

Environmental Studies 490: Senior Seminar

Fall 2023

3 credits

TTH, 11:30-1:00, Sage 4212

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Office Hours: Th 1:15-2:45, or by appt.

Course Description: This course is designed as the capstone in Environmental Studies. In it, you will put the skills and knowledge that you have learned in your Environmental Studies career into practice by working with the city of Oshkosh to plan and propose specific projects that address the city's sustainability goals and objectives. In the first few weeks of class, we will meet with city officials to identify 4 projects for the class to work on over the course of the semester. Students will then be divided into teams to complete these projects. At the end of the semester, we will give a public presentation to stakeholders, city planners, and the City Sustainability Advisory Board (SAB), and also deliver written reports containing each group's findings and recommendations. This information will be used by the Oshkosh Common Council and the Sustainability Advisory Board to advance the city's efforts at sustainability. In addition to tackling specific local issues, students will discuss readings intended to provide a context for urban sustainability issues and social change. Students will also engage in career preparation activities including updating and refining résumés and learning skills for job interviews and participating in an ES Alumni networking event.

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.

Bulletin Description: A capstone seminar for the Environmental Studies program that will examine the student's ability to integrate perspectives gained in previous environmental studies courses emphasizing science, society and values. Prerequisite: Environmental Studies 260, 261, and 282, or consent of Environmental Studies Program Director.

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1.) Apply key concepts in Environmental Studies in analyzing a real-world problem and possible solutions.
That is, they will put the concepts they have learned in the ES Program into practice.
- 2.) Understand and critically evaluate different stakeholder perspectives and assumptions in relation to a specific, local sustainability issue/problem.
- 3.) Work collaboratively in a team setting to assess a local sustainability issue and to develop a practical response to that issue.
- 4.) Produce an annotated bibliography of sources and materials that is relevant to the chosen topic and that summarizes literature related to the problem and evaluates the usefulness and limitations of each item for that specific topic.
- 5.) Communicate research and recommendations on the chosen topic in both oral and written formats in ways that is understandable to an educated general audience and sophisticated enough for an expert audience.

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A Note on Community Engagement & Environmental Studies: Because of its broad interdisciplinarity, the Environmental Studies Program is both one of the most challenging and one of the most rewarding programs at the university. The key to meeting the challenges and gaining the rewards of our program is embracing the idea of community. Just as environmental problems cannot be solved without communities coming together in dialogue and action, our classes in ES require you to come together as a community characterized by open participation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility. Participation means actively contributing both your voice in class discussions and your work to build knowledge together. Respect means listening and making space for your peers' voices while also feeling free to disagree (as the best forms of understanding often arise out of what begins as disagreement). And responsibility means holding ourselves accountable for being curious, engaged, and informed members of our shared community.

What we discuss in our classes is often difficult, but if we see each class as a community in which we are actively engaged, we will gain not only the rewards of knowledge and capacity for action, but a sense of feeling supported, both academically and emotionally – of confronting the problems we face together. Further, an environmental education obligates us to address issues we see and to collaborate with others to build relationships and try to make things better. This means embracing your major as your program, helping it be the best version of itself, and getting involved outside of the classroom on campus and beyond.

Individual Assignments, Group Projects & Grades: Some of the work in this course is individual (annotated bibliography, stakeholder analysis paper, final individual paper, Earth Charter reflection). The most important parts of the class, however, will be done in groups. As we all know, group work is challenging—it demands flexibility, communication, patience, and teamwork. True collaboration goes beyond just participating; success in group projects sometimes requires putting aside what you may want for the benefit of the group. It may mean letting go of personal frustrations, it may mean letting others know if they are not meeting your expectations. You will have significant time in class to work together, but you will also need to work outside of class time to complete your projects. At the end of the semester, your grade will be determined by the quality of your team's final product. However, I might assign different grades to different group members, based on my understanding of how the team worked together and whether responsibilities and productivity were shared equally. I will ask you to provide to me confidential, advisory evaluations of all members of your team to help in this process.

Professionalism and Community Engagement: As you complete the projects for this class, you will be out in the community interviewing and interacting with stakeholders, representing both yourselves and the ES Program. Professional behavior is expected at all times. Examples of the myriad behaviors that comprise professionalism include timeliness; preparedness; cleanly dressed; respectful listening and talking; thinking critically and creatively; challenging appropriately; producing high-caliber work; kindly and respectfully interacting with stakeholders, community members, target audience, colleagues, etc.; being a hard-working and reliable team member, etc.

Required Readings: There will be a few readings on Canvas, but no textbooks are required for this seminar. Students are expected to complete all readings prior to class on the day that those readings are assigned, and to have a copy of those readings with them in class—either in print or in digital form.

Attendance, Discussion and Participation: This course requires close interaction with research and course materials, each other, and with community stakeholders. Participation in discussions and other class activities is essential. This course will only be successful with full engagement and participation, both in class activities,

and especially in the group project. Your full participation in all group meetings and activities is expected. 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. Attendance will be taken each day; your grade will drop significantly with each absence. If you have more than five unexcused absences or fail to participate in your group’s activities, 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.

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 & Short Assignments 10%	Final Individual Paper 15%
Stakeholder Identification Paper 15%	Project Presentation 20%
Annotated Bibliography 10%	Final Written Project 20%
Earth Charter Reflection/Analysis 5%	Group Progress Reports/Presentations .. 5%
Mock Interview Workshop P/F	

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 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. This is particularly true in the context of your group. You will be working closely with group members on completing the final project—just as you will be expected to do in professional settings after you graduate.

Knowing and applying the names and pronouns that students use is a crucial part of developing a productive learning environment that fosters inclusion and personal dignity. Please let me know the name and pronoun you use any time before or throughout the semester.

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.

