

Farming the Future at Princeton

Sam Rob

In a Tortoiseshell: *Sam's paper contains a strong example of **motive** and the steps one must take to establish the importance of a paper's line of inquiry. Considering sustainability as service, this passage demonstrates the logical progression of motive from global problems to more localized, solvable issues. From this progression of "macro" to "micro" motive, we gain a greater sense of the paper's scope and relevance to the larger issues at hand.*

Excerpt

In sum, globally, we have two competing agricultural paradigms: one in which farmers are forced to consolidate their farms to create industrial-grade operations using Roundup herbicide and nitrogen fertilizer at the expense of the environment; and the other where small-scale regenerative farmers build out their soils year after year so that non-GMO crops can thrive free of chemical pesticides and fertilizers to create a sustainable system in touch with their environment. Yet, how can the small regenerative farms like Mike's survive in the status quo?

III. Princeton's Role in Shifting the Status Quo

Although regenerative farmers like Mike need genuine policy reform, the impetus for policy change lies with the consumer. The Executive Director for Princeton Campus Dining, Smitha Haneef, stresses Princeton's role in shaping tomorrow's consumers, given that we can only reverse the unsustainable trajectory of conventional farming if we collectively act *now* to demand regenerative produce. Moreover, Haneef emphasizes that Princeton, as an institution that breeds "global thought leaders," is uniquely obligated to catalyze this collective effort. In a personal interview, Haneef reinforced that "no matter where a student is in their arc at Princeton, we want to expose them to the global challenges with food beyond our campus and ways of solving problems to build their *own personal relationship with food*."¹ Not only does Princeton have the institutional prestige to incentivize other higher learning institutions to follow suit out of what social psychologist Irina Feygina terms as "the reputational risk" of being labeled as

¹ Smitha Haneef (Campus Dining Executive Director), interviewed at Whitman Dining Hall, November 21, 2016.

“unsustainable” and thus “lagging,” it also has an inherent responsibility to empower the leaders of tomorrow to be the conscious consumers needed to redefine modern agriculture.

Professor Shapiro, in his lecture “The University as a Public Citizen,” reinforces this responsibility, positing that institutions of higher learning have a broad set of moral obligations that extend beyond their immediate and traditional concerns (Shapiro described these obligations as “responsibilities as Public Citizens”). For Shapiro, the contemporary research university must serve the society that supports it as “both a responsive servant and a thoughtful, but challenging critic” by addressing “questions that society does not want to ask to generate new ideas and understandings” that push our society towards a better future.² In the context of making modern agriculture sustainable, if Princeton, the top-ranked university in the country according to *U.S. News & World Report*, cannot foster a *cohesive* ethos on its own campus that supports a sustainable agricultural system, its role as “a thoughtful critic” for society seems questionable.

Nonetheless, Princeton has already begun to tackle that challenge, a fact demonstrated in 2014 with the Princeton Sustainability Steering Council. The council set a new precedent by proposing principles to guide the University’s sustainability efforts, notably asserting that “Princeton is committed to a ‘campus as a living laboratory,’ an approach that engages the campus community in rigorous inquiry and demonstration of principled pathways to sustainability.” In turn, the recently released “Campus Vision for the Future of Dining” highlights in its values the importance of “sustainable” ingredients, of which 59% are sustainable products and 45% are from local vendors. In recognition of its efforts to foster sustainable dining, Princeton Campus Dining won the Gold Medal for the National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS) Sustainability Award for 2016. However, Campus Dining alone cannot create an ethos of sustainability around food at Princeton.

Unlike most other institutions of higher learning, Princeton’s unique “eating clubs” form a competing but non-university-affiliated entity in the undergraduate dining experience for over 70% of juniors and seniors. Each club has its own distinct identity and possesses an extreme social value as evidenced in the fact that last year 1,038 sophomores or 80% of the class

² Harold Shapiro, “The University as a Public Citizen,” (presentation, *The Phyllis Shapiro Lecture*, McGill University, Montreal, October 14, 2009).

participated in the club admissions process.³ Moreover, it is no secret that these non-university-affiliated institutions do not prioritize sustainability as does Campus Dining, and thus strongly reinforce the conventional high-yield, cheap produce status quo.

Author Commentary

Sam Rob

I grew up in a historic Pennsylvania Dutch farming community nestled in the fertile soils of the Cumberland Valley, an area characterized by endless cornfields, imposing red-brick barns, and towering silos. This past summer, when I began volunteering at an organic farm for a family friend's "Community Supported Agriculture" program, the romance around these conventional farms suddenly faded to bleak pictures of monolithic corporations that mass produce our food.

But when I took Professor Shana Weber's course, I finally engaged intellectually with the notion of sustainable agriculture. This course merged the oft-disparate spheres of academia and the real world for me, which allowed the out-of-text motive to arise naturally in the paper. Nonetheless, the technical key to producing a good paper often relies on the in-text motive. In this paper, I built a compelling in-text motive by creating a two-tiered approach to the lens of my investigation. I first looked at the "global" issues in creating a sustainable agricultural system by considering the methods of farming that could solve the paradox of feeding another 2.5 billion people without destroying the planet's already strained ecosystems. Understanding that the immensity of this global issue could alienate the reader, I simplified the problem to the dichotomy between organic and conventional farms that I experienced in my own hometown.

