



2015

# Syllabus: Sustainable Living: Solutions for the 21st Century

Laurie Simmons

*University of Massachusetts - Amherst*, [lsimmons@acad.umass.edu](mailto:lsimmons@acad.umass.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/sustainableumass\\_educationresources](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/sustainableumass_educationresources)

 Part of the [Agriculture Commons](#), [Biodiversity Commons](#), and the [Environmental Studies Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

Simmons, Laurie, "Syllabus: Sustainable Living: Solutions for the 21st Century" (2015). *Sustainability Education Resources*. 14.  
Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/sustainableumass\\_educationresources/14](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/sustainableumass_educationresources/14)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sustainable UMass at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sustainability Education Resources by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

# **Sustainability & Society RAP – Gorman Hall**

## **NRC 185 – Sustainable Living: Solutions for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **Fall 2015 Course Syllabus**

**Instructor:** Laurie Simmons (please call me “Laurie”)

**Email:** [lsimmons@acad.umass.edu](mailto:lsimmons@acad.umass.edu)

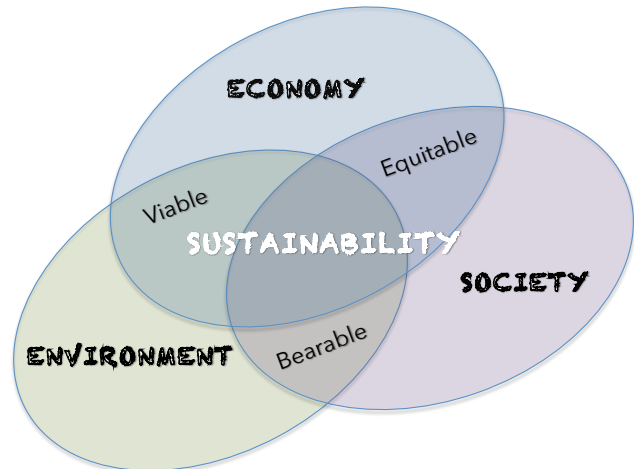
**Class time and place:**

TuTh 2:30 pm – 3:45 pm

Wheeler Hall, room B05

**Office Hours:** Weds 1:30 – 3:45 pm, Holdsworth 211

\*Please feel free to contact me with any questions that you have, at any time. I check my email frequently (though I cannot guarantee a response after 5pm or over the weekends). I am also very happy to meet with you during office hours. If you cannot make the office hours, just let me know and we’ll make other arrangements.



**Communication:**

Email will be used routinely for announcements, reminders, and resources. Please check your “official” UMass email often and carefully. It is part of your role as a student to check your email throughout the week for information about the course. You are responsible for this content.

**Course Website:**

A Moodle site is set up for the course; please refer to it for course materials, assignments, links to readings and videos, relevant announcements and the most up-to-date information.

**Course Description:**

Your generation has been handed an opportunity: the opportunity to change the story of our culture from one of blind consumption to one of conscious ecological living. As individuals, as a society and as a species, we are facing challenges related to sustainability including economic stability, social justice, resource depletion and waste management, biodiversity preservation, climate adaptation and food and agricultural resilience. In this interdisciplinary course you will learn how to seize this opportunity by working with your peers to research and understand how sustainability in different contexts presents solutions to many of these challenges facing modern society. “Sustainable Living” will provide a lens from which you can critically examine the events, patterns, systems and paradigms that shape our society and our experience as individuals living within it. You will learn to identify and practice applying sustainable solutions to the individual and societal challenges we uncover throughout the semester.

You will work in teams to investigate and reflect on the multifaceted challenges associated with our systems of waste, water, transportation, food & agriculture, resource consumption, energy and climate change. You will also research case studies, debate controversies, assess political and cultural contexts, investigate technological advances, and identify gaps in scientific knowledge. Using these resources, you will be tasked with developing your own sustainable solutions for the 21st century.

**Course Mission:**

*Increase awareness, optimism and motivation to address the systemic challenges to sustainable living we face as a culture and equip students with the information, tools and inspiration to affect positive change.*

**Learning objectives:**

1. Identify and explain the interrelationships between the “Three E’s” of sustainability: environment, economy and social equity;
2. Recognize patterns, structures and paradigms that shape the systems of our society and critically evaluate these systems to identify potential areas of intervention;
3. Experience and appreciate the current sustainability movement through engaging in service within the community;
4. Cultivate a personal understanding of your true desires and use this knowledge to make more sustainable decisions;
5. Develop collaborative teamwork skills while conceiving innovative and effective solutions for sustainability challenges;
6. Practice and improve communication skills through discussion and debate, written responses, graphic visuals, video and oral presentations;
7. Understand how to evaluate sources and improve information literacy skills;
8. Practice giving and receiving kind and constructive professional feedback.

