

Sustainability and Environmental Action Seminar

ENVI-3000 (8 credits)

Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action

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

The goal of the course is to inspire students to take action to help make the world more sustainable and to give them the tools to do so. Throughout the semester, students are introduced to the natural environment of different regions in Australia, helping to instill a sense of place and serving as a basis for understanding the varying environmental issues in each region. The seminar starts at the personal level by first exploring psychological issues related to environmental problems and then examining a whole range of environmental philosophies and encouraging students to reflect on and develop their own environmental philosophy and ethics throughout the semester. The Aboriginal Studies component of the course gives insights into an entirely different way of looking at the environment and resources, and enables students to explore the constructed character of perceptions about nature and environment.

The course then addresses what changes can be made at the level of government and industry to promote sustainability. Field trips illustrate the environmental impacts and innovative sustainable solutions in a range of industries, including agriculture, forestry, energy production, waste disposal, residential development, and tourism. The conservation of biodiversity and the management of protected areas such as national parks and world heritage sites are also examined during field trips. Finally, the course examines the processes of social change and how people can take effective action to achieve environmental goals. The course consists of a series of lectures, four main workshops, and a series of one-day field trips in Northern New South Wales. There is also a ten-day field trip to Tasmania, a ten-day excursion to Melbourne and Sydney, and a four-day field trip with Aboriginal elders. All elements have associated readings.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Identify the major environmental problems at global, national, and local scales;
- Identify a large range of measures to promote sustainability both in their own lifestyles and in the broader community;
- Detail the history of the conservation movement in Australia and evaluate the major conservation battles;

- Explain how the major features of the natural environment of Australia contribute to sustainability problems and their solutions;
- Employ the concept of “sense of place” and “ecological self” in developing a commitment to environmental action;
- Contrast a range of different environmental philosophies;
- Design a campaign for environmental sustainability utilizing social change theories and the techniques of environmental action;
- Appraise what can be learnt from the Aboriginal cultures of Australia in the quest to establish more sustainable societies;
- Evaluate the concept of sustainability, its most important principles and characteristics, and the techniques used in its assessment;
- Assess both the major environmental issues related to energy production, tourism, forestry, agriculture, housing, urban development and nature conservation, as well as the innovative strategies that are being used to minimize the environmental impact of these industries;
- Produce a vision for a steady state society and identify steps on the path to achieving it.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

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.

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; “knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners. In short, we'll often be out of the classroom and 'in the field' throughout the semester, activating learning through experience.

Required Texts: See provisional listing at end of this document. Additional readings and articles as assigned.

COURSE MODULES

The goal of the seminar is to inspire you to take action to help make the world more sustainable and to give you the tools to do so. The seminar is grouped into key themes, which are delivered as modules (often overlapping). Each module includes a range of learning experiences, such as field trips, discussions, and workshops with practitioners and experts. At the conclusion of each module, you will participate in a class discussion to review and explore the main lessons of the theme (see the Assignments section for further detail).

Sustainability and environmental action are such interconnected fields that you will find yourself engaging with all six themes across the whole semester, regardless of the module structure. The six seminar modules are described below, with examples of the learning experiences you might encounter in each.

Theme 1: Ecopsychology and sense of place

Ecopsychology examines the reciprocal relationship between human psychological well-being and the natural world. Themes include connection with place, environmental philosophies, and how human flourishing is related to care for Earth and sustainable ways of living. Learning experiences include an ecopsychology retreat at Foresthaven, and 'sense of place' discussions and activities early in the semester.

Theme 2: Sustainability, localisation and permaculture food systems

This module examines the global and local dynamics of sustainable human systems, with a particular focus on food systems. Learning experiences include field trips to Mullumbimby Community Gardens and a regenerative farm, as well as a series of workshops/lectures with experts on water sustainability, agriculture, permaculture, biology, and localisation.

Theme 3: Indigenous worldviews

Australian Aboriginal culture is the oldest continuing culture on the planet, and engaging with Indigenous worldviews offers the opportunity to engage with 65,000+ years of sustainability. Starting with the Welcome to Country at the beginning of semester, this module also includes the Indigenous worldviews camp with 'Country as Teacher', and an Indigenous worldviews workshop.

