This course is designed to provide greater opportunity, in a seminar setting, for students to engage in critical thought and develop writing skills. As an exercise in critical thought, considerable attention will be given to development of the intellectual content in written work. The purpose is not to summarize literature but to investigate the material in a critical manner. A “critical” approach to the literature requires that students question the literature and think for themselves. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with different sides of their research topics and to express their views in a way that “joins debate” – i.e., facilitates genuine communication and constructive dialogue.

In the spring of 1992, we explore several global social issues related to sustainability. These include population, hunger and resource depletion, with special interest given to the relation between the latter two and the pressures of international debt. The first part of the course will be based on lectures designed to provide background to student research topics. Special attention will be given to interest rates – the key economic variable, influenced by debt and monetary policy, and used by market forces to allocate resources between generations.

The last two thirds of the course will be given to discussions of the material covered in student research. Each student will be asked to present his or her written work at various stages of preparation. In order for class discussions to proceed smoothly and in a timely manner, deadlines for the completion of written work will be rigorously enforced. Students are expected to read and provide constructive comments on the written work of their classmates, both to help their classmates and to demonstrate (constructive) critical thought and editorial skills.

An initial part of the written work will be an interchange of central issues through various electronic discussion groups concerned with economics. Each student will be required to succinctly express their central ideas and put them out for comment and discussion. Students will receive accounts on the unix based machine, ucsu and instructions will be provided by CNS. All material submitted to the net must be reviewed by the instructor before it is posted. Deadlines for various stages of written work will be given early in the course. The penultimate draft is due the day that the final is scheduled.

Grades for the course will be based on the following:
1/6 exam (Feb 18)
1/6 netwriting
1/4 written paper, various drafts
1/4 class participation
1/6 class presentation

The first part of the course will consist primarily of lectures to provide background on the international debt problem and an introduction to some of the social implications of the problem. Some readings are available electronically and others are on reserve in Norlin. Readings include

“Intellectual Dialogue in the Communication Age” Roper
“Review of Herman Daly’s For the Common Good” Roper
“Interest Rates and Intergenerational Conflict” Roper
“Causes and Consequences of the Debt Crisis” Roper
“Population Policy” Herman Daly
“The Population Trap” Lester Brown
“Food, Environment and Development” Oxfam
“Debt for Nature Swaps” by Jose Castaneda (reserve for Econ 4111)
“Debt for Nature Swaps” newspaper articles from Nexis database
“Who Bears the Burden of Sustainability” Kenneth Piddington
“Appropriations for the IMF and World Bank” Bruce Rich

During the first part of the course, students are expected to choose their research topic. This should be done in cooperation with the instructor. An initial reading list should be submitted by February 6th.