Critical Reflective Statement #1

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The global challenge of feeding nine billion people intrigues me because it is a highly complicated issue that cannot be solved in isolation. The complex interaction of social, political, economic, and scientific forces appeals to my passion for discussing current issues and debating the best way to address them. The concept that our collective proposal could directly impact our local community or the broader world is highly enticing. I feel very strongly that we all have an obligation to leverage the opportunities given to us to help others that are not as fortunate. I am eager to be a trailblazer in the unique approach to student driven learning and incorporating the multiple research methods that this inaugural course offers. The opportunity to work with people with a wide range of perspectives and abilities holds great interest to me, especially to offset the more analytical approach that is required from my primary discipline, Engineering. I am excited to actively engage in this course to gain knowledge and wisdom that will impact my future endeavors.

I have always been performance driven and strive to set high standards in all aspects of my life. Although this skill is critical to success, I am often challenged to maintain balance between my academic and social commitments. In order to overcome fixating on a single issue and feeling overwhelmed, I am trying to improve the way that I handle my workload by creating a plan for the entire project and allocating time to complete each section. Secondly, I believe that my skills as a consensus maker will contribute to group discussions. I tend to be inherently quiet and prefer not to take the centre stage, but through purposeful exploration, I can find I can impact and influence others. Many times within a group, a single opinion can sway the outcome, but engaging and respecting each individual can explore a more encompassing solution. The last skill that I can bring to the table is my experience with adaptability. My visual impairment has challenged me throughout the years to explore alternative methods to pursue my goals. With my unrelenting commitment to push myself outside of my comfort zone, I have also built up my resiliency, as things are never foolproof. I always focus on what is possible and never am limited by other’s perceptions. I hope that these skills and experiences will positively contribute to the group dynamics and the outcomes of the course.

The magnitude of the challenge to feed nine billion people is filled with complexity and will require innovative thinking and unprecedented cooperation between the multitudes of stakeholders in order for the world citizen to thrive. The equity of the global economy is dramatically off balance due to the unrelenting competition for scarce resources. This has been compounded by the increasing impact of climate change. Society will have to rethink many cultural attitudes in order to achieve greater efficiency in regards to food security. With much patience, a shift in the way people interact with the world can create a global society that is prepared for the challenge of feeding nine billion people.

Public policy must be designed to alleviate food insecurity. Income levels are a primary determinant of food security and, according to Global Issues, the poorest 40% of the world’s population receives 5% of global income while the 20% richest individuals earn 75% of global income. The third world’s limited resources cannot cover the costs of inputs, while first world entitlement has driven increasingly volatile food prices. Over 1.1 million Canadians were impacted by food insecurity in Canada in 2012 with glaring regional disparities. 36.7% of residents in Nunavut have been affected; over four times the national average at 8.3%. Some form of income safety net will be required to improve nutrition levels, that will in turn, improve overall health and economic growth to fuel global prosperity.

Another critical shift to achieve food security will be the reduction of carbon-intensive food sources and associated attitudes towards alternative protein sources. Land use policies need to be addressed as productive land use continues to decline. Instead of growing grains for human consumption, animal feed production consumes one third of all arable land, causing great inefficiencies, as three kilograms of grain are needed to produce one kilogram of meat. It is estimated that by reducing demand for meat to 37.5kg/capita, an extra 1.2 billion people would be able to be fed by 2050. Furthermore, large-scale farming operations create a greater strain on land and water resources, let alone the associated carbon impact of storage, transportation, and distribution. The unsustainable practices of the global food production network needs to be remedied.

It is often said that the easiest and most impactful change is effected locally. Individuals can determine how and what amount of food gets produced by voting with one’s wallet and reimagining the way their own land is used through this concept of “permaculture”, to achieve self sufficiency. With these principles in mind, individuals may choose to produce their own food or other natural resources that may be used in local economies. A stronger production web in and around cities will help combat food insecurity in an increasingly urbanized landscape. Furthermore, scientific innovations can improve drought and disease resistant crops to sustain food security, By focusing on creating strong food networks locally, individuals can reduce the global carbon footprint, become self-sufficient, improve their own local economies, and help ensure food security around the world.

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