching, the term refers to, and is intertwined with, practically everything on earth in some way or another. Entities large and small dedicate countless hours and dollars to revert the Earth back to its sustainable past. In our project, we express this complexity time and time again. Never once did our team outright present a blunt, direct definition of the term “sustainability.” I believe this is important to mention.

With that being said, I believe our project was restricted in some ways. Since our semester only lasted 16 weeks, our deadlines were firm, and our class was small. Fortunately, the 11 students in our class came from a broad range of academic majors. From a public-relations student to a math student, from a biology major to a computer-science major, we were prepared to approach this project from multiple angles. However, we were limited to represent only a handful of storytellers from a small portion of our state. While this intense analysis and research was informative, we were unable to document a significant amount of insight from other equally important and knowledgeable

individuals from Indiana. I believe this was the greatest shortcoming of the project.

Although I believe we achieved our goal and never altered our original intentions, it is unfortunate that the project was short and quite abrupt. With our limited 16-week time frame being cut even shorter beginning in the middle of March as a result of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, we lost a plethora of opportunities to inform and present our project to large audiences. In the end, social media posts, mass email chains, and a dozen or so blog posts were all we had to use in our promotion strategy. From here, however, we can spread the word about what we have accomplished and inspire others to follow in our footsteps. The ultimate goal, and one I believe we achieved, was to offer a reliable source of information about sustainability that gives all readers a starting point to becoming more sustainable.

Even though we stayed within the region of East Central Indiana for this project, our fine-tooth combing of our community was intentional and produced fruitful results. For example, during one of my interviews, I had the opportunity to speak with a professor of sustainability at Ball State. The story I wrote on her behalf, “A Verdant Legacy,” tells of her coal-mining father who greatly influenced her view on energy, climate change, and sustainable living. In the story, she wanted to share with her community and readers that we need to be intentional with our decisions. The money we spend, the products we consume, and the electricity we use all contribute to our footprint on the world. This message resonated with me greatly. I think about this conversation regularly.

The second story I contributed to this project was one that I co-authored about the Cope Environmental Center in the small farming town of Centerville, Indiana. My first visit to this Center was on a snowy, frigid, February afternoon. Over the course of an hour and a half, my co-author and I conducted interviews with two staff members at the Center. The stories shared with us were those of success and pride. The staff knew the founders of the Center personally, which made the stories of establishment and growth even more memorable and meaningful. Through the selfless donations made to the Center over the years to the large number of eager visitors who come annually, from the dozens of small creatures that live in aquariums and terrariums to the open grassland prairies surrounding the Center, I was overwhelmed with an

ever-growing sense of community and belonging. I imagined children and their parents walking into and out of the building with excitement in their eyes as each of them learned about how to help the planet and how to become environmentally responsible members of their community.

The element of community can clearly be seen in our stories and project alike. As any reader will soon discover, each storyteller has a unique perception of not only sustainability but also East Central Indiana, Ball State, and our effort in producing *Facing Sustainability*. While each perception had a different origin and background, each story crossed paths with the others in some way. From an elementary teacher to a university professor, from a farmer to store owners, the place these individuals call home, as well as their shared interest in bettering the world, unifies them all.

Community is something I have struggled with due to my personal experience with moving. For the first 10 years of my life, my family never lived somewhere for longer than two years. Once we moved to Indiana, however, this changed. Over the next 11 years of my life, we only moved twice. I've attended Ball State for four years, and lived in Muncie for two of those years full-time. As this project proceeded, I started to form a real connection with others in my locale that felt about the world in a similar way that I do. Caring is just the first step in a sustainable life, though. The next steps include making personal changes, mental shifts, and sharing with others how they can do the same. I only realized this after the course and the project came to a close. The storytellers I interviewed have enabled sustainability to evolve from a passion into a lifestyle. They and others choose on a daily basis to be sustainable. Not only that, but they want to share their ideas and discoveries with others about this incredible project and platform for these lives to be shared with countless others. For this, I am truly grateful.

As I continue to pursue my career in architecture, I am realizing that sustainability in my future profession means I have to be vigilant in what I choose to support, design, and recommend. For example, the Living Building Challenge is an architecture certification that I was familiar with prior to this project. Throughout my interview with staff at the Cope Environmental Center, a building certified through the Living Building Challenge, I encountered a first-hand experience of how a building can be truly sustainable. Through the materials used in construction,

to the way electricity is acquired and used, to the amount of waste that enters and exits the building, sustainability is intertwined in the very fabric of this piece of architecture. My contribution in this part of the project was inspiring to say the least.

As I take opportunities to improve my skills and learn about my profession further, I can thank my team and the project for providing several opportunities to gain experience in conducting an interview, writing a first person account based on information gathered, and opening my eyes to the countless people that live in my community who care about the same things that I do. This project taught my classmates and me skills that we would hardly gain elsewhere.

This community-centric style of academics was a first-time experience for me, but I greatly appreciated the format and takeaways from it. I can see a lot of positive outcomes if other large topics were addressed in a similar way in future courses. Sustainability is a concept that I have only recently begun to uncover. As I learn more about it, I have come to realize that sustainability is more exciting, unpredictable, encompassing, and crucial than it appears to be.

At the time of writing this, the magazine version of *Facing Sustainability* has been given to each storyteller and writer of the publication as well as a handful of community leaders and Ball State University leaders and academics. Our project is available to the world through the published e-book version on Amazon and in the coming months will also be available through IngramSpark. A number of other efforts are being planned to inform even more people about this incredibly rich resource, including a podcast episode with hosts Kelsey Timmerman and J.R. Jamison, co-creators of The Facing Project, a virtual conference presentation at the Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis virtual Sustainability & Resilience Conference in Indianapolis, and a subsequent presentation at the National Collegiate Honors Council this year in Texas.

About the Author

Malequi Picazo is pursuing a bachelor of architecture degree at Ball State University and is serving as an intern at an architecture firm. After graduation he plans to pursue a career in residential design and sustainable practices in architecture.