

ENVIR 239: Sustainable Choices

Autumn 2016 • University of Washington

Instructor: Kristi Straus

Overview

In this course, students examine the role of personal choices in affecting broader change towards sustainability. Specifically, students develop a deep understanding of what it means to be a sustainable citizen. Early in the course, students explore the concept and definitions of sustainability, the nested dependencies model, and the history of the sustainability movement. They also examine environmental challenges and the broader social, cultural and economic systems that gave rise to those problems. They will examine the critiques of green-washing and environmental consumerism. In addition, students will gain insight into emerging fields of action such as healthy food systems, green buildings and cradle to cradle design. Finally, students experiment with and reflect upon the possibilities for sustainable living in our everyday lives. As such, they learn to flex their sustainable citizen muscle.

Role of Service-Learning in the Course

Service-learning is an option for 30 students, who will self-select to take the class for 5 credits (instead of 3). The function of service-learning in this class is to expose students to the sustainability-oriented organizations- and their goals, successes and challenges- working in the Seattle area on topics of relevance to our class. We also aim for students to gain knowledge, skills, and values in environmental stewardship, activism and citizenship. Students will engage in structured reflection to deepen their learning.

Assignments Related to Service-Learning

A unique aspect of the course is that students will engage in a series of experimental or experiential activities to further engage with the course materials. Experiments will be in the topic areas of consumption, food, personal well-being, and in areas of personal interest. Students will reflect on the meanings of these experiments in both individual writing assignments and discussions with the instructors and classmates.

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171 Mary Gates Hall • (206) 616-2885 • <http://exp.washington.edu/carlson>