

ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES 490
Senior Seminar in Environmental Studies
Spring 2009, TuTh 11:30-1:00 Swart 013

Office hours: Monday-Thursday 9:00-10:00, and by appointment

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations.

--Preamble to the Earth Charter

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course is designed as the capstone in Environmental Studies. In it ES majors and minors will pursue their own senior thesis. But this will be a shared experience, as students research and write the thesis in dialogue with the other students in the class. The UWO Environmental Studies Program has several distinctive characteristics, and these directly impact the Senior Seminar.

1. It is based in the liberal arts. The UWO College of Letters and Sciences is a liberal arts college, and all of its programs share the vision of the liberal arts. Rather than merely providing vocational training, it challenges students in a variety of ways that will enrich the student's life after graduation and empower the student to be creative and responsible as a member of various human and natural communities. COLS explains the liberal arts this way:

A liberal arts education transcends preparation for specific careers. A liberal arts education prepares students to be responsible citizens who understand and contribute to the changing world in which they live. It exposes students to a broad spectrum of knowledge about the human experience and the natural world, from contemporary science to literature, music and art. It enhances the skills of communication and critical thinking. It challenges students to appreciate their cultural heritage, to be sensitive to diverse traditions and opinions and to value truth. It encourages students to develop a lifelong commitment to inquiry. In sum, a liberal arts education develops the whole person who values knowledge for its own sake as well as for the achievement of specific objectives.

<http://www.uwosh.edu/colleges/cols/home.htm>

2. It is fully interdisciplinary. At this point you should understand why Environmental Studies is an interdisciplinary endeavor: the relationships between humans and nature are complex, and to understand them, one must understand their ecological, socio-cultural, and philosophical dimensions. You have learned how to evaluate scientific data (both natural and social scientific) and to analyze the social and ethical aspects involved. In the senior thesis you will demonstrate your ability to draw from various disciplines and integrate knowledge in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

3. It is a flexible, complementary program. ES is not a highly specified, stand-alone major. It enables students to pursue additional depth of knowledge in their specific area of interest (in a second major or minor). The senior thesis is an opportunity to bring together their learning in environmental studies and the expertise the students have gained in their complementary field.

4. A socially engaged program. Environmental Studies at UWO is not pursued simply as an intellectual endeavor. We live in a world of substantial environmental and social problems, and the program is geared toward analyzing those problems, discovering solutions to them, and being civically engaged in making a

better world. The senior thesis is an opportunity to articulate how an environmental problem can be effectively responded to.

SUSTAINABILITY

While students will be writing their own independent senior thesis, the class has an overarching focus: sustainability. Sustainability is 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 humanities (although the latter is all too often ignored). 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.

GOALS OF THE COURSE

Every program at UWO is required to have an assessment plan as a way to measure *outcomes*: the learning and skills we expect students to gain in the program. The Senior Seminar and in particular the senior thesis are the principal ways we assess our students' outcomes.

With this in mind, the senior thesis should demonstrate your ability:

1. **To understand the complex nature of an environmental issue.** This involves recognizing the problematic nature of scientific knowledge involved (e.g., conflicting, ambiguous, or insufficient data), of the social dimensions (political, economic, sociological, and/or psychological), and of the humanistic dimensions (ethical, philosophical, aesthetic and/or religious).
2. **To 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. **To understand and critically evaluate different policy positions** in relation to that problem.
4. **To articulate the student's own position** concerning the issue, supporting that position with evidence, argument, and authority, while recognizing the potential limitations and problems of that position.
5. To 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.

The thesis should also demonstrate the student's **research and communication skills**, including the ability:

6. To use in a critical and sophisticated way **a wide variety of research tools**, both electronic and paper.
7. To **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. To **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. To present the thesis (as a work in progress) as a **professional PowerPoint presentation** and lead a discussion on the issues; OR to present a **professional poster** at the Celebration of Scholarship event.

REQUIRED READINGS AND FORMAT

There will be a few readings on e-reserve, but there are no texts required for this seminar. Students will develop their own readings in consultation with the instructor and fellow seminar participants. Students will share their research and lead discussions of their topic. In addition, there will be time to reflect back on your environmental studies career.

REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

See course website for assignment descriptions. See syllabus for due dates.

1. **Research Proposal.** Approximately 2.5% of final grade.
2. **Three progress reports.** Approximately 7.5% of final grade (2.5% each).
3. **Mid-term summary.** Approximately 5% of final grade.
4. **Formal presentation of your research: PowerPoint or Poster.** Approximately 10% of final grade.

5. **First draft of research.** Two hard copies, plus electronic version to me. Approximately 10% of final grade.
6. **Final draft of research project.** One hard copy and an electronic version. Approximately 40% of final grade.
7. **Peer editing.** Approximately 2.5% of final grade.
8. **Discussion.** Approximately 20% of final grade. All students are expected to be active and positive in all seminar discussions. This grade is determined by the quantity and quality of your participation in class discussion throughout the semester.
9. **Reflections on two Earth Week events.** One hard copy. Due the class period the week after Earth Week. Approximately 2.5% of final grade (total for both). Two informal reflections on two Earth Week events. Each reflection should be about 3/4 page, double spaced. Review the basic content of the event, its significance, and your evaluation of each event.
10. **Participation in Career Services interviewing and networking workshops & mock interviews** (required but ungraded).

