

**Geography 30 – Fall 2009:  
Geographic Perspectives on Sustainability and Human-Environment Systems**

**“It’s complicated.”**

**Instructor: Seth Baum, [sdb244@psu.edu](mailto:sdb244@psu.edu)  
Class Meeting: MW 11:15 - 12:05, 026 Hosler**

	Instructor	Assistant	Assistant
	Seth Baum	Greg Lankenau	Seth Wilberding
E-Mail	<a href="mailto:sdb244@psu.edu">sdb244@psu.edu</a>	<a href="mailto:grl11@psu.edu">grl11@psu.edu</a>	<a href="mailto:spw107@psu.edu">spw107@psu.edu</a>
Office	Walker 337	Walker 335	Walker 330
Office Hours	MW 12:10 – 1:10	M 1:15 – 2:15	T 12:00 – 1:00

You will be assigned to a group of approximately five students within your discussion section.

This group serves as a study community for all aspects of the course.

When you have questions, you should generally ask your group members first, your TA second, and the Instructor third, although you are always free to contact whoever you wish.

**Discussion Sections:**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>TA</b>
1	M 4:40-5:30	025 Deike	Greg
2	M 12:20-1:10	218 Hosler	Greg
3	W 1:25-2:15	110 Walker	Greg
4	T 1:25-2:15	103 Willard	Seth W
5	W 1:25-2:15	025 Deike	Seth W
6	W 9:05-9:55	101 Walker	Seth W
7	R 10:10-11:00	218A Hosler	Greg
8	T 2:30-3:20	009 Walker	Seth W

**Required Readings**

There is no course textbook. Course readings are available on ANGEL (<https://cms.psu.edu>).

**Course Blog**

Course announcements and other information will be posted on the course blog:

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/sdb244/blogs/geog30fall09>

All announcements will also be made in lecture.

## **Course Description**

This course introduces the study of sustainability and human-environment interactions from a geographic perspective. We examine both the influence of humanity on the environment and the influence of the environment on humanity with attention to the sustainability of current human activities. We take a complex systems perspective on major environmental and societal challenges and examine linked human-environmental issues in a variety of geographic contexts. We emphasize the major individual and societal decisions which impact the environment and the ethical views implicit in the decisions. We explore key concepts such as environmental determinism, systems analysis, collective action, and ecological footprints, as well as various topical issues related to resource depletion, climate change, energy, urban design, and agriculture. Course discussions and activities highlight both major themes in human-environment geography and the experience of what it is like to perform human-environment geography.

## **Course Objectives and Outcomes**

Course Objectives: The aims of this course are to

- Investigate the ways that humans in various geographic contexts think about, affect, and are affected by the natural environment
- Consider the interconnectedness of complex human-environment systems, including relationships at multiple spatial and temporal scales
- Examine the sustainability of current social and environmental practices and explore alternatives

Learning Outcomes: Upon completion of this course, students will be equipped to

- Critically analyze and develop informed positions on major societal and environmental challenges associated with sustainability
- Enact principles of sustainability in everyday life, both as individuals and as community members

## **Course Format**

The course meets in four formats:

*Lecture:* Meets twice weekly in 026 Hosler. The lecture presents core course content, announcements, and other important course information.

*Discussion Section:* Meets once weekly. The discussion section hosts interactive discussion of course topics and group work on the course project.

*Angel:* The course Angel website (<https://cms.psu.edu>) hosts all course documents including readings, assignments, and lecture PowerPoints. Also, Angel discussion forums provide space for further participation on all aspects of the course.

*Blog:* The course blog (<http://www.personal.psu.edu/sdb244/blogs/geog30fall09>) posts course announcements and other information.

**Assignments and Grading: Overview**

The class is out of 1000 points, so a 50-point assignment is worth 5% of your total grade, a 200-point assignment is worth 20%, etc.

Midterm Exam	150 points	15%
Final Exam	300 points	30%
Weekly Quizzes	50 points	5%
Participation	150 points	15%
Writing Assignments	100 points	10%
Course Project	250 points	25%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1000 points</b>	<b>100%</b>

There are no make-up midterms. If you miss the midterm with a University-excused absence, then your final exam will be worth 450 points (45%). If you miss the midterm without a University-excused absence, then you get a 0 for the midterm.

The minimum scores for course grades are as follows:

A	93.3% (933 pts)	B-	80.0% (800 pts)
A-	90.0% (900 pts)	C	70% (700 pts)
B+	86.7% (867 pts)	D	60% (600 pts)
B	83.3% (833 pts)	F	0-59.9% (0-599 pts)

**Assignment Descriptions**

**Exams**

There are two exams: one midterm and one final exam. The exams are cumulative, with an emphasis on the more recent material. The exams consist of a mixture of multiple choice, short answer (one paragraph), long answer (3-5 paragraphs), and mapping questions.

