

USP 5/688 Sustainable Development Practices (“Integrating Sustainability”)

Winter 2008

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Course Overview and Goals

“Sustainability” is a widely used term whose meaning remains elusive. Nevertheless, a wide variety of organizational strategies and policy tools/techniques are now being pursued by governments, NGOs and businesses in support of efforts to accomplish *sustainable development (SD)*. This course is a graduate-level consideration of those sustainable development practices. It surveys newly emerging analytic and management approaches that are intended to avoid (or limit) the social and environmental harms associated with most past (and current) patterns of development.

The course is intended to build upon basic understandings of socio-environmental change *from earlier coursework and independent study*. It is also intended to provide a foundation for subsequent in-depth studies of particular sustainable development strategies and analytic techniques. It serves multiple purposes in the PSU curriculum. It is an elective course in the environmental specialty of the urban and regional planning degree, and an elective in the real estate graduate certificate. It is also the “integrating sustainability” course intended to follow the *environmental sustainability*, *social sustainability*, and *economic sustainability* courses in the graduate certificate in sustainability studies.

This term the course is being taught by an interdisciplinary faculty team. Each member approaches the topic from a somewhat different perspective. However, all share a core concern for effective real-world application of sustainability goals and principals, as well as a respect for the serious challenges faced by sustainability change-makers. This term, the core readings, discussions and class projects will focus on aspects of *food systems sustainability*.

Readings

Lester Brown. 2006. *Plan B 2.0*. New York: W. W. Norton.
Julie Guthman. 2004. *Agrarian Dreams*. Berkeley, California: UC Press.
Richard Wilk. 2006. *Fast Food / Slow Food*. Lanham, Maryland: Altamira Press.
Plus 8-10 additional articles (most noted below)

Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments

Date

- 1/10 Overview and Basics: The Problem of Sustainability (Loren/Darrell/Jennifer)
Introductions, interests, student survey
Review of the course: topics, sessions, readings, assignments, case study groups
Why “sustainability?” What does this really mean?
What are the problems/issues?
What is “sustainable development?” (SD)
- 1/17 SD Concepts and Organizing Research Teams (Loren/Darrell)
Key insights/concepts from readings and other courses related to:
 environmental sustainability
 social sustainability
 economic sustainability
Discuss *Plan B 2.0*
What is a business “case?” (FSC example)
Topic groups/teams formed
Reading: *Plan B 2.0* (Chapters 1-11)
 “FSC Case Study”
Assignment: Be prepared to discuss your assigned chapter from section two of *Plan B 2.0*
- 1/24 SD Strategies (1): Metrics and Markets (Darrell)
 – codes & standards
 – benchmarks & rating systems
 – third-party certification
 – accounting systems
 – pollution markets
Web research results (discussion)
Reading: *Plan B 2.0* (Chapters 12-13)
 FSC vs. FSI
 Accounting/Certif. paper (TBA)
Assignment: Work with team members on scoping paper/proposal due next week
- 1/31 Dynamics of Change in Organizations and Markets (Darrell)
 – organizational fields
 – markets, institutions, conventions
 – supply chains
 – value (and values) chain
 – corporate social accountability
Reading: “Sources of Corporate Environmental Performance” CMR (2003)
 “Green and Competitive: Ending the Stalemate” HBR (1995)
 “Can One Green Deliver Another, HBR” (2004)
Assignment: Scoping key players, institutions, etc. for team cases (2-3 pp. paper)
- Also “Focus the Nation” event at the University of Portland

- 2/7 SD Strategies (2): Policies and Interventions (Loren)
- law & regulation
 - procurement
 - taxes, investments, incentives & subsidies
 - planning & evaluation systems/metrics
 - RD&D, technical assistance, education & training
 - social marketing, labeling & demand-side intervention
 - market effects
- Feedback and discussion of scoping paper/proposals
- Reading:* “New Imagery” (2004)
Fast Food, Slow Food (Chapters 1-2, 11-15)
- Assignment:* Insights from *Fast Food, Slow Food* applicable to your case
- 2/14 Sustainability and Food Systems (Jennifer)
- Emerging strategies and issues
 Presentation/discussion of concrete SD cases by visitors
Reading: “Assessing the Market Dynamics...” (2006)
- 2/21 Sustainability and Food Systems (Jennifer)
- Emerging strategies and issues
 Presentation/discussion of concrete SD cases by visitors
 Preliminary team reports on SD case development
Reading: *Agrarian Dreams* (all)
Assignment: Insights from *Agrarian Dreams* applicable to your case (3-5 pp. paper)
- 2/28 Understanding Change through Time in Large Systems (Loren)
- social history of technology (SHOT)
 - social construction of technological change (SCOT)
 - diffusion of innovation
 - social movements
 - market transformation models
- Reading:* *Fast Food / Slow Food* (Chapters 3-7)
- 3/6 Student presentations of detailed cases
- 3/13 Student presentations of detailed cases
- 3/18 Wrap-up, De-brief, Contemporary Issues
 Final cases due
Official finals week meeting time: 3:30-5:20

Assignments and Grading

10% - participation

30% - short written assignments (see details below)

60% - final case report developed with team; analyzes applications of SD goals in the context of real-world organizational/business practices, market dynamics, and public response

Participation expectations include: reading assigned materials and contributing to classroom discussions, presenting results of independent inquiry, and contributing to collective assignments.

