

Soc 342 – Social Ecology

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Course Meets: MW 1:50-3:20 p.m.
Course Location: 309 S. Halsey
Office Hours: MW noon-1:00 p.m.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." Aldo Leopold

Course Description: Society and the environment are inextricably linked, a fact that becomes more and more obvious as our world becomes more and more globally integrated and our natural resources further depleted and despoiled. The theory and debate about the causes to our environmental and societal problems are many (e.g. population density, natural climate changes, overconsumption, a capitalist industrial system, etc.) and the proposed solutions varied (e.g. control population, do nothing, let the market operate efficiently, implement “ecological modernization”, etc.).

“Sustainable development” has become a popular buzz phrase over the last couple decades and viewed by many to be the key to addressing the challenges faced by both society and nature. It was famously defined by the UN’s Brundtland Commission in 1987 as development (of land, cities, businesses, etc.) that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This sounds good in theory, but what does it mean in practice?

While not denying that it is important for places to be economically, technologically, and socially connected to the broader world in this global age, a growing number of scholars and activists argue that a key to building sustainable societies is to focus on local communities, implementing strategies that will increase their economic self-reliance and establish more harmonious relations with nature. The first step towards attaining such goals is gaining a solid understanding of place and community.

This course is, therefore, organized around learning about the social ecology of a particular place. We will begin by attempting to develop a working definition of social ecology, building upon a foundation of Leopold’s land ethic and some key readings in environmental sociology. We will then examine the dangers for society of living in disharmony with nature, using Diamond’s *Collapse* as the primary text, while at the same time beginning to develop a comprehensive profile of the Oshkosh area. The remainder of the course will focus on ideas for encouraging sustainability in local communities – using Beatley’s *Native to Nowhere* and Bernard and Young’s *Ecology of Hope* as the primary readings – and applying that understanding to a unique research project that will use the Oshkosh area as the unit of analysis.

Goals:

Subject Oriented Goals

1. Increase awareness of the relationships between human society and the natural world and understanding of the social ecology of a particular place. Demonstrate your progress toward this goal through thoughtful reading responses, class participation, and contribution to the research project.
2. Learn to reference social concepts and sociological imagination when considering environmental and natural resource issues. Demonstrate progress toward this goal by applying social concepts and sociological imagination to your reading responses and research project.

Process Oriented Goals

1. Increase active learning. Demonstrate this with thoughtful responses to reading, lecture, and discussion material, through class discussion with peers and your research team.
2. Increase critical thinking skills. Demonstrate this by seriously considering multiple viewpoints and perspectives in class discussions, your responses, and your research project.
3. Apply course material to real world situations. Demonstrate this through participation in in-class case studies and activities, and applying course concepts to real world experiences in your responses.
4. Become proficient in social science research and active in the process of seeking and analyzing data and communicating findings in a clear manner. Demonstrate this through the various steps of the research project by seeking and utilizing relevant sources of information.

Readings: You have three required texts for this course. The first is *Collapse*, an analysis of historical and potential societal collapse by Jared Diamond. The second is a book called *Native to Nowhere* by Timothy Beatley, which presents a variety of strategies for developing local solutions to socio-environmental problems. The third book is *Ecology of Hope* by Bernard and Young, which presents case studies of communities responding to socio-environmental challenges. In addition, I recommend you read *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* – a wonderful, quick read by Aldo Leopold, Wisconsin’s own legend of ecology – but it is not required. Each of these books can be purchased at the university bookstore. Additional readings are provided on electronic reserve (ER).

Required Books:

Diamond, Jared (2005). *Collapse: Why Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*. New York: Viking.

Beatley, Timothy (2004). *Native to Nowhere: Sustaining Home and Community in a Global Age*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.

Bernard, Ted and Jora Young (1997). *The Ecology of Hope: Communities Collaborate for Sustainability*. Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers.

[These required texts are listed by author and underlined throughout the course outline]

Tests: There will be no tests in this class.

