

Biol 315/Sust 315: Sustainability

Spring 2025

Tuesdays/Thursdays 11:00-12:15
Newton 212

Instructor: Dr. Kristi Hannam
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Office Hours (in ISC 259): Tu/Th 3:30-4:30 and Weds 9:30-10:30

Other times available by appointment – email Dr. Hannam for an appointment suggesting some of your available times.

Walk with Me Appointments: sign up on [Google Calendar](#) to walk and talk **M/W/F 11:30-12:00**

Required Readings: Ellis, E.C. 2018. [Anthropocene a very short introduction](#). Oxford University Press.

Additional daily readings will be posted to Brightspace.

Course Description:

Sustainability is a problem-driven field that focuses on both the protection of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of life for current and future human generations. This sustainability course will explore some of the major scientific issues behind our understanding of sustainability focusing on major themes of the Anthropocene, biodiversity, global change, energy and resources, food and agriculture, and human health. An examination of potential solutions will require an understanding of how the dynamic relationship between societal changes and environmental changes influence human-environment systems. Particular attention will be given to current issues through lectures, case studies and projects.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will:

1. Be able to define the concepts of the Anthropocene, sustainability, and explain ways that sustainability problems and solutions are parts of complex systems made up of multiple interacting and inextricably linked factors.

2. Understand the scientific principles of selected environmental problems and solutions and be able to critically evaluate sustainability related data and arguments
3. Demonstrate understanding and application of scientific data and concepts to novel case studies and examples
3. Work successfully with groups or a partner on case studies, scientific communication projects and a major final project.

About planning your time for this class

Keep in mind that you should expect to be doing approximately 3 hours of work a week for every credit hour. For this course, that means 9 hours of work per week. In this face-to-face course, 3 of the 9 hours per week is spent in the classroom engaging with lecture, discussion and small group work. The other 6 hours would be spent doing homework and out-of-class project work, reading the assigned readings and studying. I strongly recommend logging into the course Brightspace page daily to see updates and comments (especially in Announcements) from your instructor and classmates.

To successfully access and use the resources needed for this course, and to submit the required assignments, you will need the following technology:

Hardware: a laptop computer (one that fulfills the Geneseo Laptop requirement) and a high-speed internet connection, sound card, speakers or headphones, and a microphone (if there is one built into your laptop, that should be fine)

Software: An internet browser compatible with Brightspace, Adobe Reader, and Google Docs and Google Slides (you may also find Microsoft Word useful).

Course Design: This course is divided into 3 modules, and you will find the course modules labeled on Brightspace. Each module focuses on a set of topics, and for each topic there will be readings, online lectures, activities and assignments.

Grading:

Final grades will be assigned according to the following point distribution:

93+% = A	77-79% = C+
90-92% = A-	73-77% = C
87-89% = B+	70-72% = C-
83-86% = B	60-69% = D
80-82% = B-	<60% = E.

Under most circumstances, there will be no adjustment to your grades after the calculation.

****IMPORTANT**** Grades for most assignments and Exams will be posted in our Brightspace site, however, the gradebook in Brightspace may **NOT** set up to accurately calculate your final grade. Dr. Hannam will export all your Brightspace grades and compute your final grade offline.

Final Grades will be based on the following breakdown of points for assignments, classwork and exams:

25%	Homeworks, Quizzes & Case Studies & in-class participation
45%	Exams
20%	Student Group Projects/Presentations (Sustainability Solutions Project+ Applied Learning Project)
10%	Sustainability Journal + Reflections, Outside of Class Sustainability Event Reflection
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100%	TOTAL

HOMEWORK, QUIZZES AND CASE STUDIES (25% OF YOUR GRADE):

For most class periods there will be assigned readings that may consist of journal articles, book chapters, websites or other source material. Our class meetings will be used sometimes for lecture, but also to answer questions, engage in small group discussion, or complete case studies and problem sets related to the work/reading you did on your own. You are expected to read the assigned readings, or complete pre-meeting assignments BEFORE coming to class meetings, and be prepared to engage in a small group work or class discussion. Case Studies done in class as a whole class or in small groups will typically have a short writing/data analysis component, concept map, or online quiz that will be completed individually and turned in as homework. Those homeworks/quizzes may also be based on assigned readings and will typically be due by Monday of the following week.

EXAMS (45% OF YOUR GRADE):

There will be exams over the course of the semester. Exams will cover material from the readings, the online lectures, case studies/problem sets or videos/guest speakers from class. For exam, students will be provided with a pool of 10-12 exam questions 5 days before the exam. **In class on the day of the exam, each student will receive 3 randomly chosen questions from the question bank to answer. Each student will be assigned different combinations of essays. Excellent answers must include a minimum of 3 specific items of supporting evidence drawn from course materials.**

STUDENT GROUP PROJECTS AND PRESENTATIONS (20% OF YOUR GRADE):

Students will be assigned to permanent groups at the beginning of the semester. In these groups, students will complete two major projects over the course of the semester. The first project will involve designing a class activity and leading a class period focused on a sustainability solution guided by the information from Dr. Hannam. More details about this assignment will be provided in the first two weeks of class.

