

SUSTAINABILITY, JOBS AND JUSTICE - 37:575:240



About the Class

Taking a broad view of sustainability, this course will explore the deep and dynamic interconnections between democracy, economy, and environment, including fundamental changes underway in the labor market, industries, and government institutions as well as emerging trends in social, environmental, and economic justice campaigns led by labor unions, environmentalists, and other social movements. Readings will be drawn from the disciplines of labor studies, sociology, economics, history, political science, and environmental studies. The course will open with an extended primer on American political economy then examine the interconnected problems of economic, social and environmental inequality and sources of ecological degradation. The final section of the course will explore the possible futures of work and jobs in a sustainable economy, the role of unions and social movements in achieving sustainability, and the possibility of a just transition for workers and historically marginalized communities in N.J., the U.S., and globally.

About the Instructor

Todd E. Vachon, PhD is Assistant Professor of Labor Studies and Employment Relations and author of *Clean Air and Good Jobs: U.S. Labor and the Struggle for Climate Justice* as well as co-editor of *Revaluing Work(ers): Toward a Just and Sustainable Future*. Todd is also the Director of the Labor Education Action Research Network (LEARN)—the university's labor education program.

Office Hours

By appointment via Zoom or at the Labor Education Center

Course Readings

All required readings, including articles and book chapters will be available as pdf files on Canvas or via links to online sources. Please see the weekly Module at the start of each week to access readings, videos, slides, and audio clips for the week.

Primary source books for lectures and readings include:

- Wright, Erik Olin, and Joel Rogers. *American Society: How It Really Works*
- Brecher, Jeremy. *Climate Solidarity: Workers vs Warming*
- Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything*
- Speth, Gus. *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*
- Vachon, Todd E. *Clean Air and Good Jobs: US Labor and the Struggle for Climate Justice*

The following films will be viewed:

- *The Corporation*
- *Inequality for All*
- *This Changes Everything*
- *From the Ashes*

There will be additional articles and online sources assigned on particular weeks.

Learning Objectives

From the instructor:

- Display critical thinking about the relationship between economic activity and the environment
- Explain the major pillars of sustainability
- Describe the ideological and material factors behind human-environmental relations and their social inequalities
- Evaluate economic, cultural, and sociological theories of inequality
- Display appreciation of the origins and patterns of human power relations, as well as of sources of mutual affection and concern.
- Display critical imagination of future possibilities for socio-ecological relations.
- Apply facts and concepts from the course to argue convincingly against common contemporary fallacies related to sustainability, jobs, and justice

Labor Studies and Employment Relations Department:

- Analyze contemporary global issues using multiple perspectives (goal 7)

School of Management and Labor Relations:

- Evaluate the context of workplace issues, public policies and management decisions (goal V)

Course Schedule

PART I. SETTING THE STAGE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

Week 1 - Perspectives and Values

- Audio: Welcome to Class/Framing
- Video: Perspectives and Values
- Slides: The Current Moment: A Dual Crisis of Ecology and Inequality on Planet Earth
- Slides: Perspectives and Values
- Assignment: Write a Personal Narrative and post to the discussion forum by 11:59pm Thursday - view other essays and comment on 2 by 11:59pm Sunday

Week 2 - Capitalism in Theory

- Reading: Wright & Rogers - Capitalism: How It's Supposed to Work
- Slides: Capitalism: How It's Supposed to Work
- Reading: Speth Chapter 2
- Film: *The Corporation*
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 3 - American Capitalism in Practice

- Reading: Wright & Rogers - American Capitalism: How It Actually Works
- Slides: American Capitalism: How It Actually Works
- Video: A Tale of Two Cities
- Video: Tragedy of the Commons
- Reading: Klein Chapter 2
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 4 - Democracy in Theory and Practice

- Reading: Wright & Rogers - Capitalist Democracy

- Slides: Capitalist Democracy
- Reading: Speth Chapter 11
- No Discussion Forum this week
- Study for Exam 1 next Week!!!

Week 5 – EXAM 1

- EXAM #1: The Political Economy of American Society

PART II. WHAT'S SO UNSUSTAINABLE, ANYWAY?

Week 6 – Silent Spring: Unsustainable Ecological Relations

- Slides: Unsustainable Ecological Relations
- Audio: Putting a Price Tag on Nature
- Reading: Insect Extinctions
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 7 – We Are the 99%: Unsustainable Economic Relations

- Slides: Unsustainable Economic Relations
- Film: *Inequality for All*
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 8 – Equal Rights and Justice: Unsustainable Social Relations

- Slides: Unsustainable Social Relations
- Film: This Changes Everything
- Study for Exam 2 after Spring Break!!!

