### Course Overview

What do ethics require of human action in relation to the natural and built environments? The answer to this question varies among stakeholders according to their values, which may be viewed as just or unjust. What are these values, and how are differences among them to be assessed and managed ethically? The difficulty of these questions is compounded by a complex problem of voice. Some human and nonhuman stakeholders, such as future human generations and nonhuman entities, cannot verbally express themselves. Other human stakeholders, such as unprotected laborers, may have little or no opportunity to voice their standpoints. Others may undertake to do so but are unintentionally or intentionally neglected, misunderstood or misrepresented; while the standpoints of others may be repudiated by those who predominate in society. Despite these difficulties, an increased sense of the need to include ethics in public and private organizational and individual decision making has emerged, particularly since the 1980s. At the same time, practical agendas and academic studies increasingly address ethical issues.

This course will focus upon sustainability ethics, which constitute a second generation of environmental ethics. The course material is organized into three sections. The first will address the rise and transformation of environmental ethics from their first generation, called environmental ethics, to their second generation, called sustainability ethics. Much debated clusters of environmental ethics will be discussed, and new directions in sustainability ethics will be introduced. The second and third sections of the course will address two sets of sector-based sustainability ethics. One set includes resource, water, clean air and waste ethics; and the other includes food, energy, consumption, place and climate ethics. An overall movement from more abstract debates to more practical applications will be seen. These applications typically involve the work of “watchdogs”, or monitoring mechanisms, such as grassroots movements that promote local activism and citizen brigades, established NGOs that create data-based indicators and conduct litigation, corporations and shareholders pursuing social responsibility, governmental institutions providing oversight and regulation, and also traditional and new forms of investigative media. Students will have the opportunity to conduct research on the work of ethics watchdogs in relation to various organizations and sectors.

Throughout the course, discussion will center upon ethical practice: how can we apply sustainability ethics, values and justice, and ensure their continued application? What kinds of initiatives, innovations and proposals can we create to bring individual and institutional goals into alignment with an array of relevant ethical standpoints, while reducing and negotiating conflicts
among them? The aim is to equip decision makers with the understanding and vocabulary needed to create and implement plans meeting the ethical requirements of sustainability.

**Course Objectives**

Students are expected to learn how to evaluate and manage the competing ethical claims of stakeholders regarding social, economic and environmental benefits and harms. On completing the course, students should be able to:

1. identify and assess ethical claims concerning both the biotic whole and distinct sectors of sustainability;
2. map conflict among competing social, economic and environmental values;
3. discern and assess values within documents, organizations and practices;
4. design incentives or disincentives to change or maintain values-based claims;
5. develop proposals for sustainability ethics initiatives for organizations and practices;
6. identify ways in which sustainability ethics training can be conducted;
7. identify mechanisms by which organizations and practices can be monitored for ethics;
8. utilize corruption assessment tools;
9. engage in public discourse on sustainability in terms of ethics;
10. engage in advocacy for sustainability ethics.

**Method of Instruction and Evaluation**

Each class session will include lecture material and open discussion. Students are welcome to raise questions and offer comments throughout. Grades will be determined as follows:

1. **Attendance and participation** will be given a weight of 19.5% (1.5% for each of 13 classes). Class attendance should be regular and timely; an absence is excused only with (a) prior e-mail notification, or (b) emergency verification.

   Class participation can take the following forms:
   a. Express views and raise questions in class about topics, readings or current events.
   b. Explain your own discussion entries and inquire about those of others in class.
   c. Serve as a group organizer, mediator, manager, leader or spokesperson.
   d. Participate in the Course Enrichment Materials section of Discussion Board.
   e. Elaborate upon class commentary and/or lecture by way of e-mail to the instructor.
   f. Express relevant views to the instructor during office hours.

2. **Discussion Entries** will be given a weight of 24% (4% for each of 6 entries).