Course Structure: In general, Monday class sessions for this course will be lectures/discussion of readings and Wednesdays will be labs, in which we will do field work, welcome guest speakers, and give presentations for the various components of the class research project.

Assignments and Grading:

Reading Responses: 100 points (10 at 10 points each)

Research Project: 160 points

 Background Paper (as group): 30 points

 Presentation (as group): 10 points

 Methods Paper (as group): 30 points

 Presentation (as group): 10 points

 Results Paper (each individual): 70 points

 Presentation (as group): 10 points

Participation: 40 points

 20 points determined by instructor

 20 points determined by your peers from research team

This is a total of 300 points. There will be no curve. If you participate, do your work and show critical thinking in your writing, discussion, and presentation, you will do well. Final grades will be distributed as follows:

A:	285-300
AB:	265-284
B:	245-261
BC:	211-244
C:	190-210
D:	170-189
F:	Below 170

Reading Responses: This important class requirement is designed to help you focus on the assigned readings and help you be able to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and topics they touch upon. Your responses should be no more than 1 double-spaced page and will be due to me as an attachment to email by 5:00 p.m. on the Sunday prior to the week in which we will be discussing those particular readings. They are meant to be an informal venue for you to explore your ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences that relate to the week's topic. I hope that these responses will get you thinking about issues we read about and how they relate to real world circumstances and issues in your own life, while helping you hone your writing skills. They will be graded on content, thoughtfulness, and completion. Responses should not simply summarize the readings but rather be comprised of your own thoughts, your reactions to them. They must also include at least two discussion questions of your own. In other words, the responses should generally cover the things that struck you most about the readings and the questions they produced for you. You will be responsible for writing a total of ten responses.

Extra Credit: You will have the opportunity to earn up to ten points extra credit by turning in a copy of a current newspaper or magazine article about something in the Oshkosh area that relates to the topic matter covered in our course, and attaching a reading response-length reaction to the article. It will be graded like a journal response, based on relevance of the article and the thoughtfulness of your response.

Research Project: Using secondary research (data gathered by you from the U.S. Census Bureau, local government sources, etc.) and primary research (conducted by you) you, as a class, will collaboratively develop a comprehensive report about the Oshkosh area's social ecology and level of self-reliance and sustainability. Approximately 8 research teams will be created for this purpose and you will work with your team throughout the semester to build the three components of the report and present the results. The first component will be a social ecological profile of the Oshkosh area, for which each research team will be assigned a different aspect of the Oshkosh area (e.g. economy, demography, natural resources, etc.) to research, analyze, make an in-class presentation, and write a(n approximately 5 page) paper about. The second and third components will be derived from the primary research you will conduct with your team. You will utilize a unique qualitative methodology that will involve asking recruited participants from the Oshkosh community to take pictures of various places/things in their social-physical environment and then interviewing them about those photo choices and more. The second component of the project will involve each group presenting and writing a(n approximately 5 page) paper about the research methodology and your experience with it. The final component will involve each group making a presentation of the analysis of their completed interviews, and for each student to individually synthesize everything you have done and what you've heard from other teams into a (10-12 page) paper that presents key project findings from your perspective and your recommendations for the Oshkosh area regarding sustainable development and living. The Oshkosh area social ecology report will be put together by combining the work of each research team on the various components of the project and creating a summary of the findings and recommendations of each student. [Note: All papers are to be double-spaced with one inch margins. The two group papers will be due one week after your group presentation for that component]

The tentative schedule for completion of the various stages of the research project will be as follows:

Profile Presentations and Papers Due: Weeks 4-6

Methods Presentations and Papers Due: Weeks 8-10

Analysis Presentations: Weeks 11-13

First Draft Final Paper Due: December 4

Final Paper Due: December 15

Further information about how to complete each task will follow.

