

### **SOCY 305: SCARCITY AND MODERN SOCIETY**

#### **Course Description**

This course assesses the ecological state of the world, predicts the economic, political, social, and cultural consequences of environmental constraints and then explores various proposals for dealing with the situation. It begins with a discussion of the optimistic and pessimistic views of environmental problems both in the United States and worldwide. Environmental problems in the U.S. are more a result of current levels and patterns of consumption than a result of high levels of population. Thus the U.S. production and consumption systems are described and the attitudes, values and choices responsible for consumption patterns are examined.

To this point the focus of the course is on whether there is a need for social changes to preserve the environment and thus make human life sustainable. The remainder of the course analyzes forecasting methods, theories of social change, some of the most important forecasts of the next several decades, and proposals for attaining a sustainable society. Students are encouraged to work jointly with the instructor on scenarios which utilize both current trends and sociological theories in predicting and designing alternative futures.

**Required Readings:** Set of Readings sold (cash only) by **College Copy at 7319 Baltimore Ave.** (301 985 5100)  
FIRST HALF OF THE COURSE (some are used in second half as well)

1. Meadows, "Limits to Growth: The 30 Year Update"; R. Scott Frey, "Environmental Problems" (2001)
2. United Nations, World Resources 2000-2001, "Findings: What Shape Are the World's Ecosystems in?"
3. Frederick Buell, From Apocalypse to Way of Life, "Natures in Crisis"
4. John Robbins, Diet for a New America; Lester Brown, "SOS," & "Desertification"
5. Bjorn Lomborg, "The Truth about the Environment"
6. David Pimentel, "Population Growth, Environmental Resources, and the Global Availability of Food"
7. Colin Mason, from A Short History of the Future, "Is there enough Food and Water?"
8. Charles Harper, Environment and Society, "Nonfuel Minerals, Materials, and Solid Wastes;" Porter, "Tables"
9. Kenneth S. Deffeyes, Hubbert's Peak: The Impending World Oil Shortage, "Overview"
10. Albert L. Huebner, "The Cost of Fossil Fuels;" Brown, "After Oil Peaks;" Richard Heinberg, Peak Everything
11. Anna da Costa, "Science of Climate Change," Peter Bunyard, "Comment;" Singer, "Unstoppable Warming"
12. Selection from William Ophuls, Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited
13. Allan Schnaiberg, "The Treadmill of Production and the Environmental State"
14. Ted Trainer, Ch 2 of Towards a Sustainable Economy
15. Neva R. Goodwin (ed.), The Consumer Society; McKibben, "Money & Happiness;" D Brown "Insatiable Self"
16. James Gustave Speth, Red Sky at Morning, "Ten Drivers of Environmental Deterioration"

#### SECOND HALF OF COURSE:

17. The Earth Charter
18. Kurt Finsterbusch, "Scarcity and Its Social Impacts: Likely Political Responses"
19. Ted Robert Gurr, "On the Political Consequences of Scarcity and Economic Decline."
20. Selections from William Ophuls, Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited
21. Selections from Lester Milbrath, Envisioning a Sustainable Society
22. Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy."
23. Richard Pearlstein, "Superterrorism;" Bruce Goldman, "Nightmare in Manhattan"
24. Donald Wells, "Environmental Policy" from The Policy Puzzle
25. Ted Trainer, Ch 12 of Towards a Sustainable Economy
26. Lester Brown, Table; "A Planet under Stress," "New Materials Economy," "Designing an Eco Economy"
27. Gary Gardner, "Accelerating the Shift to Sustainability"
28. James Gustave Speth, Red Sky at Morning, "Attacking Root Causes," "Good Governance,"

“Transition”

29. Lester Brown, “Tools for Restructuring,” “Plan B,” “Redesigning Cities;” Gelbspan, “Two Paths”

**Grade Components:** 1) mid term, 2) final exam, 3) paper. All three are equally weighted in the final grade

**REQUIRED PAPER:** In the required paper you are to present your theory of the impacts of scarcity on modern societies. Using the course materials and your own reading present your predictions of the impacts of scarcity on the social institutions and living patterns of society and explain why the changes will take place. Explain in particular and thoroughly, how a period of scarcity will impact on the **degree of democracy** (political system), the **degree of equality** (stratification system), **level of conflict** (social integration), and **lifestyles** and values. Then describe the social, political, and cultural changes that are needed to convert to a sustainable society and discuss the obstacles to these changes.