   From week to week, in the Discussion Board section of our Courseworks site, students should discuss an ethical argument they found to be persuasive or challenging (personally, socially, politically, managerially, etc.) within that week’s readings, comparing it with the arguments found
in other readings. Prompts will be available within each discussion thread. The entry should be creative, analytical or both, and should reflect studious knowledge of the readings. All entries should be posted weekly by Tuesday 6 p.m. Students should maintain a document file containing the entire sequence of their discussion entries. These should be posted for six of the thirteen weeks of class. Two entries are to be posted for each of the three sections of the course. The file is to be submitted in paper copy and also deposited in the Drop Box section of our Courseworks site at the end of the semester.

3. **Research on Ethics Monitoring** will be given a weight of 26.5%.

From the start of the semester to the end of October, students should independently gather, record and annotate sources of (“watchdog”) monitoring for sustainability ethics in relation to a chosen institution or practice. This research should be as comprehensive as possible. A timeline of the monitoring, including any important cases, incidents and reports, should be developed and provided. When due, the assignment is to be submitted in paper copy and also deposited in the Drop Box section of our Courseworks site.

4. **An Ethics Impact Study** will be given a weight of 30%.

This assignment is to explain and evaluate whether the institution or practice selected as an object of ethics monitoring has engaged in ethical conduct. Besides textual material, the discussion may include models, graphs and scorecards to illustrate aspects of the relevant behavior and the methodology of the evaluation. The assignment will be assessed for (1) technical correctness; (2) analytical coherence; and (3) presentation of the findings. It should be submitted in paper copy and deposited in the Drop Box section of our Courseworks site at the end of the semester. Time will be reserved during the exam period for paper presentations.

At the end of the semester, each student’s points for all 4 requirements (attendance/participation, discussion entries, research, and term paper) will be totaled, and a class curve will be established. Final grades will be provided on a letter grade scale.

**Course Resources**

Required readings, listed on Courseworks in the Syllabus section, are selected from a broad range of relevant literature, which takes the place of a textbook. At the start of the semester, required readings will become available in two ways: (1) as e-reserves on our Courseworks site; and (2) as desk reserves in Lehman Library (IAB).

Supplemental course materials, such as PowerPoints, will be posted on our Courseworks site in the Files and Resources section. As needed, supplemental instructions will be posted on our Courseworks site in the Assignments section.

**Course Content**
Important Notice: The weekly readings listed below are available in the Library Reserves section of our Courseworks site. Typically a reading can be found listed by its lead author’s name. However, in some cases, it can be found listed by the name of the editor of the book in which the reading is located. Check for the former, then the latter. Aim to read all weekly materials, but at least read as many as you can.

Section I: The Rise and Transformation of Environmental Ethics

1. Human Ethics [September 4]


2. Environmental Ethics [September 11]


3. Earth Justice [September 18]


4. Biocultural Ethics [September 25]

Section II: Sector-Based Sustainability Ethics (A)

5. Resource Ethics [October 2]


Esty, Daniel C. and Andrew S. Winston. 2009. Inspiring an Eco-Advantage Culture: Creating an Organizational Focus on Environmental Stewardship. Ch. 9 in Green to Gold: How Smart

6. Water Ethics [October 9]


7. Air Ethics [October 16]


8. Waste Ethics [October 23]


Section III: Sector-Based Sustainability Ethics (B)


Tironi, Manuel; Salazar, Maite; and Valenzuela, Daniel. 2013. Resisting and Accepting: Farmers’ Hybrid Epistemologies in the GMO Controversy in Chile. Technology in Society, 35.2:93-104.


Prud’homme, Alex. 2014. Why I Wrote This Book; and The Future of Fracking. Preface and Ch. 7 in Hydrofracking: What Everyone Needs to Know. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. xv-xviii; 101-123.


11. Consumption Ethics [November 13]


12. **Place Ethics [November 20]**


13. **Climate Ethics [December 4]**

Morrow, David R. 2014. Why Geoengineering is a Public Good, Even If It is Bad. Climatic Change, 123.2:95-100.


Student Presentations

[December 10]