Human Rights and Sustainability (Graduate Seminar)  
Meets: Tuesdays 1:30–4:15 p.m.  
Location: Wilson Hall 255  
(Syllabus subject to revision)

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday 10:00-11:30

“Failure to grasp the enormous potential that human rights have on sustaining environment ...  
will only lead to a larger scale of dispossession and homelessness across the world.”

- Miloon Kothari, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, Statement at the World  
Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg South Africa, August 2002

I. Course description:

This course addresses the connections between human rights and environmental sustainability.  
Legal and scholarly approaches linking human rights and sustainability are just beginning to  
emerge, given the important resource dimensions of economic and social rights realization and  
the human dimensions of sustainability. The right to food, housing, and a healthy environment  
are all areas where the discourses and practices of both human rights and sustainability are  
invoked to address shortcomings in current practices.

Yet human rights demands and environmental concerns are not always in harmony. Conservation  
efforts have at times created obstacles for local communities in terms of access to land and  
livelihoods. At the same time, the world’s poor and indigenous populations are often forced to  
bear the costs of environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change resulting from  
patterns of production and consumption from which they do not personally gain. The priorities of  
environmental justice movements, sometimes referred to as “environmentalism of the poor,” can  
thus differ considerably from those of mainstream environmental organizations. Furthermore, the  
emphasis within human rights law and practice on individual rights exists in tension with the  
collective and third-party impacts of many sustainability challenges, while the context-specific,  
place-based nature of most environmental problems (and the populations that endure them) sits  
uneasily aside claims to universal human rights.

This course addresses these dilemmas through theoretical and empirical readings on human  
rights and sustainability; grassroots accounts of struggles over environment-related human rights;  
and selections from literature and film that illustrate the environmental justice issues at stake. It  
also explores the routes by which rights can be realized beyond claims-making, emphasizing the  
importance of inclusive processes in the design and implementation of environmental policy.
The course will be divided into several sections, including an introduction to the concepts of human rights and sustainability, an exploration of how these concepts are operationalized in the real world, and a deeper examination of three substantive areas in which these ideas intersect and sometimes clash. The first substantive module will examine “urban ecology and human rights” including emerging claims for a “right to the city” and the sometimes conflicting mandates urbanization can create for states attempting to ensure adequate housing (including water and sanitation) while simultaneously protecting land and water resources.

The second substantive module will consider “the human right to food” and the related sustainability implications of the current global food system. The shift in the last 100 or so years from primarily rural agrarian societies to fossil fuel-based, urban industrial societies (and increasingly industrialized farming techniques) has created a number of challenges to both food security and environmental protection. The third substantive module investigates more deeply the consequences of industrialization processes for human rights, in particular, extractive industries such as oil and mining, and their implications for accelerated global climate change, community displacement, indigenous rights, and human health.

The objectives of the course are:

1. To clarify the official and unofficial meanings of “human rights” and “sustainability”
2. To acquaint students with theories and methodologies used to study and interrogate human rights and sustainability, in particular as they relate to one another
3. To demonstrate various ways that nations, communities, and advocates have attempted to promote human rights vis-à-vis sustainability challenges
4. To elucidate the structural characteristics of sustainability challenges, including the ways these challenges are shaped by dominant processes of production and consumption
5. To evaluate the role of power in the alleviation and/or perpetuation of environmental injustices, including the way it shapes struggles over solutions
6. To examine critically the unequal distribution of environmental injustices among poorer societies and vulnerable groups
7. To further student research on topics of human rights and sustainability
8. To foster a sense of political responsibility in regard to human rights and sustainability challenges, as well as develop a set of ideas regarding how more just and sustainable alternatives may be realized

This course provides a basis for research in the fields of international development and human rights. It can be used to prepare students for a comprehensive exam in the area of human rights and sustainability, as well as serve as a foundation for future work in internationally-focused governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, or policy institutes.
II. Course requirements and grading:

Students must:

a) Attend all seminar meetings and participate in class discussions
b) Do all required assignments prior to the class for which they are due
c) Post weekly blogs outlining your critical reactions to the assigned texts
d) Lead class discussion once during the semester
e) Complete 2 short (5-7 page) papers on substantive themes
f) Submit an annotated bibliography of sources to be used for your final paper
g) Complete a 18-23 page final paper with final bibliography (not annotated)

a) Both attendance and participation are vital to the success of the seminar and to your grade, and are particularly important given the few number of class meetings during the semester. Students who miss more than one class will face penalties for their final grade.

