

ENVS 295: Sustainability Field Studies: Emphasizing Global Warming Solutions
in Northern Vermont

(Focus Your Summer on Global Warming Solutions)

27 May–6 June 2008 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. 3XC credits Classroom:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: SUSTAINABILITY FIELD STUDIES
EMPHASIZING GLOBAL WARMING SOLUTIONS IN NORTHERN
VERMONT

I. Overview

Becoming familiar with and investigating examples of Sustainability initiatives in the Greater Burlington/Northern Vermont area through extensive field trips supplemented by readings, discussions, guest speaker presentations, and DVD/video presentations.

An Inconvenient Truth, The Eleventh Hour, Everything's Cool, the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the U.N. climate change negotiations in Bali, the 2006 Walk Toward a Clean Energy Future, Step it Up in 2007, and the Focus the Nation events in 2008 have all accentuated the problems of global climate disruption primarily caused by human-induced emissions of green house gases. This course focuses on some solutions-- found locally in northern Vermont--to these problems.

Participants will help to expand Sustainability Stories: A Field Guide to Sustainability in the Greater Burlington Area by planting seeds of change and emphasizing actual projects and working models, innovative approaches, positive role models, success stories, concrete examples, and case studies that can inspire and empower others, creating hope versus despair.

Background readings to be completed prior to classes, extended-credit project to be undertaken following classes. Prerequisite: ENVS 1 or 2 or NR 1 or CDAE 102, or permission.

Enrollment Limit: 25. Lab fee: \$25 for field trips, admission fees.

Participants in SUSTAINABILITY FIELD STUDIES will consider the process of creating communities which are environmentally sound, economically successful, and socially just; and then examine sustainability in action, where the concept gets operationalized, comes alive, becomes concrete. After gaining an understanding of sustainability from conceptual and operational points of view and becoming familiar with successful sustainability initiatives at the local, national, and international levels, students will feature an individual or group in the Greater Burlington/Chittenden County portion of the Lake Champlain Basin Bioregion who can serve as a role model or example for others to follow or emulate in bringing about the transition to more environmentally sustainable communities. In that sense, you will serve as “credible biographers” for local sustainability heroines and heroes by producing “stories” which profile and celebrate such individuals and groups. Thus, this course recognizes the important role of positive role models in affecting peoples’ sustainable and environmentally-responsible behavior. It goes beyond identifying environmental problems to actually focusing on solutions.

II. Course Objectives:

- (1) To gain an understanding of sustainability from conceptual and operational points of view.
- (2) To become familiar with successful sustainability initiatives at the local, national, and international levels.
- (2) To gain insights and advice and suggestions from interesting subjects of your own and other students’ term projects.
- (3) To learn about positive solutions to environmental problems, and gain empowerment in the process.
- (5) To consider the processes of utopian visioning and creating alternative futures. Clarify your own utopian vision--how you think the world should be, desirable futures you would like to help create--and become familiar with and employ environmental and social change strategies in seeking to achieve your utopian vision.
- (6) To employ “Writing Across the Curriculum” approaches to improve thinking and writing skills.

III. Nature of the Learning Experience

A. Class Format

The course will be conducted as a junior-senior/graduate level seminar. Seminar discussion of the readings, field trips, guest speaker presentations, DVDs/videotapes, and assignments will constitute the structure for most of the class sessions, although there will occasionally be lectures, individual and group presentations, etc. as well. Active participation by all class members (including raising questions related to reading assignments) is essential if the class is to be a success. Everyone in the class depends upon your acquired knowledge and upon your thoughtful and informed comments. Therefore, you should come to class prepared to contribute actively to class discussions. You must do the readings in such a way that you are able to evaluate, describe, and comment on them. Each class builds on the one before it, so readings must be reinforced by note-taking and remembered for use in different discussion contexts. Your journals will be helpful in this regard.

