

**BALSILLIE SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS/  
WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY**

(Draft) Course outline Winter 2021

**GV780P Governing an Environmentally Disrupted World:  
A Seminar on Sustainable Transition Strategies**

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Synchronous Zoom course meetings Wednesdays 13:00-15:50 EDT.

As heatwaves, floods, melting ice, storms and wildfires increase in severity and frequency the world is entering a new phase in its history, one in which the relatively stable period of the Holocene, the geological period since the last ice age, is being superseded by what is now widely called the Anthropocene. Traditional notions of environmental policy and practical measures to tackle pollution and resource regulations are clearly inadequate to deal with the accelerating changes of a world that is increasingly disrupted, both directly by economic development, and indirectly by climate change and the current global extinction event, pollution, land use change resource depletion and many other things.

This current crisis has generated new thinking, new emergent political identities and widespread protests about many aspects of the global ecological crisis, and inadequate responses on the part of state, financial and corporate elites. These raise fundamental questions about politics and policy in our environmentally disrupted world, and the failure of what Peter Dauvergne calls the environmentalism of the rich. In part this new thinking are exercises in imagination about new and better futures instead of the dystopian futures that often structure popular discourses.

The course will focus on these discussions of how various movements and discourses advocate for sustainable transitions to a post crisis world. It will look at the diagnosis of what the global problems are, how aspirations to a better world are formulated in response and what specific transition strategies are advocated as a result. It will focus on the discourses of organizations and programs campaigning for particular resolutions to the current global ecological crisis. A key component of these discussions involves strategies, social movements, and related activism to implement these novel policy and political frameworks.

The first component of the course will focus on the current global ecological context, the debate about the Anthropocene, and its implications for environmental policy loosely construed. Subsequent sections will be led by students, focusing second on the transition discourses, their diagnosis of current governance failures and their aspirational alternatives, and third, on the strategies for their implementation, in terms of policy, institutional reform and related social movement activity, lobbying and political campaigning.

In the first section a number of key readings will be read and commented on by all students. In the subsequent sections, on transition discourses, their aspirational goals and on their implementation strategies, students will select the key materials, provide presentations on their chosen discourse/campaign and act as discussants on others. A final paper will synthesize these findings.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### 13 January: Introductions, course logistics, etc.

#### 20 January: Global Ecological Crisis

Future Earth *Our Future on Earth 2020* <https://futureearth.org/publications/our-future-on-earth/>  
 Johan Rockström, "Bounding the Planetary Future: Why We Need a Great Transition," *Great Transition Initiative* (April 2015), <http://www.greattransition.org/publication/bounding-the-planetary-future-why-we-need-a-great-transition>.

Frank Biermann "The future of 'environmental' policy in the Anthropocene: time for a paradigm shift," *Environmental Politics*, (2020): DOI: 10.1080/09644016.2020.1846958

#### 27 January: Governance Dilemmas in the Anthropocene

Kelly Levin, Benjamin Cashore, Steven Bernstein and Graeme Auld "Overcoming the tragedy of super wicked problems: constraining our future selves to ameliorate global climate change." *Policy Sciences* 45(2). (2012): 123-152.

Radoslav Dimitrov "Empty Institutions in Global Environmental Politics." *International Studies Review* 22. (2020): 626-650.

Anthony Burke and Stefanie Fishel "A coal elimination treaty 2030: Fast tracking climate change mitigation, global health and security." *Earth System Governance* 3. (2020): 100046.

#### 3 February: Disciplinary Perspectives on Planetary Crisis

Dahlia Simangan "Where is the Anthropocene? IR in a new geological epoch" *International Affairs* 96(1). (2020): 211-224.

Dana Fisher and Andrew K. Jorgenson "Ending the Stalemate: Towards a theory of Anthroshift" *Sociological Theory* 37(4). (2019): 342-362.

Matthew Paterson "Climate change and international political economy: between collapse and transformation," *Review of International Political Economy*, (2020): DOI: 10.1080/09692290.2020.1830829

#### 10 February: Strategies (linking ways, means and ends) for Global Change

Michael Maniates "Beyond magical thinking" in Agni Kalfagianni, Doris Fuchs and Anders Hayden (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Global Sustainability Governance* New York: Routledge. 2019. 269-281.

Peter Dauvergne "The globalization of artificial intelligence: consequences for the politics of environmentalism." *Globalizations*, 18(2). (2021): 285-299.

Peter Newell and Andrew Simms "How did we do that? Histories and political economies of rapid and just transitions" *New Political Economy* 2020. DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2020.1810216

The second and third sections of this course will be shaped by student concerns, and case studies of particular campaigns and/or political discourses working on sustainability transitions, broadly conceived.

Among the numerous possibilities for analysis are the following: C40, Climate Strike/Fridays for Future, Fossil Fuel Divestment, Circular Economy, Degrowth, Green New Deal, Extinction Rebellion, Project Drawdown, Tellus Institute/Great Transition Initiative, The Club of Rome, Breakthrough Institute. This is a broadly defined category, but to fit the criteria for this course it must have an international presence, some clearly identifiable core literature and be the subject of at least some recent scholarly analysis.

