



## ERST 480 – Greening the Campus

Fall/Winter Session 2008/2009

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**Secretary:** Deb Mills, ESB B202  
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**Course time and location:** Thursday, 11 – 12:50 pm., SC W4

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### **Description of the course:**

Trent University provides many opportunities to examine environmental issues, from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The university occupies one of the largest campuses in Canada, and this raises issues regarding stewardship of ecologically significant natural areas. It uses resources—energy, water, paper, etc.—with varying levels of efficiency, while generating large quantities of waste, both organic and inorganic. New construction projects have generated their own impacts. Members of the Trent community: students, staff, and faculty, are responsible, through their activities (including transportation choices) for a variety of environmental impacts.

There have been efforts to reduce these impacts, and to encourage the university to embrace campus sustainability as a institutional goal. While these efforts have had some success, the obstacles they have encountered have also demonstrated the complexity of the institution as a political entity. Operational units such as Physical Resources and Purchasing; administrative entities, such as the president's office, senate, and academic departments; as well as other bodies, such as the Trent Central Student Association, all make decisions that have environmental implications. Outside entities, such as contractors (including Aramark), as well as the City of Peterborough and the Trent-Severn Waterway, affect decisions made within the university. The university therefore provides opportunities not just for studying the environmental impacts of an institution, and how these impacts might be reduced, but also for study of how environmental decisions are made: how interest groups interact, and how the balance between economic viability and environmental sustainability is negotiated.

Trent University especially provides an opportunity to consider carefully the central question of environmental politics: What are the barriers to effective environmental protection? Or to put it another way: given that most people agree, in principle, that we should minimize our impacts on the environment, and also that we already know what we need to know to act, why is there still such a large gap between what we could be doing, and what we actually do? This question does not yet have an

answer, but perhaps by studying environmental attitudes and actions at a complex institution like Trent we can get closer to providing one.

Our university also provides opportunities to consider critically broader issues relating to environmental affairs, especially by drawing parallels between the university and society. For example, what is implied by the concept of “environmental citizenship,” for the rights and responsibilities of individuals within the institution, or for the roles of the university itself within the national and global community? And (as a related question) who should make decisions regarding the environment: are these the responsibility of senior administration and operational departments (such as Physical Resources), or are more democratic forms of decision-making appropriate?

This, then, is the purpose of ERST 480: to study the environmental impacts of a university, to examine how decisions with environmental implications are made within the university, and to think about how what we learn about the university can be applied to the wider society (and vice-versa).

To organize our exploration of these ideas, the course year will be made up of three kinds of sessions: Issues, Themes, and Research (see course schedule, below). In the **Issues** sessions, the emphasis will be on developing a shared understanding of university environmental issues, mostly through study of several specific areas, such as transportation and energy. We will examine in detail the situation both at Trent, and also survey environmental initiatives at other universities. A basic question will be: What are the "best practices" at other universities, and how can these be applied to Trent?

In the **Themes** sessions, we will survey various ways of thinking about the campus environment and the possibilities for environmental action, including approaches to environmental management, and to integrating economic and social priorities with environmental concerns. These ways of thinking will each be relevant to several issues.

In the **Research** sessions, we will work on projects that examine, from practical perspectives, various aspects of the Trent environment. Practical research, following if possible a community-based model, will be a major part of this course. These projects are intended to be both opportunities for learning, and relevant to the environmental challenges that Trent is facing. Some examples of project ideas:

- Design and implementation of a waste audit.
- Assessment of current performance in energy efficiency, and prospects for improvement.
- The environmental implications of landscaping decisions.
- Study of effectiveness of communication relating to the environment (e.g. recycling information).
- The relevance of purchasing policies to reducing waste generation.
- Factors affecting transportation choices, and possibilities for encouraging use of alternatives to private automobiles.

It is hoped that student projects each year will contribute to an annual "State of the Campus Environment" report, to be circulated within the university, as well as other communication efforts, thereby making a link between research done for the course, and practical actions within the university.

As the course schedule indicates, we will have several guest speakers, including operational staff and other faculty. These speakers will provide a variety of perspectives, while also demonstrating that this course, like environmental initiatives generally, is a cooperative effort.

This course is experimental, in that it seeks to combine, within a small-group setting, conventional academic research and practical applications. As such, it is a work-in-progress. Changes in format,

schedule, workload and other aspects can be open to discussion and modification, as we work through the challenges of studying the Trent environment.