A second student project will be an applied learning project. More details about both of these projects will be given in class and on Brightspace.

SUSTAINABILITY JOURNAL AND REFLECTIONS (10% OF YOUR GRADE):

Over the course of the semester, you will be completing weekly observation sessions in two locations: a (relatively) natural area, and a location that is in the human built environment. Each observation session will last approximately

25minutes. At two dates during the semester you will submit images of your observation journals along with written reflections that respond to assigned prompts and utilize your observations. Additional details of this assignment, and the rubrics used to grade it can be found on Brightspace.

A second piece of this portion of your grade is the requirement to attend one event outside of class related to sustainability and write a reflection *connecting the event to material you have learned in class*. Dr. Hannam will post eligible events (some may be in-person, some may be virtual) on our Brightspace Page and announce reminders periodically in class.

LATE WORK AND MAKE-UP WORK

In the Brightspace Dropboxes for most assignments you will find that the due date/time may be different than the closing date/time. That means it is possible to submit late work (after the due date/time) up until the closing date/time. Late work is typically penalized -10% for each day (24hours) late, and the penalty may be assessed proportionally by time.

If you believe you have a valid excuse (illness or other extenuating circumstance) for late work, or need make-up work, you must contact Dr. Hannam as soon as possible, and before the end date of the module in which the work is due. Dr. Hannam will work with each student individually to determine the best solution to the missed deadline.

Communication with the Instructor

The best way to communicate with Dr. Hannam is via Geneseo email (hannam@geneseo.edu). Dr. Hannam will make every effort to respond to messages sent to her during the workday by 5pm the same day. However, be aware that Dr. Hannam checks messages in batches 2-3 times/day, so may not respond immediately even during the workday. Emails sent after 5pm may not be answered until the following workday depending on Dr. Hannam's schedule outside of work. And Dr. Hannam typically takes one day/week off from work (usually Saturdays), and checks email on weekends only sporadically.

Dr. Hannam will communicate with the whole class primarily via "Announcements" on the course Brightspace page. Please make sure you check the "Announcements" page regularly and/or sign up for notifications to your phone or email for when additions have been made to the "Announcements" page.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASS

Please make sure all cellphones, laptops and other electronic devices are on "silent" during class.

While laptops and other electronic devices can be useful learning tools in class, there is strong evidence that they can also be serious distractions from learning for the user, and for other people seated around the user. I will request you bring laptops to class on some days to access online material and data, however, please be mindful of how you use electronic devices in class, and their impact on the other learners around you. Also keep in mind that it is pretty clear to the instructor at the front of the classroom when electronic devices are being used for learning, and when they are being used for other (usually entertainment and communication) purposes and will be reflected in your participation score. Not only is it apparent to the instructor, research (Ravizza et al. 2016) measuring the duration of student Internet use in class found that students who used laptops in class for nonacademic reasons had poorer class performance, as indicated by their final grade.

ACCOMMODATIONS

SUNY Geneseo will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented physical, emotional, or cognitive disabilities. Accommodations will also be made for medical conditions related to pregnancy or parenting. Students should contact the Dean in the Office of Disability Services ([585-245-5112](tel:585-245-5112)) and their faculty to discuss needed accommodations as early as possible in the semester.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

SUNY-Geneseo's policies on academic dishonesty are summarized in the Code of Student Conduct found in the Geneseo Undergraduate Bulletin online. Plagiarism and other forms of academic cheating are prohibited and may result in a zero on an assignment or exam. Plagiarism and cheating will be reported first to the departmental office, and may be referred to the Campus Judicial Council. Repeated incidents will result in failure of the course. Exams and assignments will be checked for plagiarism. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic dishonesty please contact the instructor.

PLAGIARISM

Technology is changing rapidly offering some ways for students to complete assignments more easily, but which may pose some ethical issues. Online tools, including ChatGPT and others, have outpaced the skills of students and professors to manage them appropriately. I am convinced that ChatGPT and other tools will change the way we teach and learn in the very near future. Students should be aware that not only is using ChatGPT for assignments for this class an honor code gray area, but the artificial intelligence (AI) used by ChatGPT may make significant mistakes, for example providing information that is clearly incorrect to those with subject matter expertise. It is possible that AI will eventually get to the point where those mistakes rarely happen, but that hasn't happened yet.

Both because of the mistakes that can be made by the AI, and because the College has not come out with a clear policy on the use (or not) of ChatGPT and other AI programs, I strongly discourage you from using ChatGPT for course assignments. If you do choose to use ChatGPT or any other AI system for language and writing generation, you must cite the program for each assignment you use it for. Failure to do so constitutes a violation of the SUNY-Geneseo Code of Student Conduct, as using an AI's words without citation will be defined as plagiarism.

