

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS & SUSTAINABILITY

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

PS 116Q1-001C | 10:20–11:20 MWF | FALL 2022 | 3 CREDITS | SAGE 2234

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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Ph.D., University of Kentucky
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OFFICE HOURS

My office is Sage 4628. 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 systems and events 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. Critically analyze the signature question and 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. Discuss with classmate the purpose and procedures of Early Alert grading program
3. Attend two co-curricular campus activities or events
4. Locate and use 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 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

INCLUSION

The environment affects 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.

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

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 campus, refer you to resources, or remind you of important steps and deadlines during your first semester. Our peer mentor is **Tanner Sarauer**, a shining star in the political science department. We are incredibly fortunate to have him working with us this semester.

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

Participation (25%)

Participation is based on student preparation for and contributions to class. Minimally, students must attend class and must read and prepare course materials before coming to class. Participation comfort levels vary substantially. At one end of the spectrum are *deathers*—students who 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 the readings. Students write a reflection at the end of the term assessing their own participation, both strengths and challenges.

Reaction Papers (35%)

Students submit eight reaction papers during the term. Papers are two pages, double-spaced, and 12-point Times New Roman. Papers are not summaries of the readings but “reactions” to ideas and concepts. What do you think about the concepts? What ideas do these concepts spark? 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. Detailed writing guidelines will be distributed in class.

In-Class and Extracurricular Activities (15%)

There are many in-class activities and assignments. In many instances, students receive full credit for turning in assignments, although quality and effort will be assessed. All Quest I students participate in two extracurricular (out-of-class) activities. Your peer mentor and I will provide more information about campus and community activities. Students write brief summaries about the activities they attend and assess their efforts to get connected to campus and other students.

Comprehensive Exam (25%)

There is one exam during the last week of class, with objective, short-answer, and essay questions.

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.

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). Generally, I do not allow students to make up in-class activities, so be sure to minimize your absences. I do, however, drop the lowest activity grade at the end of the term.

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.

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.

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](#)

REGISTER TO VOTE (AND VOTE)

This is a political science class, and I encourage everyone to participate in our democracy. Minimally, voting is a great start. *National Election Day this year is Tuesday, November 8.*

Wisconsin Registration Methods & Deadlines

- *In Person:* The Friday before Election Day
- *By Mail:* Postmarked at least 20 days before Election Day
- *Online:* 20 days before Election Day (<https://myvote.wi.gov/en-us/>)
- *At the Polls:* Individuals may register to vote in person at your polling place on Election Day. You must provide documents for proof of residency and proof of identification.

Twenty days before Election Day this year is October 19. Other Wisconsin voting information can be found at [MyVoteWisconsin](#).

Other States

Students who live in other states can easily find out how to vote with a little bit of online research. Every state has an option for submitting an absentee ballot, and many states have early, in-person voting if you make a trip home. A great starting place for your research is [Vote.org](#).

Assistance

There are many “voter drives” occurring on campus this semester. If you need help, ask a volunteer during one of these events. Or, ask me. I am happy, happy, happy to help.

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 5): Intro, Course Overview

- Discussion and Activity: Introductions, Course Overview, Syllabus, Peer Mentor, Ice Breaker
- Canvas Homework (due Friday):
 - Canvas online tutorial.
 - Create Canvas Profile with headshot and info about you.

- Read syllabus in Canvas (Canvas indicates which students access documents and pages), including the section about pedagogy (democratic classrooms and the free-rider problem).
- Activity: Engaging Our Environmental Waste
- Homework (due Monday)
 - 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. Include sources (reputable ones) for your articles.

Week 2 (Sept 12): Environmental Issues

- Discussion: Which environmental issues are most familiar to people? Less Familiar? How do we distinguish between myths and reality (biased and unbiased internet research)?
- Discussion: Course Objectives, Liberal Education, University Studies Program, and Learning Outcomes, First Generation College Students, Learning Communities, Democratic Classrooms, Free-rider Problem
- Discussion (and note-taking): [3 Strategies for Effectively Talking about Climate Change](#)
- Registering to Vote (at home and on campus)

Week 3 (Sept 19): Sustainability Foundations (Part I)

- Jeremy Caradonna, *Sustainability: A History*
- David Weisser, *Introduction to Sustainability*
- Discussion: How do people understand and create a more sustainable world? Define and conceptualize sustainability (3 pillars, web of interconnectedness). What do we want to sustain? What do we value?
- Activity: Campus Scavenger Hunt
- Writing Reaction Papers (writing guidelines)
- Bus Trip to Oshkosh Farmers' Market, Saturday, September 17

Week 4 (Sept 26): Sustainability Foundations (Part II)

- Rachel Carson, *The Obligation to Endure*
- Aldo Leopold, *Thinking Like a Mountain*
- David Suzuki, *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place*
- Fritjof Capra, *Ecology and Community*
- World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future: From One Earth to One World (Brundtland Report)*
- Friday, September 30: Time Management (Lisa Marchetta, Reading and Study Skills Center)

Week 5 (Oct 3): How is Sustainability Political? (Part I)

- Metacognition, Bloom's Taxonomy, and Active Reading
- Academic Advising (UARC speaker)
- JR Thorpe, *What Exactly is Ecofeminism?*
- Carolyn Merchant, *Earthcare: Women and the Environment* (reading in Canvas)
- Discussion: In what ways does the image below support (and undermine) ecofeminism?



