GE-G, Citizenship in a Global Era

Courses that meet this requirement enhance understanding of citizenship and moral agency in today’s increasingly global society by teaching students to identify social, political, economic, and cultural forces that bear on human experience in the U.S. and around the world.

AMST 101gmw, Race and Class in Los Angeles

AMST 101gmw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

Beaches; Hollywood; palm trees; beautiful weather; and most importantly, a chance to start over. These have all been key images in representations of Los Angeles from the moment of U.S. conquest to the present. But equally important to the reality of Los Angeles has been the less glamorous side: a history of racial violence; capital of the working poor; two major waves of civil unrest (the Watts riots of 1965 and the Los Angeles uprising of 1992); and a hot-bed of anti-immigrant activism. It is the relationship between these two different trajectories that we will study in this class. How can Los Angeles produce such incredible wealth and poverty at the same time? What is the relationship between the two? Especially critical is the fact that as goes Los Angeles, so goes the rest of the U.S. Whether it is immigration, racial diversity, economic polarization, or sprawl – Los Angeles holds important lessons for both the U.S. and cities across the globe.

In this the course we will concentrate on five main topics that will hopefully illuminate larger social processes that shape Los Angeles: History and Settlement; Immigration; Economics and Labor; Place & Landscape; and Environmental Justice.

This course description has been provided by Professor Laura Pulido.

AMST 135gmw, People and Cultures of the Americas

AMST 135gmw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

This course uses sociological, geographical, and interdisciplinary methods to introduce students to the field of Latina/o and Latin American Studies. We use political economic, cultural, and social frameworks to analyze class, race, gender, and sexual identities in the Americas. The course begins by studying the colonial encounter, we then move to the nation-building period, and the consolidation of particular kinds of social identities that emerge out of these processes.

Students are guided through a variety of readings, written assignments, and lectures to help them understand how the state, political violence, immigration, social movements, poverty, debt, and cultural production help us better understand the specific social phenomena of the Americas. We use specific case studies to explore the relationship between policy, social practice, and cultural formation. For example, the class uses a mixed methods approach to interrogate the complex and intersectional processes involved in immigration and racial formation. Students analyze the category of citizenship by reviewing the changing ways citizenship has been conceptualized over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries in the United States, especially in relation to Latina/o populations. Using political economy, legal, and cultural approaches we analyze recent immigrant legislation as well as its historical shifts to address the implications of US policies and discourses about the US/Mexico border and in relation to other Latin American nations. We study how US legal mechanisms of citizenship both expand upon ideas of the importance of global citizenship, yet also continue to police and militarize the boundaries of US citizenship.

This course description has been provided by Professor Juan de Lara.
AMST 252gmw, Black Social Movements in the U.S.

AMST 252gmw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

This course examines black social movements for freedom, justice, equality, and self-determination. Beginning with the movements to end slavery and bring about full citizenship, the course will examine resistance, institution building, social thought, and the role of the arts in the collective action of African Americans and their allies from the 19th through the 21st century. We will utilize two narrative histories of black radical movements, read two biographical accounts of activists, and closely examine the documents and manifestos of black abolitionists, women’s rights organizations, Black Nationalist and mainstream civil rights groups ranging from socialists to hip hop adherents, and from presidential campaigns to prisoners’ rights organizations. This course also explores the interaction of black social movements in the U.S. with black and progressive social movements throughout the African diaspora from the 1700s to the present.

This course description has been provided by Professor Francille Wilson.

CORE 104gw, Change and the Future: Thematic Option Honors Program

This course is only for a specified cohort of students.

Human beings need to live together in groups, associations, local communities, nation-states, and transnational organizations. It’s not just a matter of getting along together (i.e. of being free of the threat of violence from others around us); we have to engage in a wide variety of cooperative ventures with others and to do so we must reasonably expect that all will have a fair share in the fruits of the venture. On what basis can we coordinate our actions and expectations with those of the people with whom we would cooperate, so that we and they can be satisfied that we are cooperating on terms that are fair and just? That is the basic question of political philosophy.

Political philosophy has a long history. We’ll begin with Plato’s classic dialogue The Republic, in which he tries to answer the question ‘What is justice?’ by paralleling justice in the state and justice in the individual soul, ending up with an insistence that the best state would be ruled by philosophers, the only ones who have knowledge of the Good. We’ll then jump ahead to the Renaissance, to the political philosophy of Machiavelli. Machiavelli is often misperceived as encouraging amorality and ruthlessness to rulers.

