

## **IMAGINING SUSTAINABILITY**

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### **Course Description**

Sustainability is one of the most influential ideas in the contemporary world. The term can be found everywhere, yet there is little agreement on what it actually means. This course will introduce students to the critical study of sustainability by identifying some of the most important meanings and applications of the term within academia and in different sectors of society.

More than a mere buzzword, sustainability can be understood as a human aspiration (i.e., an ideal of what it means to live well or to flourish) embedded within a larger framework of assumptions about "what is" and "what ought to be." As such, different ideals of sustainability represent visions of an imagined future--what might be called "counter-worlds" to current conditions--that define what a good society should be. As Miriam Greenberg notes, "Sustainability offers a vision of the future to galvanize us to imagine our world otherwise and engage in the work necessary to change it." One of the key debates within sustainability studies is whether the ideal of sustainability represents a minimal norm of survival and sacrifice in a world of scarcity, or whether sustainability seeks an enhanced or better future--an ethics of plenitude or abundance that surpasses present conditions.

This course will draw upon both humanistic resources (including religious studies, ethics, and philosophy) and social scientific perspectives (including environmental studies, cultural geography, and political ecology) to unpack the assumptions implicit in different theories of sustainability about the future we want to inhabit, and about the variety of goods (environmental, social, and economic) we want to sustain, for whom, and for how long. The course is divided into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will examine a variety of definitions and theoretical perspectives on sustainability. Topics to be explored include: the history and conceptual background of the concept; the relation between environmentalism and sustainability as social movements; the political dimensions of sustainability; sustainability as a critique of the nature/culture divide; sustainable design and the built environment; and ethical and religious dimensions of sustainability as an ideal of human flourishing. In the second half of the course, we will examine some concrete manifestations of how sustainability is currently being "imagined" in contemporary society. Topics to be explored include: Food, Health, Urban Ecology, and Sustainable Design.

### **Course Goals**

This course fulfills the Integrated Perspectives (IP) of the College Core Curriculum (CCC). The primary objectives of the course are the following: 1) to provide students with the critical thinking skills needed to analyze the content and the underlying assumptions of different disciplinary conceptions of sustainability; 2) to encourage students to "imagine" sustainability in their own ways through creative research projects that build on the interdisciplinary knowledge they have acquired in the course; and 3) to teach students "to recognize, construct, and evaluate connections among different intellectual methods, ways of learning, and bodies of knowledge," which is the stated Learning Outcome of the IP course.

## **Method of Instruction**

The instructors will model an interdisciplinary mode of intellectual dialogue and interaction by sharing joint responsibility for each class session. The course will emphasize in-depth discussion of course materials rather than formal lectures. It will highlight the different ways that knowledge about sustainability is constructed and applied from humanistic and social scientific perspectives. It will also focus on the ways in which shared goals and values often underlie different disciplinary approaches.

In general, we will use three types of activities during class sessions: (1) open-ended discussion based on readings; (2) analysis and application of concepts in the form of short exercises and small group discussions; and (3) mini-lectures summarized in PowerPoint slides and handouts.

## **Required Course Materials**

The following books (currently under consideration) can be purchased in the Bucknell Barnes & Noble Bookstore. Other readings will be available electronically on Moodle.

Julian Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities: Policy, Planning, Practice*  
 Sigurd Bergmann and Dieter Gerten, eds., *Religion and Dangerous Environmental Change: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on the Ethics of Climate and Sustainability*  
 Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity*  
 Lucas F. Johnson, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment*  
 Christian Z. Peppard and Andrea Vicini, eds., *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction*  
 Leslie Thiele, *Sustainability*  
 Jeffrey Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development*  
 Stuart Walker, *Designing Sustainability: Making Radical Changes in a Material World*  
 William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability—Designing for Abundance*

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>%</b>
Critical thinking exercises (5)	40%
Analytical papers (2)	40%
Creative visualization project	20%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100%</i>

**1. Critical thinking exercises:** In order to fully engage with the materials of the course, it is necessary to reflect critically on core themes, individual arguments, and supporting evidence that emerge from course readings. The critical thinking exercises will help you to organize your thinking and deepen your understanding of concepts and issues. Students will complete at least five exercises (out of six possible) over the course of the semester, approximately every two weeks. They will include analytical activities, reactions to the readings, reflective responses to current events, and blog entries, among others. In addition, students will complete some short, “discussion prompts” or short exercises that will be graded less formally (pass-fail). Topics and expectations for exercises will be discussed in class. Total: 40% of final grade (8% for each exercise).