Deliverables: Discussed below.

Case Study Project

The projects this year will focus on *food system change*. Of particular interest is the interplay between the role that public policy can play in influencing change, the role that market-based initiatives play, and the opportunities and challenges related to developing a comprehensive strategy that addresses the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.

Participants in the course will work together as teams on 4-5 topics. The team assignment is to develop a set of policy recommendations to address a particular sustainable development challenge. These recommendations should be supported by an articulate discussion about how businesses would function within this policy framework. The analysis should demonstrate an understanding of how businesses really work and what the roles of public sector initiatives and market based initiatives are in achieving sustainable development goals and objectives. There may be some overlap in these projects but we have attempted to direct each group to different issues around the food system.

In the final report, we expect a professional presentation, both oral and written. One of the goals of this class is to move to a relatively sophisticated and broad understanding of the issues we discuss. You need not lose your biases, but you should recognize them and carefully consider that your biases may lead you to poor conclusions. Opinions should have solid support from authoritative sources (be careful about the internet). Think about the quality of your references. Consider contacting practitioners for a reality check—but do not assume that one or two people's experiences represent the gamut of possible experience. In order to do a good job with this project you will need to carefully consider the real goals of the food system you are designing/discussing.

In brief, these are the food system topics to be considered.

Project	Primary Question
Food system supply chain	How do we develop a supply chain that supports and rewards a sustainable food system?
Rural-urban divide impact on the food system	How do we bridge the rural-divide in the process of developing a sustainable food system?
Scaleable food systems	How do we develop an infrastructure that supports a sustainable food system at a scale that meets the needs of our populace?
Land use and the food system	How do we plan land use in a manner that is viable and supports a sustainable food system?
Biofuels and food	Can we grow a biofuels industry without negative effects on food quantity and quality?
International food system	How can we manage the global/local tensions in food system sustainability?

A more detailed discussion of each topic area follows.

1) **Supply Chain** The food system supply chain (simplistically—you should have a more sophisticated understanding before long) is the agents and relationships that work together to produce and distribute food. It includes the entire system, from the producer (some would even say the supplier of inputs to the producer), through the brokers, processors, distributors, and retailers, to the ultimate consumer. Currently, the traditional food system supply chain is, by and large, geared to support economic efficiency. The primary objective of the supply chain is economic benefits.

The purpose of this project is to investigate and discuss how to develop a supply chain that supports and rewards a more sustainable food system? Discuss pros and cons of various policy approaches. Include rationale for building this supply chain as well as counter-arguments, and analyze the role of public and private partners. For example, what is the role and what are the costs and benefits of certification schemes? What are the chain of custody issues? Can/how can "values-added" be conveyed absent certifications? What is the role of procurement policies? How/should regulatory systems be put in place to support/guide behaviors of private partners? Who needs to be engaged and how?

2) **Rural-Urban Divide** Oregon is an excellent example of a common phenomenon, a “rural-urban divide”. This phenomenon occurs throughout most of the US, and in many other developed countries. The divide refers to the disconnect that urbanites have from the reality of

rural living and working, and the disconnect that rural dwellers have from the reality of urban living and working. Food system issues epitomize that divide. Food is needed in great quantities in urban areas and is produced in great quantities in rural areas. So there is a mutual dependence between these groups. But there is little understanding between the groups. Currently the primary connection between these groups is economic. Urbanites their money for food and rural dwellers exchange their food for money. Traditional views of this scenario would have the urbanites attempting to pay less money for more (or better) food and rural dwellers get more money for cheaper (easier to produce) food.

The purpose of this project is to investigate and discuss whether it is important to, and if so, how to, bridge the “rural-urban divide” in order to achieve a more sustainable food system. This may require fostering a food system that benefits both communities. Investigate, assess and articulate the issues which separate the urban and rural participants in our food system (producers through (not versus) consumers). Identify and support a set of recommendations that specifically address the rural-urban divide in order to improve the ability of the food system to achieve sustainability goals.

3) **Scale** One of the important issues surrounding sustainable food systems is the ability to take production and distribution systems that work well in small, localized operations and transfer them to a scale that provides the desirable characteristics of sustainable food systems to large populations. For example, my grandmother had a chicken coop with 20+ layer hens. We had organic, free-range eggs and chickens whenever we went to the farm in my childhood. Providing the same desirable attributes in the eggs and chickens to the city of Portland, however, presents difficulties.

The purpose of this project is to investigate and discuss issues of bringing sustainable agriculture to a scale that meets the objectives of society. How do we (should we) develop an infrastructure that supports sustainable agriculture at all scales? Understand, assess, and describe the business model for “scaling” “values-added” agriculture. Think value chain, social and environmental as well as economic inputs and outputs. How can public policy impact the likelihood and ability of a food system business to use “values-added” as a differentiator in a scaled-up business?

