

## HCOL 185 H

### Political Economy for a Finite Planet

Fall 2015

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**Michael Wironen**, PhD Student, Gund Institute for Ecological Economics

<p><b>Class meetings:</b></p> <p>Room 016 University Heights North</p> <p><i>During September:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tuesdays 8:30 to 9:45</li><li>• Sundays 4:30 to 5:45</li></ul> <p><i>Commencing Oct 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• T, Thurs 8:30 to 9:45</li></ul>	<p><b>Office hours, Zencey:</b></p> <p><i>During September:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By arrangement on Sunday afternoons.</li></ul> <p><i>Commencing Oct. 1:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tues. mornings after class, or by arrangement.</li></ul> <p><b>Office hours, Wironen:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tues. mornings after class, or by arrangement.</li></ul> <p>Both Zencey and Wironen have offices in the Gund Institute (Johnson House, 617 Main St.)</p>
<p>Email: <a href="mailto:Eric.Zencey@uvm.edu">Eric.Zencey@uvm.edu</a></p> <p><a href="mailto:mwironen@uvm.edu">mwironen@uvm.edu</a></p>	<p>Phone: Professor Zencey's cell 802 477 2277</p>

### Catalog Description

Our planet is finite. Our political and economic systems were designed for an infinite planet. These difficult truths frame this inquiry into the historical origins of our political economy and what can be done to transform it into an ecologically and socially sustainable system. Topics covered range from the laws of thermodynamics to the laws of supply and demand; from the “empty planet” assumptions encoded into the U.S. Constitution by way of the work of 18<sup>th</sup> century democratic theorist John Locke to the probable future of Fifth Amendment Takings cases (which will prove to be one of the contact points between infinite planet expectations and finite planet reality); from a history of human energy use to alternative visions for how our economy (and its political controls) should be understood, maintained and operated.

The main goal of our studies will be to empower us to become informed participants in our culture's transition to a sustainable relationship with the ecosystems in which we are

embedded. This transition is inevitable; by definition unsustainable systems do not last. The only question is what sort of sustainable system we will have—one we choose, one that evolves through crisis, accident, and catastrophe or (most likely) something that is a mixture of both. Our particular focus will be an examination of critical leverage points where efforts to change the system will have amplified effect, with energy, money, food, economic theory, and property law prominent among them.

## Objectives

This course examines the ways that contemporary economic and political theory, and institutions and practices grounded in it, encode the assumption that the planet is infinite. It asks you to explore and evaluate ways of adapting those ideas, institutions and practices to a world that has ecological limits. Many people have come to the realization that our physical infrastructure needs to be adapted to finite-planet reality: we need solar and other renewable energy systems, we need a post-petroleum agriculture, we need mass transit, we need compact village and urban centers in a healthy, working landscape. Less obvious are the changes that need to be made to our intellectual infrastructure; this course examines those changes as well.

As noted, the primary objective of the course is to empower you to become informed participants, even leaders, in our culture's transition to a sustainable relationship to its host ecosystems. Subsidiary objectives for the course include developing your understanding of:

- The four facets--ecological, economic, social, and cultural--of sustainability;
- The laws of thermodynamics and their importance to economic and ecological theorizing and modeling;
- Human energy use as a powerful explanatory factor in world history;
- The origins of modern democratic and economic theory in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century societies that inhabited a less populous, less developed planet on which infinite economic growth seemed feasible;
- The concepts of natural capital and ecosystem services;
- The perpetual-growth, infinite-planet assumptions implicit in mainstream political and economic theory;
- Contemporary crises brought on by the source-and-sink limits of planetary ecosystems, including climate change, peak oil, peak agriculture, peak water use, and peak extinction rates;
- The ethical implications of resource use, wealth creation and wealth distribution, including questions of intra-social, international and intergenerational equity and justice;
- Specific leverage points for changing an unsustainable economy, including:
  - Use of alternative indicators (like the Genuine Progress Indicator, Gross National Happiness, the Happy Planet Index, etc.);
  - Acknowledgement and measurement of the benefits of social capital;
  - Revision of a financial system dependent on infinite economic growth;
  - Changes in property law to reflect the value of ecosystem services;

- Achieving sustainable throughput of matter and energy in the economy with a focus on energy, water and food.