b) This is a reading-intensive seminar. We will cover a lot of material (~100-150 pps/wk) during the semester. All seminar participants are expected each week to allot the time required for reading assigned materials thoughtfully and thoroughly, and watching films, prior to class. This will provide the basis for your active participation in our in-class discussions. I strongly recommend, as a matter of good scholarly practice, to take extensive notes on all your assignments, outlining the main ideas and clarifying any unfamiliar terms or concepts.

c) Weekly blogs on the assigned materials will be required; these should be no more than 1-2 pages, double-spaced, composed in a standard Word document. Blog posts should outline your critical reflections on the materials (as a whole), highlighting key points, evaluating them in light of each other and your own knowledge, and including 2-3 thoughtful questions that were not answered in the materials. You should not summarize the readings; assume everyone has read them. Blogs must be completed and posted 24 hours prior to our weekly meetings. In addition to writing your own blog, you are expected to review the blogs posted by all other seminar participants and comment on at least three other people’s posts prior to our weekly meeting. When you comment on the blog of a peer, try to probe more deeply and advance the conversation, rather than just saying “I agree.” Remember to be polite.

In your introductory blog (week 1), you should:

1. Introduce yourself to the class
2. Write a brief (~400 word) statement about how you currently understand human rights and sustainability to be related or linked
3. Tell us (in another ~150 words) what is important or interesting to you about human rights and/or sustainability, and why. Try to speak from your heart rather than your head.

Note: Although blogs are posted online, they should not be written while you are online. This is not an informal “chat session.” It is intended to provide thoughtful academic commentary, comprising brief but well organized reflections, questions and criticisms regarding the readings. Conventional grammar and punctuation rules should be observed.

d) Student-led discussion: students will lead class discussion once during the semester. Sign-up will take place during the 1st session. If you join class after this, it is your responsibility to
contact me in order to sign up. You will select one reading (not more than 25 pages) or video (not more than 25 minutes) for your peers to consider in addition to the week’s assigned materials, and transmit this material through Blackboard or email one week prior to your presentation. Your task as discussion leader will be to raise important questions and issues, based on the blogs and critical reflections of all students. You should attempt to find common themes, points of divergence or confusion, and interesting observations that can guide the conversation in fruitful directions. You should not regurgitate the readings, as everyone will be expected to have done them prior to class. You are encouraged to link the week’s themes to current news.

e) There will be two short papers (5-7 pages) that explore and critique the arguments made in the readings from the first two substantive sections of the course:
   1) Urban ecology and human rights - due Week 9
   2) The human right to food - due Week 12

You can utilize comments from your own weekly blogs for these short papers, though I would like to see you synthesize, analyze, and critique the materials in a scholarly manner, and from the perspective of each topical area as a whole. I will provide guiding questions for these papers prior to their due date.

f) Your annotated bibliography is due two weeks before your final paper. It should consist of a brief (3-6 sentence) statement regarding the type of paper you will do (proposal, research paper, or theory paper) and its topic/questions, followed by a minimum of 10 scholarly sources that you intend to utilize, explaining in 2-3 sentences how each source will be useful for your topic. Please submit to the SafeAssignment on Blackboard prior to class on the due date. A PowerPoint presentation is posted on Blackboard to guide you in constructing an effective annotated bibliography.

g) Your final paper should be approximately 18-23 pages, and should link your research interests with theoretical approaches to - and empirical realities of - human rights and sustainability. You have three options in choosing the format of this paper:
   1) a dissertation (Ph.D.) or research grant (M.S. or Ph.D.) proposal
   2) an original research paper on a topic of human rights and sustainability (with intent to publish)
   3) a theoretical examination of a real-world human rights and sustainability issue (comparing/contrasting at least two theoretical perspectives), with a discussion of possible methodologies for testing these theoretical approaches

Your choice of format should depend on your year and progress toward degree, as well as on your professional goals. Regardless of which you choose, I urge you to think in terms of praxis, defined as:
   “the process by which a theory or lesson becomes part of lived experience. Rather than a lesson being simply absorbed at the intellectual level in a classroom, ideas are tested and experienced in the real world, followed by an opportunity for reflective contemplation. In this way, abstract concepts are connected with lived reality.”
Thus, all papers should include a theoretical framework, a review of relevant literature, and a
discussion of methodologies for understanding real problems posed by the issue. You are
required to meet with me to discuss your paper at least once before you write it.

**Important:** I expect graduate students to have mastered the basics of writing papers, using a
standard style manual and proofreading their work. Please take the time to present professional
quality work. Get to know one of the social science style manuals – e.g., *A Manual for Writers of
Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Kate L. Turabian), *A Manual of Style* (The University
of Chicago - use the “Author, Date” system for the social sciences), or the *APA Manual* – and
pay particular attention to the pages on bibliographic references. You can lose up to a full grade
for sloppiness, noncompliance or inconsistency with an established style, or poor proofreading.

