SDEV UN3310

ETHICS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Course Description

Aiming to create, increase and perpetuate benefit, and to prevent, rectify and remediate harm, sustainable development works to improve living conditions, most directly those of humans throughout a wide range of natural, built and hybrid environments. Woven with decisional threads concerning benefit and harm understood as right and wrong in relation to humans but also nonhumans throughout their habitats, sustainable development is inextricable from the fabric of ethics. Its variegated threads are spun from self- and other-regarding motivation and behavior, which can be viewed as infused with sensitivity and rationality, whether individual or collective, private or public, personal or societal, transcultural or cultural. Sustainable development is concerned with the ensuing human forms of both “soft” infrastructure, such as worldviews and professions, and “hard” infrastructure, such as highways and cities. The evaluative and prescriptive assessments of these processes and outcomes can be called the ethics of sustainable development.

This course is divided into four main sections, two of which are intended to show the ethical fallacies of unsustainable development, and two, the ethical dimensions of sustainable development. The first section focuses upon longstanding counterproductive assumptions or foundations, particularly those surrounding human hegemony, consumerist modernity and scientific methodology. The second focuses upon deceptive justifications or rationalizations applied to deeds, victims, situations and decisions involving climatological, chemical, ecological and biological harm. The third section responds to these problematic justifications with new ethics, including earth justice, environmental justice, biocultural ethics, and sectoral ethics (food, water, energy, place and other ethics). The fourth section responds to the problematic
assumptions with a new foundational paradigm, comprised of biotic wholeness, sustainability management and adaptive worldviews.

A simple observation is central to the material covered: if development is to be sustainable, it must be ethical. Since the field or frame of sustainable development is highly cross-disciplinary, the course readings have been selected to demonstrate the intersections of ethics with science, policy, management, environmentalism, economics, business and other arenas of human endeavor. The readings also demonstrate the vocal engagement or “voice” of many concerned parties in the discourse of sustainability, among them, scholars, literary writers, scientists, journalists, public officers at all governmental levels, corporate entities, civil society organizations, including ethics watchdogs, and “grassroots” individuals and groups. All function together to help us understand the ethical right and wrong among developmental pathways.

**Course Objectives**

The course aims to encourage and create proficiency in recognizing, comprehending and resolving ethical issues in the context of sustainable development. Students are taught to:

1. frame, defend and advocate sustainable development projects in terms of ethics;

2. analyze and evaluate development projects with a view to their climatological, chemical, ecological and biological effects as matters of rights and duties, or entitlements and responsibilities;

3. structure the remediation of conflicts resulting from unsustainable development through provision for earth and environmental justice, and cultural and sectoral ethics;

4. develop proposals for ethics initiatives within non-profit, governmental and business organizations;

5. map conflict among competing environmental stakeholders and their claims;

6. advance sustainable development policies and programs through appropriate interpersonal, social and public discourse centered upon ethics.

The overall aim is to develop capacity for promoting and enhancing the presence, impact and durability of ethics within organizational and related contexts involving development.
**Course Content – Topics and Readings**

Weekly preparation for class includes (1) reading 4 of the articles listed and (2) exploring the material at the 2 links provided for the week. This should be accomplished prior to our Tuesday class session. Short news media and other articles and documents may be added periodically to the weekly list of materials. PDFs of the readings and links to documents and organizations are available in the Files section of our Canvas site. (Click on “Resources” to open the appropriate folder of weekly readings.)

**Section I. Unsustainable Development: Deceptive Assumptions**

**Week 1. Human Status: Human Hegemony, or “Hegemonic Dualism”**
*January 16 and 18*


The Antarctic Treaty (December 1959)  
http://www.ats.aq/documents/ats/treaty_original.pdf

Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty  
http://www.ats.aq/e/ats.htm

**Week 2. Human Action: Consumerist Modernity, or “Hedonistic Materialism”**
*January 23 and 25*


**Week 3. Human Thought: Scientific Methodology, or “Technocratic Objectivity”**

*January 30 and February 1*


Environmental History Timelines
Section II. Unsustainable Development: Deceptive Justifications

Week 4. Distance from the Deeds: Climatological Change

*February 6 and 8*


Transparency International: Corruption Perceptions Index 2015
https://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/

Week 5. Distance from the Victims: Chemical Change

*February 13 and 15*


EPA: Learn About the Toxics Release Inventory
https://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program/learn-about-toxics-release-inventory

EPA: Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) National Analysis 2016
https://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program

Week 6. Distance from the Situations: Ecological Change
February 20 and 22


President Theodore Roosevelt’s Special Message on the Report of the National Conservation Commission (February 1909)
Week 7. Distance from the Decisions: Biological Change

February 27 and March 1


UNECE: Sustainable Development – Concept and Action

Section III. Sustainable Development: Ethical Justifications

Week 8. Earth Justice: Inclusivity

March 6 and 8


The Earth Charter (June 2000)  
[http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_a/img/02_earthcharter.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/mods/theme_a/img/02_earthcharter.pdf)

The Earth Charter Initiative  

**Week 9. Spring Break**  
*March 13 and 15*

**Week 10. Environmental Justice: Equality**  
*March 20 and 22*


Millennium Development Goals (September 2000)
Millennium Villages Project
http://millenniumvillages.org/

**Week 11. Biocultural Ethics: Legitimacy**  
*March 27 and 29*


Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)  

