

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS & SUSTAINABILITY

A QUEST I COURSE (SUSTAINABILITY) IN THE UNIVERSITY STUDIES PROGRAM

PS 116Q1-001C | 12:40—1:40 MWF | FALL 2021 | 3 CREDITS | SAGE 3218

POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN OSHKOSH



Charles Ray, *Shelf* (1981): steel, painted found objects, and human body. *Shelf* represents a political mindset common in Western cultures, where humans, particularly men, have disembodied attitudes toward the environment. Rather than seeing themselves as part of nature, Westerners tend to conceptualize their relationships as separate from or above nature. They imagine existences confined to the mind despite bodily and physical realities. Are politics surrounding the nude male transferrable to environmental politics?

PROFESSOR

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OFFICE HOURS

My office is Sage 4619. I am available during office hours MWF 11:30–12:30 or by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the political forces and challenges to developing and adopting sustainable environmental policies in the United States. This course provides an overview of the U.S. political system, sustainability as a lens of inquiry, and the policy making process. What values do we want to sustain? Do environmental policies support these values? Specific policy areas examined include air, water, land, energy, waste, plant, and animal life.

This is a Quest I course in the University Studies Program (USP) focusing on sustainability as the signature question. There are no prerequisites for this course.

TEXTBOOK AND READINGS

Christian R. Weisser (ed). *Sustainability: A Bedford Spotlight Reader*, 2d Edition (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2019) ISBN: 9781319056612

This textbook is required. Other materials will be available electronically at no additional cost to students.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Environmental Politics & Sustainability Objectives

1. Distinguish between policy and politics. Students will use this distinction to critically analyze the political challenges to achieving sustainable environmental policies.
2. Use models and definitions of sustainability to evaluate environmental, economic, social, and political values that should be sustained
3. Use sustainability as lens of inquiry to analyze critically the political challenges to sustainable environmental policies in the U.S.
4. Write an essay answering: *How do I understand and create a more sustainable world?*

First-Year Experience Objectives

1. Describe and explain to family, neighbor, or friend the value and purpose of a liberal education and the University Studies Program
2. Describe and explain to a classmate the three UWO Signature questions
3. Discuss with classmate the purpose and procedures of Early Alert grading program
4. Attend two co-curricular activities or events
5. Locate and use academic/campus resources

UWO Essential Learning Outcomes (ELOs)

1. Identify and evaluate theories/assumptions
2. Think critically and creatively
3. Communicate orally and in writing
4. Develop technological/information literacy
5. Knowledge of sustainability and applications

Political Science Department Learning Goals

1. *Understand and apply theory frameworks.* Apply theoretical arguments and to explain or predict political phenomena

2. *Understand and explain contemporary politics.* Connect theory and history to answer “big questions” facing contemporary politics
3. *Analyze and explain political behavior, patterns, & events.* Use evidence in a variety of forms to construct arguments
4. *Communicate effectively.* Express information in ways accessible and appropriate to different audiences

CLASSROOM MASK REQUIREMENTS

All students are required to wear an appropriate face mask that covers their mouth and nose when they are in the classroom. Students who have a medical condition prohibiting them from wearing a face mask may present written documentation from their health care provider, stating that the individual cannot wear a face mask. Students must present this documentation to the Accessibility Center in the Dean of Students office. In these situations, face shields will be provided to that student through the Risk & Safety Office upon request from the Accessibility Center.

UWO procedure dictates that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, an instructor cannot begin class until all students are wearing a mask properly. If a student is non-compliant with the masking policy and also refuses to leave the classroom promptly when requested, the instructor is required to cancel class. Students responsible for class cancellation for these reasons will be referred to the Dean of Students office, and the student will be unable to attend class until they meet with the Dean of Students. The student may be dropped from the class by the Dean of Students.

