

Sustainability and Environmental Action Project

ENVI-3060 (3 credits)

Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action (Summer)

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This program is a project-based course designed for students to develop research and advocacy skills in relation to the theory and practice of sustainability, with a focus on environmental action and leadership. It operates in parallel to 'Sustainability and Environmental Action Seminar' to provide an opportunity for students to engage more deeply with an ecological topic or theme of special interest. Through lectures, field trips, and practical and collaborative workshop experiences, students will be exposed to sustainability experts and industry practitioners while at the same time developing practical skills for real world application. This program infuses theory and practice to provide a basis for students to develop their own project under the supervision of an expert advisor.

Students will choose *one* of the following four project streams to focus on:

- Sustainable Fashion Practicum: In a global context where the fashion and textile industries are driving severe and well-known environmental and social justice problems, this project option focuses on exploring alternative sustainability practices of eco-clothing and sustainable fashion and materials. Students who select this practicum will receive instruction in garment construction, mending, 'upcycling', and repurposing, and be tasked with transforming reclaimed materials into sustainable fashion items. Students will then choose an aspect of sustainable fashion to focus on and write a report in relation to the academic literature and practicum experience.
- Permaculture Design Practicum: This project option is based on the design philosophy of permaculture. Students who select this practicum will have a range of practical workshops developing permaculture skills such as composting, raising seeds, preserving, household energy efficiency, waste minimization, bike maintenance, and repair. Students will then choose an aspect of permaculture design to focus on and write a report in relation to the academic literature and practicum experience.
- Creative Arts Practicum: This practicum gives students the opportunity to develop their pre-existing artistic or creative skills in the context of sustainability and environmental concerns. Exploring the role of art and aesthetics in social change, students who choose the creative arts practicum will also develop new creative work(s) in their area of competency (e.g. painting, music, photography, poetry,

creative writing, etc.). These students will also produce a report theorizing their creative work(s) in relation to the academic literature and practicum experience.

- **Research Project:** For those students wishing to undertake a research project instead of a practicum, this fourth option provides an opportunity to conduct a more extended and critical literature review on the student's chosen topic related to the program.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Evaluate and apply sustainability practices in personal, social, economic, and political contexts
- Understand and articulate the meaning and significance of permaculture, sustainable fashion, and the role of art and eco-aesthetics in social change
- Design a way of life drawing on ecological principles to minimize impact on the environment while increasing social and environmental wellbeing
- Develop practical skills for sustainable living related to food, clothing, and energy
- Identify how current governmental policies inhibit or support sustainable action and illustrate ways of restructuring society to better promote sustainability
- Formulate and develop sustainability research into chosen area of environmental concern
- Discuss and advocate for environmental issues in clear and engaging ways

Course Schedule

Students will be provided with a detailed course schedule during orientation on the program. Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs. The program is based in Byron Bay but includes excursions in the broader region, as well as field trips in and around the city of Melbourne. Each week the course covers major themes via classroom seminars, workshops, field trips, and class discussions. Students attend all program content, except during week 5, during which workshops and content are based on the student's specific project choice (i.e. sustainable fashion, permaculture design, creative arts, or research topic).

Course Material and Texts

A course pack, including selections from the texts listed below, will be provided upon arrival in hardcopy. Students are not required to purchase these books or articles; selected chapters and articles will also be available on the course website or provided in electronic form. Readings are selected from a range of academic and quality generalist literature, including refereed journal articles and selections from books. Beyond what is listed in the syllabus, supplementary articles are sometimes also distributed to students based on current events and relevancy. Other course resources include the SIT online resources library. In this 'project-based' course, students will also read extensively *based on their own research* in relation to their self-designed sustainability project (more details below). Select readings include:

