

# **SAMPLE SYLLABUS, SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

Northern Arizona University  
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Master of Arts in Sustainable Communities  
SUS 601

## **Visions of Good and Sustainable Communities**

**Course Prerequisites:** Must be admitted into the M.A. Sustainable Communities degree program or receive permission of the director.

**Course Description:** SUS 601 is the first core course required of graduate students in the SUS program, designed to engage students in a dialogue about good and sustainable communities. This course critically examines dominant articulations of self, other, and community, as well as alternative paradigms for sustainable and flourishing human communities and ecosystems. The questions we pursue are basic though not simple. They are: what is sustainability? In what does community consist? What are sustainable communities? What are their preconditions? What are competing conceptions of sustainable communities? And how does power function in ways that prohibit or, alternatively, enable the kinds of relationships between humans and to the more than human world crucial to flourishing communities of care?

We ask these questions at a particular historical moment of course, and not at all in the abstract. Hence the first part of the course, “Opening Provocations” is designed to engage us in framing our historical moment: what are the most fundamental challenges we face, who are *we*, and what key capacities must we develop to respond with vigor and skill to the grave social, ethical, economic, and planetary crises of our times so that we might, through our concerted work together, give birth to the world anew?

Fundamental social change in the face of crisis calls out for critical thinking, thinking that challenges and upends dominant paradigms and worldviews and the destructive forms of power, institutions, relationships and the practices they support. In the second part of the course, “Philosophical and Theoretical Matters” we deepen our inquiry, exploring various alternative frameworks, paradigms, habits of mind and sensibilities that might better support our capacity to live sustainably on the planet. We will move across a diverse terrain: from integrated systems thinking, to resilience thinking, to democratic economics, philosophies of reenchantment, subsistence thinking and forms of spiritual practice. In each case we will also explore and examine the shape and nature of the practical world these frameworks and paradigms might support and give rise to.

In the final part of the course, “On the Ground” we explore three different efforts to build, organize, galvanize and design sustainable communities. The reference points of our inquiries in 601 will largely arise out of the problem terrain centered in histories, traditions and practices on the north American continent. 602 will broaden the terrain of these inquiries.

Throughout the seminar students will be engaged in community based Action Research Teams (ARTs). The ARTs, when carefully engaged, will continually provide specific contexts that

challenge us with questions of self, other, and community that are at the heart of the seminar. They will be opportunities to explore practically the alternative philosophical and theoretical frameworks we examine, thus engaging students in a critical and evaluative process in which ideas illuminate (or don't) our social practice, and our social practices offer opportunities to sharpen and deepen the power of our ideas. Thus as we work in specific ways toward sustainable communities in our ARTs, they will be an integral and vibrant learning context for us in this course.

**Course Objectives:**

- \* To become familiar with the general outlines of “modernity” - its basic complexion, and its consequences for how people have come to understand themselves and organize the world.
- \* To develop both a critical and constructive assessment of the dominant world view as well as several alternative frameworks that would shift our understandings and practices in significant ways.
- \* To develop a basis for deepened and extended reflection on the ways in which metaphysics, psychology, and social relations are intertwined.
- \* To reflect on possible ways to reconstruct our self-understandings in line with the demands of sustainability and hopes for flourishing communities.
- \* To reflect theoretically and practically on alternative modes of theorizing and practicing political, economic, and social life.
- \* To reflect upon the interrelationships between social justice, forms of race, class and gender privilege, sustainability, and democratic power.
- \* To reflect upon theories and practices for social change – both smaller reforms and dramatic transformations – with an emphasis on models of grassroots democratic community building

**Course Structure:** This course is structured as a graduate seminar. Assigned readings are to be prepared for critical and constructive discussion in class. Students and faculty will share the responsibility of presenting course materials; all are expected to participate actively in discussion.

**Required Texts: (These books are available in the textbook section of NAU bookstore.)**

William deBuys, *A Great Aridness: Climate Change and the Future of the American Southwest*

Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow, *The Slums of Aspen: Immigrants vs. the*

*Environments in America's Eden*

Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*

John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*

Fritjof Capra, *Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living*

Andrew Zolli & Ann Marie Healy, *Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back*

Gary Holthaus, *Learning Native Wisdom: What Traditional Cultures Teach Us about Subsistence, Sustainability, and Spirituality*

Gar Alperowitz, *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming our Wealth, our Liberty and our Democracy*

David Abrams, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*

Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*

Freeman House, *Totem Salmon: Life Lessons From Another Species*

**Online:** Ted Nace, *Gangs of America: The Rise of the Corporation and the Decline of Democracy*

Gar Alperowitz, Steve Dubb and Thad Williamson, *Climate Change, Community Stability and the Next 150 Million People*

### **Articles and Book Chapters:**

**(These are posted on the class Bb Learn website or available as a pdf)**

Johan Rockstrom, et al, "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity"

Kimberley Curtis, "What is Reenchantment Narrative?"

