Organizational Details
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Course Delivered Online: http://njit2.mrooms.net

Overview
Earth systems scientists advise that we now live in a newly designated era referred to as the “anthropocene.” This term has been coined in recent years to distinguish the last 250 years of human activity on the planet from other periods of earth history. It has also become evident that efforts to date to modify human practices to conform to biospheric limits on the basis of 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.

We are moreover coming to realize that a sustainable future depends on addressing more than just the environmental impacts of human activity. Also necessary is a more systemic understanding of the numerous interlinked challenges that we face including climate change, freshwater scarcity, population growth, biodiversity loss, food availability, energy security, income inequality, and financial instability.

This course critiques several popular conceptual strategies for reversing contemporary patterns of unsustainability and develops a systems perspective for exploring the drivers of our current condition from the standpoint of the “new economics.” We assess four prominent meta-level strategies for steering toward a more sustainable future: efficiency improvements, relocalization, green consumerism, and efforts to build a “green economy.” The course also considers several other approaches at the frontiers of new economics thinking that entail more transformational changes.

Required Readings

Other readings will be available via the course website (http://njit2.mrooms.net). Items are organized into weekly folders and can be viewed online or saved. A valid UCID is required to access the website.
Evaluation

1. **Weekly Writing Assignments (40%):** This is an upper-level course and you are expected to make timely and consistent progress throughout the semester. I will post a question to the website on Thursday of each week and your completed response (limited to 750 words) should be uploaded via the relevant link by 11:59pm on the following Monday (see detailed schedule below). Essays will be graded on a five-point scale (5 = excellent; 4 = good; 3 = needs improvement; 2 = poor; 1 = unsatisfactory). I will also electronically insert comments into the text that you will be able to view on the website. No late submissions will be accepted and failure to complete an assignment will result in a zero. Note that there are twelve writing assignments for the semester and each student is—with prior notification—excused from submitting two essays of his/her choice. In cases where more than ten assignments have been submitted, the lowest two scores will be excluded.

2. **Research Project (40%):** The course requires completion of a substantial research project on a topic related to the general subject matter that we will cover. The project can be completed either individually or in a two-student team. All students (and teams) should plan to submit a one-page (double-spaced) proposal on February 17. The proposal should also include a one-page working bibliography identifying approximately 10–12 sources deemed to be useful. This proposal will then serve as the basis for a meeting (either face-to-face or by telephone) to identify points for clarification and refinement. (Feel free to schedule a prior appointment to discuss prospective project ideas before you submit your proposal.) The research project will culminate with a 15-page (double-spaced) report due on May 12.

3. **Online Discussion (20%):** There is an expectation that all students will consistently participate in the online dialogues that will be a feature of this course. Active engagement requires substantively and thoughtfully responding to the questions and comments raised by others in the course as well as initiating discussion on your own. For further details, consult the rubric for grading online participation posted to the course website.

**Grading Scale for Weekly Writing Assignments (maximum score for ten required essays is 50 points)**

- A = 45–50
- B = 40–45
- C = 35–40
- D = 30–35
- F = < 30

**Module Schedule**

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Final Project Due (May 12)

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 Code on Academic Integrity. If you are unfamiliar with this Code, you should consult [http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php](http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php).

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

Module 1 (January 27–February 2): Introduction/What is the Anthropocene?


Module 2 (February 4–10): What is System Change and How Do We Achieve It?


Module 3 (February 11–17): Is the United States in Need of System Change?


Module 4 (February 18–24): Why is the Pursuit of Energy and Materials Efficiency a Problematic Idea?


Research Proposal Due (February 17)
Module 5 (February 25–March 3): Does Relocalization Offer an Effective Answer to Our Sustainability Challenges?

Cox, S. 2010. Does it really matter whether your food was produced locally? *Alternet*. 19 February.

Module 6 (March 4–10): What is the Point of Encouraging People to Buy “Green” Products?


Module 7 (March 11–17): What is the Potential of a “Green” Economy?


March 18–24: Spring Break

Module 8 (March 25–31): Do We Need To Reduce Working Hours to Get on a More Sustainable Path?


Module 9 (April 1–7): Should We Redefine Our Understanding of Prosperity?

Module 10 (April 8–14): Is the Core Problem About Facilitating the Emergence of New Social Values and How Might We Do So?


Module 11 (April 15–21): What is Meant By “True Wealth”?


Note: The last two modules of the course will entail individual assessment and interpretation of dissenting accounts of contemporary sustainability policy with a particular focus on the role of social mobilization. The items highlighted below have attracted a high level of attention over the last few months in professional circles.

Module 12 (April 22–28): Advanced Analytic Study 1


Module 13 (April 29–May 5): Advanced Analytic Study 2


May 12: Project Due