CEE 498 – Multilateral Environmental Agreements

Objectives

“A better world depends on passionate and informed debate”
(Speth and Haas, Global Environmental Governance, Island Press, 2006).

The goals of the class are:
• to inform the next generation of scientists and engineers as global citizens of the major environmental challenges and how they have been addressed by the global community so far
• introduce the students to global discussions on sustainability
• invite them to think and debate on innovative ways to accelerate progress in achieving sustainability objectives and environmental protection goals.

Course Learning Outcomes

This class is designed so that students

1. Learn substantive material pertaining to international environmental politics, definitions, theories, concepts, ideas, and conflicts.
2. Identify:
   a. global environmental problems, causes, inter-linkages, drivers for priority setting, environmental issue framing and initiation of action at the global level.
   b. actors in global environmental politics, role of international organizations (normative vs operational), the international convention process
   c. obstacles, opportunities, criteria and conditions for successful environmental agreements.
3. Interpret “sustainability”. Identify sustainability goals at the global, national, local scale. Investigate how they are related.
4. Evaluate sustainability indicators
5. Analyze interactions and conflicts among MEAs and other global institutional arrangements: environment and trade, environment and national security.
6. Investigate how science has and can be used to inform policy makers.
7. Locate and effectively use information resources to help them communicate their views and ideas on global environmental issues.

How to Implement These Outcomes

The class is mostly student driven. Short lectures introduce the basic information and students are guided to appropriate readings and they are supported to facilitate and participate into class discussions.

One or more discussions will be on Agenda 21 in connection with the goals set for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD2012).

In the Fall 2010 semester, two projects will be assigned:
**Project 1.** Students chose a MEA of their preference and they are expected to develop a 10-15 page paper in which they interpret the MEA through an incremental process, where initially they address specific questions in short essays and finally they compose these essays into an integrated paper and develop a 10 min presentation for the class.

The purpose of this assignment is to
- help students identify in the MEA text the drivers, the conflicts and the compromises and how these are reflected in the MEA language, objectives, implementation and compliance provisions
- encourage students think critically and comment on the expected effectiveness of the regime described by the MEA and how it could be made more effective.
- help them organize information and produce a good quality paper

(learning objectives 1, 2, 5, 7).

**Project 2.** The second paper will be the product of team-work. The class will be divided in one or more teams (depending on final number of students). The subject of this paper will be “sustainability indicators”.

Each team will be called to think critically, compare and evaluate approaches on trying to measure sustainability. The final paper will have individual contributions on particular questions that I will have posed and a synthesis part compiled by the team.

The purpose of this project is to introduce students to different approaches for evaluating sustainability, encourage them to think critically on the adequacy of current indicators, introduce them to discussions that sustainability indicators should not be the sole product of “reductionist technocrats” and to alternative suggested approaches that involve systems thinking (learning objectives: 3, 4, 6, 7).

This project will also be developed in stages but students will not be as closely guided on paper structure, as with the first paper. This project assignment is still under development. It will be assigned in the middle of the semester and it will eventually be evaluated by the students in terms of usefulness and difficulty.

**How to Assess Progress on These Outcomes**
Student progress will be evaluated based on
- Class participation (discussion facilitation and participation)
- 2 presentations
- Individual paper
- Team paper
- Midterm exam
- Oral final

Specifics on assessment of outcomes:
A list of questions is distributed in class on the readings for each week. These questions are study guides but also comprise the “agendas” for the class discussions. During the discussions if there are apparent misconceptions, I intervene with further questions. The questions distributed in class are also examples of questions asked in the midterm and the oral final. The discussions might take more than one class session, if there is need for further clarification or there is more to be said.

The projects are guided and occur in increments submitted every week. Students are guided to research/analyze/synthesize specific aspects that are related to the material covered in the lectures and the readings. For each piece of work they submit, they obtain comments and eventually they have to compile all the information into an integrated paper. They first submit a draft of the integrated paper and after they receive my comments, they proceed to the final submission. This way there is constant communication and feedback providing that reinforces what is discussed in class. After a project is submitted, a presentation is given in class that is evaluated by the classmates and me.

This process provides many intervention points, to both promote the learning goals and also encourage the students to go in more depth or explore other directions not in the original class plan.

**Plans to Implement the Above**
The syllabus for the class containing a detailed list of activities and readings is attached to this summary prepared for the Prairie Project. Student interests will have an effect on the final syllabus. The attached syllabus gives the frame but not the exact details and dates. The syllabus will keep being updated until the end of the semester and the final version of it will be included with the Spring submission.