Department of
Community Sustainability

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

CSUS 310: History of Environmental Thought and Sustainability

COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 2019
Online

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LOCATION, DAYS AND TIMES Online
COURSE RESOURCES http://d2l.msu.edu

OFFICE 150 Natural Resources
OFFICE HOURS Wednesdays 2:30pm–4:30pm (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 Books, 2011
ISBN: 9780143117001

OTHER READINGS

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

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 respond to your e-mail within one *business day (btw 8am – 5pm, Mon – Fri)*. Please be aware that e-mail is NOT an acceptable method by which to submit assignments unless prior arrangements have been made with me. I will not distribute nor discuss grades via e-mail—please consult me individually during office hours (or scheduled online/in person appointment) if you wish to discuss your grades or how you were graded on an assignment. 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.

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.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION: It is your responsibility to read the e-mail sent to your MSU e-mail address. You should refer to the class D2L page via the MSU Portal (http://d2l.msu.edu). The D2L page will be used to post course materials, assignments, and to inform you of important dates and other relevant information.

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 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 participation in the online discussions each week, by responding thoughtfully to the questions posed about the readings, lectures, and videos, OR by thoughtfully responding to what your classmates have to say (approximately 200-400 words in length). 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 5:00pm I will check to see if you have participated or not.** Late discussion forum posts will not be graded. 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 7 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 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

GROUP ASSIGNMENT

At the beginning of the class, I will assign you to a 4-5 person group. 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 projects. After the assignment is turned in, 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. The group participation grade (3 points) will be part of your class participation grade. 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. 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.

ASSIGNMENTS
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. 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 below).

QUIZZES
There will be ten quizzes throughout the semester at 2 points each, for a total of 20 points credit. These quizzes 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 for that week by Friday at 5:00pm.** unless there are extenuating circumstances which you tell me about in advance me (see course policy below).

FINAL PROJECT AND PRESENTATION
Your final project will be to write an environmental history of your hometown. The final project report and presentation are due Monday, December 9. For the 'presentation', I would like you to use a visual medium to communicate the environmental history of your hometown (or city) and its potential trajectory towards or away from a sustainable future. Examples of this type of presentation could include a photo essay; a video; a poster, or any other creative expression.

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. I may also request adequate supporting documentation, and it is the student's responsibility to contact me to set a date and time for completion of the missed assignment or quiz. I reserve the right to determine the adequacy of any supporting documentation. Such documentation must explain specifically why you could not complete a given assignment or quiz.

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) 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.

RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT
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 titleix.msu.edu.

Limits to Confidentiality: Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community

members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices (including the Department of Police and Public Safety) if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child;
- Allegations of sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, or sexual harassment; and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting, you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling and Psychiatric Services.

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

There will be one extra credit assignment that will be made available to you.

ASSESSMENT

Your final grade in the course will be based on both individual and group work. The evaluation is based on:

	Course points	% of Final Grade
Participation, preparation, and discussion	10	10%
Group Project	20	20%
Individual Assignments (10 points each)	20	20%
Quizzes (2 points each)	20	20%
Final project (Project proposal 5 pts; Project report 15 pts; Final presentation 10 pts)	30	30%
TOTAL	100	100%

