Fall 2020

STS 363-101: Introduction to Sustainability Studies

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Introduction to Sustainability Studies (STS 363)
Program in Science, Technology, and Society
New Jersey Institute of Technology
Fall 2020

Organizational Details
Instructor: Dr. Maurie Cohen
Time: Tuesdays, 6–9pm
Delivery Mode: Synchronous online via WebEx (https://njit.webex.com/meet/mcohen)
Course Website: https://njit.instructure.com

Office Location: Cullimore 427
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 3–5pm and by appointment (e-mail me in advance and meet in WebEx room)
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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 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, as well as the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Required Readings
All 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 an online seminar format, attendance and participation are especially important.
1. **Class Attendance (10%)**: Students are expected to attend each class session and a record will be kept (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 (20%)**: 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 (25%)**: The midterm is intended to be a “synthesizing experience” and it is anticipated that there will be a combination of multiple-choice questions and an essay to complete (final determination as to format will be made closer to the date). 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. 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 (25%)**: The final exam will use roughly the same format described above for the midterm though the scope of the assignment will span the full semester.

5. **Book Review and Presentation (20%)**: Students are required to write a review (approximately 1000 words) of a recently published book of their own choosing. The selected book should examine the political and/or technical dimensions of a particular sustainability challenge (e.g., climate change, biodiversity, social equity, inequality, gender empowerment). Book selections should be submitted for approval by November 17.

**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](https://www5.njit.edu/doss/policies/conductcode/index.php).

Final grades are not subject to post-semester adjustment—with the exception of need to amend 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 1): Conceptual and Scientific Foundations of Sustainability**


Note: No class session on September 8 (Monday schedule in effect)

Week 2 (September 15): International Politics and Institutions


Week 3 (September 22): Are We There Yet? Measuring Sustainability


Week 4 (September 29): Sustainability and Technoscience I—The Theory and Practice of Ecological Modernization


Week 5 (October 6): Sustainability and Technoscience II—Industrial Ecology and Earth Systems Engineering


Week 6 (October 13): Sustainability and Technoscience III—Eco-design and the Potential of a Circular Economy


Week 7 (October 20): 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).

Week 8 (October 27): Midterm Exam

Week 9 (November 3): Election Day | No Class Session

Week 10 (November 10): Gross Domestic Product and its Flaws

Clifford Cobb, Ted Halstead, and Jonathan Rowe. 1995. If the GDP is up, why is America down? The Atlantic, October.
Leonhardt, David. 2018. We’re measuring the economy all wrong. The New York Times, 14 September.

Week 11 (November 17): Is a Steady-State Economy Possible…Inevitable?

Daly, Herman. 2008. A steady-state economy. The Ecologist, 1 April.

Book-review proposal due

Week 12 (November 24): Toward Sustainable Consumption and Lifestyles


Week 13 (December 1): Prosperity, Economic Growth, and Sustainability


**Week 14 (December 8): Forecasting the Future and Designing Pathways for Sustainability Transitions**


*Book review due*

**Week 15 (December 15) Final Exam**