INCLUSION

Law and politics affect all people irrespective of political affiliation, socio-economic status, gender, sex, race, sexuality, national origin, ethnicity, veteran status, religion, physical or learning ability, and other characteristics with which students commonly identify. So, I use inclusive pedagogies to foster input from everyone. *Input from all students is valued and expected.*

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

My classes are free speech zones. Say anything you want to say. No topic or viewpoint is off limits. Exercising freedom of speech carries the burden of being responsible for your speech. Similarly, exercising silence carries the burden of being responsible for your silence.

“Freedom of expression would not truly exist if the right could be exercised only in an area that a benevolent government has provided as a safe haven for crackpots. The Constitution says that Congress (and the States) may not abridge the right to free speech. This provision means what it says. We properly read it to permit reasonable regulation of speech-connected activities in carefully restricted circumstances. But we do not confine the permissible exercise of First Amendment rights to a telephone booth or the four corners of a pamphlet, or to supervised and ordained discussion in a school classroom.”

– *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District (No. 21) (393 U.S. 503, 513, 1969)*

UNIVERSITY STUDIES PROGRAM

The University Studies Program (USP) is your gateway to a 21st century college education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. This Quest I course is the first in a series of courses. The course introduces you to campus and all it has to offer as well as the challenges and opportunities of academic life as you pursue a liberal arts education.

Quest classes are designed to provide a solid foundation for the rest of your education here, no matter which major you choose. Your USP courses also provide opportunities for you to explore and connect in your

college education. For further information about the unique general education at UW Oshkosh, visit the [USP website](#).

Signature Questions

The three “Signature Questions” central to a UWO education are: (1) How do people understand and engage in community life? (2) How do people understand and create a more sustainable world? and (3) How do people understand and bridge cultural differences? The signature question for this course focuses on sustainability: “*How do people understand and create a more sustainable world?*” We examine this question in the context of environmental politics.

Learning Communities

UWO is dedicated to helping students be successful by creating smaller learning communities during students’ first semesters. To help you create a learning community, this course is paired with either your writing course (WBIS) or your communication course (COMM 111).

Liberal Education

Liberal education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings.

PEER MENTOR

As a part of this course you will have access to an upper-class student to help guide you on your quest. The peer mentor may attend campus events with the class, answer questions about the campus, refer you to various resources, or remind you of important steps and deadlines during your first semester. Our peer mentor is **Grace Herrmann**.

ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

I use the 93/90/87 grading scale for this course.

A 93–100 B 83–86 C 73–76 D 63–66
A- 90–92 B- 80–82 C- 70–72 D- 60–62
B+ 87–89 C+ 77–79 D+ 67–69 F 0–59

Grades are based on the following elements.

Participation (35%)

Participation is based on student preparation for and contributions to class. Read course materials and prepare notes before coming to class. Participation comfort levels vary substantially. At one end of the spectrum, students fear public speaking (more than death) and prefer to remain anonymous in class. These students should work actively to overcome this fear. On the other end of the spectrum are gunners. Gunners are eager to speak and tend to dominate conversation. These students should be mindful that learning involves active listening and should provide others an opportunity to speak. Quality of participation is as important as quantity. Students receive the best participation grades when they demonstrate critical thinking and assimilate complex ideas, including classmates’ ideas, across a range of topics. These participators contribute meaningfully to the learning of others, including the professor. There are both formal and informal opportunities for participation. Each student will lead a class discussion based on one of the readings.

Reaction Papers (35%)

Students submit six reaction papers throughout the term. Papers should be two pages (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman). Reactions are not summaries of the readings; they are engagements with a particular reading or concept. The purposes of reaction papers are to (1) prepare students for class discussions and (2) have students write, write, write. Grades are based primarily on whether students engage the material. A good paper references readings (or specific passages) and analyzes or criticizes concepts. Submit papers without spelling or grammar errors. Excessive errors result in lower grades. Three reaction papers must be submitted during the first half of the course, with the remaining three submitted during the second half of the course. No more than one reaction paper may be submitted per week. Reaction papers must be submitted in Canvas before the start of the class period during which the relevant reading is discussed.

