

ADVANCED STUDIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL & SUSTAINABILITY POLICY (EPS 712)
NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
COURSE SYLLABUS
SPRING 2014

Organizational Details

Instructor: Dr. Maurie Cohen

Office: Cullimore 427

Office Hours: Mondays 2–5pm & by appointment

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Course Delivered Online: <http://njit2.mrooms.net>

Overview

Earth systems scientists advise that we now live in a newly designated era referred to as the “anthropocene.” This term has been coined in recent years to distinguish the last 250 years of human activity on the planet from other periods of earth history. It has also become evident that efforts to date to modify human practices to conform to biospheric limits on the basis of public regulations and remedial technologies have not been successful and we have already crossed several “planetary boundaries.” Despite progress on some local and regional issues, most global-scale ecological problems have worsened due to growing demand for energy and other resources.

We are moreover coming to realize that a sustainable future depends on addressing more than just the environmental impacts of human activity. Also necessary is a more systemic understanding of the numerous interlinked challenges that we face including climate change, freshwater scarcity, population growth, biodiversity loss, food availability, energy security, income inequality, and financial instability.

This course critiques several popular conceptual strategies for reversing contemporary patterns of unsustainability and develops a systems perspective for exploring the drivers of our current condition from the standpoint of the “new economics.” We assess four prominent meta-level strategies for steering toward a more sustainable future: efficiency improvements, relocalization, green consumerism, and efforts to build a “green economy.” The course also considers several other approaches at the frontiers of new economics thinking that entail more transformational changes.

Required Readings

Boyle, D. & A. Simms. 2009. *The New Economics: A Bigger Picture*. London: Earthscan (ISBN 978-1844076758).

Meadows, D. 2008. *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green (ISBN 978-603580557 (free copy downloadable from http://www.ess.inpe.br/courses/lib/exe/fetch.php?media=wiki:user:andre.zopelari:thinking_in_systems_a_primer.pdf)).

Schor, J. 2011. *True Wealth: How and Why Millions of Americans are Creating a Time-Rich, Ecologically Light, Small-Scale, High Satisfaction Economy*. New York: Penguin Press (ISBN 978-0143119425 [paperback]). (Note this book was previously issued by the publisher in 2010 in hardback under the title *Plenty: The New Economics of True Wealth*).

Owen, D. 2011. *The Conundrum: How Scientific Innovation, Increased Efficiency, and Good Intentions Can Make Our Energy and Climate Problems Worse*. New York: Riverhead (ISBN 978-1594485619).

Other readings will be available via the course website (<http://njit2.mrooms.net>). Items are organized into weekly folders and can be viewed online or saved. A valid UCID is required to access the website.

Evaluation

1. **Weekly Writing Assignments (40%):** This is an upper-level course and you are expected to make timely and consistent progress throughout the semester. I will post a question to the website on Thursday of each week and your completed response (limited to 750 words) should be uploaded via the relevant link by 11:59pm on the following Monday (see detailed schedule below). Essays will be graded on a five-point scale (5 = excellent; 4 = good; 3 = needs improvement; 2 = poor; 1 = unsatisfactory). I will also electronically insert comments into the text that you will be able to view on the website. No late submissions will be accepted and failure to complete an assignment will result in a zero. Note that there are twelve writing assignments for the semester and each student is—with prior notification—excused from submitting two essays of his/her choice. In cases where more than ten assignments have been submitted, the lowest two scores will be excluded.
2. **Research Project (40%):** The course requires completion of a substantial research project on a topic related to the general subject matter that we will cover. The project can be completed either individually or in a two-student team. All students (and teams) should plan to submit a one-page (double-spaced) proposal on February 17. The proposal should also include a one-page working bibliography identifying approximately 10–12 sources deemed to be useful. This proposal will then serve as the basis for a meeting (either face-to-face or by telephone) to identify points for clarification and refinement. (Feel free to schedule a prior appointment to discuss prospective project ideas before you submit your proposal.) The research project will culminate with a 15-page (double-spaced) report due on May 12.
3. **Online Discussion (20%):** There is an expectation that all students will consistently participate in the online dialogues that will be a feature of this course. Active engagement requires substantively and thoughtfully responding to the questions and comments raised by others in the course as well as initiating discussion on your own. For further details, consult the rubric for grading online participation posted to the course website.

Grading Scale for Weekly Writing Assignments (maximum score for ten required essays is 50 points)

A = 45–50
 B = 40–45
 C = 35–40
 D = 30–35
 F = < 30

Module Schedule

Module Number	Module Name	Module Start Dates (Tuesdays)	Assignment Distribution Dates (Thursdays)	Assignment Due Date (Mondays)
1	Introduction/Anthropocene	January 27	--	--
2	System Change	February 4	February 6	February 10
3	System Change in US	February 11	February 13	February 17
4	Energy/Materials Efficiency	February 18	February 20	February 24
5	Relocalization	February 25	February 27	March 3
6	Green Consumerism	March 4	March 6	March 10
7	Green Economy	March 11	March 13	March 17
Spring Break				
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8	Worktime Reduction	March 25	March 27	March 31
9	Redefining Progress	April 1	April 3	April 7
10	Values Shift	April 8	April 10	April 14
11	Schor <i>Plenitude</i>	April 15	April 17	April 21
12	Advanced Analytics 1	April 22	April 24	April 28
13	Advanced Analytics 2	April 29	May 1	May 5
Final Project Due (May 12)				

Important Notices

Students enrolled in this course are forewarned that the consequences of plagiarism or academic misconduct of any kind are severe. Violations will be handled in accordance with the rules outlined in the University Code on Academic Integrity. If you are unfamiliar with this Code, you should consult <http://www.njit.edu/academics/honorcode.php>.

