Human Rights and Sustainability
Meets Tuesday and Thursday 10:30-11:45 a.m.
Location: ED 328

Fulfills electives for the “Human Rights” and “Food System Sustainability” Certificates; L, G, & SB General Ed requirements; and honors credit by petition

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:00-3:00, and by appointment

“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 explores connections between human rights and environmental sustainability. Legal and scholarly approaches linking human rights and sustainability are emerging, due to the important resource dimensions of economic and social rights 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 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 often bear the costs of environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change that result from patterns of production and consumption from which they do not personally gain. The priorities of environmental justice movements, at times referred to as “environmentalism of the poor,” may differ from those of mainstream environmentalists. Furthermore, the emphasis within human rights law and practice on individual rights exists in tension with the collective and third-party impacts of sustainability challenges, while the context-specific, place-based nature of most environmental problems (and the populations that endure them) sits uneasily beside universal human rights claims.
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 governments 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, and ideas regarding how just and sustainable alternatives may be realized

Student learning outcomes: Students who have taken this course will have a theoretical and empirical basis for research in the fields of international development, human rights, and human dimensions of sustainability. It can 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 class meetings and participate in discussions
b) Do all required readings prior to the class for which they are assigned
c) Complete discussion posts outlining critical reactions to the assigned texts
d) Lead class in a review and discussion once during the semester
e) Complete 2 short (4-6 page) papers on substantive themes
f) Submit an annotated bibliography of sources to be used for the final paper
g) Complete a 12-15 page final paper with final bibliography (not annotated)

a) Both attendance and participation are vital to the success of the class and to your grade. You are required to participate meaningfully in class discussions by contributing relevant information, addressing controversial issues, and raising probing questions based on readings and films. Attendance will be tracked and grades lowered for excessive absences (defined as more than four absences for any reason).

b) This is a reading- and writing-intensive seminar. We will cover a lot of material (up to 150 pps/wk) during the semester. All participants are expected each week to allot the time required for reading assigned materials thoughtfully and thoroughly, prior to class. This will provide the basis for your active participation in our in-class discussions. You may also be asked to watch films outside of class. I strongly recommend, as a matter of good scholarly practice, to take extensive notes on course materials by:

1. noting the main points of each source, and if there is more than one source, considering how they are related (with one main point from each work as an example);
2. considering what is new to you about the topics discussed and how (if at all) they have changed your conception of human rights and sustainability; and
3. developing an understanding of how the week’s readings, films, and lecture material apply to current events

I want you to engage the readings, so you should have questions ready each week regarding how they relate to modern life and/or current events.

c) Discussion posts of 300-500 words, outlining your critical reflections on the assigned texts, are required. A separate set of guidelines will be distributed to assist in completing these posts.

d) Prior-week review and discussion: Once during the semester, you and 1-2 of your peers will lead the class in a review of key ideas from the previous week’s readings and present a current case study to illustrate those ideas. Your case study will be distributed to the class in the form of a news article, report, or informative video (not more than 20 min). You should submit your chosen materials to the professor for approval one week before your presentation, then transmit them electronically to the class by the Sunday before your presentation, with a brief explanation (1-2 sentences) of their relevance to the previous week’s materials.

During class, you will review only the most important ideas from the prior week and explain how your chosen case illustrates those ideas. Do not regurgitate readings, as everyone will be
expected to have done them prior to class. You will then ask the class 1-2 questions raised by the materials and critical reflection posts and lead the class in a brief discussion. You should attempt to find common themes, points of divergence or confusion, and interesting observations that can guide the conversation in fruitful directions. Avoid “yes or no” questions. You will have 10-12 minutes total for this assignment, so be concise and come practiced and prepared. Sign-up for this assignment will take place during Week 3, so if you miss it, please contact me to sign up.

e) There will be two short papers (4-6 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 Monday of Week 10
   2) The human right to food – due Tuesday of Week 12
I encourage you to have discussions with your classmates in preparation for these short papers, but the final product must be your own work, and in your own words, or it may be considered plagiarized. You can utilize (and cite) your own discussion posts 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. Papers should be submitted on Canvas by 5:00 p.m. on the due date. I will provide guiding questions for these assignments later in the semester.

f) Your annotated bibliography is due three weeks before your final paper. It should consist of a brief (3-6 sentence) statement regarding the topic of your paper and the questions it seeks to answer, followed by a minimum of six (6) scholarly sources that you intend to utilize, explaining in 2-3 sentences how each source will be useful for answering your questions. Please submit in hard copy in class on the due date. A PowerPoint presentation will be posted on Canvas under “Files” to guide you in constructing this bibliography.

g) Your final paper should be 12-15 pages and should link your substantive interests with theoretical approaches to - and empirical realities of - human rights and sustainability. You are required to you meet in person with me at least once to discuss your paper before you write it. My office hours are posted at the top of this syllabus, and I take appointments.

