**HIST 4388/ESST2300**

**UNSUSTAINABLE! DESTRUCTION, EXTINCTION, AND CATASTOPHIC FAILURE IN HISTORY**

**INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY TOPICS**

Fall 2014

**Instructor:** Christopher Morris

**Office Number:** UH 346

**Office Telephone Number:** 817-272-2861

**Email Address:** [morris@uta.edu](mailto:morris@uta.edu)

**Faculty Profile:** <https://www.uta.edu/profiles/dr-christopher-morris>

**Office Hours:** MWF Noon to 1:00 pm, and by appointment.

**Section Information:** HIST 4388/007 and ESST 2300/001

**Time and Place of Class Meetings:** MWF 10:00-10:50, CRB 114

**DESCRIPTION OF COURSE CONTENT:**

This course will introduce students to basic concepts necessary to understand and engage present-day debates over policy, politics, and science of sustainability. This will be accomplished primarily by exploring past examples of communities and societies that have collapsed because their relationship with the natural environment was unsustainable, and by connecting these past examples to present-day problems and issues of sustainability. Along the way, the class will interrogate the meaning of the word “sustainable,” by considering how it has been used, by whom, with what reasons, to sustain what, with what effect.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

By the end of the semester students will be able to explain the concept of sustainability and related concepts, and to apply those concepts critically and thoughtfully to issues and examples drawn from the relationship between people and the natural environment in the past and present, and to speculate thoughtfully and in an informed way on the future.

**REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER COURSE MATERIALS:**

Anthony N. Penna and Jennifer S. Rivers, *Natural Disasters in a Global Environment*

Thomas Homer-Dixon, *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*

Simon Dresner, *The Principles of Sustainability*

**DESCRIPTIONS OF MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:**

**Writing Exercises:** There will be three writing exercises, in which students will explain in a brief essay (500 words) a key concept as it applies to their own lives.

**Exams:** There will be two midterm exams and a final exam covering class readings and discussions. The final exam will be cumulative. Although the final exam question will emphasize the last four weeks of discussion and reading, students will be expected to draw on their work over the entire semester in their final essay exam.

**Extra Credit:** Extra-credit opportunities will be available to students who, for example, visit one of the area’s Audubon centers, participate in activities at the Botanic Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) in Fort Worth, attend a public lecture or watch a documentary film on a topic covered by this class. All extra-credit assignments require a 250 word essay on how the assignments relates to material covered in class.

**Missed assignments and Exams:** Students with a valid, documented reason for missing a writing assignment or exam will be permitted an extension or make-up exam as arranged with the instructor.

**ATTENDANCE:**

At The University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students’ academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I will not assign a grade specifically for attendance, however, I will take not of attendance for diagnostic reasons, to monitor student engagement, progress, reading comprehension, and oral communication skills.

**GRADING**:

Three Writing Exercises (10 points each) 30 points

Two Midterm Exams (20 points each) 40 points

Final Exam (30 points) 30 points

TOTAL 100 points

A=90-100 B=80-89 C=70-79 D=60=69 F=<60

**Assessments:**

The short writing exercises are designed to monitor each student’s progress at learning how to describe or explain basic concepts, events, and issues related to the subject of environment and sustainability. Short assignments, along with the exams, will also permit students and the instructor to monitor progress at acquiring critical thinking skills, by being able to explain how past societies have faced problems of sustainability, and by suggesting how those past experiences might be applied to present-day problems. Altogether, the written assignments that monitor student progress at description and analysis, the exams that monitor student progress at analyzing past societies and synthesizing them by applying them to present-day problems will provide a gauge of overall understanding of environmental and sustainability studies. Finally, written assignments, exams, and class discussions will permit the instructor to monitor student progress at written and oral communication skills.

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:**

Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester and seek guidance from available sources (including the instructor) if their performance drops below satisfactory levels; see “Student Support Services,” below.

As a general rule, for every credit hour earned, a student should spend 3 hours per week working outside of class. Hence, a 3-credit course might have a minimum expectation of 9 hours per week of their own time in course-related activities, including reading required materials, completing assignments, preparing for exams, etc.

**DROP POLICY:**

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance**. Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://wweb.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**TITLE IX:** The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to upholding U.S. Federal Law “Title IX” such that no member of the UT Arlington community shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. For more information, visit [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX).