Field Work: Because this is a practice-oriented course that revolves around place, community, and local ecology, we will plan to take trip(s) into the field as time and logistical considerations allow. These will be important opportunities to get out of the classroom and into the field to learn first-hand about challenges to and models for working towards sustainability. Participation in these trips will be strongly encouraged and those who do not attend will be asked to complete alternative field work locally.

Participation: I expect you to attend class and field work trips, and come prepared to engage in thoughtful discussion of the material. In addition, you will be expected to collaborate appropriately with your research teams – which will also serve as your small group discussion teams (to talk about readings, films, etc.) throughout the semester. Accordingly, 20 points of your grade will be awarded by the instructor (based on your participation in class debates and discussions, in-class writing assignments and attendance), and 20 points will be awarded by the peers from your research team, based on their evaluation of your contribution to the project and discussion.

Some Ground Rules:

- Lively debate and discussion will be encouraged in what should be a very interesting and enjoyable class. Note, however, that you will be expected to show respect for the opinions and ideas of others at all times.
- Please let me know ASAP if you have any disabilities or special needs that I should be aware of.
- Make sure your cell phones are turned off before you come to class. If yours rings during class, you will simply be asked to leave.
- Feel free to email me when you have questions about assignments and to schedule a meeting for a time during my office hours, etc. Questions about readings and subject matter should generally, however, be included in your journal responses and taken up in class as appropriate. Please use common sense and moderation in terms of your frequency of emailing and expectations for responses from me.
- Academic dishonesty will absolutely not be tolerated. If you are found to be guilty of such, you will fail the class. You will find the rules here: <http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/conduct.htm>.

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Course Outline¹:

Part 1: Introduction – Background and Concepts

Week 1

September 6: Introduction to course, assignment of research teams

Week 2

* Readings for the week:

- Winters et al. (2000) “Executive Summary” and “Natural Resources” from *Wisconsin’s Economy in the Year 2010* [(p. 1-10 and p. 13-21) ER]
- Leopold, Aldo (1968). “The Land Ethic” in *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* [(p. 201-226) ER]
- Humphrey et al. (2002), Chapter 7, “The Sociology of Sustainable Development” [(p. 220-264) ER]

September 11 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings, potential data sources for first project component.

September 13 – Lab

- Field Work: Trip to Cambria (discussion of the conflict over a proposed ethanol plant, lunch) and the Aldo Leopold Foundation (the site of Leopold’s weekend “shack” where he did much of his writing).

Part 2: Understanding the Nature and Consequences of Society/Environment Relations

Week 3

*Readings for the week:

- Princen, Thomas (2002). “Consumption and its Externalities: Where Economy Meets Ecology” [(p. 23-42) ER]
- Diamond, Prologue [p. 1-23], and Chapter 1, “Under Montana’s Big Sky” [p. 27-75]

September 18 – Lab: Linda S. Freed, Director of the Office of Grants & Faculty Development, will be here to lead us through a human subjects research training session. *You need to go through this training in order to participate in the primary research component of the research project (i.e. be here!).*

September 20 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings and primary research methodology.

Week 4

*Readings for the week:

¹ Subject to change

- Diamond, Chapter 2, “Twilight at Easter” [p. 79-119], Chapter 4, “The Ancient Ones” [p. 136-156], Chapter 5, “The Maya Collapses” [p. 157-177], and Chapter 8, “Norse Greenland’s End” [p. 248-276]

September 25 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings.

September 27 – Lab: first component of research project **presentations**

Week 5

*Readings for the week:

- Diamond, Chapter 10, “Malthus in Africa” [p. 311-328], Chapter 12, “China, Lurching Giant” [p. 358-377], and Chapter 13, “Mining Australia” [p.378-416]

October 2 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings.

October 4 – Lab: first component of research project **presentations**

Week 6

*Readings for the week:

- Diamond, Chapter 14, “Why Do Some Societies Make Disastrous Decisions” [p. 419-440], Chapter 15, “Big Businesses and the Environment” [p. 441-485], and Chapter 16 [p. 486-525]

October 9 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings.