Having established the "macro" motive on the supply side by looking at the environmental issues in the debate over conventional versus organic farming, I then teased out the "micro" motive on the demand side by highlighting the manifestation of this debate at Princeton in the contradictory ethos on campus towards dining. This is where I was able to blur the lines between academia and the real world, tying in the work of Professor Harold Shapiro and his thesis on the University as a "Public Citizen" with the realities of creating a sustainable ethos towards agriculture here on campus by demanding organic or "regenerative" produce.

This was a truly unique and engaging work that allowed me to craft a distinct motive for an academic project with real world implications. From beginning to end, my work was guided by the dialogue between the "macro" and "micro" in-text motives and was framed by my passion that was derived from my out-of-text motive. While I recognize that most academic work cannot follow the same two-tiered structure as a paradigm, if you can allow the "context" of your work to inspire you, but restrain it from supplanting your creation of compelling in-text motive, you might be able to keep your readers engaged more often!

³ "ICC Releases Results on Spring 2016 Club Admissions," *The Eating Clubs of Princeton*, 2016, February 14, 2016.

Fellow Commentary

Ryan Vinh

When thinking about motive, a good question to ask is, “What problem am I trying to solve?” In Sam’s paper, we can see that he presented a series of problems that gradually reduced in scope to one that was more solvable in the context of his paper. The “micro” problem that he poses ultimately became the driving force for his paper, but one that also establishes progress in solving some of the overarching “macro” problems he presented. Sam’s paper is particularly successful in how well it articulated this progression of motive from overarching problems to a more localized, solvable one. It is this chain of motive that provided readers with an understanding of not only the global problems at play but also the particular problem Sam hopes to solve that is derived from these global problems.

Sam’s motive is composed of a ladder of problems that progressively ask more specific and complicated questions. He first presents the problems posed by “two competing agricultural paradigms”: industrial-grade agriculture that requires the excessive use of pesticides on the one hand, and small-scale regenerative agriculture on the other. Sam points out that in a world where industrial-grade methods are prioritized, small regenerative farms struggle to survive. In this way, he first establishes how regenerative farming practices were eclipsed by large-scale industry. However, ensuring the survivability of these farms was not his explicit goal in the paper. Instead, he used this problem to segue into the role Princeton University could play as a “public citizen” and model for others, discussing the various steps Princeton Campus Dining had taken to promote sustainability and regenerative farming on campus. However, what would at first appear to be an effective promotion of sustainability fell short: despite the university’s official promotion of sustainable dining options, its policies failed to capture a large portion of the upperclass student body due to their membership in eating clubs. Thus, Sam arrives at another problem in the fact that Princeton “cannot foster a *cohesive* ethos on its own campus that supports a sustainable agricultural system.” In other words, the division of upperclassmen into separate eating clubs ultimately reduces the ability of the Princeton community to engage in the same sustainable dining practices promoted by Princeton Campus Dining. Thus, it is the contradictory policies that nullify the University’s sustainable efforts that ultimately become the main motive of Sam’s paper, a motive that he builds through several levels of problems.

To review, the central strength of Sam’s paper is the progression of motive in this excerpt: he begins with problems around the environment and then progressed to problems faced by regenerative farming. Next, he cites the importance of Princeton University acting as a “public citizen” but ultimately arrives at the dilemma concerning the contradictory ethos on campus that prevented the Princeton community from acting as one body in promotion of sustainability. In providing such a progression of motive, Sam gives us a sense of the scope of his paper. Finally, the way he resolves this “micro” motive helps contribute to solving his “macro” motives.

Works Cited

Harold Shapiro, “The University as a Public Citizen,” (presentation, *The Phyllis Shapiro Lecture*, McGill University, Montreal, October 14, 2009).

“ICC Releases Results on Spring 2016 Club Admissions,” *The Eating Clubs of Princeton*, 2016, February 14, 2016.

Smitha Haneef (Campus Dining Executive Director), interviewed at Whitman Dining Hall, November 21, 2016.

Bios

Sam Rob '18 is a Woodrow Wilson concentrator, pursuing certificates in Environmental Studies and Latin American Studies with the intention to study environmental law upon graduation. Sam is from Boiling Springs Pennsylvania, and is an avid fly-fisherman and organic gardener. At Princeton, he is an Army ROTC cadet, a writing center fellow, a global ambassador for OIP, a member of the Model UN team, and the captain of Whitman's IM team. He wrote this paper during the fall of his junior year at the culmination of his research on Princeton's commitment to sustainable agriculture for his course ENV 327: “Investigating an Ethos of Sustainability at Princeton.”

Ryan B. Vinh '19 is one of *Tortoise's* new editors this year. He is currently trying to escape the College of Engineering to major in Philosophy. Outside of *Tortoise*, he organizes the Princeton Social Impact Competition and heads the Careers Team of the Entrepreneurship Club. He doesn't have much else to say. He wrote this as a sophomore.