### **Format of the Course**

The class is a seminar, which means in-class discussion is central to your learning experience. Participation therefore counts for a great deal (see “How you will be evaluated,” below). You’ll have focused assignments (assigned readings and regular writing in your learning journal, described below) framing the discussion each session. For the month of September, the class will meet on Tuesdays and Sundays, with the Tuesday session facilitated by Michael Wironen and the Sunday session facilitated by me (Eric Zencey). There will be a midterm exam; in lieu of a final exam, class members will make a presentation of their capstone projects to the class. There will be other opportunities for you to practice the skill of presenting to a small group, as you do smaller research projects and share the results (see “**scavenger hunt**” assignments below).

### **Writing and Research Assignments**

In addition to completing the assigned readings, preparation for class will include writing in your **learning journal**. You’ll use the Blackboard Journal feature to do this so that the seminar facilitators can review your entry before class. The writing will usually be free form, as you respond to the reading in your own way (keeping in mind the general guidelines for learning journals given in a separate handout). On occasion the instructor might ask for the class to take up a particular thought or issue in the learning journal—that is, on occasion your learning journal entry might be in response to a prompt from the instructor.

Some students like to keep a physical learning journal, one that includes sketches, diagrams, conceptual maps, etc. This is perfectly acceptable—as long as you scan and upload the relevant pages to the online journal so that the instructors can see it. (And, since scans never do full justice to that kind of work, it would be nice for the instructors to look at the originals once in a while.)

*For classes that meet on Sunday, the entries are due by 10:00 a.m. that morning.  
For classes that meet at 8:30 a.m., entries are due by midnight the night before.*

Both of us (Zencey and Wironen) will read these, and you’ll get a general sort of response to them, but they won’t be graded. Nor will others in the class be able to view your journal--though Michael and I may call on you to share an insight or idea from your journal in the ensuing class discussion.

In addition to the learning journal, writing assignments will also include **three reflective and integrative essays** (of 500 to 800 words), a **final project** (of 3000 to 3500 words; see the fuller description below) and a final **narrative self-evaluation** of your experience and work in the course. The reflective papers and the final project will be submitted for

grading. For all graded work, you'll have the chance to submit a draft and then revise it in response to feedback before getting a final grade. Your final grade for any revised writing will reflect a 40% - 60% split: 40% for the first submission, 60% for the revision.

In addition to the reading and the journal writing, sometimes the assignment for class will include a small-scale research project. (One possibility, by way of example: "find and bring to the next class several examples of how the term 'sustainable' has been used in news media.") I think of these as "**scavenger hunt**" assignments—everyone in the class goes out to see what they can find and in the next class we compare what was found. When you're sent off to do this sort of research, you'll be expected to submit some kind of documentary evidence of what you found. The assignment will determine what counts as the documentary evidence: it might be a photocopy of a paragraph from a book, a copy of a map, or a short write-up that reports the finding. In each case you'll need to cite sources appropriately.

For your convenience, here are details on the various kinds of writing:

*Learning Journal:* This you keep regularly, using the Journal function on the course Blackboard site. The course requirement is that you write one entry for each class session (*before* the class session), in which you respond in some way to the reading (see the separate guidelines on learning journals for useful approaches to this). That's the minimum. You are welcome to use the learning journal more ambitiously than that. You could use it to record responses to the class discussion (thus framing each class session with both a before and an after entry). You could keep a regular, maybe even daily record of the connections you make between the course material and other aspects of your experience (the learning you're doing in other courses, the conversations you have outside of class, your experience of news and other media, and so on). You can highlight ideas, contradictions, or questions that arise that might form the basis for a reflective essay or your final project.

Beyond the minimum expectation, you can do anything else in your journal that you think or feel contributes to your learning of the material. Individual entries in the Learning Journal will not be graded, but the keeping of the journal is worth 10% of your final grade. In practice this means that the journal is a pass-fail activity for 10% of your grade. Keep it regularly and well (i.e., meet the minimum expectation outlined here) and you'll get an A for 10% of your grade. You'll lose some consideration if the required entries are sloppy, ungrammatical, perfunctory, or give any other indication that the thinking and writing is slapdash.

*Reflective essays:* You'll submit three reflective essays for grading during the semester. One may be an extension of a learning journal entry, if you wish; the others (or all three) will be in response to a prompt set by the instructor. You'll have the opportunity to revise each of these essays in response to feedback from the instructor, and your final grade on each will be a 40-60 blending of the grades on the original (40) and the revised (60) paper.

*Final Project:* The subject, scope and form of your final, capstone project will emerge in discussions with me and other classmates. The purpose of the capstone paper is to integrate aspects of the course content and to give you practice at completing a significant research project that extends your knowledge. It will serve as the foundation of a presentation you make to your fellow classmates during the course's scheduled finals period. The presentation will be 15 minutes with 5 minutes reserved for Q and A. The quality of the presentation will contribute to your grade for the project.

