

**CSUS 310**  
**History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability**

Spring 2017  
Tuesday and Thursday, 10:20 – 11:40am  
01 Natural Resources Building

<b>COURSE NAME</b>	History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability
<b>COURSE NUMBER</b>	CSUS 310
<b>DAYS AND TIMES</b>	Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:20am – 11:40am
<b>LOCATION</b>	19 Natural Resources

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<b>OFFICE</b>	305 Natural Resources
<b>OFFICE HOURS</b>	Wednesdays, 10:00am – 12:00pm (or by appointment)
<b>COURSE RESOURCES</b>	<a href="http://d2l.msu.edu">http://d2l.msu.edu</a>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is a survey of the history of events, attitudes and values associated with the environment, wilderness, environmentalism, conservation, preservation, pollution, 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 (i) attitudes about the environment, (ii) human actions and behaviors toward the environment, and (iii) 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, 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 will be able to:

- 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 weasels”.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

*Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*  
Jared Diamond  
Penguin Group, 2011  
ISBN: 9780143117001

*Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*  
Ted Steinberg  
Oxford University Press, 2012, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition  
ISBN: 9780199797394

## OTHER READINGS

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

## RESOURCES

Numerous links to academic resources, online media, and environmental advocacy organizations are provided at <http://d2l.msu.edu>.

## 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, 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.

*Use of electronic devices:* While electronic and wireless devices have improved our lives in many ways, they also can be distracting and disruptive to fellow classmates, and they can undermine learning in the classroom. 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 [Stop Multitasking! It's Distracting Me \(And You\)](#)). 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: [Surfing the web in class: Bad Idea](#)). Consequently, in the interest of establishing a focused learning environment for all students, all electronic screens and wireless devices should be turned off and stored by the beginning of each class period (e.g., mobile phones, iPods, tablets, and laptops connected to the Internet). Please see the instructor if you have special needs or would like to discuss this policy further.

## 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 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, readings, 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](http://www.allmsu.com) website to complete any coursework in this class. Students who violate MSU regulations on Protection of Scholarship and Grades will receive a failing grade in the course or on the assignment. Contact the instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of any course activities.

## 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 Form](#) 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, rather than after the fact.

## COURSE GRADE ASSESSMENT

Participation, preparation, and discussion	10%
Assignments (5)	25%
Exam I	20%
Exam II	20%
Environmental project	25%

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

Grade	4.0	3.5	3.0	2.5	2.0	1.5	1.0	0.0
Average	94-100%	88-93%	83-87%	78-82%	73-77%	68-72%	60-67%	< 60%

## **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. 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.

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

## **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 exams—in Week 6 and Week 13. The exams will be comprised mostly of definitions of concepts and explanations of issues related to short answer questions (i.e., 2-3 sentence responses).

## **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 at <http://d2l.msu.edu>).

The Environmental Project is due May 2, the Monday of final exam week. The Environmental Project will serve in place of a final exam.

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Week	Date	Topic	Readings and activities
1	January 10	Course introduction	n/a
	January 12	Climate change	D2L: James Hansen: Why I must speak out about climate change (TED, 2012)  In class: <b>no class meeting</b> (see Discussion Forum on D2L)
2	January 17	Societal collapse	<i>Collapse</i> Prologue: A tale of two farms  In class: Review of course objectives, five-point framework
	January 19	Energy, resources and history	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 1: Under Montana's big sky  D2L: Burke, Ch2: The Big Story: Human History, Energy Regimes, and the Environment
3	January 24	Ecological catastrophe	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 2: Twilight at Easter  D2L: McAnany & Yoffee, Ch. 2: Ecological Catastrophe, Collapse, and the Myth of 'Ecocide' on Rapa Nui, Questioning Collapse  D2L: 'Easter Island's Demise May Have Surprising New Explanation
	January 26	Abandonment	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 4: The ancient ones: The Anasazi and their neighbors  In class: The mystery of Chaco Canyon  <b>Environmental Issue assignment due</b>
4	January 31	Climate change and collapse	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 5: The Maya collapses  D2L: Climate and the collapse of Maya civilization, <i>American Scientist</i>  In class: Images of Mayan sites
	February 2	Malthus and conflict	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 10: Malthus in Africa: Rwanda's genocide  D2L: Could food shortages bring down civilization? <i>Scientific American</i> 300(5): 50-57.  D2L: Climate for conflict, Andrew Solow, <i>Nature</i> 476, August, 2011

