CSUS 310 : History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability

Spring 2015
Tuesday and Thursday, 10:20---11:40am
152 Natural Resources Building

DAYS AND TIMES
Tuesday & Thursday, 10:20am – 11:40am

LOCATION
152 Natural Resources

INSTRUCTOR
Dr. Laura Schmitt Olabisi

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TWITTER
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COURSE RESOURCES
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OFFICE
138 Natural Resources

OFFICE HOURS
Tuesdays 1:00pm – 3:00pm (or by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course is a survey of the history of attitudes and values associated with the environment, wilderness, environmentalism, conservation, preservation, and sustainability. The course examines the perceptions and assessment of modern environmental problems.

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, and energy.

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;
• Relate the wilderness metaphor to current environmental issues;
• Assess and critique current environmental problems, and contemporary perceptions about them;
• 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;
• Articulate various environmental behavior concepts and processes, including what it takes to influence people to change to more pro-environmental attitudes and behaviors;
• 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

A Short History of Progress (SHP)
Ronald Wright
Da Capo Press
ISBN: 9780786715473

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
EJ Magazine: http://news.jrn.msu.edu/ejmagazine
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.strategyforsustainability.com The
Switch Project: http://www.switchenergyproject.com

Web logs and discussion sites:
Aguanomics: http://www.aguanomics.com
Environmental Economics: www.env-econ.net

MUSEUM EXHIBITION
The MSU Museum is featuring an exhibition on the Passenger Pigeon (Ectopistes migratorius), which was once Earth’s most abundant bird before the extinction of the entire species, a victim of human hunting and
exploitation. The last observed colossal nesting of birds was in Michigan, and it has been 100 years since we have seen the last living Passenger Pigeon (see http://museum.msu.edu/?q=node/1139). We will use the exhibition as a resource in this course. For more information about the Passenger Pigeon, see Project Passenger Pigeon: Lessons from the Past for a Sustainable Future http://passengerpigeon.org/.

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.

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
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 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/). Consequently, in the interest of establishing a focused learning environment for all students, all electronic screens and wireless devices must 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.

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 in the online fora (Google Plus). 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.

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 8 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 May 7, the scheduled date of the final exam. The exam will consist of a short presentation of your final project.

