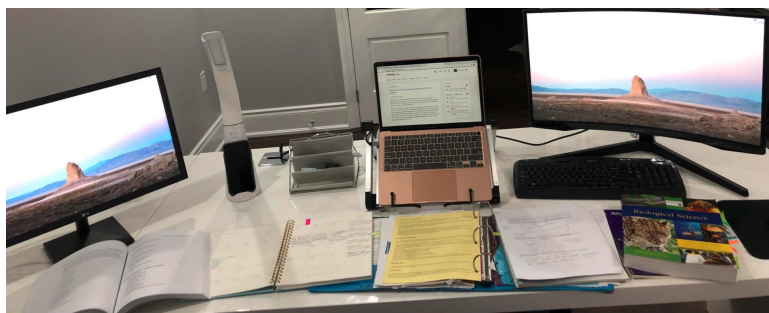
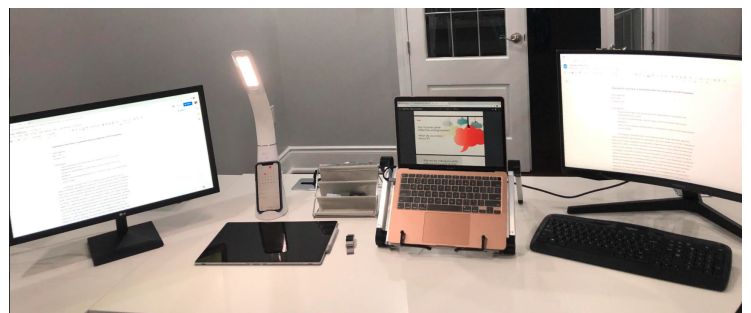


Digitizing My Study Desk: A Sustainable Endeavour amidst the COVID-19 pandemic

BEFORE



AFTER



Instagram Approved Post Screenshot



Learning goals

- Acquire knowledge on the ethical and social implications of our choices and responsibilities as a citizen
- increase my understanding of the human impact on the environment from a local perspective
- Induce critical thinking methods and ways of problem-solving in issues impacting the society at large

Growing up, I had spent most of my academic career using notebooks, physical copies of textbooks, and journals for coursework. However, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, many of my routines changed to accommodate a digitized and online learning environment. In the Fall of 2020, universities switched to an asynchronous, virtual method of delivering lecture content, making it very difficult to accommodate my personal studying accordingly. I feared the possibility of never being able to adjust or this change having an impact on my grades and chances of going to medical school. In the beginning, I purchased physical resources from the McMaster Bookstore as I retained information the best when I could flip through pages, highlight keywords, or bookmark and flag important passages. However, I felt that using so many physical copies and hundreds of line pages were impacting my carbon footprint on the environment. I was disappointed in myself when I realized how much paper I had wasted and thrown away that could have been used for a better purpose. The pandemic gave me the chance to self-reflect on how we can save the Earth from the growing concerns of climate change and forest management.

I realized that with this opportunity in Sustain 1S03, I can approach a sustainable way to eliminate the use of paper products. I strategized on how I was going to adapt to this eco-friendly approach and decided to completely redesign my study environment by switching to ergonomic tools like tablets and digitized computers for accessing notes. Rather than using line pages or notebooks, I have resorted to Google Docs or other online note-making sites to store my online documents in a safe space such as Google Drive. As a result, I eventually started using online PDF versions, textbooks, or borrowed/used books instead of newly purchased ones to limit my paper consumption.

According to an article, paper products make up 1.3% of global greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to 721 metric tons of carbon dioxide.¹ Minimizing the usage of paper

¹ Hackenberg, Jonquil. Digitizing Sustainability Will Help 'Sustain' The Corporate Agenda. *Forbes*. 2020. Accessed on October 3, 2021.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonquilhackenberg/2020/08/18/digitalizing-sustainability-to-sustain-the-corporate-agenda/?sh=403f11b21149>

helps to prevent trees from being cut down and eliminates the energy required to convert a tree. Moreover, the amount of waste accumulated at home is also reduced, lessening the amount of material sent to landfills.² In reading this article, I found that the mentioned facts showcase the detrimental effects consumption of paper can have on our society. It made me wonder about what our planet will look like in the upcoming years if these emissions keep accumulating and their consequences on climate change. We have found ourselves in a chain of supply and demand where the demand for elastic goods like paper products has increased in light of the pandemic. Hence, additional caution on paper consumption is vital to ensure these numbers do not exceed.

Reflecting back, one of my biggest challenges was adjusting to the online aspect as I have always been used to traditional methods of note-taking by hand, thus requiring additional time and patience to adapt. This was a learning curve in my virtual experience as technological difficulties contributed to the ongoing adversities such as poor internet connectivity, increased risk of crashing websites, power outages, cyber-attacks, and software issues that evoked frustration and anger. I was able to overcome these difficulties by making sure my electronics were updated and restarted daily. Additionally, to prevent losing documents, I ensured they were backed up and stored on a USB or external disk, also making porting files more efficient.

Consequently, I took this as a challenge to involve and evaluate the role of digitization in other activities of my day-to-day life. For instance, rather than using a journal or agenda to keep track, I found an online Calendar app that organizes upcoming assignments according to their date. This would remind or alert my Fitbit watch of upcoming notifications that I may have otherwise forgotten and allowed me to save time. Also, this has caused a significant improvement in my physical activity and health as the app alerts me on when to go for walks or take breaks, resulting in increased attentiveness throughout the day. This has become

² Murphy, Niall. Here's how digitization can boost recycling rates. *World Economic Forum*. 2019. Accessed on October 6, 2021. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/here-s-how-digitization-can-boost-recycling-rates/>

another example of how the online world has not only reduced my carbon footprint but disciplined my daily schedule to stay on track, plan ahead and be active.

Despite the struggles, this made a huge difference in my online organization as digitizing allowed me to protect documents and follow a logical method for saving, formatting, and accessing data. In addition, going paperless has avoided the additional stress of gathering scattered documents or misplacing them in which the document may be lost forever. Fortunately, this has also provided more space for downsizing. Today, I am using various technological tools such as a computer for organizing files, a screen monitor for viewing lectures, a tablet for writing notes, and a smartphone for reminders. As suspected, I have significantly reduced my consumption and reliance on paper-based products. I have saved financially and declined my purchasing rate on a stack of 100-paged printer paper from every 2 weeks, to one every 2 months. Overall, I feel successful in making an impact on my environment, which has contributed to an increased level of personal happiness and satisfaction.

Going forward, my next goal is to minimize my usage of paper utilities that contribute to carbon emissions outside of my study environment. Other forms involve toilet paper, straws, and tissues with eco-friendly alternatives like organic cotton and reusable straws. A challenge in employing this practice would arise from the societal reliance and accessibility of these household items. Nonetheless, I anticipate this will be a rewarding opportunity as eliminating paper-based products from my study environment was a difficult task. However, perseverance allowed me to tackle these issues. Hence, this experience contributed to my learning goals as it increased my understanding of human impact on the environment from a local perspective and ways of problem-solving to combat issues affecting society. Now, I feel accomplished in making an effortful difference to reduce the environmental burden consumers impose.

Word count: 1000

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