Comprehensive Exam (30%)

There is one comprehensive exam during the last week of class. The exam will consist of objective, short answer, and essay questions. One of the essay questions will be the signature question.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is expected and required. I take attendance at the beginning of class, mainly to learn student names. Because participation in discussions and activities is required, you should remember that you cannot participate if you are absent. Absences are sometimes necessary, but it is unnecessary to contact me about absences unless it is an extended absence.

Extracurricular Activities

Quest I students must participate in two extracurricular activities. For this class, one activity must be connected with *Earth Charter Week*. The second activity can be anything you choose. There are many options. I and your peer mentor will provide more information for these options later in the course.

DEADLINES AND MISSED ASSIGNMENTS

Turn in assignments on the due dates. Students who miss assignments will be excused only for university-approved reasons (e.g., documented illness, family death, university-sponsored activity).

EARLY ALERT

During the fifth week of classes, you will receive by e-mail notice about your progress in this course. This is called *Early Alert*. Early Alert helps you evaluate your study skills and class attendance so you know if you are on the right track. If you need to make changes, there are tons of resources available. Early Alert grades are not permanent and do not appear on your transcript.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Expectations for Academic Honesty: A college education is intended to develop your skills, knowledge, and confidence. Graded assignments are designed to work on these items. Thus, to gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence of a college-educated person all graded work is to be your own. When you are directed to work alone, an assignment or test must be done by you, its primary ideas are to be your own, and any outside materials should be dealt with properly (quoted when using someone's words, and cited when quoting or referencing them in any other way). When your teacher directs you to work in teams, the work is to be done by the team. More information can be found [here](#).

UWO is committed to academic integrity for all students. System guidelines state, "Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for

respect of others' academic endeavors." We expect students to review and adhere to procedures related to academic honesty as outlined in Chapter UWS 14, Wisconsin Administrative Code, available on the Dean of Students website [here](#). Students should direct specific questions regarding the code (and institutional procedures approved to implement the code) to the Dean of Students Office.

STUDENT CONSUMER INFORMATION

Students should see the following URL for disclosures about essential consumer protection items required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990 available [here](#).

GRIEVANCES

The Department of Political Science is committed to offering you a high-quality classroom experience, and we take your feedback seriously. If you have concerns about anything related to this course, assignments, or teaching method, you are encouraged to first speak with your instructor directly. If you are not comfortable speaking with the instructor, you are invited to speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. James Krueger. He can be reached at kruegerj@uwosh.edu. Should he be unable to resolve your concerns, he will guide you to appropriate resources within the College of Letters and Science.

ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

UWO provides reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements. We accommodate *flexibly* and *individually*. Register with *Accessibility Services* or Project Success to get an accommodation recommendation form.

Accessibility Services

125 Dempsey Hall
(920) 424-3100
dean1@uwosh.edu

[Accessibility Services Website](#)

NOTE TO POLITICAL SCIENCE MAJORS

Political Science majors should take Political Methodology (245) in either their sophomore or first semester of their junior year. PS245 is a prerequisite for the senior capstone, Political Analysis (401), and cannot be taken concurrently.

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Changes to the schedule are inevitable and will be communicated in class or through e-mail. If substantive changes are made, notification will be provided in a timely manner and a revised syllabus made available.

This schedule lists the major academic components of the course, that is, the readings and discussion topics. In addition to these readings, the course incorporates weekly topics and discussions related to students' first-year experiences at UWO. These topics include advising, getting involved in campus activities, time management, diversity, selecting a major, and becoming familiar with the campus community.

Week 1 (Sept 6): Intro, Course Overview

- Discussion and Activity: Introductions and Course Overview, Peer Mentor, Ice breaker
- Assignments (homework):
 - Canvas online tutorial. Create Canvas Profile with headshot and info about you.