Final grades are not subject to post-semester adjustment—with the exception of the change of a grading error. Under no circumstances will students be given the opportunity to complete extra-credit papers or other assignments to enhance their final grades.

Schedule

Module 1 (January 27–February 2): Introduction/What is the Anthropocene?

Zalasiewicz, I., M. Williams, W. Steffen, & P. Crutzen. 2010. The new world of the Anthropocene. *Environmental Science & Technology* 44(7):2228–2231.
 Kolbert, E. 2010. The Anthropocene debate: marking humanity’s impact. *Yale e360*, May 17.
 Boyle, D. & A. Simms, *The New Economics*, Chapters 1, 2, & 3.

Module 2 (February 4–10): What is System Change and How Do We Achieve It?

Meadows, *Thinking in Systems* (entire book).

Module 3 (February 11–17): Is the United States in Need of System Change?

Boyle & Simms, *The New Economics*, Chapters 4 & 10.
 Brinkbäumer, K. 2010. A superpower in decline: is the American dream over? *Der Spiegel*, November 1.
 Packer, G. 2011. The broken contract: inequality and American decline. *Foreign Affairs* 90(6): 20–31.
 Wylie, M. 2010. Has the American dream become our nightmare? *Psychotherapy Networker*, July 10.

Module 4 (February 18–24): Why is the Pursuit of Energy and Materials Efficiency a Problematic Idea?

Boyle & Simms, *The New Economics*, Chapters 5 & 7.
 Owen, *The Conundrum* (entire book).

Research Proposal Due (February 17)

Module 5 (February 25–March 3): Does Relocalization Offer an Effective Answer to Our Sustainability Challenges?

Boyle & Simms, *The New Economics*, Chapters 8 & 9.

Berry, W. 2001. The idea of a local economy. *Orion Magazine*. Winter.

Halweil, B. 2003. The argument for local food. *World Watch* 16(3):20–27.

Born, B. & M. Purcell. 2006. Avoiding the local trap: scale and food systems in planning research. *Journal of Planning Education & Research* 26(2):195–207.

Cox, S. 2010. Does it really matter whether your food was produced locally? *Alternet*. 19 February.

Module 6 (March 4–10): What is the Point of Encouraging People to Buy “Green” Products?

Assadourian, E. 2010. The rise and fall of consumer cultures, pp. 3–20 in *State of the World 2010*. Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute.

Reed, A. 2010. New emissions measurements show “green” consumerism failing. *World Changing* (<http://www.worldchanging.com/archives/011257.html>).

Hannis, M. 1998. The myth of green consumerism: consumption, community, and free markets. Unpublished paper.

Wilk, R. 2013. Green consumerism is no solution. *Huffington Post* (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/american-anthropological-association/green-consumerism-is-no-solution_b_3437457.html).

Module 7 (March 11–17): What is the Potential of a “Green” Economy?

Krugman, P. 2010. Building a green economy. *The New York Times Magazine*, April 11.

Kahn, M. 2009. The green economy. *Foreign Policy* 172:34–38.

Jackson, T. & P. Victor. 2013. *Green Economy at the Community Scale: Report Prepared for the Metcalf Foundation*, Toronto: Metcalf Foundation (<http://metcalffoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/GreenEconomy.pdf>).

March 18–24: Spring Break

Module 8 (March 25–31): Do We Need To Reduce Working Hours to Get on a More Sustainable Path?

Boyle & Simms, *The New Economics*, Chapter 6.

de Graaf, J. 2010. Reducing work time as a path to sustainability, pp. 173–184 in *State of the World 2010*. Washington, DC: Worldwatch Institute.

New Economics Foundation. 2010. *21 Hours: Why a Shorter Working Week Can Help Us All to Flourish in the 21st Century*. London: NEF.

Module 9 (April 1–7): Should We Redefine Our Understanding of Prosperity?

Victor, P. 2010. Questioning economic growth. *Nature* 468:370–371.

Thompson, C. 2010. Nothing grows forever. *Mother Jones*, May/June.

Marglin, S. 2012. *Premises for a New Economy*. Boston: Tellus Institute.

Eisler, R. 2009. Roadmap to a new economics: beyond capitalism and socialism. *Tikkun Magazine*, November/December.

Costanza, R. et al. 2014. Time to leave GDP behind. *Nature* 505:283–285.

Module 10 (April 8–14): Is the Core Problem About Facilitating the Emergence of New Social Values and How Might We Do So?

Boyle & Simms, *The New Economics*, Chapter 11.
 Crompton, T. 2010. *Common Cause: The Case for Working with Our Cultural Values*. London: WWF-UK.
 Ingram, J. 2012. Belief is biased. *Alternatives Journal*. September.
 Kahan, D. 2012. Why we are poles apart on climate change. *Nature* 488:255.

Module 11 (April 15–21): What is Meant By “True Wealth”?

Schor, *True Wealth* (entire book).

Note: The last two modules of the course will entail individual assessment and interpretation of dissenting accounts of contemporary sustainability policy with a particular focus on the role of social mobilization. The items highlighted below have attracted a high level of attention over the last few months in professional circles.

Module 12 (April 22–28): Advanced Analytic Study 1

Holt, D. 2014. Why the sustainable economy movement hasn't scaled: toward a strategy that empowers Main Street. Forthcoming book chapter to appear in J. Schor & C. Thompson, *Plenitude in Practice*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Module 13 (April 29–May 5): Advanced Analytic Study 2

Graeber, D. 2013. A practical utopian's guide to the coming collapse. *The Baffler* 22.

May 12: Project Due