Week 9 – EXAM 2

- Exam #2: What's so Unsustainable, Anyway?

PART III. A BETTER WORLD IS POSSIBLE? SUSTAINABILITY, JOBS, AND JUSTICE

Week 10 – Jobs vs. the Environment: Class, Ecology, and Sustainability

- Reading: Lynas
- Reading: Obach Chapter 3
- Reading: Vachon Chapter 3

- Reading: Brecher Chapters 1-5
- No Discussion Forum this week

Week 11 – Not in my Backyard: Environmental Injustice

- Videos (x3): Environmental and Climate Justice in the U.S. and Globally
- Reading: Bullard
- Reading: Principals of EJ
- Reading: Jemez Principals
- Reading: Tessum
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 12 – Just Transitions – Planning for Environmental, Social, and Economic Sustainability

- Slides: Democracy, Economy, and Sustainability
- Video: This is What Energy Democracy Looks Like
- Reading: Vachon JT Frames
- Read Klein Chapters 9, 10, and 11; Write 2 discussion questions for class
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 13 – This is What Democracy Looks Like!: Fighting for Environmental, Social, and Economic Sustainability

- Slides: Democracy from Below
- Reading: Brecher Chapters 6-8;
- Reading: Klein Conclusion
- Film: From the Ashes
- Assignment: Post in discussion forum for this week

Week 14 – Possible Futures

- Slides: Possible Futures
- Prepare for your last exam and submit it via Canvas by 5 pm on May 6

FINAL EXAM - Due by 5 pm on May 6th

Note: weekly schedule and course readings are subject to change. Please check course announcements regularly.

Course Grading

Online Discussion Forum/Class Participation (200pts - 40%)

There will be an online discussion prompt each week (except for exam weeks and spring break). It is possible to earn up to 25 points by excellence in participation in each forum.

A forum is an interactive threaded discussion. The weekly forum will open each week on Monday, and end on Sunday and you are expected to contribute three times. Your contribution will be evaluated as follows:

- **How much you participated in a substantive way.** In general, you can think of this as requiring 3-4 SUBSTANTIVE posts that add ideas to the discussion. Of course, you will also have some posts that are not substantive but involve interaction with other students (e.g. ones that agree with a point they have already made) (5 points).
- **Was your participation ongoing and interactive?** You should have at least one substantive post by **Wednesday** night, one by **Friday** night, and another by **Sunday** night for full credit here. But additionally for full credit, you must interact with others by asking or answering questions, or by agreeing or disagreeing with them. But, remember that you must add to the discussion, not simply agree. (5 points).
- **Were your comments thoughtful and based on the readings?** Did you demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts? Did you connect the ideas from the readings or lectures to the discussion topics? In other words, what was the quality of your comments? (5 points)
- **Breadth and Evidence.** Did you comment on multiple questions or just one? Were your opinions backed by personal experience or other types of evidence? Persuasive opinions are backed by a variety of types of evidence – from other academic sources, from current events, and from personal experience (5 points).
- **Were your comments expressed clearly and appropriately?** While it may seem like a group text thread--you must use standard written English of the sort that would be appropriate in a work setting (5 points).

Be sure to adhere to the discussion post rules and guidelines and the Forum Grade Rubric

Note: Threaded discussions (forums) are closed once a week is over so you must be sure to stay current with the class in terms of online discussion. Showing up is 90% of success in life! It is also part of your participation grade, so be sure to participate in the class forum!

Exam #1 (100pts - 20%)

Exam 1 will be a standard exam comprised primarily of multiple choice and short answer questions based on the readings and lectures from the first section of the course.

Exam #2 (100pts - 20%)

Exam 2 will be a standard exam comprised primarily of multiple choice and short answer questions based on the readings and lectures from the second section of the course.

Exam #3 (100pts - 20%)

The final exam will be an open book, take-home essay that will draw content from the entire semester.

Extra Credit (up to 15pts total to be added to exam grades)

At the time of each exam, one extra credit opportunity will be provided. It might involve attending a virtual event, watching a video, or listening to a speaker. Students will write a short response paper and can earn up to five points of extra credit on the exam score for that section (Exam 1, Exam 2, or Exam 3). Students can earn up to a total of 15 extra credit points (not exceeding 5 per exam) during the semester by completing extra credit assignments.