

## The University of Northern Iowa LIFESTYLE Challenge – Spring 2025

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Project start date = April 1

Project end date = April 30

The Lifestyle Challenge (after Kirk and Thomas, 2003) is a way for you to learn about environmental alternatives by modifying your own lifestyle. It is a three-week exercise for you to reduce your impact on the environment by changing the way in which you live from day to day. The project has fairly rigid parameters, allowing you to achieve a gradual but definitive change in your everyday habits. Each of you will choose three different ways in which you are interested in changing your habits. The possible categories are: use of electricity and water, heat, automobile usage, food consumption, waste production and environmental education or activism. For each category the rules are clearly defined, such as turning down the heat three degrees or eliminating the use of the car. Each week the project becomes more rigorous, because you will have to meet the requirements more frequently.

### The rules:

1. The idea of this project is to make changes in your lifestyle that will have a beneficial effect on the environment. The changes aren't difficult, but they are significant. Mostly they will require planning and thinking about your actions.
2. You will slowly increase the degree or frequency of the changes, week by week, for a total period of three weeks. You can pick which days will count as your "project days." You can spread out your project days any way it works best for you. For example, the days you opt out of driving your car do not have to be the same days when you eat a vegetarian diet.
3. You will keep a journal with entries for each day that you complete your project requirements.
4. For whatever reason, you can bail out part way through and complete the lifestyle research paper instead.
5. The Lifestyle Project involves making changes to your personal lifestyle. If you feel that these changes might negatively affect your health, happiness, and well being in any way, or if they conflict with your religious or philosophical beliefs, then you should choose the research paper assignment.

Choose **ONE** category from the six choices below. Don't pick something that you normally do, the idea of this project is to make changes. Some changes won't be possible in your particular living situation, so obviously you can't pick those. If you are interested in extra credit, up to 10points, choose and document an additional category.

### The Categories:

**1. HEAT** - Expand your comfort zone by turning your heat down 3 degrees Fahrenheit from its normal setting. Continue lowering the heat by 3 degrees every week until you have reduced it by 9 degrees at the end of three weeks. The heat reduction applies for the entire week, not just for your project days. This option is limited to those who have control over their own thermostats and who have cooperative housemates!

**2. Waste** - Spend each project day producing no waste at all. You will have two waste-free days the first week, then three days the second week and four days for the last week. The idea of reducing your input to landfills follows a certain hierarchy. The best thing is to reduce the amount of garbage you make by simply using less, buying less, and wasting less. The second option is to reuse whatever you can to avoid buying new things that will eventually end up as garbage. Recycling is the last option, to be used only when the first two options fail. So on your waste-free days you must live by these rules, and not contribute anything to the landfill on those days. Even if something is theoretically recyclable, if you aren't able to recycle a particular type of waste in your area, it counts as garbage. It is considered cheating to just hang on to something until you're given waste-free days pass, and then throw it out. Toilet paper does not count as garbage; it goes to the wastewater treatment plant or your septic system, not the landfill. Cigarette butts are exempt from this category as well, because quitting smoking is beyond the scope of this project. However, all butts must be put in the garbage can, not on the ground or out your car window.

**3. ELECTRICITY AND WATER** - Trim the fat off your excess energy consumption by reducing your water and electricity needs by at least 50%. To do this, you can do the following things: turn the lights off when you're not around; turn on only one light instead of two; replace incandescent light bulbs with fluorescent bulbs; read next to a window; leave the TV and the stereo off; don't leave your computer and all its accessories on when you are not using them (use the hibernate mode); cook meals that don't require lots of burners at once or long cooking times; use the microwave instead of the stove or oven; take a shower at half the usual duration; turn the water down in the shower so it's not full blast; take a cooler shower; don't leave the water running while washing, shaving, brushing your teeth, or washing dishes; skip the blow dryer and electric razor; don't use any unnecessary appliances; run the washing machine and dishwasher only when totally full; and hang laundry to dry instead of using the dryer. If you do all of these things it is possible to cut your consumption by 50% or more. The first week, you'll do this on two days, and you will add one more day each week, until you have four days for the last week.

