Introduction to Sustainability

Mansfield College
9:40-11:30 am, Tu/F

Prep-Chris Wells
On-Rosa 243

Course Description

The term “sustainability” is everywhere but what it means can be slippery. On the one hand, it is used to conjure green virtue, in the form of catchy advertising slogans designed to attract consumer goods, and in the form drawn from one of these lists: Ten Simple Things YOU Can Do to Save the Planet. On the other hand, sustainability is also a threshold involving broad and fluid definitions and actions. In this course, we will learn about sustainability in a sophisticated way to understand, analyze, and assess a complex world. We will look at problems that play across scales from the local to the global, that span across the fabric of our everyday lives, and that have no clear, straightforward solutions. We will arguably sustainability as a set of analytical tools designed to provide some of the tools and some of the most important questions of our time. How can people work together to imagine and build just and sustainable communities while nurturing healthier, more diverse ecosystems? How can we understand and confront the complicated social, environmental, and economic problems of modern life in the context of a rapidly warming world?

Contact Information

Prof. Chris Wells
webmaster@moodle.edu

You can always reach me by email, and I will usually get back to you quickly, and as within 48 hours on weekdays. You have my full attention.

Call me “Chris”

She/her/hers

Students are sometimes not sure what to call their professors. Like many other professors, I hate to use my first name, though it is used for formal email, Professor Wells or Dr. Wells are both fine. Please be sure to choose what you would like to be called, as well.

Office Hours

My standing office hours this semester will be after class on Tuesday and Thursday, and on Wednesdays from 1–3. If either of those times works for you, you can drop in without needing an appointment. If the scheduled times don’t work, send me an email suggesting a few times that will work for you so that I can check them against my schedule.

Telling students to come to me is not my favorite thing about being a professor. No question is too small, and no praise is too large. If you want to talk, we can talk.

Preceptor: Kaela Bloemendaal

Office hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 11:00–11:30 am

kaela.bloemendaal@ox.ac.uk

I will have office hours on Saturday afternoons 1–2 (in the following on the first floor of OIXE) and in the evenings Thursday 9–11 in the Tuck. (Please Email me to come here.) Ask me questions about the course material and ideas around me with me; or I can stay at any step in the writing process. It is also okay if you’re feeling stuck or not writing exactly what you need with your job to be a necessary one for you, so without your engagement, it is because incredibly dull.

Challenging Times

These are challenging times. As one who collaborates as it isn’t all in the same bed, but all of us are confronting the same storms. The president is right. Constantly moving up to stay healthy is rough. Climate change is rough. Racial inequality is rough. Our national politics are rough. Despite these challenges, let’s try to be kind and patient with one another, and with ourselves. Let’s learn and explore as much as we can while acknowledging that there are limits to our time, energy, capacity, and attention that external circumstances will dictate. If things aren’t working for you, whatever the measure, please let us know and I’ll do what I can to help.

This syllabus does not stand on its own!

Our Moodle site (moodle.mansfield.ox.ac.uk) links just a small resource, but is also our primary point of contact for this class. In addition to hosting this syllabus, it is where you can find our complete daily schedule, as well as links to all of our readings, discussions, activities, and assignments. In short, it’s where we are trying to begin the course. Please familiarize yourself with the Moodle site before doing anything else, and we are happy to support you if you have any questions or run into any problems!
Policies

Attendance, Participation, and Engagement

Active engagement and participation in class discussions and activities in all classes are required of all students. Poor attendance, tardiness, and inappropriate classroom behavior may jeopardize your academic success.

Class Recordings

These course materials may be recorded by students and uploaded to the Canvas site (in the Announcements). This policy is consistent with the university’s policies regarding student privacy. Students who record classes or upload them to the Canvas site will be subject to the university's policies regarding student privacy. Students who record classes or upload them to the Canvas site will be subject to the university's policies regarding student privacy.

Helpful Resources

Use a helpful resource that is right for you. Blackboard is a powerful tool that can help you learn how to be a better student. You can do this by using the Blackboard resources in your Blackboard class. You can get help by using the Blackboard resources in your Blackboard class. You can get help by using the Blackboard resources in your Blackboard class.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty involves the unauthorized use of inventions, ideas, and the like. The instructors in this course are committed to ensuring that each student has the opportunity to succeed. However, if you are found to be using resources that are not your own, such as classmates, you will be subject to disciplinary action as outlined in the university's policies.

Accommodations

I am committed to supporting all students of all ages in achieving their highest potential. I will accommodate all students who request reasonable accommodations and who send in their requests in a timely manner. If you have a known disability and think that you may need some type of accommodation, I would encourage you to contact me. I can be reached at 651-962-6275. Please note that this text is not intended to be used as an excuse for absences or tardiness, but rather as a means to ensure that you are fulfilling your responsibilities. If you have any questions about accommodations, please ask me or email me.

