Sociology 265(SD): After Sustainable Development: How Would We Build a Better World?

Fridays, 9 a.m. to noon

SSMS 3017

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Office Hours: will be held at the Coral Tree Cafe (near Cheadle Hall) on Thursdays, 12:15-2:15 p.m., and by appointment (the best policy is to e-mail or see me after class to reserve a spot – I’ll also do lots of e-mail consultation!)

Sustainable development is the central challenge of our times.

-- Ban Ki-moon, U.N. Secretary General

... it is more and more apparent that, mainstreamed as sustainability or sustainable development, environmentalism has failed to reduce, even remotely adequately, the impact of humans on the biosphere.... The world talks the talk, but walks only as much of the walk as will enable it to go on talking.

-- John Foster, After Sustainability: Denial, Hope, Retrieval (Earthscan, 2015), 2

It is not enough to know what is wrong. You also have to be able to know how to fix it.

-- Albert Bates, “Stairway to Heaven”
(August 19, 2015).
http://www.resilience.org/stories/201
5-08-19/stairway-to-heaven

Statement of Purpose and Course Description

“Sustainable development” can mean many things, and I don’t know what they all are. One way to put it, for me, would be moving the planet toward the most exacting possible global climate treaty, contributing to the strongest possible social movement participation in creating the future worlds we envision, and through both of these channels to bring about the creation of a low-carbon, sustainable [that word again], equitable, and deeply democratic future.

What I do know is that in addition to all our efforts to stop obviously bad things from happening – out-of-control climate change, the further narrowing of democratic options [say, Donald Trump versus Hillary Clinton], the waves of militarism and violence that engulf us, or
their component pieces, like fracking, tar sands, Arctic oil, the climate treaty on offer for Paris COP 21, a Republican win for the presidency in 2016, the list goes on – in addition to stopping all that…

We will need to have visions of a better world to offer to each other and to all the people we hope to build it with, and ideas about how to tie these strategically into one large social movement that stops the machinery of destruction and sets off in a different direction.

The dream of “sustainable development” is one of those visions. Will it turn into a long nightmare for our century, like “development,” its twentieth-century predecessor, continually betraying its (arguably) noble initial goals of a world without poverty, with political freedom, and with healthy, plural cultures?

2015 is one of those hinges of history, when, in a happy confluence of timing, the Millenium Development Goals that were the highest expression of the dream of development will get traded in for the new model – the Sustainable Development Goals (in a three-day U.N. conference in New York that begins on the day of our first meeting!), and when the world community – or at least the United Framework Convention on Climate Change – has vowed to deliver a global climate treaty that will save us from the elephant in the room of all discussions of future worlds, in Paris on practically the last day of class in December.

How wonderful, then, that we will meet and spend three hours together each week to take stock of the state of the world, the import of these events, the field of sustainable development, and discuss our own dreams and nightmares about the future!

I believe that if we are to pass on a world worth living in to the next generation, this network of movements for global and climate justice and an authentically sustainable future must become the biggest the world has ever seen.

And the moment is now.

The latest reports of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and leading climate scientists James Hansen, Alice Bows, and Kevin Anderson point toward the need for a treaty that will limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius or less and restore the Earth’s atmosphere to the scientifically established sustainable level of 350 parts per million of carbon dioxide (it passed the threshold of 400 ppm in May 2013 and we have added another 3 ppm since then).

Meanwhile, activist-scholar Bill McKibben notes that for an 80 percent chance to stay under a “realistic” but far riskier 2 degrees, we have to keep the total of all future greenhouse gas emissions under the equivalent of 565 gigatonnes of CO₂, but scarily, the proven reserves of all the fossil fuel corporations and exporting countries come to 2,795 gigatonnes. This means that 80 percent of these reserves – by some estimates, worth as much as $27 trillion – have to be kept in the ground somehow and never extracted and burned.

The annual United Nations climate summits, known as the COPs (for Conference of the Parties), followed by a number denoting the year (the first, in 1995 was COP1) have been trying to negotiate such a treaty for almost twenty years now, and have set themselves the deadline of the COP21 in Paris in December 2015, to achieve it. But the international climate negotiations process is at an impasse, as the dominant parties to the climate negotiations continue to advance
positions completely at odds with each other and with what science requires, suggesting that humanity is on a collision course with nature that it cannot win.

Perhaps more importantly, on the side of hope, since 2007, or even earlier, a promising global climate justice movement has emerged behind the slogan “System change, not climate change!” making demands for a socially just, scientifically appropriate, and legally binding climate treaty. To get such a treaty, governments who do not want to vote for it, or whose short-term interests and economic elites are not served by signing, will need to be persuaded, or more probably, forced to do so by their own civil societies and Earth citizens everywhere.

