Sustainable Economics

Instructor: Don Roper
Office Hours: Room 14  

A major purpose of a "capstone" course is to develop skills of critical thought and writing. Critical thought means that readings are to be studied closely to evaluate the assumptions and the coherence of the arguments with great care. The readings are chosen to explore the question "What constitutes sustainable economics?" But the answer to that question is not as important as the process of critical-thought used in deriving one's own views.

The last 60% of the course will be given to a written project in sustainable economics or sustainable development in Latin America. Examples are online from previous sessions of the course.

The course is divided into three parts:

1. 2 weeks (10%) -- four page paper due on Monday, February 2. critiquing Hardin.
2. 4 weeks (30%) -- electronic discussions of readings, weekly meetings with instructor over readings and plans for term paper.
3. 10 weeks (60%) -- term papers on sustainable-economics or sustainable-development in Latin American -- completion is required at the scheduled time of the final exam.

Part One: Critique of Garrett Hardin:
- Tragedy of the Commons
- Second Thoughts on the "Tragedy of the Commons"
- Population Theory: Academia's Stepchild
- Cowboy Economics vs Spaceship Ecology
- What Malthus Missed
- Trying to Escape Malthus
- Anthropocentrism debate

Part Two: Critique/Discussion of
- Beyond Growth by Herman Daly.
  This is the only textbook in the course.
  A critical reading of this book is facilitated by a seminar on the book.
- Daly's For the Common Good
- Intergenerational Equity
- Al Bartlett guest lecture
- Natural Capitalism by Paul Hawken
- Value of Natural Capital by Robert Costanza et.al. (recommended)
- George Soros "The Capitalist Threat"
- If the GDP is Up, Why is America Down? by Clifford Cobb, et. al.

Please distinguish the frequency of writing from the volume of writing. The emphasis is on quality, not quantity, and each subsequent bit of writing, no matter how short, becomes a refinement of the previous writing. Greater clarity is acquired as one comes back to one's writing/thinking and makes revisions. Guidelines will be given on each assignment to help students focus on key issues. During the course students are expected to develop greater skill at determining the critical issues of the readings.

Part Three: Term Project:

The heart of the course is a term "paper," really a web site, on some aspect of sustainable economics or sustainable development in Latin America. The first two parts of the course should acquaint students with potential topics in sustainable economics. More suggestions are found under here.

There is extensive debate about whether institutions like the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund) foster or undermine sustainable development. Some material on the World Bank and IMF will be found on reserve and students
are expected to do research for further materials. To give coherence to the course, students will focus their term papers on one or more countries in Latin America.

Topics regarding Latin America might include international debt, poverty, natural resources, trade and growth, foreign investment, inflation and exchange rate devaluations, ... Students focusing on a particular country should integrate their work with an account of the political economy of the country which requires an account of the political swings over the last few decades, sometimes since WWII.

Students are required to build modern term papers as web sites. Students should have mastered the use of the Pine COmposer (PICO) early in part II of the course. Pico is an editor that can be readily used to construct web pages.

The major web sites in Sustainable Economics are in

- California
- Colorado

Students are expected to make constructive comments on one another's term projects. These comments will constitute 15% of the grade.