

*Department of Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo*

**ERS 253: The Politics of Sustainable Communities**

WINTER 2016

Date and Time: Tuesdays 2:30–5:20 PM, EV2 2006

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 1:30 – 3:00, EV2 2039

**Course Description**

The Politics of Sustainable Communities is a course that considers a variety of contemporary issues and challenges focusing on the City of Waterloo. Topics include local environmental politics, public participation, local government structures, political accountability, and the quest for a healthy sustainable community. Through your course work, you will consider the practical application of such concepts as environmental ethics, social justice, participatory democracy, rights vs. responsibilities, and sustainable community development.

This is a self-reflective, experiential course. Your work is not confined to the classroom or computer but will involve field trips into the community, particularly the City of Waterloo to consider lessons learned from the course material. You will learn about how decisions are made and how to influence local politics and policy-making and, in the process, how to foster sustainable communities.

This course is recognized as a PACS Content Course that fulfills requirements in the interdisciplinary Peace and Conflict Studies plan.

Important note: The course requires careful reading of all requirements and material placed on the website including this syllabus. If you are not prepared to read and to actively engage in the class and in the community around you, this is not the course for you. Users can login to LEARN via:

<http://learn.uwaterloo.ca>

Use your WatIAM/Quest username and password.

**Course Structure and Evaluation**

The Course Structure is conceptually divided into three parts:

- What are the key characteristics of a sustainable community? (Design your own perspectives drawing on the course material.)
- What are the political and government barriers and opportunities for getting there?
- What are the political strategies for achieving a sustainable community and overcoming the barriers?

By the end of this course you will know, understand and explain:

- Basic political decision-making processes and structures as well as the social, economic and physical factors that influence sustainable communities;
- How to influence governing processes in order to foster sustainable communities;
- How to contribute actively to your municipality in an informed, effective manner.

Each of the modules contains information about the course and expectations for the week. You should use the website as your primary source of information regarding requirements and expectations for this course.

Each student’s work will focus on five contributions weighed as follows:

In-class short quiz on local government institutions and democracy Date: February 9	10%
City of Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge or Region of Waterloo Council meeting analysis Date: before March 29	20%
Environmental or social policy recommendation, choose your own topic (to be approved by professor) Date: March 11 (assignment), March 15 (oral presentation: 10%)	30%
Final In-Class Test, using all the course material including lectures, videos and readings. Date: March 29	25%
Course participation based on contributions and knowledge of readings	15%

\*note: all assignments are to be submitted through the LEARN drop boxes

### *Participation*

Each week, approximately one hour of the class will be devoted to discussion of core questions related to the week’s topic. The class will be divided in small groups who will choose a spokesperson each week to answer the related questions and share the group’s thoughts on different issues. Evaluation of participation quality will be based on the understanding of the concepts and issues, the familiarity with the related readings, creativity and the illustration of practical implications. Students are also invited to share with the rest of the class songs, poems, drawings, etc., that are relevant to the content of the course as well as different innovative sustainability initiatives taking place in communities.

### *Assignments*

#### Assignment 1: City Council Meeting Analysis

For this assignment, you will need to attend a City of Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge or Region of Waterloo Council meeting for an evening and write a paper that considers the topics and issues covered from the perspective of the democratic process. Use paragraph style. Pay attention to the council members speaking. It may be helpful to check out the Mayors and individual councillors’ websites that you can find through a link on the City or Region Websites under Mayor and Council. Those websites will tell you about how they view their communities and what issues they thought important. The council meetings are typically held on Monday nights in Kitchener and Waterloo and on Wednesday

nights in the Region of Waterloo. Check the websites early to make sure that you attend when there are some interesting issues being discussed.

Length: 1500-2000 words

When watching and listening to the discussions, reflect on the democratic process, the kinds of topics debated and the decisions reached. Draw on the course materials and the local government websites to support your arguments. Make sure that you draw on the information gathered at the local council meeting you attended to provide examples and illustrate your argument. Additional library research is not required for this assignment. Incorporate the following considerations when writing your paper.

- Considering the local council meeting you attended do you think local government promotes democratic participation?
- Do you think that the current structures of local government are well suited to deal with the requirements of a socially and ecologically sustainable community?
- What observations can you make about how local decisions are presented, debated and made; do you think that the process fosters a healthy, sustainable community?

#### Assignment 2: Environmental or social policy recommendation (group assignment)

In this assignment your group of 4 students will need to lay out a position and make recommendations for a by-law in one of the topic areas listed below, unless you have another proposed by-law that you would like to introduce (subject to instructor approval). Approximately half your paper should be specifically about your proposed by-law. However, you will also need to go in more depth and or breadth to elaborate the topic. For example, if you are looking at the possible introduction of a chicken by-law, you might want to look more broadly at the topic of local food security or undertake a more extensive comparative research project of livestock in urban settings.