- Research: Find two articles to share with the class about environmental issues. The first article should be on a topic you believe most everyone (including yourself) has some familiarity. The second article should be on an environmental topic about which you know very little (or nothing). Prepare an outline (typed) for each article (about ½ page each) that you will turn in for a grade. The purpose of the outline is for you to reference in class when you talk about environmental issues. You must provide sources for your articles.
- Read syllabus
- Discussion: Which environmental issues are most familiar to people? Less Familiar? How do we distinguish between myths and reality (biased and unbiased internet research)?

Week 2 (Sept 13): Environmental Issues

- Discussion: Course Objectives, Liberal Education, University Studies Program, and Learning Outcomes, First Generation College Students, Learning Communities, Pedagogy
- David Weisser, *Introduction to Sustainability*
- Jeremy Caradonna, *Sustainability: A History*
- Discussion: How do people understand and create a more sustainable world? Define and conceptualize sustainability (3 pillars, web of interconnectedness, lens of inquiry). What do we want to sustain? What do we value?

Week 3 (Sept 20): Sustainability Foundations

- John Muir, *The American Forests*
- Rachel Carson, *The Obligation to Endure*

Week 4 (Sept 27): Sustainability Foundations (Part II)

- Aldo Leopold, *Thinking Like a Mountain*
- David Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place*
- Fritjof Capra, *Ecology and Community*

Week 5 (Oct 4): How is Sustainability Political? (Part I)

- World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World (Brundtland Report)*
- JR Thorpe, *What Exactly is Ecofeminism?*
- Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (Prof. Thomas)
- Discussion: Does the image below support ecofeminism or undermine it?



Source: www.contramare.net/site/en/ecofeminism/

Week 6 (Oct 11): How is Sustainability Political? (Part II)

- Jim Manzi and Peter Wehner, *Conservatives and Climate Change*
- Roger Scruton, *How to Think Seriously about the Planet: A case for an Environmental Conservatism*
- Mark Buchanan, *How to Sell Conservatives on Climate Change*
- Jeffrey Kaplan, *The Gospel of Consumption*

Week 7 (Oct 18): Campus Environmental Politics

- Campus Sustainability: Guest Speaker/Tour
- UWO Campus Sustainability Plans
- Scott Carlson, *Whatever Happened to the Drive for Campus Sustainability?*

Week 8 (Oct 25): Politics of Fear and Denial

- Video: Skeptical Environmentalist (Bjorn Lomborg)
- Al Gore, *Climate of Denial*

Week 9 (Nov 1): Current Events

- Current Events in Environmental Politics
- News sources TBD

Week 11 (Nov 8): Endangered Species, Biodiversity, and Non-human Others

- Sylvia Earl and others TBD (TED Talk)
- Robyn Migliorini, *Is Hunting Sustainable?*
- Russell Mittermeier, *Language Diversity is Highest in Biodiversity Hotspots* (or other reading TBD)

Week 12 (Nov 15): Politics of Crisis/Disaster

- Lindsay Abrams, *The Climate Refugee Crisis We Still Won't Address*
- Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*
- Heather Brady, *4 Key Impacts of the Keystone XI and Dakota Access Pipelines*
- David Biello, *How Did the BP Oil Spill Affect Gulf Coast Wildlife?*
- Jared Diamond, *The Last Americans: Environmental Collapse and the End of Civilization*

Week 13 (Nov 22): Review & Thanksgiving Break

- Review
- Thanksgiving Break: Nov 24-28

Week 14 (Nov. 29): Environmental Politics in Transnational Perspective

- Mark Hay, *Five Years after Fukushima, Japan's Nuclear Debate is Heating Up*
- Michael Moyer and Carina Storrs, *How Much Is Left? The Limits of Earth's Resources*
- Paris Climate Accord

Week 15 (Dec 6): Making it through the First Year Experience

- Getting through the end of the term
- Managing time and stress
- Campus Resources

Week 15 (Dec 13): Final Assessments

- Exam, signature question essay, course evaluations, and learning and participation reflections

