



Course Description

The term "sustainability" is everywhere, but its meanings can be slippery. On one hand, it is used to conjure green virtue, in the form of catchy advertising slogans, desirable consumer goods, and action items drawn from one of those lists: Ten Simple Things YOU Can Do to Save the Planet! On the other hand, sustainability is also a rich, interdisciplinary field of study and action. In this course, we will learn about sustainability as a sophisticated way to understand, analyze, and assess a complex world. We will look at problems that play out across scales from the local to the global, that are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives, and that have no obvious, straightforward solutions. We will also engage sustainability as a set of analytical tools designed to grapple with some of the thorniest and most important questions of our time: How can people work together to imagine and build just and equitable communities while nurturing healthier, more resilient ecosystems? And how can we understand and confront the complicated social, environmental, and economic problems of modern life in the context of a rapidly warming world?



Contact information

Prof. Chris Wells

wells@macalester.edu

You can always reach me by email. I will usually get back to you quickly, and always within 24 hours on weekdays. You have my full attention.



Call me "Chris"

(he/him/his)

Students are sometimes not sure what to call their professors. Like many others at Macalester, I invite you to use my first name, though if you are feeling formal, Professor Wells or Dr. Wells are both fine. Please be sure to share what you would like to be called, as well!



Office Hours

My standing office hours this semester will be after class on Tuesday, 11:15-noon, and on Wednesdays from 12-1. If either of those times works for you, you can claim a spot without asking me [here](#). If the scheduled times don't work, send me an email suggesting a few times that will work for you so that I can check them against my calendar.

Talking to students is one of my favorite things about being a professor. No question is too small, and no pretext to talk is too flimsy: if you want to talk, we can talk!



My mom makes me send her a selfie on the first day of every semester, and thank goodness for that because otherwise I wouldn't have a single picture of myself.

Preceptor: Kaela Bloemendaal

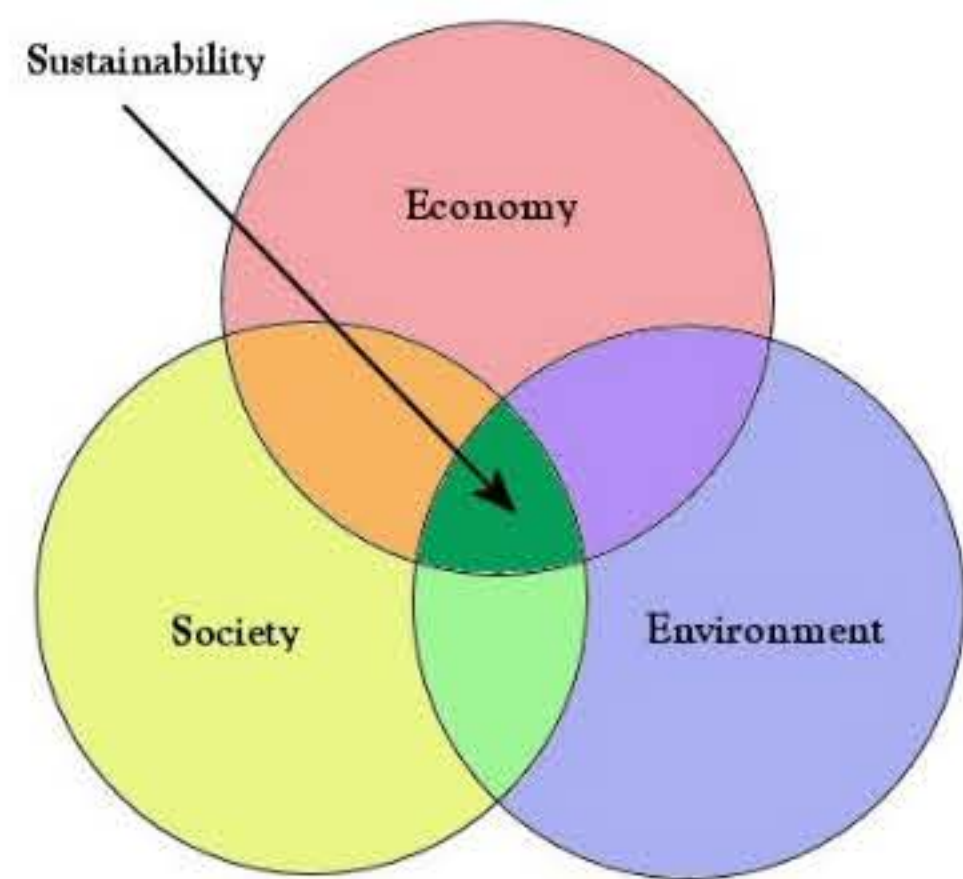
(they/them/theirs)