The purpose of this course, then, is to explore the diverse meanings and impacts of the concept and practice of the term “sustainable development” as used by scholars, social movement organizations, communities, and activists to imagine and create a sustainable, equitable, democratic world for future generations.

*This course is about co-generating knowledge and positive action to secure a better future. We need to break new ground as scholars and make commitments to be active participants in this process.*

**My Philosophy of Teaching and Learning**

I consider teaching a radical act…

Learning and teaching are complex, endlessly fascinating collaborations. I learn enormous amounts from the students in classes I have facilitated, whom I consider colleagues and companions on an intellectual, sometimes life-changing journey. My goals for my classes and myself include dramatically increasing our knowledge base about the world, developing critical thinking, analytical skills, and the historical perspective necessary to examine our deeply held assumptions regarding the social world, and cultivating our sociological imaginations as we attempt to provide explanations for these phenomena. We will collectively facilitate our work in a convivial and collaborative way, hone the arts of applying theoretical concepts to actual historical and contemporary situations, and make connections between these situations and what we study and what we do.

I agree with Manolo Callahan: “We [should] attempt to convert the competitive atmosphere of the traditional graduate seminar into a site for collective reflection and action. We will **think out loud** as we examine concepts, theoretical frameworks, and specific evidence convivially, constructing new tools as we proceed. Sharing our unique perspectives, histories, experiences, skills, and desires will allow us to acknowledge the resources we ourselves claim as well as the knowledge we hope to share. Given that we will engage difficult and controversial concepts and issues, it will be our shared obligation to maintain an intellectually rigorous and respectful environment. Thus, it is imperative that our engagement be thoughtful and supportive of the views, experiences, expertise, and desires of others at all times.”

**Texts**

There will be a fairly heavy amount of reading in this course, by any standard. The good news is that *you* decide what and especially how much to read. And, you will find this includes
some exciting and inspiring materials you can’t find elsewhere – or your money back (well, not really…)!

There are four required books. They will cost you as little as $25 in all, if you use the pdfs for the Foster and Porritt books.


Along with the books of John Foster and Jonathan Porritt, all other course readings will be posted on our GauchoSpace for the class. Let me know if you have any problems accessing them.

**Students with Disabilities**

This course welcomes and accommodates all interested students. Students with disabilities who require accommodations to fully participate in course activities or meet course requirements should speak to the Disabled Students Program, as well as the Instructor. If you qualify for services through the DSP, please turn in a letter of accommodation to the Instructor. We will do everything possible to accommodate your individual needs. For more information, go to http://dsp.sa.ucsb.edu/

**GauchoSpace**

Yes! It is indispensable to our work, so check it regularly – https://gauchospace.ucsb.edu/ You will be posting your weekly writing to GauchoSpace so we may all read each other’s work before class meets to discuss the readings.

**Course Requirements**

**Attendance and Participation**

*Attendance at all class meetings is indispensable for making this course a success for all of us.* Class participation will be noted by attendance and participation in class, volunteering on multiple occasions for presenting a reading, and general engagement with the materials. *It is always greatly to your advantage to attend class.*

I would like to center this course around class discussion and a collective search for new knowledge. To do this, we will share or delegate responsibility so that with each other’s help we can cover a lot of ground in terms of the reading, and at the same time read some items with greater attention than usual.
Note: please try to follow the movement principle of “Step up, step back” in our discussions, meaning if you tend to take a lot of turns or make long interventions, be mindful of this and step back from the discussion so that others, and especially those who may not speak as easily, can step up and contribute to the discussion. Or, as CodePink puts it: “Encourage those who don’t talk much to speak up, and those who talk a lot to say less” – see more at: http://www.codepink4peace.org/article.php?id=103#sthash.kCn9IAy7.dpuf

Writing

I see no reason to assign a long paper at the end of the term. Let’s put all our effort into writing great briefs and having great discussions!

We will accomplish this through a group-centered form of learning and by circulating our weekly briefs to the group the day before our discussion (hard as this will probably be for most of us).

A typical brief might develop an analytical discussion about some part of the readings and/or the weekly topic. By a critical analysis of the reading, I am thinking of an assessment of a selected aspect or aspects of the week’s reading(s), including your own reflection, emotions, or ideas on the issues raised by the reading (your agreement or disagreement, along with the reasons for either; and/or questions you have). Try to take no more than two single-spaced pages (12 point Times Roman font please) for your briefs (less can be fine, just write something every week), so they can be printed out on one page back-to-back. Why not keep it short and to the point?

The goal is to post weekly briefs on GauchoSpace on Thursdays (the earlier the better) before class, so that we may come to class having read them.

Paper Style and “Grading” Policy

Paper style: The formatting guidelines for all papers in this course are 1” margins all around and 12 point size. I would like all papers single-spaced so that they use one sheet of paper when I print them out, as I must. For grammar and other writing matters, see John Foran, “Tips for Writers.” All papers are to be submitted on GauchoSpace.

