CSUS 310: History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability

Fall 2015
Monday and Wednesday, 10:20---11:40am
19 Natural Resources Building

DAYS AND TIMES
Monday & Wednesday, 10:20am -11:40am

LOCATION
152 Natural Resources

INSTRUCTOR
Dr. Laura Schmitt Olabisi

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OFFICE
138 Natural Resources

OFFICE HOURS
Wednesdays 1:00pm – 3:00pm (or by appt.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is a survey of the history of events, attitudes and values associated with the environment, wilderness, environmentalism, conservation, preservation, and sustainability. The course examines the historical roots of modern environmental problems in the United States and globally.

This course is designed to foster a better understanding of the environment, human actions and behaviors toward the environment, and how these actions and behaviors foster or hinder sustainability. Environmental action, be it political, financial or social, requires knowledge and awareness of environmental problems and the challenges associated with the range of possible solutions. This course will survey historical environmental perspectives and present-day environmental problems in the context of the human quest for progress. The process of preserving wilderness will be defined and used as a metaphor for understanding how we know the environment, respond to it, use or abuse our surroundings and natural resources. Historical points of view will be compared and contrasted with modern environmentalism as well as multicultural and ecocentric perspectives. The course will cut across a number of settings, from urban to rural, wilderness to the planned landscape. Some of the concepts to be covered include: wilderness, preservation, environmental values and ethics, environmental attitudes and perceptions, environmental movements and organizations, contributions of women to environmental understanding, multicultural perspectives on the environment, natural resource use and management, impacts of recreation and tourism activity, resilience, energy, and ecological collapse.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
I am motivated and inspired by the material in this course, and I believe that it will be worth your efforts and useful in your future endeavors. By the end of the course, I would expect that you can:

• Understand historical sources of modern day attitudes and responses toward natural resources;
• Understand how these attitudes and the actions associated with them have contributed to current environmental problems in the U.S. and globally;
• Relate the wilderness metaphor to current environmental issues;
• Assess and critique current environmental problems, and contemporary perceptions about them, from a systems perspective;
• Differentiate between various worldviews regarding the environment as well as the movements and organizations that represent these worldviews;
• Understand the factors and determinants that influence environmental attitudes and behavior;
• Understand sustainability from individual, societal, and global perspectives;
• Describe individual, social, and institutional actions and changes necessary for planetary health and the transition to sustainability;
• Know how to live like a weasel.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Down to Earth: Nature’s Role in American History (DE)
Ted Steinberg
ISBN: 9780199797394

Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed
Jared Diamond
Penguin Group
ISBN: 0670033375

OTHER READINGS

Additional reading assignments will be placed on the course website on Desire2Learn, which can be accessed at http://d2l.msu.edu.

RESOURCES

Academic resources
MSU Environmental Studies Resources: http://libguides.lib.msu.edu/environmentalstudies
George Mason University Center for Climate & Society: http://climate.society.gmu.edu
Yale Form on Climate Change and the Media: http://www.yaleclimatemediaforum.org

Online media resources
Climate Counts: http://climatecounts.org
Grist: Environmental news, commentary: http://www.grist.org
E: The Environmental Magazine: http://www.emagazine.com
EJ Magazine: http://news.jrn.msu.edu/ejmagazine
– Michigan environmental issues: http://www.mlive.com/environment
Orion Magazine: http://www.orionmagazine.org
treehugger: http://www.treehugger.com/ YES!
Magazine: http://www.yesmagazine.org/

Policy and advocacy resources
350.org: http://www.350.org
Earth Policy Institute: http://www.earth-policy.org
Green America: http://www.greenamerica.org
Michigan Land Use Institute: http://mlui.org
MSU ESPP GreenBoard: http://espp.msu.edu/news/blog
The Natural Step: http://www.naturalstep.org
Strategy for Sustainability: http://www.strategysustainability.com The
Switch Project: http://www.switchenergyproject.com

Web logs and discussion sites:
Aguanomics: http://www.aguanomics.com
Environmental Economics: www.env-econ.net
EXPECTATIONS
You can expect me to be approachable, willing to listen, respectful of your ideas, and open to suggestions. In turn, I have the following expectations of you:

Class Attendance: Class attendance is considered to be an important part of your educational experience. Please arrive on time for every class meeting.

