

## *Course Syllabus*

# **Controversies in Sustainability**

*Course numbers: 11:216:320 (undergraduate) and 16:215:582 (graduate) 3 credits*

Online

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## **Description**

Sustainability is one of the dominant economic, environmental and social issues of the 21st century. This course will delve into a number of controversies in the field of sustainability while integrating ideas from the biological sciences, social sciences, economics, transportation, planning, and engineering. Online materials (articles, papers, podcasts, videos, etc) will provide the background to examine controversial topics like climate change, environmental justice, renewable energy, waste management, GMOs and others. Discussions will provide a forum for debate and further examination of the issues.

I tried to create this course along three topic lines:

1. Local issues (NJ) to global issues (worldwide)
2. Short term issues (in the news now) to long term issues (in the news for decades)
3. Small issues to big issues

And, I tried to include as many of the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs) as possible:

# UN Sustainable Development Goals



I hope the variety gives you some spatial and temporal perspective on the importance of various issues in sustainability.

## Learning goals

To undertake critical thinking on a variety of local/global, short/long term, and small/large issues, all of which have sustainability topics at their core

To practice and increase personal sustainability initiatives during the course

To develop a “sustainability mindset”

## Academic Integrity Policy

Academic Integrity. You are responsible for understanding the RU Academic Integrity Policy. I will strongly enforce this Policy and pursue all violations. For all assignments, you will be required to uphold the RU Honor Pledge, which states, “On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination or assignment.” For all written assignments, we will screen your work through an automated plagiarism detection service that compares your work against a large database of past work.

## AI Statement

The use of generative AI tools or apps for assignments, discussion posts, projects or any class activity in this course, including tools like ChatGPT and other AI writing assistants, is prohibited. We take AI use very seriously in this course. Do your own work.

## Course Format

This course will utilize readings, podcasts, videos, on-line discussions, topical activities, and a final project.

You will begin each topic area by viewing an intro document which will provide an overview to the content and will contain links to required readings, videos or audio clips. The intro document will have references to other optional readings. You may use these sources to learn more about the topic and as references for your answers in the discussion forums.

Discussion forums provide you with an opportunity to explore your ideas on each topic with the instructor(s) and the other students. You will be expected to go deeper into the topic than the material covered in the intro document using resources you find in the suggested readings and through your own research. You will also be expected to post your response to the forum and review and comment on the postings of other students. Thus, there will be lots of communication between you and your classmates and the instructor(s) throughout the course.

## Grading System

This course utilizes *student-directed* learning as the primary means of instruction and evaluation. Consequently, grading is based largely on your participation and performance in the online discussions. Graduate students will have additional weekly sustainability challenges related to the topic of the week; their discussion grade reflects their posts about these weekly additional challenges.

Participation in online discussions (graded weekly)	65%
Activities: palm oil crisis, earth hour challenge, letter to elected officials	15%
Final project	20%

- Online discussion – New topics are introduced on Mondays and are open for discussion throughout the week. You are expected to review the required readings/videos/podcasts and make your initial post to the weekly discussion question plus at least one response to a classmate's top post ***within the first 2 days*** (which means by midnight Tues) of the time the discussion opens and interact with other students throughout the week.

Grading will follow this formula:

Quality + timeliness+frequency+consistency+interaction

See section called “how to do well in this course” for more detail on grading scheme

The discussion with the lowest score will be dropped.

- Activities – These are extra activities on selected weeks. These will be graded based on the quality and thoughtfulness of your essays and demonstrated completion of the activity.

- Final project – You will post in the discussions (with pictures) your attempts to incorporate sustainability concepts into your life, the impact on you, and the responses of others. See Final Project link on the course website for more detail.

Late submission policy for all activities and final project essay: 10% deduction per day; down to 50% (so it is still worthwhile submitting very late assignments).

## Graduate students

Graduate students will be expected to work at a higher level than undergraduates. As such, graduate students will have the unique responsibility to complete an additional sustainability challenge and report on it in the discussion each week. Information on the weekly sustainability challenge will be provided to graduate students via announcements and will start in week 2 of the course.

## Readings, videos, and podcasts

Information is provided in the online intro documents on readings, videos and podcasts. References are provided at the end of each intro document for optional additional material on each subject. These references may be helpful in researching your responses to the Discussion questions. In addition, we will have readings from the book *No Impact Man* by Colin Beavan. This book is on reserve at Chang Library and the first two chapters are available electronically on Canvas. If you don't plan to use the book on reserve, please purchase the book (you can find it inexpensively online). Keep a list of ideas from *No Impact Man* that you can use for your final project as you are reading and note the appendix at the back of the book for helpful ideas.