Important: As this course fulfills the “L” requirement, I expect students to master the basics of writing, using a standard style manual and proofreading. Please take the time to present professional quality work. Get to know one of the social science styles – 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, inconsistency with an established style, or poor proofreading.

Summary of assignment (discussion posts, short papers, bibliography, final paper) due dates:

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Please note that late work will not be accepted without a documented and dire reason.
Your grade will be based on:
Attendance, participation, presentation: 15%
Critical discussion posts: 15%
Paper #1: 20%
Paper #2: 20%
Final paper/bibliography: 30%

The grading scale is as follows:
(No A+) 95-100 = A  90-94 = A-
87-89 = B+  84-86 = B  80-83 = B-
77-79 = C+  74-76 = C
60-73 = D  Below 60 = E

III.  Required Texts:

The following texts will be available online through ASU library:

IV.  Additional materials

A number of required and suggested articles and videos will be posted on Canvas.

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. You are required to arrange with the instructor for the completion of the course requirements. The arrangement is recorded on the Request for Grade of Incomplete form. Do not re-register or pay fees to complete the course. The completion date is determined by the instructor but may not exceed one calendar year from the date the mark of “I” is recorded. When you complete the course, the instructor must submit an online grade change request. An "I" will be automatically changed to a failing grade "E" (0.00 for purposes of evaluating graduation requirements) if not completed within one calendar year. Official University policy can be found at: http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/ssm/ssm203-09.html.

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, not to mention lifelong shame and regret. For more information, see http://provost.asu.edu/academicintegrity/.
Please note that plagiarism is a serious offense. *Anyone caught plagiarizing could fail the plagiarized assignment and the class.* Plagiarism includes failing to cite sources, failing to put quotation marks around direct quotes, representing others’ work as yours, or allowing others to represent your work as theirs. **Stay away from copy-and-paste!** If you have doubts about what constitutes academic dishonesty, ask me.

*Disability Services:* ASU’s Disability Resource Center (DRC) is the entity that provides services to students with disabilities. If you desire accommodation for this course, contact DRC at [http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc](http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc) to establish your eligibility and make sure they can provide you with the services you will need for this course. Students with disabilities must meet the same standards, deadlines, etc. as any other student in the course. All information regarding disability is confidential.

*Writing assistance:* The ASU Writing Center is available to help enrolled students improve their writing skills through online and in-person tutoring: [https://tutoring.asu.edu/writing-centers](https://tutoring.asu.edu/writing-centers). The Writing Center website also contains handouts and services that can help you write better papers. You are strongly encouraged to use this service for your final paper, especially if you receive feedback on your memos regarding the need to improve your writing.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**WEEK 1: August 22**
Overview and Introduction to the Course

**WEEK 2: August 27-29**
What are Human Rights?

*Readings:*
  [read pps. 499-509 -- from “Human Frailty...”; skim the rest]
  [read pps. 45-61 only; skip pps. 62-69]
  [Read pps. 1-6, paying special attention to the social transformation model; skip pps. 7-15, skip pps. 16-22]

*UN Activities:* (Familiarize yourself with these activities and skim the reports, but do not read them word for word.)
- Review the SDGs ([https://sustainableddevelopment.un.org/sdgs](https://sustainableddevelopment.un.org/sdgs)), noticing in particular the human rights content of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:  
- Human rights 'non-negotiable' on post-2015 agenda, says global civil society:
Films: (Watch before class - two very short, very basic introductions to human rights):
1. www.humanrights.com/#/what-are-human-rights
2. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbul3hxYGNU&list=PLCAA1D8F69131A393&index=3&feature=plpp_video

Questions to consider this week:
- How are human rights defined?
- Where did human rights come from?
- What are the key founding human rights instruments and institutions?
- What are the links between human rights and development?
- How can human “rights realization” be assessed?

WEEK 3: September 3-5
What is sustainability?

