

CSUS 310 – History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Phillip Warsaw

Office: Natural Resources Building, Room 326

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:30am – 12:30pm or by appointment, arranged by email.

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Meeting Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:40 – 2:00pm

Meeting Location: Natural Resources Building, Room 152

Course Description and Outcomes

Total Credits: 3

Description: This course takes an historical look at concepts of sustainability, resilience, resource use, development, and the human relationship with ‘nature’ and ‘wilderness’. We will 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 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 several 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, environmental justice and environmental racism, multicultural perspectives on the environment, natural resource use and management, economics and environmental action, and resilience.

Outcomes: At the end of this course, students 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, 2019, 4th edition

ISBN: 9780190864422 (paperback); 9780190864439 (e-book)

Other Readings

Additional reading assignments will be placed on the course website in D2L. Readings will be uploaded to D2L at least one week before class. All readings must be done **in advance of class** to inform the discussion.

Resources

Numerous links to academic resources, online media, and environmental advocacy organizations are provided on the D2L course website

Technology

Students must have Internet connectivity to access course materials, familiarity with D2L to engage with the online portions of the course and their peers, and a willingness to explore additional common platforms such as the Google Suite. More than one application (e.g., web browser, Microsoft Word, Excel) may be needed for a given assignment or in-class activity. Our interactions will be both in-person and via Zoom. For Zoom, video is optional but encouraged. During both types of classes, you will be asked to simultaneously access other applications (e.g., Google Drive features, MSU Library, external websites, PDFs).

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 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, avoiding the use of overly casual language or 'text-speak', with proper citations of all references.

Flow of Class

This course contains asynchronous and synchronous components. There will be some traditional lectures delivered both ways. Other than these, the course will consist primarily of student-led discussion based on both the assigned readings and other materials that you might independently identify, review, and present, as well as student-focused learning activities applied to collaborative and solo exercises and assignments. This course is reading-intensive and students should plan their time accordingly.

The basic format for the course is as follows, though there may be some modifications week-to-week. The course schedule provides further details on the weekly and daily structure. **Please note that the following description refers to how class will run once in-person classes resume. The same structure will be used during the first few weeks of the class, but all class sessions will run via Zoom, not in-person.**

Friday of the previous week:

- Materials will be posted to D2L for the following week.

Before you attend class on Tuesday OR Thursday:

- Engage with the materials for the week.
- Review any individual and/or group assignments posted and/or due that week.
- Prepare reflections and questions you have about the topic(s) and materials for sharing.

Tuesday:

- Class discussion, activities, and engagement about the week's content in-person (Natural Resources Building, Room 152). If you attend this class session of a given week, you do not need to attend the Thursday session of that same week.
- Office hours available to you via Zoom the hour before class.

Thursday:

- Class discussion, activities, and engagement about the week's content via Zoom. If you attend this class session of a given week, you do not need to attend the Tuesday session of that same week. The classroom (Natural Resources Building, Room 152) will be available to you if you would like to attend via Zoom in the same space as other students.
- Office hours available to you via Zoom the hour before class.

Friday:

- Submit any individual and/or group assignments for the week via D2L by the end of the day (midnight of Friday turning to Saturday).
- Materials will be posted to D2L for the following week.

To summarize the general format:

You will attend class one day per week: Tuesday in-person or Thursday. You via Zoom. You are expected to be present, prepared, and contributory in this class session. You may plan to use the other session for interacting with the week's materials and/or completing assignments.

