

ENVS 491: Campus Sustainability Experience
Institute for Sustainability, Energy, and Environment
Instructor of Record: Prof. Benjamin J. McCall

Course Description: Students will work with faculty, staff, and/or the Student Sustainability Committee to advance campus sustainability goals and the Illinois Climate Action Plan. This course is designed to enable students to apply their disciplinary knowledge to tackle inherently interdisciplinary problems, while also developing and enhancing their critical analysis, leadership, organizational, and project management/evaluation skills and preparing them for addressing sustainability issues in their careers.

Principal Topics: The topics to be covered will be different for each enrollee, but will generally fall into one or more of the following areas: (1) Energy Conservation and Building Standards, (2) Energy Generation, Purchasing, and Distribution, (3) Transportation, (4) Agriculture, Land Use, Food, and Sequestration, (5) Water and Stormwater, (6) Purchasing, Waste, and Recycling.

Work Required of Students: The exact work expected will depend on the section in which a student is enrolled; in some sections (e.g., CSI) the exact work will be different for each enrollee, and will be arranged at the beginning of the semester through discussions between the instructor, the student, and any additional faculty and/or staff who are involved in the work to be performed. Each student will be assigned an Advisor, who will direct the student's work, set clear expectations at the start of the semester, and evaluate the student's work. This course will not involve formal instruction, but rather students will engage in experiential learning under the guidance of the instructor and the Advisor.

Sections: The following sections for the course are currently envisioned, although other sections may be added in the future:

Section SSC: Students in this section serve on the Student Sustainability Committee and/or one of its topical working groups. Working group members cultivate proposals from the campus community to fund projects that will enhance the sustainability of the campus, and Committee members evaluate those proposals and decide which will be funded by student fee revenue. Students who serve only on a topical working group are expected to canvass the campus community to solicit new proposals, work closely with prospective proposers to clarify and improve their proposals, and provide preliminary evaluation of submitted proposals to the Committee. These students are expected to attend working group meetings and to provide comments in electronic form on submitted proposals. Students who also serve on the Committee will be expected to attend Committee meetings, participate in the final evaluation and selection of proposals to be funded, and provide organizational leadership for the Committee. Evaluation of proposals, both at the working group and Committee level, takes place through written comments in shared documents as well as in group discussions. In this section, a faculty or staff advisor to the Student Sustainability Committee will serve as Advisor.

Section SWA: The campus has a Sustainability Working Advisory Team (SWATeam) in each of the six areas listed above, and each team will be staffed by a student in section SWA. In this capacity, the student's responsibilities may include analysis of campus sustainability related data, preparation of formal recommendations and reports to the campus, and development of scope for proposed sustainability studies. In this section, the Chair of the SWATeam will serve as Advisor.

Section CSI: Students in this section will serve as Campus Sustainability Interns, working directly with (1) iSEE staff to develop, refine, implement, and analyze the performance of various campus sustainability initiatives, such as the Certified Green Office Program, or (2) staff in campus units (e.g., Facilities & Services, Housing, Parking) on projects related to campus sustainability that are particular to that unit's role within campus operations, for example the

development of an electric vehicle charging program within Parking. In this section, an iSEE staff member, or a staff member in the relevant campus unit, will serve as Advisor.

Readings: Naturally, this course does not have any texts. In section SSC, the readings for this course will be the sustainability project proposals submitted by the campus community. In other sections, students will be expected to seek out appropriate readings that are relevant to their work, which may range from internal or external reports to the primary literature.

Exams: This course has no examinations, but a final brief report on your overall experience in the course will be required.

Credit Hours and Contact Hours:

Section SSC: Student members of the Student Sustainability Committee (who also serve on working groups) are expected to register for 2 credit hours, while students only serving on working groups are expected to register for 1 credit hour. Working groups meet once every two weeks for an hour, and members are expected to spend an average of 4 hours per week cultivating and evaluating proposals. The Committee holds regular meetings every two weeks for an hour or more, in addition to occasional longer meetings for proposal evaluation, and members are expected to spend an average of 4 hours per week evaluating proposals.

Sections SWA & CSI: The number of credit hours for each student in these sections will be based on the expected time commitment of the work to be undertaken, with an approximate conversion of one credit hour for every four hours per week of expected effort. For this type of course, it is challenging to define contact hours, as the students will be actively engaging not only with the Advisor but with other faculty, staff, and students in the course of their work. Each student is expected to meet with his/her assigned Advisor at least once per week to review progress.

Evaluation:

Section SSC: Students will generally register for this course on an S/U basis. In order to receive a grade of Satisfactory, students are expected to attend every meeting of their working group (and of the Committee if they are a member), unless they provide a legitimate excuse in advance (to the working group chair or the Committee secretary) for missing a particular meeting. Students are also expected to provide written feedback on every submitted proposal, and actively contribute to the discussions during proposal evaluation meetings. Grades will be assigned by the instructor of record with input from the assigned Advisor. The instructor of record, as a staff member of the Student Sustainability Committee, will directly see the contributions of Committee members. The instructor will receive feedback on working group members' contributions by the chair of each working group and the assigned Advisor.

Sections SWA & CSI: Students will be formally evaluated by their designated Advisors based on the quality and quantity of their contributions. Each student will receive a written mid-term evaluation from the Advisor in the 7th week of the semester, which will include the anticipated grade if the student continues at the same level of productivity and quality. This mid-term evaluation will be copied to the instructor of record, and if the student disagrees with the mid-term assessment s/he may appeal to the instructor of record, who will then engage both the student and Advisor to clarify expectations. At the end of the semester, the Advisor will provide a final written evaluation, including a recommended grade, to the student and the instructor of record. The instructor of record is ultimately responsible for assigning the final grade, in order to ensure fairness and uniformity of grading procedures among the various Advisors.

It is expected that students will generally register for this course on a letter grade basis, and this is the default registration type. However, there may be certain projects that are better suited to grading on an S/U basis, so this is retained as an option, and would be used only when the instructor of record deems it to be appropriate. In order to

ensure uniformity of grading, the following guidance will be provided to Advisors (with examples for Section SWA given in parentheses):

A – Student has met all expectations, and the quality of the student’s contributions has been exceptional (e.g., student has attended all meetings, taken detailed and organized notes that were shared promptly with all members, proactively sought out relevant data, performed insightful analysis of campus sustainability data, taken a leadership role in preparing reports and written recommendations)

B – Student has met all expectations, and the quality of the student’s contributions has been adequate (e.g., student has attended all meetings, taken reasonable notes, followed through on specific data requests from the team, performed reasonable analyses as requested, and participated in drafting reports and recommendations as directed)

C – Student has met expectations, but the quality of the student’s work has been sub-standard (e.g., student has attended all meetings, taken some notes, not entirely obtained requested data, done a minimal job of analysis requested, participated minimally in editing reports and recommendations)

D – Student has met many but not all expectations, and/or the quality of the work has been poor (e.g., student has not regularly attended meetings, or has not consistently taken notes, or has not obtained requested data, or has not performed requested analysis, or has not contributed to reports and recommendations)

F – Student has not met the majority of expectations (e.g., student regularly missed meetings, regularly did not take notes, ignored requests for data or analyses, did not contribute to reports and recommendations)