kbloemen@macalester.edu

I'll be having office hours on Sunday afternoons 1-2 (in the fishbowl on the first floor of OLR!) and in the evenings Thursday 8-9 in the Turck 3 lounge! Please (!) come to them! Ask me questions (about the course or whatever!), bounce ideas around with me, or I can join you at any step in the writing process! It's also okay if you're having trouble articulating exactly what you need help with! My job is to be a resource for you so without your engagement my job becomes incredibly dull!

Challenging Times

These are challenging times. As one wise colleague put it, we aren't all in the same boat, but all of us are confronting the same storm. The pandemic is rough. Constantly masking up to stay healthy is rough. Climate change is rough. Racial inequality is rough. Our national politics are rough. Despite these challenges, let's try to be kind and patient with one another, and with ourselves. Let's learn and explore and aim as high as we're able, while acknowledging that there are limits on our time, energy, capacity, and attention that external circumstances will dictate. If things aren't working for you, whatever the reason, please let me know and I'll do what I can to help.



This syllabus does not stand on its own!

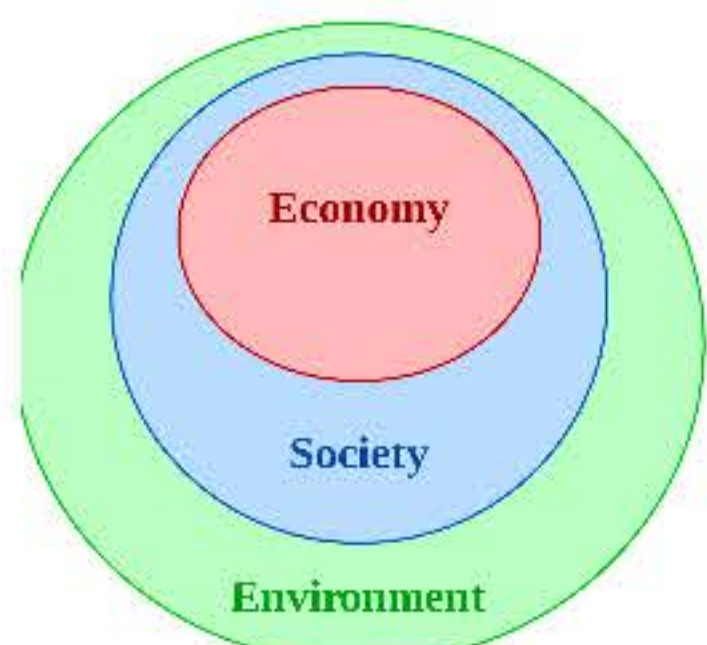
Our Moodle site (moodle.macalester.edu) is not just a crucial resource, but is also our primary point of contact for this class. In addition to hosting this syllabus, it is where you can find our complete daily schedule, as well as links to all of our readings, discussions, activities, and assignments—in short, anything and everything related to the course. Please familiarize yourself with the Moodle site before doing anything else, and let me know promptly if you have any questions or run into any problems!



Required Texts

Two books for the course are available from the Macalester Bookstore:

- Hope Jahren, *The Story of More: How We Got to Climate Change and Where to Go from Here* (NY: Vintage, 2020)
- Jenny Price, *Stop Saving the Planet! An Environmentalist Manifesto* (NY: W.W. Norton and Co, 2021)



Attendance, Participation, and Engagement

Active engagement and participation in class discussions and activities is vital to the success of this class. Our project in class meetings will be to explore connections between events, to answer questions, to clear up any confusion, to discuss the major themes of the course, and above all to engage with assigned readings. Please remember that we are all in this together, and we are all responsible for the success of the course. As eager as I am to share with you what I know, I expect that you will learn at least as much from one another as you will from me. We will discuss in class the mutual rights and responsibilities that you would like to see govern our classroom, but at minimum it is important that we all respect one another's time, space, values, and ideas by coming to class on time and prepared to engage in respectful, intellectually challenging discussions.