## How to do well in this course

Each week a new topic (unit) will be introduced. You will be expected to review the readings, videos and/or podcasts and respond to the discussion question for each unit and to your classmates' postings throughout the week. This format is designed so that you have time to post on a reasonable timeline (given other things going on in your life).

In a traditional course you would normally spend 3 hours/week in the classroom plus additional time outside class for assignments. Since each unit here is the equivalent of a single week of traditional class, be prepared to spend several hours researching and writing about each unit's topic and responding to classmates' posts.

To get full credit on your discussions in this course you should:

- Review all required readings, videos, podcasts once the discussion opens
- Research the discussion topic using additional resources given in this course or beyond the course; reference things that are relevant from the assigned book; cite your sources
- Post a thoughtful response to the discussion question and at least one response to a classmate's top post (within 2 days of opening)

- Post on at least two additional days of the week (but not just the last two days of the week)
- Have back and forth interactions throughout the week with at least 6 students with thoughtful responses and questions that move the discussion forward
- Use your own words. Remember anything copied verbatim needs to be in quotes and cited appropriately

Bottom line: the people who do well in this course make their initial post before the deadline, have quality well-researched postings based on required readings/videos/podcasts and other sources (with citations), and post frequently and consistently throughout the week to other classmate's postings.

### *Setting up notifications*

Please make sure your Notification Settings for announcements in Canvas are set to “notify immediately” (you can check this by going to Account, then Notifications; make sure the “Announcement” item and all items under “Conversations” are set to “notify immediately”). I’ll be using announcements throughout the course to make sure you are aware of deadlines, etc.

You may also want to switch your settings to “notify immediately” for the items under the Discussions subheading in the same Notification Settings area on Canvas so you know when someone has responded to a posting of yours. We’ll be using discussions heavily in this course.

## Class schedule

*Note: all due dates are midnight unless otherwise noted*

*Stars(\*) indicate discussions with more involved research. Given the research involved, we do not expect you to post your entire analysis within the first two days these weeks. However, for these weeks, we generally have intermediary information due by the midnight Tuesday deadline.*

Unit	Topic
1	<b><i>Sustainable Cities &amp; Communities (SDG 11)</i></b> Required reading online + chapter 1 of No Impact Man Discussion Respond to icebreaker & include sustainability definition
2	<b><i>Biodiversity and GMOs (SDG 2 and 15)</i></b> Required reading online + chapter 2 of No Impact Man Discussion Palm oil crisis activity
3	<b><i>Landfills and waste (SDG 6 and 12)</i></b> Required reading online + chapter 3 of No Impact Man *Discussion
4	<b><i>Environmentalists Paradox (human wellbeing) (SDG 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, and 16)</i></b> Required reading online + Chapter 4 of No Impact Man Discussion
5	<b><i>Climate Change (SDG 13)</i></b> Required reading online + Chapter 5 of No Impact Man *Discussion
6	<b><i>Diet: Meat or No Meat (SDG 2, 12 and 15)</i></b> Required reading online + Chapter 6 of No Impact Man Discussion
7	<b><i>Ocean Sustainability (SDG 14)</i></b> Required reading online + Chapter 7 of No Impact Man Discussion

- 8            **Renewable Energy in NJ (SDG 7 and 9)**  
Required reading online + Chapter 8 of No Impact Man  
Discussion
- 9            **Spring break**
- 10          **Environmental Justice (SDG 8)**  
Required reading online + Chapters 9 & Epilogue of No Impact Man  
Discussion  
Earth Hour Challenge activity
- 11          **Sustainable Living (SDG 12)**  
Required reading online  
Discussion  
List of concepts for final project (upload to canvas)  
Final project begins
- 12          **Project week 1**  
Sustainability project discussion 1  
Making good climate choices quiz (incl results in prj disc)
- 13          **Project week 2**  
Sustainability project discussion 2
- 14          **Project week 3**  
Sustainability project discussion 3  
FINAL PROJECT DUE (upload essays on course website)  
Letter to elected officials activity
- 15          **Sustainability and You (SDG 4 and 17)**  
Required reading online  
Discussion  
Extra credit (if >90% of students fill out course survey)