**RAP Component:**

In addition to teaching sustainable living, I hope to foster a smooth transition to college for each of you. This course will additionally:

1. Support students in achieving a smooth transition to college life. *I will check in with the class about this periodically.*
2. Ensure first-year students are aware of the multitude of resources and opportunities that are available at UMass Amherst. *I will introduce you to the Learning Resource Center, the Writing Center, and other resources referenced in the Student Resource Booklet as well as sustainability-related campus groups through a team treasure-hunt challenge and various guest speakers.*
3. Develop an awareness and appreciation for the specific skills (inquiry and analysis, problem solving, critical and creative thinking, etc.) that are found in all Gen Ed courses. *I will elaborate on when and how our curriculum incorporates Gen Ed skills and will invite you to reflect on them as well.*
4. Promote the practice of thinking about, talking about, and making connections between classes and life experience in order to deepen engagement, understanding and ultimately increase the value of a college education. *I will ask you to reflect on this in discussion and in writing, especially through the holistic goal project.*
5. Provide first-year students with structured guidance in the development/advancement of various skills necessary to be successful in their college experience and be prepared to be engaged members of a global community upon graduation. *I will utilize material from the Student Resource Booklet to incorporate these topics as they come up in our course and host a special session on information literacy.*

**Course format:**

We will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30 pm - 3:45 pm throughout the semester in Wheeler Hall, room B05. You will be assigned readings and videos to access outside of class and will be responsible for the content individually (through the Moodle forums and class discussions) and in teams (through activities and projects). In-class time will be spent discussing the course material, engaging in activities and working on relevant team projects. Teams will be required to meet in-person outside of class routinely to complete team projects, though there will be class time reserved for team project work.

## Reading:

There are two required texts for this class, listed below. Both are accessible and enjoyable books. Any other readings and links that you are responsible for will be posted on the course Moodle site or available via the UMass Libraries e-reserves website <http://ereserves.library.umass.edu>. Some of these weekly “readings” will actually be films, TED Talks and YouTube videos.

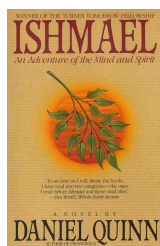


### Core text:

Beavan, Colin. *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes about Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

- Provided as part of this course (I will hand them out on the first day of class!)
- Copy also on reserve at DuBois Library Circulation Desk (3hr checkout)

We will use Colin’s experience as a map to structure our investigation of sustainability topics throughout the semester. Many of the moodle forums will be used to engage with this reading.



### Supplementary text:

Quinn, Daniel. *Ishmael*. New York: Bantam/Turner Book, 1995.

- Can be found used or new for \$3-\$14
- Copy also on reserve at DuBois Library Circulation Desk (3hr checkout)

*Ishmael* captivantly frames the story of our culture. You will be assigned selections to read from this text. The novel in its entirety will be assigned as an extra credit opportunity with written reflection.

## Assignments & Grading Breakdown:

Assignments	Points toward final grade
<b>Attendance &amp; participation</b> - includes daily attendance, active engagement during in-class activities and discussions and iPeer teamwork evaluation grades	20
<b>Moodle forum posts (10)</b> - create one original post and respond to at least one of your peers. You are responsible for participating in 10 of the 12 forums (your choice) for 2pts each.	20
<b>Personal holistic goal</b> – individual project that helps you to identify your core desires and acts as a tool to guide you towards them (progress/feedback check-ins 6pts, completed holistic goal workbook 12pts)	20
<b>Team projects</b> – three team projects on the topics of waste (powerpoint & oral presentation, 6pts), food (infographic & oral presentation, 6pts) and energy (research project – choose your deliverable, 8pts)	20
<b>Service learning team project</b> – partner with an organization on campus or within the wider community through <i>MassImpact</i> to provide (with your team) at least 8hrs of service (8pts) that contributes to the sustainability of our society – produce a short film documenting your experience, the organization’s mission and how it impacts sustainability (12pts).	20
<b>Ishmael reading and reflection (EXTRA CREDIT)</b> – read Daniel Quinn’s “Ishmael” and write a 2-3 page response to Ishmael’s philosophy on the story of our culture (earning up to 3 points on your final grade)	3
<b>Total:</b>	<b>103</b>