The participation and engagement portion of your grade will be determined based on how well you:

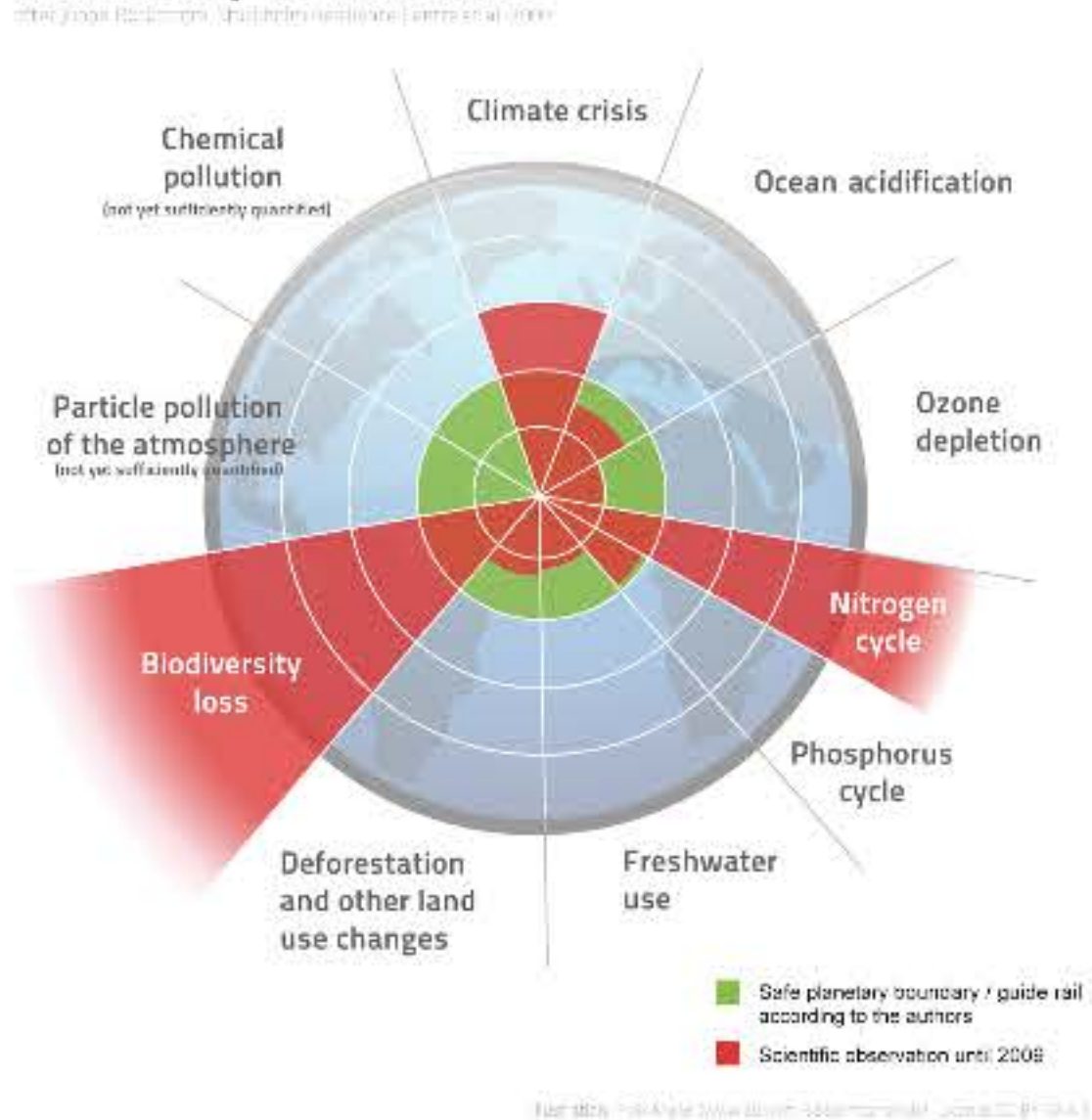
- Attend class regularly. Everyone may miss three classes without explanation or penalty. Any additional absences will require both make-up work and a discussion with me in order to stay on track. **If you are ill or think you might be coming down with something, you SHOULD NOT come to class. Instead, you SHOULD reach out to me, let me know what's going on, and make arrangements with me, if necessary, to stay on track.**
- Do the reading ahead of class, and show up prepared to engage with the day's material and to participate in class activities.
- Turn in work that is on time and complete, even if it is not your best work, on days when we will be discussing one another's writing.
- Give honest, constructive feedback on others' writing in class and in peer conferences.



