Fall 2018

STS 363-101: Introduction to Sustainability Studies

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Introduction to Sustainability Studies (STS 363/H)
Program in Science, Technology, and Society
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Fall 2018

Organizational Details
Instructor: Dr. Maurie Cohen
Time: Tuesdays, 6–9pm
Room: CKB 217
Course Website: https://njit.instructure.com

Office Location: Cullimore 427
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3–5pm and by appointment
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Overview
Over the past three decades, the pursuit of sustainable development has become a prominent objective for many policy makers concerned with issues at the intersection of society, economy, and environment. The international community has created new institutions to foster sustainability and reoriented the focus of existing organizations. At the local level, there have been numerous initiatives implemented to facilitate more sustainable land-use practices and businesses have taken incremental steps to reduce the adverse impacts of their operations. Despite this progress, sustainable development remains an ill-defined (perhaps even elusive) concept and evidence of unambiguous achievements—especially in the United States—can be difficult to ascertain. Moreover, developed and developing countries have formulated largely different (and potentially incompatible) agendas with which to engage with the notion of sustainability. Large countries with emergent economies, most notably China, India, Indonesia, and Brazil, pose especially vexing dilemmas. This course devotes primary attention to the challenges that sustainable development holds for affluent countries (the so-called G-20; see http://www.g20.org). We examine the intellectual roots of the concept and explore why it has become a central feature of international politics and policy planning in such a relatively short period of time. Of additional interest is how the sustainability agenda is likely to evolve over the next few decades given the onset of anthropogenic climate change and increasingly pervasive biophysical constraints on economic growth.

Required Readings
Other readings and multimedia presentations will be available via the course website (https://njit.instructure.com). Items are organized in weekly folders and can be viewed online or saved to your computer.

**Evaluation**
The evaluation of student performance is comprised of four components. Since the course will be conducted in accordance with a seminar format, attendance and participation are especially important.

1. **Class Attendance (15%)**: Students are expected to attend each class session. You will be required to sign a weekly attendance sheet and late arrival (more than twenty minutes) will be treated as an absence. Each student will be granted two “free absences” during the semester; every subsequent absence will mean a full letter-grade reduction in the attendance portion of your final grade (i.e., three absences is a B, four absences is a C, and so forth).

2. **Class Participation (25%)**: All students are encouraged to engage actively in class discussions by offering comments, posing questions, and demonstrating familiarity with the course material. Feel free to ask me for a periodic performance appraisal if you would like feedback on your class-participation standing.

3. **Midterm Exam (30%)**: The midterm is intended to be a “synthesizing experience” and will be a combination of multiple-choice questions and essay format. For the latter part, I will provide an article one week in advance that integrates across the various themes covered during the first half of the semester. On the day of the midterm, I will then give you several questions and you will have approximately one hour to write your responses (bring your own laptop!). While working on this part of the midterm you will be able to freely consult all course materials including lecture notes, required readings, and multimedia presentations.

4. **Final Exam (30%)**: The final exam will use the same format described above for the midterm though the scope of the assignment will span the full semester.

**Important Notices**
Students enrolled in this course are forewarned that the consequences of plagiarism or academic misconduct of any kind are severe. Violations will be handled in accordance with the rules outlined in the University Code on Academic Integrity. If you are unfamiliar with these procedures, refer to https://www5.njit.edu/doss/policies/conductcode/index.php.

Final grades are not subject to post-semester adjustment—with the exception of the change of a grading error. Under no circumstances will students be given the opportunity to complete extra-credit papers or other assignments to bolster their final grades.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 (September 4): Conceptual and Scientific Foundations of Sustainability**

Week 2 (September 11): International Politics and Institutions

Mulligan, An Introduction to Sustainability, Chapters 1, 2, and 4.

Week 3 (September 18): Are We There Yet? Measuring Sustainability

Mulligan, An Introduction to Sustainability, Chapters 8 and 12.

Week 4 (September 25/Virtual Session): Sustainability and Technoscience I—The Theory and Practice of Ecological Modernization

Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2007. Mr. Green: environmentalism’s most optimistic guru. The New Yorker, January 22.
Nijhuis, Michelle. 2015. Is the “Ecomodernist Manifesto” the future of environmentalism. The New Yorker, 2 June.

Week 5 (October 2): Sustainability and Technoscience I—Industrial Ecology and Earth Systems Engineering

Mulligan, An Introduction to Sustainability, Chapters 5 and 16.

Week 6 (October 9): Sustainability and Technoscience III—Architecture and Design

McDonough, William and Michael Braungart, The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability—Designing for Abundance.

Week 7 (October 16): Sustainability and the Limits of Techoscientific Innovation

Huesemann, Michael. 2015. Why technology can’t save us. IFG Teach-in on Techno-
Utopianism and the Fate of the Earth (see also the video version of the text at http://www.ratical.org/ratville/AoS/MHuesemann102514.html).

Mulligan, An Introduction to Sustainability, Chapters 10 and 11.

Week 8 (October 23): Midterm Exam

Week 9 (October 30): Gross Domestic Product and its Flaws

Mulligan, An Introduction to Sustainability, Chapter 9.
Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe. 1995. If the GDP is up, why is America down? The Atlantic, October.
Lederer, Katy. The end of GDP? The New Yorker, 9 September.

Week 10 (November 6/Virtual Session): Is a Steady-State Economy Possible...Inevitable?

Mulligan, An Introduction to Sustainability, Chapter 6.

Week 11 (November 13): Toward Sustainable Consumption and Lifestyles


November 20: No class: Thursday schedule in effect

Week 12 (November 27): New Politics of Progress I

Jackson, Prosperity Without Growth, pp. 1–102.

Week 13 (December 4): New Politics of Progress II

Jackson, Prosperity Without Growth, pp. 103–207.

Week 14 (December 11): Forecasting the Future and Designing Pathways for Sustainability
Transitions


Final Exam as Scheduled