In the early modern period the personal authoritarianism that was implicit or explicit in previous political philosophy was challenged, and a new emphasis on the consent of the governed as the basis of legitimate political authority came to the fore. We will study key works by three social contract theorists: Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan, John Locke’s Two Treatises of Government, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Of the Social Contract and Discourse on Inequality. We will find that the three theorists give very different accounts of the basis and implications of the social contract.

In the next part of the course we consider two nineteenth century reconceptualizations of political philosophy. The very influential work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels rejected political philosophy as traditionally conceived and replaced it with economic analysis, focusing particularly on class relations as key to political consciousness. John Stuart Mill developed Jeremy Bentham’s theory of morality, utilitarianism, and paired it with a liberal theory of political freedoms in his works On Liberty and The Subjection of Women.

The 20th century saw a revival and reconceptualization of the social contract theory. John Rawls argues for a theory of justice which supports a liberal democratic welfare state, with a pluralistic accommodation of diverse religious commitments and overall conceptions of value. Robert Nozick, on the other hand, fashions an argument for a libertarian political philosophy legitimating only a minimal 'night-watchman' state the functions of which are to protect its citizens from crime and external threats and to enforce contracts. Given the libertarian emphasis on the market as a locus of liberty, it will be appropriate to end the course with a very recent philosophical work by Debra Satz, in which she provides a thorough analysis of what she calls the moral limits to markets. She discusses such problematic markets as those in human organs (kidneys), voluntary slavery, women’s reproductive labor and women’s sexual labor, and considers whether the moral problems such markets raise extend to markets of other kinds.

This course description has been provided by Professor Ed McCann.
IR 101xgw, International Relations

IR 101xgw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

The United States is the richest, most powerful country the world has ever seen. Yet even the U.S., as events of the past few years have shown, is deeply and inescapably enmeshed in international problems and developments that it cannot control. Events in distant parts of the world affect our economic wellbeing, the health of the world’s natural systems, and prospects for war and peace. The international challenges we face are complex and daunting. But the first step toward coping with them effectively is understanding the nature of international relations. This course has three main objectives:

1. To promote analytical reasoning about issues in international relations.
2. To introduce different social science perspectives on international relations.
3. To investigate crucial problems in international relations, from the past and the present.

This course description has been provided by Professor Wayne Sandholtz.

IR 210gw, International Relations: Introductory Analysis

This course is only for a specified cohort of students. IR 210gw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

"Our theory of human nature is the wellspring of much in our lives. We consult it when we want to persuade or threaten, inform or deceive." -Steven Pinker

"Political action must be based on a co-ordination of morality and power." -E. H. Carr

"Creating and maintaining a balance of power requires finesse and flexibility, and the nation’s leaders must locate the place where national and international interests converge. This is the art of statecraft." -Reinhold Niebuhr

"I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills." -Mohandas Gandhi

"Among the things which are unique to man is the desire for society, that is for community with those who belong to his species—though not a community of any kind, but one at peace, and with a rational order." -Hugo Grotius

The words above introduce you to the major themes for this course and to major themes in the field of international relations. This course is designed as a comprehensive review of theoretical and analytical developments in the field of international relations. IR 210 is required for all majors and minors in the School of International Relations. However, it is a course designed for any student who wants to participate as an informed citizen in the world around them and not just be a spectator. We want to prepare you to be a critical and creative thinker and a potential problem-solver. The study of international relations began in earnest in the years following WWI. At the time, leaders believed that by educating people in international relations it might be possible to avoid future wars. This new enlightenment project was obviously not completely successful but we continue to search for ways of preventing war and providing human security. Violence and wars continue to plague the populations of the world. The U.S. and a coalition of Western nation-states has chosen to fight the global war on terrorism on two fronts: assisting failed or fragile states and adopting a new doctrine of counterinsurgency that suggests wars will be frequent and involve war-fighting and state-building. In the economic world, globalization has created one big production, trade and financial system. Recent economic crises have resulted in debates about what form of capitalism is best for producing wealth and employment—the Anglo-American version, the Beijing model or the Nordic model? Yet, the world must deal with the fact that inequality within and between states is greater than ever. We can just accept the violence and deprivations that divide our world or we can try to do something about it. As university educators, we believe in the enlightenment project. Thus, we continue to prepare students to understand how challenges and problems develop and then go out in the world to find ways of solving or at least managing all of these problems created by past generations. We do not expect you to solve all of the world’s problems but at least you will know what they are, how these problems developed and some possible ways to resolve them.
Thus, one major goal of this class is to introduce you to some critical and creative thinking skills that will help you participate in the various communities that you will encounter in the next 70 plus years of your life. We want you to know where to find information to verify claims made by leaders and we want you to learn to think before acting. A second, perhaps more pragmatic and immediate goal of the course, is to provide an introduction to concepts, theoretical frameworks, and issues in this field. This is a foundational course and at times you may find it difficult. This course is not about current events; instead, it will introduce you to the tools that are essential for understanding the current events that splash across your various electronic screens every minute of the day— but not in lecture. We hope you will learn to become a scholar and reject the ideological and polemical arguments we often hear on podcasts and talk shows and from media pundits and self-proclaimed experts with their own blogs.