Class Recordings

I have no current plans to make any recordings of what we do in class. Should that change for any reason, such as to accommodate a documented disability, I will notify you in advance and any recording will be in a manner consistent with Macalester's [classroom recording policy](#). That policy states that no one may record any classroom activity, in whole or part, without the prior written approval of the Office of Disability Services and the knowledge of the instructor, and that any such recordings are limited to personal academic use only, may not be shared, replicated, or published, and must be destroyed or stored by the Office of Disability Services at the end of the semester.

Planetary Boundaries



Helpful Resources

Many wonderful resources exist that will help you with this class. Kaela Bloemendaal is our writing preceptor, and will hold regular office hours to discuss your written work. To book an appointment with a writing counselor at the MAX Center, visit [WConline](#) or drop by the center, which is located on the first floor of Kagin Commons. For the the [First-Year Writer's Handbook](#), visit <http://tinyurl.com/MAXFYHandbook>. Our research and instruction librarians are also a great resource for many writing-related questions. To meet with them, find them [online](#) or stop by the reference desk of the library. Macalester's [Write Well video series](#) is another useful resource, with lots of advice from people around campus!

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty erodes the basic foundations of higher education: exchange, debate, and the thoughtful consideration of what we know, how we know it, and why it matters. It has no place at Macalester or in this course. Find Macalester's academic integrity policy [here](#). For help avoiding plagiarism, visit the Library's Academic Integrity materials [here](#). Send me an email, subject line "Easter Egg," when you read this.



Accommodations

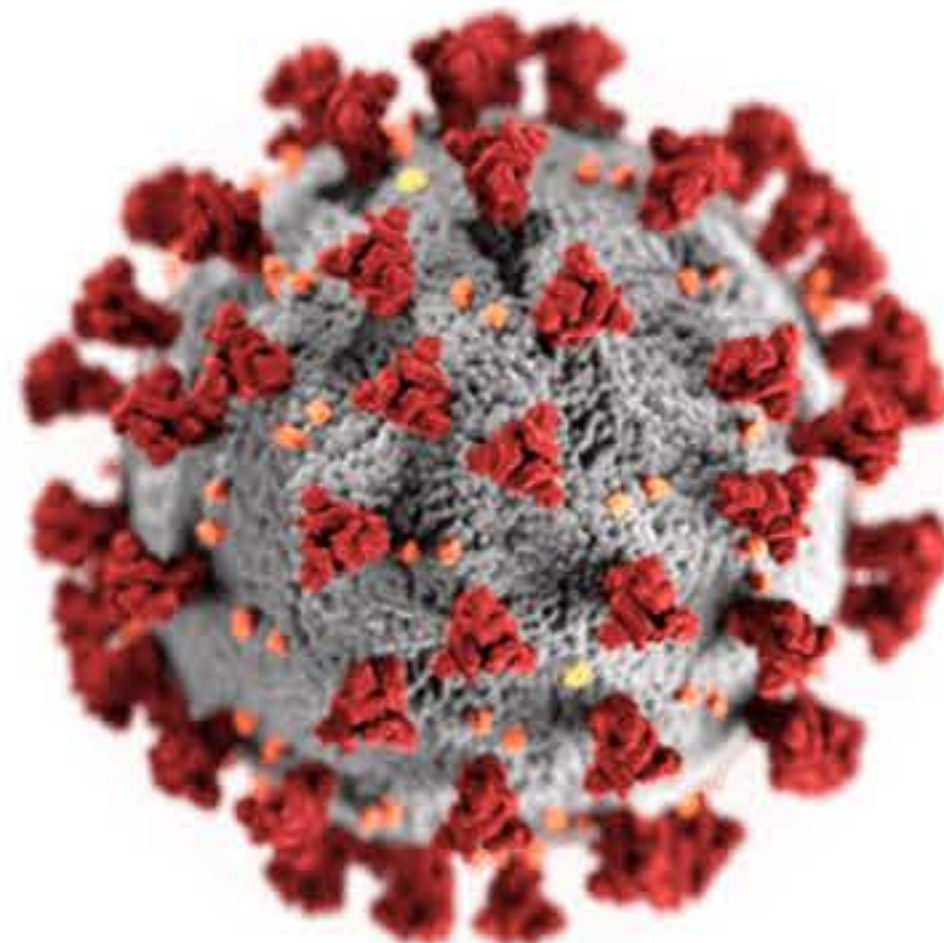
I am committed to supporting all students in my class. If course design ever poses barriers to your ability to access or to demonstrate mastery of course content, please let me know. I will make reasonable academic accommodations in such cases. If you have a known disability and think that you may need formal accommodations, email disabilityservices@macalester.edu, call the office at 651-696-6275, or use their [online scheduler](#). Given the unusual circumstances this semester, you may find yourself needing things that you normally would not. In those cases, please let me know what is going on. I may be able to make reasonable accommodations that will help.