Theme 4: Environmental campaigning and conservation

This module focuses on environmental campaigns and conservation activism in Australia. Learning experiences primarily take place on the Tasmania field trip, including discussions with key forest campaigners and activists, and visits to the incredible native forests that were protected through direct action and social mobilisation. As well as the intellectual component of this module, an important part of environmental experiential education is simply spending extended time in nature.

Theme 5: Policy, politics and the environment

This module addresses the systemic, macroeconomic, and political aspects of sustainability and equity. How do the structures within which we live shape behaviour and sustainability outcomes? How might different structures incentivise different behaviours and outcomes? Learning experiences include discussions with current and former Green politicians, and theorists of environmental politics and ecological economics.

Theme 6: Social change

This module examines the systems, narratives, and power relations shaping our shared environmental and social justice problems, while imagining more just and sustainable alternatives. Through reflection, creative exercises, and collaborative planning and engagement, this module offers a Social Change workshop where you will analyse and explore practical strategies for collective action and cultural and structural transformation.

Assignments and Evaluation

Table 1 below provides an overview of the assessment components and their contribution to the total grade for the seminar. Note there are a number of assignments that are “hurdle” requirements, which means you must complete the assignments to demonstrate your engagement in course learning, but they are not marked in detail and do not contribute separately to your final grade. Below the table, more detail is provided on each assignment.

TABLE 1. Assignments and Weighting

Assignment	Weight
Group discussions and facilitation on key themes	15%
Sustainability toolbox	25%
Ecopsychology essay	15%
Social change essay	15%
Contribution to group learning and active course engagement, including: • Policy presentation (hurdle requirement but not marked) • Maps (hurdle requirement but not marked) • Final reflection (hurdle requirement but not marked)	10%
Closed-book exam	20%
Total	100%

GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND FACILITATION OF KEY THEMES (15%)

Objectives: To provide for review and further exploration of the main lessons of each module of the SEAS course (i.e., ecopsychology; localisation and food systems; Aboriginal culture and worldviews; Tasmania and environmental campaigning; action for social change)

- To enable the group to discuss what we have learnt from various parts of the course, to integrate knowledge gained from a variety of sources and experiences, including field trips, and to share insights
- To provide a forum for discussion of course readings
- To review sustainability tools we have learnt
- To give you practice at facilitating discussions

How it works:

Soon after the end of orientation, you will be assigned to one of six groups. Each group will be assigned one group discussion theme to facilitate during the semester. These discussions will be guided by faculty but run by students. The group discussions will last for two hours and will foster debate or discussion about what we have learnt in SEAS since the previous meeting and will integrate what we have learnt that week in workshops, lectures, field trips and readings with what we have previously covered in the semester.

When it is your turn to facilitate a discussion, you need, as a group, to identify the most important topics (check the learning goals) that are suitable for class discussion (don't pick so many topics that there isn't adequate time to discuss them all). At the meeting, the facilitators should first identify the topics to be covered. They should then encourage and direct group discussion of the topics.

Facilitators should talk with the relevant faculty member prior to starting their preparation for their meeting in order to review the topics to be discussed, and then again, after you have met, to review the questions you will put to the group. We reserve the right to include critical questions or topics if they are absent from your list. It is important to allow sufficient time for discussion of the readings.

Grading:

The group discussions make up 15% of the grade for SEAS. Your grade will depend on the quality of your facilitation of, and contribution to, the discussions throughout the semester. This 15% is split evenly – 7.5% for facilitation, 7.5% for participation in other discussions.

As a facilitator, you will be graded on preparation, time management, presentation and delivery, structure and organisation, covering key themes/issues, creative, thoughtful, and well-crafted prompts and tasks, engaging approach, drawing on a variety of aspects of the course (e.g. readings, lectures, fieldtrips, workshops, etc), and valuable interaction with class and co-facilitators.

As a participant, you should come to group discussions with your notes from each reading, including a sentence summarising the author's main message, and your notes from the relevant field trips and lectures. You should contribute to the discussions but not dominate them; your contributions should be informed, and you should respect others' opinions but not be afraid to disagree.

