

# Rural Community Sustainability

## Social Science 4390—Seminar in Sustainability Issues

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Course Meets: T/R, 11:05-12:20  
Annex Building Conference Room  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-4:00

This is a class about rural communities and their ability to continue on as vibrant, happy, and sustainable places to live. Sustainability is a word that is often-used but not always understood. People use it to mean a lot of different things. Most commonly, it refers to environmental conservation of some kind, often balanced with economic and social well-being. In this class, we'll use the term "sustainability" in a broad and holistic sense including environment, social relationships, economic well-being, health, and culture. When we talk about "rural community sustainability", we are referring not only to environmental sustainability but also the ability for rural communities to achieve and maintain rewarding economic opportunities, long and healthy lives, constructive social relationships, recreational and cultural opportunities, and overall vibrant and happy lives for their residents. Sustainable rural communities are good places to live for all different kinds of people while also supporting the natural environment in both the local area and globally.

In a global environment threatened by climate change, pollution, resource exhaustion, and growing levels of human consumption; rural places serve as the stewards of vital ecosystem services for people around the world. One premise of this course is that **healthy rural environments depend on healthy rural communities, and vice versa**. Yet, many rural communities struggle with out-migration, high poverty, low levels of education, aging populations, pollution, poor health, lack of infrastructure (like high speed internet, medicine, and public transportation), lack of jobs, and race/ethnic/sexuality/gender discrimination. Rural areas of the United States consistently have higher poverty rates, lower income, and lower education rates than their more urban counterparts; and, as a whole, rural communities have experienced steady and profound out-migration of young adults and those with higher education and skills. These challenges create a situation where many rural communities across the United States, and especially those in areas more remote from large urban centers, struggle for their very survival and where residents of these communities face few opportunities for social and economic advancement. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, for example, 13 of the 15 counties experienced population loss between 2000 and 2010; and in 2007 all UP counties had a median household income less than the state of Michigan total (seven had a median household income less than 80% that of the state total).

This course will be unique because we will be collaborating closely with a community organization (Main Street Calumet) to understand community sustainability in Calumet. Throughout the course, we will analyze assets and challenges that rural communities face and explore opportunities for rural communities to become more sustainable. We will rely on concepts that are well tested in multiple contexts, and we will apply them to the Calumet case. This will help students to understand rural community development and sustainability in a tangible, on-the-ground, sort of way.

Beyond simply applying concepts to a case, **students in this course will engage in community based research and conduct a community project in collaboration with Main Street Calumet**. This means that you'll be asked to respectfully engage with Calumet community members and serve as part of a team with the ultimate goal of helping Calumet to become a more sustainable rural community. You will be expected to spend 25-30 hours of out-of-class time in Calumet. The class will travel together and transportation will be provided. Trips will be the first Friday of each month.

This course **requires your active participation both in class and with the Calumet community**. You will be asked to participate in class discussions. There will be few lecture-type sessions, and instead class time will primarily be spent on project work and discussion among students and instructor. You will need to consistently do the readings and come to class prepared to discuss. You will also be asked to participate in meaningful ways on a real life community project with Main Street Calumet. Treat this like a job that you are hired to do. It is very important work and it really matters! You have an important role to play in making a difference in the Calumet community.

**The major learning goals in this class are:**

- 1- Understand assets and challenges that rural communities face in creating and maintaining a vibrant and sustainable environment for their residents and apply this knowledge to understand a specific case community—Calumet (academic enhancement).
- 2- Learn to conduct research (research skills).
- 3- Improve collaboration skills by collaborating with classmates and Main Street Calumet on a community research project (collaboration).
- 4- Make a positive difference in improving community life in Calumet, MI (civic learning).
- 5- Think creatively about how social life might be reorganized to promote global sustainability by focusing on the local scale (civic learning).

