**Course Overview**

What do ethics require of human action in relation to the natural and built environments? The answer to this question varies among stakeholders according to their values, which may be viewed as just or unjust. What are these values, and how are differences among them to be assessed and managed ethically? The complexity of such questions is compounded by a recurrent problem of voice. Some human and nonhuman stakeholders, such as future human generations and nonhuman entities, cannot verbally express themselves. Other human stakeholders, such as unprotected laborers, may have little or no opportunity to voice their standpoints. Others may undertake to do so but are unintentionally or intentionally neglected, misunderstood or misrepresented; while the standpoints of still others may be simply repudiated, censored or otherwise silenced. Despite these difficulties, an increased sense of the need to include ethics in public and private, or public, civic and social organizational and individual decision making has emerged, particularly since the 1980s. At the same time, practical agendas and academic studies increasingly articulate and address ethical processes and issues.

The course is focused upon sustainability ethics, which constitute a second generation of environmental ethics. The course material is organized into three sections. The first addresses the rise and transformation of environmental ethics from their first generation, called environmental ethics, to their second generation, called sustainability ethics. Heavily debated clusters of environmental ethics are identified, and new directions in sustainability ethics are introduced. The second and third sections of the course address two sets of sector-based sustainability ethics. One set includes land, water, air and waste ethics; and the other includes
energy, food, place, consumption and climate ethics. An overall movement from more abstract debates to more practical applications is discussed. Such applications typically involve the work of “watchdogs”, or monitoring mechanisms, such as grassroots movements that promote local activism and even citizen brigades, established NGOs that create data-based indicators and undertake litigation, corporations and shareholders pursuing social responsibility, governmental institutions providing oversight and regulation, and both traditional and new forms of investigative media. Students will have the opportunity to conduct research on sustainability ethics in relation to an organization or sector they select.

Throughout the course, ethical practice is central to the overall discussion: how can we apply sustainability ethics, values and justice, and ensure their continued application? What kinds of initiatives, innovations and proposals can we design to bring individual and institutional goals into alignment with an array of relevant ethical standpoints, while reducing and negotiating conflicts among them? The aim is to equip decision makers with the understanding, vocabulary, conditions and models needed to generate and implement initiatives that meet the ethical requirements of sustainability.

**Course Objectives**

Students are expected to learn how to evaluate and manage the competing ethical claims of stakeholders concerning social, economic and environmental benefits and harms. On completing the course, students should be able to:

1. identify and assess ethical problems concerning the biotic whole and its sectors;
2. decipher and understand ethics in statements, documents, arguments and outcomes;
3. create mechanisms for ethics training and monitoring in the practice of management;
4. recognize the distinct ethical challenges of wild nature and managed nature;
5. anticipate the distinct ethical challenges of urban and agrarian environments;
6. mediate competing basic needs of non-human and human nature;
7. design incentives or disincentives to influence, alter or enforce climate-related issues;
8. map conflict and corruption in local, regional, national, international and global arenas;
9. apply sustainability ethics to policy and project design, and in public discourse;
10. utilize cases and case histories to inform, improve and ground decision making.
Course Topics and Readings

In advance of each class, students should become familiar with the materials posted in the Files section of our Canvas site, reading the 4 required articles. A relevant website is also provided weekly as a source of additional information and potential research. Occasionally, some background readings may be posted, and will be designated as optional. Note that the required readings have all been selected from different journals, with the purpose of demonstrating the wide range of cross-disciplinary inputs in the field of sustainability.

During each class session, the required readings will be discussed, and students will have the opportunity to express their thoughts on them.

Section I. The Rise and Transformation of Environmental Ethics

Week 1. Human Ethics: Critical Limitations
September 5


Website: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300

Week 2. Environmental Ethics: Deep Divides
September 12


Website: National Science Foundation – The Antarctic Treaty (December 1959)  
https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/antarct/anttrty.jsp

**Week 3. Earth Justice: Unaccountable Trade-offs**  
*September 19*


Website: Earth Charter Initiative – The Earth Charter  
http://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/

**Week 4. Biocultural Ethics: Exculpatory Narratives**  
*September 26*


Website: The World Happiness Report 2019  
Section II. Sector-Based Sustainability Ethics (A)

Week 5. Land Ethics: Border Barriers  
October 3


Website: United Nations Global Land Outlook – Regional Reports 2019  
https://knowledge.unccd.int/glo/global-land-outlook-regional-reports

Week 6. Water Ethics: Downstream Burdens  
October 10


Web Page: Water Integrity Network—Annual Report 2018  
https://www.waterintegritynetwork.net/annual-reports/

