How to Change the World: Sustainability and Social Change

Course Information
Instructor: Prof. Robert Goodspeed (rgoodspe at umich.edu)
Office: 2223C Art & Architecture Building
Office Hours: Friday 1-3PM (sign up via Canvas link)
Credits: 3
Prerequisites: None

Class Schedule: Tuesday/Thursday 9:00-10:30 AM 2222 A&AB

Course Overview
This course is premised on the assumption that however sustainability is defined, achieving it always requires changing contemporary society. Many public sector professions, such as urban planning, public policy, public health, social work, and environmental policy pursue missions to advance economic, social, and environmental sustainability. While professionals in these fields develop deep technical skills and expert knowledge, they typically face significant barriers when they attempt to implement their normative agendas for sustainability in practice. This class investigates theories and research from several fields about how societies change at multiple scales. Although the focus of the course is on social change, the course considers the connections among social, technical, and natural systems, and the final module focuses especially on cities. The aim is to develop a sophisticated portrait of social life and nuanced understanding of social innovation concepts, with the goal to empower students as citizens, researchers, and reflective practitioners committed to achieving social change.

Major themes of the course include:
- The view of society as a complex adaptive sociotechnical system, and the consequences of this perspective at multiple scales;
- The importance of learning and innovation to achieving sustainable outcomes at the individual, organizational, and societal levels;
- The reality of racial, ethnic, gender, and other identities as historically-rooted forces of oppression and empowerment;
- The explanatory limitations of individual-centered theories from psychology and economics, and the crucial role of organizations, the state, and other institutions in shaping sustainability outcomes;
- The role of leadership and inspiration in processes of individual and institutional development and transformation.

Although they are mentioned, the course does not include a detailed examination of the professional field of sustainability planning, or the substantive topics it can encompass such as environmental degradation, climate change, energy efficiency, urban sprawl, resource consumption, and social inequality.

The course is divided into three modules. Module 1 introduces several core issues: the sustainability debate, the concept of society as a complex adaptive system, and the importance of framing and race to explaining social structures. In addition, the concept of design is introduced as the conceptual origin of innovations. Module 2 explores several general theories of social change. First, some scholars have studied the diffusion of innovations across society, which can be conceptualized as
disruptive innovations when they take the form of products in the capitalist economy. However, these theories to not account for changes within institutions, such as the firms, state, and other actors which enact the economy. Therefore, this module also considers internal and external perspectives on institutional formation and change. Module 3 critically examines four specific change paradigms particularly relevant to cities: social entrepreneurship, sociotechnical practices (such as civic technology and crowdsourcing), sustainability transitions, and tactical urbanism.

Theoretical readings are complemented by the close study of cases provided in the course textbook, as well as a diverse array of invited guests. The course does not advocate an overly narrow particular theoretical position to the exclusion of others. However, the course does reflect a point of view which ties together the diverse topics. One important element of this point of view is the assumption that the future is at least partly indeterminate, and therefore the agency of individuals, groups, and states is viewed as centrally important. The course aims to invite students to reflect on their beliefs, investigate and critique diverse perspectives about how the world works, and consider how they might act together with others to improve it.

Materials


Assignments

**Weekly Response Essay (40%)** – Students must complete a response for 10 of the 13 full weeks with assigned readings. Regardless of the format, all of these should be posted to the Canvas website by **noon on Monday** the week the readings are assigned. The responses should include:

- **Four (4) long responses** which should take the form of 2-page, 1.5-spaced, response essays uploaded in Word (DOC or DOCX) format (20%);
- **Six (6) short responses** which should take the form of a 300-500 word response posted to the discussion forum (20%).

The long responses will be graded and returned by the instructor, the short responses will be graded on an as-completion basis as long as they contain substantive references to all of the assigned readings.

**Scholarly Book Review (15%)** – Students should complete a 1,000-word scholarly book review on a book of their choosing from the list at the end of the syllabus, or another book with the instructor’s permission. The review is due on noon the day before the student is scheduled to present their book (Feb. 25, March 10, or March 17).

**Final Essay (30%) and Peer Review (5%)** – Students will prepare an 8,000-word scholarly essay examining a topic of interest related to the course. The essay requires a novel thesis, brief literature review, and the discussion of evidence supporting the thesis. A variety of essay types will be allowed, including theoretical arguments, and use of qualitative and quantitative evidence. A draft will be due **5pm on Fri., March 11th** and a peer review is due by **Fri., March 25th**. Final papers are due **noon on Wed., April 20**.