CALCULATING GRADES

At the end of the semester grades will be calculated as a percentage of the total, possible points:

> 92%: A; 88-92%: AB; 83-87%: B; 78-82%: BC; 73-77%: C; 68-72%: CD; 63-67%: D; < 63%: F.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS, ATTENDANCE, AND RETURNED ASSIGNMENTS.

- **Plagiarism:** Students are expected to know what constitutes plagiarism and academic dishonesty; anyone found to have engaged in either will receive an F and may face University discipline. I will submit each thesis to a website that looks for plagiarism.
- **Attendance:** Attendance by all students is crucial to the success of the course. There are no excused absences except for illnesses (bring a note) or real emergencies (bring some written evidence of it).
- **Research project:** I will keep a copy of your final project in your file. If you want a copy, let me know and I'll have a copy made.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR ES 490

⇒ *Note: I may change assignments if I deem the change to be beneficial to students*

- T 2/3 Introduction to the course. Statement of topics.
Thursday February 5: National Teach-In
- R 2/5 Discussion of sustainability, bias, neutrality, objectivity, balance, critical thinking, advocacy, engaged scholarship.
- Print, read, and bring to class "Definitions of Sustainability" (*course website*)
 - *Be prepared to discuss the study questions on sustainability*
 - *Submit research proposal*
- T 2/10 Discussion of senior thesis on sustainable development.
- Print, read, and bring to class Olesya Savchenko, "Is Sustainable Development a Plausible Approach to Environmental Problems?" (*on e-reserve*)
 - **Hand in** *written responses to study questions.*
- R 2/12 Guest librarian: using research resources for environmental research.
- **Submit by email** *progress report #1*
- T 2/17 Critical discussion of Herman Daly on sustainability.
- Print, read, and bring to class Herman Daly, "The Shape of Current Thought on Sustainable Development" from *Beyond Growth*, pages 1-18 only (*on e-reserve*)
 - **Hand in** *written responses to study questions.*
- R 2/19 Interviewing and networking workshop, in our classroom, Swart 013
- *Work on thesis*

- T 2/24 Critical discussion of Rio Principles
- Print, read, and bring to class Rio Declaration, “Principles on Environment and Development.” (*course website*) *NOTE*: This is not the article on Education for Sustainable Development, which we will read later.
 - **Hand in** written responses to study questions.
 - **Submit by email** progress report #2
- R 2/26 Mock interviews, Dempsey 230. Sign up at Titan Jobs beforehand.
- T 3/3 Group review of student research projects: topic, issues, sustainability, research progress and problems.
- **Hand in** written response to questions on “your definition of sustainability and its relation to your thesis”
- Wednesday March 4: Town Hall Meeting**
- R 3/5 TBA.
- *Work on thesis*
 - **Submit by email** progress report #3
- Friday March 6: Aldo Leopold Celebration**
- T 3/10 Sustainability in higher education
- Print, read, and bring to class Rio Declaration. “Education for Sustainable Development.” (*course website*)
 - Print, read, and bring to class Calder, Wynn and Richard M. Clugston. “A Model Sustainable Institution.” (*course website*)
 - Print, read, and bring to class Second Nature. "Education for Sustainability." (*course website*)
 - Print, read, and bring to class the “UWO Campus Sustainability Plan Executive Summary.” (*course website*)
 - **Hand in** written responses to study questions on “Sustainability in higher education and at UWO”
- R 3/12 Individual meetings with professor about thesis (1-5)
- *Work on thesis*
- T 3/17 Individual meetings with professor about thesis (6-10)
- *Work on thesis*
- R 3/19 Individual meetings with professor about thesis (11-14)
- **Submit by email** midterm summary
- *** SPRING BREAK ***
- T 3/31 Individual meetings with professor about thesis (15-18)
- *Work on thesis*
- R 4/2 Individual meetings with professor about thesis (19-22)
- *Work on thesis*
- T 4/7 Student presentations 1&2
- *Work on thesis*
- R 4/9 Student presentations 3&4
- *Work on thesis*
- T 4/14 Student presentations 5&6
- *Work on thesis*
- R 4/16 Student presentations 7&8
- *Work on thesis*
- *** EARTH WEEK 4/20-4/25 ***
- T 4/21 Student presentations 9&10
- *Work on thesis*
- R 4/23 Student presentations 11-13
- *Work on thesis*
- T 4/28 Student presentations 14-16
- *Work on thesis*
 - **Hand in** reflections on two Earth Week events (3/4 page each)

- R 5/30 Student presentations 17-19
➤ *Work on thesis*
- T 5/5 Student presentations 20-22
➤ ***Hand in two hard copies of first (complete) draft of paper, beginning of class; also email electronic copy to barnhill@uwosh.edu***
- R 5/7 Peer editing
➤ *Read and comment on peers' theses*
- T 5/12 Celebratory reflections on Environmental Studies and on students' future plans
➤ *Work on thesis*
- R 5/14 No class
➤ ***Submit an electronic version of final draft of paper, plus first drafts with peer editors' names and peer editing evaluation form. Due beginning of class.***