Covid Caveats

Given the uncertain and ongoing nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, everything in this syllabus is subject to change, although I am hopeful that no significant changes will be necessary. In the meantime:

- We will follow Macalester's [face coverings policy](#) and wear face coverings in class, regardless of our vaccination status, through at least Sep. 22. I am vaccinated, but have an unvaccinated child at home. Depending on the state of community spread and changes in the availability of vaccines to children under 12, I may request that everyone continue to wear a face covering in class beyond Sep. 22.
- Based on these same variables, I will not conduct in-person office hours in my office at least for the first portion of the semester, and probably not until my child is vaccinated. Instead, I will be available for in-person meetings outdoors (taking a walk together works well!), or for virtual meetings scheduled in Zoom.



Assignments and Grading



Writing Assignments

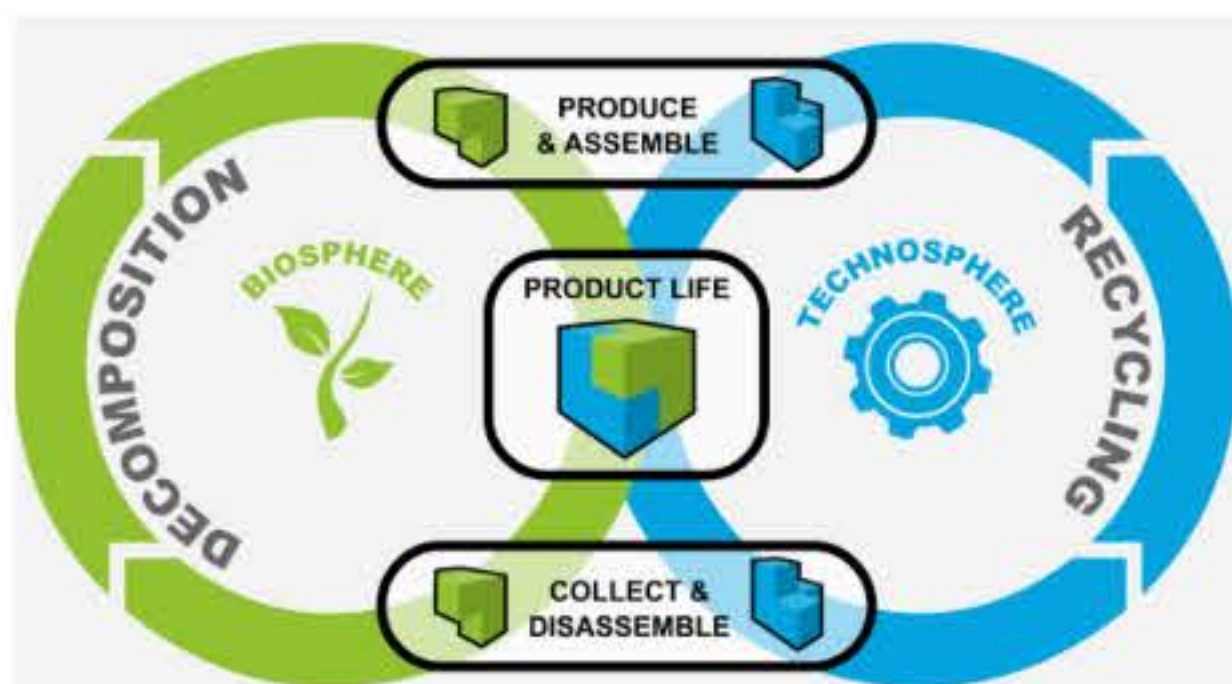
This course fulfills Macalester's Argumentative Writing (WA) General Education requirement. That means we will spend some class time discussing the conventions of good argumentative writing and honing our writing skills. In addition, it means that you will do various kinds of writing for this class, which range from relatively informal reflections (which are designed to help you think through ideas to understand them more clearly) to more formal assignments (which ask you to present your ideas in polished, carefully edited, thoughtfully considered prose). You will also have the chance to revise and improve some of your written work based on feedback from me and your peers.

