

17.181/17.182

Sustainability: Political Economy, Science, and Policy

SYLLABUS

INSTRUCTOR:

Prof. Nazli Choucri

COURSE MEETING TIMES

Seminars: 1 session / week; 2 hours / session

PREREQUISITES

There are no prerequisites for this course.

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course examines alternative conceptions and theoretical underpinnings of sustainable development. It focuses on the sustainability problems of industrial countries, and of developing states and economies in transition. It also explores the sociology of knowledge regarding sustainability, the economic and technological dimensions, and institutional imperatives, along with implications for political constitution of economic performance.

17.181 fulfills the undergraduate public policy requirement in the Political Science [major](#) and [minor](#). Graduate students are expected to explore the subject in greater depth through reading and individual research.

LIST OF COURSE BOOKS

Choucri, Nazli, ed. *Global Accord: Environmental Challenges and International Responses*. MIT Press, 1995. ISBN: 9780262531344.

Stavins, Robert N., ed. *Economics of the Environment: Selected Readings*. 6th edition. W. W. Norton & Company, 2012. ISBN: 9780393913408.

Tainter, Joseph A. *The Collapse of Complex Societies (New Studies in Archaeology)*. Cambridge University Press, 1990. ISBN: 9780521386739.

For additional readings, see the table in the Readings section.

WEBSITES

[Global System for Sustainable Development](#)

[Sustainable Development Goals: 17 Goals to Transform Our World](#)

[World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\): Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005](#)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Class attendance participation (20% of final grade)
- Midterm (take home) (25%)
- Assignment (submit 10 websites for the [Global System for Sustainable Development](#) (GSSD) database (20%)
- Final (take home) or a research paper on topic of your choice with the approval of the instructor (35%)

For details on the GSSD database assignment, see the Assignments section.

For details on the midterm and final exams, see the Exams section.

CALENDAR

WEEK #	TOPICS	KEY DATES
Part I Content & Context		
1	Introduction-Debates, Definitions & Dilemmas	
2	Evolving Concepts: Growth vs. Sustainability	
3	Sustainability as a “Knowledge Domain”	
4	Cyberspace & Sustainability	
Part II Actors, Processes & Institutions		
5	Critical Drivers-Social Mechanisms & Cognitive Factors	GSSD assignment due
6	Economic Performance-Production & Consumption	
7	Technology, Firms Markets-Corporate Perspectives	Midterm posted
8	Climate Change & Sustainable Development	Midterm due
9	From Sustainability “Problems” to “Solution” Strategies	
Part III Strategic Issues		
10	New International Institutional Contexts	
11	International Responses to Sustainability Dilemmas	
12	Global Accord: Next Round	Final exam posted
13	Transformation & Change: Alternative Futures	Final exam due