Human Rights Watch (originally Helsinki Watch, 1978)  
https://www.hrw.org/

**Week 12. Sectoral Ethics: Equity**  
*April 3 and 5*


Section IV. Sustainable Development: Ethical Assumptions

Week 13. Human Status: Biotic Wholeness
April 10 and 12


The Nature Conservancy: Conservation by Design

ExxonMobil: Energy Center
http://corporate.exxonmobil.com/

Week 14. Human Action: Sustainability Management
April 17 and 19


World Justice Project: Rule of Law Index 2016

World Justice Project
http://worldjusticeproject.org/who-we-are

Week 15. Human Thought: Adaptive Worldviews
April 24 and 26


Sustainable Development Goals (September 2015)
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network
http://unsdsn.org/

**Week 16. Student Presentations**
*During Exam Period, as Scheduled by the Registrar*

**Course Resources**

Required reading materials are indicated under weekly topics in the Syllabus section of our Canvas site, and are available in the Files section, typically as PDF files. The readings have been selected from a broad range of highly contemporary relevant literature. To access a reading, simply click on “Resources” in the Files section, then in the appropriate weekly list of materials, click on the title of the reading. Typically it takes less than a minute for the article to appear fully, depending upon the strength of internet connectivity and the structure of the reading. Links to the websites to be explored are also provided in the weekly lists.

**Method of Instruction and Evaluation**

Each class session is comprised of both lecture material and open discussion. Students are welcome to raise questions and offer comments throughout the class sessions. Course requirements include the following, upon which grades are based:
1. **Class Attendance:** Attendance will be given a maximum weight of **14 points**. One half (.5) grade point will be given for each attended class session. Attendance should be timely and regular. An absence is excused only with (a) prior e-mail notification for a critical documented purpose, or (b) emergency verification. Attendance should be professionally “attentive”, or without distractive use of electronic or other equipment.

2. **Class Participation:** Participation will be given a maximum weight of **14 points**. A maximum of one grade point will be given for active participation during a week’s 2 class sessions. Active participation includes both (a) raising questions and offering comments connected meaningfully to ongoing discussion; and (b) introducing readings by sharing highlights and considerations prepared in advance of the class session. Details pertaining to (b) are provided below and also at the start of the syllabus section titled *Course Content – Topics and Readings:*

   Weekly preparation for class includes (1) reading 4 of the articles listed and (2) exploring the material at the 2 links provided for the week. This should be accomplished prior to our Tuesday class session. Short news media and other articles and documents may be added periodically to the weekly list of materials. PDFs of the readings and links to documents and organizations are available in the Files section of our Canvas site. (Click on “Resources” to open the appropriate folder of weekly readings.)

3. **Discussion Entries:** Discussion entries on our Canvas website in the Discussion section will be given a maximum weight of **28 points**. A maximum of two grade points will be given for the timely preparation and posting of informative, perceptive, coherent and cogent essay-style observations on the reading material for each week. A discussion entry should not be less than 250 words long, which is equivalent to somewhat less than a half page of single-spaced text. The entry is due by Monday, 9 p.m., each week, in advance of the two classes to which it pertains. (A lateness penalty will apply, and no credit will be given if the entry is not posted by the start of the Tuesday class.)

4. **A Term Paper:** A paper focusing on a clearly framed, specific type of progress in or deviation from the ethics of sustainable development will be given a maximum weight of **44 points**. A short draft of the final paper will be due by Saturday, March 24, at 9 p.m. This draft will be given a maximum of **9 (of the 44) points.** The final version will be given a maximum of the remaining **35 points.** Three organizations should be discussed comparatively, including a government agency, a non-profit organization, and a business, with a view to illustrating and detailing the type of progress or deviation explored in the paper. The comparative analysis should serve to illuminate (1) some aspect of “best practices” or “corrupt practices”; (2) the type of organization that may be least or most problematic in this regard; and (3) what can be done to encourage or discourage the conduct under consideration.

   Formatting details include the following:
   - (1) the text should be a minimum of 5,400 words in length, which is equivalent to approximately 12 pages of double-spaced text;
   - (2) the font size should be 11 or 12 (check overall word length accordingly);
   - (3) the left, right, top and bottom sides of a page should all have 1-inch margins;
(4) endnotes should be used (not footnotes or parenthetical notes) and should be situated on pages following the text;
(5) textual citations to endnotes should appear in Arabic, not Roman superscript;
(6) a bibliography should be situated on pages following the endnotes;
(7) neither the endnotes nor the bibliography should be included in the word count;
(8) citations, endnotes and bibliography should be prepared in Chicago Style, using the guidelines provided at the following link:
   http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html
(9) any images, photos, diagrams, models, graphs, tables, charts, diagrams, etc., should be situated on pages titled Appendix, following the end-notes;
(10) all pages should be numbered.

The report should be submitted online by Sunday, May 6, at 9:00 p.m. A paper copy should be delivered by Tuesday, May 8, at 4:00 p.m.

Papers will be grouped by cohesiveness or similarity of topics, and informal presentations by student groups formed accordingly will be scheduled for the exam date assigned to our class by the university Registrar. Each student should create 2 slides to help transmit their findings efficiently.

At the end of the semester, each student’s points for all requirements (class attendance, class participation, discussion entries and the research project, including the draft) will be totaled, and a class curve will be established. Final grades will be provided on a letter grade scale.

**Office Hours**

Time:   Wednesday, 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. and by appointment. (It is best to secure a time slot by making an appointment even if for office hours.)
Office:  1406 IAB.

**Statements of University Policy**

**Academic Integrity Statement**

Columbia does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Students who violate the Academic Integrity and Community Standards will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures. The standards can be viewed online:

[http://studentconduct.columbia.edu/](http://studentconduct.columbia.edu/)

You are strongly encouraged to familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. Columbia provides some useful resources online, which you should examine before conducting research:

[http://library.columbia.edu/research/citation-management.html](http://library.columbia.edu/research/citation-management.html)
Facilities Accessibility Statement

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student’s disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please visit the University’s Health Services website.

http://www.health.columbia.edu/disability-services