**Attendance:**

You are expected to attend *every* class. Much of the work in this class is team-based, and you will negatively impact your team members and team's work if you are not present. If you must miss class, let me know as far in advance as possible (exceptions made for documented illness and family emergencies). Unexcused absences will be noted and will impact your grade (see the [University Class Absence Policy](#) for additional information). Absences due to observance of religious holidays will be excused if I am notified *at least* one week in advance (see [the University Policy on Absence due to Religious Observance](#) for additional information)

**Participation:**

Active engagement during class discussions and activities is expected of all students. This includes preparing for class by completing all assigned readings and/or films and contributing to class sessions in a positive manner. For students who are especially quiet in class, I would encourage additional participation in the Moodle forums (by responding to more than one of your peers per forum and/or completing the extra forum). If you are concerned about your participation grade, I am happy to provide a mid-semester check-in and discuss suggestions for improvement.

**Course Norms:**

Cell phone use is not allowed during class; this includes times when we are working in teams. Laptops are fine for taking notes and for appropriate team project work, but please respect your classmates and instructor by limiting yourself to class-related activities.

**Late Assignments:**

It is expected that all assignments will be completed in a timely manner by the specified due dates. This is good practice for your college career and life in general. Assignments that are turned in late will be graded in the following manner:

- Less than one day late (24hrs) 75% credit
- Less than one week late 50% credit
- More than one week late or extenuating circumstances, please contact me to discuss a plan of action

*Translation: Before you are in a position of losing credit, please talk to me!*

**Accommodations:**

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services or the Center for Counseling and Psychological Health, you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements.

**Academic Honesty Statement:**

Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University and applies to all work in this course. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty.

Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent. For more information about what constitutes academic dishonesty, please review the [University Policy on Academic Honesty](#) - <http://www.umass.edu/ombuds/honesty.php/>.

*Translation: Don't do it! And if you're not sure, please ask!*

**Course Schedule (subject to change):**



"We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors,  
we borrow it from our children."  
—Native American Proverb

Week	Date	Topic	Readings & Forum	Assignments Due
1	9/8 (TU)	<b>Welcome!</b> Course overview, sustainability: the three 'E's <i>RAP- Course Syllabi – Your Key to Success</i>		
	9/10 (TH)	<b>Sustainability &amp; Systems Thinking</b> "coffee" & holistic goal project intro; Team logistics: why & how	<b>Read:</b> "Places to Intervene," Donella Meadows <b>Watch:</b> "The Price of a Cup of Coffee; "The Story of Stuff," Annie Leonard	
2	9/15 (TU)	<b>What is a solution?</b> Create teams & campus "treasure" hunt bingo. <i>RAP- Success Through Action</i>	<b>Read:</b> Ishmael, Ch1, pp. 3-29; No Impact Man, Ch. 1-2, pp. 3-33; "Why Bother," Michael Pollan <b>Watch:</b> "The Story of Solutions," Annie Leonard <b>Forum entry #1</b> – see moodle	
	9/17 (TH)	<b>Service learning &amp; community engagement;</b> Service learning project intro & Mass-Impact signups (Guest: Boone Shear)		Team Contract Team Sustainability- Treasure Hunt Activity
3	9/21 (M)	<b>LAST DAY TO DROP WITHOUT RECORD</b>		
	9/22 (TU)	<b>Waste</b> Waste project intro <i>RAP- Time, Place &amp; Pace</i>	<b>Read:</b> No Impact Man, Ch.3-4, pp. 35-72; "I haven't made trash in 2 years" (web) <b>Watch:</b> TedTalk "Success in a Throwaway Culture on Campuses, Kevin Hollerbach <b>Forum entry #2</b> – see moodle	
	9/24 (TH)	Information Literacy (Guest: Madeline Charney); Holistic goal check-in	<b>Read:</b> "Who Are You," Derrek Jensen <b>Watch:</b> Ted Talk "Life is Easy, Why do we Make it So Hard?" Jon Jarndai	Holistic Goal: Reflection Questions; Service Learning Plan
	9/26 (SAT)	"Mass Impact" Day of Service (Required volunteer component of your Service Learning Team Project)		
4	9/29 (TU)	Hallmarks of a Great Presentation & Waste project workshop <i>RAP- General Education Program</i>	<b>Read:</b> "Zero Waste Student Manual," Ari Moscone (web); "Our Prosperity is in Peril..." (web) <b>Watch:</b> "Trashed," Jeremy Irons <b>Forum entry #3</b> – see moodle	
	10/1 (TH)	Waste Presentations		Team Waste Presentation
5	10/6 (TU)	<b>Water</b> <i>RAP- Find Meaning &amp; Learn More in Every Class</i>	Read: USGS water use report <b>Forum entry #4</b> – see moodle	
	10/8 (TH)	Holistic Goal: describing your future	<b>Read:</b> "Who Writes Your Story," Chris Marano	Holistic Goal: Quality of Life Statement

