POLs 380 – Environmental Sustainability

Summer 2016 – Second Session July 5 – August 12

Professor: Emily A. Pesicka
Office: Saunders Hall 621
Office Hours: TBA, via Skype, FaceTime by appointment
Mailbox: Political Science Department Office
Phone: TBA
Email: eab613@hawaii.edu

Course Description:

Can we create a Sustainable Future? Are our current national societies and global society and economy sustainable? What do we mean by Sustainability and a Sustainable Future? Can we design a society and economy that is sustainable, democratic, and prosperous? This course uses a broad interdisciplinary approach in order to help students understand the central issues of sustainability and sustainable futures. We will study sustainability through the lens of culture and societal change, political conflict, ecological economics, global environmental issues, globalization and development, ecological design, and a 21st century liberal arts education. The larger goal of this course is to teach you how to critically analyze, evaluate, and judge competing perspectives on the challenge of creating a sustainable future in the 21st century. If you disagree with an argument or perspective, or find it biased or limited, then say so. If you find the reading difficult, confused, or pointless, then say so. But, in each case, you must be prepared to support your argument and larger conclusions.

Aside from grade and attendance policies, this syllabus and schedule are subject to change with notice.
Central Questions for Examination:

These are some of the central questions of this course: Why isn’t our global society sustainable? What is the sustainability crisis? What is a sustainable society? What are the major roadblocks preventing the creation of a sustainable society? How do we protect the global environment, maintain a healthy global economy, and create a sustainable society? How do we design a sustainable economy and society?

Course Objective:

In this course we will examine the scientific and policy efforts to optimize the management of environmental, economic, and social resources. One of the most common sustainability definitions is from the Brundtland Commission (1987): "... meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This cuts across almost all human endeavors.

Through lectures, readings, class discussions and a project, the course will examine issues essential to learning best practices in sustainability. Prominent issues include:

- systems thinking tools and the decomposition of complexity;
- human population trends and associated resource demands;
- energy use trends, including status quo and alternative production approaches;
- regional and global climate trends and implications, including policy alternatives;
- economic and social drivers, including triple bottom line business practices
- food and water security, including production and management alternatives;
- ocean and land ecosystems: trends and management alternatives;
- market and other incentives; best practices for building design; community planning.
- behavioral economics: constraints and opportunities for sustainability advances

Indicators to measure sustainability within differing disciplines will be examined and utilized. The roles of private, public, nonprofit, and other sectors will be comparatively examined across linked topics. Paths to solutions will be emphasized - focusing on student interests.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Increased knowledge of the conceptual history and logic of sustainability practices.
- Increased understanding of real-world applications of current sustainability principles.
- Increased understanding of systems thinking tools and the decomposition of complexity.
- Ability to debate common sustainability issues from multiple perspectives.
- Experience with the measurement of sustainability: utilizing indicators and other tools.
- Recognition of uncertainty envelopes and constraints on predictive knowledge.
- Ability to apply best practices in sustainability to one’s specific field of interest.
- Ability to apply interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability outside of one’s field.
- Experience with the challenges and opportunities of applying science to governance.
- Messaging skills needed to deliver scientific information to popular audiences.
- Experience in abstract theoretical evaluation of sustainability challenges and solutions.
- Improved critical reading and writing skills within both scientific and policy documents.

**Reading Materials and Course Schedule:**

There are many books on many diverse sustainability issues; very few are organized as introductory textbooks. Due to the multi-disciplinary nature of the course and the diverse student population (from all colleges on campus and many global continents), we will use two books for portions of the semester. All students will need both of these books (they are inexpensive):

- **Meadows, D. 2008. Thinking in Systems: A Primer. Publisher: Chelsea Green.**


Course readings will also include technical journal articles, government and NGO reports, and significant current articles from print and web media. These readings and assigned chapters from the books will be posted on Laulima or hyperlinks will be listed below. Once familiar with the diverse primary issues, the semester can include additional readings from these and other books:


**ARTICLES:**

You will find the other readings listed below in two different places.
1) **IF** there **IS** a link listed below the title, then simply click on the link, and read or print the article or book excerpt directly from the Internet.
2) **IF** there **IS NOT** a link listed below the title, then the reading is available for reading or printing on the course Laulima page, under the week’s folder.
GRADING:

10% Weekly Quizzes
20% Midterm Exam
20% Final Exam
20% Weekly Response Papers
20% Final Paper
10% Participation

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Students will be required to turn in 8 writing assignments throughout the course of the semester (please see course schedule for due dates). These short writing assignments should analyzes a newspaper article, journal, or story (online or otherwise) that pertains to the topics that the class is discussing that week. These weekly papers should be 12pt font, Times New Roman, and roughly 2 pages long. Writing assignments will be due at the end of the week, via Laulima, on the appropriate due date.