**Participation**

Participation involves attendance and active, thoughtful participation in lecture, discussion section, and Angel discussion forums.

**Writing Assignments**

Two writing assignments will be given during the course. Assignments will be evaluated based on both the quality of the ideas and the quality of the writing. To receive full credit, the writing must be free of spelling and grammar mistakes and must clearly communicate the underlying ideas.

**Course Project**

The course project is an immersion in the practice of human-environment geography. The project involves group work tied to the Borough of State College’s ongoing sustainability initiatives.

**Attendance Policy**

For the lectures (i.e. in Hosler 026), attendance is strongly recommended but not strictly required. 5% of the Participation grade comes from lecture via unannounced in-class activities. Also, content presented in lecture may or may not be available elsewhere.

**For the discussion sections, attendance is mandatory.** Except in the case of University-excused absences, each absence beyond the first will result in a 10-point deduction from your section participation grade. If you miss a discussion section, you can make it up by attending another section that week only. Absences cannot be made up during weeks when sections are working on the course project.

**Late Exam & Assignment Policies**

Make-up exams will not be offered except in the case of University-excused absences. Late assignments (including project components) will be penalized at 10% per business day (MTWRF). Assignments more than ten days late automatically receive zero points. All assignments have precise (to the minute) deadlines. Anything past the deadline is automatically late, even if it is just one minute late. Every 24 hours (to the minute) after the deadline, another day of late penalty is incurred.

**Special Fall 2009 Flu Protocols**

In compliance with Pennsylvania Department of Health and Centers for Disease Control recommendations, students should NOT attend class or any public gatherings while ill with influenza. The illness and self-isolation period will usually be about a week. It is very important that individuals avoid spreading the flu to others. Students with the flu do not need to provide a physician's certification of illness. However, ill students should inform your instructor or teaching assistant via e-mail, not personally, that they are absent from class because of the flu. Notification needs to occur at the onset or during the illness and the instructor or teaching assistant will work with you at the time of your recovery to get you back on track in the class. If you have questions about academic policy-related issues, please call the Associate Dean/Chief Academic Officer of your college. For health-related questions you can email Dr. Margaret Spear, director, University Health Services, at [uhsinfo@sa.psu.edu](mailto:uhsinfo@sa.psu.edu).

**Assignment and Exam Schedule**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
ALL	ALL	ALL	Participation
4	M	Sept 14	Project Activity Proposal
5	F	Sept 25	Writing Assignment 1
8	M	Oct 12	Midterm
9	M	Oct 19	Project Initial Analysis
11	F	Nov 13	Writing Assignment 2
14	F	Dec 4	Final Presentations: Written
14	D	Various	Final Presentations: In-Class
16	?	TBD	Final Exam

**Course Schedule and Assigned Readings and Activities**

Please note that this schedule might be subject to change. It is your responsibility to keep up with any changes. Also, Day “D” is Discussion Section.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading/Activity</b>
1	M	Aug 24	Course Introduction	n/a
	W	Aug 26	Environmental Determinism	Guns, Germs, & Steel review
	D		Syllabus; Structure & Agency	n/a
2	M	Aug 31	Global Environmental Change	The Anthropocene
	W	Sep 2	Systems Analysis	Wikipedia Articles on Systems
	D		Project Overview	n/a
3	M	Sep 7	Labor Day	n/a
	W	Sep 9	Borough Sustainability	Project Reflections
	D		None	n/a
4	M	Sep 14	Environmental Ethics	Muir, Pinchot, Singer, & O'Neil
	W	Sep 16	Sustainability 1	Our Common Future; Kates et al.
	D		Project Library Research	n/a
5	M	Sep 21	Sustainability 2	Meadows; Baum
	W	Sep 23	Ecological Footprints	Story of Stuff, Eco. Footprint quiz
	D		Ethics & Sustainability	n/a
6	M	Sep 28	Collective Action	Ostrom & Nagendra
	W	Sep 30	Population, Affluence & Tech.	Ehrlich; Simon; Kurzweil
	D		Collective Action Game	Collective Action Pre-Game