Your position and recommendations should be justified according to a set of criteria that would foster a more sustainable city. Criteria might include sustainability or resilience criteria applied to your specific context, Healthy Communities indicators, Vital Signs ([http://www.kwcf.ca/vital\\_signs](http://www.kwcf.ca/vital_signs)), local food charter (if your goal is to foster more sustainable food systems) and so on.

Your assignment will draw on at least five secondary sources including at least three university journal sources as well as references to government websites and other documents. You can, and should, research other communities that have passed by-laws in the topic area and draw on their by-laws for recommendations. You should also look at local newspapers archives and the City of Waterloo's documents to review the previous discussions dealing with the topic area. The following website lists all the City of Waterloo by-laws.

[http://www.waterloo.ca/en/document/document.aspx?param=pPzfZp7snlpua9BtSHPIUsuSAeQuAleQuAl&\\_mid\\_=660](http://www.waterloo.ca/en/document/document.aspx?param=pPzfZp7snlpua9BtSHPIUsuSAeQuAleQuAl&_mid_=660)

When taking a position and making recommendations, make sure that you consider, acknowledge, and address diverse perspectives. City decision-makers, operating in a democratic society, need to consider the wide range of preferences held by citizens while also ensuring the long-term social and bio-physical well-being of the city. Finally, make use of my office hours: I am here to provide some assistance. Time will be allocated during class for group work on the assignment.

You will present your position and recommendations in class March 15. Presentations should be between 7 and 10 minutes. All members of the group are not required to present but should participate in preparing the presentation (structure, power point, etc.).

Length: 1750-2000 words (not including references)

Late assignments will be given a deduction of 5% a day unless, of course, there are demonstrable mitigating health or other personal circumstances.

Topics include:

- Graffiti: street art or vandalism?  
How should street art be dealt with by the city of Waterloo?
- Parking in student neighbourhoods: making room for cars and walkable communities:  
What are the competing interests and how might they be addressed?
- Heritage by-law: a) heritage tree by-law or b) heritage houses on private property  
Consider the issue in terms of individual property rights vs. the common good.
- A ban on impromptu street parties such as those held in university student areas on St. Patrick's Day.  
What are the considerations involved?
- An introduction of a City of Waterloo by-law permitting the keeping of chickens in residential backyards.  
What are the opportunities, drawbacks and considerations if such a by-law were to be passed?
- A junk food and bottled water ban offered for sale in publicly-owned buildings.  
What are the diverse perspectives on the topic and how might they be addressed?
- Controlling the use of bicycles in unpaved, forested areas?  
Whose rights are being protected?

### *Tests*

You will need to complete two tests. The first test is a short quiz on local government institutions and democracy. No material is allowed for this test. In the second and final test, you will use the course material and concrete examples from the Region of Waterloo or other cities discussed in class to illustrate your answers. One week before the test, you will be provided with a list of questions. For the test, you will be asked to answer two questions in essay form.

## Schedule of course sessions, activities and readings

### **Module 1: What is a Sustainable Democratic Community?**

Weeks one and two: Jan. 5 and Jan. 12

- Course introduction
- Introduction to community sustainability
- The evolution of local governance
- How can communities become more sustainable?
- Choosing your topics

### **Objectives**

- Learn how to conceptualize and define sustainability in the context of local communities
- Learn how to apply sustainability criteria to assess sustainability in a community
- Gain an understanding about some of the policy initiatives taken locally to foster sustainability and resilience in local communities
- To gain some understanding about how well local governments and communities are doing with respect to fostering sustainability initiatives

### **Questions to consider**

- a) Drawing on the readings and course material, define a healthy, sustainable and resilient community.
- b) Using that definition, develop a list of criteria about what would constitute a sustainable community making sure you justify each criterion with the readings.
- c) Discussing each criterion in turn, would you consider local government in the Region of Waterloo sustainable? Why or why not?