Assignments for each week are due on Friday of that week (i.e., after the discussion and exercises about the topic(s) and materials) via D2L. Materials will be posted on D2L by that Friday for the following week. Dr. Warsaw aims to provide you with evaluations/feedback, individually and as groups, within 10 days. **Again, note that to start the semester, you still must only attend one class a week. However, all sessions will be held via Zoom until in-person classes resume.**

[Course Schedule](#)

Week	Dates		Topic	Due (Fridays at 5pm)
1	1/11, 13	Past Civilizations	Introductions; Societal Collapse	
2	1/18, 20		Energy, Resources & History; Civilization & the Environment	Quiz #1
3	1/25, 27		Climate change and collapse; Civilization and sustainability, limits to growth	Quiz #2
4	2/1, 3		The Norse: Two Civilizations, Two Outcomes	Easter Island
5	2/8, 10		Resilience; Systems Thinking	Reflection 1
6	2/15, 17	Modern Society	The Rise of Capitalism; Alienation from the Land	Quiz #3
7	2/22, 24		Commodification of Nature; Transcendentalism	Quiz #4
8	3/1, 3		Agrarianism; Industrialism	Group Systems Thinking
9			Spring Break; No Class	
10	3/15, 17		Urbanism; Writing about Nature	Quiz #5
11	3/22, 24	Preservation and Utilitarianism	Quiz #6	
12	3/29, 31	Food and Sustainability	Nature Writing Assignment	
13	4/5, 7	Transportation	Reflection #2	
14	4/12, 14	Fut	Revisiting Limits to Growth; Consumerism	Quiz #7
15	4/19, 21		Environmental Justice	Reflection #3
16	4/26, 28		Environmental Action; the Shift to Sustainability	
17			Final: Environmental History Project	Wednesday, 5/4 by 12pm

Assignments/Assessment

Assignment	Points
Class Attendance and Participation	55
Quizzes (8 x 10; lowest grade dropped)	70
Take-Home Individual Assignments (2 x 50)	100
Written Reflections (2 x 25; three opportunities = 25 bonus points)	50
Systems Thinking Project	100
Final Project	125
TOTAL	500

Letter Grade Assignment

Grade	Points
4.0	470 – 500
3.5	440 – 469
3.0	405 – 439
2.5	375 – 404
2.0	350 – 374
1.5	325 – 349
1.0	300 – 324
0	<300

Class Attendance and Participation (55 points)

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. We have 15 weeks of synchronous content during the semester; you may miss one week without an excused absence without penalty. Additional absences will lead to a reduction in your attendance score by 5 points

I expect you to participate in the discussion EVERY week (with the allowance of one missed class) with HIGH QUALITY participation. 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

Quizzes (70 points)

There will be eight quizzes throughout the semester at 10 points each, for a total of 70 points credit. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped. These are designed to test whether you have completed and

absorbed the readings. If you have, it should be relatively easy to get full credit for this component of the course. You must complete the quiz or exercise for that week by the end of Friday unless there are extenuating circumstances that you tell me about in advance.

Individual Assignments (100 points)

Two take-home assignments will be assigned throughout the semester. They are designed to stimulate creative thinking and to help reinforce the concepts presented in class. They will be essay-based, with topics noted in the calendar of this syllabus.

Reflections (50 points)

These reflections will center on synthesizing the recent content of the course. There are three opportunities for these reflections: two (any two) are required and the other is bonus credit if you choose to complete it. Reflections are expected to be ~500 words (one page single spaced) and will be in response to guided prompts. These will assess your understanding of the material and your ability to analyze and apply concepts from it to other contexts. You may be asked to seek and interact with additional content to complete these reflections. You are welcome to discuss these reflections with others, and reference discussions within them, but they must be your own work.

Group Project (100 points)

At the end of the first course module, you will divide yourselves into groups of 4 – 6. You will work with your group to complete one of the assignments for the class. I expect each group member to contribute equally to the group project. After the assignment is turned in, each of you will rate the contributions of your fellow group members and yourself (confidentially) so that I can get a sense of how much effort each person put into the group assignments. I will work with each group to set up a plan for collaborating and completing tasks, and I will give comments on a rough draft. Based on my experience, 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.

Final Project (125 points)

Your final project will be to create an environmental history of your hometown or another location of personal interest. The final project is due on Wednesday, December 15, at noon (the end of our exam period). You will complete this project as a photo essay video – a visual medium to communicate this environmental history and its potential trajectory towards or away from a sustainable future. Videos will be 4-5 minutes long and include descriptions of the location, its history, your interest in it before and after completing the project, and relevant images and visuals.