James Speth, "A New American Environmentalism and the New Economy"

Amy Cortese, *Locavesting: The Revolution in Local Investing and How to Profit From It (selections)*

Robert Gottlieb, *Food Justice (selections)*

Wendell Berry, "The Idea of a Local Economy,"

Rebecca Solnit, "Revolutionary Plots"

Julie Guthman, "Bringing Good Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice"

### **Seminar Reading Schedule:**

We may decide to modify this schedule during the semester in response to the pace of class discussion and to thematic interests that develop in the course.

## **Section One: Opening Provocations: What Are We In? Who Are We? Of What are We Capable?**

### **Week 1:**

Aug. 27: Introductions

Seminar Dynamics

**Prophetic Voices:** Discussion: Moyers-Hedges

### **Week 2:**

Sept. 3: **This Haunted Place**

DeBuys, *A Great Aridness*

**all but chs. 9, 10.**

Johan Rockstrom, et al, "Planetary Boundaries"

<http://www.stockholmresilience.org/download/18.8615c78125078c8d3380002197/ES-2009-3180.pdf>

### **Week 3:**

Sept. 10: **Sustaining What for Whom?**

Park and Pellow, *The Slums of Aspen*

### **Week 4:**

Sept. 17: **“What Time is it on the Clock of the World?”**  
**Dialectical Thinking and Revolutionary Activism**  
Boggs, *The Next American Revolution*

**Week 5:**

Sept. 24: **On Turning Points and Human Creativity**  
Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*,  
chs. 1-12.

**Section Two: Philosophical & Theoretical Matters: Paradigm Shifts and  
Alternative Frameworks**

**Week 6:**

Oct.1: **Social and Natural Systems: A Unified Conceptual Framework**  
Capra, *Hidden Connections*,  
preface, chs. 1, 2, 3, 6; pp. 229-268  
Polyface Farm:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYWYU5V8JOo>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yfw2ybbRTYs&feature=relmfu>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FrxmlgR-vYms&feature=relmfu>

**Week 7:**

Oct.8: **The Idea and Practices of Resilience**  
Zolli and Healy, *Resilience*  
pp.1-190; 219-258

**Week 8:**

Oct. 15: **From Corporate Power to Democratic Commonwealth: A Systemic  
Framework**  
Ted Nace, *Gangs of America (Online)*  
chs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7. 13, 16  
Gar Alperowitz, *Beyond Capitalism*  
all introductory material & Part One.

**Week 9:**

Oct 22: **A Subsistence Worldview**  
Gary Holthaus, *Learning Native Wisdom*  
(selections tba)

**Week 10:**

Oct. 29: **Reenchantment in a Disenchanted World**  
David Abrams, *Spell of the Sensuous (Bblearn; preface, pp.72)*  
Kimberley Curtis, “What is Reenchantment Narrative?” (Bblearn)

**Week 11:**

Nov. 5: **Gratitude, Grief, and Love: Buddhist Vision and Practice**  
Joanna Macy, *World as Lover, World as Self: Courage for Global Justice and Ecological Renewal*,  
**all but ch. 5**

**Section Three: On the Ground: Sustainable Community Activism and Design**

**Week 12:**

Nov. 12: \*\*\*Holiday\*\*\*

**Week 13:**

Nov. 19: **Bioregional Community Building**  
Freeman House, *Totem Salmon: Life Lessons From Another Species*,

**Week 14:**

Nov. 26 **Cities: Urban Planning, Policies and Design for the Future**  
Alperowitz, Dubb and Williamson, *Climate Change, Community Stability and the Next 150 Million People (online)*  
James Speth, "A New Environmentalism and the New Economy"  
[http://environmentalgovernance.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/A\\_New\\_American\\_Environmentalism\\_and\\_the\\_New\\_Economy\\_final.pdf](http://environmentalgovernance.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/A_New_American_Environmentalism_and_the_New_Economy_final.pdf)

