

Spring 2021

STS 364-102: Sustainability Policy & Practice

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**SUSTAINABILITY POLICY & PRACTICE (STS 364/H)
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY PROGRAM
NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
COURSE SYLLABUS
SPRING 2021**

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

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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.

Cohen, Maurie. 2021. *Short Introductions: Sustainability*. Cambridge: Polity Press
(<https://politybooks.com/bookdetail/?isbn=9781509540310>).

Cohen, Maurie. 2017. *The Future of Consumer Society: Prospects for Sustainability in the New Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
(<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-future-of-consumer-society-9780198768555?cc=us&lang=en&>).

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.

Number of Postings During Semester	Grade
33+	A
29-32	B
26-29	C
22-25	D
<24	F

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%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

Short Introductions: Sustainability, Chapter 1: What is sustainability? pp. 1–21.
The Future of Consumer Society, Chapter 1: Introduction, pp. 1–14.

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

Short Introductions: Sustainability, Chapter 2: The science of sustainability, pp. 22–46 and
 Chapter 3: Engineering a more sustainable future, pp. 47–67.
 Nijhuis, M. 2015. When did the human epoch begin? *The New Yorker*, March 11.
 Kolbert, E. 2010. The Anthropocene debate: marking humanity’s impact. *Yale Environment 360*,
 May 17.
 Zalasiewicz, J., M. Williams, W. Steffen, and P. Crutzen. 2010. The New World of the
 Anthropocene. *Environmental Science and Technology* 44:2228–2231.

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

Short Introductions: Sustainability, Chapter 4: Planning sustainability transitions, pp. 68–93.
 Hofman, P., B. Elzen, and F. Geels. 2004. Sociotechnical scenarios as a new policy tool to
 explore system innovations: co-evolution of technology and society in The Netherland’s
 electricity domain. *Innovation: Management, Policy and Practice* 6:344–360.
 Raskin, P. 2010. Paul Raskin on making the Great Transition. *Solutions* 1(3):12–13.

Deadline for Notification about Formation of Project Teams

Week 4 (February 9): “Doughnut” Economics

Monbiot, G. 2017. Finally, a breakthrough alternative to growth economics – the doughnut, *The
 Guardian*, 17 April.
 Raworth, K. 2012. *A Safe and Just Space for Humanity: Can We Live Within the Doughnut?*
 Oxford: Oxfam.
 Deaton, A. 2018. The U. S. can no longer hide from its deep poverty problem. *The New York
 Times*, 24 January.
The Future of Consumer Society, Chapter 2: Fathoming consumer society, pp. 15–43.

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.

- Greenhouse, S. 2016. The whatchamacallit economy. *The New York Times*, 16 December.
- Schor, J. 2014. Debating the sharing economy. *Great Transition Initiative*, October (and associated commentary and author's response).
- Kessler, S. 2014. Pixel and dined: on (not) getting by in the gig economy. *Fast Company*, March 18.
- The Future of Consumer Society*, Chapter 3: The (mostly) empty promise of the sharing economy, pp. 44–69.

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

- Fallows, J. 2016. Why the maker movement matters: part 1, the tools revolution. *The Atlantic*, June 5.
- Fallows, J. 2016. Why the maker movement matters: part 2, agility. *The Atlantic*, June 9.
- Morozov, E. 2014. Making it. *The New Yorker*. January 13.
- The Future of Consumer Society*, Chapter 4: The mass-market maker movement, pp. 70–91.

Week 7 (March 2): Economic Relocalization

- Berry, W. 2001. The idea of a local economy. *Orion*, Winter.
- Shuman, M. 2010. Relocalizing business, pp. 110–115 in *State of the World: Transforming Cultures From Consumerism to Sustainability*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Boyer, M. 2012. 100-mile houses expand the locavore movement from food to architecture. *Good Design*, February 24.
- The Future of Consumer Society*, Chapter 5: Localization fallacies, pp. 92–114.

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

March 16: Spring Break—No Class Session!

Week 9 (March 23): Digital Automation and Sustainability

- Chui, M., J. Manyika, and M. Miremadi. 2016. Where machines could replace humans—and where they can't (yet). *McKinsey Quarterly*, July.
- West, D. 2015. What happens if robots take the jobs? The impact of emerging technologies on employment and public policy. *Center for Technology Innovation at Brookings*, October.
- The Future of Consumer Society*, Chapter 6: Consumption in the era of digital automation, pp. 115–132.

Week 10 (March 30): Sustainability When Work Disappears

- Thompson, D. 2015. A world without work. *The Atlantic*, July/August.
- Beckett, A. 2018. Post-work: the radical idea of world without jobs. *The Guardian*, 19 January.
- Strauss, I. 2016. Would a work-free world be so bad? *The Atlantic*, June 28.
- Frayne, D. 2016. Stepping outside the circle: the ecological promise of shorter working hours. *Green Letters* 20(2):197–212.

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

Short Introductions: Sustainability, Afterward: sustainability in the era of COVID-19, pp. 144–149.

Cohen, M. 2020. Does the COVID-19 outbreak mark the onset of a sustainable consumption transition? *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy* 16:1–3.

Naidoo, R. and B. Fisher. 2020. Reset sustainable development goals for a pandemic world. *Nature* 583(7815):198–201.

Florida, R. et al. 2020. How life in our cities will look after the coronavirus pandemic. *Foreign Policy*, May 1.