Late Work Policy

Submission of assignments after the assigned deadline will result in a reduction of the maximum score by 10% for each 24 hours beyond the deadline. So, for example, the grade for an assignment with 10 points due but not submitted by 11:59pm on February 16 would be able to score a maximum of 9 points so long as it is submitted by 11:59pm on February 17. After that, the maximum grade will be reduced by 10% further, so long as it is submitted by 11:59 p.m. on February 18, etc. Assignments that are more than three days late will not be accepted.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Students whose names do not appear on the official class list for this course may not attend this class. Students who fail to attend the first four class sessions or class by the fifth day of the semester, whichever occurs first, may be dropped from the course.

This course follows the General University Attendance Policy. If you miss a class due to a Special Consideration Absence as defined by University Policy, your class participation grade for those excused absence days will not be reduced.

E-Learning Policies:

Information technologies such as D2L and email are widely used in this class. As a result, there are some additional policies that need to be understood.

- Students should visit the course's D2L site on a regular basis.
- Students should check their email frequently (all class email is sent to the student's official MSU email account).
- All assignments submitted electronically, either on disk or via email, should be free of any viruses and/or worms. Any infected file or disk that is submitted will receive a zero (0) for that assignment.
- This course recognizes the students' right to privacy and adheres to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- Students need to review the university policy "Acceptable Use of Computing Systems, Software, and the University Digital Network" at <http://lct.msu.edu/guidelines-policies/aup/>.
- The Web site tech.msu.edu provides a number of information technology resources for students.
- You are responsible for the operation of any personally owned computers you use on or off campus. A malfunctioning computer system is NOT a valid excuse for submitting late work.
- Students are expected to have a high degree of self-motivation and self-direction in this class and develop the needed technology skills to excel in this class and in life.
- Turnitin Policy
 - Consistent with MSU's efforts to enhance student learning, foster honesty, and maintain integrity in our academic processes, instructors may use a tool called Turnitin to compare a student's work with multiple sources. The tool compares each student's work with an extensive database of prior publications and papers, providing links to possible matches and a 'similarity score'. The tool does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or not. Instead, the instructor must make a complete assessment and judge the originality of the student's work. All submissions to this course may be checked using this tool.
 - Students should submit papers to Turnitin Dropboxes without identifying information included in the paper (e.g. name or student number – i.e. using the title protocol outlined above). The system will automatically show this info to faculty in your course when viewing the submission, but the information will not be retained by Turnitin.

Excessive emails make an unreasonable time demands on both sender and recipient. Please ensure you have a legitimate need before you write. Dr. Warsaw will answer email about:

- Questions arising from difficulty in understanding course content.
- Requests for feedback about graded assignments.
- Private issues appropriate for discussion within the teacher-student relationship.

Dr. Warsaw will NOT answer email which:

- Poses questions answered in the course information sections of the course D2L site.
- Poses questions answered in the course syllabus.
- Lacks a subject line clearly stating the purpose of the email and the course number (CSUS343).
- Raises an inappropriate subject.

Dr. Warsaw will answer email received on a given day no later than close of work on the next workday.

Academic Honesty:

[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. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide and/or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu).

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you 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.

Faculty are required to report all instances in which a penalty grade is given for academic dishonesty. Students reported for academic dishonesty are required to take an online course about the integrity of scholarship and grades. A hold will be placed on the student's account until such time as the student completes the course. This course is overseen by the Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education.

(See also <https://www.msu.edu/~ombud/academic-integrity/index.html>). **There will be no warnings – the maximum sanction allowed under University policy will occur on the first offense.**

Bereavement:

Students seeking a grief absence should be directed to the Grief Absence Request Form found on the RO home page (<https://reg.msu.edu/>) under ‘Student Services – Grief Absence Request Form’ OR to StuInfo (<https://stuinfo.msu.edu/>) under ‘Academics - Enrollment Information and Services – Grief Absence Request Form.’ Per policy, graduate students who should see their major professor and notify course instructors are directed to do so when they access the form.

