

GEO 300

Geographies of Sustainability

Spring 2014
Tuesday & Thursday
3:30-4:50pm
Eggers 070

Professor: Bob Wilson

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 2:00-4:00

Friday, 1:00-2:45 or by appointment

“How serious is the threat to the environment? ...all we have to do to destroy the planet’s climate and biota and leave a ruined world to our children and grandchildren is to keep doing exactly what we are doing today...and the world in the latter part of the century won’t be fit to live in.”

*-- Gus Speth, *The Bridge at the Edge of the World**



Jay 'Ding' Darling, “How Rich Will We Be When We Have Converted All Our Forest, All Our Soil, All Our Water Resources and Minerals to Cash?” (1938)

Overview

Sustainability is a new word with old roots. First introduced as a concept in the 1970s and 1980s, sustainability is now everywhere. There are sustainability majors and minors at many universities, companies have sustainability divisions, and in general, many see striving for sustainability as a laudable goal.

But where did this term come from? What are we trying to sustain? And for whom? What political, economic, and cultural changes—especially over the past thirty years—made the idea of sustainability so attractive? What are the root causes of unsustainability?

This class will look at the *history* of a number of key environmental ideas, such as nature, conservation, the environment, the Anthropocene, resilience, and sustainability. We will then look at the application of sustainability ideas in a number of areas, especially related to climate change. Finally, we will end the course by reflecting on the question “Is sustainability still possible?” Given our unchecked carbon emissions and rapidly changing climate, this ability to construct a society that is even remotely sustainable seems in question.

Evaluation

10%	Attendance and Participation
10%	Reading Quizzes (4)
15%	Essay 1 – <i>The Bet</i> book review
25%	Essay 2 – Is Sustainability Still Possible?
20%	First Exam
20%	Second Exam

Attendance and Participation

I will run this class, as much as possible, like a seminar. *Attendance and participation are essential.* You must do the readings and be willing to participate in class discussion.

To give you a sense, of my expectations for class participation, I offer the following guidelines:

The **A** student reads all the material beforehand and demonstrates a clear understanding of the key aspects of the text. She is able to answer questions posed by the professor, but more importantly, she has developed her own questions and comments about the text. She speaks regularly without dominating the discussion. She also listens carefully to what her classmates say and builds on their contributions.

The **B** student more or less reads the material, though not very carefully. He understands the ‘gist’ of the article or chapter, but when pressed, he has difficulty assessing the implications of the text. He is an infrequent contributor to discussion. In general, this student participates from time to time, but is mostly content to let others do most of the talking and critical thinking.

The **C** student demonstrates little evidence of doing the reading and she rarely, if ever, speaks. However, she attends regularly.

The **D** or **F** student never talks, shows no evidence of doing the reading, and may also miss classes. Basically, this student is a pain-in-the-behind. ☹

*** You must bring the day’s assigned readings to class. If you don’t bring the readings, I will mark you as absent.*

Reading Quizzes

To ensure students are keeping up with the reading, I will give four pop quizzes during the semester. These quizzes should be quite straightforward. If I think students are not doing the reading, or reading the books and articles superficially, I will give quizzes beyond just the four I am planning now.

You may use your notes, but not the assigned readings, during the quizzes.

Essays

There will be two essays in the course: a five-page book review of *The Bet* and an eight-ten page paper on the topic “Is sustainability still possible?” Please see the syllabus schedule for the essay due dates. Two to three weeks before these papers are due, I will distribute hand outs laying out my expectations in more detail.

Exams

There will be two exams in the course. Exam questions will likely consist of short answers and short essays.

Laptops, Tablets, Smart Phones, and Texting

You are welcome to use laptops and tablets in this course. *However*, I consider the use of such technologies a privilege, not a right. If it is clear you are surfing the web, cruising Facebook, etc.—and trust me, in a class of ~30 people it is *very* clear when you are doing this, even if I can’t see your screen—I will revoke your laptop/tablet privileges and deduct points from your class participation grade.

No texting at all during class, either.

Academic Integrity

Cheating in any form will not be tolerated, nor is assisting someone to cheat. The submission of any work in this class is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions are the student’s own unless properly cited. Breaking this policy on exams, essays, or other assignments will, at a minimum, result in a failing grade for an assignment and likely a failing grade for the course. For more information, see the student section of the university’s web site about academic integrity (<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/>).