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

- Berson, Josh. 2019. *The Meat Question: Animals, Humans, and the Deep History of Food*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Foer, Jonathan. 2019. *We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Lappé, Anna. 2010. *Diet for a Hot Planet: The Climate Crisis at the End of Your Fork and What You Can Do About It*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Oppenheimer, Richard. 2013. *Food Choice and Sustainability: Why Buying Local, Eating Less Meat, and Taking Baby Steps Won't Work*. Minneapolis: Langdon Street Press.
- Preece, Rod. 2008. *Sins of the Flesh: A History of Ethical Vegetarian Thought*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Singer, Peter and Jim Mason. 2007. *The Ethics of What We Eat. Why Our Food Choices Matter*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press.

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

- Alvord, Katie. 2000. *Divorce Your Car! Ending the Love Affair with the Automobile*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society.
- Balish, Chris. 2006. *How to Live Well Without Owning a Car: Save Money, Breathe Easier, and Get More Mileage Out of Life*. Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press.
- Hurst, Robert. 2009. *Cyclist's Manifesto: The Case for Riding on Two Wheels Instead of Four*. Guilford, CT: Falcon Guides.
- Mapes, Jeff. 2009. *Pedaling Revolution: How Cyclists are Changing American Cities*. Corvallis: Oregon State University Press.
- Newman, Peter and Jeffrey Kenworthy. 2015. *The End of Automobile Dependence: How Cities are Moving Beyond Car-Based Planning*. Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Schwartz, Samuel. 2015. *Street Smart: The Rise of Cities and the Fall of Cars*. New York: Public Affairs.

3. Shopping Avoidance and the Demise of the Consumer Society

- Dannemiller, Scott. 2015. *The Year Without a Purchase: One Family's Quest to Stop Shopping and Start Connecting*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Flanders, Cait. 2018. *The Year of Less: How I Stopped Shopping, Gave Away My Belongings, and Discovered Life Is Worth More Than Anything You Can Buy in a Store*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.
- Levine, Judith. 2006. *Not Buying It: My Year Without Shopping*. New York: Free Press.
- McGagh, Michelle. 2017. *The No Spend Year: How You Can Spend Less and Live More*. London: Coronet.
- Schor, Juliet. 1999. *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need*. New York: Harper Perennial.

4. Eliminating Waste and Plastic-Free Living

- Abbing, Michael. 2019. *Plastic Soup: An Atlas of Ocean Pollution*. Washington, DC: Island Press.

- Buffington, Jack. 2018. *Peak Plastic: The Rise and Fall of Our Synthetic World*. New York: Praeger.
- Freinkel, Susan. 2011. *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Marine Conservation Society. 2020. *How to Live Plastic Free: A Day in the Life of a Plastic Detox*. London: Headline.
- Rodale Sustainability. 2019. *F**k Plastic: 101 Ways to Free Yourself from Plastic and Save the World*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press.
- Terry, Beth. 2012. *Plastic-Free: How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too*. New York: Skyhorse.

5. Giving Up Toxic Cosmetics and Personal-Care Products

- Epstein, Samuel and Randall Fitzgerald. 2009. *Toxic Beauty: How Cosmetics and Personal-Care Products Endanger Your Health...and What You Can Do About It*. Dallas: BenBella Books.
- Erickson, Kim. 2002. *Drop-Dead Gorgeous: Protecting Yourself from the Hidden Dangers of Cosmetics*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Jones, Geoffrey. 2010. *Beauty Imagined A History of the Global Beauty Industry*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Malkan, Stacy. 2007. *Not Just a Pretty Face: The Ugly Side of the Beauty Industry*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society.
- Preiss, Kathy. 2011. *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

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

- Brooks, Andrew. 2015. *Clothing Poverty: The Hidden World of Fast Fashion and Second-hand Clothes*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books.
- Cline, Elizabeth. 2012. *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. New York: Portfolio.
- Eagan, Greta. 2014. *Wear No Evil: How to Change the World with Your Wardrobe*. New York: Running Press.
- Little, Tyler. 2018. *The Future of Fashion: Understanding Sustainability in the Fashion Industry*. Potomac, MD: New Degree Press.
- Press, Clare. 2018. *Wardrobe Crisis: How We Went from Sunday Best to Fast Fashion*. New York: Skyhorse.
- Thomas, Dana. 2019. *Fashionopolis: The Price of Fast Fashion and the Future of Clothes*. New York: Penguin.

7. Worktime Reduction and the Future of Work

- De Graaf, John, Ed. 2003. *Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Fayne, David. 2015. *The Refusal of Work: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Work*. London: Zed.
- Ferris, Timothy. 2009. *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9–5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich*. New York: Harmony.
- Rifkin, Jeremy. 1995. *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*. New York: Tarcher/Putnam.

Srnicek, Nick and Alex Williams. 2015. *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. New York: Verso.

Weeks, Kathi. 2011. *The Problem with Work: Freedom, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

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

Becker, Joshua. 2016. *The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own*. New York: WaterBrook.

Chayka, Kyle. 2020. *The Longing for Less: Living with Minimalism*. New York: Bloomsbury.

Coyne, Kelly and Erik Knutzen. 2011. *Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post-Consumer World*. Emmaus, PA: Rodale Books.

Harris, Tracey. 2020. *The Tiny House Movement: Challenging Our Consumer Culture*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Nelson, Anitra. 2018. *Small is Necessary: Shared Living on a Shared Planet*. London: Pluto Press.