Students will select one of these, supply appropriate background reading (a scholarly journal article or equivalent, to provide at least a week in advance to the course group and instructor) that discuss how the movement/campaign/discourse diagnoses the current crisis and identifies a desirable future. They will be responsible for leading the discussion of this movement/campaign/discourse in one of the weeks of 24 February, 2 March or 10 March.

**24 February: Transitions: Diagnosis/Aspirations 1**

**3 March: Transitions: Diagnosis/Aspirations 2**

**10 March: Transitions: Diagnosis/Aspirations 3**

In the weeks of 17, 24 and 31 March students will supply appropriate background reading (a scholarly journal article or equivalent to provide at least a week in advance to the course group and instructor) that focuses on the strategies for transformation advocated by the movement/campaign/discourse, the “how to get there from here” question, and make a second presentation on that theme and the implications it has for how scholars tackle questions of future global governance broadly defined.

**17 March: Strategies for Transition 1**

**24 March: Strategies for Transition 2**

**31 March: Strategies for Transition 3**

**7 April: Synthesis discussion on lessons learned**

**14 April: Wrap up, course evaluation, paper deadline etc.**

### **COURSE EVALUATION**

**Participation (10%):** This is an important component of this course, the seminar will only work as a venue to explore the difficult issues raised by contemporary literature on sustainability transitions if there is sustained dialogue among all students.

**Commentaries (10%):** The required weekly single sheet commentary on the readings in the first four weeks (to be deposited in the course dropbox before class each week) is designed to focus attention on the key issues and to provide a vehicle for clarifying questions to be raised in the seminar. It must engage each of the assigned readings each week. It will not be formally graded but students will be notified if their contributions are not adequately coming to terms with the themes in the literature.

**Seminar presentations (x2) (30%):** A single page outline of the presentation must be deposited in the course dropbox prior to the presentation, and circulate to discussants well in advance. Presentations must be focused and to the point; they ought to be **ten** minutes long. They will be strictly limited to **twelve** minutes to allow plenty of discussion time.

**Discussants (10%):** Each student will act as a lead discussant on one of the presentations on a week where they are not doing a presentation. Background material (in the form of a journal article or equivalent) will be supplied by the presenter in advance for the discussant.

**Papers (40%):** Papers will be elaborated versions of both the seminar presentations. They will draw on the scholarly analysis of environmental governance and related discussions of transformation, be fully footnoted or referenced to the appropriate sources for academic writing. Papers must be original, in that they will be written specifically for this course. They will be clearly organized and coherently link the three themes of diagnosis, aspiration and strategy. They will be approximately 5,000 words in length (excluding references, illustrations or notes), correctly and completely referenced, using any one of the standard academic reference or footnoting styles. Each of these factors will be taken into consideration in evaluating the paper. **Deadline: April 14. (Late paper submissions will be deducted 5% per day, weekends included.)**

**Academic and Research Misconduct** *You are reminded that the University will levy sanctions on students who are found to have committed, or have attempted to commit, acts of academic or research misconduct. You are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing such offenses, and to take responsibility for your academic actions. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalty, please consult the relevant section of the Undergraduate Academic Calendar. If you need clarification of aspects of University policy on Academic and Research Misconduct, please consult your instructor. Wilfrid Laurier University uses software that can check for plagiarism. Students may be required to submit their written work in electronic form and have it checked for plagiarism.*

**Accessible Learning** *Students with disabilities or special needs are advised to contact Laurier's Accessible Learning Office for information regarding its services and resources. Students are encouraged to review the Graduate Calendar for information regarding all services available on campus.*

In thinking about transitions to a rather different world, and the implications this may have for numerous peoples in various places, please bear in mind the history of what became called the Canadian province of Ontario, and remember the colonizing practices that have led to the situation where the Balsillie School and Wilfrid Laurier University are now located on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishnawbe, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

**Background reading (just in case it is useful):**

Hans Günter Brauch, et al (eds.): *Sustainability Transition and Sustainable Peace Handbook*. Heidelberg – New York – Dordrecht – London: Springer-Verlag, 2016.

*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 76(5): 2020. Special issue on the transition away from fossil fuels.

Simon Dalby *Anthropocene Geopolitics* Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2020.

Erle C. Ellis "Ecology in Anthropogenic Biosphere" *Ecological Monographs* 5(3): 2015. 287-331.

<https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1890/14-2274.1>

Maja Gopel *The Great Mindshift: How a New Economic Paradigm and Sustainability Transformations go Hand in Hand* Springer Open 2016.

<https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/27799/1002206.pdf?sequence=1>

Manfred Hafner and Simone Tagliapietra (Eds) *The Geopolitics of The Global Energy Transition* Springer Open 2020. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-030-39066-2>

*Rough Planet Guide to Notterdam* <https://www.reinvent-project.eu/roughplanetguide>

Kim Stanley Robinson *The Ministry for the Future* New York: Orbit, 2020.

Ben Sovacool et al "Imagining sustainable energy and mobility transitions: Valence, temporality, and radicalism in 38 visions of a low-carbon future" *Social Studies of Science* (2020).

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0306312720915283>