

SAMPLE, SUBJECT TO CHANGE

NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Masters of Arts in Sustainable Communities

SUS 602 - ELEMENTS & CONTEXTS OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION

As the second core course in the MA Sustainable Communities program, this seminar broadens and deepens the critical dialogue about sustainable communities, examining some of the large and often invisible contexts that make our work necessary, that often impede it, and sometimes give it great strength. The broadening and deepening of critical dialogue from 601 is both geographic and epistemic: we ask deeper questions of why/how, and expand our answers to traverse connections between the global and the local. We specifically focus on systemic factors, questioning how the globalization of 1) capitalist economies, 2) “Western” cultural values and knowledge systems, and 3) ecological destruction, are occurring and what efforts are underway to find sustainable alternatives. As in 601, we continue to explore theories and practices that may transform and inform our sense of the real, the necessary, the possible, and the desirable. We can achieve these goals most meaningfully and effectively within a friendly community of inquiry and practice that is hospitable to myriad differences, rigorous in critical dialogue, courageously experimental, and passionately engaged in hopeful initiatives to change the world.

We will begin our study with two novels: a dystopia and a utopia. These texts set the stage for examining a wide array of powerful systems that impact the formation and maintenance of sustainable communities, situating them within (albeit fictional) “potential future” contexts. Subsequently, we examine these influences in more detail, and in a “real-world, modern-day” context. We explore the rise of capitalism, global markets, and political foreign affairs, the spread of information and knowledge through media and education, and we end with a special focus on the multiple dimensions of climate change. We are lucky to have Bill McKibben here at the end of the semester, and will thus tie the final section of our course to this community event.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What are the systemic factors that make sustainable communities work or inhibit their functioning? How do they operate?
- What have powerful, systemic factors impacting sustainable communities looked like in the past, what do they look like now, and what might they look like in the future?
- What alternatives exist to destructive and unjust systems, institutions, and relations?

- How do global systemic factors impact local lives and sustainable communities?
- In the face of powerful, global, and systemic challenges, what can we do? What should we do? How have others engaged/how are they engaging in productive action or social movement toward good and sustainable communities?

STUDENT LEARNING EXPECTATIONS

When the course is completed, you will be able to:

- Identify, explain, and analyze the ways in which a local issue is connected to global economic, political, and cultural systems.
- Identify, explain, and analyze the ways in which global economic, political, and cultural systems impact many types of local realities.
- Elucidate the interactions between the macro factors and broader contexts that shape the creation and/or inhibition of sustainable communities
- Explicate alternative modes of political economy, education, media, and policy that are more democratic, just, and sustainable.
- Identify the interplay between different modes of power and its function in communities.
- Approach your work with greater humility, enhanced appreciation of the multitude of struggles throughout the world, and insight into helpful paths for approaching those struggles within your own and others' lives
- Communicate respectfully across differences (in values, character, or identity) within our classroom and within your communities outside of class
- Identify and utilize strong interpersonal, listening, and leadership skills to facilitate and create inclusive, diverse, egalitarian, and democratic spaces in class and elsewhere.

COURSE READINGS The list below is not exhaustive, though it includes all major texts assigned for the seminar. Note that for many of the texts, we will read a selection of chapters rather than the whole book. Additionally, presentation groups are asked to read outside the given reading list for the section during which they present. I will try to make those additional readings available online, through Interlibrary loan, or through my own copies when possible. Many of these books are available at the NAU and/or Flagstaff public libraries.

@ = Texts online, access through BbLearn course site <> = Texts you must buy/find

- <> Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*
- <> Ursula K. LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*
- <> Helena Norberg Hodge, *Ancient Futures*
- @ Karl Polyani, *The Great Transformation*
- @ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine*
- @ Manfred Steger, *A Very Short Introduction to Globalization*
- @ Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*
- <> Christian Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos*
- <> Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest*
- <> Bill McKibben, *Eaarth*

GRADING & EVALUATION

A high grade will be assigned to those students who work hard, participate extensively and continuously, demonstrate a clear understanding of the readings and course concepts, and produce work that shows evolution in terms of conceptual analysis, reflection on practice, writing skill, creativity, and engagement/application with/in ongoing, critical issues.