SUSTAINABILITY TOOLBOX (25%)

Objective:

A primary objective of this course is for you to become aware of and consider using the numerous sustainability tools and strategies that you will be presented with during the semester. This assignment prompts you to collect moments and insights of inspiration for your own future action.

How it works:

Throughout the semester, maintain a dedicated notebook recording sustainability tools that you encounter in SEAS lectures, readings, workshops, field trips, research, observations and discussions. At the end of the semester you will select the 20 tools that most inspire you as your "Sustainability Toolbox".

We are using a broad idea of “tools”, referring to concepts, strategies, models and real-life examples of action that you encounter during the course — but importantly, they must be directly actionable, not just statements of facts or theories. Don't just rehash your class notes; identify the sustainability actions they could inspire you to undertake.

This is likely to result in a list of hundreds of different tools or actions that can be taken to advance sustainability. You can think of these lists as constituting a sustainability toolbox, or an ‘inspiration station’ for environmental action.

For your notebook:

- Use headings with the date and name of each source (e.g. which reading, lecture, field trip, or discussion inspired the idea)
- Write entries chronologically; use a separate page per source so you can add tools discussed in group sessions
- Phrase each tool as a concrete action with a verb (avoid vague verbs like “understand” or “know”)
- Write each tool as a phrase or sentence, or at most two or three sentences — keep things concise! — but make sure there is enough information so that you will understand it in years to come
- Include tools from all four avenues of action: individual, communication, community, political

For the assignment submission:

Select your 20 most inspiring and impactful tools that you want to build into your life. Create a Word document listing each tool with a 2–3 sentence explanation of why you chose each one. Include no more than 7 individual-level actions, and draw from diverse sources across the semester.

This should not be a particularly time-consuming assignment if you've been taking notes throughout the semester. The aim is to capture, clearly but concisely, some of the most practically relevant and important insights you've had throughout the semester.

Grading:

This assignment – worth 25% of the seminar – will be graded on quality of the 20 tools you submit; depth of analysis / inspiration / creativity; concise explanation and justification of each tool; diversity of avenues of action and sources; and presentation and formatting.

ESSAYS: ECOPSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE (30%)

Objectives:

The two essays (worth 15% each) are designed to help you reflect upon, analyse and synthesise what you are learning from lectures, workshops, field trips, readings, formal and informal discussions and your own observations. You do not need to conduct background research for your essays. They will be based on what you have learnt from your experiences and class readings. We expect each essay will take about five hours to complete if you have taken good notes from the readings and classes. The theme of the first essay is Ecopsychology. The theme of the second essay is Social Change. More details will be provided in class.

How it works:

You will be asked to write two essays during the semester in order to reflect on aspects of an experience you have just had (e.g. a workshop or field trip) and to relate this to what you have previously learnt and observed, including the class readings. These essays will be short (1500 word minimum) but need to be succinct, well organised, and to show that you are thinking about what you are experiencing and that you are synthesising what you learn from disparate sources. The essays will usually be due within one to two days of their being assigned, since their purpose is to get you to reflect on your experiences while they are still fresh in your mind, and to prepare you for the group discussions. Material from class readings or other sources needs to be properly cited and referenced. Essays submitted late will be penalised at 5% per day. More details will be provided in class.

Grading: The essays will comprise 30% of your SEAS grade (15% each). Each essay will have a different objective and therefore detailed instructions and grading criteria will differ and will be given at the time they are assigned.

CONTRIBUTION TO GROUP LEARNING (10%)

In this seminar, great emphasis is placed on your active participation in your own education. This element is worth 10% of your SEAS grade. Your grade is allocated on an assessment of your timely attendance and informed and active participation in all activities, including field trips; your adherence to codes of conduct and conditions of participation; your help with group duties; and your general contribution to the maintenance of a positive learning environment throughout the semester; and your engagement with the three hurdle requirements (policy presentation; a maps exercise; and a final reflection discussion - more details in class).