**Week 15**

Dec 3 **Food Movement: Localizing Community Food Economies Democratically, Justly and Sustainably?**  
Robert Gottlieb, *Food Justice*  
**(Intro, chs 1, 6, 8, 9)**  
Rebecca Solnit, "Revolutionary Plots"  
<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/6918/>  
Wendell Berry, "The Idea of a Local Economy," **(Bb Learn)**  
Amy Cortese, *Locavesting (Bblearn)*  
Julie Guthman, "Bringing Good Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice"  
[http://www.rslocum.com/Guthman\\_bringing%20good%20food%20to%20others.pdf](http://www.rslocum.com/Guthman_bringing%20good%20food%20to%20others.pdf)

**Requirements, Assignments, Evaluation**

**Community Based Action Research Teams (ARTS) :**

Students will elect to join one Action Research Team. This engaged learning experience will allow students to join with a variety of community partners in ways that promote reciprocal learning between those at NAU and those in the broader community. ART's will provide a context for students to develop grassroots leadership practices and skills that enable effective collaboration aimed at enhancing good and sustainable communities. Students will devote 3 hours a week to their ART work throughout the semester.

### **Evaluation and Assessment:**

20% - Two Seminar Facilitations with Partner

10% - One Critical Analysis – 2 pages (single spaced, double space between paragraphs)

20% - Five Reading Response Papers – 1 single spaced page each, and

- Two “Critical Comments and Questions” on two of your classmates’ submissions.

10% - One Reenchantment Narrative – 2 single spaced pages

40% - Final Seminar Paper: 5-8 single spaced pages.

**Collaborative Seminar Facilitation:** In pairs, students will take responsibility for facilitating two seminars during the semester. This should be a deeply cooperative learning endeavor for you. You will want to meet well in advance, have a robust discussion about the reading, identifying key themes, questions, dialogues, insights, problems etc. How you present the material and facilitate discussion is up to you. Think about developing insights, posing questions, extending relationships between the current week’s readings and ideas and arguments from other readings, making connections with threads of debate and concern that have been surfacing in seminar discussions, etc. Be provocative, exciting, risk-taking, curious, passionate, sharp and imaginative in your engagements with the work and your facilitation of the group! The quality of your work here is vital to the quality of our seminar conversations. Presentations should be about 15 minutes long, but the questions and insights you offer should keep us going for at least an hour.

**Critical Analysis:** Write a critical analysis of *The Slums of Aspen*. The point of this analysis is to engage the reading for purposes of illuminating its subject matter. Your analysis should have three components: 1) introductory paragraph with information about the book (title, author, publication info, topic and purpose of the book), and a thesis statement indicating your primary reaction to the book; 2) a paragraph summary description of the work; 3) your evaluation of the book.

**Reading Response papers:** In section two of the course, “Philosophical and Theoretical Matters” you will write five 1-page response papers. **Papers (single spaced, double between paragraphs) should be posted to the course’s BbLearn website by Monday at Noon. (Unless you’re ill, in which case you must alert me about this by email in advance of the deadline and I will be accommodating.)** Roughly the first 1/3 should summarize the key arguments or most significant ideas in the reading. The rest of the paper should engage the reading: These short reflections are an opportunity for you 1) to get down on paper with clarity and succinctness the primary philosophical and/or theoretical insights of the author or authors, and 2) to think through their practical implications. You can reflect on what you find compelling in the material and what you do not and why; take up the ideas and their significance in relation to past readings or discussions; develop critical angles on particular insights; experiment with creative elaborations of points you find suggestive but insufficiently developed, etc. These papers will be spring boards for your participation in class, and they will also be excellent preparation for writing your final seminar paper.

**Critical Comments and Questions on your Peers’ Papers:** You will respond twice to your peers’ Reading Responses. Write a good page. Read carefully and think expansively about what they are writing about. Endeavor to enlarge their thinking if you think theirs falls short in some

respect. Draw on course materials and class discussions, among other sources to do this. Raise one or more potent question you think your peer should engage and give some indication of why.

**Reenchantment Narratives:** Students will be required to write one Reenchantment Narrative. You will already have written a Public Narrative in SUS 599. This Reenchantment Narrative is inspired by Ganz's work, but explores, cultivates, and mobilizes different sensibilities, relationships and powers.

**Final Seminar Paper:** Each student will write a 5-8 page (my spacing specs) seminar paper. These papers should engage a question or problem on a key theme related to the seminar. Papers should draw on at least two of the paradigms or frameworks from part two of the course. Please develop your paper idea according to your concerns and interests in consultation with me.

**Due Dates:**

August 27: Ungraded Reflection: Sustainable Communities

September 10: Critical Analysis Paper

October 1, 8, 15, 22, November 5: Reading Response Papers;

Critical Comments and Questions due one week later

October 29: Reenchantment Narrative

December 12: Final Seminar Paper