You'll tackle the paper in stages. The course schedule shows five distinct deadlines for the submission of these stages. They are:

- 10/22 Thesis statement (problem-solution pairing) is due
- 11/3 Preliminary conceptual outline and annotated bibliography is due
- 11/17 Detailed structural outline first 3 paragraphs and writing plan due
- 12/1 Completed paper due [comments on this draft will be returned by 12/8]
- 12/15 Final version of paper due

*Portfolio:* Taken together, your three graded essays and the final project constitute your portfolio for the course. The portfolio is due on December 15.

*Narrative self-evaluation.* The narrative self-evaluation is your summative reflection on your learning for the semester. It will be at least 750 words but could be significantly longer if you find it useful to go into greater detail. The self-evaluation is yours to create for yourself—it isn't graded—and it should respond to questions like these:

- What do you know now and what can you do now that you didn't know and couldn't do before?
- What were the principle learning activities that brought you this knowledge and these skills?
- What resources did you make use of? (List books, articles, other readings, movies, presentations, lectures, interviews done, discussions had, etc.)
- How did you demonstrate your learning during the semester; that is, what products of study did you create?
- What were some of the high points of your learning in this subject this semester? What really worked, what do you feel you did really well or learned a lot from? Why?
- What were one or two low points? What didn't work, what do you feel you could have done better or would rather not have done at all? Why?
- Does completion of this work this semester point to other learning agendas for you in the future? If so, what's next?

The narrative self-evaluation is due at the Final Project Presentations.

## **Other Expectations**

*Participation:* It is expected that you will attend every class and participate fully in the class, including making contributions to discussion. *The single factor that most closely correlates with success in the Honors College is simple attendance.* Absences are reported to the HCOL staff so that we can track troubling or self-defeating patterns before they get out of hand. Personal or family emergencies that would require you to violate the attendance expectation are covered under college policy.

Your class participation should show that you are prepared for class—have done the reading and any other assignment—and that you have comments or questions to share. Ideally I'd hear everyone's voice at least once in every class.

**The official policy for this class is no cuts. In practice this means your final grade will be reduced by 1% for each unexcused absence.**

Excused absences include religious holidays; varsity games (of a team you're on, of course); serious illness; and death in the family. If you cannot make a class for an excusable reason you need to inform an instructor beforehand unless circumstances (such as, you were in a serious accident on the way to class) prevent this. You must also offer independent verification of the reason for the absence; otherwise the absence is unexcused. Unexcused absences include family vacation, wedding, having a plane ticket for travel that has you miss class, signing up for a field trip for another class, and of course oversleeping.

The relevant university policy on attendance is in the student handbook.

*Group work and peer consulting and reviewing:* At several points in the semester we'll do small group work. This will help ease you into another course expectation: you'll work with one or more other members of the class, to help each other to articulate your final project and to review drafts of the work at various stages.

*Individual meetings with the instructor:* You're expected to **meet with the instructor** for an individual appointment at least twice during the semester—once in the first two or three weeks, and again to discuss the topic for your final paper. These two meetings are part of your class participation and contribute to your grade in that area. You are of course welcome (even expected!) to seek the instructor out during office hours (or other times by appointment) if you have any questions, issues, or problems arising from the class.

## **Methods of Evaluation**

You'll be evaluated on your written work as collected in your portfolio; on whether your journal has been kept well and is serving you as a useful tool; on your class participation; on your performance on the midterm exam and several quizzes; on your performance as a peer collaborator and reviewer; and on the quality and clarity of your project presentation. Written work will be evaluated according to the writing rubrics that are included as part of this syllabus. I encourage you to think in terms of these rubrics when

revising your own work and when helping classmates think about their writing. The relative weight that each of these products of study will have in determining your grade is given in a chart below.

*Exams:* There will be one quiz during the semester checking your comprehension of course material (the technical vocabulary, concepts, theories and other content) and your ability to apply this material to events and circumstances in the world. The midterm will be a mixture of objective (short-answer, matching, fill-in-the-blank) and take-home essay under deadline (as in, you'll have perhaps 24 hours to prepare the essay and submit it, which renders last minute studying problematic.) There is no final exam, but during the scheduled finals period you'll present your capstone project to your peers.

*Other forms of evaluation:*

The methods of evaluation outlined above will be applied to all class members. The class as a whole, or individuals within the class, may request to be evaluated on additional materials or activities, and to have those evaluations factored into their grades. The nature of those materials—be they tests, additional essays, public presentations, video presentations of class content for a general audience, etc.—is subject to mutual agreement before their production is undertaken. (Don't just go and make a video for Youtube, and then present it as part of your portfolio, without talking to me first!)

