

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

Spring 2020  
Tuesday and Thursday, 10:20 – 11:40am  
152 Natural Resources Building

<b>COURSE NAME</b>	History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability
<b>COURSE NUMBER</b>	CSUS 310
<b>DAYS AND TIMES</b>	Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10:20am – 11:40am
<b>LOCATION</b>	152 Natural Resources Building

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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

Both texts have been held in Course Reserve at the Main Library Reserve, 1st floor Patron Services Desk.

## 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:* Attendance is required. 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, 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.

### **SAFE AND INCLUSIVE CAMPUS COMMUNITY**

*Michigan State University is committed to fostering a culture of caring and respect that is free of relationship violence and sexual misconduct, and to ensuring that all affected individuals have access to services. For information on reporting options, confidential advocacy and support resources, university policies and procedures, or how to make a difference on campus, visit the Title IX website at [www.titleix.msu.edu](http://www.titleix.msu.edu). " [Office of the Ombudsperson](#)*

### **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. After three (3) unexcused absences, the final course grade will be deducted by 1% for each additional absence.

“As for me, the grounds of my hope have always been that history is wilder than our imagination of it and that the unexpected shows up far more regularly than we ever dream.” —Rebecca Solnit

## **COURSE GRADE ASSESSMENT**

Participation, preparation, and discussion	10%
Assignments (5)	25%
Exam I	25%
Exam II	25%
Environmental project	15%

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

<b>GRADING SCALE:</b> Grade	Percentage
4.0	93.5 - 100%
3.5	87.5 - 93.4%
3.0	82.5 - 87.4%
2.5	77.5 - 82.4%
2.0	72.5 - 77.4%
1.5	67.5 - 72.4%
1.0	62.5 - 67.4%
0.0	less than 62.4%

## **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.

Preparedness for class will occasionally be tested through in-class exercises, unannounced quizzes, and engagement checks. The following criteria will be used for evaluating student PARTICIPATION, PREPARATION, AND DISCUSSION:

- 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. Five formal homework assignments are scheduled throughout the semester (5% each), and worth 25% of the final course grade. The penalty

for assignments submitted late is 10% per day that the assignment is late. In-class assignments or exercises will contribute to the Participation, Preparation, and Discussion component of the course. One in-class assignment may be omitted or missed without penalty.

## EXAMS

There will be two exams—in Week 7 and Week 15. The exams will be comprised mostly of definitions of concepts and explanations of issues related to short answer questions (i.e., 3-5 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 by the end of the day on May 1, the Wednesday of final exam week. The Environmental Project will serve in place of a final exam.

## COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

This schedule includes the course topic for each class meeting, as well as the readings that should be completed in preparation for each class date. Please come prepared each class day to discuss the readings assigned for that day.

Week	Date	Topic	Readings and activities
1	January 7	Course introduction	n/a
	January 9	Energy, history, and climate change	D2L: Burke, Ch2: The Big Story: Human History, Energy Regimes, and the Environment  D2L: James Hansen: Why I must speak out about climate change (TED, 2012)  <b>Course Entry Essay assignment due</b>
2	January 14	Societal collapse	<i>Collapse</i> Prologue: A tale of two farms  D2L: Under the Spell of Malthus (Ronald Bailey, 2005, reason.com)
	January 16	Models of the world	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 1: Under Montana's big sky
3	January 21	Abandonment	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 4: The ancient ones: The Anasazi and their neighbors  In class: The mystery of Chaco Canyon
	January 23	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

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
4	January 28	Climate change and progress	<i>Collapse</i> Ch. 7: Norse Greenland's Flowering
	January 30	Deforestation and collapse	<p><i>Collapse</i> Ch. 8: Norse Greenland's End</p> <p>D2L: Did the medieval Norse society in Greenland really fail?, Joel Berglund, in <i>Questioning Collapse</i> (2010), edited by Patricia A. McAnany, Norman Yoffee, Cambridge University Press.</p> <p><b>Norse Greenland assignment due</b></p>
5	February 4	Malthus and conflict	<p><i>Collapse</i> Ch. 10: Malthus in Africa: Rwanda's genocide</p> <p>D2L: Could food shortages bring down civilization? <i>Scientific American</i> 300(5): 50-57.</p> <p>D2L: Climate for conflict, Andrew Solow, <i>Nature</i> 476, August, 2011</p>
	February 6	Social history, environmental beliefs	<p><i>Collapse</i> Ch. 11: One island, two peoples, two histories: The Dominican Republic and Haiti</p> <p>D2L: Richard Conniff, When civilizations collapse, <i>Environment Yale</i></p>
6	February 11	China and the environment	<p><i>Collapse</i> Ch. 12: China, lurching giant</p> <p>D2L: China's Top 6 Environmental Concerns, LiveScience, March 15, 2013</p>
	February 13	Societal collapse and decision-making	<p><i>Collapse</i> Ch. 14: Why do some societies make disastrous decisions?</p> <p>In class: Discussion of exam preparation</p>
7	February 18	EXAM	<b>EXAM I</b>
	February 20	Historical origins of wilderness	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 1: Wilderness under fire</p> <p>D2L: Nash, Prologue: The condition of wilderness</p>
8	February 25	Settlement	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 2: A truly new world
	February 27	Transcendentalism	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 3: Reflections from a woodlot</p> <p>D2L: Emerson, Ch1: Nature</p> <p>D2L: Annie Dillard, Living like weasels</p> <p>In class: Reflections from a woodlot</p>

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
9	March 3	<b>Spring Break</b>	n/a
	March 5	<b>Spring Break</b>	n/a
10	March 10	Rationalization: Agrarianism	<p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 4: A world of commodities</p> <p><i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 5: King climate in Dixie</p> <p>D2L: Singapore: Legend of the lost mill city buried under Saugatuck dunes, MLive, August 1, 2011</p> <p>In class: Meaningful experiences with nature</p> <p><b>“Living Like Weasels” assignment due</b></p>
	March 12	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>
11	March 17	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>, 2009</p>
	March 19	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 24	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>, 2012</p> <p><b>History of Place assignment due</b></p>
	March 26	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>

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
13	March 31	Transportation and consumerism	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 13: America in black and green <i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 14: Throwaway society
	April 2	Environmentalism	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 15: Shades of green D2L: Rachel Carson, Spring without voices D2L: Lois Gibbs, Learning from Love Canal
14	April 7	Climate change	D2L: When words fail, Bill McKibben, <i>Orion Magazine</i> D2L: Shrinking Arctic ice prompts drastic change in <i>National Geographic Atlas</i> , Christine, Dell'Amore D2L: Big Gap between What Scientists Say and Americans Think about Climate Change, <i>Scientific American</i> , January 30, 2015 <b>Brains and Climate Change assignment due</b>
	April 9	Ecology	D2L: <i>The Economist</i> , Welcome to the Anthropocene D2L: Johan Rockström et al., A safe operating space for humanity, <i>Nature</i> D2L: 'Which countries are in ecological debt?', World Economic Forum, August 21, 2015
15	April 14	International perspectives	<i>Down to Earth</i> Ch. 16: In corporations, we trust D2L: Ramachandra Guha, Radical American environmentalism In class: Discussion of exam preparation
	April 16	EXAM	<b>EXAM II</b>
16	April 21	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 23	Collapse and reflections	<i>Collapse</i> , Ch. 16: The world as polder: What does it all mean to us today? In class: Summary reflections and final project discussion
17	May 1	Final Project	<b>ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT</b> due Wednesday, May 1 There will be no in-class final exam.