Classroom behavior: The following classroom behaviors are disrespectful to our class, and therefore not acceptable: excessive and/or loud talking with other students, disruptive arrivals and exits, answering cell phone calls, using text/instant messaging, using e-mail/Internet for purposes unrelated to classwork, and other distracting behaviors. Please turn off or silence your mobile phone during class. If you are expecting a call in an emergency situation, please inform the instructor before class.

Mutual respect: In order to create a positive atmosphere for open discussion, you should feel confident that you can express your views and perspectives freely without penalty, and that your comments will not be attributed to you outside the classroom. Please show consideration all of us by honoring the expressions of others. Disagreement is natural, but trust and respect should permeate this class.

Quality of written work: I expect high quality writing in all your assignments, and I hope that you will take pride in your written work. Your written assignments should be well planned and coherent, following standard, written English language and grammar, with proper citations of all references.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
Students are expected to adhere to high standards of integrity and honesty. Dishonesty or plagiarism with regard to assignments or examinations will not be tolerated. See the MSU Regulations, Ordinances and Policies Regarding Academic Honesty and Integrity: https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/. The University policy on academic dishonesty is provided in the Student Handbook and Resource Guide: http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/. Article 2.III.B.2 of the Academic Freedom Report states: “The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards.” In addition, the Department of Community Sustainability adheres to the policies on academic honesty specified in General Student Regulation 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations.

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, students are expected to complete all course assignments, including homework, lab work, quizzes, tests and exams, without assistance from any source. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course. Also, you are not authorized to use the www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in this course. Students who violate MSU regulations on Protection of Scholarship and Grades will receive a failing grade in the course or on the assignment. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your written work or other course activities.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS
You are all adults, and are capable of making wise decisions about the appropriate use of electronic devices to support your learning during and outside of class. I suggest that you keep in mind that recent cognitive research challenges the notion that individuals can efficiently “multitask” and effectively learn new information. Evidence from psychological research has suggested that the use of electronic devices in the classroom negatively affects the performance of other students within view of the devices, and it also negatively affects student users’ ability to track their own ability to learn and understand (for more information about this research, see http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2013/08/19/213439794/stopmultitasking-it-s-for-other-people-s-good). A recent study led by MSU researchers found that “even the smartest college students suffer academically when they use the Internet in class for non-academic purposes” (see more at: http://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2014/surfing-the-web-in-class-bad-idea/). I therefore strongly suggest that you use laptops, mobile phones and tablets sparingly during the class period. As mentioned above, if your
use of these devices is obviously distracting to the instructor or to other students, I will ask you to leave
the classroom. Please see the instructor if you have special needs or would like to discuss this policy
further.

PARTICIPATION, PREPARATION, AND DISCUSSION
The framework of the course is based on the assumption that learning takes place best in a reflective,
interactive and critical atmosphere. Accordingly, the course relies heavily on your participation. You are
expected to be present and prepared, and to actively participate in class discussions. Open, frank, and
civil discussion is encouraged and expected in each class period and on D2L. You are expected to read
assignments before class and be prepared to describe the main themes of the readings and present your
own discussion questions. Failure to be prepared for class will be readily apparent to all of us, and will be
reflected in your course grade. Each of you will lead or co-lead one discussion section during the
semester. Your efforts in preparing for and carrying out this discussion will count for one half of your
participation grade.