This is what the university obliges me to tell you. This is my own simple take on the matter: plagiarize a paper or cheat on an exam and you will fail. Period. Other professors may let issues of academic dishonesty slide or let you off with a warning. *I am not one of those professors.*

Student Athletes

Many of you are student athletes. Athletics is an important part your time in college, and I will do my best to accommodate your travel schedules.

Typically, your coaches or another official associated with the team or athletic department will give you a letter explaining your status and a list of your away games. Once you receive this material, please give me a copy.

Students with Disabilities

Syracuse University has a commitment to aiding students with disabilities. If you have disability that will affect your ability to succeed in this course, please let me know and we will work out an arrangement in consultation with SU’s Office of Disability Service to ensure that you can complete assigned readings, attend lectures, and finish assignments.

Religious Observances

Students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes if, and when, they will be observing their religious holiday(s). You may fill this out online via MySlice. When you log-

on to MySlice, you (should) see a link for religious observances. Click on that and fill-out the requested material.

Required Texts

Robin, Libby, Sverker Sörlin, and Paul Warde, eds. *The Future of Nature: Documents of Global Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

Sabin, Paul. *The Bet: Paul Ehrlich, Julian Simon, and Our Gamble Over the Earth's Future*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013.

The Worldwatch Institute. *Is Sustainability Still Possible?* Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2013.

** Other course articles and chapters are available on the course Blackboard site under "Readings."

Course Schedule

(BB) – reading available on Blackboard

Week One

January 14 Welcome and Introduction

January 16 Early Ideas about Nature

Readings

Glacken, Clarence. *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967. (BB)

Williams, Raymond. "Nature." In *Keywords*. (BB)

Week Two Does the Environment Sculpt Society?

January 21 ** No Class. MLK Day.**

January 23 Environmental Determinism

Readings

"Geographies: Are human and natural futures determined or chosen?" "Ellsworth Huntington, *The Pulse of Asia* and Commentary: Carole Crumley, *Future of Nature*, 117-133.

Castree, Noel. *Nature*. New York: Routledge, 2005. (BB)

Week Three Dawning of Conservation

January 28 Sustainable Farming in Colonial New England?

Readings

Cronon, William. *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1983. (BB).

Donahue, Brian. "The Great Meadow: Sustainable Husbandry in Colonial Concord." *Historically Speaking* 6, no. 2 (2004): 34–37. (BB)

January 30 Man and Nature

Readings

William Cronon, "Foreword: A Classic of Conservation" and David Lowenthal, "Introduction to the 2003 Edition," In George Perkins Marsh. *Man and Nature*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003 [1864]. (BB)

Trombulak, Stephen C., ed. *So Great a Vision: The Conservation Writings of George Perkins Marsh*. Hanover, NH: Middlebury College Press/University Press of New England, 2001. (BB)

Week Four Progressive Conservation

February 4 What was Conservation?

Readings

Stradling, David. *Conservation in the Progressive Era: Classic Texts*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004. (BB)

Pinchot, Gifford. *The Fight for Conservation*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1910. (BB)

Roosevelt, Theodore. "Conservation as a National Duty." In *Proceedings of a Conference of Governors in the White House, May 13-15, 1908*. Washington, D.C.: Washington Government Printing Office, 1909. (BB)

February 6 Conservation and the Land Ethic

Readings

Leopold, Aldo. "Land Ethic." In *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989 [1949]. (BB)

Week Five Conservation Critiques

February 11 Conservation, Justice, and Resource Management

Readings

Scott, James. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. (BB)

Langston, Nancy. "Environmental History and Restoration in Western Forests." *Journal of the West* 38 (1999): 45–56. (BB)

Kosek, Jake. "Smokey Bear is a White Racist Pig." *Understories: The Political Life of Forests in Northern New Mexico*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. (BB)

February 13 **** First Exam ****

Week Six Population and Limits to Growth

February 18 Neomalthusianism

Readings

Sabin, *The Bet*, ix-61.

February 20 Limits to Growth?

Readings

Sabin, *The Bet*, 62-95.

