

Environmental Studies 490: Senior Seminar Spring 2013

TTH, 11:30-1:00, Sage 2215

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Course Description: This course is designed as the capstone in Environmental Studies. In it, ES majors and minors will pursue their own senior thesis. The thesis will be a semester-long project in which students demonstrate the research, writing, and analytical skills that they have acquired during their time in the ES Program. This means that thesis projects should reflect the nature of the program: they should be interdisciplinary, grounded in the analytical tools of the liberal arts, and engage directly with social and environmental issues. But this will be a shared experience, as students research and write the thesis in dialogue with the other students in the class.

While students will be writing their own independent senior thesis, the class has an overarching focus: sustainability. Sustainability is a highly complex term as well as a major term in environmental studies. It is used frequently in a wide variety of disciplines and careers, from business to natural resource management to nature writing. It involves natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities. It has international, national, regional, local, and personal dimensions. During the first half of the course, the class will examine collectively different conceptions and dimensions of sustainability. Each student's thesis should be relevant to the idea of sustainability, and each student will be responsible for writing a brief (3-4 page) analysis of how their topic engages with this important idea.

An additional goal of this class is to further your liberal arts education. What does this mean? The liberal arts education focuses on general learning, intellectual ability, and critical thinking rather than technical or professional skills. The goal of this class, then, is not just to convey specific information about sustainability but to teach you how to interpret this information critically, and how to understand modern environmental issues in their social, historical, and political context. A liberal arts education provides the tools we need to be active citizens of our communities. In Spring 2008, UW Oshkosh adopted a set of Essential Learning Outcomes to help define the meaning of a liberal education. One of these outcomes is the recognition that a liberal education recognizes our "Responsibility, as individuals and communities." This includes "Knowledge of sustainability and its applications." This course is designed to help us think about our responsibilities to each other, to our communities, and to our environment.

Thesis Project: The Senior thesis is meant to be the capstone of your Environmental Studies education at UW Oshkosh, in which you put to work the research, analytical, and communication skills that you have been practicing as you have progressed through the major. With this in mind, the senior thesis should demonstrate your ability to:

1. **Understand the complex nature of an environmental issue.** This involves recognizing the problematic nature of scientific knowledge (e.g., conflicting, ambiguous, or insufficient data), the social dimensions of the problem (political, economic, and/or sociological), and its humanistic dimensions (ethical, philosophical, aesthetic and/or religious).
2. **Apply key concepts in Environmental Studies** in analyzing the problem and possible solutions, including concepts found in the natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities.
3. **Understand and critically evaluate different policy positions** in relation to that problem.
4. **Articulate your own position** concerning the issue, supporting that position with evidence, argument, and authority, while recognizing the potential limitations and problems of that position.
5. Articulate the ways that the problem and the student's position **calls for an active response**, such as social and environmental policies or personal engagement.
6. Use in a critical and sophisticated way **a wide variety of research tools**, both electronic and paper, and craft a **research strategy** for accessing and processing these materials.
7. **Produce an annotated bibliography** of sources, print and electronic, on a specific environmental studies topic, briefly summarizing the source and evaluating the usefulness and limitations of each item for that specific topic.
8. **Write a thesis in a clear, efficient, and compelling way** that is understandable to an educated general audience and sophisticated enough for an expert audience.
9. Present the thesis (as a work in progress) as a **professional PowerPoint presentation** and lead a discussion on the issues.

Required Readings: There will be a few readings on e-reserve and D2L, but there are no texts required for this seminar. Students are expected to complete all common readings prior to class on the day that those readings are assigned.

Attendance, Discussion and Participation: Your participation in discussions and other class activities is essential. This course will only be successful with full student engagement and participation. Attendance will be taken each day; your grade will drop significantly with each absence. If you have more than five unexcused absences, you will fail the course. An “unexcused absence” is any absence for which you cannot provide a note from a doctor, another professor, or some other documented explanation of your absence. If you simply cannot make a class, please contact one of the instructors before the class meets; perhaps an arrangement can be made to ensure that you are not penalized for missing class for legitimate reasons. Your active participation is the key to your learning the material and to the success of the course—both for you as an individual and for the class as a whole.