Readings:

UN Activities: (Familiarize yourself with these activities and skim the reports, but do not read them word for word.)
- 1987 - Our Common Future (“The Brundtland Report”) World Commission on Environment and Development. OVERVIEW ONLY (pp. 18-38) [the full report is there 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 (Earth Summit follow up: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20.html); official conclusions (“The Future We Want”) and conclusions of the “People’s Summit” (posted on Canvas - read the full "People's Summit" document - it's relatively short.)

Films:
- (Watch before class) The Story of Stuff: http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/
Questions to consider this week:

- How is “sustainability” defined?
- What are the historical origins of ecological crises?
- What are some “root metaphors” that guide our thinking about the relationship between humans and the planet?
- How have key international environmental agreements (Rio summit, Kyoto protocol, The Brundtland Report, etc.) evolved?
- How is “development” explained and articulated in these different texts?

WEEK 4: September 10-12

Human Rights and Sustainability: Making the Linkages

Readings:


Short informational articles:


Questions to consider this week:

- How are “economic rationality” and “ecological rationality” similar or different?
- What are the core rationalities and/or principles that characterize “environmental human rights,” “Eco-Justice,” and “Just Sustainabilities”?
- Do efforts to promote “carbon markets” support or undermine human rights and sustainability? Why?

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

September 17-19: Economic rationality and global expansion

Readings:


Short news article:

Questions to consider this week:

- How do the following concepts help illuminate our current socio-ecological situation: ecological rift, treadmill of accumulation, Jevon’s Paradox, and paperless office paradox?
- How does capitalist accumulation operate? In particular, how is surplus value created and distributed, and what happens in the “black box” of production? What is considered “valuable” in capitalism?
- What are “externalities” and how do they come to be?
- How do capitalist social relations (of production and consumption) impact the working class, women, people of color, and the environment?
- What role does commodification play in creating social and ecological vulnerability? How does globalization exacerbate these vulnerabilities?
- What solutions are put forward by champions of capitalism as a way through ecological crises? Why does Foster et al. find these solutions misguided?

September 24-26: Alternative Logics

Readings:


Website:

- The Happy Planet Index: http://www.happyplanetindex.org/

Film:

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

Questions to consider this week:

- What are some alternatives to the capitalist mode of production?
- What are public goods and why are they crucial to human rights and sustainability?

WEEKS 7-8: CASE STUDY 1 - Urban ecology and human rights

October 1-3 – Ecology of Cities

Readings:

- Selections from Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (eds.) Cities for People, Not for Profit.
  o Ch. 3 – Peter Marcuse, “Whose Rights to What City?” [16]
  o Ch. 5 – Margit Mayer, “The ‘Right to the City’ in Urban Social Movements” [18]
News article:

UN Activities: (Familiarize yourself with these activities, and their protagonists)
- Habitat III: https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/about
- Draft New Urban Agenda: https://www.habitat3.org/draft_new_urban_agenda
- Special Rapporteur on the right to housing: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx

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

Questions to consider this week:
- What is the meaning and utility of the following concepts: urban ecology, ecological footprint, and urban metabolism?
- How does global trade affect ecological footprints?
- What is the difference between “strong sustainability” and “weak sustainability”?
- What instruments and agencies promote basic human rights – housing, water, and sanitation – in urban areas, and how?
- What is the difference between a “Right to the City” and these specific rights? How can a “Right to the City” framing change how urban policy is evaluated?

October 8-10 – Livable Cities
Readings:
- Evans, Peter. 2002. Livable Cities: Urban Struggles for Livelihood and Sustainability. University of California Press. Read Chapters 1 & 8, as well as the following chapter, and be prepared to share your observations on that case with the rest of the class:
  o Chapter 6: São Paulo, Brazil – Group A
  o Chapter 7: Mexico City - Group B

Questions to consider this week:
- Who are so-called “agents of livability”? What does it mean to say these agents operate within an “ecology of actors”?
- In what ways might human rights and environmental sustainability goals compliment and/or contradict each other in urban policy?
- What are the key challenges to sustainable human rights realization in cities? What are some possible strategies for overcoming these challenges?