Donella Meadows et al., *The Limits to Growth* and Commentary: Michael Egan, *Future of Nature*, 101-116.

Week Seven Sustainability in the Era of Markets

February 25 From Limits to Free-Market Fundamentalism

Readings

Sabin, *The Bet*, 96-180.

February 27 Seeking Sustainability in an Age of Political Polarization

Readings

Sabin, *The Bet*, 181-227.

Development, World Commission on Environment and. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987. (BB)

Week Eight Limits to Sustainability

March 4 Sustainability Critiques
****Essay: *The Bet* book review due ****

Readings

Robert Engelman, "Beyond Sustainability," *Is Sustainability Still Possible?*, 3-16.

Newton, Julianne, and Eric T. Freyfogle. "Sustainability: A Dissent." *Conservation Biology* 19, no. 1 (February 2005): 23–32. (BB)

March 6 Capitalism and Sustainability?

Readings

Speth, James Gustave. *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008, 1-17, 46-66. (BB)

Foster, John Bellamy, Brett Clark, and Richard York. "Planetary Emergency." *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010, 151-164. (BB)

Week Nine

March 11 **Spring Break**

March 13 **Spring Break**

Week Ten Climate Change and Sustainability
 March 18 The Angry Beast: Discovering Global Warming

Readings

Wallace Broecker, “Unpleasant Surprises in the Greenhouse?” J. R. Petit, “Climate and Atmospheric History,” and Commentary: Tom Griffiths, *Future of Nature*, 337-362.

March 20 Storms of My Grandchildren

Readings

Anderson, Kevin. “Climate Change Going Beyond Dangerous – Brutal Numbers and Tenuous Hope.” *Development Dialogue*. September (2012): 16–40. (BB)

Hansen, James. *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth About the Climate Catastrophe and the Last Chance to Save Humanity*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009, 70-89. (BB)

Week Eleven Coping with Climate Change
 March 25 Climate Activism I

Readings

Klein, Naomi. “How Science is Telling Us to Revolt.” *New Statesman* 29 October 2013. (BB)

Thomas Princen et al., “Keep Them in the Ground: Ending the Fossil Fuel Era,” *Is Sustainability Still Possible?*, 161-171.

Melissa Leach, “Pathways to Sustainability: Building Political Strategies,” *Is Sustainability Still Possible?*, 234-243.

March 27 Climate Activism II

Readings

Stephenson, Wen. “The New Abolitionists: Global Warming Is the Great Moral Crisis of Our Time.” *The Phoenix*, March 12, 2013. (BB)

Bron Taylor, “Resistance: Do the Ends Justify the Means?” *Is Sustainability Still Possible?*, 304-316.

Wilson, Robert. “Forging the Climate Movement: Environmental Activism and the Keystone XL Pipeline.”

Week Twelve
 April 1 Living in the Anthropocene

Readings

“The Anthropocene: How can we live in a world where there is no nature without people?” Paul Crutzen et al, “The Anthropocene,” and Commentary: Will Steffan, *The Future of Nature*, 479-490.

Steffen, Will, Paul J Crutzen, and John R McNeill. “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” *Ambio* 36, no. 8 (2007). (BB)

April 3 Love Your Monsters?

Readings

Latour, Bruno. "Love Your Monsters: Why We Must Care for Our Technologies As We Do Our Children." *The Breakthrough*, Winter 2012. (BB)

Shellenberger, Michael, and Ted Nordhaus. "The Long Death of Environmentalism." *The Breakthrough* (2013). (BB)

Week Thirteen

April 8 ****No class. Away at AAG Conference. ****

April 10 ****No class. Away at AAG Conference. ****

Readings

None. Work on your essay!

Week Fourteen

April 15 From Sustainability to Resilience I
**** Is Sustainability Still Possible? ****

Readings

None.

April 17 From Sustainability to Resilience II

Readings

To be announced.

Week Fifteen

April 22 Discussion: Is Sustainability Still Possible?

Readings

To be announced. Most likely, a selection of quotes or sections from student papers on "Is sustainability still possible?" I will post these on Blackboard

April 24 Wrap Up

Readings

None.

Week Sixteen

April 29 **** Second Exam ****

Readings

None. Prepare for final.