PEDAGOGY

Democratic Learning

I like democratic classrooms, where students are actively involved and contribute to their own learning. The role I prefer to play in the classroom is not a sage on the stage, but a guide on the side. The sage on the stage is an authoritarian model of learning, where the professor is the authoritarian and students are passive citizens (learners) who do exactly what they are told to do. The guide on the side facilitates discussions, helps students reach their goals, serves as a resource, and listens/learns from others. In a “pure” democracy, students would write their own syllabus, determining what and how they will learn. So, there is an authoritative element to my pedagogy in that I have designated learning goals, readings, timelines, and the like. My classroom is not purely democratic, but I try as much as possible to yield power and control to students. Instead of dictating exactly what students should know and do, I want to empower students to develop skills necessary for leadership in democratic society—working in teams, conflict resolution, personal responsibility, initiative, making mistakes, critical and creative thinking. We need leaders to help us solve real challenges, environmental challenges.

I have reservations about authoritarian approaches in the classroom, especially in political science courses where I have observed students can talk about principles of democracy, but lack the skills, confidence, and/or desire to create and implement functioning democracies even in microcosms (classrooms). A *Forbes* quote reflects this idea:

Ken Robinson in [Do Schools Kill Creativity](#), says we need to reform our education models designed to support industrialization. Robinson argues that because the world is changing in transformational ways, “creativity now is as important in education as literacy,” and should therefore be treated with the same status. And if our children are “not prepared to be wrong, [they] will never come up with anything original.” He further contends that as a society, “we stigmatize mistakes,” and the result “is that we’re educating people out of their creative capacities” and destroying children’s natural willingness to take chances.¹

I have concerns when I compare what UWO students in our programs are unable to accomplish with minimal guidance—for example, a research paper using a book that outlines steps from start to finish—with what 12-year-old Tamil-speaking children in the poorest regions of India are able to learn from a street-side computer in Self-Organized Learning Environments (SOLEs)—biotechnology of DNA replication, in English.² My point is not to lambast student abilities. Authoritarian models of learning are what UWO students are accustomed to using. I cannot expect students to develop democratic abilities at the drop of a hat anymore than I can expect a country to convert from authoritarianism to democracy at the drop of a hat. I want students to work toward self-governance in their own educations, and I am quite willing to assist them in this process.

The Free-Rider Problem

According to Jane Mansbridge, president of the American Political Science Association (2013), the number one challenge facing the political science discipline as we wrestle with how best to self-govern is learning how to deal with the free rider problem. This is especially true in environmental politics. It is also true in democratic classrooms. Unfortunately, free riders in the classroom, like free riders in democracy, spoil things for a great number of us. Empowering students in a democratic classroom means stepping back and trusting students, all of them. Doing so means that free riders (namely students who are not concerned with learning and who want to do only the bare minimum to complete the course) must be treated the same as other students who take learning more seriously. To step in and hold nonperforming students accountable (including threats to their grades) is to arbitrarily take away democracy and re-install authoritarianism. My predicament—finding the right balance between authoritarianism and democracy in the classroom—is rooted in the free-rider problem. In the past, free riders have taken advantage of classroom democracy, sometimes refusing outright to participate, other times undermining learning for other students.

¹ [How America’s Education Model Kills Creativity and Entrepreneurship](#), *Forbes*, March 19, 2015.

² See [TED Talks by Sugata Mitra](#).

I want to foster a different learning environment than the authoritarian one I mastered, anachronistic learning environments that presume the knowledge that privileges me can come only from me and not through devices citizens hold readily in the palms of their hands. I remain open to ideas from students about how to create a more democratic learning environment.

As we move forward in this course, I request the following from students. Please take responsibility for your own learning. Use the tools provided. Find other tools. Use me as a resource to talk through particular problems. Do not wait until the last minute. Don't be a free-rider. Contribute to the learning of others. Learn something about environmental politics and sustainability.