

Course Syllabus

Controversies in Sustainability

Course number: 11:216:320

Online

Professor: Dr. Marci Meixler (meixler@sebs.rutgers.edu)

Description

Sustainable environmental management is one of the dominant economic, environmental and social issues of the 21st century. This course will develop the concepts of sustainable environmental management on the basis that it is an evolutionary process, not easily captured by a simple definition. Sustainable environmental management integrates ideas from the biological sciences, social sciences and engineering. Online readings will provide the background and material (articles, papers, podcasts, video, etc) to examine controversial topics like climate change, natural gas drilling, renewable energy, and others. Discussions will provide a forum for debate and further examination of the issues.

I tried to create this class 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

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

Learning goals

- To gain an understanding of the various definitions of sustainability
- To practice personal sustainability for the duration of the course
- To undertake critical thinking on a variety of local/global, short/long term, and small/large case studies, all of which have sustainability issues at their core

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 examinations and 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.

Course Format

This course will use web-based education consisting of readings, critical scientific papers, on-line threaded discussions, and a final project.

You will begin each topic area by reading an overview which will provide an introduction to the content and will contain links to required readings, video or audio clips. The overviews have references to other optional readings. You may use these 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 and the other students. You will be expected to go deeper into the topic than the material covered in the overview using resources you find yourself. You will also be expected to post your answer to the forum and review and comment on the postings of other students. Thus, there will be lots of communication between students throughout the class.

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 online discussions. The class grading scheme is outlined and described in detail below.

Participation in online discussions (graded weekly—25% per week; week 4–5%)	80%
Final project	20%

1. Online discussion - You will have until midnight EST the Sunday after the discussion topic opens to post to a discussion forum. You will be expected to post your initial response to the weekly discussion question and to respond to the posts of other students. Grading will follow this formula:

Time+frequency+quality

#minutes spent researching & writing (0-3 pts) + # responses (0-3 pts) + quality (0-4 pts)

2. Final project – You will create a journal on your attempts to incorporate sustainability concepts into your life, the impact on you, and the responses of others. See Final Project link on course website for more detail. Final project will be turned in on the last day of class. Late projects will be docked 10 pts per day. See Project Rubric in the doc sharing section for details on grading of final projects.

Readings

There is no required textbook for this class. All information is provided in the online readings. References are provided at the end of each reading for optional additional material on each subject. These references may be helpful in researching your responses to the threaded discussion questions.

Policy for excuses

To qualify for special consideration, all excuses must be submitted by email with supporting documentation (i.e. medical note, army drill notice, etc). Excuses submitted 'before' the event are given more weight. Whether or not special consideration is given is entirely at the discretion

of the instructor. *Excuses without supporting documentation will not be granted. Do not email asking for special consideration without including supporting documentation.*

Things that do not qualify: vacation, work travel, long hours at work, etc.

How to do well in this class

Each weekday over the next three and a half weeks a new topic (unit) will be introduced. You will be expected to review the reading (and any associated papers) and respond to the discussion question for each unit.

The due date for responding to the discussion question is midnight EST on the Sunday following the week in which the discussion was opened (see due dates in Class Schedule below). At midnight on Sunday the discussions for that week will be closed and no further postings will be allowed (no exceptions). The next week a new set of discussions will open, one each day. This format is designed so that you have time to post on a reasonable timeline (given other things going on in your life) but that there is not too much of a backlog of open discussions that still need your attention. This also means that some discussion topics will be open longer than others. Thus, I expect that these topics will be explored in more depth.

One note: this is a 16 week class shrunk down into just three and a half weeks. It will be intense. In a traditional class you would normally spend 3 hours/week in class 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.

To do well in this class you should:

- Review all readings on the day they are assigned
- Post a thoughtful response to the discussion question (within 48 hours of opening)
- Post throughout the week asking questions, moving the discussion along, and remembering to go back to earlier discussions to see if you can add any additional insight as the discussion morphs and to see if anyone has responded to your postings
- Respond to other student's postings with thoughtful responses and questions that move the discussion forward
- Research your discussion topic using additional resources beyond those provided in the class; cite your sources using MLA (or other) format
- Use your own words. Remember anything copied verbatim needs to be in quotes and cited appropriately
- Meet all deadlines (post to the discussion forums within 48 hours of opening and respond continually before the discussions end at midnight EST on Sunday)
- Get started on the final project Day 1 of class! And, make sure you turn your final project in on time.

Class schedule

Unit	Topic
1	<i>Sustainability</i> Required reading Threaded discussion Respond to icebreaker
2	<i>Landfills</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
3	<i>Environmental Justice</i> Required reading Threaded discussion List of sustainability concepts for final project
4	<i>Natural Gas Drilling (hydrofracking)</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
5	<i>Diet: Meat or No Meat</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
6	<i>Climate Change</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
7	<i>Plastics</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
8	<i>Renewable Energy in NJ</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
9	<i>Sustainable Oceans</i> Required reading Threaded discussion
10	<i>Economics and the Environment</i>

Required reading
Threaded discussion

11 ***Sustainable Communities***

Required reading
Threaded discussion

12 ***Sustainable Cities***

Required reading
Threaded discussion

13 ***Sustainable living***

Required reading
Threaded discussion

14 ***Biodiversity and GMOs***

Required reading
Threaded discussion

15 ***Environmental Paradox***

Required reading
Threaded discussion

16 ***Sustainability and You***

Required reading
Threaded discussion

17 ***Earth Hour Challenge***

Required reading

18 **FINAL PROJECT DUE**