MIDTERM AND FINAL EXAM:

For this class, students will be required to take two exams. The midterm and final will be timed exams and you will have 5 days to complete them. A study guide will be provided to students via Laulima in preparation for both exams. These exams will cover the course materials and concepts and students will be asked to provide examples that were discussed in class, within supplemental materials and in the textbook.

RESEARCH PAPER:

The research paper will enable students to use the critical thinking skills learned throughout the course and explore a topic by 1) select a particular sustainability issue such as climate change, water, biodiversity or another approved by your instructors; or 2) examine in depth a company’s sustainability efforts and record. Your project should raise an issue or challenge, explore the various dimensions of the challenge, and propose one or more solutions that you defend as viable. The project should be ~15 pages in length and contain a bibliography. Additional details and a template will be forthcoming. This research paper will provide a valuable opportunity for the student to mobilizes some of the key terms, ideologies, and critical analysis that the student gained throughout the semester and the student is required to reference the texts within their paper. This research paper should be roughly 10-12 pages long, 12 pt. font, Times New Roman and utilize at least 10 different sources. The student is required to present and provide descriptive analysis on their topic – not just a summary of the student’s findings. Students will be required to check with their instructor regarding their chosen topic before they begin writing. Additionally, the instructor will provide a list of different possible topics on Laulima.

Aside from grade and attendance policies, this syllabus and schedule are subject to change with notice.
CONDUCT:

*Maturity:* Please refrain from reading newspapers, having conversations, eating, sleeping or partaking in other distracting behavior while in class. Arrive on time.

*Academic Integrity:* Plagiarism and cheating are not tolerated. Violations may result in a failing course grade and disciplinary action.
All students are expected to abide by the UHM Student Conduct Code: [http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code](http://studentaffairs.manoa.hawaii.edu/policies/conduct_code)

*Students with Disabilities:* I will accommodate all students with learning disabilities as recommended by the Kokua program. If students need accommodations made, they should please coordinate with Kokua. Disability Services on campus webpage can be found at [http://www.hawaii.edu/kokua/services.htm](http://www.hawaii.edu/kokua/services.htm)

*Disrespectful and Threatening Behavior:* Be respectful of others. Debate and disagreement is encouraged and necessary for vibrant discussion. But degrading and threatening remarks will not be tolerated.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE:

**Week 1 – July 5 – July 8**
Introduction and defining sustainability
What is your ecological footprint?
What is your ecological address?
What is sustainability?
Sustainability Ethics, Culture, and History
It’s Not Easy Being Green -  [http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2109778,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2109778,00.html)
Quiz 1

**Week 2 – July 11 – July 15**
Economic Vitality
Eco- Economy, The Economy and the Earth
Quiz 2

**Week 3 – July 18 – July 22**
Economic Vitality Continued
Green Revolution – Green Washing – Green Innovation
Aside from grade and attendance policies, this syllabus and schedule are subject to change with notice.

How do we get out of this mess - https://www.sustainabilityprofessionals.org/sites/default/files/Korten%20Economic%20Rx.pdf


What is your consumption factor - http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/02/opinion/02diamond.html?pagewant=all&r=1

Quiz 3
- Discuss Term Papers
- Review for Midterm
- Midterm Exam

Week 4 – July 25 – July 29
Ecological Integrity
What is your Carbon Footprint?
What is your water footprint?
The Post Carbon Reader: The International Response to Climate Change - www.postcarbon.org/Reader/PCReader-Douthwaite-Climate.pdf
Earth in the Balance: Introduction - www.takepart.com/article/2012/12/03/climate-struggle
Blue Gold (pages 1-36) (pages 36-63) - www.ratical.org/co-globalize/BlueGold.pdf
A Sand County Almanac. (Respect of Place) (63 pages)
Quiz 4

Week 5 – August 1 – August 5
Social Equality
Tragedy of the Commons
Can Extreme Poverty be eliminated?
In California Town: Birth Defects, Deaths, and Questions
Quiz 5

Week 6 – August 8 – August 12
- Review for Final
Aside from grade and attendance policies, this syllabus and schedule are subject to change with notice

- Student Research Paper Presentations
- Final Exam