

ECON-118-2
Economics of Sustainability

Classroom: BRE 209

Karl Seeley (he/him/his), GOL 231

Student Support Hours: M 1:00-3:00; Tu 12:30-2:30; W 12:30-1:30

Contact Information: seeleyk@hartwick.edu; 607 431-4628

Key Academic Deadlines:

Last Day to Add: January 6

Last Day to Drop: January 21

Link to academic deadlines:

<https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-resources/academic-deadlines-important-dates-2025-2026/>

“Sustainability” is a popular word. What does it mean in practice? What are the economic forces that push us in unsustainable directions? Can they be harnessed to provide a more durable outcome? In the end, what is it we’re trying to “sustain”?

Learning Outcomes: At the completion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Assess and apply varied definitions of “sustainability”
2. Identify the elements of economic structure
3. Demonstrate the role of resources in the economy
4. Identify the roles of cooperation, competition, preferences, and innovation in sustainability
5. Use the supply-and-demand model in sustainability applications
6. Improve in summarizing and responding to assigned readings

Outcomes Assessment:

Grades in this course are based on a version of “specifications grading,” where your overall grade is based on the accomplishment of “Competence” or “Mastery” in the areas listed above. Details are on D2L.

The specific assignments [with associated outcomes in brackets] are:

- Critiques of various definitions of “sustainability” [1]
- Integrative exercises [2, 4]
- Excel work [3]
- Supply-and-demand quizzes and exercises [5]
- Reading summaries [6]
- An individual research question [1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]

What is this course about? (also known as “Catalog Description”): Explores the ecological underpinnings of human economies: how natural constraints influence the kinds of societies a place can support, and the way that new technologies and human choices change our relationship to the environment. We use Hartwick College’s main campus, Pine Lake campus, and the City of Oneonta as a series of living classrooms. The course looks at the roles of markets, governments, and other social structures, and applies the concepts of opportunity cost, supply-and-demand, and economic efficiency to understand patterns of growth and economic change and to consider what “sustainability” is and how to move toward it.

Texts and Other Instructional Materials: All readings will be available either directly on D2L or directed to from there.

Attendance: You’ll learn more by being in class than by not being there. In J-term in particular, each day is an entire 7% of the course time, so missing a single day’s class is a big deal. Sometimes absences are unavoidable. If you need to be absent, communicate with me about it as early as possible and make plans to make up any classwork missed. Note that absence from class doesn’t make assignments go away. Attendance is the most observable form of effort toward learning the material; if you’re missing class without a good reason that’s been communicated to me, I have less motivation to work extra with you. I can’t care more

about your success than you do.

Academic Accommodations:

Hartwick College is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students, and welcomes students with disabilities into all the College's educational programs. The AccessAbility Services Office is responsible for the determination of appropriate modifications for students who encounter barriers due to a disability. If a student with a disability wishes to request academic accommodations, they should contact Lara Sanford, Director of AccessAbility Services and Academic Inclusivity, at

AccessAbilityServices@hartwick.edu. To serve you best, requests should be made as early as possible. Please let me know if you have questions or need assistance. **I am committed to creating a course that is inclusive in its design. If you encounter barriers, please let me know immediately so that we can determine if there is a design adjustment that can be made or if accommodation might be needed to overcome the limitations of the design.** I am always happy to consider creative solutions provided they do not compromise the intent of the assessment or learning activity.

Course Schedule: See D2L.

Inclement Weather Plans: If the operation of campus is affected by bad weather, check both your email and D2L. To the extent that the internet situation allows, I'll use one or both of those to communicate with you what we will be doing with our class.

ChatGPT etc.

AI is a tool. In practiced hands, a tool can help you do better work. If a skilled wood carver obtains a sharp, well-shaped chisel, it will get easier for her to produce a good sculpture than before. But the tool doesn't make the craft. An unskilled carver working with a sharp tool will find that it's gotten easier to damage a piece of wood, but still won't produce good art. If you acquire an understanding of the economic concepts covered in this course, AI *might* help you present them better. But AI itself won't help you learn them, and it is unlikely to help you write good assignments if you haven't started assimilating those concepts and turning them into tools that you carry around in your own mind.

The University of North Carolina has developed a set of guidelines for the use of AI in college courses, and there is some good material there: <https://provost.unc.edu/student-generative-ai-usage-guidance/>.

Phones/Computers in the classroom

Like ChatGPT, phones and computers are tools—in the right hands, they can help people do more stuff, and with better quality. But they can also be a powerful source of distraction. Our class period is 55 minutes long. Treat each one as an opportunity to practice being present and to build some separation between you and your phone.

College Policies and Campus Resources *Refamiliarize yourself with these*

- **Academic Honesty:** <https://www.hartwick.edu/academics/student-services/academic-affairs/academic-policies/>
- **Title IX/Sexual Misconduct:** <https://www.hartwick.edu/about-us/employment/human-resources/title-ix/>
- **Counseling:** <https://www.hartwick.edu/campus-life/health-wellness/counseling-center/>

Sample Schedule

I.	1	Basic concepts	Bus game
	2	Energy	Energy data: big picture; supply/demand; ETTA
	3	Energy	Uses of energy
II.	4	Energy	Guest: Norm Farwell, former energy-efficiency retrofitter; Ultimatum game
	5	Food	Energy in the food system
	6	Food	Non-energy impacts of agriculture
	7	Food	Fisheries as a model of bio-economic systems
III.	8	Food	Pushing the envelope
	9	Settlement	Curitiba; Contribution game
	10	Settlement	Town & country (structure of the economy)
IV.	11	Settlement	Possible field trip, Pine Lake
	12	Settlement	Possible field trip, Greater Oneonta Historical Society
	13	An end-point?	Half Earth
	14		Discussion recap