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

Week 6 (Oct 10): How is Sustainability Political? (Part II)

- Activity: Personal is Political—Human Imaging and Tapping Our Creativity
- 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 17): Campus Environmental Politics

- Monday, October 17: Campus Sustainability and Tour (Brad Spanbauer, UWO Sustainability Director)
- Scott Carlson, *Whatever Happened to the Drive for Campus Sustainability?*
- UWO Campus Sustainability Plan

Week 8 (Oct 24): Politics of Fear and Denial

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

Week 9 (Oct 31): Plastic, Food, and Pesticides

- [The Plastic Problem](#) (PBS News Hour, @ 54 minutes)
- [We need to stop eating meat to save our planet](#) (Ted Talk) 13 minutes
- [A vision for sustainable restaurants](#) (Ted Talk) 8:33 minutes
- Research Activity and Discussion: Pesticides in Our Food

Week 10 (Nov 7): Endangered Species and Biodiversity

- *Election Day*: Tuesday, November 8
- Sylvia Earl and others TBD (TED Talk)
- Robyn Migliorini, *Is Hunting Sustainable?*
- Russell Mittermeier, *Language Diversity is Highest in Biodiversity Hotspots*
- Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*

Week 11 (Nov 14): Politics of Crisis and Disaster

- Heather Brady, *4 Key Impacts of the Keystone XL 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*
- *Queerer Ecologies*, Campus Presentation by Jerry Thomas, Nov. 16, 11:30–12: 30, Swart Conference Room and Zoom

Week 12 (Nov 21): Personal Environmental Politics & Thanksgiving Break

- Ecological Footprints, Personal Consumption, Personal Actions (e.g., printed books or Kindle?)
- Thanksgiving Break: Nov 23–27

Week 13 (Nov. 28): Current Events and Public Attitudes

- Climate change initiatives in the *Inflation Reduction Act of 2022*.
- [State of the Climate Crisis in 2021](#) (Ted Talk) 5:37
- [5 surprising ways climate change will disrupt our daily lives](#) PBS 4:20
- [Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2020 - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#)
- [How to Shift Public Attitudes and Win the Global Climate Battle - Yale E360](#)
- [Americans' Knowledge of Climate Change - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication](#)

Week 14 (Dec 5): Making it through the First Year Experience

- Final paper assignment and discussion—signature question: *How do I understand sustainability?*
- Getting through the end of the term (planning and campus resources)
- Exam Review

Week 15 (Dec 12): Final Assessments

- Exam, course evaluations, and learning and participation reflections

PEDAGOGY (APPROACH TO TEACHING)

Democratic Learning

I like democratic classrooms, where student 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 mode of learning, where the professor is the authority and students are passive citizens (learners) who do exactly what they are told to do and parrot back the same things they are told. The guide on the side facilitates discussions, helps students reach 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-world challenges, especially environmental challenges.

I have reservations about authoritarian approaches in the classroom, especially in political science courses where I have observed students who can talk about principles of democracy, but who 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

It concerns me when I compare what UWO students in our programs with 12-year-old Tamil-speaking children in the poorest regions of India. UWO students are often unable to produce with minimal guidance, for example, a research paper using a book that outlines all the steps from start to finish. Students are unable to figure out how to write research papers on their own because they have become accustomed to teachers and professors holding their hands in an authoritarian classroom telling them piece-by-piece, inch-by-inch what to do and think. The Tamil-speaking children taught themselves to use a street-side computer. They also taught themselves, using only a computer loaded with information in English, the biotechnology of DNA replication, in a language they did not know.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.

Free-Rider Problem

According to Jane Mansbridge, a former president of the American Political Science Association, 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 (such as threats to 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. Mostly, free riders learn that there are a handful of students who will always be prepared and speak, which means that the free riders can ride on their coattails.

I want to foster a different learning environment than the authoritarian one I grew up in, anachronistic learning environments that presume that the knowledge that privileges me can come only from me and not through other devices, such as the ones most 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.

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

² See [TED Talks by Sugata Mitra](#).