Grading system: Since all the paper assignments in this class are short, they will be “graded” on a check minus/check/check plus system, where “v+” is roughly an “A”, “v” is roughly a “B”, and “v-” is roughly a “C.” You may also receive a “split” grade, such as v/v+ or v-/v. You may on occasion even have the good fortune to receive a “v++” which can be thought of as something like “A+.” This is a graduate seminar, so final grades should be in the A to A+ range.

If you have any questions about a grade, please see the person sitting next to you as I don’t want to talk about it – we’re not doing this for the grade…

Writing Resources

We all need to work on our writing skills, continuously; each of us can become better at this. The class GauchoSpace contains several excellent guides on how to write well, by John
Foran, Chris Bickel, Manuel Callahan, Arthur McEvoy, and UCSB for Writers. You might want to study at least one of these before every piece of writing you do this quarter, until you feel you have mastered and can practice what they say.

Following the News: Tracking Current Issues

As a series of current “events” and ongoing process, climate change – whether named or not -- is always in the news. As the occasion arises, we may discuss current events, so please feel free to share news with the class, especially if you are moved to report on the news for a reaction paper.

Some tips on how to read and analyze the news are found in our GauchoSpace: Rich Kaplan, “Analyzing the News,” and Yousef Baker, “Reading the News on the Middle East.”

As the occasion arises, we may discuss current events, so please feel free to share news with the class by bringing it to the instructors’ attention.

Excellent resources, among others, are:

Grist – Environmental News, Commentary, Advice -- http://grist.org/ -- “An American non-profit online magazine that has been publishing environmental news and commentary since 1999. Grist’s taglines are ‘Gloom and doom with a sense of humor’ and ‘A beacon in the smog’” – Wikipedia.

EcoWatch -- http://ecowatch.com/ -- “EcoWatch is a dedicated platform for environmental news that helps transform the ability of individuals to learn about environmental issues and take action. EcoWatch provides timely access to relevant information that educates and motivates individuals to become engaged in their community, adopt sustainable practices and support strong environmental policy.”

Resilience -- http://www.resilience.org/ -- “both an information clearinghouse and a network of action-oriented groups. Our focus is on building community resilience in a world of multiple emerging challenges: the decline of cheap energy, the depletion of critical resources like water, complex environmental crises like climate change and biodiversity loss, and the social and economic issues which are linked to these. We like to think of the site as a community library with space to read and think, but also as a vibrant café in which to meet people, discuss ideas and projects, and pick up and share tips on how to build the resilience of your community, your household, or yourself.”


The Guardian -- http://www.guardian.co.uk/ -- the United Kingdom’s best newspaper.

Amy Goodman’s Democracy Now! -- http://www.democracynow.org/ -- the best source of progressive global political journalism in the U.S. They will do extensive coverage of COP21.
Resources on an Earth in Crisis

The following websites are useful sources of information on the climate crisis and on some of the things people are doing about it…

Climate Central – http://www.climatecentral.org/
Climate Connections – http://climatevoices.wordpress.com/
Climate Debate Daily – http://climatedebatedaily.com/
DeSmog Canada – http://www.desmog.ca/
The International Institute of Climate Action and Theory (iicat) – www.iicat.org
Real Climate – http://www.realclimate.org/
Skeptical Science – http://www.skepticalscience.com
System Change not Climate Change – http://systemchange.ca
Youth Climate: Dispatches from the Global Youth Climate Movement – http://youthclimate.org/


Course Topics and Reading Assignments

Part One:
Situating [Sustainable] Development and Its Many Alternatives

Reading [to be done before our first class!]

Please poke around the website: https://sustainableddevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=13&nr=1064&menu=1634
Friday, September 25.  Week One

First meeting:  Earth/Crisis/Justice/Sustainability

An introduction to the course and to each other.  John will sketch the content of the traditional Sociology 265:  Development and Its Alternatives, with a few informal remarks, clearing the way for our first discussion of the topics of this course as we begin to identify some of the questions we want to explore this quarter.

Friday, October 2   Week Two

After Sustainability

Today, we’ll try to wrap our heads around John Foster’s new book, After Sustainability:  Denial, Hope, Retrieval.

Readings


Friday, October 9   Week Three

Sustainable Development, Degrowth, and Ecosocialism

Today, we’ll read and discuss Wayne Ellwood’s little book, The Non-Nonsense Guide to Degrowth and Sustainability, and a couple of short texts on ecosocialism.

Readings


The Lima Ecosocialist Declaration (December 2014), http://ecosocialisthorizons.com/2014/10/the-lima-ecosocialist-declaration/
We’ll also watch and discuss the controversial new film, *Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret* (directed by Kip Andersen and Keegan Kuhn, A.U.M. films, 2014, 91 minutes).