**Your grade will be based on the following:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, participation, presentation:</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical reflection blogs:</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #1:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper #2:</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper:</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
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**The grading scale is as follows:**

- 90-94 = A-
- 95-100 = A
- 80-83 = B-
- 84-86 = B
- 87-89 = B+
- 74-76 = C
- 77-79 = C+
- 60-73 = D
- Below 60 = E

Please note that late work will not be accepted without a documented and dire reason.

**III. Required Texts:**


2. Brenner, Neil, Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer (eds.) *Cities for People, Not for Profit: Critical
Urban Theory and the Right to the City*. New York: Routledge. Also available online

3. Alkon, Alison Hope and Julian Agyeman (eds). 2011. *Cultivating food justice: race, class,
and sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Also available online through ASU library


**IV. Supplementary materials**

Ashgate.

2. A number of articles for this course will be handed out in class or posted to Blackboard.

**V. Miscellaneous course information:**

*Obvious courtesies:*

- Arrive on time
- Turn off your cell phone
- Let me know in advance if you must leave early
Incompletes: “A mark of ‘I’ (incomplete) is given by the instructor only when a student who is otherwise doing acceptable work is unable to complete a course because of illness or other conditions beyond the student’s control” (from the ASU General Catalog).

Academic integrity: Academic honesty is expected of all students in all examinations, papers, laboratory work, academic transactions and records. The possible sanctions include, but are not limited to, appropriate grade penalties, course failure (indicated on the transcript as a grade of E), course failure due to academic dishonesty (indicated on the transcript as a grade of XE), loss of registration privileges, disqualification and dismissal. For more information, see http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity.

Disability Services: If you have a learning disability, need disability accommodations in this class, or have other particular needs, please let me know as soon as possible. All information regarding disability is confidential.

COURSE OUTLINE

WEEK 1: August 26
Overview and Introduction to the Course

WEEK 2: September 2
What are Human Rights? [98 pps.] - Topics: Where do rights come from? How do we know they exist? How can we gauge rights realization?

Readings:
- Review (skim) the latest United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals Report, which can be found at: http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/reports.shtml

Films: For those who have little knowledge about human rights, here are two very short, very basic introductions (Watch before class):
1. www.humanrights.com/#/what-are-human-rights
2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbul3hxYGNU&list=PLCAA1D8F69131A393&index=3&feature=plpp_video
WEEK 3: September 9
What is sustainability?
Topics: Rio summit, Kyoto protocol, The Brundtland Report, etc.; Alternative definitions of sustainability; Historical roots of ecological crises
Readings:
- Bowers, C. A. “Toward an Eco-Justice Pedagogy”
UN Activities: (Familiarize yourself with these activities and reports, but do not worry about reading everything word for word. * Asterisked sources are posted on Blackboard)
- *1987 - Our Common Future (“The Brundtland Report”) World Commission on Environment and Development. OVERVIEW ONLY (pp. 18-38) [I have posted the full report in case you are interested, but no need to print or bring to class]
- *1998 - Kyoto protocol (“an international agreement linked to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change”): http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/kpeng.pdf
- * Rio+20 (follow up to 1992 Earth Summit: http://www.earthsummit2012.org/); official conclusions (“The Future We Want”) and conclusions of the “People’s Summit” are both posted on Blackboard. Please read the latter completely, as it is relatively short.
Video:
- Very basic intro; watch before class - The Story of Stuff: http://www.storyofstuff.com/

WEEK 4: September 16
Human Rights and Sustainability: Making the Linkages
Topics: Environmental human rights, Eco-Justice
Readings:

**WEEKS 5-6: Consumption, production, and the role of capitalism**

_**Topics:**_ Economic rationality and global expansion; Industrialization, carbon-based economies, technological advances and pollution, transportation; Inequality in costs and benefits, winners and losers at all scales/levels, gender/class/race; exploitation; Public goods; Alternative logics

**September 23: Economic rationality and global expansion**

_**Readings:**_

• Foster, John Bellamy, Brett Clark, and Richard York. 2010. _The Ecological Rift: Capitalism’s War on the Earth_. New York: Monthly Review Press. [Read Ch. 3-6 and 8-10 (pps. 89-164 and 183-211)]

_**Film:**_

• In class: _The Carbon Rush_ (52/84 min) – Carbon offsets and justice

**September 30: Alternative Logics**

_**Readings:**_


• The Happy Planet Index: [http://www.happyplanetindex.org/](http://www.happyplanetindex.org/)

_**Film:**_

• Wendell Berry: “Now We're Hearing from the World” (on the BP Gulf oil spill) - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My2WJ5nZbAw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My2WJ5nZbAw) [4min 50sec: watch outside class]

