Sustainability in the US
Northeastern University
Course Design

1. General Information
2. Learning Goals
3. Course Description
4. Assessment
5. Course Schedule
6. References
General Information

This is an optional Web-based course designed for general education, open to freshmen and sophomores of both English major and non-major students.

Credits: 2hs*16ws=32hs
General Information

Instructors:
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Learning Goals

Students will
• learn to synthesize interdisciplinary sources and methods of analysis in order to acquire comprehensive understanding of sustainability in America;
• be able to think, speak and write both critically and creatively on the topic of sustainability;
• develop interdisciplinary sustainable awareness and competence.
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Course Description

This course aims to help develop the awareness of ecological balance among students through an extensive exploration of sustainable development in the United States. Academically and intellectually, the course will provide them with key concepts, analytical tools and interdisciplinary perspectives that can be used in more advanced courses. Moreover, students will be able to sharpen their analytical skills, interdisciplinary scholarship and their capability of critical thinking.
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Grading and Integrity Policy

Exams – 50% (Exam 1, 15%; Exam 2, 15%; Final, 20%)
Weekly blog with peer review – 25%
Participation + Presentation – 25%

Students are expected to complete all academic work assigned in the course. Violations include: cheating, plagiarism, submitting previously submitted work, falsification of academic materials, misrepresentation of documents, misusing confidential academic materials, selling or purchasing academic assignments.
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Detailed Schedule

Week One

View video clip Under the Dome, introduce the course, and the key concepts of the field: environment, development, ecosystems, biosphere and human evolution.
Detailed Schedule

Week One
Readings
Assignment
Read the introductory part of listed material, view the video and write 100 words summary of the video in your weekly blog.
Detailed Schedule

Week Two

Limits of present development mode and the importance and challenges of sustainability
Detailed Schedule

Week Two
Readings
Walden (Thoreau)
Walden (E.B. White)

Assignment
Read the related parts of the above material and write your own interpretation of the material.
Detailed Schedule

Week Three

Project development & planning
Project 1: experience-based learning: theory and practice. Students are required to apply concepts learnt in previous sessions to analyze events they experienced concerning sustainability. The analysis should include the issue and solutions, incorporating at least 2 of the concepts covered in class.
Detailed Schedule

Week Three
Readings
Sand County Almanac (Aldo Leopold) (10-15 pages)

Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Four
Project 1 Presentations
Detailed Schedule

Week Four
Readings
The Limits to Growth & Road to Survival (The Future of Nature: Documents of Global change (Libby Robin, Sverker Sorlin, Paul Warde)) (1-2 articles)

Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Five
An overview of sustainability in the United States.
Detailed Schedule

Week Five
Readings
The Economics of Climate Change, The Anthropocene & A Safe Operating Space for humanity (The Future of Nature: Documents of Global change (Libby Robin, Sverker Sorlin, Paul Warde)) (3 articles)
Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Six

EXAM ONE: IN-CLASS
Detailed Schedule

Week Six
Readings
Radical American Environmentalism and Wildness Preservation, Nature’s Services (The Future of Nature: Documents of Global change (Libby Robin, Sverker Sorlin, Paul Warde)) (2 articles)
Detailed Schedule

Week Seven
Projects 2: case study (1-1): an overview of American mining industry
Detailed Schedule

Week Seven
Reading
Film
*Harlan County, USA (1976)*
Assignment
Read, discuss, weekly blog entry;
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Eight
Project 2 evaluation lecture: case study (1-2): American mining industry
Detailed Schedule

Week Eight
Readings
4-5 readings for a group, with options for students to choose from; Mining America: The Industry and the Environment, 1800-1980
Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations (6-8 minutes); weekly blog entry.
Detailed Schedule

Week Nine
Project 2 presentations
Detailed Schedule

Week Nine
Reading:
Assignment
Work together as a group to do the presentations with peer review; weekly blog entry.
Detailed Schedule

Week Ten
Project 3: Case study (2-1): An overview of sustainability in American energy industry
Detailed Schedule

Week Ten
Readings
Routes of Power, Harvard University Press. Christopher Jones. (2-3 chapters)
A landscape of energy abundance: ANTHRACITE. Christopher Jones (2-3 chapters)

Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Eleven
Project 3 evaluation lecture: case study (2-2) American energy industry
Detailed Schedule

Week Eleven

Readings
Routes of Power, Harvard University Press. Christopher Jones. (2-3 chapters)
A landscape of energy abundance: ANTHRACITE. Christopher Jones (2-3 chapters)
The nature of California by Sarah D. Wald

Films
Broken Rainbow
Black Diamonds (by Bullfrogfilms)

Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations, with each group focusing on a kind of renewable energy;
Identify the weakness and strength of each type of energy systems. Examples:
Rooftop solar, utility solar, wind, biofuels, geothermal, etc.;
And its applicability to the Chinese context.
Detailed Schedule

Week Twelve

Project 3 presentations
Detailed Schedule

Week Twelve

Readings
Routes of Power, Harvard University Press. Jones Cristopher. (2-3 chapters)
The Wired northwest: The history of electric power, 1870s-1970s
Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest.

Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Thirteen

*EXAM TWO: IN-CLASS*
Detailed Schedule

Week Fourteen
Project 4: case study (3-1) sustainability on the campus of NEU
The students need to choose one case for their own group and use what they have learnt to illustrate how sustainability is realized and can be improved.
Detailed Schedule

Week Fourteen
Readings
Energy and Modern America
Coal: A Human History (Barbara Freese)
Children of the Sun

Assignment
Work together as a group to prepare for the presentations.
Detailed Schedule

Week Fifteen
Project 4 case study (3-2) presentations
Detailed Schedule

**Week Fifteen**

Readings
The organic machine: The remaking of the Columbia River, Hill and Wang, Richard White, 1995
Something New Under the Sun (John McNeill)

Assignment
Get over what has been covered in the course and get ready for the exam.
Detailed Schedule

Week Sixteen

FINAL EXAM
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References
Silent Spring (Raqueal Carson)
Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wildness (Edward Abbey, 1968, leave the nature alone)
Almanac of the Dead (Lesslie Marmon Silko) American Indian woman writer
Sand County Almanac (Aldo Leopold, land ethics, live in harmony with nature)
A Great Aridness: Climate Change and the Future of the American Southwest (William deBuys)
Vision of Technology: An Anthology (Richard Rhodes)
References
Films (on demand)

*Mining: From Exploration to Rehabilitation*
*The Road*
*Children of Men* (Book & films) (P. D. James)
*Sleep Dealer*
*Safe* (1995, Todd Haynes)
*An Inconvenient Truth*
*King Corn*
*Food, Inc.* (2008)
*No Impact Man* (2008)
*The Future of Food* (2005)
*The Garden* (2008)
*The Wall E* (2008)
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