Week 7. Air Ethics: Invasive Irritants  
October 17


Website: The World Justice Project – Rule of Law Index 2019

Week 8. Waste Ethics: Prohibitive Residues
October 24


Website: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Toxics Release Inventory (TRI Program)
https://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program/tri-data-and-tools

Section III. Sector-Based Sustainability Ethics (B)
Week 9. Energy Justice: Inadequate Transitions

October 31


Website: The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative – Progress Report 2019
https://eiti.org/homepage


November 7


Web Page: Codex Alimentarius International Food Standards—UN Food and Agriculture Organization

Week 11. Place Justice: Negligent Takeovers

November 14


van Meerbeke, Gabriel Ortiz and Bjørn Sletto. “‘Graffiti Takes its Own Space’: Negotiated Consent and the Positionings of Street Artists and Graffiti Writers in Bogota’.” *City – Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 23, no. 3 (August 2019): 366-387.


Website: Our Common Home – Encyclical, 2015
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

**Week 12. Accoutrement Justice: Excessive Acquisitions**
*November 21*


Website: La Via Campesina, International Peasants Movement – Annual Report 2018

**Week 13. Thanksgiving Holiday**
*November 28*

**Week 14. Climate Justice: Unnatural Extinctions**
*December 5*


Website: Ethical Systems, Business Integrity through Research – Research Essay, Ethics Pays https://www.ethicalsystems.org/content/ethics-pays

Week 15. Term Paper Commentaries
December 12 [or sooner]

Course Materials

Required reading materials are indicated under weekly topics in the Files section of our Canvas site, typically as PDFs. To access a reading, simply click on the title in the Files section. You may also download it into your own computer.

In addition, for the purpose of review, PPTs used in class will be posted weekly in the Files section of our Canvas site.

Course Requirements and Grades

Course requirements are listed below, together with their grade point values.

1. **Class Attendance:** Attendance will be given a maximum weight of 13%. One grade point will be given for each attended class session. Attendance should be timely and regular. An absence is excused only with (a) prior e-mail notification for a critical documented purpose, or (b) emergency verification. Attendance should be professionally “attentive”, or without distracting use of electronic or other equipment.

2. **Class Participation:** Participation will be given a maximum weight of 26%. Two grade points will be given for active participation in each class session, including at least one significant contribution to class discussion in each of the three sections of the course. Active participation includes both (a) raising questions and offering comments connected meaningfully
to ongoing discussion; and (b) introducing readings by sharing highlights and considerations pertaining to them.

3. **Discussion Entries:** Discussion entries posted on our Canvas website in the Discussion section will be given a maximum weight of **26%**. A maximum of two grade points will be given for the timely preparation and posting of an informative, perceptive, coherent and cogent essay-style statement pertinent to the reading material assigned for a class session. One such statement should be prepared in advance of each class session. The statement is due by Wednesday, 2 p.m. before the Thursday class to which it pertains. Students should consider the possibility of accomplishing their readings and posting their statements over the weekend prior to any class.

4. **A Paper:** A paper focusing on a specific, clearly framed case of innovation in or deviation from sustainability ethics in public, civic and private organizational activity will be given a maximum weight of **35%**. The paper should explain why the relevant conduct or policy in the selected case is ethical or unethical, with reference to the sustainability ethics addressed in the course, or how the conduct or policy demonstrates “best practices” or “corrupt practices”. A topic proposal and some preliminary research are components of the assignment to ensure focus and feasibility. The paper should be submitted both online and in paper copy by Friday, December 13, at 11:59 p.m. Informal commentaries on student papers will be scheduled for Thursday, December 12, during the usual class time framework.

Additional details regarding course requirements will be posted, as needed, in the Assignments section of our Canvas site.

Each student’s points for all requirements (class attendance, class participation, discussion entries and the paper) will be totaled, and a class curve will be established. Final grades will be provided on a letter grade scale.

**Statements of University Policy**

**Academic Integrity Statement**

The School of International and Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Students who violate the Academic Integrity guidelines or the Student Conduct and Community Standards will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures. These rules can be viewed online at:

http://studentconduct.columbia.edu/

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. Columbia provides some useful resources online, and you are strongly encouraged to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research:

http://library.columbia.edu/research/citation-management.html

Violations of the Academic Integrity guidelines and the Student Conduct and Community Standards will be reported to the Associate Dean for Student and Alumni Affairs.
Facilities Accessibility Statement

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student’s disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please visit the University’s Health Services websites at:
https://health.columbia.edu/
http://www.health.columbia.edu/disability-services

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https://www.nps.gov/mora/learn/nature/wildflowers.htm

Page 2. Image Credit:
https://www.gscouncil.org/unlocking-the-business-value-of-sustainability-through-innovation/