Plagiarism is very serious. If you plagiarize, you will be prosecuted. No excuses. No second chances -- even if you had planned to graduate. Plagiarism doesn't just happen accidentally. You are responsible for determining how to properly cite the work and ideas of other people. If you are unsure or have questions, refer to Milne library's links for citations (under "Research Help"). If you still need assistance, ask your instructor or a librarian.

Students sometimes think that citations are necessary only when using material that is a direct quote. This is not true. A citation is necessary any time you include any information or idea that is not yours (i.e., directly or indirectly derived from someone else's thinking or writing). Any non-original idea that you fail to cite is plagiarized. Plagiarism is intellectual stealing and the consequences of plagiarism are substantial. In order not to be accused of plagiarism, all a student needs to do is properly cite sources.

For the purpose of this policy, plagiarism shall be considered to be deliberate representation of someone else's words or ideas as one's own or the deliberate arrangement of someone else's material(s) as one's own. This means that even on oral exam submissions, you must properly cite any sources you use to answer questions.

Taking Care of Your Mental Health

The Biology major is demanding, and as your instructor I try to keep in mind that mine is not the only course you are taking, and that most of you also have other demands on your time and attention in addition to your coursework. Juggling your many responsibilities can have an impact on your mental health. With this in mind, I realize that diminished mental health, including significant stress, mood changes, excessive worry, or problems with eating and/or sleeping can interfere with optimal academic performance. The source of symptoms might be strictly related to your course work; if so, please make an appointment to speak with me one-on-one.

I realize problems with relationships, family worries, loss, or a personal struggle or crisis can also contribute to decreased academic performance. SUNY Geneseo provides mental health services to support the academic success of students. Counseling Services, a part of the Lauderdale Center for Student Health & Counseling, offers free, confidential psychological services to help you manage personal challenges that may threaten your well-being and success here in college.

In the event I suspect you need additional support, I will express my concerns and the reasons for them, and remind you of resources (e.g., Counseling Services, Career Services, Dean of Students, etc.) that might be helpful to you. It is not my intention to know the details of what might be bothering you, but simply to let you know I am concerned and that help, if needed, is available.

Getting help is a smart and courageous thing to do -- for yourself and for those who care about you.

Copyright Notice

All materials used in this course, including lectures, slides, videos, and handouts, have specific licensing and copyright restrictions that identify how they can be used, distributed, and adapted. The original work created by me, your instructor, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Materials created by other authors have their own licensing and copyright restrictions. Please do not violate the restrictions we have put on our intellectual property. This includes, but is not limited to, transferring files to websites such as StudyBlue and Course Hero, storing old tests in sorority/fraternity test banks, and passing on assignments to friends who may take the course in the future. Be aware that UUP (Union of University Professionals, the union representing faculty on this campus) is seeking to take legal action against groups who violate copyright, and that posting or selling copies of materials to such groups may put a student in legal jeopardy.

This syllabus & schedule are accurate as of the first week of classes (Jan 21-Jan26, 2025), any changes to the syllabus & schedule after that will be posted on Brightspace.

The following schedule is not set in stone, and the order of topics, or amount of time spent on a topic may expand or contract depending on a number of factors this semester. You can confidently put the exam dates in your personal calendar, as those dates will not change.

SCHEDULE:

DATE	TOPIC
Jan 21	Introduction to the Course
Jan 23	Intro to Journaling & Reflection
Jan 28	Introduction to the Anthropocene
Jan 30	The Anthropocene
Feb 4	The Anthropocene
Feb 6	The Anthropocene and the Problem of Sustainability
Feb 11	The Anthropocene and the Problem of Sustainability
Feb 13	The Anthropocene and the Problem of Sustainability
Feb 18	Global Change Biology
Feb 20	Global Change Biology
Feb 25	Diversity Summit - No Class
Feb 27	Exam 1 – in class
Mar 4	Biodiversity and Sustainability
Mar 6	Biodiversity and Sustainability
Mar 11	Biodiversity and Sustainability
Mar 13	Biodiversity wrapup + Ag/Food
Mar 18-20	Spring Break – No Classes
Mar 25	Food, Agriculture & Sustainability
Mar 27	Food, Ag & Sustainability
Apr 1	Food, Agriculture & Sustainability
Apr 3	Energy and Sustainability – Fossil Fuels & Renewable Energy
Apr 8	Energy and Sustainability
Apr 10	Energy and Sustainability
Apr 15	Wrap Up Module 2
Apr 17	Sustainability Solutions/Project Work
Apr 22	Exam 2 – in class
April 24	Sustainability Solutions Presentations
April 29	Sustainability Solutions Presentations
May 1	Sustainability Solutions Presentations
May 6	TBA
May 12	FINAL EXAM PERIOD – 12-2:30 Final Exam Period

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