You may also learn how policy and theory are related and how history shapes our ideas. What we know about international relations is dependent upon developing sound international relations theory. Without theories and time-tested analytical models and frameworks, our explanations, descriptions, predictions, and policy prescriptions are limited in scope and are usually excessively normative. Above all, we hope that all students in this class will learn to review and analyze issues from the perspectives of all relevant actors.

Here is a critical assumption of this course: Where you stand on issues depends on where you sit and you are sitting in a world constructed by your core beliefs and assumptions about human behavior, social relations, institutions and the world around you. Consider the words of Walter Lippmann: We are all captives of the pictures in our head—our belief that the world we experience is the world that really exists.

Another critical assumption: Politics is all about conflict and controversy. People look at the world through different prisms that we will call worldviews. These worldviews are shaped by their environment, their histories, experiences and by the core beliefs that define their world. Discussions and analyses of international relations are more contentious because of the diversity of worldviews and the lack of consensus on such issues as governance, the nature of human rights and how best to provide order and stability in an anarchic system. What makes international relations different from domestic politics is that it is more about survival and it is a constant search for order and equity in an anarchic, unequal, and competitive global environment.

A final critical assumption here is that theory matters! Every individual uses theories to organize, evaluate, and critically review contending positions in controversial policy areas. Your confidence as a scholar or policy-maker is increased if supported by theoretical positions that are in turn formulated after a thorough understanding of historical evidence in a given policy area.

This course description has been provided by Professor Steven Lamy.

IR 308w, Economic Globalization

This course is only for a specified cohort of students.

This course is an introduction to economic globalization for students of international relations—what it is and how and why people react to it as they do. The primary purpose of this course is to enhance students' understanding of the way that states' authority and relations have changed under increasing economic interdependence and how that affects people's lives.

First, we will focus on understanding the economics behind globalization, e.g. the movement of money, things and information. How and why have economic interactions changed? What role does globalization play in the current global financial crisis? How does globalization and trade affect poverty and development? How do international financial organizations affect development and crises?

Second, we will investigate the way that economic globalization has increased the mass movements of people and ideas, leading to changes in the conceptions of citizenship. We will focus on the issues such as the capitalism and migration and its impact on human rights and human trafficking.
Third, we will consider the consequences of globalization and the prospects for governance of globalization. How and to what extent has it changed international politics? How and to what extent can people/movements influence outcomes? This course will analyze the winners and losers of globalization, study the emerging threats and benefits posed by globalization, and identify possible ways of acting to ameliorate problems that arise due to globalization.

This course description has been provided by Professor Nina Rathbun.

**IR 424w, Citizenship and Migration in International Politics**

*This course is only for a specified cohort of students.*

The increased mobility of people within and across borders, either by choice or by force, combined with changing notions of the proper role of the state and the extent of its sovereignty have rendered both immigration and emigration critical topics in international relations. This course seeks to examine various aspects of migration, but within the context, not just of a changing international political economy, but also that of changing notions of citizenship -- the relationship, the contract, the bond between a human being and the state. As this course will explore, changes in that relationship have served as important push and pull factors for migrants; likewise increased population movement, both legal and illegal, has led the bases of what constitutes citizenship to be called into question, rethought and reformulated.

This course has three main parts. The first examines traditional notions and subsequent critiques of the definitions and practices of citizenship historically. It moves to examine the history of migration, followed by an introduction to migration theory. With those elements as background, we then begin to draw the strands of the course together, exploring how the many aspects of citizenship and migration are intertwined, especially in the contemporary world. We examine in detail the concept of diaspora, several case studies of diaspora communities and sending states, as well as the emergence of immigrant networks and organizations as part of a growing transnational civil society. We examine not only the interests of the receiving states, but also those of the sending states, just as we attempt to explore the relationships between the two.