**2. Analytical papers:** Students will write two analytical papers, approximately 2,000 words in length. The first paper will be due during Week 7 (mid-term) and the second paper will be due during Week 13 (prior to Thanksgiving break). The topics will be designed to engage your critical capacities to analyze various

interdisciplinary perspectives on sustainability. Further guidance and writing guidelines will be forthcoming. Total: 40% of final grade (20% for each paper).

**3. Creative Visualization Project:** The culminating assignment for the course will be a creative exercise that will allow you to imagine, visualize, or express your own understanding of sustainability using diverse media. Examples could include a poster, video, infographic, photo essay, website, drawings, creative writing, etc. The final project will be due at the end of the semester including a public presentation during finals week. Further instructions and guidance will be forthcoming. Total: 20% of final grade.

### **Additional Requirements and Expectations**

**1. Completion of all assignments:** It is essential that you complete all of the assignments for the course. *Students who do not hand in all assignments will not receive a passing grade in the course.*

**2. Attendance:** Your presence in class is important to the quality of class discussion and will be encouraged with an attendance policy. After the drop/add period, we will circulate a sign-in sheet for the purposes of taking attendance during every class session. Only excused, documented absences are acceptable (e.g., serious illness, family or personal emergencies). In addition, athletes should alert the instructors to scheduled competitions that conflict with class time. *Students who have more than two unexcused absences during the semester risk a reduction in their final grade, at the instructors' discretion.*

**3. Preparation for class:** Your success in this course depends on the effort you put into learning the materials. At a minimum, you are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to the class for which they are assigned. You should come to class prepared to discuss the readings or raise questions about them, and to listen and respond thoughtfully to your classmates' comments. *Obviously, assigned readings should be brought to class so that they can be referred to during discussion. Electronic readings from Moodle should be printed out. If you do not bring the readings, you risk being counted "absent" for that day.*

**4. Careful reading of texts:** Reading college-level material requires your full attention. *Please do not try to multi-task while reading* (e.g., watching TV or movies, using the aerobic machines in the gym while blasting music into your brain, etc.). Instead, you should make every effort to *minimize distractions and focus on the content* as much as possible.

**5. Class Participation:** Although there is no formal participation grade for this course, *making an effort to contribute to class discussion is essential to your learning and success in the course.* It also has the benefit of demonstrating the seriousness of your engagement with the materials. For those who find it difficult to speak up in class, coming to office hours to ask questions or to discuss the course content is another way you can participate.

**6. Academic Responsibility:** Academic dishonesty or misconduct is unacceptable and is taken very seriously at Bucknell. *All students are expected to follow Bucknell's official policy on academic responsibility.* Go to <http://www.bucknell.edu/AcademicResponsibility> and make sure to read all the information on the drop-down menu thoroughly. Please pay particular attention to the section titled "For Students," which defines plagiarism and the related error of paraphrasing and suggests ways to avoid them. Even mature and well-known scholars have sometimes fallen into the trap of paraphrasing another scholar's work without properly citing the source. Be on guard against these and other forms of dishonesty. *Any student who is found to have engaged in this type of misconduct will be referred to the Board of Review and subjected to appropriate penalties.*

**7. Bucknell University expectations for academic engagement:** The Committee on Instruction of the College of Arts & Sciences has recommended the following expectations for student academic engagement at Bucknell:

*"Courses at Bucknell that receive one unit of academic credit have a minimum expectation of 12 hours per week of student academic engagement. Student academic engagement includes both the hours of direct faculty instruction (or its equivalent) and the*

*hours spent on out of class student work. Half and quarter unit courses at Bucknell should have proportionate expectations for student engagement."*

### **8. Bucknell University Honor Code:**

As a student and citizen of the Bucknell University community:

1. I will not lie, cheat or steal in my academic endeavors.
2. I will forthrightly oppose each and every instance of academic dishonesty.
3. I will let my conscience guide my decision to communicate directly with any person or persons I believe to have been dishonest in academic work.
4. I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans.

### **Other Policies and Logistics**

**1. Due dates and extensions:** All written assignments should be handed in by the deadline. An extension may be granted in rare cases (e.g., serious illness, family emergency). Please consult with us preferably at least 24 hours ahead of time if you find yourself in these circumstances, or if you are facing any other serious issues that jeopardize your ability to hand your work in on time.