WEEK 9: October 17 (No Class October 15 – Fall Break)
No readings or discussion posts are due this week. Review will take place in class. Please start working on your annotated bibliographies for your final paper.
WEEKS 10-11: CASE STUDY 2 - Sustainable agriculture and the human right to food
October 22-24 – Food Production

Assignment:
• First short paper is due Monday, October 21 at 5 pm

Readings:
• BOOK: Alkon and Agyeman, Cultivating food justice. Everyone reads chapters 1 & 14. Groups 1-5 should read the following chapters and be prepared to summarize the main ideas and share their observations about food production and justice with the class:
  • Chapter 2: Group 3
  • Chapter 3: Group 4
  • Chapter 4: Group 5
  • Chapter 7: Groups 1-2

News:
• Beware of “climate smart” agriculture: http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/09/climate-smart-agriculture-is-corporate-green-washing-warn-ngo/
• Blog about beef: https://blog.ucsusa.org/marcia-delonge/while-bbq-season-sizzles-a-case-for-healthy-farms-and-better-beef

Questions to consider this week:
• What is the meaning and utility of the following concepts: socio-ecological metabolism, metabolic rift, and agrarian citizenship?
• Impact on the environment of historical and contemporary forms of food production:
  o What was the impact of colonialism on agriculture and farming?
  o What was the “Green Revolution” and how did it affect production processes and ecological and human health?
  o What was the global impact of neoliberal economic policies on agriculture/farming?
• What causes hunger and malnutrition in the world today?

October 29-31 – Food Consumption
Readings:
• BOOK: Alkon and Agyeman, Cultivating food justice. Everyone reads chapters 5-6 & 15. Groups 6-10 should read the following chapters and be prepared to summarize the main ideas and share their observations on consumption and food justice with the class:
  • Chapter 8: Group 6
  • Chapter 9: Group 7
UN Activities:
- Familiarize yourself with the Special Rapporteur on the right to food: [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/HilalElver.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Food/Pages/HilalElver.aspx); previous rapporteur: [http://www.srfood.org/](http://www.srfood.org/)

Website of interest:
- [https://whyhunger.org/](https://whyhunger.org/)

Questions to consider this week:
- What is *food justice*?
- What is the “human right to food,” and what *instruments* are designed to promote it? How?
- What is “food security”? What threats to food security are posed by the *global food system*?
- How promising are the different possible *alternatives* to the current global food system? (e.g. Via Campesina, food sovereignty model, food justice movements, traditional and/or contemporary localism)

**WEEKS 12-13: CASE STUDY 3 - Industrialization, extractive industry, and human rights**

**November 5-7**

**Assignment:**
- *Second short paper due Tuesday, November 5 at 5 pm*

**Readings:**

**UN Activities:**
- United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

**Film:**

News:
- https://_rightsaction.org/hudbay-minerals-lawsuits-media/

Questions to consider this week:
- What are some negative impacts of mining, petroleum dependency, and extractive industry on the environment? In what ways do these outcomes violate indigenous human rights?
- What human rights instruments are designed to prevent, mitigate, or remedy industry-led violations (Ruggie Framework, UNDRIPS), and how they are used for this purpose?
- Why do violations of indigenous rights continue to occur?

November 12-14
Assignment:
- Meet 1:1 with professor this week regarding your final papers

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

Questions to consider this week:
• What are some *alternative visions* regarding our relationship with the earth put forward by indigenous communities?
• What are possible *strategies* to promote and/or protect indigenous rights and the earth vis-à-vis industry?

**WEEK 14-15: SOLUTIONS**

**November 19-21**

*Assignment:*

- *Annotated bibliography for final paper due in class in hard copy Nov. 21*

*Readings:*

- **One more reading TBD**

*Questions to consider:*

- What are the root causes of the unsustainable pathways humanity has followed?
- What specific actions could be taken to reverse climate change, repair environmental degradation, build sustainable communities, and protect, respect, and fulfill environmental human rights?

**November 28 (Thanksgiving – No Class)**

**WEEK 16: SEMESTER WRAP**

**December 3-5: Wrap up and LAST DAY OF CLASS (Thursday)**

- Informal presentations on student paper topics

*Questions to consider as you prepare to discuss your paper topic in class* (using the “social transformation model” of Haglund and Stryker):

- How have norms (of human rights) and ideas (of sustainability) evolved and been adopted as beliefs or values (or not) in your topical area? What alternative norms or ideas might address violations of human rights and/or environmental problems in your topical area?
- How and why have existing beliefs and perceptions led to actions that support or undermine human rights and sustainability in your topical area? How might actions in support of human rights or environmental protection be fostered or forced?
- What would be necessary for those actions to really make a difference; in other words, when would they represent truly meaningful social transformation?
- Which actors, operating within existing structures and power relations, use what kinds of mechanisms (e.g., policies, institutions, strategies) to promote or restrict change?

**FINAL PAPER DUE Thursday, December 12 at NOON**