**Websites on Cowspiracy with tons of pretty shocking facts**

http://www.cowspiracy.com/facts/

http://www.cowspiracy.com/infographic

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***SPECIAL EVENT***

**Friday, October 9-Sunday, October 11: The West Coast System Change Not Climate Change Gathering**

Everything you need to know about the conference can be found here [and if it’s not, just ask John about it!]: “21st Century Ecosocialism: Practicing System Change, Making Connections, Building a Movement” -- [http://www.westcoastecosocialists.org/](http://www.westcoastecosocialists.org/)

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**Friday, October 16  Week Four**

**Manifestos, Dark and Sunny:**

Ecomodernization, the Good Anthropocene, and the Dark Mountain Project

Today, we’ll traipse our way through the emerging debates around such notions as “ecomodernization,” “the good Anthropocene,” and Paul Kingsnorth’s “Dark Mountain” worldview.

**Readings**

*The Dark Mountain Provocation*

Website of the Dark Mountain Project, [http://dark-mountain.net/about/the-dark-mountain-project/](http://dark-mountain.net/about/the-dark-mountain-project/)

*Uncivilisation: The Dark Mountain Manifesto* (2009), [http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/](http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/)

“What is the Dark Mountain Project?” [http://dark-mountain.net/about/faqs/](http://dark-mountain.net/about/faqs/)

The Ecomodernist Manifesto Controversy


An Ecomodernist Manifesto (April 2015), http://www.ecomodernism.org/


Ian Angus, “Hijacking the Anthropocene” (May 2015), http://climateandcapitalism.com/2015/05/19/hijacking-the-anthropocene/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+climateandcapitalism%2FpEtD+%28Climate+and+Capitalism%29

The “Good Anthropocene” debate


Nathanael Johnson, “Is the Anthropocene a world of hope or a world of hurt?” (July 7, 2014), http://grist.org/climate-energy/is-the-anthropocene-a-world-of-hope-or-a-world-of-hurt/


Ian Angus, “When Did the Anthropocene Begin…and Why Does It Matter?”


Part Two: The Great Turning

Friday, October 23 Week Five

Climate Justice: “The Two Most Important Words We Have”
Today, we’ll consider the accomplishments, limitations, and potential of a movement for global climate justice to start to move the world in the direction of a better future.

**Readings**


**Film**

*The Great Turning Joanna Macy and the Great Turning* (Chris Landry, 26 minutes, 2013), [https://vimeo.com/ondemand/greatturning](https://vimeo.com/ondemand/greatturning)

**Video clip**

Bill McKibben, “The two most important words we have…”

**Friday, October 30   Week Six**

**Possible Futures: The U.K. in 2050**

This week, we’ll take on Jonathan Porritt’s book, *The World We Made* and amuse each other with “mini-Ted Talks,” in which each of us delivers “My Best Idea for Building a Better World,” in five minutes or less.

**Readings**


**Friday, November 6   Week Seven**
Possible Futures: California in 2065

This week, we’ll discuss Kim Stanley Robinson’s novel, *Pacific Edge* and each of us will attempt a visual pechakucha-style presentation on the theme of “A Better Future World.”

**Readings**


**Video**


**Friday, November 13  Week Eight**

The Movement that has No Name: Transition Towns, Resilience, Buen Vivir, and more…

This week we will form groups that do readings around one or another strands of “just sustainability” that we will identify earlier in the quarter and develop reading lists for, such as:

**Sample readings**


**Friday, November 20  Week Nine**

Teaching Sustainable Development

This week we’ll each present a book we have read outside class on the themes of this course to the group…
We will also have some discussion about teaching and practicing justice-based sustainable development as public sociologists and/or scholar/activists.

Readings

Readings will come from a list that the class generates in the first three weeks of the course, with each of us picking one book to read and report on to the class.

Friday, December 3  Week Ten

COP21

This week will (hopefully, hopefully) feature a Skyped session with John and perhaps other class members from COP21 in Paris, France.

Please study the websites of the International Institute of Climate Action and Theory, www.iicat.org and the Climate Justice Project, www.climatejusticeproject.com

Readings


Keep up with the first reports on COP21 by reading the following on-line:

Amy Goodman’s Democracy Now! – http://www.democracynow.org/

Climate Action Network [CAN], Eco Newsletter, http://www.climatenetwork.org/eco-newsletters

Third World Network [TWN], “Lima News Updates,” which will be found on their website at http://www.twnside.org.sg/


Friday, December 18  “Week Eleven”

Facing the Future – Final Thoughts, and Farewells

This week, it is my hope that we can gather to celebrate, hear what everyone’s thinking, and figure out how we’ll stay in touch.
We need to remember that the work of our time is bigger than climate change. We need to be setting our sights higher and deeper. What we’re really talking about, if we’re honest with ourselves, is transforming everything about the way we live on this planet.


*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*

-- Martin Luther King Jr.