*Relative weights of study activities:*

Product	Percentage of final grade
Three graded essays	15
Learning journal	10
Capstone project	25
Quiz	10
Midterm exam	25
Participation	15

## Readings

There are two books on the syllabus that are available from the bookstore.\*

Daly, Herman and Joshua Farley, *Ecological Economics: Principles and Applications*

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\* The books have not come into the bookstore as of 8/27. The Zencey book is available through Project Muse on the UVM library website. Chapters from the Daly and Farley book will be made available as needed via Blackboard until the books arrive at the bookstore.

Zencey, Eric. *The Other Road to Serfdom and the Path to Sustainable Democracy*.

(That's right—I've assigned a book I wrote. I did this because I want you to encounter the material in it and I certainly didn't want to lecture it all at you. Having you read it seemed the most efficient and effective way to communicate it to you.)

In the syllabus, "Zencey" refers to this book, while "D and F" refers to (wait for it...) the Daly and Farley book.

Most of the other assigned reading will be found online, either on the course Blackboard site or easily found on the web. In some cases physical, hard-copy materials may have to be placed on reserve.



	HIGHEST		AVERAGE		FAILING
Context and purpose	Demonstrates very good understanding of context and purpose of the writing; is responsive to the assigned task, which focuses all elements in the work. Purpose is clear throughout.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context and purpose and is mostly responsive to task. Purpose is evident nearly throughout	Begins to show awareness of context and purpose of the writing; is only partially responsive to task; purpose is sometimes obscured or not in evidence	Demonstrates minimal attention to context and purpose and little awareness of the expectations of the instructor or others as audience	Is off-task; displays no regard for expectations of instructor or audience
Content	Uses appropriate, relevant, compelling content, illustrating mastery of the topic and effectively communicating the writer's understanding	Uses appropriate and relevant content but fails to be fully compelling for want of additional relevant content; displays good acquaintance with but not mastery of topic	Uses appropriate and relevant content in some but not all of the work. Conveys marginally acceptable acquaintance with topic	Uses insufficient, inappropriate or irrelevant content; fails to convey sturdy acquaintance with topic	Has little to no appropriate or relevant content.
Conventions	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to the discipline and/or writing task, including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices	Demonstrates consistent use of conventions, including organization, content, presentation, stylistic choices	Work is somewhat disorganized: elements of repetitious or apparently random presentation; some stylistic choices are inappropriate	Very little organizational effort is in evidence; presentation is confused and confusing; stylistic choices are mostly inappropriate	No organizational effort is in evidence; presentation is obscure and uncommunicative
Sources and evidence	Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources and evidence to develop ideas relevant to purpose	Demonstrates consistent use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources and evidence to support ideas that are familiar within the discipline and supportive of purpose	Demonstrates an attempt to use high quality, credible, relevant sources and evidence but use of these is not consistent	Demonstrates an attempt to use sources and evidence, but these are not credible, high-quality, or relevant	Makes no attempt to use sources and evidence to support the purpose
Control of mechanics	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning; is virtually error-free	Uses straightforward language that conveys meaning to readers with clarity and has few errors of usage, spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.	Uses serviceable language that generally conveys meaning with clarity; writing includes some errors	Gives evidence of lack of control of mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.). Work is not clear due to errors.	Gives little or no evidence of control of mechanics and fails to communicate clear meaning

Prof. Zencey

## HCOL 185 Political Economy for a Finite Planet

### Course Schedule

#### 1. Introduction to the Course

9/1 Reading: Syllabus  
Activity/Assignment due today: none

9/6 Reading: D and F, introduction and chap. 1; independent research  
Activity/Assignment due today: share research

#### 2. Paradigms and Clear Thinking

9/8 Reading: D and F chap. 2 & 3; Zencey, Introduction & chap 1.

9/13 Reading: Zencey, "Dewey's Process of Inquiry;" Naughton, "Thomas Kuhn: the man who changed the way the world looked at science," *The Guardian*, August 18, 2012; handout from Adler's *How to Read a Book*

#### 3. The Laws of Thermodynamics and of Markets

9/15 Reading: D and F, chapter 4; Zencey, pp. 42-71.

9/20 Reading: "Energy Literacy," pp. 3-24 from Butler, Lerch and Wuerthner, *The Energy Reader*.