Weekly Reflections



In the first eleven weeks of the semester, you will have eight opportunities to submit a weekly reflection (2-3 double spaced pages long). You must submit at least six of these eight weekly reflections, which, taken together, are a significant writing assignment for the course. The purpose of the assignment is to give you the chance to synthesize what you have learned each week, to clarify your thinking, and to put it in dialogue with the ideas of your classmates. A good reflection will identify and briefly summarize the week's big takeaway points and connect those points to relevant readings and class discussions. It will then discuss more deeply some aspect of the week's material that you find particularly interesting, significant, or confusing, drawing on specific passages and/or class discussions to illustrate your points. The best weekly reflections tend to engage the week's most interesting questions, to explore tensions, connections, and resonances with previous class material, and/or to reflect on how what you are learning is changing the way you see the world today. In general it is better to choose one or two key points to focus on rather than to try to be comprehensive. Each weekly reflection should be 2-3 double-spaced pages long, and is due on Moodle by 5 pm on the last day of the week (usually Friday, with the exception of the week of Fall Break, when reflections are due on Wednesday Oct. 20). For weekly reflections, you may always request--and I will always grant--a 24-hour extension on the assignment.

This assignment is an example of "writing to learn" writing, and I will evaluate your submissions based on the ideas, insights, and questions you share rather than on writing style or polish. Your weekly reflections will be evaluated on a 0 (no credit), 1 (needs improvement), 2 (good), 3 (very good), 4 (excellent), 5 (outstanding) basis. I will only sparingly use the 5 rating (outstanding) for reading responses. To earn full points for this portion of your final grade, you must submit at least 6 weekly reflections (of 8 possible) and earn an average rating of 3 or higher. If you submit more than 6 reading responses, I will drop the lowest score(s) when calculating your average.