B. Readings

The required texts for this course are:

McKibben, Bill, Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community (Holt, 2007)

McKibben, Bill, Wandering Home: A Long Walk Across American's Most Hopeful Landscape: Vermont's Champlain Valley and New York's Adirondacks (Crown Journeys, 2005)

Northwest Earth Institute, Choices for Sustainable Living (NWEI, 2007)

Northwest Earth Institute, Global Warming: Changing Course (NWEI, 2007)

There will be selections from such other books as:

Edwards, Andres R., The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift (New Society, 2005)

Gershon, David, Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5000 Pounds (Empowerment Institute, 2006)

Hawken, Paul, Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw it Coming (Viking, 2007)

Kolbert, Elizabeth, Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change (Bloomsbury, 2006)

Lappe, Frances Moore and Anna Lappe, Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet (Tarcher/Putnam, 2003)

Lerner, Steve, Eco-Pioneers: Practical Visionaries Solving Today's Environmental Problems (MIT, 1997)

Lopez, Barry, selector & arranger & introducer, The Future of Nature: Writing on a Human Ecology from Orion Magazine (Milkweed Editions, 2007)

McKibben, Bill, Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and Durable Future (Times Book, 2007)

McKibben, Bill, Hope, Human and Wild: True Stories of Living Lightly on the Earth (Milkweed, 2007)

Additional required readings will be available as xeroxed copies or on reserve in Bailey-Howe Library or on electronic reserve.

To derive maximum benefit from the course, it is essential that you:

(1) complete the assigned readings in advance of class (see COURSE SCHEDULE) and

(2) allow some time for reflecting on what you read (the journal entries are intended to help in this regard).

C. Journals-Field Notebooks

Journal writing is different from almost all other writing that you do in that its end is really the *process* of writing, rather than the written *product* itself. In your journal you engage in a form of writing known as "expressive writing." This is the form of writing closest to thought. It is the same as the voice that you use to talk to yourself all the time ("Uh oh! I can't believe I..."). In contrast, "transactive writing" is the form of writing that you use to communicate to others. While transactive writing must be clearly organized, and carefully worded, expressive writing can be raw -- pure thought poured out onto the page.

The wonderful thing about journal keeping -- as those of you who already keep journals know -- is that it offers the opportunity to give full range to your ideas, exploring and clarifying your thinking in a way not possible without the written word; yet it frees you from the constraints of conforming your writing style to the standards necessary to communicate with others. In your journal, you become actively engaged with your ideas and experiences. Through the free writing process you make connections, build relationships, focus, and stretch your thinking.

Specific journal-writing exercises will be given in class and as homework assignments. They will relate to your term project, the reading assignments, field

trips, guest speaker presentations, DVDs/videotapes, etc. They are intended to help you process and incorporate your own ideas and to reflect on the ideas of others. All of the individual submissions to the instructor will be much easier if you make journal entries regularly and keep up.

There will be different kinds of journal entries for this course:

(1) We will use the journals in class to start discussions, to focus attention upon topics, to draw connections between readings and class discussions, to summarize discussions, and to respond to field trips or guest speakers.

(2) Longer entries of a reflective or comparative nature, reflecting upon what you have written or done, or comparing some aspect of the class with some other aspect of your life. Think of how the class relates to other classes you have taken, books you have read, places you have visited. For these longer, reflective pieces, give full range to your ideas and impressions.

In keeping with the "writing across the curriculum" approach, each journal entry that you write should be for a minimum of five minutes, about one page long. This means that you should write continuously for at least five minutes, without stopping your pen. Longer entries are better than short entries, to more fully develop your thoughts, insights, ideas, and questions. The more that you write, the more you will be actively engaged by your subject. Each entry must have a short descriptive title and a date. Your journal should show a serious, continuous involvement with the course material.

Journal writing may be new to you. I know from my experience that when you make frequent entries in your journal, and when you take those entries seriously as your own thoughts, you will enjoy writing them. Your journals will help the class material to be more meaningful, more focused and more fun. You will be writing what you choose to write and remember about this course.

Varieties of Writing:

(1) Poetic writing

(2) Transactional writing

- Purpose: Communicate to an audience
- Features: Clear, credible, conventional
- Examples: Reports, term papers, etc.

(3) Informal writing

- Purpose: Find out what you think, feel, and know
- Features: Informal, like speech, writer-based ("I"), "thinking on the page," unconventional
- Examples: Journals, diaries, first drafts, letters to friends, grocery lists

Specifically for this course, this written journal will be combined with your drawings, photographs, etc. from the field trips and guest speaker presentations.

D. Papers

- Paper defining sustainability and scorecard for analyzing/assessing/evaluating/measuring sustainability initiatives (10):

In 5 double-spaced typewritten pages or less, provide a working definition of sustainability and operationalize the concept by providing concrete examples. Draw on the course readings as well as other sources you discover. In addition, develop a scorecard or list of criteria for analyzing/ assessing/ evaluating/measuring sustainability initiatives. You will apply your scorecard to many of the sites/venues we visit in this course.