### **Readings for Module 1**

- Michael Harcourt, *From Restless Places to Resilient Communities: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians* (2006), Final Report (Ottawa: Infrastructure Canada). (On course website) <http://www.ontariomcp.ca/library/reference-materials/restless-communities-resilient-places>
- ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability Website (<http://www.iclei.org/>)
- Robert B. Gibson, "Sustainability Assessment: Basic Components of a practical approach" (On course website)
- Trevor Hancock, "Healthy Communities Must Also Be Sustainable Communities" (On course website)

### **Suggested Readings**

- Harrison and al. "Resilience Thinking" in *Urban Resilience Thinking for Municipalities*, University of the Witwatersrand, Gauteng City-Region Observatory (2014) pp. 10-24 (On course website)
- Dale and W.T. Duchenko (2012) *Urban Sustainability: Reconnecting Space and Place, Reflections*, pp.269-284, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo and London (e-reserve)

## Module 2: Governance and Sustainable Communities

Weeks three and four: Jan. 19 and Jan. 26

- Democracy: a contested concept
- Avenues of participation in local governance
- Public and private spaces: Speaker's Corner, Gated Communities, Shopping Centres
- Intergovernmental Relations

### Objectives

- Understand that there are different definitions of democracy and that there are competing ideas about what this concept should entail and how it should be applied at the local level of governance
- Recognize that democracy and sustainability are mutually dependent
- Learn about the political, structural and institutional barriers to achieving local democracy in Canadian communities
- Consider the degree to which we govern ourselves democratically in Canadian communities

### Readings for Module 2

- Mary Louise McAllister (2004), *Governing Ourselves: The Politics of Canadian Communities*, Chapter 3: "Avenues of Participation in Local Governance" (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press) pp. 46-72 (On course website)
- IDEA (2001) *Democracy at the Local Level: The International IDEA Handbook on Participation, Representation, Conflict Management and Governance*, Chapter 1 "Concepts, Challenges and Trends," Available at <http://www.idea.int/publications/dll/index.cfm#toc>
- Local Government in Canada: Organization & Basic Institutions Website (<http://www.mapleleafweb.com/features/local-government-canada-organization-amp-basic-institutions>)

### Suggested Readings

- Alternatives Journal (Alternatives offers many creative ways in which citizens might participate locally)

### Questions to consider

- a) Is a strong local democracy essential to a sustainable community discussed in Module 1?
- b) How might federalism or the division of jurisdictional authority between federal, provincial and local governments foster local democracy or detract from it?

### Module 3: Decision-making Institutions

Weeks five and six: Feb. 2 and Feb. 9 (February 9 Quiz on material and readings to date: 45 minutes)

- Local public administration and management
- The business of government: finance

#### Objectives

- Acquire a basic understanding of the structure and function of local governments in Canada.
- Understand some of the challenges of effectively administering local governments.
- Learn about the role finance and budgeting plays in local governance.
- Critically assess the political role played by municipal staff.
- Consider who influence and who benefits from local decision-processes.
- Become aware of the challenges of holding local governments accountable.

#### Readings for Module 3

- McAllister, *Governing Ourselves*, Chapter 10: “Local Public Administration” pp. 201-231, Chapter 11: “Business, Management, and the Municipal Corporation” pp. 232-253, (On course website)
- Explore the Region of Waterloo, the City of Waterloo and the City of Kitchener’s Websites (and consider their differences and similarities).

#### Suggested Readings

- Sancton, Andrew (2011) *Canadian Local Government: An Urban Perspective* (Toronto: OUP Press) part iv - financial issues 13. Budgets, Grants, and User Fees 14. The Property Tax (See course reserve)
- Thompson, David and Shannon A. Joseph (2011) *Building Canada’s Green Economy: The Municipal Role* (Ottawa: Federation of Canadian Municipalities)  
([http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/Building\\_Canadas\\_green\\_economy\\_the\\_municipal\\_role\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fcm.ca/Documents/reports/Building_Canadas_green_economy_the_municipal_role_EN.pdf))

#### Questions to consider:

Do you think that the current structures of local government are well suited to deal with the requirements of a sustainable community? Why? Look for examples from the local City of Waterloo government or the Region of Waterloo’s websites. Consider specifically the following questions:

- a) How do municipal finance and the budget process influence the local environment and its ability to be sustainable both in terms of social equity and biophysical viability?
- b) How could local financial decisions be adjusted to more effectively foster sustainability? Keep in mind that funding will have to be reallocated from one spending area to another. For

example, if you wish to increase funding for public transit that funding might come at the cost of some other public initiative.

**Note: No class on Tuesday, Feb. 16 (Reading Week)**

#### **Module 4: The Physical Environment, Green Infrastructure**

Weeks seven, eight and nine: Feb. 23, Mar. 1 and Mar. 8

Field trip to REEP House March 8 (<http://reepgreen.ca/> for information)

- Planning for a sustainable community
- Environmental challenges
- Urban Agriculture
- Smart Cities
- Smart Grid

#### **Objectives**

- Learn about various initiatives to overcome challenges to sustainability
- Consider how 'Smart' initiatives are being used to try to plan more efficient use of physical resources and reduce urban sprawl
- Learn about how some initiatives such as urban agriculture can foster sustainability