#### 4. Energy in World History

9/22 Reading: Jackson, "Five Carbon Pools"; Hall and Klitgaard, "Energy and Wealth Production: an Historical Perspective."

9/27 Reading: Homer-Dixon, pp. 31-75 from *The Upside of Down*. Zencey, 96-102.  
**Due: first graded essay**

#### 5. Natural and Social Capital

9/29 **QUIZ**  
Reading on Natural Capital, TBD

10/1 Reading: Putnam, "Bowling Alone," *Journal of Democracy*, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html>;  
Garrett Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons."  
Activity in class: view "The Power of Community"

#### 6. Infinite Planet Thinking

10/6 Reading: Zencey, 118 to 161 (EKC and Simon-Ehrlich Bet); additional independent reading on EKC or Simon-Ehrlich Bet.

10/8 Reading: [selection from a standard economics text book, TBD]; D and F, Chaps 5 & 6

## 7. Reality: Source and Sink Limits

10/13 Reading: D & F, chap 7;  
Eric Zencey, "Where Infinite Growth Meets Biophysical Limit," at <http://steadystate.org/where-infinite-growth-meets-biophysical-limit/>  
from and on Malthus, TBD; reading on other source and sink limits TBD  
Activity/Assignment: in class

10/15 **MIDTERM EXAM**

## 8. Levers and Locke

10/22 Reading: Donella Meadows, "Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System," at [http://www.sustainer.org/pubs/Leverage\\_Points.pdf](http://www.sustainer.org/pubs/Leverage_Points.pdf)  
Activity/Assignment: attendance at and report on a campus or off-campus event connected with "New Economy Week" in Vermont

10/22 Reading: Locke, "The Second Treatise," to chap 4, "On Property," plus secondary/contextual work.

**Final Project Milestone: thesis statement/problem-solution pairing due**

## 9. Money

10/27 Reading: D & F, Chap. 14, "Money"; Zencey, pp. 96-117 (Pyramid scheme, financial crisis).  
**Required Activity:** attendance at a research workshop in the library TBA

10/29 Catch-up day, or a second session on Money.  
Reading: TBD  
**Due: second graded essay**

## 10. Justice, Ecological and Otherwise

11/3 Reading: D & F, chap 18, "Globalization", particularly "Just Distribution"; Zencey, 208-225 (SUVs and Climate Justice); Monbiot, chaps 1 & 3 from *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning* (pp. 1-19 and pp. 43-58; introduction and chapter 2 are recommended as well)

**Final Project milestone: Preliminary conceptual outline & annotated Bibliography due**

11/5 Reading: Shiva, "Outsourcing Pollution...." From *The Energy Reader*.  
(Recommended: see her interview online at DemocracyNow.org)  
Watts, "The Curse of Oil in the Niger Delta," from *The Energy Reader* or his more technical version online

## 11. Alternative Indicators

11/10 Reading: Zencey, "Sustainable, Happy, Efficient." Erickson et al., "Findings and Recommendations," VT GPI Report  
**Due: third graded essay**

11/12 Reading: GNH instrument, GNH webpages

Activity/Assignment: respond to/analyze/critique adapt GNH instrument

## 12. Fulcrum Points and Policy Objectives

11/17 Reading: D & F, chap 20, "General Policy Design Principles";  
**Due: Writing plan, detailed structural outline and first 3 paragraphs of final project**

11/19 Reading: David Orr, "Governance in the Long Emergency," at  
<http://www.resilience.org/stories/2013-05-14/>

Activity/Assignment: meet with peer editor(s) this week; choose additional reading from list on Blackboard for presentation to class 12/ 3.

## 13. THANKSGIVING BREAK

Activity: work on capstone paper; read for presentation 12/3

## 14. The Great Transition

12/1 Reading: The Transition Town Primer (online); Zencey, pp. 225-242  
**Due: complete draft of final project for instructor review/feedback**

12/3 Presentations by class on additional reading as assigned/agreed upon from optional and recommended readings given on Blackboard. A partial list:  
McKibben, "Three Steps...."  
Heinberg, "The Case for Conservation"  
Lovins, "Reinventing Fire"  
Cafaro, "No Sustainability without Limits to Growth"  
ETC Group, "...The False Promise of Geoengineering"  
Homer-Dixon, final chapter from *The Upside of Down*  
Kunstler, final chapter from *The Long Emergency*

## 15. Putting it all together

12/8 **Last class: practical political economy**

Final project draft returned for revision

12/15 Portfolio (Graded Essays, Final Project) due.

12/?? Finals Week: self-evaluation due at presentation of final project to the class