<b>Week</b>	<b>Day</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Reading/Activity</b>
7	M	Oct 5	Technological Change	Schelling + Transhumanist Declar.
	W	Oct 7	Midterm Review	n/a
	D		Midterm Rev. + Current Events	Current Events Readings
8	M	Oct 12	Midterm	n/a
	W	Oct 14	Climate Change Science	IPCC WGI FAQ + Climate Skeptics
	D		Project Work	n/a
9	M	Oct 19	Climate Change Impacts	IPCC WGII Ch.5
	W	Oct 21	Climate Change Policy	Barrett; Obama
	D		Climate Change Discussion	n/a
10	M	Oct 26	Energy 1	Smil: 21st Century Energy
	W	Oct 28	Energy 2	BP World Energy
	D		Project Work	n/a
11	M	Nov 2	Power, Power, Power, & Pirates	Somali Piracy Article
	W	Nov 4	Political Ecology	TBD
	D		Political Ecology Discussion	n/a
12	M	Nov 9	Buildings, Transport, & Cities	LEED Guidelines
	W	Nov 11	Buildings, Transport, & Cities	New Urbanism
	D		Project Work	n/a
13	M	Nov 16	Food & Agriculture	Smil: Haber-Bosch; FAO
	W	Nov 18	Food & Agriculture	Vegan Outreach
	D		Writing Workshop	Project Writing Drafts
	M	Nov 23	Thanksgiving	n/a
	W	Nov 25	Thanksgiving	n/a
	D		Thanksgiving	n/a
14	M	Nov 30	Current Events	Current Events Readings
	W	Dec 2	Beyond Earth	Space Colonization; Fermi Paradox
	D		Present Projects	Course Projects
15	M	Dec 7	Class Choice	TBD
	W	Dec 9	Course Synthesis	n/a
	D		Course Synthesis	n/a
16	?	TBD	Final Exam	Finals Week

## **Grading Policy**

Some assignments/questions have clear-cut right or wrong answers (e.g., multiple-choice questions). These are graded right or wrong, with no partial credit.

Most other assignments/questions are graded in 10% increments. Criteria for grading include completeness, depth of analysis, active engagement, and quality of writing/presentation. Please note that average college work will earn a grade of 80% of the possible points on an assignment/question. The complete grading scale is as follows:

**100% (exceptional):** The grade of 100% is reserved for exceptional work. To meet the minimum standards to earn this grade, your work must meet all assignment/question criteria (and exceed many), be rich in explanation and analysis with connections to other course material or outside topics, show significant active and creative engagement with the material, and be very well-written and largely error-free.

**90% (very good):** The grade of 90% indicates a job very well done. To meet the minimum standards to earn this grade, your work must meet all assignment/question criteria (and exceed some), be moderately deep in explanation and analysis, show active engagement with the material, and be well-written with only minor errors.

**80% (satisfactory):** The grade of 80% indicates average work. Work that earns this grade is satisfactory and complete, but lacks the depth, engagement, and presentation quality required of higher scores. To meet the minimum standards to earn this grade, your work must meet all assignment/question criteria, be somewhat deep in explanation and analysis, show fairly active engagement with the material, and be adequately written with only minor errors.

**70% (adequate):** The grade of 70% indicates work that is mostly satisfactory and complete, but falls somewhat short. To meet the minimum standards to earn this grade, your work must meet most assignment/question criteria and contain no more than one of the following shortcomings: lack of depth in explanation and analysis, little or no active engagement with the material, poor quality of writing/presentation, or major errors.

**60% or less (unsatisfactory):** Grades of 60% or less indicate unsatisfactory work. Your work earns these grades if it fails to meet significant assignment/question criteria, and/or it contains two or more of the following shortcomings: lack of depth in explanation and analysis, little or no active engagement with the material, poor quality of writing/presentation, or major errors. Work that is incomplete or contains many of these shortcomings can earn grades all the way down to 0.

### **Penn State Academic Integrity**

“Academic integrity includes a commitment by all members of the University community not to engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation or deception. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of work completed by others.” (Penn State Faculty Senate Policy 49-20).

**Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course.** Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, using source material without proper citations, fabricating information or citations, tampering with the academic work of other students, having unauthorized possession of examinations or other course material, submitting the work of another person, submitting work previously used (without permission from the instructor), seeking individual credit for work done collaboratively (without permission from the instructor), and facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others.

Students who are found to be dishonest will receive a grade of 0 on the assignment in question and may face other consequences, including automatic failure of the course.

If you have any questions on what defines academic integrity or dishonesty, please consult the instructor or a teaching assistant, ideally **before** engaging in the action in question.

For more information, see Penn State’s policies and rules for undergraduate students:  
<http://www.psu.edu/ufs/policies>

### **Accommodations in the Classroom**

If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about access, please see the instructor **within the first week of the course** so the instructor can work with you to develop appropriate accommodations.

For more information, see Penn State’s Office for Disability Services:  
<http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods/>

### **Student Expectations in the Classroom**

This class will touch on sensitive subjects, including gender, race, class, sexuality, politics, religion, lifestyle, international relations, and others. Every individual in the class has the right to speak freely and offer his/her questions and opinions. The rights of each individual to have a safe and comfortable space to discuss these issues must also be considered.

If you have suggestions or concerns about how we can improve the safety and comfort of the classroom environment, please feel free to speak with the instructor or a teaching assistant.