Disruptive Behavior:

Article 2.III.B.4 of the [Student Rights and Responsibilities \(SRR\)](#) for students at Michigan State University states: "The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned." Article 2.III.B.10 of the [SRR](#) states that "The student and the faculty share the responsibility for maintaining professional relationships based on mutual trust and civility." [General Student Regulation 5.02](#) states: "No student shall . . . interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to, classes . . .) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action through the Student Judicial Affairs office.

Social Media

As members of a learning community, students are expected to respect the intellectual property of course instructors. All course materials presented to students are the copyrighted property of the course instructor and are subject to the following conditions of use:

1. Students may record lectures or any other classroom activities and use the recordings **only** for their own course-related purposes.
2. Students may share the recordings with other students enrolled in the class. Sharing is limited to using the recordings **only** for their own course-related purposes.
3. Students **may not** post the recordings or other course materials online or distribute them to anyone not enrolled in the class without the advance written permission of the course instructor and, if applicable, any students whose voice or image is included in the recordings.

Any student violating the conditions described above may face academic disciplinary sanctions.

Commercialized Lecture Notes:

Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is not permitted in this course.

Complete Assignments

All assignments for this course will be submitted electronically through D2L. Assignments must be submitted by the given deadline or special permission must be requested from instructor **before** the due date. Extensions will not be given beyond the next assignment except under extreme circumstances.

Understand When You May Drop This Course

It is the student's responsibility to understand when they need to consider un-enrolling from a course. Refer to the [Michigan State University Office of the Registrar](#) for important dates and deadlines.

Drops and Adds

The last day to add this course is the end of the first week of classes. The last day to drop this course with no refund and no grade reported is **X**. You should immediately make a copy of your amended schedule to verify you have added or dropped this course.

Inform Your Instructor of Any Accommodations Needed

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. If you have a documented disability and verification from the [Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities](#) (RCPD), and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact your instructor as soon as possible. It is the student's responsibility to provide documentation of disability to RCPD and meet with an RCPD specialist to request special accommodation before classes start. 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 the instructor at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

RCPD is located in 120 Bessey Hall, near the center of the Michigan State University campus, on the southwest corner of Farm Lane and Auditorium Road. RCPD may be contacted by phone at (517) 884-7273 (884-RCPD), or [via their website \(http://www.rcpd.msu.edu\)](http://www.rcpd.msu.edu).

Commit to Integrity

Academic Honesty

Article 2.3.3 of the [Academic Freedom Report](#) states that "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the (insert name of unit offering course) adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See [Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide](#) and/or the [MSU Web site: www.msu.edu](#).)

Therefore, unless authorized by your instructor, you 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 academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. Contact your instructor if you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work. (See also <http://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/dishonestyFAQ.html>)

Handling Emergency Situations

In the event of an emergency arising within the classroom, the Professor will notify you of what actions that may be required to ensure your safety. It is the responsibility of each student to understand the evacuation, "shelter-in-place," and "secure-in-place" guidelines posted in each facility and to act in a safe manner. You are allowed to maintain cellular devices in a silent mode during this course, in order to receive emergency SMS text, phone or email messages distributed by the university. When anyone receives such a notification or observes an emergency situation, they should immediately bring it to the attention of the Professor in a way that causes the least disruption. If an evacuation is ordered, please ensure that you do it in a safe manner and facilitate those around

you that may not otherwise be able to safely leave. When these orders are given, you do have the right as a member of this community to follow that order. Also, if a shelter-in-place or secure-in-place is ordered, please seek areas of refuge that are safe depending on the emergency encountered and provide assistance if it is advisable to do so.

Syllabus Disclaimer

All syllabi are subject to minor changes to meet the needs of the instructor, school, or class. Every effort will be made to avoid changing the course schedule but the possibility exists that unforeseen events will make syllabus changes necessary. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus as deemed necessary. Students will be notified in a timely manner of any syllabus changes through the course site announcements. Please remember to check your MSU email and the course site announcements often.