

*Research Proposal for the*

**Graduate Student Research and Professional Development Fund**

To the

School of Graduate Studies  
Western Illinois University  
1 University Circle  
Macomb, IL 61455

Submitted by

XXXX  
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Date Submitted: February 16, 2009

Amount Requested: \$500

Title of Project: "Food in the American Experience: A Rhetorical Analysis of Attempts to  
Change How We Grow and Consume"

Dates of Performance: June 3-6, 2009

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Graduate Student

## **Description of Research Project**

The Association for the Study of Literature & Environment (ASLE) has accepted my proposal to present “Food in the American Experience: A Rhetorical Analysis of Attempts to Change How We Grow and Consume,” for their Biennial Conference, *Island Time: The Fate of Place in a Wired, Warming World*. This year’s conference theme invites presenters to explore the interconnectivity of people and places through the Internet and globalization as well as the effects our warming planet has on our interpretations of literary texts, the cultures that produce them, and our relationship to nature.

My presentation contributes to this international gathering by examining how the discourse and practice of conventional agriculture generates a fragmented identification with nature. In addition, I offer an explanation of the environmental drawbacks associated with specific methods of conventional agriculture and how localized and organic methods cannot only reunite people with their unique environment, but also reduce the environmental impacts of food growth, production, and consumption.

My presentation is developed from my master’s thesis, a rhetorical analysis of the debates surrounding the environmental and cultural impacts of contemporary American agriculture. My aim is to enhance understanding and eliminate misconceptions amongst a variety of agricultural stakeholders as a contribution to a larger effort to move forward as a society by adopting environmentally sustainable practices that are crucial to the health of the planet. In order to do so, I first make distinctions between two key philosophies that have guided the direction and development of my research: deep ecology and social ecology. Though the primary proponents of deep and social ecology are typically at odds with one another, it is important to recognize the common ground surrounding their ideas. For instance, one basic tenet of deep ecology is that beings do not exist autonomously; one being exists only in terms of its relation to other beings. Acceptance and adoption of this principle can guide farmers and consumers in making more sustainable efforts to feed their communities and

families; reliance on multiple species working interdependently to grow food has the potential to eradicate dependency on unnatural chemical pesticides and fertilizers that cause erosion, poor water quality, and both proven and suspected adverse effects on human health.

Furthermore, certain principles of social ecology can enlighten our understanding of agriculture because as many of these philosophers suggest, environmental problems stem from social ones. For instance, the Dust Bowl of the 1930's and the Farm Crisis of the 1980's created a series of economic burdens for farmers and consumers that have led to the industrialization of farming in order to relieve these economic pressures. Not only were chemicals introduced to the fields to enhance fertility, conversely leading to land and water deterioration, but also, as the twentieth-century progressed, farm animals were removed from the farm in order to make land space to grow commodity crops including corn, wheat, and soybeans. These animals are now fed with the high caloric grains that grow in place of their pastures and inevitably end up on the plates of Americans. Though food sources are now cheaper, health risks due to food raised in this way have risen dramatically, and it is even speculated that the generation currently growing up in the United States will be the first not to outlive the life expectancy of their parents—primarily because of the way food is grown and consumed today.

A new way of thinking about how we grow food is essentially required in order to progress beyond these environmental and human health problems posed by industrial agriculture. Deep and social ecology both offer principles and practices that can guide a paradigmatic shift and are already influential on many currently practiced sustainable methods of agriculture. As evidence of this, many communities and individuals are supporting local farmers who use biodiversity and natural fertilizers as a means of growing food. By selling directly to the consumer, farmers eliminate the need to ship food great distances, reducing the already demanding need for petroleum. Foods grown according to more organic, locally-relevant methods are ultimately healthier. Furthermore, local purchases of seasonal foods

award consumers a deeper connection with their environment because there is an opportunity to partake in the integral relationship shared by the multiple beings that contribute to the process of growing food.

As a life-long resident of southwestern Illinois, I am very familiar with the regional farming culture and local food movements. I hope that through my research and networking with like-minded scholars from around the world, I can contribute to the development of a sustainable agricultural system here at home.

### **Conference Information**

ASLE's Eighth Biennial Conference will take place June 3 through 6 at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. ASLE is an internationally recognized association in literary and writing studies, and the conference itself draws a magnitude of scholars both nationally and internationally. This year's event is the first to be held outside of the United States and has attracted more than six hundred proposals from professionals in the fields of environmental literature, eco-criticism, sustainability studies, and a variety of other interdisciplinary fields. This is an ideal atmosphere in which to present my thesis research because of the caliber of scholarship the conference draws and its significance to my studies and professional development. Furthermore, there will be great opportunities for me to network with other scholars interested in my field of study with whom I can exchange information regarding PhD programs, career opportunities, and publication venues.

**Itemized Budget**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Requested from SoGS</b>	<b>Cost Sharing</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Travel</b>	Airfare (RT): \$513	Airfare: \$100	Airfare: \$100 (requested from Dept. of English & Journalism) Airfare: \$313 (my personal funds)	\$513
<b>Accommodations</b>	\$45/night x 5 : \$225	\$225	--	\$225
<b>Food</b>	Per Diem: \$100	\$100	--	\$100
<b>Other Conference Registration</b>	Conference Registration Fee (student rate): \$75	\$75	--	\$75
<b>Total</b>	\$913	\$500	\$413	\$913

My estimated total cost for this conference is \$913, and my budget includes four items. I intend to depart from Lambert Airport in St. Louis, Missouri on June 2 and arrive in Victoria, British Columbia on the same day. The round-trip airfare comes from orbitz.com and totals \$513. The University provides accommodations at a cost of \$45 per night, totaling \$225 for a five night stay. The registration fee for graduate students is \$75, and because the conference planners will not be providing a meal plan as in years pass, I have included \$100 for meals.