Building Sustainable Communities:
From Environmental Injustice to Just Sustainability
Environmental Studies 116
Spring 2016

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Class Meets: Mondays and Wednesdays: 12:30pm – 1:45pm Girvetz 2128

Purpose and Rationale
This course introduces students to the theoretical and historical foundations of a core focus of Environmental Justice Studies: understanding the roots and consequences of our socioecological crises so that we may work to build an ecologically sustainable and socially just, democratic future. We will examine and interrogate the scholarly evidence concerning the phenomena of socioecological crises and the efforts by community residents, activists, workers, social movements, corporations, and governments to document and combat them. We will consider the ways in which human and nonhuman forces interact, collide, collaborate and are indeed inseparable. Students will be expected to master scholarly theories and concepts related to the subject matter. In particular, we pay close attention to the ways in which concepts like nature, environment, economy, society, humanity, culture, capital, and the state intersect and shape one another in order to better understand how social and natural systems are constructed, reinforced, and challenged. Questions we will pursue include: what do we mean by the term “sustainability”? What do we want to sustain, for whom, how, and why? What would we not want to sustain? How do human and nonhuman forces work together and why are they so often in conflict? What is the relationship between social hierarchies within human society and myriad impacts on ecosystems? How do we—as individuals and groups—contribute to ecological harm and how might we be a part of solutions to socioenvironmental crises? How shall we (and, some would ask, should we) rethink, rebuild and recast our relationships with the more than human world, the biosphere, and our shared ecosystems? Furthermore, students will be exposed to key concepts, theories, and perspectives from the environmental social sciences, environmental humanities, climate science, chemistry, physics, history, public health, epidemiology, economics, sociology, ethnic studies, gender and feminist studies, urban studies, history, philosophy, anthropology, ethics, and law.

Studying the relationship between human society and the nonhuman world is fundamentally an ethical issue and a matter of shared responsibility because it reveals the ways that our everyday activities and the public policies our elected officials enact have real consequences for the health of humans, nonhuman species, and the ecosystems upon which we depend. We will consider and debate evidence and perspectives from scholarly studies on this matter with an eye toward inculcating the importance of students acting as historical agents of change in the quest for improvements in knowledge, scholarship, and
action toward more sustainable and just relationships within and across species and ecosystems. To that end, this course will place particular emphasis on connecting knowledge and practice by requiring students to 1) complete writing assignments and in-class exercises that demonstrate an understanding of the links between the articulation and application of theories and major intellectual ideas in the fields of environmental studies; and 2) complete a major class project that allows you the freedom to apply your knowledge in the form of a term paper, a community engagement activity, or creative project.

**Required Texts:**


All books are available at the University bookstore and are on Reserve at the UCSB library. There are several readings on GauchoSpace as well.

This syllabus, all assignments, a number of articles (required reading), and other important course information are all available on the course GauchoSpace site. Note: GauchoSpace will be used for posting course information and messages, discussion forums, and readings. All assignments will be turned in via hard copy in-class and grades will be made available on those copies.

**Evaluation:**

- Participation and attendance…………………………………………. 10%
- Pop Quizzes (3)…………………………………………………………. 10%
- Midterm Test…………………………………………………………….. 30%
- Final Test …………………………………………………………………… 30%
- Final Project ………………………………………………………………… 20%

As the above figures indicate, a significant portion of your grade is based on participation and attendance. The class participation grade will be calculated based on your regular involvement in class. You are responsible for staying abreast of the reading materials each week so that you can fully participate. Please read all materials for the week before the first class meeting (Monday). The professor will facilitate class participation, clarify
questions you may have about class materials, and evaluate your participation. Note: you must complete all course requirements in order to earn a passing grade for the course.

Quizzes will be administered from time to time during class lectures. As always, pop quizzes are intended to provide a motivation for you to stay abreast of the readings and lectures. They are also a means of encouraging your attendance.

Final Project. Below are three options for your Final Project. You must choose one.

Analytical Paper: This assignment will require you to (1) bring to life a topic related to the topic of sustainable communities with your own voice and analysis of primary and/or secondary sources and (2) draw on concepts and theories used in class and the readings. Specifically, you will be expected to produce an original review and analysis of work that others have done on a topic of your choosing. This can include an examination of: A) scholarly writings from the social sciences, humanities, or sciences or B) literary fiction, art, music, or films relevant to your topic. Your grade will be based on analytical depth, supporting evidence, creativity, and indication of time and effort devoted to the project. Length of analytical paper: 12-15 double-spaced pages (not including bibliography). Further details concerning this assignment will be made available by week 3.