#### Course work / evaluation:

Study report on Trent environmental issues (due October 30)	18%
Reports on classes	32% (8 x 4)
First term research projects – first and second presentations:	16% (4 + 12)
Major research projects – phase 1, phase 2, and final presentations:	35% (5 + 5 + 25)

#### Descriptions of course work:

The study report on Trent environmental issues is intended to discuss, in detail, Trent environmental issues, in the context of experience at other universities.

The reports on classes are summary/discussion papers that identify the key pieces of information and implications from a specific class. They can be based on any of the following classes: September 25, October 2, October 9, October 16, October 30, November 6, November 20, January 8, January 15, January 22, February 5, February 12, March 12. It is your choice which eight classes you write about, but your report must be handed in the following week.

The first term research projects will be an initial opportunity to study a specific question regarding the Trent environment. The major research projects will be the focus of the second term, and will be an opportunity to define a more extensive problem to be solved through research.

#### Course readings:

Michael M'Gonigle & Justine Starke, Planet U: Sustaining the World, Reinventing the University, (Gabriola Island: New Society, 2006).

Trent Environmental Advisory Board: [www.trentu.ca/eab](http://www.trentu.ca/eab).

Trent Sustainability Office (Shelley Strain): [www.trentu.ca/physicalresources/sustain.php](http://www.trentu.ca/physicalresources/sustain.php).

#### Other useful readings:

Ann Rappaport & Sarah Hammond Creighton, Degrees That Matter: Climate Change and the University (MIT Press, 2007).

Peggy F. Barlett & Geoffrey W. Chase, eds. Sustainability on Campus: Stories and Strategies for Change, (MIT Press, 2004).

John Blewitt & Cedric Cullingford, eds., The Sustainability Curriculum: The Challenge for Higher Education, (Earthscan, 2004).

Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, [www.aashe.org](http://www.aashe.org).

National Wildlife Federation, [www.campusecology.org](http://www.campusecology.org).

Sarah Hammond Creighton, Greening the Ivory Tower: Improving the Environmental Track Record of Universities, Colleges, and Other Institutions, (MIT Press, 1998).

Dixon Thompson & Serena van Bakel, A Practical Introduction to Environmental Management on Canadian Campuses, (National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, 1995).

### COURSE SCHEDULE (Subject to revision)

**I = Issues      T = Themes      R = Research**

#### FIRST TERM

**September 11:** Preliminary meeting

**September 18:**      **I**      Intro to the course and to Trent environmental issues: review & discussion

<b>September 25:</b>	<b>R</b>	Environmental issues and research needs at Trent, with Shelley Strain
<b>October 2:</b>	<b>T</b>	Environmental management at universities, with Stephen Hill
<b>October 9:</b>	<b>R</b>	Research methods, with Ray Dart
<b>October 16:</b>	<b>R</b>	First research projects – Presentations and working session
<b>October 23:</b>		Reading Week
<b>October 30:</b>	<b>I</b>	Campus grounds issues
<b>November 6:</b>	<b>T</b>	The triple bottom line and Trent University, with Asaf Zohar
<b>November 13:</b>	<b>R</b>	First research project presentations
<b>November 20:</b>	<b>I</b>	The perspective from Physical Resources
<b>November 27:</b>		No class (SB at ECREA conference)
<b>December 4:</b>	<b>R</b>	Second term planning: Identifying major research projects
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<b>January 8:</b>	<b>I/R</b>	Waste management and reduction / Planning research projects
<b>January 15:</b>	<b>I</b>	Energy conservation
<b>January 22:</b>	<b>I</b>	Transport at Trent
<b>January 29:</b>	<b>R</b>	Major project presentations: Phase 1
<b>February 5:</b>	<b>T</b>	Defining the role of Trent in the community
<b>February 12:</b>	<b>T/R</b>	Measuring Progress / Working session
<b>February 19:</b>		Reading week
<b>February 26:</b>		No class (SB at ASEH conference)
<b>March 5:</b>	<b>R</b>	Major project presentations: Phase 2
<b>March 12:</b>	<b>T</b>	The university and democratic decision-making
<b>March 19:</b>	<b>R</b>	Working session
<b>March 26:</b>	<b>R</b>	Final major project presentations
<b>April 2:</b>		Wrapping up the class: What difference have we made?