

2820

CSUS 310: History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability

Fall 2017

Online

INSTRUCTOR
E-MAIL ADDRESS

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OFFICE
OFFICE HOURS

138 Natural Resources
Mondays 3:00pm – 5:00pm (or by appt.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION: ONLINE

This course takes an historical look at concepts of sustainability, resilience, resource use, development, and the human relationship with 'nature' and 'wilderness'. We examine the roots of modern environmental problems in the United States, and learn from global civilizations that have grappled with the challenge of sustainability—some successfully, and others less so.

This course is designed to foster a better understanding of how human attitudes and behaviors can promote or hinder a society's progress towards sustainability. Environmental action, be it political, financial or social, requires knowledge of how environmental problems evolve over time (decades to centuries, in some cases), 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. Concepts of 'wilderness' and 'nature' as used historically will be interrogated and discussed in relation to more modern concepts of 'resilience' and 'sustainability'. 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: ecological collapse, wilderness, preservation and conservation, environmental values and ethics, environmental attitudes and perceptions, environmental movements and organizations, contributions of women, indigenous societies, and communities of color to environmental understanding, multicultural perspectives on the environment, natural resource use and management, impacts of recreation and tourism activity, and resilience.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, I would expect that you can:

- Understand historical roots of modern day attitudes and behaviors toward the environment;
- Understand how these attitudes and the actions associated with them have contributed to current environmental problems in the U.S. and globally;
- Relate the concept of 'wilderness' 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
 Oxford University Press, 2012, 3rd edition
 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 Forum 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>
 The Environment Report: <http://michiganradio.org/programs/environment-report> mlive
 – 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.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

EXPECTATIONS: ONLINE COURSE

You can expect me to be approachable, willing to listen, respectful of your ideas, and open to suggestions. The most important aspect of an online course is the interaction between students and the

instructor, and so I will make every effort to be available online (every day) and in person (on Mondays; see office hours above). I will answer emails within 24 hours, other than the period from Saturday noon to Sunday noon, when I will typically be offline. In turn, I have the following expectations of you:

Class Participation: I expect you to be 'active' in the class on at least a weekly basis, if not more frequently. Please see Participation section below for more detailed guidelines.

Online behavior: We have all experienced appalling behavior online, often driven by the anonymity that the internet affords, and I'm sure we can all agree that this is not conducive to learning or to the free exchange of ideas. I expect all of you to operate from a position of respect for your fellow students, for the instructor, and for the course material. Disagreement is natural, and vigorous discussion and debate are welcome, but trust and respect should permeate this class. As the instructor, I will be monitoring the discussion fora in D2L very closely. Any comment that contains derogatory or inflammatory language, or constitutes a personal attack against a student or the instructor, will be taken down and the commenter will receive no credit for that participation. Any student who persists in making these types of comments despite a warning may fail the course or be otherwise disciplined.

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. Submitting comments online is no excuse for using 'text-speak' or overly casual language. All of your writing for this course, including your comments on D2L, should be of the same quality as the written assignments you turn in.

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.

PARTICIPATION, PREPARATION, DISCUSSION, and GROUP WORK

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 online discussions. You are expected to read assignments by the beginning of the week for which they are assigned, 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.

Your participation grade will consist of two components. First, you will participate in the online discussions each week, either by posing your own question or observation about the readings, lectures, or videos, or

by responding thoughtfully to your classmates' questions or observations. I expect you to participate in the discussion EVERY week. I will monitor the discussion actively throughout the week (prompting/correcting as needed), and by Friday at 5 p.m. I will check to see if you have participated or not. There are 15 weeks in the semester, so I expect at least 14 HIGH QUALITY posts for an 'A' grade for this portion (consisting of 5 points). Please see the criteria below for what constitutes 'high quality'. Between 12 and 14 posts is a 'B' grade; fewer than 12 posts is a 'C'.

