Prairie Project sustainability curriculum retreat
Spring 2010

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Political Science:
PS 280 Introduction to International Relations
Fall 2010

Course learning outcomes

1. Student will identify “hot-button” international environmental issues.
2. Student will explore how different theoretical perspectives address these issues differently.
3. Student will identify the connections and, often, trade-offs between international development and environmental sustainability.
4. Student will explore how the Millennium Development Goals address sustainability issues.
5. Student will analyze how environmental problems create collective goods problems for states, and how state face these challenges.
6. Student will evaluate the range of new international organizations and agreements created to help solve problems in managing environmental issues.

Planned activities

1. In week 2, the student will be asked to come into class with an article or utube clip on an international environmental issue. We will spend half an hour discussing the issues, comparing their differences and similarities. We will discuss what “sustainability” means to them.
2. Student will write a two-page essay describing the issue and suggesting how the different theoretical approaches (Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, Gender and Constructivism) understand the environmental issue.
3. The midterm exam will give the student a conflict or dilemma in international environmental arena and ask her to compare perspectives on solving the problem.
4. In week 7, students will access the United Nation’s Millennium Development Goal (MDG) website and will get into groups; each group will discuss one of the 8 goals and describe how achievement of this goal impacts sustainability issues.
5. In week 8, students address issues of poverty and how it impacts international relations. We will indirectly discuss the trade-offs that developing countries face as they face economic growth versus environmental sustainability.
6. In week 10 and 11, the sessions are on Environment and Issues of Sustainability. Students will do readings on Interdependence and the Environment, global warming, biodiversity issues, (with a special reading on the International Whaling Commission), Amazon rain forest, natural resource depletion and water disputes. Articles address in particular collective goods problems for states as they confront environmental issues.
7. In week 12, students will undertake a creative audio/visual project to present in the classroom. Some may choose a topic that addresses sustainability issues. Some examples include a children’s’ book, a re-do of “Chutes and Ladders” that includes environmental issues as reasons for the player to move up or back.

Assessment of whether students achieved outcome

1. The first assignment to find an international environmental issue will make the student actively decide what is an international environmental issue. It should help to raise the student’s awareness of environmental sustainability issues (Due Sept 9). I suspect that there will be a range among the students in the level of conscious understanding about what is “sustainability”, as well as a good discussion about the international aspect of all environmental issues.

2. The first assignment (Due Sept 14) will evaluate whether the student understands that different perspectives see the same environmental issue quite differently. Students will grapple with whether Realists or liberals or Marxists do a “better” job of understanding the how environmental problems emerge and how states and other international actors address these challenges.

3. Over the course of the semester, class discussions on related topics (such as the impact of international conflict on the environment) will help students recognize the dilemmas that states and international organizations face in confronting choices.

4. The midterm exam will test the students’ ability to take a “real world” environmental conflict, explore different solutions, and evaluate outcomes.

5. The reading on the environment and sustainability explore more in depth the issues that we brought up in weeks 2–4. The readings provide greater analysis and evaluation of the trade-offs in managing environmental developments.

6. The audio-visual project will make the student address in a more creative manner these issues. Looking at the environment from a non-academic perspective also underscores its general impact on society.

7. The final exam will include one question asking the student to evaluate collective goods problems in managing environmental issues. The student will suggest a new international organization or agreement to be created in the coming years to help solve environmental problems and to predict the problems their proposals will run into.