**4. TRANSPORTATION** - Experience the thrill of the outdoors by riding your bike, walking or taking the bus in your daily travels. Hitching a ride with your friends or roommates does reduce the amount of driving, but is also just too easy, so avoid that option unless there are no other alternatives. You will start with two days and increase the number of car-free days per week by one, until you have four days of bike riding (or whatever) during the last week.

**5. EAT EFFICIENTLY** - The production of meat requires a large amount of water and energy, and also produces considerable waste. In 1999, it was reported that approximately ninety percent of the grain grown in the US is fed to livestock (Cunningham and Saigo, 1999). However, since 1999, the percentage of the US corn crop that is used for ethanol has risen from 4% to over 25%, so proportionally less of our corn is presently feeding livestock. (see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/datablog/2010/jan/22/us-corn-production-biofuel-ethanol>, which contains the ethanol data.) Nonetheless, the principle remains the same: if you ate the grain crop directly, instead of the livestock, you would be using resources more efficiently. For example, 16 pounds of grain fed to beef cattle produces only one pound of edible meat. The majority of the calorie content is used up by the animal for metabolism. This means that you ingest only about 6% of the original calories produced by the grain crop. Another way of looking at this is by the amount of water required to produce different foods. For example, it takes 160 gallons of water to produce a loaf of bread, but it takes 2,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef (Cunningham and Saigo, 1999). By reducing the amount of meat that we eat, we can have a smaller environmental impact. So, for your first week, spend two days feasting on healthy and delicious fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains, and yes, even cheese doodles; just cut out the meat on these days. Add one vegetarian day each week, until you have four days by the end of the project. You should also be very vigilant about not wasting food during the project. Think of all the resources that go into the production of the food that are wasted if food is thrown out.

If you are already a vegetarian or nearly so, you can change your diet to include vegan, locally-produced, organic, minimally-processed, or in-season foods. The parameters of the category can be tailored to fit your situation, so long as you change your diet in a significant way and adopt new habits. Note: If you eat a balanced diet otherwise, you don't need to worry about getting enough protein without meat. An average adult needs about 40 grams of protein per day (Cunningham and Saigo, 1999). Vegetarian sources of protein include whole grain bread (4 g per slice), beans (7 g per serving), pasta (7 g per serving), peanut butter (7 g per serving) and yogurt (11 g per cup). In any case, you should consult a physician or nutritionist before making changes to your diet or if you have any questions about your ability to complete this aspect of the project.

**6. CREATE YOUR OWN CATEGORY** - There are many different things that you can do to lessen your impact on the environment or to have a positive effect on the environment. Be creative and come up with your own way of making a difference. You could write letters to your senators, volunteer with the Sierra Club, spend time cleaning up the woods, set up a carpooling system or recycling system in your home or workplace, find ways to educate others about the importance of conservation, or change your lifestyle in a way not described in the categories above. Invent your own category and discuss it with me before the project starts.

## **Lifestyle Project Journals**

You will keep track of your activities in the Lifestyle Project by recording everything in a journal. Journals are due on the following dates:

Monday	April 14	Week 1 electronic journals due (20 points)
Wednesday	April 30	Final electronic journals due (20 points)

Keep your journals and data in your class google drive work folder. Your journal should begin with-

- A. Your categories (2) and reasoning behind selecting these choices. For example, we started off the semester with a reading of wicked problems and how to address them within a diverse population, it is not easy...
- B. Identify/predict and define the problems/issues that will make your adaptations difficult.
- C. How will you attempt to remedy these problems/issues, so that your adaption.

Your journal should include what you did each day with a summary of how the changes are proceeding. You should write what you did, what things worked, what did not, what surprised you, how this affected your roommates/family, and so on. You will likely find that there is a story to tell as you work on this project!

The grade for your journal will be based on the effort you make to complete the project requirements, your honesty and sincerity in sticking with the project, your creativity in achieving all of the project's requirements, and the completeness of your journal. I will provide feedback after your first week, so that you will know if you are on the 'right' track...