**Integrating Sustainability into the Curriculum**

**Final Project: POLS 204 Introduction to Comparative Politics**

**By Tim Jones**

**A. Mission Statement: Personal Sustainability in Teaching**

One of my primary goals as an instructor is to help students realize their rights and responsibilities as citizens. By “realize” I mean both knowing and appreciating what it means to be a citizen and translating that knowledge and appreciation into constructive action. There is paradox at the heart of citizenship, which is that our rights are easily eroded when we do not take our responsibilities as citizens seriously. Unfortunately, most people are free riders who take for granted their rights while abdicating their responsibilities. I believe this is especially true when it comes to the environment. Since all human communities depend on a healthy environment for their survival and flourishing, I will try to get students to include the natural world in their circle of concern. In the words of Chief Seattle (“Si’ahi”): "The earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."

**B. Mission Statement: Connecting Discipline to Sustainability**

In Political Science, one of the most widely cited definitions of politics is David Easton's contention that politics is the "authoritative allocation of values." As a Political Scientist, I ask my students to engage with empirical questions like "What ***do*** we value individually and collectively?" and normative questions like "what ***should*** we value individually and collectively?" Issues of sustainability are both empirical and normative and they are almost always political so it is easy for me to incorporate the concept of sustainability into my classes. For example, the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution reads: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and ***secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity***, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” Notably, the posterity clause of the Preamble was influenced by the Iroquois concept that public decisions should consider the impact they might have on the seventh generation. Thus, sustainability is at the heart of the U.S. Constitution and should be part of the political discussion.

**C. Teaching Portfolio**

**1. Mapping Sustainability Outcomes to POLS 204 Learning Outcomes**

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| **Relevant POLS 204 Outcomes** | **Relevant Sustainability Outcomes** | **Readings** | **Assignments** |
| * Evaluate the ways in which different countries have shaped their political institutions and public policies and the costs and benefits of these choices
* Demonstrate the opportunities and challenges of globalization to different political systems.
* Apply the comparative method to generalize about various political systems
 | * Synthesize and communicate an understanding of social, economic, and environmental systems in the context of sustainability.
* Demonstrate connections between a student’s chosen course of study and sustainability.
 | * Excerpts from *What’s the Economy for Anyway?* by John de Graaf and David Batker and *The Bridge at the Edge of the World* by James Gustave Speth
* Excerpts from the Fall 2008 Issue of Yes Magazine which was themed *Sustainable Happiness*
* Viewing: “Sustainable Happiness” TEDx talk by John de Graaf
* Rowe and Costanza Readings related to GDP
 | * Journal reflection on the inadequacy of the GDP
* Analyze different countries using different indexes of economic, environmental, and social wellbeing—e.g., the Human Development Index, the Happy Planet Index, etc.
* Create Your Own Index of Societal Well-Being
* Tragedy of the Commons Exercise
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**2. Teaching Strategies** (Short explanation of teaching strategies that I will use)

I will use a variety of teaching strategies to introduce students to the concept of sustainability in this course, including lecture, reading and viewing assignments, writing assignments, and a research project.

**3. Assignments, Activities, & Resource** (including course/sustainability outcomes, description of activity, and explanation of assessment).

In Fall 2013, I will be co-teaching an Interdisciplinary Studies (IDS) course called “The Pursuit of Happiness: The Politics and Psychology of Wellbeing.” Students who take this course will receive 10 credits: five in Psychology and five in Political Science. On the Political Science side, students can choose to get credit for POLS 101: Introduction to Political Science or POLS 204: Introduction to Comparative Politics. Both courses are core courses in Political Science. It is my hope that the resources/activities that I develop for this IDS course can be incorporated into future versions of POLS 204.

The tentative title of the unit I am developing is “Sustainable Happiness: A Cross-National Comparison of Economic and Social Wellbeing.” The purpose of this unit is help students understand where the United States ranks on various indicators and indices that measure and rank countries in terms of economic and social wellbeing. Many Americans mistakenly believe that we are the best or close to it at just about everything internationally. While it is true that we rank highly in a number of areas, it is also true that we rank quite low in others. This unit raises both normative and empirical questions about the purpose of government and the economy, how we measure success, where we rank as a nation, and what we might do differently to improve in the areas that matter to us.

**Activity 1: Measuring Wellbeing at the Individual (or Micro) Level:** Start with a writing exercise, asking students how they would define and measure quality of life at the individual level. This will be followed by an in-class brainstorming session that builds on the writing exercise. Students will be asked why each category is important what it represents. For example, if a student indicates that money is important, they will be asked why money is important and what it represents to them (e.g., security, freedom, etc.). Similarly, if a student says a good job, they will be asked how they would define that and why it matters. For example, does a good job just include a good salary or does it also include time off for family, friends, and leisure? What about health benefits? Etc. Students will not be graded on this assessment. Assign “So what does make us happy?” from *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* by Richard Layard (2005), 55-75 (21 pgs).