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
5	February 7	Social history, environmental beliefs	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 11: One island, two peoples, two histories: The Dominican Republic and Haiti  D2L: Richard Conniff, When civilizations collapse, <i>Environment Yale</i>
	February 9	China and the environment	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 12: China, lurching giant  D2L: China's Top 6 Environmental Concerns, LiveScience, March 15, 2013
6	February 14	Societal collapse and decision-making	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 14: Why do some societies make disastrous decisions?  In class: Discussion of exam preparation
	February 16		<b>EXAM I</b>
7	February 21	Historical origins of wilderness	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 1: Wilderness under fire  D2L: Nash, Prologue: The condition of wilderness
	February 23	Settlement	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 2: A truly new world  D2L: Corbett, Ch1: The formation of environmental beliefs, <i>Communicating Nature</i>
8	February 28	Transcendentalism	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 3: Reflections from a woodlot  D2L: Emerson, Ch1: Nature  D2L: Annie Dillard, Living like weasels  In class: Reflections from a woodlot
	March 2	Rationalization: Agrarianism	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 4: A world of commodities  <i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 5: King climate in Dixie  D2L: Singapore: Legend of the lost mill city buried under Saugatuck dunes, MLive, August 1, 2011  In class: Meaningful experiences with nature
9	March 7	<b>Spring Break</b>	n/a
	March 9	<b>Spring Break</b>	n/a

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
10	March 14	Rationalization: Industrialism	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 6: The great food fight</p> <p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 7: Extracting the new South</p> <p>D2L: Corbett, Ch2: A spectrum of environmental ideologies, <i>Communicating Nature</i></p> <p><b>“Living Like Weasels” assignment due</b></p>
	March 16	Preservation, Utilitarianism	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 8: The unforgiving west</p> <p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 9: Conservation reconsidered</p> <p>D2L: The miseducation of John Muir, <i>Atlas Obscura</i>, July 26, 2016</p> <p>In class: excerpts from <i>The National Parks: America's Best Idea</i>, <a href="http://www.pbs.org/">http://www.pbs.org/</a>, 2009</p>
11	March 21	Environmental attitudes and behavior	<p>D2L: Corbett, Ch3: The links between environmental attitudes and behaviors, <i>Communicating Nature</i></p> <p>D2L: Gardner, Accelerating the shift to sustainability</p> <p>In class: <i>The Wilderness Idea</i></p>
	March 23	Urbanism, transition	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 10: Death of the organic city</p> <p>D2L: Talking trash during the dog days: A brief history of sanitation in New York City, <i>Scientific American</i>, July 29, 2010</p>
12	March 28	Food and sustainability	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 11: Moveable feast</p> <p>D2L: Michael Pollan, What's eating America, <i>Smithsonian</i>, June 15, 2006</p> <p>In class: excerpts from <i>The Dust Bowl</i>, <a href="http://www.pbs.org/">http://www.pbs.org/</a>, 2012</p>
	March 30	Food and sustainability	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 12: The secret history of meat</p> <p>D2L: A meat eater's guide to climate change + health: What you eat matters, EWG</p> <p>In class: Discussion with Rob Greenfield</p> <p><b>Sustainable Living assignment due</b></p>

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
13	April 4	Transportation and consumerism	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 13: America in black and green</p> <p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 14: Throwaway society</p> <p>D2L: Jeffrey Kaplan: The gospel of consumption, <i>Orion Magazine</i>, May/June, 2008</p> <p>In class: Discussion of exam preparation</p>
	April 6		<b>EXAM II</b>
14	April 11	Environmentalism	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 15: Shades of green</p> <p>D2L: Orr, Conservation and conservatism</p> <p>D2L: Rachel Carson, Spring without voices</p> <p>D2L: Lois Gibbs, Learning from Love Canal</p> <p>In class: Minimalism</p> <p>In class: Voices of environmentalism</p>
	April 13	Climate change	<p>D2L: When words fail, Bill McKibben, <i>Orion Magazine</i></p> <p>D2L: Shrinking Arctic ice prompts drastic change in <i>National Geographic Atlas</i>, Christine, Dell'Amore</p> <p>D2L: As sea levels rise, Norfolk is sinking and planning, <i>NPR</i>, June 24, 2014</p> <p>D2L: Big Gap between What Scientists Say and Americans Think about Climate Change, <i>Scientific American</i>, January 30, 2015</p> <p>In class: "Climate of Doubt"</p> <p><b>Brains and Climate Change assignment due</b></p>
15	April 18	Ecology	<p>D2L: <i>The Economist</i>, Welcome to the Anthropocene</p> <p>D2L: Johan Rockström et al., A safe operating space for humanity, <i>Nature</i></p> <p>D2L: 'Which countries are in ecological debt?', World Economic Forum, August 21, 2015</p> <p>In class: Discussion of ecological debt</p>



Week	Date	Topic	Readings
	April 20	International perspectives	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 16: In corporations we trust D2L: Ramachandra Guha, Radical American environmentalism In class: “How to feed the world in 2050”
16	April 25	Business and the environment	<i>Collapse</i> , Ch. 15 Big businesses and the environment: Different conditions, different outcomes <b>Nature and Human History assignment due</b>
	April 27	Reflections	<i>Collapse</i> , Ch. 16: The world as polder: What does it all mean to us today? Summary reflections and final project discussion
17	May 2	Final Project	<b>FINAL PROJECT assignment due Monday, May 2</b> There will be no in-class final exam.