The following criteria will be used for evaluating student participation:
  - Quality of interaction with others
    • noting connections among what others are saying, showing how the comments are similar or
different, so as to carry the discussion forward
    • encouraging other members of the group or class, by complimenting them, or by offering
gestures that show you understand
    • demonstrating respect and politeness toward others, especially during times of disagreement
  - Quality of contribution to discussion
    • showing obvious interest in material, demonstrated by attentiveness and being prepared,
coming to class with questions and concepts/theories which you want to discuss
    • offering clear and creative comments and questions about the material
    • citing passages from the text (as evidence) to support your comment or question
    • demonstrating improvement in all the above over the semester
  - You may contribute to discussions, following the above guidelines, either in class or on the course
Google Plus site.

ABSENCES
Michigan State University is committed to ensuring that the bereavement process of a student who loses
a family member during a semester does not put the student at an academic disadvantage in their
classes. If you require a grief absence, you should complete the “Grief Absence Request” web form
(found at https://www.reg.msu.edu/sitemap.aspx?Group=7) no later than one week after knowledge of the
circumstance. I will work with you to make appropriate accommodations so that you are not penalized
due to a verified grief absence. I will also work with you to make reasonable accommodations for
legitimate absences due to family responsibilities and illness. It is much easier for me to do so if you notify
me of your absence in advance of the class period or assignment due date.

ASSIGNMENTS
Most material is presented through short lectures, discussions, and in-class, cooperative learning
exercises. Students are expected to be present, prepared and ready to answer questions and participate
in discussions, willing to engage in cooperative learning (small group) activities, and turn in all
assignments. If you receive less than full credit on an in-class or take-home assignment, it was either
incomplete or not thoroughly prepared. In-class and take-home assignments will be assigned occasionally
throughout the semester. These assignments will include short essays designed to stimulate critical
thinking and to help reinforce the concepts presented in class. The penalty for assignments submitted late
is 10% per day that the assignment is late. One in-class assignment may be omitted or missed without
penalty.
EXAMS
There will be two mid-term exams—in Week 9 and Week 14. The exams will be comprised mostly of short answer questions (i.e., 2-3 sentence responses). There will be no comprehensive final exam.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT
You will be given several options for an environmental project that you will work on this semester, to apply and deepen your knowledge of the content of this class (see Environmental Project, Project Options). The final project is due December 16, the Monday of final exam week. The exam will consist of either a short in-class presentation of your final project, or a poster or a video.

ASSESSMENT
Participation, preparation, and discussion 10%
Assignments (5 total) 25%
Exam I 20%
Exam II 20%
Environmental project (Project report 20%; Final presentation 5%) 25%