CLOSED BOOK EXAM (20%):

The SEAS exam will take 1 hr 20 mins, and will comprise 20% of the SEAS grade. The exam will comprise a series of short-answer questions. The questions are designed to be answered quickly to mimic how you might respond to verbal questions, and will primarily assess the learning outcomes detailed in this syllabus.

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 (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). 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.

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 person. 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, printed, 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 lecturer. These are often very busy 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, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

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](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

SAMPLE READING LIST (reading materials provided during orientation)

Schwarz, S., & Stacey Woody T. (2008). Q&A with Bill McKibben. *Abroad View*, 10 (2), 1-2.

Winton, T. (2003). *Landing*. In M. Tredinnick (ed.) *A Place on earth: An anthology of nature writing from Australia and North America*. University of New South Wales Press.

Orr, D. (1992). *Place and pedagogy*. In D. Orr, *Ecological literacy: Education and the transition to a postmodern world*. SUNY Press.

Jackson, T. (2006) 'Readings in Sustainable Consumption', in Jackson, T (ed.) *The Earthscan Reader in Sustainable Consumption*. Earthscan, 2006.

Jackson, T. (2017) 'The Myth of Decoupling' in Jackson, T. *Prosperity without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow*. Routledge, 2017, 2nd ed., Ch. 5.

Bragg, E. (2015). "What if...?": Climate change as ally. *Ecopsychology*. 7 (4), 231-237.

Shields, K. (1991). *Building bridges with the opposition*. In K. Shields, *In the tiger's mouth: An empowerment guide for social action*. Millenium Books.

De Young, R. & Princen, T. (2012), 'Introduction', In De Young, R. & Princen, T. (Eds.). *The localization reader: adapting to the coming downshift*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Pp. xvii-xxv

Ryan, R (2002), 'Foreword' in Kasser, T. (2002) *The high price of materialism*. MIT Press, 2002.

Hickel, J. (2015a) 'It will take 100 years for the world's poorest to earn \$1.25 per day' *The Guardian* (30 March 2015).

Hickel, J. (2015b) 'Could you live on \$1.90 per day? That's the international poverty line' *The Guardian* (1 November 2015).

Norberg-Hodge, H. (2019). *Localization: Essential steps to an economics of happiness*. Parts 1,2 & 3. London: Local Futures (PDF will be emailed)

Reaganold, J. & Wachter, J. (2016). *Organic agriculture in the twenty-first century*. *Nature Plants*, 15221. 1-8

Alexander, S. (2011), 'Looking Backward from the Year 2099: Ecozoic Reflections on the Future' *Earth Jurisprudence and Environmental Justice Journal* 1(1): 25-59.

Alexander, S. and B. Gleeson (2020). *Urban social movements and the degrowth transition*. *Journal of Australian Political Economy*. 86, 355-378.

Ricketts, A. (2021, April 11). *What's your motivation: is it yourself or the change you're making?* Message posted to <https://aidanricketts.com/>

Litfin, K. (2012). A whole new way of life: ecovillages and the revitalization of deep community. In De Young, R. & Princen, T. (Eds.). *The localization reader: adapting to the coming downshift*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Pp. 129-140.

Trainer, T. (2010) 'The global predicament: the way out'. *Transforming Cultures* 5(1): 185-192.

Costanza, R. (2013). Building a sustainable and desirable economy-in society-in-nature. Report to the United Nations for the 2012 Rio+20 conference. Canberra, ANU E Press (pp17-27).

Flanagan, R. (2019, February 5). Tasmania is burning. The climate disaster future has arrived while those in power laugh at us. *The Guardian*.

Yunkaporta, T. (2019) *Sand talk*. Text Publishing (pp 201-227).

Marris, E. (2020). To mark the 50th Earth Day, take collective action. *Nature*. 580, 433.

Hopkins, R. (2008). Understanding the psychology of change. In R. Hopkins, *The transition handbook: Creating local sustainable communities beyond oil dependency* (pp.84-93). Finch.

Thomas, L. & Sherwood-O'Regan, N.K (2022). Intersectional Environmentalism. In Thomas, L. *The intersectional environmentalist: How to dismantle systems of oppression to protect people and planet*. Souvenir Press (pp. 39-51).