SO CY 305: SCARCITY AND MODERN SO CIETY

Course Description

This course assesses the ecological state of the world, predicts the economic, political, social, and life style consequences of environmental constraints and then explores various proposals for dealing with the situation and attaining sustainability. It begins with a discussion of the optimistic and pessimistic views of environmental problems both in the United States and worldwide. Environmental problems in the U.S. are largely the result of current levels and patterns of production and consumption. Thus the U.S. production and consumption systems are analyzed and the attitudes, values and choices responsible for consumption patterns are examined.

To this point the course focuses on environmental degradation and limits and their causes. The remainder of the course works with theories of social change, current trends and past cases of scarcity to estimate future likely changes in our society in your lifetimes. Finally we will identify the characteristics of a sustainable society and proposals for attaining it. Students are encouraged to develop their own theory about what impacts environmental limits will have on America in their lifetimes and how America could manage to transform itself into a sustainable society. FOCUS: Where are we headed?

REQUIRED READINGS will be on Canvas and early ones also will be emailed

FIRST HALF OF THE COURSE

I STATE OF THE PLANET (You should get from your readings knowledge about all the major environmental problems including food and agriculture, cropland and grassland deterioration, global warming, forests, oceans, water issues, ozone depletion, pollution, resource issues, and species extinction. Also obtain some limited knowledge about lesser environmental problems.)

1. Frederick Buell, Ch 3 "Natures in Crisis, Apocalypse to Way of Life email
1. Fred Pearce, Earth’s Nine Lives email
1. Lester Brown “Geopolitics of Food” email
1. GEO5 - global press release summary (UNEP)
1. Jonathan Foley, “Can We Feed the World and Sustain the Planet?” Scientific American email
1. Ramaz Naam, “State of the Planet” Part I Scientific American
1. Paul and Anne Ehrlich “Can a Collapse of Global Civilization Be Avoided?”
1. John Robbins, Fact Sheet from Diet for a New America

II REVERSAL OF STATE OF THE PLANET PROBLEMS

2. Ronald Bailey, “Postenvironmentalism and Technological Abundance,”
2. Ronald Bailey “How Free Markets and Human Ingenuity Can Save the Planet”
2. Ramez Naam, “How Innovation Could Save the Planet

III ANTHROPOMORPHIC GLOBAL WARMING (often referred to as climate change)

3. Pew Center on Global Climate Change, “Climate Change 101: Science and Impacts"
3. Craig Loehle, “CC Impacts Not Happening”

IV ENERGY AND RESOURCES (Key issues: future of fossil fuels, potential of renewables, prices)

4. Energy and Capital, “3 Trillion bbl of Oil”
4. BBCNews, “Resource Depletion”
4. Fred Magdoff, “Global resource Depletion”
4. Philip W. Porter, A World of Difference, Tables and Graph

V PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION (Can the production and consumption patterns be changed? If so, how? To what?)
SECOND HALF OF COURSE: [new material is being examined and will replace some of these readings]

VI IMPACTS OF SCARCITY ON SOCIETY (Key part of course and paper. Know cold)
5 John Fullerton, Limits to Investment: Finance in the Anthropocene
5 Martin Gilens, Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens
5 C. J. Polychroniou, Political Economy of Predatory Capitalism
5 Juan Cole, Top 10 Ways the US Is the Most Corrupt Country in the World
5 Doug Brown, “The Culture of Insatiable Freedom,” Insatiable Is Not Sustainable
5 Bill McKibben, “Reversal of Fortune,” Mother Jones [may be replaced]
5 James Gustave Speth, “Ten Drivers of Environmental Deterioration,” Red Sky at Morning

6 SECOND HALF OF COURSE: [new material is being examined and will replace some of these readings]

VI IMPACTS OF SCARCITY ON SOCIETY (Key part of course and paper. Know cold)
6 William Ophuls, Selections from Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited

VII SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY: TRANSITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS [new material is being examined]
7 Lester Milbrath, Selections from Envisioning a Sustainable Society: Learning Our Way Out
7 Ted Trainer, Ch 12 “Market Forces, Free Enterprise, and the Profit Motive” Towards a Sustainable Economy
7 CASSE “Top 15 Policies for Achieving a Steady State Economy”
7 James Speth, Red Sky at Morning, 3 chapters 1)“Attacking Root Causes;” 2)“Good Governance,” 3)“Transition”
7 Ross Gelspan, “Two Paths for the Planet”
7 Richard Pearlstein, Ch 6 “Superterrorism: What’s in It for You?” Fatal Future?
7 Bruce Goldman, “Nightmare in Manhattan” NewScientist
7 Donald Wells, “Environmental Policy” The Policy Puzzle
7 “The Earth Charter”

GRADE COMPONENTS: 1) mid term or paper, 2) final exam, 3) paper. All three are equally weighted in the final grade. Minus a point for each card less than 20. OPTIONAL PAPER SUBBING FOR THE MID-TERM. Your reasoned opinion of the state of the planet using course and other materials.