Papers

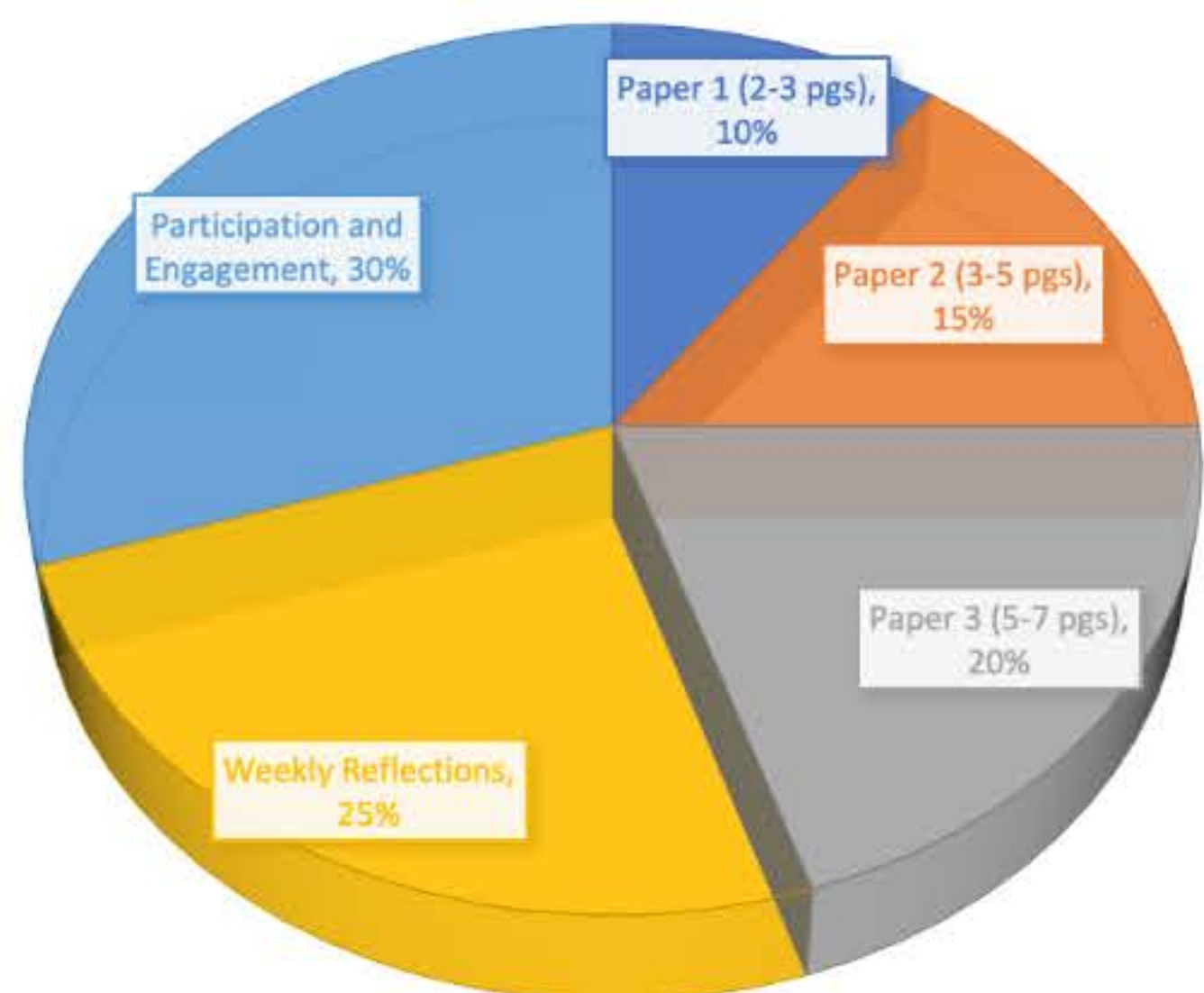
You will write three papers for this class of varying lengths and genres. The first paper (2-3 double-spaced pages) will give you a chance to synthesize--and demonstrate a deeper understanding of--the material we discuss together in the first unit of the class. In contrast to the weekly reflections (which are the same length), this paper will be a formal, thesis-driven essay responding to a specific prompt from me. The second paper will take the form of a research proposal (3-5 pgs) and annotated bibliography, and will give you the chance to explore a sustainability topic or problem that you would like to learn more about. The third paper (5-7 pgs) asks you to craft your own "sustainability manifesto" that is in dialogue with the major readings of the course.

Late Work Policy

Late work will be subject to a standard late penalty of one-third of a letter grade per day. However, for Papers 1 and 3, and for the revised version of Paper 2, as long as you turn in complete work of passable quality by the due date, you may request--and I will always grant--a penalty-free extension of 72 hours to work on it further.