4) **Land Use** An important issue in sustainable food systems is competing forces for use of that rare commodity, land. Concepts of “highest and best use” for rare resources complicate the incentives and pressures surrounding food production. Land use, land use planning, individual property rights, and philosophies of personal liberty all interact in relation to sustainable food systems.

The purpose of this project is to investigate and discuss issues of land use planning, local food systems, and sustainable agriculture. Analyze the benefits and costs (economic as well as social and environmental) of land use planning that seeks to retain land as farmland (i.e. ecosystem services, cultural landscapes, small farm retention, highest and best use, etc). Discuss pros and cons of developing a localized food system. Discuss the pros and cons of regulatory versus market-based approaches.

5) **Biofuels and Food** Increasing populations, limited energy supplies, growth in demand for energy, geopolitical uncertainties, and precarious agricultural and rural economies combine to promote the expansion of biofuels—new sources of energy supply from agricultural crops. Corn ethanol is likely the most controversial in terms of dollar cost and energy yield, but an array of environmental impacts, crop rotation disturbances, crop displacement, and even global shifts in where food crops can now be grown are also a part of the picture. Oil crop production and even the growth of cellulosic fuel feedstocks are not without controversy.

The purpose of this project is to investigate and discuss issues of agricultural energy production and its impacts upon farming, food, and rural communities. Analyze the markets, technologies, policies, and impacts involved. Consider alternative paths along with a biofuels industry might develop. Discuss the relative sustainability of alternative trajectories in respect to environmental, economic and social systems. Assess policies and market arrangements working together and at cross purposes in the area of biofuels development.

5) **International Context** We are all part of a global economic system, with complex interdependencies between countries and communities across the planet. We face a planetary challenge related to climate change as a result of our dependence on fossil fuels. Partly in response to perceived negative impacts of globalization and to the impacts of global transport on climate challenge, there is a growing constituency for localizing food systems across the planet.

The purpose of this project is to investigate and discuss issues of globalization and their relation to creating a sustainable food system. Analyze the implications of moving toward localized food systems for communities around the globe. Consider such factors as the relatively limited growing season of much of the planet, the rapid trend of urbanization in many countries, and the fact that, for Oregon cherry producers to be able to sell all of their products locally, every Oregonian would have to consume 10 times the national average consumption of cherries every year. Consider the potential implications for agricultural producers in developing countries. Identify strategies to address the social, economic and environmental impacts of our global food economy.

Deliverables

1. January 17th — be prepared to lead a short discussion of one of the chapter from *Plan B 2.0*. All students should have read the first 6 chapters, and skimmed chapters 7-11. At the first class meeting, each student will be assigned a specific chapter from the 7-11 group that s/he will be ready to discuss. There is no required paper or presentation to be submitted, but all students should have a good understanding of their assigned chapter and be able to contribute to discussion and ask intelligent questions about the other assigned chapters.
2. Jan 31st — 7-10 page paper identifying key players, institutions, and other factors that impact your sector of the food system. This is a team paper. It should be based on a literature and internet search, your readings, and conversations with knowledgeable actors in your project arena. The paper should also outline a proposed research strategy (“what you’re planning to do”) and identify the primary sources from which you gather information helpful for preparing to meet with local participants in the food system.

Identify key organizations, databases, important players, and useful concepts that will inform your further investigations. This paper requires a (relatively) broad search for information about a (relatively) narrow focus in the food system.

3. Feb 7th — 2-3 page individual paper discussing the issues raised in the final 5 chapters of *Fast Food, Slow Food* and how they relate to your project. This paper requires thinking about your particular project factors in terms of the ideas introduced by the book. You should clearly indicate how the main ideas of these chapters relate to your project and why they do (or do not) facilitate sustainable development in your area of interest in the food system.
4. Feb 21st — 3-5 page individual paper discussing issues raised in *Agrarian Dreams* and how they relate to your project. You should examine the policies and practices that are evident in the book and think about how they can inform your thoughts and conclusions about your project. The book includes considerable detail that can inform all of the projects; be sure that you are responsive to issues of your project and not just write about general and generic issues that could be relevant to any issue in the sustainable food system discussion.
5. March 6th and March 13th — Comprehensive team presentation of the project. This is a professional level presentation, laying out the institutional field in which your issue exists, the sustainable development issues relevant to the specific players in your issue, how your players respond, and what you see as appropriate recommendations for the future of your issue. It is important that you carefully analyze and present expected reactions to your recommendations by the various players. Good support and thoughtful, logical presentations are expected. This presentation can be facilitated with PowerPoint or other presentation software. You need not have a completed paper when you do your presentation. But do understand that the presentation is a significant portion of your final deliverable, so it must be well prepared. An outside audience of interested sustainability actors may be invited.
6. March 18th — Final paper due. This is a professional paper. Content requirements will be provided.