

The Environmental Context

STS300

Autumn session, 2004, all campuses

SUBJECT NOTES

Subject coordinator

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Sometimes you can find me in my office, especially in the afternoons. You are also welcome to contact me by phone (at home after 7am and before 9pm, please), fax or email, to discuss any issue or make an appointment.

Objectives

To promote critical thinking about environmental issues and the science and economics associated with them and to practice using social theory in the environmental area.

To ensure familiarity with mainstream thinking about environmental issues as embodied in the concept of sustainable development.

To provide exposure to alternative views, philosophies and ways of thinking that can be applied to environmental problems.

To encourage independent examination of possible solutions and courses of action for reducing or avoiding environmental problems.

To develop and improve oral presentation, research and writing skills.

Outline

This subject introduces you to the social and political aspects of environmental issues and policies.

It examines the concept of sustainable development from a variety of viewpoints. In particular it analyses the principles of sustainable development including equity, valuing the environment, market-based solutions and the precautionary principle. Other aspects covered include the role of scientific uncertainty in regulation, the role of technological change, the participation of the public in environmental decisions and the part played by environmentalists.

Materials

The major text is Sharon Beder, *The Nature of Sustainable Development* (Melbourne: Scribe, 1996, 2nd edition). Many of the required basic course readings are provided at <http://www.uow.edu.au/LOL>. This site substitutes for formal lectures. Students are expected to review the appropriate material on the site before each week's tutorial. Additional readings and links to useful web sites are provided on the internet site for seminar presentations and essays. For the assignments you will be expected to find additional material yourself, both on the internet, from the library and from other sources. Please note that electronic databases available through the library are a good source of research material and a tutorial in electronic databases is available via the WebCT course material.

Subject notes for STS300, The Environmental Context, Autumn session 2004

Additional information The *Faculty of Arts Undergraduate Handbook 2004* is a supplement to these subject notes. See in particular:

- Staff consultation, student representation, p. 11
- Assignments, assessment, pp. 70-72
- Plagiarism, pp. 72-76 [Plagiarism will not be tolerated. For more information, see <http://www.uow.edu.au/handbook/courserules/plagiarism.html>]
- Sub-Dean matters, pp. 77-78.

See also Code of Practice—Teaching and Assessment, http://www.uow.edu.au/about/teaching/teaching_code.html

You are not required to pass every component of assessment to pass the subject. The subject coordinator and tutors reserve the right to hold an additional oral examination for any piece of assessment.

Theories

In addition to the theories covered in the text, we will be exploring a range of other theories and how they can be used to understand environmental issues. Some possibilities are:

- political theories: liberalism, representative government, fascism, socialism, anarchism, totalitarianism (but *not* participatory democracy since that's part of the formal subject matter).
- economic theories: neoclassical economics, Marxism, political economy, Gandhian economics, humanistic economics
- religious "theories": Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, atheism
- other theories: feminism, racism, altruism, pacifism, militarism

Your tutorial group can also use theories from psychology, law, education and other fields. To find out about theories, consult introductory textbooks in economics, sociology or political science, or search library catalogues or the web using the name of the theory or related terms.

Assessment

Task	Format	Length	Weighting	Due Date
Attendance			pass/fail	Every week
Class activity	Segment of tutorial organised by student group	20+ minutes	20%	allocated in tutorials
Bulletin board contributions	Contributions to online discussion group	variable	40%	Every week, weeks 3 to 12
Essay	Essay in dialogue form	2000 words	40%	noon 31 May

Attendance

To pass the subject, you must attend at least 80% of tutorials. (Tutorials are omitted from the calculation when a certificate is provided justifying absence on medical or compassionate grounds.) If you are present for only part of a tutorial, that counts as fractional attendance.

With the agreement of all students, the following modification will be used. For those with less than 80% tutorial attendance, a corresponding percentage will be subtracted from the overall mark. For example, with 72% attendance, $80\% - 72\% = 8\%$ will be subtracted.

Class activity

You can work individually or in a group of two or three students to run a class on a topic agreed by the tutor. Normally the topic will cover both a case study from the weekly readings and one of the theories covered in the essay. For example, you might cover limits to growth from the perspective of feminism or environmental valuation under fascism. The class can be run as a presentation, debate, game, quiz, small group exercises or any other activity that helps others to learn. Facilitators should not just stand and talk, but should design one or more participatory activities. Consider using overheads, handouts, tapes and videos. You should also include some method to evaluate how well the class has *understood* what you are trying to get across (not just how well they liked the activity). This is important!

