Spring 2021

STS 364-102: Sustainability Policy & Practice

Maurie Cohen

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Organizational Details
Instructor: Dr. Maurie Cohen
Location: WEC Lecture Hall (course is scheduled for delivery in converged mode but meets in synchronous online mode at https://njit.webex.com/meet/mcohen until further notice)
Time: Tuesdays 6:00–8:50pm
Office: Cullimore 427
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3–5pm and by appointment
Telephone: 973.596.5281
E-mail: mcohen@njit.edu
Course Website: https://njit.instructure.com/courses/10808
Personal Website: https://mauriecohen.net

Overview
Earth systems scientists advise that we now live in a newly designated era referred to as the “Anthropocene.” This term – Anthropo-meaning “man” or “human” and -cene meaning “new” – has been coined in recent years to distinguish the last approximately 250 years of human activity on the planet from other periods of geological history (though there is debate on the starting point with some appraisals suggesting either a longer or shorter timeframe). It has also become evident that efforts to date to modify human practices to conform to biospheric limits based on public regulations and remedial technologies have not been successful and we have already crossed several “planetary boundaries.” Despite progress on some local and regional issues, most global-scale ecological problems have worsened due to growing demand for energy and other resources.

At the same time, familiar systems of social organization in affluent countries are starting to erode in the face of demographic aging, growing income inequality, decline of wage-based labor, political paralysis, and resource scarcity. There is building public awareness that a sustainable future depends on more than individually implemented behavior changes that modestly reduce the environmental impacts of human activities. Also necessary is a systemic understanding of the numerous interlinked challenges that we face— including climate change, freshwater availability, population growth, biodiversity loss, food sufficiency, energy security, social inclusion, and financial stability— and the need for large-scale system innovation. But what will propel the necessary changes? And how can we ensure that they unfold in directions that ameliorate rather than exacerbate extant conditions? It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has powerfully accelerated some trends and impeded others.

This course examines several popular conceptual strategies currently “in the air” for moving toward conditions of sustainability during the 21st century (sharing economy, small-scale provisioning, and relocalization). (Some analysts are referring to the coming decade as the “Transition 20s.”) We also consider the social, economic, and environmental implications of sweeping technological changes that are poised to disrupt conventional arrangements for supporting contemporary livelihoods. Throughout this course, we will consider the general
notion of social change and how we might steer transpiring developments in ways that can lead to a more sustainable future. Students will also complete a research project that will provide an opportunity to learn about current and ongoing developments to achieve more environmentally tenable and socially equitable outcomes in a particular societal domain.

Course Materials
Reading materials and other associated items are mostly available via the course website. Items are organized into weekly folders and can be viewed online or saved. A valid UCID is required to access the website. Students should make arrangements to acquire the following two books which are available in variety of formats.


Useful websites:
Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (https://bealocalist.org)
Center for a New American Dream (now New Dream) (https://www.newdream.org)
Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (http://www.cusp.ac.uk)
Democracy Collaborative (http://democracycollaborative.org)
Great Transition Initiative (http://www.greattransition.org)
Green Economy Coalition (http://www.greeneconomycoalition.org)
Institute for New Economic Thinking (https://www.ineteconomics.org)
New Economics Foundation (http://www.greeneconomycoalition.org)
New Economy Coalition (see also map of constituent members at the top of website) (http://neweconomy.net)
*Orion* Magazine (https://orionmagazine.org)
P2P Foundation (https://p2pfoundation.net)
Post-carbon Institute (http://www.postcarbon.org)
Redefining Progress (http://rprogress.org)
Schumacher Center for New Economics (http://www.centerforneweconomics.org)
Sustainable Consumption Research and Action Initiative (http://scorai.org)
The Next System Project (http://thenextsystem.org)
*Yes!* Magazine (http://www.yesmagazine.org)

Evaluation
1. **Class Attendance (10%)**: This course is being delivered in “converged” mode which means that students have the option to attend either in person or online (or some combination). Regardless of the manner of participation, you are expected to attend each session. Arrival more than twenty minutes after the start 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. **Participation in Class Sessions (20%)**: All students are required to engage actively in class discussions by offering comments, posing questions, and demonstrating familiarity with the course material. The default form of participation for students connecting remotely is to activate the camera functionality and to keep it generally turned on throughout the duration of the class session. *Consult the supplementary rubric posted to the course website for information on the assignment of grades for class participation.*

