CIEE Beijing, China

Course title: Sustainability in Context
Course code: ENVI 3002 BJCH
Programs offering course: Sustainable Development
Language of instruction: English
U.S. semester credits: 3
Contact hours: 45
Term: Fall 2020

Course Description

The World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainability in 1987 as “meeting the needs of society of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This course systematically introduces the field of sustainability through a “three-pillar” model articulating the critical need to balance environmental, sociocultural, and economic spheres in development. Emphasis will be placed on sustainability within the Chinese national context as well as on how China interacts with and impacts other regions and peoples in the world. The course focuses on key knowledge areas of sustainability including population, ecosystems, global change, energy, agriculture, water, culture, and identity. In addition to providing a basic introduction to concepts and theories of sustainability, you will analyze environmental issues related to sustainability in China and reflect upon how individual behaviors and governmental policy and structural forces impact environmental justice and sustainable ethics. Through course exercises and research projects, you will have the opportunity to study the intricate interdependence among the ecological, the social-cultural, and the economic spheres of sustainability in China and the world.

Learning Objectives

By completing this course, students will:

- Gain an understanding of conceptual and theoretical foundations of sustainability in the three-pillar model
- Develop critical analysis of the interdependence between nature, sociocultural transformation, and economic development in China as well as around the globe
- Develop skills in selection of issues, qualitative research, and presentation of inquiries on sustainability

Course Prerequisites

There is no prerequisites for this course; however previous experience in the social and environmental sciences is beneficial.

Methods of Instruction

The teacher view learning as an intellectual journey supported by collaboration among the instructor and the students. Each week, the teacher will utilize readings and films to introduce students to a variety of social phenomena, worldviews, and cultures, with the goal of sensitizing students to perspectives pertaining to sustainability in China and the world. Guest speakers and site visits will be included in the instruction. In addition, weekly group activities and discussions will require students to integrate newly learned concepts to build their own observation of daily lives in Beijing. The final project will give students the opportunity to apply their insights to produce a written research paper and present their findings to the class.
N.B. Course schedule is subject to change due to study tours, excursions, or local holidays. Final schedules will be included in the final syllabus provided to students on site.

**Assessment and Final Grade**

1. Reading Discussions (2) 20%
2. Short Papers (2) 20%
3. Presentation and Critique 20%
4. Final Project 20%
5. Class Participation 20%

**TOTAL** 100%

**Course Requirements**

**Reading Discussions (2)**

You will lead two discussions of specific readings for the class. These exercises are designed to encourage students to develop abilities to critically comprehend complex issues and clearly communicate their ideas with their colleagues in a seminar setting. It is important for the discussant to demonstrate to the class how the assigned readings are situated within the broader discussion on sustainability and their experiences living in China. In addition, you are responsible to facilitate class participation by asking informed questions and by constructing roadmaps of comprehension in the presentation. You will be graded based on your familiarity with the assigned readings and analytical engagement with the topics of the week. I will provide the grading rubric in Week 3 of the course. Class discussion usually lasts half an hour to forty five minutes. Please feel free to contact me a week in advance if you have any questions.

**Short Papers (2)**

The first short paper is due on Week 6 of the semester. In this paper, please identify one sustainability issue you have noticed in Beijing. Pose a research question, and then outline why you think the question is relevant to the course and how you plan to conduct the research. Your chosen topic needs to fit into the concepts introduced in the course (a list of key concepts will be distributed in the second week of the semester). I will schedule individual meetings in week six to discuss the research questions and methodological plan with each student before the due date of the assignment.

The second paper is due on Week 10 of the semester. In this paper, please provide a preliminary analysis of your data employing the three pillar model. Please list in detail the interplay between the causes and the economic, sociocultural, and ecological consequences of the specific issues you have observed. I will meet with each student individually to discuss the projects after I review paper. I will provide more instruction for this assignment after you turn in the first paper.

Late papers will be marked down 5% after the first day and 1% every day afterwards.

**Presentation and Critique**

On **Week 13**, present a 15-minute overview of your project to the class. In the presentation, you will need to present a thesis statement of your research project, your analysis based on the three-pillar model, and any unanswered questions. In addition, you will sign up to critique a fellow student’s
research and suggest possible solutions to the particular sustainability issue your classmate studies. These exercises are designed to help students to become better presenters and discussants in future academic and corporate settings. The advice and suggestions will help your classmate to modify their research project before the final due date. More instruction on the assignment will be shared on Week 10. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to discuss them with me a week in advance.

Final Project

Write a final paper and present to the class, synthesizing your experiences and reflections that link your research experience and findings in Beijing/China to broader theoretical and conceptions from the course. The written portion should be 12 to 15 pages long and the presentation will be 20-30 minutes. More instruction will be given on this assignment during the course of the semester.