**2. Moodle:** In addition to the books purchased for the course, other reading materials are posted electronically on Moodle, where you will also find the syllabus, paper topics, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, and other information. We will also use Moodle to post announcements or send email reminders. Please let the instructors know via email if you have any trouble accessing any of the materials electronically.

**3. Cell phones, laptops, etc.:** The use of cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices are not permitted during class. Please turn off all such devices before coming to class or leave them at home. (Exceptions to this policy may be made by the instructors for compelling reasons only; please see us if you have any questions.)

**4. Basic Courtesy:** Please avoid interrupting class by *arriving on time* and by *using the restroom before coming to class*. If you find it necessary to leave the room for any reason, please have the courtesy to do so as quietly and unobtrusively as possible.

**5. Accommodations:** Any student who may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact Heather Fowler, Director of the Office of Accessibility Resources at 570-577-1188 or hf007@bucknell.edu who will help coordinate reasonable accommodations for those students with documented disabilities.

**6. Asking for help:** Both instructors are here to support you in developing to your full intellectual potential and achieving high academic standards. Office hours are listed on the first page of the syllabus; both instructors are also available by appointment to discuss any matter related to the course.

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## CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

### PART I:

#### INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABILITY

##### Weeks 1-2: Defining Sustainability

Readings:

- Leslie Paul Thiele, *Sustainability* (selections)  
 Joshua Yates, "Abundance on Trial: The Cultural Significance of 'Sustainability'"  
 Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (selections)  
 Sigurd Bergmann and Dieter Gerten, eds., *Religion and Dangerous Environmental Change: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on the Ethics of Climate and Sustainability* (selections)  
 Miriam Greenberg, "What on Earth is Sustainability? Toward Critical Sustainability Studies"

##### Weeks 3-4: Historical and Conceptual Foundations of Sustainability

Readings:

- Brundtland Report, "Our Common Future"  
 Jeffrey Sachs, "What is Sustainable Development?"  
 \_\_\_\_\_, "Sustainable Development Goals"  
 Willis Jenkins, "Religion and Sustainability"  
 Lucas F. Johnson, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (selections)

##### Weeks 5: Sustainability and Nature

- Robert Goodland, "The Case that the World has Reached its Limits"  
 Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics* (selections)  
 Emma Marris, "Weeding the Jungle"  
 Damian White and Chris Wilbert, "Inhabiting Technonatural Time/Spaces"

##### Week 6: Sustainability and Economy

Readings:

- Juliet Schor, "The Economics of Plenitude"  
 Herman Daly, "Economics for a Full World"  
 Giorgos Kallis, "The Degrowth Alternative"  
 Jeffrey Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (selections)

##### Week 7: Sustainability and Society

Readings:

- Julian Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities* (selections)  
 Christian Z. Peppard and Andrea Vicini, eds., *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction* (selections)  
 Thomas Dietz, "Prolegomenon to a Structural Human Ecology of Human Well-being"  
 Jeffrey Sachs, *The Age of Sustainable Development* (selections)

**PART II:**  
**MANIFESTATIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY**

**Week 8: Sustainable Food**

Readings:

Julian Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities* (selections)

David M. Kaplan, *The Philosophy of Food* (selections)

Jonathan Bloom, *American Wasteland: How American Throws Away Nearly Half its Food* (selections)

**Week 9: Health and Sustainability**

Readings:

David J. Rapport, “Healthy Ecosystems: An Evolving Paradigm”

Sasha Abramsky, “The Fragile Safety Net”

Christian Z. Peppard and Andrea Vicini, eds., *Just Sustainability* (selections)

Linda Tirado, “This is why poor people’s bad decisions make perfect sense”

**Week 10: Sustainable Cities**

Readings:

Jeffrey Sachs, “Resilient Cities”

Melissa Checker, “Urban Sustainability as Myth and Practice”

Steve Hinchcliffe and Sarah Whatmore, “Living Cities: Toward a Politics of Conviviality”

Eric Swynedouw, “Circulations and Metabolisms: (Hybrid) Natures and (Cyborg) Cities”

**Week 11: Sustainable Design**

Readings:

Stuart Walker, *Designing Sustainability: Making Radical Changes in a Material World* (selections)

William McDonough and Michael Braungart, *The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability—Designing for Abundance* (selections)

**Weeks 12-14: Final Research Projects**