This course description has been provided by Professor Laurie Brand.

**IR 444w, Theories of Global Society**

*This course is only for a specified cohort of students.*

Global society is an increasingly discussed concept, if not a clearly defined one. Global society can be alternatively conceptualized as a context, an arena, a process, or a set of relationships, depending on one’s particular perspective or theoretical position. This course will explore these different iterations of global society, looking at it as both a theoretical concept and a material phenomenon. Throughout the semester we will pose (and answer!) questions around this concept, such as, what is it? Does it exist? How do we identify its existence? Who are citizens of this society? Is it truly global? We will discuss, analyze, and deconstruct various theories about global society in its current state as well as its potential future state. In the process we will also debate questions about theories of global society, such as is there one “correct” theory of global society? Should theory only describe global society in its current state or should it proscribe the ideal type of global society?

We begin the semester with an overview of the concept of global society and the various actors that populate it. After discussing the ways global society is conceptualized as well as the role of citizenship within the context of global society, we will turn to discussing various theories of global society, looking at how ideas of and about global society both represent a challenge to, as well as a continuation of, the nation-state in the 21st century. We will explore how ideas about citizenship in the 21st century reinforce traditional boundaries of nation-state and national identity. We will also explore current challenges to the nation-state and global society, ranging from globalization and technology to new forms of cultural identity, focusing on how such challenges are (legally, ethically, morally) reshaping our traditional notions of citizen, state and society.

This course description has been provided by Professor Jessica Peet.
JS 211gw, The Holocaust

JS 211gw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

The historical event we now know as the Holocaust or the Shoah, occurred in a technologically advanced, highly cultured and "civilized" society in the heart of modern twentieth-century Europe. Studying these events as well as their interpretations by among others, historians, political philosophers, and religious thinkers, forces us to question some of the most fundamental assumptions of western culture, including the foundations of the society in which we live today. Why did the political and religious traditions of the West fail to prevent the industrialized mass killings of those deemed racially inferior? How could science and medicine become instrumentalized to plan and execute mass murder? What allowed perpetrators of genocide to follow the norms of their government and peers, at the expense of their conscience? Why were there not more Raoul Wallenbergs and Oscar Schindlers?

This course is intended as an introduction to the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people, as well as to the genocide of Poles, gypsies, Soviet POWs, and the disabled, between the years 1933-1945. In the class we will look at the kinds of ideological, political, and social factors that prepared the way for genocide, closely scrutinize the motivations of the perpetrators, try to understand the responses of those who became bystanders, and consider the impact of dehumanization on its victims. As we examine the specific historical, sociological, and psychological factors shaping human behavior during the Holocaust, we will focus especially on evaluating the moral dilemmas that arose during this terrible chapter in the history of modern Europe and the West and reflect on the existence of parallel issues in our own society.

The Holocaust was neither the first nor the last genocide of the twentieth century, however. It is crucial, therefore, that we situate the Nazi genocide within the larger perspective of twentieth-century genocides, and attempt to understand it in relation to those events that preceded and succeeded it. For this reason, the course will begin by examining the genocide of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and conclude in the latter half of the twentieth century by looking at the genocide of indigenous peoples in Central America, together with the cases of Rwanda and Sudan.

This course description has been provided by Professor Sharon Gillerman.

LING 115gw, Language, Society, and Culture

LING 115gw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

This course examines the various ways that language and society influence each other. We consider why people speak in different ways, and how the language we make use of has important consequences for the projection of identity in society. Specific topics studied in the course will include the following:

LANGUAGE, DIALECTS AND VARIETIES.
How languages and dialects are frequently ‘defined’ due to socio-politic rather than pure linguistic reasons, and how the language-dialect division is often manipulated for the control of resources in a population.

DIGLOSSIA, CODE-SWITCHING AND CODE-MIXING.
The use of languages in multilingual societies around the world. Societies in which one variety of a language is viewed as a ‘high’ variety, and another related variety is used a colloquial ‘low’ variety (diglossia). How and why speakers mix languages (for example English and Spanish ‘code-mixing’) in single sentences, and attitudes of monolingual speakers towards such code-switching.

LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT.
How minority groups experience the loss of their heritage/ancestral languages during typical 3-generation patterns of language shift. How and why minority groups come into existence in larger majority populations and the sociolinguistic pressures which lead minority group speakers to give up speaking their mother tongues. How languages around the world are dying out at very high rates due to pressure from larger languages and their speakers (2/3 of the world’s languages are predicted to disappear in the course of the 21st century).
NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE PLANNING.
How new nations and states use language to promote national identity. The difference between national and official languages. Successful and unsuccessful examples of national language planning around the world, and the consequences of national language planning for ethno-linguistic minorities in newly emergent states. How the creation of new words may reflect the targeted national identity of a state (linguistic protectionism, linguistic purity).

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE.
The growth of English as a world language, and the sociological consequences of the increasing dominance of English. The future of English – continued growth or displacement by other dominant languages or (machine translation) technologies?

PIDGINS AND CREOLES.
New languages emerging from situations of language contact around the world (e.g. slave communities in the 19th century, multi-ethnic plantation communities, trading and war situations). How basic ‘pidgin’ languages evolve into more sophisticated ‘creole’ languages. Negative attitudes held towards pidgin/creole languages and their speakers.

LANGUAGE(S) IN THE USA AND CALIFORNIA.
How English came to be the dominant language in the USA, and how other languages have been subjected to pressure and subordination (e.g. German, Native American languages). Increased focus on languages other than English in the 1960s, the growth of bilingual education programs in the US as a way to help minority students struggling to make progress in schools. The US English/English-Only Movement, and the drive to make English the official language of the USA and individual states. Attitudes towards the perceived growth of Spanish in the US. Legal cases involving linguistic issues and the right to use languages other than English in the workplace and in schools in the US.

THE EBONICS DEBATE: AFRICAN AMERICAN VERBANCULAR ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION.
Linguistic challenges facing young speakers of African American Vernacular English in the education system. The attempt to introduce the use of African American Vernacular English in schools and public reaction towards the Ebonics Initiative.

BILINGUALISM.
Growing up in a family where more than one language is spoken. Becoming bilingual: challenges, rewards and potential dangers (semilingualism). The role of language in the projection of personal identity. Young people being caught between two cultures and languages (Generation 1.5, ‘anomie’ – cultural alienation and confusion). Issues of bilingualism in the US in comparison to Europe, Asia and Africa.

LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY.
The issue of whether and to what extent the language a person speaks affects a person’s perception of the world and influences their behavior. Language as a reflection of culture and life-style. Different perceptions of space and time in different cultures and their relation to differences in the languages spoken in those cultures. Appreciating how speakers of different languages may have partially different world views as the result of the language they make use of.

LANGUAGE AND GENDER.
How men and women make use of language in different ways in the US and other countries. Why such differences in male/female speech have arisen due to different pressures on men and women in modern and traditional societies around the world. Issues of power, personal status, and solidarity in the gendered use of language. Sexism in language in the US.

LANGUAGE CHANGE.
How rising generations regularly change the way a language is spoken in a community, and how this frequently results in negative attitudes towards language change. How the study of ongoing language change reveals aspects of targeted personal and group identity. The change of language in contact situations involving immigrant minority groups, and attitudes of majority speakers towards minorities speaking the majority language in different, adjusted ways.

This course description has been provided by Professor Andrew Simpson.
POSC 265gw, Environmental Challenges

POSC 265gw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

This assignment is designed to give you a chance to find out more about the consequences of personal and household decisions for greenhouse gas emissions. You will be asked to develop and carry out a personal program of greenhouse gas reduction, and report on the results. On the basis of this experiment with your own lifestyle, you will analyze whether we as Americans can change our behavior in time to prevent dramatic climate change and its consequences. By most accounts, this goal requires at least a 75-80 percent reduction in annual emissions from the United States by the year 2050.

The written portions of the assignment consist of two parts. Over the first weeks of the semester, you will carry out a lifestyle assessment and an intensive experiment on how you can reduce your emissions, and submit a paper on this exercise. Over the remainder of the semester, you will be expected to reflect and experiment further on ways to reduce your emissions over the longer term. In a report due at the end of the semester, you will be expected to estimate personal results from your efforts over the entire semester. In the final examination, one question will ask you to reflect again on these results, and their implications for the prospects for changes in lifestyles in the U.S. and beyond.

This course description has been provided by Professor Jefferey Sellers.

SOCI 225gw, Sociology of Health and the Body

SOCI 225gw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

This course introduces you to three forms of citizen participation found in the U.S. and around the world. We will learn about volunteer groups, social movement organizations that pursue political issues, and NGOs (“non-governmental organizations”) or nonprofit organizations that produce public goods. We will ask: How and why do ordinary people get involved in organizations that address local, national or global problems? What are the benefits and drawbacks of different forms of citizen participation? How does the same form vary in its workings and its outcomes in different national contexts?