In designing your activity, use one or more methods developed by Edward de Bono, as described in books such as *Parallel Thinking*, *Six Thinking Hats*, *Serious Creativity*, *Six Action Shoes* and *Water Logic*. Provide a handout for the class describing the de Bono method(s) that you've used, why you chose them and how they relate to your topic. Books by de Bono are available in most bookshops and libraries.

Time allocated for each class activity will be at least 20 minutes times the number of group members, e.g. 60 minutes for a three-person group.

Class activities will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- knowledge of case study
- understanding of theory
- audience involvement
- aids (handouts, overheads, posters, videos, etc.)
- use of de Bono methods
- method of evaluating how well the class has understood your message.

Bulletin board contributions

Due date: Weeks 3 to 12

Length: 200 words or more

Each week you should make a contribution to the bulletin board about the environmental topic for that week, linking it to the theory for that week. (The sequences of theories for each tutorial group will be decided in tutorials.) You should cite at least one substantial source about the theory (something more substantial than a dictionary or newspaper article) and one source about the environmental topic in addition to Sharon Beder's book and the WebCT course material.

Contributions will not be counted if posted later than 4am on the day of your tutorial

Unless your contribution is the first for the week, you should comment on someone else's contribution, including a summary of what they said in a sentence or two.

Assessment will be based on your contributions made during four weeks chosen randomly, one from weeks 2-4, one from 4-6, one from 7-9 and one from 9-12.

You are welcome to work in a group to prepare your contribution (see restriction below). You can make a single group submission, or you can make individually signed contributions that are linked together around a theme (a debate or a dialogue, for example) and submitted from one person's account.

For each week selected, a single tutor will mark all contributions from all groups.

Bulletin board contributions will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- understanding of the week's environmental topic
- understanding of the week's theory and its relevance to the topic
- use of sources (including comment on a previous contribution)
- argument (starting from clearly articulated premises; mobilising evidence and logic towards a conclusion; recognising assumptions made and limitations)
- quality of expression (organisation of material, clarity, grammar, spelling, etc.).

Note re group work

University regulations restrict group work to no more than 30% of total assessment. For example, you can work in a group for the class activity (20%) and one assessed bulletin board contribution (10%), in which case the remaining bulletin board contributions should be individual contributions (which could be linked together around a theme).

Essay

Due date: noon 31 May

Length: 2000 words

Submission: All essays from all campuses go direct to Brian Martin for marking. Either (1) send by express post (posted by noon on 31 May) to Brian Martin, STS, University of Wollongong, NSW 2522, or (2) put under the door to my office (19.2016).

Put your name on a cover sheet but not elsewhere on the essay.

Write a fictional dialogue between two people (or possibly more) concerning two environmental issues covered in the subject. The people ostensibly engaging in the dialogue can be fictional or real, dead or alive, but should not be staff or students at the university. For example, the dialogue might involve Saddam Hussein, Ralph Nader, Germaine Greer, Lara Croft, Albert Einstein, Aung San Suu Kyi, Nicole Kidman, Socrates, Sappho, Homer Simpson or Mother Teresa, but not, for example, Sharon Beder or yourself. The dialogue should be as realistic as possible within the assumptions about the participants and situation. Virtually the entire essay should be dialogue. You may add the equivalent of “stage directions” (see typical plays for examples).

The topic of the dialogue should be a comparison of the two environmental issues, focussing on connections, differences, causes or responses.

Each participant in the dialogue should speak from and/or advocate a theoretical position. See earlier under “Theories” (p. 2). For example, Saddam might speak as a dictator and Germaine Greer as a feminist.

Participants in the dialogue should not normally refer to references explicitly (with the exception of well known writers). You, as the author of the dialogue, should provide footnotes at appropriate places, explaining what sources the speakers might be using, drawing inspiration from or bouncing off. A sample essay will be provided to show how this can be done. A minimum expectation is three different sources about each environmental issue and three different sources about each of the two theories. (That’s a minimum of 12 in total.)

You are encouraged to work in a team on the essay. For example, in a team of four, two team members could investigate the environmental issues and the other two members could study two theories. You must write your own individual essay.

Essays will be assessed using these criteria (roughly equally)

- knowledge of case study
- understanding of theories
- use of sources
- quality of the dialogue

Tutorial and Seminar Outline

This material is adapted from Sharon Beder's previous subject outlines.

Week 1 (beginning 23 February): Introduction

At this tutorial we will introduce each ourselves, discuss tutorial activities for the rest of the session, and try out some de Bono and/or other techniques for thinking and learning.

Essential Reading: STS300 subject notes; Section 1: Introduction, WebCT; any book by Edward de Bono dealing with creative thinking.