**Required Texts:**

- 1- *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change*. 2012. Fourth edition. Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora. Westview Press.
- 2- *The Natural Step for Communities*. 2004. Sarah James and Torbjorn Lahti. New Society Publishers.
- 3- Readings posted on Canvas

**Assignments and Grading:**

Community Research Project: 30%  
Demographic Profile: 10%  
Artist Interviews: 10%  
Reflection Paper: 35%  
Sustainability Pictures: 5%  
Discussion/Participation: 10%

**Community Research Project:** You have been hired to collaborate with a community-based organization (Main Street Calumet) to conduct a social impact analysis of Calumet's First Fridays Art Tours. Calumet has five art galleries. On the first Friday of each month, the galleries are open late for special exhibits and events. Students will work together on a group project to collect and analyze data and to interpret results. The major questions we'll address are:

- 1- Who attends First Fridays?
- 2- To what extent do First Fridays promote new social relationships and/or strengthen existing ones?
- 3- Why do people attend First Fridays?
- 4- How might Calumet better support its artist community?
- 5- How do First Fridays contribute to the seven community capitals, or not? How might they do a better job?

The entire class will work together to collect data, analyze that data, interpret results, and write a report to the community summarizing our findings. The final report will be presented to the Calumet community. It will also be submitted for publication in the *Undergraduate Journal of Service Learning and*

*Community Based Research.* Specific instructions on the components of the project and report will be provided.

This project serves multiple goals. First, we'll use it as a case study where you can apply concepts that we learn about in class to understand the Calumet case. Second, students will gain professional experience working with community partners to do important work that promotes community development. Finally, students will make a positive difference toward improving community life in Calumet.

**Project Grading:** Because all students will work together, the project will be graded in two ways. Half of each individual student's grade will be based on the product outcome. This will be the same grade for everyone in the class since there is only one product. This grade will be based on how well the project (1) carefully and thoughtfully gathers and analyzes data; (2) coherently interprets data and presents results; (3) responds to community needs; (4) promotes sustainability; (5) uses material from readings and class to inform the project; and (6) displays creative and critical thinking. The other half of each student's grade will be based on the quality and quantity of individual effort that he/she put into the project. All students will be asked to grade one another's overall contributions. The instructor will also make observations of individual effort. The effort half of grade will be given by instructor based on the recommendations of students' evaluating one another. **Draft due April 16. Opportunity to revise until April 25.**

**Presentation to community April 25.**

*Demographic Profile:* Your job for this assignment will be to gather secondary data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, and On the Map that measure human capital in the Calumet area. This is individual work, but it will be integrated into the group community research project. You will need to collect data on population, economics, and social conditions and present the data in a coherent fashion with a 2-3 page report with tables and one or more maps. More specific direction will be provided. **Due Feb 14.**

*Artist Interviews:* Students will each interview one person involved in art in the Calumet community and take detailed notes. Notes should include the time, location, and general situation under which the interview was conducted and the interviewer's immediate impressions of the interview, as well as specific comments and responses that respondents made. As soon after the interview as possible, students should carefully organize and more fully develop their notes. Fill out any missing information and expand on any details you noticed. Then, analyze the interview. The analysis should include identifying key themes that emerged in the conversation—what key issues related to community did the respondent discuss? What stands out as important? Interview questions and a worksheet noting how to do the analysis will be provided. This is individual work, but the findings from these interviews will then inform the group Community Research Project. **Interviews will by March 1. Interview Analysis Due March 5.**

*Reflection Paper:* This should be a 5-10 page (typed and double-spaced) reflection paper. It is aimed at helping you to describe, examine, and articulate your learning experiences in this course, and especially with regards to the community research project. A specific framework for how to do this paper will be provided. Some of the key questions to consider will be: How has working on the project affected you? Is this project really helping Calumet? How so or how not? How does the project relate to course readings and other material? What have you learned? How did you learn it? Why does it matter? How will it change your life? Bonus points for submitting paper to the *Undergraduate Journal of Service Learning and Community Based Research* as an "Analytical Essay." First Version **Due March 19** by 5:00pm. **Final Version Due May 1** by 5:00pm. This is **individual work**. Turn in electronically via Canvas.