Community Engagement Project: The goals of the CEP are (1) to ensure that your education is multifaceted and that your overall understanding of theoretical concepts related to the course material deepens and expands, and (2) to offer you the opportunity to practice community building and leadership that go beyond the classroom. You will be required to spend time volunteering for a relevant organization on campus or in the Santa Barbara County area working on a range of tasks assigned by that organization in consultation with the instructor. Another option would be to launch your own group or focused on sustainable communities, environmental justice, etc. You could create a petition drive, a letter writing campaign, a social media or marketing campaign etc. You will be asked to reflect on your experiences in written form. Questions you might reflect on could include: what are the opportunities and limitations that organizations experience when confronting environmental sustainability crises?; how can universities and other organizations better address problems of sustainability?; to what extent is your understanding of the course shaped by your experience working with this organization?; how has this experience helped you critique and question academic concepts and theories concerning environmental studies and sustainability?; how has the reading and in-class experience assisted you in offering productive critiques of the organization you have worked with? Length of CEP paper: 12-15 double-spaced pages.

Creative Project: The goal of the Creative Project is to have you engage ideas and materials from the class in an original, innovative fashion that allows you to creatively
express your interpretations of and reactions to the subject matter. This can involve a range of approaches, including but not limited to: composing songs, poetry or spoken word, a film, dramatic theatrical sketches, a short novel or short story, a board game, painting, photography, a blog or website, a children’s book, etc. The idea is to move beyond the traditional boundaries and requirements of a typical written class assignment while encouraging you to express your views on the topic in an informed, constructive, and imaginative way.

Midterm Test: The midterm test will be a take home essay test requiring the use of course readings, lectures, discussions, and films to answer questions.

Final Test: The final test will be a take home essay test requiring the use of course readings, lectures, discussions, and films to answer questions.

Technology: Unless you have documented special needs that require the use of a computer in the classroom, I do not allow computer usage during class time, other than my own. I know that many students like to take notes on their laptops and electronic notebooks and tablets, etc., but the availability of chat functions, email, and the web have compromised this otherwise noble pursuit. Furthermore, all other electronic products with a screen of any size should be turned off during class at all times (cell phones, PDAs, iPads, and any other hand held device). Usage of such devices during class time will be grounds for your removal. If you are ever unclear or confused about any of the instructor’s policies, class materials, subject matter, or assignments, please visit me after class or during office hours for assistance.

Academic Integrity vs. Misconduct: It is expected that all UCSB students will support the ideal of academic integrity and that you will be responsible for the integrity of your work. The strictest disciplinary action will be pursued in all instances of academic misconduct. Academic misconduct includes (among other things): cheating on assignments or tests; plagiarizing any part of work done by someone else; and submitting the same (or substantially similar) work for two courses without the professor’s consent. For more information, see the Office of Judicial Affairs page on “Academic Integrity”: http://judicialaffairs.sa.ucsb.edu/AcademicIntegrity.aspx

Ground Rules: The number one ground rule to which we will all adhere is to engage in respectful and considerate discussion and debate in the classroom. By the very nature of the course topic, there will likely be a wide range of opinions among students, many of which may be rooted in your personal and perhaps painful experiences. This is what a good classroom environment is supposed to do: stimulate you to think for yourselves and raise critical questions. However, if you feel the need to do this in a manner that offends and insults your peers or otherwise disrupts the learning process, you should find
somewhere else to engage in such behavior. Abusive and harsh language will not be tolerated in this classroom. We are all responsible for keeping discrimination, harassment, and intimidation out of the classroom.

**Regarding Trigger Warnings:** Per the 2014 UCSB A.S. “Resolution to Mandate Warnings For Triggering Content in Academic Settings,” students are hereby informed that some course materials may include references to, descriptions of, and/or presentations of content that could conceivably trigger PTSD symptoms for persons who have experienced severe trauma. As the instructor of record, I will do my best to warn students ahead of time if there are videos that will be shown in class that might fall within the parameters of this Resolution. Students can opt out of viewing such material with no penalty.