The second component of your participation grade will be group work (also 5 points). In the first week of class, I will assign you to a group of three to four. Working with your groupmates, you will select a week during which you will develop a response to the readings and video material that is designed to stimulate discussion among your classmates. You may do this through a written response, a powerpoint, a short video, or any other medium you wish to use. I will review this response and post it on D2L for your classmates. Regardless of the medium, the response should contain the following: (1) A reaction to the class material. What did you find interesting and/or surprising? What did you agree, or disagree, with? (2) What discussion questions would you like to pose for your classmates? A good discussion question does not simply require students to regurgitate what they read; rather, it encourages them to reflect and apply course concepts in other settings. For example, rather than asking, 'What are the differences between conservation and preservation?', a better question would be, 'In what ways do we see conservationist and preservationist views playing a role in modern environmental issues?'. You must submit your response and discussion questions *by the Friday before you are scheduled to lead discussion*. For example, if you are signed up to lead discussion in Week 3 (Sept. 11-15), you should submit your materials to me *no later than Friday, September 8*.

The following criteria will be used for evaluating the quality of student participation:

- noting connections among what others are saying, showing how the comments are similar or different, so as to carry the discussion forward
- stating agreement or disagreement politely and respectfully, and supporting your stance with facts and examples
- offering clear and creative comments and questions about the material and/or points raised by classmates
- citing passages from the text (as evidence) to support your comment or question
- using complete sentences, correct spelling and grammar, and coherent logic
- demonstrating improvement in all the above over the semester

You will also work with your group to complete one of the assignments for the class, as well as the final project and presentation. I expect each group member to contribute equally to the group projects. At the end of the semester, each of you will rate the contributions of your fellow group members (confidentially) so that I can get a sense of how much effort each person put into the group assignments. In general, I will not 'micro-manage' group dynamics throughout the semester—you are all adults and I expect you to figure out a way to work together, resolve conflicts, and listen to one another. Based on my experience teaching this class, you will learn as much (or more) from your classmates as you will learn from me and from the course material, so I expect you to take the obligations to your group seriously.

ABSENCES, SPECIAL NEEDS ACCOMMODATIONS AND EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

My goal for each and every one of you is for you to have a positive learning experience through this class. I am willing to work with you to make reasonable accommodations for legitimate absences due to family responsibilities, illness, or sudden changes in work obligations. In order for me to do so, it is imperative that you communicate with me either in person or online as soon as possible should a circumstance arise that makes it impossible for you to meet a deadline. It is much easier for me to accommodate you if you notify me of your absence in advance of the class period or assignment due date.

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.

If you require special accommodation due to a disability, please contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a Verified Individual Services Accommodation ("VISA") form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc.). I am happy to work with you to make sure you have the environment and materials necessary for your successful performance in the class. In addition, please feel free to contact me if any of the online materials present accessibility challenges.

ASSIGNMENTS

Four take-home assignments will be assigned throughout the semester. Three of these assignments will be completed individually, and one will be a group assignment. They are designed to stimulate creative 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, unless there are legitimate extenuating circumstances which you discuss with me (see course policy above).

EXAMS

There will be one mid-term exam in Week 12. Because this is an online course, the exam is presumed to be open-book, meaning you may use any online or hard copy material from the course or other sources to answer the questions. However, you **MUST** complete the exam individually.

FINAL PROJECT AND PRESENTATION

You will work with your assigned group to complete the final project and presentation. 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 under the Assignments tab). The final project report is due December 6. On Monday, December 11, from 3 p.m.-5 p.m., you will give a presentation of your project **IN PERSON**.

REFERENCES

Some of the assignments you complete in this class will ask you to use references. It is useful to distinguish between sources which attempt to present an objective point of view (typically by analyzing both sides of an issue), and sources which are presenting an opinion or arguing for a particular point of view. Neither are 'good' or 'bad'—we will read examples of both in this class—but using an opinion-based source to provide facts about an issue can be dangerous or misleading, because typically only one set of facts are presented in these pieces.