- Jackson, T. (2006) Readings in Sustainable Consumption, in Jackson, T (ed.) *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption* (London: Earthscan, 2006).
- Castro-López, A., Iglesias, V., & Puente, J. (2021). Slow Fashion Trends: Are Consumers Willing to Change their Shopping Behavior to Become More Sustainable?. *Sustainability*, 13(24), 13858.
- Leahy, T. (2021) What is Permaculture? Three Perspectives, in Leahy, T. (2021) *The Politics of Permaculture* (London: Pluto Press), pp. 1-45.
- Alexander, S. and Gleeson, B. (2020) 'Suburban Practices of Energy Descent' *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 79(3): pp. 907-940.
- Alexander, S. (2023), 'Poet-Farmer: A Thoreauvian Aesthetics of Sufficiency' in Alexander, S. (2023) *SMPCLTY: Ecological Civilisation and the Will to Art* (Melbourne: Simplicity Institute), pp. 357-377.
- Pautasso, M. (2013) 'Ten Simple Rules for Writing a Literature Review' *PLoS Computational Biology* 9(7) e1003149. Doi: 1371/journal.pcbi.1003149.
- Hay, I. (2002). Preparing and Giving a Talk. Chapter 8 in Iain Hay, *Communicating in Geography and the Environmental Sciences*. Second Edition. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of sustainability and environmental discourse through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Pre-departure readings

All pre-departure readings and assignments can be found on the program's Virtual Library at <http://sit.libguides.com/ice>.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

- 1) Preliminary Proposal (5%):** This preliminary proposal asks students to specify which of project option they are intending to undertake, namely a) the 'sustainable fashion' practicum; b) the 'permaculture design' practicum; c) the 'creative arts' practicum; or d) the research project. Once the project option is selected, students are asked to write 500 words on why they are interested in their selected project and share some preliminary ideas on how they see the project taking form. This assignment is due at the beginning of week two of the semester, providing an early opportunity for feedback from the academic director and/or other SIT faculty (the 'advisor') on matters of content, relevance, and feasibility.
- 2) Final Proposal (10%):** The final proposal builds on the preliminary proposal, with the benefit of further reflection, research, and feedback from the advisor. This final proposal is expected to be 2000 words, with a more developed theoretical framework, deeper engagement with the relevant literature, and a more detailed project and presentation outline. Students doing one of the three practicums are expected to show evidence that they are coherently theorizing their project in relation to relevant literature, and research students are expected to outline their research question with a detailed literature review plan.

3) Practicum Activity Assessment (15% for permaculture design and sustainable fashion practicum students only): For students doing either the permaculture design or sustainable fashion practicums, the activity assessment involves demonstrating to the academic director or advisor that the student is engaging with the practicum activity and developing competency in the relevant skills. These assessments are based on practicum-specific program activities and discussions with the academic director or advisor. This assessment is graded based on attendance (5%), engagement (5%), and demonstrated skill development (5%). (Students doing a creative arts practicum or a research project are not assessed on practicum activity, as their projects are more self-directed, and instead their final project report is weighted more heavily by 15%).

4) Project Report (50% for practicum students and 65% for research or creative arts students): All students must submit a 4000-word report which explains and theorizes their project, outlines what they did and why, discusses it in relation to relevant literature, and draws relevant conclusions. For permaculture design and sustainable fashion practicum students, this final report is worth 50%, and for creative arts and research students this project report is worth 65%. The grading rubric for the project report is:

- i. quality of title (5%)
- ii. abstract and acknowledgements (5%)
- iii. quality of research question (10%)
- iv. introduction (10%)
- v. literature review (20%)
- vi. critical analysis of literature (20%)
- vii. conclusion (10%)
- viii. originality (10%)
- ix. references and technical aspects (10%)

5) Presentation (20%): All students must deliver a 20-minute presentation to the class at the end of the semester, followed by five minutes of questions and comments. This assessment may involve a practical demonstration or presentation of a skill or creative activity (for practicum students) and/or involve poster or slideshow presentations to supplement the oral presentation. The grading rubric for the project report is:

- i. Oral presentation style and slide show (5%)
- ii. Clear statement of topic and research question (5%)
- iii. Clear review and critical analysis of literature (5%)
- iv. Conclusion and application of theory to practice (5%)

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination. It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12

hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff. Unjustified absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturers and presenters. These are often very busy academics and/or professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates, lecturers, guest speakers, SIT staff, etc). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding:

academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.