GRADES



Final Grades

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Paper 1 (2-3 pgs): 10%
- Paper 2 (3-5 pgs): 15%
- Paper 3 (5-7 pgs): 20%
- Weekly Reflections: 25%
- Participation and Engagement: 30%



Schedule and Topics

Course Topics

WK 1	INTRODUCTIONS	
	9/2 Thur	Introductions
Unit 1: The Grand Challenges of Sustainability		
WK 2	DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY	
	9/7 Tues	* Caradonna, Intro, 1-20
	9/9 Thurs	* United Nations, "Transforming Our World." Focus on pp. 1-6 and 14.
	9/10 Fri	* Nugent, "Amsterdam Is Embracing a Radical New Economic Theory to Help Save the Environment. Could It Also Replace Capitalism?" <i>Time</i> , 1 Feb. 2021
		Weekly Reflection #1 due by 5 pm
WK 3	FRAMING PROBLEMS: MORE PEOPLE, MORE RESOURCE USE, MORE EVERYTHING	
	9/14 Tues	* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , chs 1-4 and Appendix III, 191-93
	9/16 Thurs	* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , ch 7 (Finding Fish)
	9/17 Fri	Weekly Reflection #2 due by 5 pm
WK 4	FRAMING PROBLEMS: THE GRAND CHALLENGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE	
	9/21 Tues	* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , chs 14-16
		* Climate Change 2021, Intro and Part A
		* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , chs 17-19
	9/23 Thurs	* Climate Change 2021, Part B
	9/24 Fri	Weekly Reflection #3 due by 5 pm
Unit 2: UNDERSTANDING PROBLEMS		
WK 6	Revisions and Revising	
		No Reading:
		* Paper 1 Due at start of class
	10/5 Tues	* In-class peer review workshop
	10/7 Thurs	No Class: meet with Chris and Kaela about papers and work on revisions!
	10/8 Fri	Revised papers due by 5 pm
WK 7	FOOD PART 1	
	10/12 Tues	* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , , 27-51 & 63-78 (chs 5-6 & 8-9)
	10/14 Thurs	* Pollan, "The Feedlot," 65-84
	10/15 Fri	Weekly Reflection #4 due by 5 pm
WK 8	FOOD PART 2	
	10/19 Tues	* Pollan, "Big Organic," 134-84
		Class Dinner Tonight! (details TBA)
	10/20 Wed	Weekly Reflection #5 due by 5 pm
	10/21 Thurs	NO CLASS: FALL BREAK
WK 9	ENERGY	
	10/26 Tues	* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , , 81-124 (chs 10-13)
	10/28 Thurs	* Butler et al, "A Deeper Look at the Energy Picture," 5-15.
	10/29 Fri	Enbridge Line 3 Case Study: Readings TBA
		Weekly Reflection #6 due by 5 pm
WK 10	CITIES	
	11/2 Tues	Owen, "More Like Manhattan," 1-48
	11/4 Thurs	Fitzgerald, "Is There Treasure in Our Trash?" 116-44
	11/5 Fri	Weekly Reflection #7 due by 5 pm
UNIT 3: TAKING ACTION		
WK 11	SO, WHAT CAN WE DO?	
		No Reading:
		* Paper 2 due at start of class
	11/9 Tues	* In-class lecture
		* Heglar, "The Big Lie We're Told About Climate Change Is That It's Our Own Fault," Vox 27 Nov 2018
		* Marris, "How to Stop Freaking Out and Tackle Climate Change" The New York Times (2 pgs)
	11/11 Thurs	* Hayes, "The New Abolitionism" (19 pgs)
	11/12 Fri	Weekly Reflection #8 due by 5 pm
WK 12	MANIFESTOS	
	11/16 Tues	Price, <i>Stop Saving the Planet!</i> , 9-61 (first 6 reasons)
	11/18 Thurs	Price, <i>Stop Saving the Planet!</i> , 63-94 (reasons 7-11)
WK 13	TAKING ACTION 1: INDIVIDUALS	
		* Jahren, <i>The Story of More</i> , 177-89 (Appendices I & II)
		* Price, <i>Stop Saving the Planet!</i> , 96-140 (39 Ways to Stop Saving the Planet)
	11/23 Tues	
	11/25 Thurs	NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING
WK 14	TAKING ACTION 2: COLLECTIVE	
	11/30 Tues	Student-determined readings
	12/2 Thurs	Student-determined readings
WK 15	TAKING ACTION 3	
	12/7 Tues	Student-determined readings
	12/9 Thurs	Student-determined readings
	12/10 Fri	Sustainability Manifesto due by 5 pm