Covid Caveats

Other than the ongoing and emerging nature of COVID-19, please note that the remainder of the semester will be handled in a manner that is consistent with university policies. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your instructor or the Office of Student Affairs.

Note: These policies are subject to change at any time. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your instructor or the Office of Student Affairs.
Assignments and Grading

Writing Assignments

This course will follow the Grading Policy below. Grading will be based on the following:

- Assignments and Weekly Reflections: 50%
- Final Grades: 50%

Assignments

Weekly Reflections

- Due on Fridays
- Must be submitted by 11:59 PM
- Late submissions will be penalized

Papers

- 1 paper per week
- Due on Fridays
- Late submissions will be penalized

Late Work Policy

Late work will be accepted for a maximum of 5 days after the due date, unless otherwise specified by the instructor.

Final Grades

- Paper: 25%
- Final Exam: 25%
- Participation and Engagement: 20%
Course Topics

WK 1

INTRODUCTIONS

9/12 Thurs Introductions

WK 2

UNIT 1: The Grand Challenges of Sustainability

9/17 Tues * Cardona, Intro, chs 1-3
* United Nations, "Transforming Our World." Focus on pp. 3-6 and 14.
* Nugent, "Amsterdam Is Embracing a Radical New Economic Theory to Help Save the Environment. Could It Also Replace Capitalism?" Time, 1 Feb. 2021

9/19 Thurs * Johnsen, The Story of More, ch 7 (Finding Fish)

9/21 Fri Weekly Reflection #1 due by 5 pm

WK 3

FRAMING PROBLEM: MORE PEOPLE, MORE RESOURCE USE, MORE EVERYTHING

9/24 Tues * Johnsen, The Story of More, chs 14-16
* Climate Change 2021, Intro and Part A
* Johnsen, The Story of More, chs 17-19

9/26 Thurs * Climate Change 2021, Part B

9/28 Fri Weekly Reflection #3 due by 5 pm

UNIT 2: UNDERSTANDING PROBLEMS

WK 4

Revisions and Revising

10/5 Tues No Reading

10/7 Thurs No Class: meet with Chris and Kaela about papers and work on revisions!

10/8 Fri Revised papers due by 5 pm

WK 7

FOOD PART 1

10/12 Tues * Johnsen, The Story of More, chs 27-51 & 63-78 (chs 5-6 & 8-9)

10/14 Thurs * Pollan, "The Feed" 65-84

10/15 Fri Weekly Reflection #4 due by 5 pm

WK 8

FOOD PART 2

10/19 Tues Class Dinner Tonight! (details TBA)

10/20 Wed Weekly Reflection #5 due by 5 pm

10/21 Thurs NO CLASS: FALL BREAK

WK 9

ENERGY

10/26 Tues * Johnsen, The Story of More, chs 85-124 (chs 10-13)


10/28 Thurs Enbridge Line 3 Case Study Readings TBA

10/29 Fri Weekly Reflection #6 due by 5 pm

WK 10

CITIES

11/2 Tues Owen, "More Like Manhattan," 1-48

11/4 Thurs Fitzgerald, "Is There Treasure In Our Trash?" 116-44

11/5 Fri Weekly Reflection #7 due by 5 pm

UNIT 3: TAKING ACTION

WK 11

SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?

No Reading

11/9 Tues * Paper 2 due at start of class

* In-class lecture

* Slegers, "The Big Lie We've Told About Climate Change Is That It's Our Own Fault," Vox 27 Nov 2018

* Morris, "How to Stop Freaking Out and Tackle Climate Change?" The New York Times (2 pp.)

11/11 Thurs * Hayes, "The New Abolitionism" (19 pp.)

11/12 Fri Weekly Reflection #8 due by 5 pm

WK 12

MANIFESTOS

11/16 Tues Price, Stop Saving the Planet!, 9-61 (End 6 reasons)

11/18 Thurs Price, Stop Saving the Planet!, 63-94 (reasons 7-11)

WK 13

TAKING ACTION 1: INDIVIDUALS

* Johnsen, The Story of More, 177-89 (Appendices I & II)

* Price, Stop Saving the Planet!, 96-140 (50 Ways to Stop Saving the Planet)

11/23 Tues NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

11/25 Thurs

WK 14

TAKING ACTION 2: COLLECTIVE

11/30 Tues Student-determined readings

12/2 Thurs Student-determined readings

12/10 Fri Sustainability Manifesto due by 5 pm

WK 15

TAKING ACTION 3

12/7 Tues Student-determined readings

12/9 Thurs Student-determined readings

12/10 Fri Sustainability Manifesto due by 5 pm