Final course grades will be assessed according to the following scale:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>4.0</th>
<th>3.5</th>
<th>3.0</th>
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<th>1.5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>88-93%</td>
<td>83-87%</td>
<td>78-82%</td>
<td>73-77%</td>
<td>68-72%</td>
<td>60-67%</td>
<td>&lt; 60%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Readings and activities</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>September 2</td>
<td>Course introduction</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>September 7</td>
<td>NO CLASS: LABOR DAY</td>
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<td>September 9</td>
<td>Societal collapse</td>
<td>Collapse Prologue: A Tale of Two Farms</td>
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| 3    | September 14| Energy, resources and history | Collapse Ch1: Under Montana’s Big Sky  
D2L: Burke, Ch2: The Big Story: Human History, Energy Regimes, and the Environment     |
|      | October 12| Resilience: an alternative to collapse? | Collapse Ch16: The World as a Polder  
D2L: Nash, Prologue: The condition of wilderness                                         |
| 4    | September 21| Climate change and collapse   | Collapse Ch5: Pyramid schemes  
D2L: Climate and the collapse of Maya civilization, American Scientist                |
|      | September 23| Civilization and sustainability, limits to growth | Collapse Ch14: Why do Some Societies Make Disastrous Decisions?  
D2L: Meadows et al. Excerpt from Limits to Growth: the 30-year Update                   |
|      | September 28| Resilience: an alternative to collapse? | environmental issue assignment due                                                      |
|      | September 30| Michigan history              | Optional field trip and history assignment (Dr. Schmitt Olabisi absent)                 |
| 5    | October 5  | Historical origins of wilderness | DE Ch1: Wilderness under fire  
DE Ch2: A truly new world  
D2L: Nash, Prologue: The condition of wilderness                                         |
|      | October 7  | Transcendentalism             | DE Ch3: Reflections from a woodlot  
D2L: Emerson, Ch1: Nature  
D2L: Corbett, Ch2: A spectrum of environmental ideologies, Communicating Nature         |
| 7    | October 12 | Rationalization: Agrarianism  | DE Ch4: A world of commodities  
DE Ch5: King climate in Dixie                                                          |
<p>|      |            | Optional Michigan History Assignment Due |                                                                                        |</p>
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<th>Week</th>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>Rationalization: Industrialism</td>
<td>DE Ch6: The great food fight&lt;br&gt;DE Ch7: Extracting the new South</td>
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<td>October 19</td>
<td>Preservation, Utilitarianism</td>
<td>DE Ch8: The unforgiving west&lt;br&gt;DE Ch9: Conservation reconsidered</td>
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<td><strong>Environmental Project Outline Due</strong></td>
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<td>October 21</td>
<td>Urbanism, Environmental attitudes and behavior</td>
<td>DE Ch10: Death of the organic city&lt;br&gt;D2L: Corbett, Ch3: The links between environmental attitudes and behaviors, <em>Communicating Nature</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Rachel Carson, Spring without voices&lt;br&gt;D2L: Rob Dunn, In retrospect: Silent Spring&lt;br&gt;<em>In class: Exam prep</em></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>October 26</td>
<td>EXAM</td>
<td>Exam I</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>November 9</td>
<td>Climate change</td>
<td>D2L: Film, ‘Climate of Doubt’</td>
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<td>November 11</td>
<td>Consumerism: food</td>
<td>DE Ch11: Moveable feast&lt;br&gt;DE Ch12: The secret history of meat&lt;br&gt;D2L: A meat eater’s guide to climate change + health: What you eat matters, <em>EWG</em></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>November 16</td>
<td>Food and sustainability</td>
<td>D2L: Michael Pollan, What’s eating America?&lt;br&gt;D2L: Barbara Kingsolver, Stalking the vegetannual, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Nathanael Johnson, Teaching a humongous foundation to listen to small farmers, <em>Grist</em></td>
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|      | November 18| Transportation and sustainability | DE Ch13: America in black and green  
D2L: Marcus Renner, The people’s freeway, *Orion Magazine*  
D2L: Richard Heinberg, Visualize Gasoline, Post Carbon Institute  
D2L: Jay Walljasper, How to make biking mainstream: Lessons from the Dutch |
| 13   | November 23| Consumerism and environment    | DE Ch14: Throwaway society  
D2L: Jeffrey Kaplan: The gospel of consumption, *Orion Magazine*  
D2L: Katharine Mieszkowski, Plastic bags are killing us, *Salon*  
D2L: Annie Leonard, The iPhone and consumer guilt, *The Huffington Post*  
D2L: Ecofriendly product claims often misleading, NPR |
|      | November 25| International perspectives: China | Collapse Ch12: China, Lurching Giant  
*Systems Thinking Assignment Due* |
| 14   | November 30| Environmentalism              | DE Ch15: Shades of green  
D2L: Orr, Conservation and conservatism  
D2L: Lois Gibbs, Learning from Love Canal  
D2L: Lauret Savoy, New place, old roots, *Orion Magazine*  
*In class: Exam Prep* |
|      | December 2 | EXAM                           | Exam II |
| 15   | December 7 | Environmental action          | DE Ch16: In corporations we trust  
D2L: Derrick Jensen, Forget shorter showers, *Orion Magazine*  
D2L: Mike Tidwell, Snap into action for the climate, *Orion Magazine*  
D2L: Alex Williams, Buying into the green movement, *New York Times* |
|      | December 9 | Visions of sustainability     | *Nature and Human History Assignment Due* |
|      | December 16| FINAL EXAM                    | Environmental Projects Due Monday, Dec. 14 |

12:45-2:45 p.m.