A Note about AI/ChatGPT: Generative AI technologies are becoming widespread and have the potential to enhance learning experiences and promote critical thinking in this course. However, it is important to note that the use of AI should be supplementary and should not replace the development of essential cognitive skills. Generative AI is like Wikipedia - a great place to start, but you, as the author, are responsible for ensuring that the information and outputs are appropriate. Often, ChatGPT and similar sites are wrong in their interpretations of a text. Again, AI can be great for inspiration, especially when you’re stuck, but you must clearly demonstrate your own knowledge surrounding content in this course. Know that work created by AI tools may not be considered original work and instead is considered automated plagiarism. Remember that most of the writing assignments in this course are based on YOUR OWN reflections and interpretations of readings, so there is no right answer. Do not rely on generative AI to do the thinking for you. I want to know what YOU think, not read a word salad created by ChatGPT. If you use an AI tool at any point in the development and/or creation of your

work for this course – including discussion board posts, exams, and reading responses – you must include appropriate citations and the acknowledgment of what tool you used, and the date.

Students are advised to see the following URL for disclosures about essential consumer protection items required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990: <https://uwosh.edu/financialaid/resources/consumer-information/>

Course Calendar (subject to change, but clear notification will be provided if changes are made)

Wk 1: Thursday, September 7 – Introduction & Course Themes

Friday, September 8 – Furlough Day (I will not be paid on this day and so won't be allowed to work)

Wk 2: Tuesday, September 12 – Achieving Change

Reading: Michael Maniates, "Individualization," Canvas

Watch: Annie Leonard, "Story of Change," <https://www.storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-change/>

Reading response (1-2 pages, dbl spaced): What do Maniates and Leonard say is necessary to achieve social/environmental change? How can change be achieved?

Thursday, September 14 – Issue Briefing with City Officials: Oshkosh Sustainability Plan, City Hall Room 404

Reading: Review City of Oshkosh Sustainability Website,

<https://www.ci.oshkosh.wi.us/SustainableOshkosh/>

City of Oshkosh Sustainability Plan, Canvas; read pp. 1-19 and all chapter introductions; skim goals and objectives; identify 1-2 ideas that you might be interested in working on.

Wk 3: Tuesday, September 19 – Greening Oshkosh and Green Cities

Reading: Barber, *Cool Cities*, pp. 1-12, Canvas

McKinsey Sustainability, *Focused adaptation: A strategic approach to climate adaptation in Cities*, 1-28, Canvas

To consider while you read: In what ways is the City of Oshkosh (based on the materials read last week) following or diverging from national patterns of the green city movement, as seen in Barber and the McKinsey Report?

Thursday, September 21 – Civic Engagement

Reading: Mathews, *Together: Building Better, Stronger Communities*, Canvas

Barth, "Rise Above," Canvas

Reading Response (1 page): What is the connection between civic engagement, community organizing, and the three pillars of sustainability?

Friday, September 22 – Furlough Day (I will not be paid on this day and so won't be allowed to work)

Wk 4: Tuesday, September 26 – Library Workshop—meet in Polk Library Lobby

Thursday, September 28 – Project Planning: Team Meetings with Jim/Brandon

Wk 5: Tuesday, October 3 – Team Research; no class (meet with Jim if needed)

Thursday, October 5 – Team Research; no class

Friday, October 6 – Furlough Day (I will not be paid on this day and so won't be allowed to work)

Wk 6: Tuesday, October 10 – Project Planning: Team Meetings with Jim/Brandon

**Tuesday, October 10th: Required Attendance at Earth Charter Community Summit Evening
Keynote, Randy Jackson, Grassland 2.0. Further details TBA**

Thursday, October 12 – Networking/Interviewing workshop with Office of Career & Prof. Development

Wk 7: Tuesday, October 17 – Annotated Bibliography due; in class presentation workshop

Thursday, October 19 – Class meets—Research & Sustainability Analysis Presentations

- Wk 8:** Tuesday, October 24 – No Class--Team Meetings with Jim
Thursday, October 26 – Class Meets: Eco-Anxiety & Making a Difference Workshop
Reading: Ray, A Field Guide to Climate Anxiety, Canvas
Additional readings TBA
- Wk 9:** Tuesday, October 31 – Class meets: **Audit/Benchmarking Presentations**
Thursday, November 2 – No class; mock interviews as scheduled through Career Services—team meetings with Jim if needed; **Earth Charter Reflection Due**
- Wk 10:** Tuesday, November 7 – **Stakeholder Presentations & Stakeholder Analysis Due**
Wednesday, November 8: **Required attendance** at ES Alumni Networking Night, 5:30-7:00; Reeve 306
Thursday, November 9 – Class meets—Final Project writing workshop
- Wk 11:** Tuesday, November 14 – No class—team meetings with Jim; **Cost Analysis Due**
Thursday, November 16 – Class meets—**draft report due**; workshop on final presentations
- Wk 12:** Tuesday, November 21 – Presentation Dry Run 1
Thursday, November 23 – No class– Thanksgiving Break
Friday, November 24 – Furlough Day (I will not be paid on this day and so won't be allowed to work)
- Wk 13:** Tuesday, November 28 – Presentation Dry Run 2
Thursday, November 30 – Presentation Dry Run 3
- Wk 14:** Monday, **Final Presentation to Oshkosh SAB, 5:00, City Hall Room 404; 6:00pm (arrive by 5:45)**
Tuesday, December 5 – Class meets—final paper workshop and course evaluations
Thursday, December 7 – Class meets—final paper workshop and course evaluations
- Wk 15:** Tuesday, December 12 – Class meets – course evals & wrap up; **individual reflection papers due**
Thursday, December 14 – No class; **Final Group Papers in Canvas Dropbox by 5:00 pm**