For example, if you were to write an essay on genetically modified organisms (GMOs), it would be appropriate to use a New York Times article to support statements of fact about GMOs (<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/30/business/gmo-promise-falls-short.html>). This is because the NY Times, like other high profile news outlets, employs fact-checkers and editors to make sure information is presented accurately, and reporters attempt to employ an objective, let's-consider-all-sides stance. It would be less appropriate to use statements from an organization which is explicitly anti-GMO (for example: <http://gmofreeusa.org/>) to derive your facts about the issue. It would be fine to use anti-GMO references to discuss the arguments and points of view of those people/organizations who are opposed to the technology. Regardless of your *personal* stance on the issue (you may take any stance in this class, as long as you support it well and argue it clearly!), one should always seek to use more objective sources for factual information, while opinion-based content is appropriate for generating ideas and arguments. This is because opinion-based or issue-advocacy content by definition does not present a full set of facts—only the facts that support that point of view.

In general, I ask you to refrain from using blog posts as references—while some blogs contain excellent writing, they are not subject to any type of quality control and can contain factual errors and

misleading arguments. If you find a particular blog to be a useful source of information, please send the link to me and I will vet it before accepting it as a reference for your assignment.

Please use Wikipedia only sparingly (once per assignment). Wikipedia is not a bad source of information, but it is typically only surface-level, and I would like you to do deeper research.

EXTRA CREDIT

Some assignments for extra credit will be available throughout the semester.

ASSESSMENT

Participation, preparation, and discussion	10%
Assignments (4 total)	40%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final project (Project report 20%; Final presentation 10%)	30%

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

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

COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings and activities
1	August 30-Sept. 1	1. Course introduction 2. Societal collapse	<u>Read:</u> <i>Collapse</i> Prologue: A Tale of Two Farms <i>Collapse</i> Ch1: Under Montana's Big Sky <u>Watch:</u> Class Intro video Jared Diamond TED talk, 'Why do Societies Collapse?'
2	Sept. 5-8	1. Energy, resources & history 2. Civilization & the environment	<u>Read:</u> D2L: Burke, Ch2: The Big Story: Human History, Energy Regimes, and the Environment <i>Collapse</i> Ch2: Twilight at Easter D2L: McAnany & Yoffee, Ch. 2: Ecological Catastrophe, Collapse, and the Myth of 'Ecocide' on Rapa Nui, <i>Questioning Collapse</i> D2L: 'Easter Island's Demise May Have Surprising New Explanation'. <u>Watch:</u> Lecture dated September 5
3	Sept. 11-15	1. Climate change and collapse 2. Civilization and sustainability, limits to growth	<u>Read:</u> <i>Collapse</i> Ch5: Pyramid schemes D2L: Climate and the collapse of Maya civilization, <i>American Scientist</i> <i>Collapse</i> Ch14: Why do Some Societies Make Disastrous Decisions? D2L: Meadows et al. Excerpt from Limits to Growth: the 30-year Update <u>Watch:</u> Lecture dated September 11
4	Sept. 18-22	The Norse: Two civilizations, two outcomes	<u>Read:</u> <i>Collapse</i> Ch6: The Viking Prelude and Fugues <i>Collapse</i> Ch7: Norse Greenland's Flowering <i>Collapse</i> Ch8: Norse Greenland's End <u>Watch:</u> The Lost Vikings EASTER ISLAND ASSIGNMENT DUE SEPT. 15
5	Sept. 25-29	1. Resilience: an alternative to collapse? 2. Systems Thinking	<u>Read:</u> <i>Collapse</i> Ch16: The World as a Polder D2L: Walker & Salt, Ch. 6: Creating Space in a Shrinking World: Resilience & Sustainability, <i>Resilience Thinking</i> D2L: A systems thinking model: The iceberg, NWEI <u>Watch:</u> Lecture dated September 25