[about 10 pages (but there is no page limit) & due on the last day of class]

**QUESTIONS:** You are also expected to read each assignment by the date assigned and be ready to discuss the reading in class. You should understand the author’s thesis and main points and remember a few details that support your interpretation. I have supplied questions (on the question hand out sheet (p3)) for the assignments that ask you to state the main idea of the reading to aid your understanding.

## 305 SCARCITY AND MODERN SOCIETY: COURSE OUTLINE

- I **Need for Social Change: The Strained Ecosystem or the Problem of Scarcity and the Unsustainable Aspects of American Society**
- 1/27 Course Description, The Limits to Growth thesis
- 1/29 State of the World and Environmental Overview: **Meadows, Frey; United Nations** p.20-35
- 2/3 Video: Save the Earth, Feed the World: Race to Save The Planet (TD174.R33; 1990 part 7)
- 2/5 Population and the Environment: **Buell; Robbins, Brown** 36-64
- 2/10 The Optimists' View: **Lomborg** & The Food Problem: **Pimentel, Mason** 65-80
- 2/12 Energy Crisis & Diminishing Resources: **Harper; Deffeyes; Huebner; Heinberg** 81-112
- 2/17 Environmental Problems: **da Costa, Bunyard** & Technology: **Ophuls Ch 3:163-175** 113-126
- 2/19 Production: Causes, Success, Failure, Restructuring: **Schnaiberg** 127-133
- 2/24 Production Issues: **Trainer Ch 2** 134-136
- 2/26 Consumption: Consumerist society **Goodwin, McKibben, D. Brown** 137-159
- 3/3 Housing, Transportation, Leisure Choices, and My Theory of Adjustable Values: **Speth** 160-170
- 3/5 SUMMARY AND REVIEW

**MID-TERM EXAM: Tuesday March 10**

- II **Social Changes from Ecosystem Strains**
- 3/12 Methods for Predicting the Future
- 3/24 Macro Social Change Theory: 1) Marx' Theory of Social Change, 2) Theory of Economic Growth, 3) Program to Correct the Faults of Economic Growth: **The Earth Charter** 171-173
- 3/26 Finsterbusch's Theory of the Impacts of Economic Growth and Scarcity: **Article** 174-181
- 3/31 Finsterbusch's Theory cont.
- 4/2 Gurr's Political Consequences of Scarcity: **Article** 182-194
- 4/7 Ophuls' Sustainable Society: **Ch 4,5** 195-218
- 4/9 Ophuls' Sustainable Society: **Ch 6** 219-227
- 4/14 Milbrath's Sustainable Society: **Article** 228-260
- 4/16 Finsterbusch, Gurr, Kaplan, Heilbroner, Ophuls, Dahrendorf, Shrifin and Pirages Consider the Viability of Democracy: **Kaplan** 261-265
- 4/21 Democracy cont.; Terrorism: **Pearlstein; Goldman** 266-283
- 4/23 U.S. Environmental Policy: **Wells** 284-291
- 4/28 Trainer's Sustainable Economy and Society: **Trainer Ch 12** 292-308
- 4/30 Milbrath, Brown, Daly, Halal, O'Connor, and Finsterbusch consider the transformation of capitalism: **Brown "Green Taxes," "A Planet under Stress," "A New Materials Economy," "The Designing of an Eco-Economy"** 309-317
- 5/5 Finsterbusch, Milbrath, Packard, and Jones Predict and Propose New Values and Gardner and Speth analyze the transition to sustainability: **Gardner; Speth** 318-355
- 5/7 Lifestyle Changes: **Brown "Tools for Restructuring the Economy," "Plan B," "Redesigning Cities for People," Gelbspan "Two Paths** 356-382
- 5/12 The Optimistic Predictions of Kahn and Bell; CONCLUSION

**FINAL EXAM: Friday May 15 8:30-10:00am** (1 1/2 hours for the exam)