Course Components & Grading Breakdown: Students will be evaluated on the following components, each of which will be discussed in further detail during class:

Attendance & Participation	15%	First Draft	5%
Research Proposal	10%	Final Paper	30%
Annotated Bibliography	5%	Final Presentation/Discussion	10%
Project Sustainability Analysis	15%	Peer Editing	5%
Earth Week Reflection/Analysis	5%	Mock Interview Workshop	P/F

Course Policies and Conduct: All of us must do our best to be intellectually honest and tolerant of personal differences. Environmental topics are often controversial, and we all have our own beliefs. I hope that everyone will feel safe to express an idea, even if that idea is not a popular one.

There are some university guidelines for behavior that I expect all of us to abide by. One of these has to do with plagiarism, or taking credit for the work of others. This is a serious offense and will be treated according to university guidelines; failure of the course is a potential outcome of academic dishonesty. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t talk with other students about what you are thinking or writing; but when you write something on a paper, it must be in your own words, not copied from someone else. We will discuss what plagiarism means more fully during the course of the semester. If you have any questions about academic honesty, and what might or might not be considered plagiarism, please ask, rather than taking a risk with grave consequences.

Please let me know what I can do to accommodate any disabilities that you might have.

Grading Scale:

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	≤ 59
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66		
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62		

Course Schedule:

Wk 1: Tuesday, January 29: Introductions & Community Sustainability Discussion

Thursday, January 31: Defining Sustainability

Reading: Definitions of Sustainability, D2L

Jenkins, “Sustainability Theory,” D2L

Reading response (1-2 pages, dbl spaced): Pulling at least one example from each reading, write a 1-2 page response paper in which you identify the definition/theory/model of sustainability that you like the most, and at least 2 with which you see problems. Be sure to discuss *why* you like one more than the others, and *why* you have problems with the others.

Wk 2: Tuesday, February 5: Refining Sustainability: Ecology; In-class workshops: Research Proposals, TitanJobs

Reading: Sample Research Proposals, D2L

Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, “The Anthropocene,” ER

Thursday, February 7: Library workshop; class meets in Polk Lobby; **tentative thesis idea due**

Reading: Sample Papers, D2L (read quickly for style, methods, evidence of critical thinking, not content)

- Wk 3:** Tuesday, February 12: Refining Sustainability: Economics
Reading: Brown, *Plan B 4.0*, ER (read entire selection, but skim 3-13)
Thursday, February 14: Refining Sustainability: Societies
Readings: Sachs et al., "Fairness in a Fragile World," ER
Agyeman, "Towards a 'Just' Sustainability," ER (skim)
- Wk 4:** Tuesday, February 19: No class; work on proposals
Thursday, February 21: **Project proposal due (3 copies)**; peer editing in class
- Wk 5:** Tuesday, February 26: Sustainability & Sustainable Development
Reading: Easton, "Taking Sides," both articles, ER
Callenbach, "Sustainable Shrinkage," ER
Thursday, February 28: Sustainability on Screen; **Revised Project Proposals Due**
- Wk 6:** Tuesday, March 5: In-class brainstorming on Sustainability Paper
Reading: Be prepared to discuss worksheet on Sustainability Questions
Thursday, March 7: **Sustainability Paper due (2 copies)**; peer editing of sustainability papers
- Wk 7:** Tuesday, March 12: Networking & Interviewing Workshop in Class
Thursday, March 14: No class; **revised Sustainability Paper due**; individual student meetings

SPRING BREAK

- Wk 8:** Tuesday, March 25: No class; work on thesis; individual student meetings
Thursday, March 27: No class; individual student meetings; **20-item annotated bib. due, electronic copy only**
- Wk 9:** Tuesday, April 2: Class meets; **1-page progress report and reflections worksheets due, electronic copy only**
Thursday, April 4: No class; work on thesis
- Wk 10:** Tuesday, April 9: Class meets; **tentative outline and 1-page narrative of argument due, 3 copies**
Thursday, April 11: No class; individual meetings if desired; mock interview (sign up in advance)
- Wk 11:** Tuesday, April 16: Student Presentations
Thursday, April 18: Student Presentations
- Wk 12:** Tuesday, April 23: Student Presentations
Thursday, April 25: Student Presentations
- Wk 13:** Tuesday, May 4: student presentations; **Final Paper Due (3 copies)**
Thursday, May 6: Peer Editing; **Earth Week Reflection/Sustainability Analysis Due (1 page)**
Reading: read and provide detailed comments on peer drafts
- Wk 14:** Tuesday, May 11: Reflections & Wrap up
Thursday, May 13: No class; Revised **Final Papers due by noon in paper and electronic form**