#### **Readings for Module 4**

McAllister, Governing Ourselves? Chapter 9: "Environmental Challenges: Redefining the Public Interest" pp. 172 -196 (On course website)

Explore Smart Growth Ontario <http://www.smartgrowth.on.ca/index.htm>

Blais, P. 2010. Perverse Cities: Hidden Subsidies, Wonky Policy, And Urban Sprawl. Vancouver: UBC Press, Chapter 3 "The costs and benefits of sprawl" pp. 27-40 and Chapter 13 "Perverse Subsidies, Perverse Cities" pp. 221-237 (on e-reserve)

#### **Suggested activity**

- visit the Working Centre (<http://www.theworkingcentre.org/> for information)

#### **Questions to consider**

- How might cities be planned in a way to enhance their sustainability?
- What is smart growth?
- What are smart cities?
- What initiatives are governments in the Region of Waterloo taking to promote smart growth, sustainable food security, and green infrastructure?
- What can governments do to promote energy efficient homes? How?



## **Module 5: Sense of Place and Community capacity-building**

Weeks ten and eleven: Mar. 15 and Mar. 22

- Sense of Place
- What makes a great place
- Community-building

### **Objectives**

- Explore how all members of communities have assets to contribute for the collective good
- Understand the relationship between sense of place, green spaces and healthy communities
- Contemplate how those values might be restored and fostered in the 21st century
- Think how certain groups are marginalized and excluded from many communities of interest and government decision-making processes and how that might be turned around

### **Readings for Module 5**

- John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. Introduction to "Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets," Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets, Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research (1993). pp. 1-11
- Glenn Albrecht "Solastalgia: A New Concept in Health and Identity" (posted on the course webpage)
- Tim Cresswell (2004) Place: A Short Introduction, (London; Blackwell) Chapters 1-3 (On Reserve in Dana Porter Library)
- Look at the Working Centre's website and the Waterloo School for Community Development. [http://www.theworkingcentre.org/wscd/wscd\\_main.html](http://www.theworkingcentre.org/wscd/wscd_main.html)Resources for Learning

### **Suggested Readings**

- Slow movement website: [http://www.slowmovement.com/slow\\_cities.php](http://www.slowmovement.com/slow_cities.php)
- The Asset-based Community Development Website, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/publications/downloadable/>

### **Questions to consider**

Glenn Albrecht sends the message that we need to slow down and consider the impacts of rapid change. What is being lost and why is it considered important? How might local governments make decisions to preserve some of the valued socio-ecological components of a community? What are the barriers to overcoming some of those adverse impacts?

### **March 29 Final in-class Test**

## Important Course Information

- ◆ Unclaimed assignments will be retained for one month after term grades become official in quest". After that time, they will be destroyed in compliance with UW's confidential shredding procedures.
- ◆ Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/)
- ◆ Students who are unsure what constitutes an academic offence are requested to visit the on-line tutorial at <http://www.lib.uwaterloo.ca/ait/>
- ◆ Research Ethics: Please also note that the 'University of Waterloo requires all research conducted by its students, staff, and faculty which involves humans as participants to undergo prior ethics review and clearance through the Director, Office of Human Research and Animal Care (Office). The ethics review and clearance processes are intended to ensure that projects comply with the Office's Guidelines for Research with Human Participants (Guidelines) as well as those of provincial and federal agencies, and that the safety, rights and welfare of participants are adequately protected. The Guidelines inform researchers about ethical issues and procedures which are of concern when conducting research with humans (e.g. confidentiality, risks and benefits, informed consent process, etc.). If the development of your research proposal consists of research that involves humans as participants, the please contact the course instructor for guidance and see <https://uwaterloo.ca/research/office-research-ethics>
- ◆ Note for students with disabilities: The AccessAbility Office located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the AccessAbility Office at the beginning of each academic term.
- ◆ Mental Health: The University of Waterloo, the Faculty of Environment and our Departments consider students' well-being to be extremely important. We recognize that throughout the term students may face health challenges - physical and / or emotional. Please note that help is available. Mental health is a serious issue for everyone and can affect your ability to do your best work. Counselling Services <http://www.uwaterloo.ca/counselling-services> is an inclusive, non-judgmental, and confidential space for anyone to seek support. They offer confidential counselling for a variety of areas including anxiety, stress management, depression, grief, substance use, sexuality, relationship issues, and much more.
- ◆ Religious Observances: Student needs to inform the instructor at the beginning of term if special accommodation needs to be made for religious observances that are not otherwise accounted for in the scheduling of classes and assignments.
- ◆ Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm). When in doubt please contact your Undergraduate Advisor for details.
- ◆ Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71 – (Student Discipline) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72 (Student Appeals) [www.adm](http://www.adm)