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>4.0</th>
<th>3.5</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>Course introduction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Civilization and existentialism</td>
<td>SHP Ch1: Gauguin’s questions</td>
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<td>January 20</td>
<td>Societal collapse</td>
<td>SHP Ch2: The great experiment</td>
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<td>January 22</td>
<td>Civilization and the environment</td>
<td>D2L: Richard Conniff, When civilizations collapse, <em>Environment Yale</em></td>
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<td>January 27</td>
<td>Climate change and collapse</td>
<td>SHP Ch3: Fool’s paradise</td>
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<td>January 29</td>
<td>Civilization and sustainability, limits to growth</td>
<td>D2L: Jared Diamond, Easter’s end, <em>Discover</em></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Resilience: an alternative to collapse?</td>
<td>D2L: McAnany &amp; Yoffee, Ch. 2: Ecological Catastrophe, Collapse, and the Myth of ‘Ecocide’ on Rapa Nui, <em>Questioning Collapse</em></td>
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<td>February 5</td>
<td>Historical origins of wilderness</td>
<td>D2L: Walker &amp; Salt, Ch. 6: Creating Space in a Shrinking World: Resilience &amp; Sustainability, <em>Resilience Thinking</em></td>
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<td>February 10</td>
<td>Transcendentalism</td>
<td>DE Ch1: Wilderness under fire</td>
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<td>February 12</td>
<td>Rationalization: Agrarianism</td>
<td>DE Ch3: Reflections from a woodlot</td>
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<td>February 17</td>
<td>Rationalization: Industrialism</td>
<td>DE Ch4: A world of commodities</td>
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<td>February 19</td>
<td>Preservation, Utilitarianism</td>
<td>DE Ch5: King climate in Dixie</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>February 24</td>
<td>Urbanism, Environmental attitudes and behavior</td>
<td>DE Ch6: The great food fight</td>
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<td>DE Ch7: Extracting the new South</td>
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<td>DE Ch8: The unforgiving west</td>
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<td>DE Ch9: Conservation reconsidered</td>
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Environmental Issue Assignment Due
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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</table>
| 7    | February 26 | Water and sustainability | D2L: PROJECT: ICE Documentary Portrays Changing Climate on the Great Lakes, *National Geographic*  
D2L: Setting rivers free: As dams are torn down, nature is quickly recovering  
D2L: Dam removals: Rivers on the run |
| 8    | March 3 | EXAM | Exam I  
*Environmental Project Outline Due* |
|      | March 5 | The shift to sustainability | D2L: Gary Gardner, pp. 189-206, Accelerating the shift to sustainability  
D2L: Bill McKibben, When words fail, *Orion Magazine*  
D2L: Aldo Leopold, The land ethic, *A Sand County Almanac*  
D2L: Annie Dillard, Living like weasels |
| 9    | March 10-12 | SPRING BREAK WEEK: NO CLASS | |
| 10   | March 17 | A call to sustainability | D2L: Paul Hawken, You are brilliant and the Earth is hiring, *YES! Magazine*  
D2L: Michael Pollan, Why bother?, *New York Times*  
D2L: A systems thinking model: The iceberg, NWEI |
|      | March 19 | Ecology | D2L: Welcome to the Anthropocene, *The Economist*  
D2L: Johan Rockström et al., A safe operating space for humanity, *Nature*  
D2L: Earth sliding into ecological debt ‘earlier and earlier’  
**Weasels Assignment Due Friday, March 20** |
| 11   | March 24 | Climate change | D2L: Christine, Dell’Amore, Shrinking Arctic ice prompts drastic change in *National Geographic Atlas*  
D2L: As sea levels rise, Norfolk is sinking and planning, *NPR*  
D2L: Yale Project, Climate change in the American mind: beliefs and attitudes |
|      | March 26 | Consumerism: food | DE Ch11: Moveable feast  
DE Ch12: The secret history of meat  
D2L: A meat eater’s guide to climate change + health: What you eat matters, EWG |
| 12   | March 31 | Food and sustainability | D2L: Michael Pollan, What’s eating America?  
D2L: Barbara Kingsolver, Stalking the vegetannual, *Orion Magazine*  
D2L: Nathanael Johnson, Teaching a humongous foundation to listen to small farmers, *Grist* |
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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td><strong>Transportation and sustainability</strong>&lt;br&gt;DE Ch13: America in black and green&lt;br&gt;D2L: Marcus Renner, The people’s freeway, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Richard Heinberg, Visualize Gasoline, Post Carbon Institute&lt;br&gt;D2L: Jay Walljasper, How to make biking mainstream: Lessons from the Dutch</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>April 7</td>
<td><strong>Consumerism and environment</strong>&lt;br&gt;DE Ch14: Throwaway society&lt;br&gt;D2L: Jeffrey Kaplan: The gospel of consumption, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Katharine Mieszkowski, Plastic bags are killing us, <em>Salon</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Annie Leonard, The iPhone and consumer guilt, <em>The Huffington Post</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Ecofriendly product claims often misleading, NPR</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>April 9</td>
<td>Environmentalism</td>
<td><strong>Environmentalism</strong>&lt;br&gt;DE Ch15: Shades of green&lt;br&gt;D2L: Orr, Conservation and conservatism&lt;br&gt;D2L: Lois Gibbs, Learning from Love Canal&lt;br&gt;D2L: Lauret Savoy, New place, old roots, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Product Life Cycle Assignment Due</strong></td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td><strong>Environmental action</strong>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Derrick Jensen, Forget shorter showers, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Mike Tidwell, Snap into action for the climate, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Alex Williams, Buying into the green movement, <em>New York Times</em></td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>April 21</td>
<td><strong>International perspectives: China</strong>&lt;br&gt;DE Ch16: In corporations we trust&lt;br&gt;Other readings TBA</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>April 23</td>
<td><strong>International perspectives: Costa Rica</strong>&lt;br&gt;Readings TBA</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>April 28</td>
<td>Visions of sustainability</td>
<td><strong>Visions of sustainability</strong>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Frances Moore Lappé, Free your (eco)mind*, <em>YES! Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Derrick Jensen, To live or not to live, <em>Orion Magazine</em>&lt;br&gt;D2L: Valerie Schloredt, Boulder votes to free its electric company&lt;br&gt;D2L: Donella Meadows, Living green isn’t a sacrifice, it’s an adventure, Donella Meadows Institute&lt;br&gt;In class: <em>Switch</em> film and exercise</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>May 7</td>
<td><strong>FINAL EXAM</strong>&lt;br&gt;Environmental projects due today, Thursday, May 7. Final Presentations 7:45am – 9:45am</td>
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