**Facilitation (10%)** – Students will select a week as individuals or as a group of two to lead the class discussion of the topic. Students should post to the class forum by **noon on Monday** the week of the discussion 1) a working definition or brief summary of the topic to be discussed; 2) a set of questions that will be used to organize the discussion about the readings and the topic in general. Students may choose to provide additional examples, readings, activities or other materials, however these should be introduced during the class period. Students are encouraged to review the “Additional Resources” provided for each week, as well as discuss their plans with the instructor during office hours the week previous.
## Schedule Overview

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## Schedule

### Module 1

**Week 1: Setting the Stage**

Thurs., Jan. 7


**Week 2: The Art of Navigating Complex Adaptive Systems**

Tues., Jan. 12


Jan. 12 Event: “How Does Planning Lead to Diversity in Higher Education?” Duderstadt Gallery, 7-9PM

Thurs., Jan. 14

1. AOC, Ch. 1 and 2, “Introduction,” and “Strategies and Tactics,” Ch. 3 and 4, “Crafting the Case: The Art of Making a Start,” and “Prompting Progress: The Art of Moving Things Forward”


**Week 3: Framing and Race**

Mon., Jan. 18th - #WhoWillBeNext U-M Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Symposium 2016
- “#WhoWillBeNext 2016 U-M MLK Symposium Theme Statement”
- View symposium event listing: [http://oami.umich.edu/um-mlk-symposium/](http://oami.umich.edu/um-mlk-symposium/)

Tues., Jan. 19
1. Case: AOC, Ch. 8, “Just a Tool? Implementing the Vulnerability Index in New Orleans.”
2. AOC, Ch. 5, “Managing Meanings: The Art of Making Sense”

Additional:

Thurs., Jan. 21 - Guest: Prof. Robert Marans, UM Sustainability Cultural Indicators Program
- GTM, Ch. 1 and 2
- SCIP website: [http://graham.umich.edu/leadership/scip](http://graham.umich.edu/leadership/scip)

**Week 4 – The Origins of Innovation: Design**

Tues., Jan. 26
5. d.school. 2013. Bootcamp Bootleg. (skim)

Additional:

Thurs., Jan. 28 - Guest: Victoria Campbell-Arvai, Assistant Research Scientist, SNRE
1. GTM, Ch. 3 and 4.
Module 2

Week 5: Change as the Adoption of Innovations

Tues., Feb. 2
1. Case: AOC, Ch. 6, "Under the Radar: Medical Informatics in Japan"
5. GTM, Ch. 3 and Ch. 4.

Additional:

Thurs., Feb. 4 – Paper Topic Workshop

Week 6: Disruptive Innovations in the Capitalist Marketplace

Tues., Feb. 9

Thurs., Feb. 11 - Guest: W. David Tarver, Founder and President of the Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative
- GTM, Ch. 5 and 6

Week 7 – Changing Institutions: Internal

Tues., Feb. 16
1. Case: AOC, Ch. 11, “Change on Steroids: Public Education in New Orleans”

Additional:
Week 8 – Changing Institutions: External

Tues., Feb. 23
1. Case: AOC, Ch. 13, “The Cat out of the Bag: Institutional Reform in Denmark”

Thurs., Feb. 25 – Book Reviews 1

Week 9 – Spring Break

Module 3

Week 10: Social Entrepreneurship 1 – Introduction

Tues., March 8
1. AOC, Ch. 7, “Relentless Incrementalism: Financial Literacy Training for Newcomers in Canada”
3. Horn, Denise M. Democratic Governance and Social Entrepreneurship. Introduction, Ch. 1, Ch. 5.

Thurs., March 10 – Book Reviews 2

Week 11: Social Entrepreneurship 2 - Critique

Tues., March 15

Additional

Thurs., March 17: Book Reviews 3
Week 12: Sustainability Transitions

Tues., March 22
1. AOC, Ch. 10, “The Sun Kings: The Emergence of Social Energy in Germany”

Additional

Thurs., March 24 – Guest: Dr. Peter Pelzer, University Utrecht (Netherlands)

Week 13: Sociotechnical Practices

Tues., March 29: Civic Technology, Civic Crowdfunding and Crowdsourcing

Thurs., March 31 - Guest: Kentaro Toyama, Associate Professor of Information, UM School of Information

Week 14: Tactical Urbanism

Tues., April 5
1. Lydon, Mike, and Anthony Garcia. 2014. Tactical Urbanism. (selections)

Thurs., April 7 - Guest: Ken Snyder, PlaceMatters
- Readings on Canvas

Week 15 – Towards Planning Practices: Insurgence, Transformation, or Collaboration?

Tues., April 12


Additional Readings:

Thurs., April 14: Taking Stock
Review Books
Students can choose any book from this list, or with the permission of the instructor review a book not listed here. Recommended books are marked with an asterisk.

Miscellaneous Social Change

Philanthropy

Social Entrepreneurship

Leadership/Organizational Change
Public Sector

Social Movements/Activism

Design