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings and activities
6	Oct. 2-6	1. Historical origins of wilderness 2. Transcendentalism	<p>Read: <i>DE</i> Ch1: Wilderness under fire <i>DE</i> Ch2: A truly new world D2L: Nash, Prologue: The condition of wilderness <i>DE</i> Ch3: Reflections from a woodlot D2L: Thoreau, Ch16: The Pond in Winter, <i>Walden</i></p> <p>Watch: Lecture dated October 2</p>
7	Oct. 9-13	1. Agrarianism 2. Industrialism	<p>Read: <i>DE</i> Ch4: A world of commodities <i>DE</i> Ch5: King climate in Dixie <i>DE</i> Ch6: The great food fight <i>DE</i> Ch7: Extracting the new South</p> <p>Watch: Lecture dated October 9</p> <p>SYSTEMS THINKING PROJECT DUE OCT. 13</p>
8	Oct. 16-20	Preservation & Utilitarianism	<p>Read: <i>DE</i> Ch8: The unforgiving west <i>DE</i> Ch9: Conservation reconsidered D2L: Aldo Leopold, The land ethic, <i>A Sand County Almanac</i></p> <p>Watch: The National Parks, Muir vs. Pinchot</p>
9	Oct. 23-27	1. Urbanism 2. Visions of sustainability	<p>Read: <i>DE</i> Ch10: Death of the organic city D2L: Rachel Carson, Spring without voices D2L: Rob Dunn, In retrospect: Silent Spring D2L: Annie Dillard, Living like weasels</p> <p>Watch: Lecture dated Oct. 23</p>
10	Oct. 30-Nov. 3	Ecological Limits	<p>Read: D2L: Welcome to the Anthropocene, <i>The Economist</i> D2L: Johan Rockström et al., A safe operating space for humanity, <i>Nature</i> D2L: Earth sliding into ecological debt 'earlier and earlier' D2L: Paul R. and Anne H. Ehrlich, The population bomb revisited, <i>Elec. Journal of Sustainable Development</i></p> <p>Watch: Lecture dated Oct. 30 Johan Rockström TED talk, 'Let the Environment Guide our Development'</p> <p>NATURE WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE NOV. 3</p>

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings and activities
11	Nov. 6-10	Food & Sustainability	<p><u>Read:</u> <i>DE</i> Ch11: Moveable feast <i>DE</i> Ch12: The secret history of meat D2L: A meat eater's guide to climate change + health: What you eat matters, EWG D2L: Edna Lewis, What is Southern? D2L: Jon Foley, Changing the Global Food Narrative</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> Mark Bittman TED talk, What's Wrong With What we Eat? Lecture dated Nov. 6</p>
12	Nov. 13-17	1. Climate Change 2. Transportation and sustainability	<p><u>Read:</u> <i>DE</i> Ch13: America in black and green D2L: <i>Your choice</i> of 2 readings selected from 'Future of Transportation' e-book D2L: Jay Walljasper, How to make biking mainstream: Lessons from the Dutch</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> D2L: Film, 'Climate of Doubt' Lecture dated Nov. 13</p> <p>MIDTERM EXAM DUE NOVEMBER 17</p>
13	Nov. 20-22	Consumerism and environment	<p><u>Read:</u> <i>DE</i> Ch14: Throwaway society D2L: Jeffrey Kaplan: The gospel of consumption, <i>Orion Magazine</i> D2L: Katharine Mieszkowski, Plastic bags are killing us, <i>Salon</i> D2L: Annie Leonard, The iPhone and consumer guilt, <i>The Huffington Post</i> D2L: Ecofriendly product claims often misleading, NPR D2L: Robin Kimmerer, Windigo Footprints</p> <p><u>Watch:</u> Annie Leonard, <i>The Story of Stuff</i> 60 minutes, <i>The Wasteland</i></p>
14	Nov. 27-Dec. 1	Environmentalism	<p><u>Read:</u> <i>DE</i> Ch15: Shades of green D2L: Orr, Conservation and conservatism D2L: Lois Gibbs, Learning from Love Canal D2L: Robert Bullard, Confronting Environmental Racism in the 21st Century</p> <p>FUTURE THINKING ASSIGNMENT DUE DEC. 1</p>

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings and activities
15	Dec. 4-8	1. Environmental action 2. The shift to sustainability	<p>Read: <i>DE</i> Ch16: In corporations we trust D2L: Frances Moore Lappé, Free your (eco)mind”, <i>YES! Magazine</i> D2L: Kate Raworth, Change the Goal D2L: Donella Meadows, Living green isn’t a sacrifice, it’s an adventure, Donella Meadows Institute D2L: Gary Gardner, pp. 189-206, Accelerating the shift to sustainability</p> <p>Final Projects Due Wednesday, Dec. 6</p>
16	MONDAY Dec. 11	FINAL PRESENTATIONS IN PERSON 3 p.m. – 5 p.m., NR 338	