**Note:* Only whole grades (no pluses or minuses) are granted at the end of term. For individual assignments, however, you may receive a plus or minus at the instructor's discretion. Students may not agree with the instructor's evaluation. With few exceptions, decisions are final, and no post-grading negotiation will be permitted. Incompletes are discouraged. At any time during the semester, students are invited to schedule an appointment with the professor to discuss academic status in class.

Participation, Written Responses & Portfolio 30% Expansive Group Presentation 15%
Public Opinion Piece 15% Final Paper/Project 40%

ASSIGNMENTS

Response Questions & Freewrites - (hard copies submitted in class, day reading is due)

Throughout the course, for each week, you will bring written responses to class that will contain two things: 1) a list of questions and 2) a two-paragraph “freewrite,” both in relation to the text(s) assigned for the week. Two exceptions to writing in response to assigned texts will occur part-way and at the end of the term; in these two instances, you will write questions and freewrites in relation to: 1) a peer’s public opinion piece mid-way through the class, and 2) a peer’s final paper/project at the end of class.

These assignments should be *legibly* handwritten on recycled paper of your choosing (get creative if you like). They are due at the start of class each week. Ensure your name is on your paper(s). Response questions and freewrites will be graded with a check minus, check, or check plus. Consider check pluses to be very rare and reflective of very exceptional work.

- . 1) Questions: between 8-10 thoughtful, provocative questions that reflect your engagement with the text; these can be refined versions of those questions that are especially important for you that you make in the margins of your book
- . 2) Freewrite: two paragraphs (no more, no less) of your thoughts on the book; demonstrate your curious, self-reflexive engagement with core concepts and dilemmas in the text(s)

Participation & Portfolio - (cumulative, portfolio due at end of course)

Engagement means active listening, careful consideration, compassionate and challenging dedication to your own and others’ learning, and self-awareness. Class discussion is where some of the most significant learning can happen if you are both prepared and engaged. Participating in class does not just mean speaking up, although that is obviously crucial. Participating in what we strive to foster in SUS - a democratic, sustainable, classroom of students - means joining into a conversation to deepen our collective and individual understanding. We must recognize the value of everyone’s participation, not just as a quota, but as each person having their own wealth of knowledge and validity of experience. I fully expect your participation to demonstrate a healthy, collaborative, and engaged attitude toward class material and class members.

We cover a lot of material in our courses. To help you keep track of what you (and others) have read, written, and asked, you are required to create a portfolio for the class. In your portfolio, you should keep records of your notes from class, assignments, printed off readings if applicable, and other related materials. Organize them in whatever fashion makes the most sense for you. You will turn these in at the end of the semester.

Expansive Group Presentation - (due throughout the course from wks 3-14)

In groups of 2-3, students will take responsibility for a 1-hour long combined presentation and activity during class. There will be a presentation for each of the three sections of our seminar. Groups are responsible for providing a synthesis and analysis across material covered during that section (plus one). Groups will make explicit ties to how the material from your section is related to daily life and/or practice in Flagstaff.

Your presentation ought to be between 15-20 minutes, and the activity between 40-45 minutes. Guiding questions for this assignment include:

- What are the overarching themes and messages that were discussed among the authors of texts from your assigned section of seminar?
- What are the overarching *concerns* or *critiques* that these authors present?
- What are some of the salient *strategies* or *actions* that the authors suggest?
- Where in your day-to-day lives, projects, and/or aspirations do you see evidence of these main messages, concerns, and strategies?