*Sustainability Pictures:* Students are asked to take two digital pictures in the local Copper Country area. They can be from Calumet, but don't have to be. One should exemplify *rural community sustainability*. The other should exemplify *rural community un-sustainability*. The pictures should be accompanied by a 1-2 page written paper explaining how each picture demonstrates sustainable or unsustainable community aspects. Individual work. Turn in on Canvas for entire class to see. **Due March 28.**

*Discussion/Participation:* I expect students to attend class regularly and to engage in discussion of the material. Students will need to actively participate in class discussions and in the group project. Students will regularly be asked to post to a discussion on Canvas about readings, the project, or other course material. Students may also be asked to bring discussion questions to class. **Poor attendance will be a big problem both for your participation grade, but also for your group project grade.**

**Important Notes:**

- To be successful in this class you will need to do the readings regularly and keep up.
- You are expected to regularly use the course website on Canvas. This is where you find out what the required readings are, turn in assignments, view grades, engage in discussions with your classmates, and access extra resources.
- We will be spending a good deal of time working directly on a community project. This will be different than your other classes. It will be both rewarding and sometimes challenging. It will require three field trips to Calumet, MI (about 20 min drive from Houghton).

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## Schedule, Readings, & Assignments

### Week 1: Defining “Rural”, “Community”, and “Sustainability”

- Jan 15: Read syllabus and review course website  
Jan 17: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 1 AND  
*Most of Nature*, Beeton and Lynch

### Week 2: Natural & Cultural Capital

- Jan 22: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 2  
Jan 24: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 3 AND  
Calumet Michigan Cultural Economic Development Plan

### Week 3: Human Capital

- Jan 29: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 4  
Jan 31: Review Research Methods. Prep for First Friday  
Read-- Social Science Research Methods Knowledge Base: Two Research Fallacies,  
Ethics in Research, Evaluation Research, Qualitative Data, Qualitative Approaches,  
Qualitative Methods  
**COMPLETE HUMAN SUBJECTS CITI TRAINING**  
**Feb 1: Field trip to Calumet, 12:00pm to 9:00pm: Tour NPS, explore, First Fridays 1**

### Week 4: Social Capital

- Feb 5: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 5  
Feb 7: No Class—Winter Carnival

### Week 5: Artist Revivals & Political Capital

- Feb 12: *Putnam or something on community vibrancy/Florida, etc.*  
Feb 14: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 6  
**Demographic Profile Due**

### Week 6: Financial and Built Capitals

- Feb 19: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 7 AND  
*Locally Owned Business*, Michael H. Shuman  
Feb 21: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 8

### Week 7: Globalization & Consumption

- Feb 26: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 9 & 10  
Feb 28: Prep Interviews.  
Read-- Social Science Research Methods Knowledge Base: Interviews, Qualitative  
Methods  
**March 1: Calumet Field Trip 12:00pm to 10:00pm: First Fridays 2, Copperdog, Interviews**

Week 8: Governance

- March 5: Class discussion of Calumet Project  
**Interview Analysis Due**
- March 7: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 11 AND  
*Ecological Democracy*, John S. Dryzek

\*\*\*\*\* Spring Break \*\*\*\*\*

Week 9: Generating Community Change

- March 19: *Rural Communities*, Chapt 12  
**Reflection Paper, Version 1 Due**
- March 21: *Conserving Communities*, Wendell Berry

Week 10: Sustainable Communities

- March 26: *A Whole New Way of Life: Ecovillages and the Revitalization of Deep Community*,  
Karen Litfin
- March 28: Sustainable Communities picture discussion. **Sustainability Pictures Due.**

Week 11: The Natural Step

- April 2: *The Natural Step*, pp. xv to 26 (Preface, Introduction, and Part 1)
- April 4: Group Project Work Time.  
Read-- Social Science Research Methods Knowledge Base: Descriptive Statistics,  
Write-Up
- April 5: Calumet Field Trip 3:00pm to 9:00pm: First Fridays 3**

Week 12: Sustainable Practices

- April 9: Class discussion of Calumet Project/Group Project Work Time
- April 11: *The Natural Step*, Chapt 4, plus 3 more chapters of choice between 5-14

Week 13: Process of Change

- April 16: *The Natural Step*, pp. 177-240 (Part 3)  
**Draft of Community Project Due**
- April 18: Class discussion of Calumet Project—7 capitals and opportunities for change.

Week 14: Sustainable Calumet

- April 23: Class Discussion: Reflections on Calumet, Project, and course overall
- April 25: Community Presentation in Calumet. **Field Trip to Calumet time/place TBD.**

\*\*\*\*\* **Final Project Due April 25** \*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\* **Final Reflection Paper Due May 1** \*\*\*\*\*