**Activity 2: Measuring Wellbeing at the National (or Macro) Level:** Start with a writing exercise, asking students what they think countries should be evaluated on in terms of economic and social wellbeing. As with the previous exercise, this should will be followed by a brainstorming session and students should be asked why each category is important and what it represents. For example, if a student indicates that national income or wealth is important, they will be asked why income/wealth is important and what it represents to them. Students will not be graded on this assessment.

**Activity 3: Understanding Indicators and Indices:** Lecture on indicators and indices. What are indicators and how do they relate to indices? What are common examples of each? What makes a good indicator/index?What makes a bad indicator/ index?

**Activity 4:** **Conventional Measurements of National Wellbeing:** Lecture covering the strengths and weaknesses of conventional measurements of national wellbeing (e.g., GDP, GDP per capita, the unemployment rate, etc.). Assign one or more of the following: “Our Phony Economy” by Jonathan Rowe in *Harper’s Magazine* (June 2008) (7pgs); “Beyond GDP: The Need for New Measures of Progress” by Costanza et al. (2009); “Introduction” from *Deep Economy* by McKibben (2007) (4 pgs); “After Growth” from *Deep Economy* by McKibben (2007) (41 ps).

**Activity 5: Alternative Measurements of National Wellbeing:** Lecture introducing several alternative measurements of national wellbeing (e.g., the Human Development Index, the Gross Progress Indicator, etc.).

**Activity 6: We’re Number One, Right!?!?:** Assign the article “We’re Number One!” by James Gustave Speth. Have students write a journal response and then discuss in class. This article highlights all the areas where the United States is ranked highly among comparable countries (i.e., other advanced industrial nations). In some areas our high ranking is (arguably) a positive: for example, we have the most national wealth, we have a high per capita income, we are relatively free, etc. In many areas, however, we are ranked highly and this is (arguably) a negative: for example, we have the highest per capita prison population in the world, we spend more on the military than any other country, etc. Many of the indicators that are included in this article are environmental and students will be asked to assess whether our high ranking is a positive or negative and why. Students will be graded on the journal write-up (complete/incomplete). This assignment relates to the following sustainability outcomes: Apply an ethical perspective in which one views oneself as embedded in the fabric of an interconnected world.

**Activity 7: Comparing Indices/Small Group Presentations:** Divide students into groups and have them explore an index of wellbeing. Have students present their index to class, including: (1) an overview of its methodology and their evaluation of it, (2) how the United States ranks relative to comparable countries, (3) what factors influence the U.S. ranking, and (4) what can U.S. policymakers learn from how the U.S. performs on this index. This assignment relates to the following course learning outcomes: (1) Apply the comparative method to generalize about various political systems and (2) Evaluate the ways in which different countries have shaped their political institutions and public policies and the costs and benefits of these choices. This assignment also relates to the following sustainability outcomes: (1) Synthesize and communicate an understanding of social, economic, and environmental systems in the context of sustainability and (2) Demonstrate connections between a student’s chosen course of study and sustainability.

* 1. Happy Planet Index
		1. <http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>
	2. OECD Better Life Index
		1. <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>
	3. Environmental Performance Index
		1. <http://epi.yale.edu/>
	4. Ecological Footprint
		1. <http://www.footprintnetwork.org>

**Activity 8: Create Your Index:** Working individually or in groups, have students create their own index of wellbeing. This can be through sites such as the OECD Better Life Index. Students will write a paper and/or make a presentation to the class about their index. The paper/presentation should include a discussion of: (a) the indicators that students chose and why they chose them, (b) how the United States ranks relative to comparative countries, and (c) what they think the major takeaways are from what they learned. Students will be graded on their presentations/papers. This assignment relates to the following course learning outcomes: (1) Apply the comparative method to generalize about various political systems and (2) Evaluate the ways in which different countries have shaped their political institutions and public policies and the costs and benefits of these choices. This assignment also relates to the following sustainability outcomes: (1) Synthesize and communicate an understanding of social, economic, and environmental systems in the context of sustainability and (2) Demonstrate connections between a student’s chosen course of study and sustainability.

**D. Syllabus** (a copy of the syllabus for the course with evidence that it will sustainability related).

I am co-teaching this course, it is an interdisciplinary course that I have never taught before, and my co-instructor is dealing with a death in the family so we/I have not yet created a syllabus. However, we are thinking about assigning the following books in full:

* *What’s the Economy for, Anyway?: Why It’s Time to Stop Chasing Growth and Start Pursuing Happiness* by John de Graaf and David Batker (this book explicitly addresses issues of sustainability).
* *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump’s Search for the Happiest Places on Earth* by Eric Weiner
* *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want* by Sonja Lyubomirsky
* *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* by Richard Layard (this book implicitly addresses issues of sustainability—we will make the connections explicit).

We are also likely to assign excerpts from the following books:

* *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson
* *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Economies and the Durable Future* by Bill McKibben (this book explicitly addresses issues of sustainability).
* *The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* by James Gustave Speth (this book explicitly addresses issues of sustainability).
* *State of the World 2013: Is Sustainability Still Possible* by the Worldwatch Institute (this book explicitly addresses issues of sustainability).

I will share the syllabus when it has been written.