• In class: _The Water Front_ (53 min) – water justice in Detroit

**WEEKS 7-9: CASE STUDY 1 - Urban ecology and human rights**

_**Topics:**_ “Right to the City”; Right to housing, water, sanitation; Impact of building and urbanization on ecology

**October 7**

_**Readings:**_

• BOOK: Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (eds.) _Cities for People, Not for Profit_. Read chapters 1, 3, 5, 8-9, 13, 15-16; Please read, in addition, the following one chapter each, and be prepared to share your observations on that case with the rest of the class:
  o Chapter 10 (“Grey space” and Bedouin Arabs) – Waquin, Laila, Pieter
  o Chapter 11 (Gentrification and London) – Natalie, Trevor, Kimmy, Jenna
Chapter 12 (Right to the City in Amsterdam) - Drew, Melanie, Ti ffanie, Katie

- “General Motors’ Destruction of California Transit Systems”
  [http://moderntransit.org/ctc/ctc06.html](http://moderntransit.org/ctc/ctc06.html)
- Also check out this website: [http://www.humanrightscity.com](http://www.humanrightscity.com)

UN Activities:

- Familiarize yourself with the Special Rapporteur on the right to housing:
  [http://www.righttohousing.org](http://www.righttohousing.org)

Film:

- The Unforeseen (93 min. – may need to watch outside class) [WEST MEDIA: GE198.T4 U54 2008 DVD] – PART 1
- Curitiba video?

October 14 - NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

October 21 - First short paper due today

Readings:

- Evans, Peter. 2002. *Livable Cities: Urban Struggles for Livelihood and Sustainability*. University of California Press. [Available online through ASU library] Please read Chapters 1 & 8, as well as the following one chapter each, and be prepared to share your observations on that case with the rest of the class:
  - Chapter 6: São Paulo, Brazil - Laila, Drew, Melanie, Trevor, Katie
  - Chapter 7: Mexico City - Waquin, Jenna, Pieter, Natalie, Ti ffanie, Kimmy

WEEKS 10-11: CASE STUDY 2 - The human right to food

*Topics:* Trade, intellectual property rights; Agricultural policy; Green revolution; Land and energy use; Hunger and malnutrition; Food security; Biodiversity; GMOs

October 28

Readings:

TWN Environment and Development Series. Penang, Malaysia: Third World Network.

**UN Activities:**
- Familiarize yourself with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food: [http://www.srfood.org/](http://www.srfood.org/)

**News:**

**THURSDAY October 30, 2014:** Please consider attending the talk by Vandana Shiva at ASU - [https://sustainability.asu.edu/events/rsvp/vandana-shiva](https://sustainability.asu.edu/events/rsvp/vandana-shiva)

**November 4**

**Readings:**
- BOOK: Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating food justice*. Read chapters 1-6 and 12-15, as well as the following one chapter each, and be prepared to share your observations on that case with the rest of the class:
  - Chapter 7: Pieter, Kimmy
  - Chapter 8: Drew, Natalie
  - Chapter 9: Waquin, Jenna
  - Chapter 10: Laila, Trevor
  - Chapter 11: Melanie, Tiffanie, Katie

*Second short paper due Friday of Week 11 – Submit via SafeAssignment before 11:59 p.m. on Nov. 7; no hard copy needed*

**WEEK 12**

**November 11: NO CLASS – Veteran’s Day**

**WEEKS 13-14: CASE STUDY 3 - Industrialization processes and human rights**

**Topics:** Mining; Petroleum dependency and extraction; Climate change; Indigenous Rights

**November 18**

**Readings:**
UN Sources:

Film:
- (Watch before class): Very brief video on the Oil/Tar Sands in Alberta: http://iturn.tv/content/2009/h2oil-das-business-mit-wasser-und-oel-318

News:

November 25
Readings:

UN Activities:
- Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth, drafted at the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth: http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18931

Film:
- “Daughters of the Canopy” [indigenous women in the Amazon charting a new course for development] (58 min - available online through the ASU library; you have to log in) - http://search.alexanderstreet.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/view/work/1641374

Annotated bibliography for final paper due today
WEEK 15: SOLUTIONS

Topics: Deep ecology, deep economy; Global public goods and global commons; Governance, right to participation, autonomy, decision-making, inclusion

December 2 – LAST DAY OF CLASS

Readings:
• BOOK: Klein, Naomi. 2014. This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate. Canada: Alfred A. Knopf. [READ 84-163, 252-403; SKIM 1-83, 164-251]

Other curiosities to check out:
• http://www.worldwewant2015.org/ - voices for sustainable development
• http://vote.myworld2015.org/ - what kind of world

FINAL PAPER DUE December 10th at NOON