**Resources**

- The Writing Lab at the Campus Learning Assistance Services helps students with many aspects of writing, including getting started, making revisions, organizing ideas for papers, proofreading, editing, and general writing skills. To schedule an appointment, come to Student Resource Building (SRB) 3231 or visit my.sa.ucsb.edu/clas

- The Mental Health Peer Program (MHPP) is a UCSB campus resource offering guidance with regard to stress management, anxiety, depression and other related challenges. They offer a range of resources, including psychological counseling services and the Test Anxiety Program (for students experiencing mild to moderate anxiety before and/or during an exam). MHPP is located in Counseling and Psychological Services, Building 599. Phone consultations are available 24 hours: (805) 893-4411.

- Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Disabled Students Program to get documentation of needs and to generate suggestions for reasonable accommodation (room 2120 Student Resources Building, phone: 805.893.2668; email: DSP.Help@sa.ucsb.edu). Requests for accommodation via Disabled Students Program will be granted.

**Course Schedule**

[Note: this schedule and its content are subject to change]

**Week 1 (March 28 & 30): Introduction to the Course: What is Sustainability?**

Reading (for March 30th): Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans. “Joined Up Thinking: Bringing Together Sustainability, Environmental Justice and Equity” (GauchoSpace)

First Assignment, due in-class on Wednesday, March 30th. Take the “ecological footprint quiz” at [http://www.earthday.org/take-action/footprint-calculator/](http://www.earthday.org/take-action/footprint-calculator/) and in 1 page or so,
write about the following: what does your ecological footprint mean to you? What do you think its significance is for the rest of us (the human and more-than-human world)? How do you think your ecological footprint reflects your biography and social location (your social class status, gender, nationality, etc.)? How will you respond to the results of your ecological footprint test? The purpose of this assignment is to get you to think openly, analytically, and critically about how your everyday activities affect your wellbeing and the wellbeing of others (both human and non-human), and how these relationships are contingent, malleable, and reflect choices that we have made and choices that have been made for us. Please bring your assignment on a printed sheet of paper and be prepared to share your thoughts in class on Wednesday, March 30th.

**Week 2 (April 4 & 6)** What’s the Problem? An Environmentalist’s Perspective on Extraction and Production AND Theories of Environment-Society Dynamics

**Readings:** Leonard (Introduction, A Word about Words, Chapters 1 and 2)

**Week 3 (April 11 & 13th): Critical Perspectives on Distribution, Consumption, and Disposal**

**Readings:** Leonard (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and Epilogue)

**Week 4 (April 18 & 20): Climate Change, Climate Justice, and System Change**

**Readings:** Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report. 2014. (GauchoSpace);
Bill McKibben, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math”
James Hansen et al. “Ice Melt, Sea Level rise and Superstorms: Evidence from Paleoclimate Data, Climate Modeling, and Modern Observations that 2 Degrees Celsius Global Warming is Dangerous” (GauchoSpace)
John Foran. “A Few Thoughts on the Climate Justice Movement”(GauchoSpace)

April 20th: special guests—leaders from the UCSB and Santa Barbara area climate justice movement

**Final Project proposals due April 18th**

**Week 5 (April 25 & 27): Environmental Injustice and Unsustainable Communities**
Readings: Agyeman (Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 3)

Midterm Test assigned April 25th
Students are required to attend a minimum of 1 event at The Next System Project Teach-In on UCSB campus this week. Accordingly, there will be no class on Wednesday April 27th.

Week 6 (May 2 & 4): From Environmental Injustice to Just Sustainability
Readings: Agyeman (Chapters 4, 5, and 6, and Principles of Environmental Justice)
Midterm Test due May 2

Week 7 (May 9 & 11): Understanding and Confronting an Unjust Food System
Readings: Gottlieb and Joshi (Introduction and Chapters 1-5)

Week 8 (May 16 & 18): Food Justice Action and Strategies
Readings: Gottlieb and Joshi (Chapters 6-10)
Catriona Esquibel and Luz Calvo, “Decolonize your Diet” (GauchoSpace)

Readings: Derrick Jensen, selections from End Game: The Problem of Civilization (GauchoSpace)

May 25th: Student Reports and Reflections

Final Test assigned on May 25th

Week 10 (May 30 & June 1): No class this week because of the Memorial Day holiday and the instructor’s travel to a professional conference
Final Test due on Tuesday, June 7, 2016 at 3pm in the Environmental Studies main office (4312 Bren Hall).

Final Projects due on June 1 by 1:45pm in the Environmental Studies Main Office