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

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

COURSE SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

Week	Dates	Topics	Readings and activities
1	August 28-30	1. Course introduction 2. Societal collapse	Read: *Collapse* Prologue: A Tale of Two Farms *Collapse* Ch1: Under Montana's Big Sky Watch: Jared Diamond TED talk, 'Why do Societies Collapse?'
2	Sept. 3-6	1. Energy, resources & history 2. Civilization & the environment	Read: D2L: Burke, Ch2: The Big Story: Human History, Energy Regimes, and the Environment *Collapse* Ch2: Twilight at Easter D2L: McAnany & Yoffee, Ch. 2: Ecological Catastrophe, Collapse, and the Myth of 'Ecocide' on Rapa Nui, *Questioning Collapse* D2L: 'Easter Island's Demise May Have Surprising New Explanation'. Watch: Lecture - Week 2 **Quiz #1**
3	Sept. 9-13	1. Climate change and collapse 2. Civilization and sustainability, limits to growth	Read: *Collapse* Ch5: Pyramid schemes D2L: Climate and the collapse of Maya civilization, *American Scientist* *Collapse* Ch14: Why do Some Societies Make Disastrous Decisions? D2L: Meadows et al. Excerpt from Limits to Growth: the 30-year Update Watch: Lecture – Week 3 **INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE** **Quiz #2**
4	Sept. 16-20	The Norse: Two civilizations, two outcomes	Read: *Collapse* Ch6: The Viking Prelude and Fugues *Collapse* Ch7: Norse Greenland's Flowering *Collapse* Ch8: Norse Greenland's End Watch: The Lost Vikings **Quiz #3**
5	Sept. 23-27	1. Resilience: an alternative to collapse? 2. Systems Thinking	Read: *Collapse* Ch16: The World as a Polder D2L: Walker & Salt, Ch. 6: Creating Space in a Shrinking World: Resilience & Sustainability, *Resilience Thinking* D2L: A systems thinking model: The iceberg, NWEI Watch: Lecture – Week 5 **Quiz #4**

6	Sept. 30-Oct. 4	1. Historical origins of wilderness 2. Transcendentalism	Read: *DE* Ch1: Wilderness under fire *DE* Ch2: A truly new world D2L: Nash, Prologue: The condition of wilderness *DE* Ch3: Reflections from a woodlot D2L: Thoreau, Ch16: The Pond in Winter, *Walden* Watch: Interview with Dr. Kyle Powys-Whyte **Consultations with Tatevik Avetisyan around group project** **Quiz #5**
7	Oct. 7-11	1. Agrarianism 2. Industrialism	Read: *DE* Ch4: A world of commodities *DE* Ch5: King climate in Dixie *DE* Ch6: The great food fight *DE* Ch7: Extracting the new South Watch: Lecture – Week 7 **GROUP PROJECT DUE**
8	Oct. 14-18	Preservation & Utilitarianism	Read: *DE* Ch8: The unforgiving west *DE* Ch9: Conservation reconsidered D2L: Aldo Leopold, The land ethic, *A Sand County Almanac* D2L: What's Wrong With the National Parks? *NYTimes Room for Debate* Watch: The National Parks, Muir vs. Pinchot **Quiz #6**
9	Oct. 21-25	1. Urbanism 2. Visions of sustainability	Read: *DE* 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 Watch: Lecture – Week 9 **Quiz #7**
10	Oct. 28-Nov.1	Food & Sustainability	Read: *DE* Ch11: Moveable feast *DE* Ch12: The secret history of meat D2L: Excerpt from The Cooking Gene, Michael Twitty D2L: Jon Foley, Changing the Global Food Narrative Watch: Mark Bittman TED talk, What's Wrong With What we Eat? Lecture – Week 10 **Quiz #8**

11	Nov. 4-8	1. Climate Change 2.Transportation and sustainability	Read: *DE* Ch13: America in black and green D2L: *Your choice* of 2 readings selected from 'Future of Transportation' e-book Watch: D2L: Film, 'Climate of Doubt' Interview with Dr. Julie Winkler **INDIVIDUAL FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE** **Quiz #9**
12	Nov. 11-15	Consumerism and environment	Read: *DE* Ch14: Throwaway society D2L: Jeffrey Kaplan: The gospel of consumption, *Orion Magazine* D2L: Katharine Mieszkowski, Plastic bags are killing us, *Salon* D2L: Annie Leonard, The iPhone and consumer guilt, *The Huffington Post* D2L: Ecofriendly product claims often misleading, NPR D2L: Robin Kimmerer, Windigo Footprints Watch: Annie Leonard, *The Story of Stuff* Interview with Dr. Pascal Kamdem **INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT #2 DUE**
13	Nov. 18-22	Environmentalism	Read: *DE* 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 D2L: Bernstein, On Mother Earth and Earth Mothers **Quiz #10**
14	**Nov. 25-29**	**THANKSGIVING WEEK**	
15	Dec. 2-6	1. Environmental action 2. The shift to sustainability	Read: *DE* Ch16: In corporations we trust 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 Watch: Interview with Dr. Robby Richardson **Individual Final Projects (i.e., Report and Presentation) Due Monday Dec. 9**