

Sustainability
GEOG 3200 – Fall 2025 Course Syllabus
CHIL 245 MW 2:00-3:20 PM

Instructor: David Ferring

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Office hours: W 3:30-5 PM, F 1-2 PM, or by appointment via Zoom

(<https://unt.zoom.us/j/83108273872>)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sustainability is a broad discipline that involves the integration of environmental health, economic vitality, and social equity – meeting the needs of today without compromising the needs of the future. This course is designed as an introduction to sustainability from a variety of perspectives: as a conceptual framework, scientific field of study, growing industry, social movement, etc. We will investigate the ecological and political dimensions of sustainability projects, as well as the industries that are developing to support them and the implications for a variety of stakeholders. Each week we will explore topics such as renewable energy, food and agriculture, environmental justice, urban infrastructure, water, waste, etc. We will examine the integrated environmental-economic-equity dimensions of these issues at the local, state, national, and global scales. Students will also conduct research projects for a campus sustainability project, drawing upon concepts, analytical tools, and strategies surveyed throughout the course.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

- **Examine** ecological, economic, and equity dimensions of sustainability in a variety of environmental and political contexts from the local to the global.
- **Explore** the metrics and methods used to study, implement, and evaluate sustainability-related projects, initiatives, and developments in government agencies, industry, research, etc.
- **Engage** sustainability issues through research of scholarly literature, policy documents, business proposals, media, and case studies.
- **Apply** analytical tools in the collaborative development, design, and proposal of a sustainability research project.
- **Demonstrate** critical thinking and writing, teamwork, presentation, and outreach skills in the production of a UNT campus sustainability initiative.

GRADING

In-class activities	30%
Discussion (8)	15%
Field Trip Reflection	10%
Final Essay	15%
Group Project	30%

- Grades are calculated as follows:

A	90-100
B	80-89.4
C	70-79.4
D	60-69.4
F	<59.5

In-class activities: These activities will be conducted on a weekly basis in order to assess your understanding of the main themes and/or arguments of the week's readings, films, or other materials, to reinforce topics or concepts discussed in class, or to reflect on other elements of the course (e.g. a guest speaker or virtual tour). There will be 10 activities administered throughout the semester, but the lowest score will be dropped.

Discussion (and Responses!): Student engagement is one of the most critical elements of a productive and enjoyable classroom experience. Additional forms of communication between students and faculty will improve any course as a whole. To that end, we will be using the Discussion function in Canvas to provide an online platform for this Sustainability course. I will post a general topic or jumping off point each week a discussion is assigned, reflecting material from the readings, lecture, or other sources (including your ideas!), you will be required to submit a brief post and respond to one of your fellow classmates' submissions.

Field Trip Reflection: Students will submit a reflection following the one of our field trips this semester. I will provide prompts for this reflection, or will allow you to write on your own proposed topic, with approval required. This paper should be at least 2 pages in length, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point font. This paper will be evaluated on engagement with the provided questions, as well as evidence provided that both supports opinions or claims made in the paper and demonstrates active participation in the experiential field learning (e.g. specific examples of information provided by hosts/staff/faculty, insights gained through group activities, etc.).

Final Essay (Letter): You will submit a final essay (in the form of a letter) on the Monday of Finals Week. This letter may be addressed to any particular person (familiar, friendly, famous – or infamous) and can focus on a singular weekly topic (e.g. Air), or combine topics from a variety of weeks, or you may propose your own topic. These letters are not intended to be summarizations of the readings, but rather to reflect your engagement with the texts and other materials discussed in class. These letters need not address all texts read for class, but may serve as an opportunity to thoughtfully consider ideas, films, writings, etc. that had a particular resonance for you – and how you might share the knowledge you've gained with someone, open a dialogue with a researcher whose work you encountered, or voice your concerns to someone in a position of power, etc. I am open to format and approach, and will discuss possibilities with you later in the semester. Letters should be 2-3 pages in length, double-spaced, with one-inch margins and 12-point font. These papers will be evaluated on demonstrated critical thinking, as well as writing style and grammar.

Research project: The research project will be a collaborative effort, drawing upon analysis of a specific issue related to sustainability on campus. Drawing upon the concepts and tools explored in class, the groups will develop, design, evaluate, and present this project to UNT as the project “client.” There will be several steps within the project development throughout the semester, and each component will constitute part of the project grade.

- Research Question (5%): Each group will identify and describe the topic of interest for their proposal. The types of data that will be used in the study, key personnel or experts that could be consulted, and the potential benefits to the university and broader community will be included in this description.
- Preliminary Proposal (5%): Each group will provide a preliminary project proposal. This proposal should include an abstract, introduction, significance of research, proposed methods of data collection, expected results, potential benefits, etc.
- Methodology (5%): Groups will submit the final methodology for data generation and analyses, including any raw data files for review.
- Preliminary results (5%): Groups will present the results of their analyses via maps, charts, tables, figures, etc. and troubleshoot any potential issues.
- Research Product & Presentation (80%): Groups will present their research project to the class for comment and feedback. Each group research group, as co-authors, will communicate the findings of the research project and provide recommendations to the “client” (university faculty and staff) in the form of a final report.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

- *Sustainability: A Comprehensive Foundation*. Online textbook by Theis and Tomkin 2012. (https://cnx.org/contents/F0Hv_Zza@45.1:HdWd2hN5@2/Foreword)
- All other readings will be posted to Canvas in the module for each week’s lecture.

POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

- Condensed PowerPoints will be available on Canvas *after* we cover the material in class.

CLASS POLICIES

Rule #1: Be on time and do not leave early. If there is an exceptional circumstance, let me know before or after class and make sure to close the door quietly and sit as close to the exit as possible.

Rule #2: Silence your phones when you come to class and refrain from using them during lecture. Do not sleep or whisper to neighbors during class.

Rule #3: Be courteous. To paraphrase bell hooks, the classroom remains a space of possibility, but we must take care to be thoughtful and open in our interactions with each other.

Laptops/Touch Screen Policy: Students using laptops must sit in the last two rows of the lecture hall or at the very end of a row. Only tabs directly related to the lecture should be open during class. Students who do not follow this rule will lose their privilege to use the laptop in class. Phones and other devices should not be used in the classroom.

Make-up Policy: If you must be absent from an assignment in class to attend a religious holiday, or due to a family obligation, please contact me **at least one (1) week in advance** of the class or due date. If you are ill, you must let me know by e-mail or phone in advance of the due date. If you do not tell me until the due date has passed, **you will lose a letter grade for each day that you are late in giving me notice.**

Extra Credit: The Geography Department **does not allow** extra credit (work not specified on this syllabus).

Accommodations: The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940-565-4323.

Academic Dishonesty & Acceptable Student Behavior: Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a "0" for that particular assignment or exam. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities for further penalty. Remember that you have agreed to follow the UNT Code of Student Conduct. "Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. *Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct.* The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc."

- The Code of Student Conduct can be found at: <https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/dean-of-students/conduct/index.html>

According to UNT's webpage on [AI, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity](#):

- AI **should not be** used to assist in writing papers, searching for sources, or creating citations. Some citations provided by AI are not reliable.
- AI **can be** used to help students develop an outline for a paper, generate ideas, and learn a citation style.

The "Plagiarism Review" feature in Canvas will be enabled for all essays and project reports. This will automatically generate both the similarity and AI detection rate for each submission. If either the similarity or AI rate is high (above 30%), the flagged sections will be reviewed to determine whether (1) the student should be asked to rewrite and resubmit the assignment, or (2) further action is needed.