3. **Participation in Canvas Discussions (20%)**: We are collectively going to engage with the online-discussion feature of the course website and all students are encouraged to participate on an active and consistent basis throughout the semester. Three students will be assigned to serve for a two-week period (one week prior to and one week after a specific class session) as “session leaders” and during this interval it will be their responsibility to pose questions and facilitate the ensuing dialogue. It is up to the session leaders to determine how they want to conduct affairs – whether to work in concert or independently. Regardless of whether you are a session leader, the expectation is that you will engage in an ongoing and enthusiastic manner on at least three occasions each week. Postings should be concise but substantive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Postings During Semester</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33+</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-32</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-29</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;24</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Group/Individual Research Project (30% for Report and 20% for Presentation)**: Students will be required to complete a group or individual research project focused on sustainability and social change. The particular societal innovation can center on a domain/issue of your own choosing and the final pages of this syllabus provide some general ideas (as well as offering some preliminary resources). If undertaken on a group basis the team should not have more than three members. Groups should be assembled on a self-organizing basis but I am glad to provide assistance if necessary. Project teams need to be organized by February 2 and proposals (250 words) should be submitted by February 9. Groups may want to implement in real time and on a personal basis individual behavior changes consistent with the social change that they are studying. Each team will provide a preliminary overview of its project on March 9 and final presentations will be held during the last three weeks of the semester. In addition to the presentation, the group (or sole individual) is required to submit a report (15 pages, double-spaced) summarizing the results of their research.

**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 Policy on Academic Integrity. If you are unfamiliar with this Policy, you should consult the following document* ([https://www5.njit.edu/doss/sites/doss/files/University%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrit.pdf](https://www5.njit.edu/doss/sites/doss/files/University%20Policy%20on%20Academic%20Integrity.pdf)).
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 enhance their final grades.

Schedule

Week 1 (January 19): Introduction


Week 2 (January 26): What is the Anthropocene?

*Short Introductions: Sustainability*, Chapter 2: The science of sustainability, pp. 22–46 and

Week 3 (February 2): Sustainability Transitions and System Innovation

*Short Introductions: Sustainability*, Chapter 4: Planning sustainability transitions, pp. 68–93.

Deadline for Notification about Formation of Project Teams

Week 4 (February 9): “Doughnut” Economics

Deadline for Project Proposals (250 words and including a bibliography of at least ten sources)

Week 5 (February 16): Sustainability and the Platform (Sharing) Economy / Collaborative Consumption

*Short Introductions: Sustainability*, Chapter 5: Social innovation and sustainability, pp. 94–122.

**Week 6 (February 23): Maker Movement and DIY Production**

*The Future of Consumer Society*, Chapter 4: The mass-market maker movement, pp. 70–91.

**Week 7 (March 2): Economic Relocalization**

Boyer, M. 2012. 100-mile houses expand the locavore movement from food to architecture. *Good Design*, February 24.

**Week 8 (March 9): Research Projects: Preliminary Presentations**

**March 16: Spring Break—No Class Session!**

**Week 9 (March 23): Digital Automation and Sustainability**


**Week 10 (March 30): Sustainability When Work Disappears**

Week 11 (April 6): Sustainability in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond


**Week 12 (April 13): Project Presentations 1**

**Week 13 (April 20): Project Presentations 2**

**Week 14 (April 27): Project Presentations 3**

*Project reports are due by 11:59pm on May 4*
Research-Project Suggestions and Preliminary Resources

1. **Meat Reduction and Redesigning Agro-Food Systems**

2. **Car-free Lifestyles and the Future of Urban Mobility**

3. **Shopping Avoidance and the Demise of the Consumer Society**

4. **Eliminating Waste and Plastic-Free Living**


5. **Giving Up Toxic Cosmetics and Personal-Care Products**


6. **Disrupting Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothing and Textiles**


7. **Worktime Reduction and the Future of Work**


8. **Minimalism, Sufficiency, and Small(er)-scale Living**