Week 2 (beginning 1 March): The Limits to Growth

During the 1960s and 1970s there was a widespread debate about whether there were limits to population and economic growth. Consider the merits of the arguments put for limits to growth at that time, particularly economic growth, and whether those arguments still have merit today.

Essential Reading: Beder, 1996, chapter 3; Section 2: Limits to Growth, WebCT.

Week 3 (beginning 8 March): Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development has different meanings to different people but at a government policy level it has developed into a concept that incorporates economic growth as being compatible with environmental protection. Examine the various definitions and principles in the essential readings and consider which are best and why.

Essential Reading: Beder, 1996, chapter 4; Section 3. Sustainable Development, WebCT.

Week 4 (beginning 15 March): Valuing the Environment

There is considerable controversy over whether the environment can or should be given a monetary price. Consider whether you believe that putting a price on the environment will help save it or merely reduce everything to economic commodities that can be bought and sold.

Essential Reading: Beder, 1996, chapters 6-8; Section 4: Valuing the Environment, WebCT.

Extra Reading: Biodiversity Case Study, WebCT

Week 5 (beginning 22 March): Market Instruments

The market can be used as an environmental policy instrument by governments using economic instruments to encourage firms to curtail environmentally damaging behaviour. It can also be used by consumers who use their purchasing power to encourage firms to produce environmentally sound goods. Why are market instruments so popular at the moment and to what extent should they replace legal instruments?

Essential Reading: Beder, 1996, pp. 105-121; Section 5: Market Instruments, WebCT.

Extra Reading: Green Consumerism and Rights-Based Measures, WebCT.

Week 6 (beginning 29 March): Equity

Equity is about fairness. Environmental equity includes intergenerational and intragenerational equity. Consider the ways that environmental degradation can be exacerbated by inequities and the ways that inequity can be caused by environmental degradation.

Essential Reading: Beder, 1996, pp. 166-185; Section 6: Equity, WebCT.

Extra Reading: Greenhouse Case Study and International Economic System, WebCT.

Week 7 (beginning 5 April): Environmental Standards

Environmental standards are supposed to be set on the basis of scientific knowledge but in reality differ from country to country because of the differing social context and varying influence of pressure groups. Consider how social and political pressures can influence environmental standards, particularly where there is much uncertainty about the effects of various chemicals and human activities.

Essential Reading

Beder, 1996, pp. 92-96, 121-127, 185-190; Section 7: Science and Uncertainty, WebCT.

Extra Reading: Regulation of Pesticides and Precautionary Principle, WebCT.

Week 8 (beginning 19 April): Technological Choice

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Technological change is not only determined by scientific inventions and market forces. A variety of social, cultural and political factors may also determine the choice of a technology and cause some technologies to be researched, developed and promoted at the expense of others. Consider what measures governments can take to encourage research and innovation that leads technological development in more environmentally sound directions.

Essential Reading: Beder, 1996, chapters 20 and 21; Section 8: Technological Choice, WebCT.
Extra Reading: Appropriate Technology and Clean Technology, WebCT.

Week 9 (beginning 26 April): Participatory Democracy

In recent years, when environmental consequences are foreseen, it has become fashionable to involve the public in planning and developmental decision-making. It has been argued, however, that some of the consultation processes that have been adopted do not facilitate real public participation in decision-making. What would a genuine consultation process involve?

Essential Reading: Section 9: Participation, WebCT.
Extra Reading: Information Access and EIA, WebCT.

Week 10 (beginning 3 May): The Environment Movement

As the environment movement has grown and matured it has become more professional and institutionalised. Some groups, in their efforts to attract members, have also sought to portray themselves as respectable and mainstream, which has seen a shift in preferred strategies from activism to negotiation. Is this shift beneficial to the environment?

Essential Reading: Section 10: Environmentalism, WebCT.
Extra Reading: Greenpeace and Environment Groups and Issues and Strategies, WebCT.

Week 11 (beginning 10 May): study week

Week 12 (beginning 17 May): Controversies/Politics

Environmental controversy is seldom based on technical issues alone. Usually there are differences of belief, philosophy or politics underlying the controversy. These underlying beliefs are frequently concealed behind, or obscured by, rational arguments and scientific evidence. Consider the ways that beliefs and self-interest can influence a person's position in environmental debates.

Essential Reading: Section 11: Controversy and Politics, WebCT.
Extra Reading: Environmental Philosophies and Environmental Politics, WebCT.

Week 13 (beginning 24 May): Evaluation

Students will evaluate what they've learned during the session.