You will learn how a society’s practices of “social responsibility” are shaped by cultural and institutional contexts that vary nationally, as well as between different populations within a nation. You will learn those different contexts as we compare forms of U.S. citizen participation with non-U.S. cases of participation, in order to broaden our understanding of what “active citizen participation” could include. This helps us avoid assuming that U.S.-style citizen participation is simply natural for a democracy.

You will learn how each form of participation we study implies a different definition of “the good citizen” and a different understanding of how best to improve the quality of life. Many public organizations, and many nations, want to increase citizen participation, but that can mean many different things! The course does not aim to say which form of participation is “better.” Instead, the course introduces you to different sociological concepts and theories you can use to contrast the goods of three kinds of participation, and compare those cross-nationally.

Our course is grounded in a distinctive understanding of global citizenship, based on several decades of sociological research: Citizen practices, such as the ones we will study, develop in particular cultural and institutional milieux and never are just “logical” applications of principles on paper. Globally aware citizens cannot simply transcend the cultural and social conditions of their home nations, but can instead achieve inter-cultural and critical awareness of their own and others’ civic practices. Such citizens understand the possibilities, and the limits, of citizen practices in different contexts instead of expecting one nation to be a universal model. Our class begins from the standpoint of U.S. citizen experience and uses international comparisons to engage that standpoint critically and cross-culturally from other national standpoints.

While introducing you to different forms of citizen participation and debates about participation, the course also introduces you to ethnographic research. Los Angeles is a fabulously diverse city with many different kinds of citizen participation, and many, many problems that citizens try to address. Everyone will need to attend at least three meetings or events of a “grassroots” civic group, organization, coalition, or project: an activist group, volunteer group, local political party.
organization, or non-profit organization working on some social problem, or else a government-sponsored forum that involves average citizens.

This course description has been provided by Professor Paul Lichterman.

SSCI 165Lgw, Sustainability Science in the City

SSCI 165Lgw also satisfies the requirement in GE-C, Social Analysis.

Sustainability is among the most pressing scientific and social challenges of our time. Typically defined as utilizing natural resources so as to create a high quality of life for future as well as current generations, the idea of sustainability has provided a strong orientation towards a long-term re-thinking of the human role in and domination of ecosystems. Yet, despite the emergence of this sustainability discourse in the late 1980s, global climate change, ocean degradation, deforestation, habitat loss, and species endangerment continue nearly unabated. This situation seriously threatens the inventory of natural capital for present and future generations.

In response to such ongoing challenges, the field of sustainability science emerged in the late 1990s. It is a multidisciplinary collection of social, physical, and life sciences that work to understand the complex coupling of human and natural systems across global, national, regional, and local scales. Without a deep understanding and reconsideration of the human role in natural systems, it is impossible to envision a sustainable future. Thus, policymakers rely upon various forms of scientific knowledge and the scientific method itself to understand how to re-chart the human journey towards sustainability.

In this course, you will learn how social and ethical theories of sustainability relate to the emergence of sustainability science and how theory and empirical work are mutually constitutive. In particular, you will learn why the social and natural sciences and their methods are important to policies and planning for sustainable cities.

In 2008, an important global threshold was reached, with over 50% of people living in cities. According to UN forecasts, by 2050 70% of the Earth’s growing population will be living in urban areas. The rapid growth of cities across the world results from a common undercurrent of global political and economic forces that rests on a history of colonialism. An understanding of these forces and how they might be reshaped to create sustainable forms of urban development will be key to our enquiry. Indeed, issues of global sustainability are increasingly urban issues: land use, population, consumption, industrial organization, and infrastructural technologies (e.g. energy). In a series of laboratory experiences and linked writing exercises, you will learn how to articulate the relationships among observed phenomena, the analytical approaches and methods used to understand them, and their societal implications. For example, one focus of sustainability science is improving our understanding of how the Earth’s land cover is changing as a result of deforestation or the growth of cities, and what it means for people and places. In the laboratory, you will learn how technological tools and data, such as geographic information systems and satellite imagery, are used for measuring land use/land cover change and how observed land use/land cover changes are linked to principles of land use or vegetative cover distribution. In a related writing assignment, you will consider how land use/land cover influences social well-being, economic livelihoods, and land use politics and regulation.

This course description has been provided by Professor Robert Vos.