6	10/13 (TU)	No class – UMass Monday		
	10/15 (TH)	<b>Transportation</b>	<b>Read:</b> No Impact Man, Ch. 5, pp.73-105 <b>Forum entry #5</b> – see moodle	
7	10/20 (TU)	<b>Food Systems</b> Food infographic project intro <i>RAP- Studying in Groups Gives You an Advantage</i>	<b>Read:</b> No Impact Man, Ch. 6, pp. 107-140 <b>Forum entry #6</b> – see moodle	
	10/22 (TH)	<b>LAST DAY TO DROP WITH A “W” ON YOUR RECORD</b>		
		Designing Persuasive Visuals & Graphics Holistic Goal: testing decisions	Maintain a one day (24hr) food log and bring to class	Holistic Goal: Futures Statement
8	10/27 (TU)	Food project workshop <i>RAP- Academic &amp; Personal Resources</i>	<b>Watch:</b> Interview “Wendell Berry on His Hopes for Humanity,” Bill Moyers; “e2: Food Miles,” PBS <b>Forum entry #7</b> – see moodle	
	10/29 (TH)	Food Systems Infographic Presentations		Team Food Infographic
9	11/3 (TU)	<b>Consumerism</b> Sustainable apparel project (Guest Speakers: Courtney Angen & Sumedha Rao) <i>RAP- Expand Your Academic Horizons</i>	<b>Read:</b> No Impact Man, Ch. 7, pp. 141-162 <b>Forum entry #8</b> – see moodle	
	11/5 (TH)	Holistic Goal & Service Learning Check-ins		Team Service Learning Project Storyboard/ Outline
10	11/10 (TU)	<b>Energy</b> Climate change <i>RAP- Academic Plan: What’s Yours?</i>	<b>Read:</b> No Impact Man, Ch. 8, pp. 163-191 <b>Forum entry #9</b> – see moodle	
	11/12 (TH)	Energy project intro & workshop	<b>Watch:</b> “Gasland,” Josh Fox	Holistic Goal: Testing Decisions /Turn in HG Workbook
11	11/17 (TU)	Energy project workshop <i>RAP- Going Beyond Academics</i>	<b>Read:</b> “UMass Climate Action Plan 2.0,” Ezra Small <b>Forum entry #10</b> – see moodle	
	11/19 (TH)	Energy project workshop		
12	11/24 (TU)	Energy project presentations <i>RAP- Spring Semester Planning</i>		Team Energy Project
	11/26 (TH)	No class – Thanksgiving break		
13	12/1 (TU)	TBD	<b>Forum entry #11</b> – see moodle	
	12/3 (TH)	TBD		iPeer Team Evaluations
14	12/8 (TU)	<b>“The Great Turning”</b>	<b>Read:</b> No Impact Man, Ch. 9-, pp. 193-224 <b>Forum entry #12</b> – see moodle	
	12/10 (TH)	Evaluations., Wrap-up & Continued Learning		Ishmael Reflection Paper (Extra Credit); Team Service Learning Film
	Finals Week	Team Service Learning Documentary Film Festival		

**My role as instructor:** It is my goal to act as facilitator and guide to support *your* learning and engagement with sustainable living topics throughout the semester by creating a comfortable and inclusive course climate for

open sharing of thoughts and ideas. I will strive to serve as a role model by sharing some of my own sustainability tips, tricks and skills I've learned along the way. I pride myself on being approachable and supportive to any student that seeks help and providing kind and constructive feedback for continued improvement. It is not my intention to be a grading dictator... I want you to succeed!

**Your role as active learner:**

Learning is a collaborative process, and this course is structured around the assumption of active collaboration and co-ownership. Although I, as the Instructor, will take responsibility for the overall design and direction of the course, all participants must share in the responsibility of creating a rich intellectual environment and a fruitful dialogue. Therefore, please read all assigned readings, and join each class experience, prepared to participate actively and respectfully, to ask questions, to discuss the salient issues, themes, and problems that emerge from the readings, and to utilize and contribute your knowledge and professional experiences in addressing the course material. You are responsible for your own learning and for helping create an effective learning community.