October 11 – Lab: first component of research project **presentations**

Part 3: Exploring Strategies for Restoring Harmony in Place

Week 7

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 1, “Sustaining Place in the Global Age” [p.1-24]
- Shuman, Michael (2000), “Introduction” from *Going Local* [p. (1-29) ER]
- Bernard and Young, “Introduction” [p. 7-15], Chapter 1, “The Meaning of Copernicus” [p. 18-23], Chapter 2, “The American Conservation Movement” [p. 24-40] and Chapter 6, “Listening to the Forest: Menominee, Wisconsin” [p. 93-110]

October 16 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

October 18 – Lab: activities to be determined

Week 8

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 2, “Place Basics” [p. 25-52] and Chapter 3, “Place Strengthening” [p. 53-81]
- Shuman, Michael (2000), “Place Matters” from *Going Local* [p. (31-50) ER]

October 23 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

October 25 – Lab: second component of research project **presentations**

Week 9

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 4, “Tackling Sprawl” [p. 82-118]
- Platt, Rutherford H. (2000), “Ecology and Land Development” from *The Practice of Sustainable Development* [(p. 25-52) ER]
- Bernard and Young, Chapter 10, “Restoration at Two Extremes” [p. 167-180]
- “Smart Growth Initiative” and the other components of *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s* “Our Vanishing Landscape” series [found online at: <http://www2.jsonline.com/news/state/jan00/smartgrowth013000.asp>]

October 30 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

November 1 – Lab: second component of research project **presentations**

Week 10

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 5, “Nature and Place” [p. 119-156]
- Bernard and Young, Chapter 3, “Islands Foreshadow the Future” [p. 43-58] and Chapter 5, “Fishing, Farming, and Ecotourism” [p. 73-91]

November 6 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

November 8 – Lab: second component of research project **presentations**

Week 11

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 6 “Pedestrian Places” [p. 157-182] and Chapter 8 “Learning by Design” [p. 209-242]
- Bernard and Young, Chapter 4, “Following the River Home” [p. 61-71]

November 13 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

November 15 – Lab: third component of research project **presentations**

Week 12

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 9, “Strengthening Place Through Sharing Institutions” [p. 243-270]
- Rudel, Thomas (1998). “Organizing for Sustainable Development” (p. 361-372)
- Blakely, Edward J. (2000) “Social Equity and Sustainable Development” from *The Practice of Sustainable Development* (p. 67-73)

November 20 – Lecture/Discussion and Lab: third component of research project **presentations**

November 22 – NO CLASS (Thanksgiving break)

Week 13

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 11, “Energy and Sustainable Place Making” [p. 293-321]
- Bernard and Young, Chapter 9, “A Restorative Economy” [p. 149-165]
- Berry, Wendell (2002), “The Idea of a Local Economy” [online article: http://www.oriononline.org/pages/om/archive_om/Berry/Local_Economy.html]

November 27 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

November 29 – Lab: third component of research project **presentations**

Week 14

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 12, “The New Politics of Place” [p. 322-349]
- Curry and McGuire (2002), “In Thought” from *Community on Land* [(p. 181-207) ER]
- Bernard and Young, Chapter 11, “Envisioning the Goal” [p. 182-193]

December 4 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings and **Final Paper First Draft Due** [in class]

December 6 – Lab: activities to be determined

Week 15

*Readings for the week:

- Beatley, Chapter 13, “Renewing our Place Commitments” [p. 350-355]
- Curry and McGuire (2002), “Toward Community on Land” from *Community on Land* [(p. 209-234) ER]
- Bernard and Young, Chapter 12, “Finding the Path” [p. 194-209]

December 11 – Lecture/Discussion of the above readings

December 13 – Course wrap-up

FINAL PAPER DUE: FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15 [email to vanaukep@uwosh.edu by 5:00 p.m.]