Class Participation

Class participation is an integral component of this course. You cannot do well in this course without attending punctually. Please arrive at class meetings on time and fully prepared, having completed the assigned readings, reviewed your reading and film notes, and ready to discuss. Your participation and discussion grade in class is worth 20% of your total grade and will be assessed on the following scale:

- **A-level:** The student attends class, listens and speaks in a respectful manner, demonstrates familiarity with the reading and lecture material, and can articulate the three-pillar model and apply it to real world examples
- **B-level:** The student attends class, listens and speaks in a respectful manner, and demonstrates familiarity with the reading and lecture material
- **C-level:** The student attends discussion section and listens and speaks in a respectful manner

Per CIEE guidelines, each unexcused absence will cost 2% while the penalty for being late is 1% of your total grade. In addition, internet surfing, texting, or working on other courses during discussion section constitutes a kind of mental absence and will lead to a loss of all participation points for that day.

Attendance

Weekly Schedule

**Week 1**

Class | Orientation Week

Introduction to class

**Week 2**

Class | Sustainability: The Three-Pillar Model

Introduction to the goals and grading rubric of the course/Introduction to the three-pillar model, development in China, and global sustainability crises.

Chinese Development

Read:


Activity: Do We Have a Sustainable Campus?

**Week 3**

**Class** Crowded and Hot but Not So Flat

Introduction and application of concepts such as carrying capacity: Malthus paradigm, ecological footprint, I=PAT; Try to think China’s population and environmental issues in a global context.

Read:


Activity: Ecological Footprints and Global Inequality: A Lesson in Individual and Structural Components of Environmental Problems.

**Week 4**

**Class** Research Methodology and the Great Collision

Examination of the contradictions between global capitalism and capacity of the planet; Introduction to ecological and social consequences of the Chinese local corporatism development model (i.e. Ordos/Lanzhou); Introduction to qualitative methodologies

Read:


Activity: Doing Interviews

Week 5
Class

Buy, Baby, Buy and Drill, Baby, Drill

Introduction to the Treadmill of Production and Consumption and Jevons paradox concepts. Examination of the global consumer culture and GDP myth in the Chinese context.

Read:


Activity: An Analysis of Chinese Consumerism

Week 6
Class

Is Sustainability Possible in Our Current World System? /Field Trip

First Short Paper

Introduction to the Treadmill of Production and Consumption and Jevons paradox concepts. Examination of the global consumer culture and GDP myth in the Chinese context.

Read:


Fieldtrip: Sustainable Beijing!? Green Buildings and Urban Planning Museum

Hand in the first short paper.
Week 7
Class
Case Study: The Three Gorges Dam

Examination of the modernization paradigm and environmental justice; overview of displacement, degradation and inequality

Read:


Activity: Social Class and Built Environment in Beijing

Week 8
Class
Case Study: Grassland Degradation in Inner Mongolia

Overview of the Common Pool Resource Approach; Discussion on the importance of cultural heritage and community in sustainability

Read:


Activity: Tragedy of the Commons Exercise

Week 9
Class
Dying of Thirst (and Hunger)

Overview of global climate change, food security, and water shortage issues; Using project on the Minqin oasis and the Qilian Glaciers as a case study

Read:

IPCC Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report IPCC.


Activity: Rediscover local agriculture around Beijing

**Week 10**
**Class** Maybe It Is Not Too Late

Overview on environmental Kuznets: Energy and Waste Alternative; discussion on China’s attempts to alter its development model

Read:


Activity: Where did my bottles go?

*Hand in the second short paper.*

**Week 11**
**Class** Mid-Semester Field Trip: No class in Beijing

**Week 12**
**Class** Guest Speaker and National Holiday

Guest Speaker: Zhao Zhong, Pacific Environment China Program Coordinator and Director of Green Camel Bell in Gansu

**Week 13**
**Class** Thesis Overview Statement Presentation and Critique

**Week 14**
**Class** Sustainable Development with Chinese Characteristics

Discussion on the institutional constraints and opportunity for de-coupling to happen in China

Read:


Activity: Write to Chairman Xi

Week 15
Class Writing and Editing Week

Week 16
Class Final Project Presentations and Concluding Remarks

Week 17
Class Chinese Final: No class

Course Materials

Readings

• IPCC Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report IPCC.

Media Resources

Films

We will use short segments (10-12 minutes) from the following films during lecture:

• Black Gold
• Capitalism and People’s Republic of China
• China’s balancing act: high growth vs. sustainability
• Demography
• Food, INC.
• Fuel—Change your fuel… change your world
• Is Wal-Mart good for USA?
• King corn Made in China
• Manufactured Landscapes
• Mined to death
• Planet in peril
• Rainmakers—China’s warriors for the environment Seeds of hunger
• The rise of ecology, 10 disasters that changed the world
• Up the Yangtze
• We feed the world
• When clouds clear
• Yangtze River—China’s Wild Life Line