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington’s tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents’ Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university’s standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student’s suspension or expulsion from the University.

**ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**STUDENT FEEDBACK SURVEY:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**FINAL REVIEW WEEK:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**EMERGENCY EXIT PROCEDURES:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located [insert a description of the nearest exit/emergency exit]. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

**STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES**:UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).

**WRITING CENTER:** The Writing Center, 411 Central Library, offers individual 40 minute sessions to review assignments, *Quick Hits* (5-10 minute quick answers to questions), and workshops on grammar and specific writing projects. Visit [https://uta.mywconline.com/](https://owa.uta.edu/owa/luket@exchange.uta.edu/redir.aspx?C=jqplelmmw0KcvkWv1pRv_rHS8ofUUtFIXl_CWZTLffEmCPyZf3x4ncUbBmD9p3gSPROCbhSJj7U.&URL=https%3a%2f%2futa.mywconline.com%2f) to register and make appointments. For hours, information about the writing workshops we offer, scheduling a classroom visit, and descriptions of the services we offer undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members, please visit our website at [www.uta.edu/owl/](http://www.uta.edu/owl/).

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

*NOTE: As the instructor for this course, I reserve the right to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course.*

WEEK ONE

Aug. 22 Introduction: What Do We Mean by Nature? The Environment? Sustainability?

**SECTION ONE: PAST**

WEEK TWO

Aug. 25 Volcanoes and Earthquakes

Aug. 27 continued

Aug. 29 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Penna and Rivers, Introduction, plus chapters 1 and 2.

WEEK THREE

Sept. 1 LABOR DAY HOLIDAY: No Class

Sept. 3 Tsunamis

Sept. 5 Fires

READING ASSIGNMENT: Penna and Rivers, chapters 3 and 4.

WEEK FOUR

Sept. 8 Floods and Landslides

Sept. 10 continued

Sept. 12 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Penna and Rivers, chapters 5 and 6.

WEEK FIVE

Sept. 15 Disease

Sept. 17 Hurricanes

Sept. 19 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Penna and Rivers, chapters 7 and 8.

WEEK SIX

Sept. 22 Famine

Sept. 24 Drought

Sept. 26 Meteorites

READING ASSIGNMENT: Penna and Rivers, chapters 9 and 10.

**SECTION TWO: PRESENT**

WEEK SEVEN

Sept. 29 **FIRST EXAM**

Oct. 1 What If Environmental Disaster Isn’t Really Disastrous?

Oct. 3 continued.

READING ASSIGNMENT: Homer-Dixon, Prologue, plus chapters 1 and 2.

WEEK EIGHT

Oct. 6 Sustainable Megacities: Paradox or Oxymoron?

Oct. 8 continued

Oct. 10 Peak Oil: When, Exactly?

READING ASSIGNMENT: Homer-Dixon, chapters 3 and 4.

WEEK NINE

Oct. 13 The Anthropocene

Oct. 15 continued

Oct. 17 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Homer-Dixon, chapters 5 and 6.

WEEK TEN

Oct. 20 Can We Grow Our Way Into a Sustainable Future?

Oct. 22 continued

Oct. 24 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Homer-Dixon, chapters 7 and 8.

WEEK ELEVEN

Oct. 27 Our Changed Planet

Oct. 29

Oct. 31

READING ASSIGNMENT: Homer-Dixon, chapters 9 and 10.

WEEK TWELVE

Nov. 3 Resilience

Nov. 5 continued

Nov. 7 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Homer-Dixon, chapters 11 and 12.

WEEK THIRTEEN

**SECTION THREE: FUTURE**

Nov. 10 **SECOND EXAM**

Nov. 12 What Is Sustainability?

Nov. 14 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Dresner, Introduction and Part One

WEEK FOURTEEN

Nov. 17 Sustainabile Development? Sustainable Capitalism? Sustainable Whatever

Nov. 19 continued

Nov. 21 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Dresner, Part Two

WEEK FIFTEEN

Nov. 24 A New Ethic?

Nov. 26

Nov. 28 THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY: No Class

WEEK SIXTEEN

Dec. 1 All Is Lost

Dec. 3 continued

READING ASSIGNMENT: Dresner, Part Three.

**FINAL EXAM, MONDAY DECEMBER 8, 8:00 a.m.**