

“Tragedy of the Commons” Focused Research Paper

We have spent all semester considering issues related in some way to those raised by “The Tragedy of the Commons.” Although Hardin focuses on overpopulation, National Parks, and pollution as specific instances of “the working out of the tragedy of the commons,” we have looked at other circumstances, in *Amsterdam* and *Into Thin Air*, in which private gain and public good may be at odds. This last paper gives you the opportunity to apply the ideas you have encountered in this class to a topic of interest to you.

We will work in class to brainstorm and compile a list of approved topics. If you pick a topic not on the list we develop, you must check it with me. The trick is to find a topic narrow and focused enough that you can research and write a credible paper in the limited time we have.

We will then work on framing your topic as a focused research question so that you do not become lost in the plethora of information. Remember that the librarians are available to help when you feel overwhelmed by materials. I want to see at least five credible sources, and they should include a range of types of sources, including scholarly periodicals and a book. Use the library to help find databases that lead to good sources. Do NOT just Google your topic and expect to find respected sources. Study Chapter 7 in *Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing* carefully, as it gives you detailed information on using sources properly.

The first task in your paper (probably in the introduction) is to explain the idea of “The Tragedy of the Commons.” I am hoping that the work you did in the learning community groups will be apparent in your discussion. You will introduce your particular topic as a specific instance of this ethical dilemma. Your thesis will make some kind of judgment about the issue, one that seems reasonable considering the limited time you have to do your research. It should indicate your awareness of opposing viewpoints in some sort of concession clause, and it should be carefully qualified. It is not likely that you have found an ideal solution, but you might suggest some direction that society should be taking with respect to your issue.

In your first several body paragraphs, you should discuss the specific details of your issue. What are the conflicting goods? Who are the parties involved, and what are their motives and reasoning? What is the damage being done and who is or will be suffering that damage? These body paragraphs are crucial in demonstrating your understanding of good academic writing: the sentences are your own, with meticulous references to your sources of information. Any borrowed phrases or sentences are

framed in your own words, attributed to the author, and put in quotation marks, and the sources of paraphrases, data, charts, etc., are also properly cited. You are explaining what you have learned through your research, but the writing is your own—NOT a pastiche of others' writing.

I will be looking at your ability to relate the particulars of your issue to the concepts we have explored throughout the class, from Adam Smith's "invisible hand" to Wangaari Maathai's solution of women's local action. Keep your Reader at hand as you are working on your paper and think about connections you can make. Try to situate your issue in relation to the larger issues we have read about and discussed.

By making such connections, you should be able to make some recommendations in the later paragraphs of your paper. Again, beware of simplistic solutions, but apply the insights you have gained from the other papers you have written to your consideration of this ethical dilemma. Is "tragedy" inevitable or can you see some worthwhile paths to take, even if they are as personal and limited as Joy Williams's? End with a strong concluding paragraph.

This paper must, of course, have a Works Cited page attached. The best papers from the learning community will be recognized at our last joint session, The Commons Fair. All the instructors are excited to see what you have gained from this experience.