REQUIRED PAPER: In the required paper for the second half you are to present your theory of the impacts of scarcity on modern societies. Using the course materials and your own reading, present your predictions of the impacts of scarcity on the stratification system, level of social integration and system legitimacy, political system, and culture and explain why these changes will take place. Explain in particular and thoroughly, how a long period of scarcity will impact on the degree or level of equality; conflict, integration, and legitimacy; democracy; and lifestyles and values. You must use the Gurr and Finsterbusch articles in your discussion because they are the most relevant to your essay. Then describe the social, political, and cultural changes that are needed to convert to a sustainable society and discuss the obstacles to these changes [about 10 or more pages double spaced (but there is no page limit) & due the last day of class (12/11). No references are needed for course materials. Names are sufficient to identify where ideas or quotes are from.

QUESTIONS AND CARDS: You are also expected to answer 20 of 26 questions from the question sheet briefly on 3x5 cards (no alternatives to 3x5 accepted) and turn them in the day that the assignment is listed or later with an excuse (in class or mailbox). Only one question per card. One point will be deducted from your final course points for each assignment missed below 20. Cards will be returned before the exam so you can use them in your preparation. You should understand the author’s thesis and main points and remember a few details that support your interpretation.
305 SCARCITY AND MODERN SOCIETY: COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS

I Need for Social Change: The Strained Ecosystem or the Problem of Scarcity and the Unsustainable Aspects of American Society

9/2 Course Description, The Limits to Growth thesis: Meadows vs Kahn
9/4 State of the World and Environmental Overview: Buell, Pearse, email
9/9 Food, and the Environment: Brown, GEO5, Foley,
9/11 Video: Save the Earth, Feed the World: Race to Save The Planet (TD174.R33; 1990 part 7)
9/16 Population, food, and the Environment: Naam, Ehrlichs, Heinberg, Robbins
9/18 The Optimists’ View: Bailey, Kelly, Naam
9/23 Climate Change: da Costa/Bunyard, Pew, RCSRT, Loche

II Social Changes from Ecosystem Strains

10/2 Methods for Predicting the Future - Lecture (L)
10/28 Finsterbusch’s Theory of the Impacts of Economic Growth and Scarcity (continued):

10/30 Gurr's Political Consequences of Scarcity:

11/4 Market Failure: Ophuls: Ch 5,
11/6 Government failure: Ophuls' Ch 6
11/11 Finsterbusch, Gurr, Kaplan, Heilbroner, Ophuls, Dahrendorf, Shrifin and Pirages Consider the Viability of Democracy: Kaplan
11/13 Milbrath's Sustainable Society
11/18 Trainer's Sustainable Economy and Society: Trainer Ch 12; CASSE’s Policies for SSE
11/25 Finsterbusch, Milbrath, Packard, and Jones Predict and Propose New Values and Gardner and Speth analyze the transition to sustainability: Gardner; Speth

12/2 Lifestyle Changes: Gelspan
12/4 Terrorism: Pearlstein; Goldman
12/9 U.S. Environmental Policy: Wells
12/11 Program to Correct the Faults of Economic Growth: The Earth Charter

The Optimistic Predictions of Kahn and Bell; SUMMARY and CONCLUSION

Final Exam: December 16, 8:30-10:00
QUESTIONS ON READINGS FOR 305 CLASS

INSTRUCTIONS: As preparation for class and the exams please think through your answers to the following questions. The dates indicate the day these will be discussed in class and the card is due.

January

September
4  1 Present your summary judgment of the state of the world and how your judgment compares with that of Meadows from lecture and Buell and Pearse from readings
9  2 Brown, GEO5, Foley, Buell discuss many environmental problems. Select 4 and write down a few key facts on each
16  3 Why do Brown, Foley, Heinberg, and Ehrlichs believe that expanding food production for a world population of over 9 billion in the next half century will be very difficult and costly to the environment?
18  4 Summarize Bailey’s, Naam’s, and Kelly’s arguments against the Ehrlichs and the pessimists and critique them
23  5 What are some of the gravest potential problems that might result from global warming?
25  6 Is there an energy crisis? How long will there be an abundance of fossil fuels? How serious a problem is resource depletion? Explain.
25  7 Evaluate the potential for technology to solve environmental problems
30  8 What forces make American production unstoppable?

October
2  9 Try to identify the aspects of U.S. production and consumption that make it so damaging to the environment.

7  10 What are the major failings of the U.S. consumerist society?
9  11 What are the principal causes (drivers) of environmental deterioration?

Second Half

23  12 According to Finsterbusch scarcity increases inequality, conflict, and authoritarianism. Explain how it causes one of these changes.
28  13 How will America respond to serious scarcity according to Finsterbusch?
30  14 How does Gurr's theory differ from Finsterbusch's theory of the consequences of scarcity?

November
4  15 According to Ophuls why does the market and the politically reformed market fail to deal adequately with scarcity? (Chapter 5)
6  16 What are the 3 key characteristics of the U.S. polity that make it unsuited for dealing with scarcity (Chapter 6)?
11  17 Briefly summarize Kaplan's prediction of the future for developing nations.
13  18 What roles does Milbrath give to values and politics in transforming society to sustainability?
18  19 What are the key characteristics of a sustainable economy according to Trainer or CASSE?
20  20 What needs to be done to green the economy?
25  21 What processes does Gardner think are crucial to the transformation to sustainability?
22  22 What processes does Speth think are crucial to the transformation to sustainability?

December
2  23 Briefly describe Gelspan’s two paths for the planet.
4  24 What are the key characteristics of the terrorist threat to America?
9  25 Identify four major accomplishments of U.S. environmental policies.
11  26 Very briefly critique “The Earth Charter.”