Choose any 2 of the following (10 each):

- Product origin as element of footprint analysis:

Pick an item and try to determine or trace the materials that went into its manufacture and the energy that went into its manufacture and transport from its place of origin to you the ultimate consumer (and its disposition after you are finished with it)

[Ecological Footprint Calculator software is available at one or more of these sites:

- <http://www.redefiningprogress.org/programs/sustainabilityindicators/ef/>
- <http://www.bestfootforward.com/footprintlife.htm>
- <http://www.csf.concord.org/esf/>
- <http://www.myfootprint.org>
- <http://www.lead.org/leadnet/footprint/intro.htm>]

- Visionary newspaper article

Choose one item from the vision for the Burlington community, 2017, exercise and write a newspaper article (dateline: Burlington, 2017) describing conditions once your vision has been fulfilled. Have fun!

- Paper on community and community building/creating community:

What is community? What contributes to community; what are some elements of community? How do you create or build community? Feel free in your paper to react to the “Bowling Alone” article.

- Paper on indicators:

What are indicators, and what role do they play in sustainability initiatives? Why is GNP or GDP not a good indicator?

- Point-counterpoint” debate: for-profit business and capitalist system are the best hope for achieving sustainability v. for-profit business and capitalist system are the biggest obstacle to achieving sustainability.
- Strategy paper to convince people to consume less OR “Ad-buster” advertisement. [<http://www.adbusters.org/home/> and especially <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/fashion/>]

E. Term Project

Each student will develop a written term paper--not to exceed 20 double-spaced typewritten pages--which features an individual or group in the Greater Burlington/Chittenden County portion of the Lake Champlain Basin Bioregion who :

- * can serve as a role model or example for others to follow or emulate in bringing about the transition to more environmentally-sustainable communities
- * takes action at the local grassroots level to deal with, or minimize the impacts of, global environmental problems
- * has a positive vision of a sustainable future environment....and acts to achieve that vision, to turn that vision into reality
- * solves environmental problems
- * initiates real change out of concern for the earth and her/his fellow human beings
- * is a catalyst for change, a pioneer, a leader, a risk-taker
- * offers courageous, creative, innovative approaches
- * inspires, encourages, and empowers others
- * informs others of the possible beneficial actions that can be taken
- * through her/his actions, demonstrates the power of the individual
- * illustrates how one person can make a difference.

This activity is based on the premise that “once something has been done, it seems obvious that it could have been done. But before it’s even been attempted--let alone attempted for a long time, let alone attempted with a degree of success--it may be perceived to be impossible...if it is conceived of at all.” Collectively, we can spread the word to others about these examples/role models/heroes and heroines in our midst, so that they can respond by giving them encouragement and helping them to get their jobs done--or by starting their own initiatives for finding solutions to global environmental problems and for healing the earth and for living more sustainably.

Your term paper will become an integral part of Sustainability Stories: A Field Guide to Sustainability in the Greater Burlington Area. Your paper should be written in the same fashion as each chapter in Ecopioneers and Hope’s Edge

and each of the 3 case studies in Hope, Human and Wild, in which your paper outlines the nature of the problem(s) and then profiles the individual or group and her/his solution to that/those problem(s).

Due Date: Final draft of written term paper due: 6 July 2008

F. Grading and Expectations:

Journal and active participation and scorecards(and quizzes?)	20
Papers	30
Term project	<u>50</u>
TOTAL	100

Each participant is expected to be in attendance at all class sessions, to complete reading assignments and required assignments on time, and to participate and become actively involved in class sessions. I expect that you read, study, and work on assignments an average of 2 hours for every hour of class.

In grading for this course, I employ criterion-referencing assessment. You must reach certain criteria; that is, I have minimum-accepted standards regardless of who is in the class. My task is to help you succeed. If everybody in the class performs excellent quality work, everybody receives a grade of A. (This approach is quite different from norm-referencing assessment, which assumes that there is a normally-distributed range of abilities within the class and the grades are, therefore, spread accordingly.)

And what is my role as instructor? My primary role is to serve as a facilitator, to help make things happen. I hope to inspire you and motivate you by offering relevant, confidence-building, attention-focusing experiences. I see myself as a catalyst, coach, guide, prod, question-asker. I also hope to serve as a resource person to help direct you to personnel resources (e.g., potential subjects for your term project) and physical resources (e.g., interesting books, DVDs/videotapes, journal articles, etc.).