- How is what we've learned in this section relevant to our lives? *Public Opinion Piece* - (hard copies and presentations due in class, March 25/26) Halfway through the semester, you will hand in a short paper written on an issue that is of interest to you and relevant to the course. This paper is intended as a public document: an editorial for a local paper (not a hypothetical one, a real one), a script for a three-minute speech to city council, etc. Within this paper, you will examine a local/regional issue and connect it to the global, systemic issues and movements discussed in class. Because your paper will have to be short (look up guidelines for your chosen venue), tailored to a public audience, and inclusive of a dynamic range of concepts and concrete issues, it will be a healthy challenge! Excellent papers/scripts would be of a high enough quality to submit/present to outside sources as-is. *Final Paper/Project* - (electronic copy submitted via email, May 6/7) Students are expected to write 15-20 page final papers. Ideally, these papers will either 1) speak to the context of your thesis research question (hopefully feeding into your thesis), or 2) focus on an issue of relevance to course material and your own passions, conundrums, or visions. I am also open to the idea of students working together in groups on a final project. As the course continues, we should dialogue about this option and all it would entail.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Preliminary - INTRODUCTIONS - Global contexts of sustainable communities

wk **1** (January 14/15): Syllabus, etc.

wk **2** (January 21/22): Dystopia,

Atwood, *Oryx & Crake* wk

3 (January 28/29): Utopia,

LeGuin, *The Dispossessed* Section I - POLITICAL ECONOMY - Global politics, economy, and

corporate rule

wk **4** (February 4/5): A local story turned global again

Norberg-Hodge, *Ancient futures* (all)

wk **5** (February 11/12): Origins & dynamics of capitalism

Polyani, *The great transformation* (ch. selections on BbLearn)

wk **6** (February 18/19): Orientation to globalization & disaster capitalism

Klein, *Shock doctrine* (ch. selections on BbLearn) Steger, *Globalization: A very short introduction* (all)

Additional reading options for Presentation Group:

required: de Sousa, *The rise of the global left* (ch. selections BbLearn)

optional: Gibson-Graham, *A post-capitalist politics* optional: Piven, *Challenging authority*

Section II - "DEVELOPMENT," EDUCATION, MEDIA, KNOWLEDGE & INFORMATION

wk **7** (February 25/26): Media control/Control media

Final readings TBD, Possibilities below, final readings will be posted to BbLearn

wk **8** (March 4/5): Ironic ineffectuality of institutionalization; Conviviality as alternative

Illich, *Deschooling society excerpts* (online PDF) Illich, *To Hell with good intentions* (online PDF) Illich, *Tools for conviviality*

Goodman, *The exception to the rulers* (ch. selections on BbLearn) Chomsky, *Media control: The spectacular achievement of propaganda* (ch. selections on

BbLearn) Herman & Chomsky, *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media*

(ch. selections on BbLearn)

wk **9** (March 11/12): Deschooling our lives; Living as learning

Prakash, *Commons, common sense & community collaboration in hard times* (PDF on BbLearn) Greenwood, *Nature, empire & paradox in environmental education* (PDF on BbLearn) Ruitenberg, *Deconstructing the experience of the local: Toward a radical pedagogy of place* (PDF)

Additional reading options for Presentation Group:

Esteva & Prakash, *Grassroots postmodernism* Shiva, *Earth Democracy*

wk **10** (March 18/19): SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS

Send final draft of public opinion piece to peer no later than Friday, March 21st, midnight, cc me

wk **11** (March 25/26): No readings due

Present and submit public opinion pieces Submit response ?&FW on peer's public opinion piece

Section III - VIOLENCE & CLIMATE, SOLIDARITY & ACTION

wk **12** (April 1/2): Climate unrest: An uneasy concoction

Parenti, *Tropic of Chaos* (ch. selections denoted on BbLearn)

wk **13** (April 8/9): Social unrest: A revolutionary concoction

Hawken, *Blessed unrest* (ch. selections denoted on BbLearn)

wk **14** (April 15/16): Lightly, carefully, gracefully

McKibben, *Eaarth*

Additional reading options for Presentation Group:

Bacon, *Illegal People* Hartmann, *The overpopulation myth* Ostram, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of*

Institutions for Collective Action

wk **15** (April 22/23): SPECIAL COMMUNITY TALK: McKibben,

McKibben talk followed by 45 minute course wrap-up with both sections Five-page draft of final paper/project due to peer reviewer at or before lecture (cc me on emails)

wk **16** (April 29/30): Reading Week

Final paper presentations Peer response ?&FW presentations Workshopping of final papers/projects