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STR 30: Sustainable Development and the Prosperity of Humankind

Dates: September 5 – December 1, 2019

Faculty: Arthur Lyon Dahl, Christine Muller, Laurent Mesbah

Course Description:

Many people are troubled by the poverty and suffering of people at home and abroad, concerned about the future of their children, and worried about the destruction of the environment on which their lives depend. These are the challenges of sustainable development, requiring a fundamental transformation in the economic, social and environmental actions of our lives and society. This course will explore the profound implications for sustainability of our higher human purpose, as explained in the Baha'i teachings, and the scientific and spiritual principles that can ensure the future prosperity of humankind.

Today the nations have agreed on Sustainable Development Goals with detailed targets and indicators that define how to reach sustainability by 2030, leaving no one behind. We shall explore the concept of sustainability in all its dimensions, and how only an ethical and spiritual transformation as defined in the Bahá'í authoritative texts will motivate people to transform their individual lifestyles and their local communities as essential steps towards a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future.

Learning Objectives: To acquire the capacity:

- To explain the concept and issues behind sustainable development, how it evolved, why it is important, and how it affects people today and in the future
- To understand the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals as the present global framework for action
- To relate sustainability to the issues of the environment, economic development, wealth and poverty, and social development in an integrated systems perspective
- To see the relevance of sustainability as a priority for communities, national governments, and the international system
- To identify ways you can live more sustainably that are consistent with your own spiritual and ethical values, and to explain your choices to others
- To plan ways to educate others about the material and spiritual dimensions of sustainable development
- To demonstrate your understanding through postings in the course, weekly essays, and a final paper or project

Course Expectations:

- This course is divided into one-week (or less) sessions beginning with an orientation unit and ending with a unit for review and summary. All units include video presentations, readings, and online discussion among course participants. The course has been structured so that it typically requires an estimated 6 hours per week of readings and graded discussion, in addition to the videos and a graded weekly essay. A final project or paper is expected.
- Because the requirements of colleges and universities differ widely, the course can be taken at one of three different levels:
- STR 130: The 100-level requirements are suitable for many freshmen (first-year) students. In addition to the readings and videos, the student is expected to complete at least two postings in the discussion forum

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of each unit, one of which should be at least 300 words in length and reflective of what the student has learned. The final project is a paper of at least 5 pages or a PowerPoint and recorded presentation to the course.

- STR 330: The 300-level requirements are suitable for juniors and seniors or students at more rigorous universities. In addition to the readings and videos, the student is expected to complete at least two postings in the graded discussion form of each unit, one of which should be substantive, and a 500 to 750-word (2-3 page) graded essay each unit. The final project is a paper of at least 10 pages (exclusive of bibliography) or equivalent.
- STR 530: The 500-level requirements are suitable for Master's degree students. In addition to the readings and videos, the student is expected to complete at least two postings in the graded discussion form of each unit, one of which should be substantive, and a 500 to 750-word (2-3 page) graded essay each unit. The final project is a research paper of at least 15 pages (exclusive of bibliography) or equivalent.
- Additional requirements may be requested by the credit-grading institution.

Course Readings:

Arthur Lyon Dahl, *The Eco Principle; Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis*. This is the primary text for the course. Every unit includes a reader of authoritative Bahá'í texts and scholarship, links to videos and web pages, and/or additional supplementary readings for higher level requirements.

Course Discussion:

Your instructor will periodically review your progress in the course and be available to discuss things with you. The following guidelines will help you gain maximum benefit from your participation in the course and will contribute toward a rich and rewarding experience through dialogue with others.

- Complete the readings and activities for each unit. Afterwards, your first posting in the discussion area should make reference to the readings and activities in such a way that your instructor can tell you read the material and engaged in the activities.
- Post at least 2 message replies in the discussion area for each unit/session. Each post should contain substantive comments (i.e., a comment like "oh, that's interesting" is NOT substantive).
- Choose at least 2 different days each session when you will participate in the discussions. We suggest posting at least once within the first few days of the session, with your second post at least two days before the next session begins. By contributing more than one post on different days, you will help the group develop rich ongoing discussions.
- If you post on time (i.e., within the time period of each unit on the course schedule), others will be able to read and respond to your post.
- Keep a course journal to help you track your ideas as you work on your final project.

Preparatory Tasks:

1. Watch the Director's Welcome Video, read about the Technology Requirements of the course, the Technical Assistance we can provide, and our ability to Accommodate Disabilities.
1. Create or update your personal profile.
2. Tour the course website to get better acquainted with the elements of a course:
 - a. Open and glance through a few of the Unit pages, including the readings and discussion forum.
 - b. Look at the items in the sidebars (columns).
 - c. Take a look at the other elements on the course site.
3. Read through the information pages and watch the videos about our Moodle course delivery platform.

Course Schedule:

Unit 1	Getting Started: Welcome to Sustainable Development	Sept. 5-8, 2019
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In this unit, you will review the unit topics and dates, learn how to use Moodle (our course management system), set up your user profile, and learn how to post and reply in the discussion forums.

Other learning objectives:

- To develop a Personal Learning Plan
- To imagine and discuss a vision for a sustainable future society

Video:

Wilmette Institute web talk on The Transition to Sustainability with Arthur Lyon Dahl

Discussion topic:

Write a paragraph or two on the forum giving your vision of the future

Unit 2	The Concept of Sustainable Development: Origins and Evolution	Sept. 9-15
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Learning objectives:

- To explain the concept of sustainable development
- To examine the history of international efforts for environment and sustainability
- To appreciate the important role that women have played in defining sustainability

Readings:

[United Nations Environment Programme, Global Environment Outlook 4, ch. 1: Environment for Development \(34 pages with many graphics\)](#)

[World Commission on Environment and Development \(Brundtland\) 1987: Our Common Future](#), Overview

The Rio Declaration and summary of Agenda 21 (to be added)

Dahl, *The Eco Principle*, Chapter 1, pp. 1-6

Dahl (1996), *The Eco Principle*: ch. 2, pp. 7-28

[Bahá'í Quotations on Environment and Sustainable Development, Opening section: Spiritual Principles \(first 3 paragraphs in the compilation\)](#)

Video:

Dahl presentation on women in environment and sustainability (in ppt, to be recorded)

Discussion topics:

1. What is the goal of sustainable development?
1. Why do you think it has been so hard to put sustainable development into practice?

Unit 3	The 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals	Sept. 16-22
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Learning objectives:

- To understand the current United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their implementation
- To consider the ethical implications of the SDGs

Readings:

[Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General \(2014\), paragraphs 1-35, 46-86, 131-132, and 157-161](#)

Selections from *Transforming Our World, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (to be added)

IEF: Baha'i texts for each of the SDGs: <https://iefworld.org/node/882#Bahai>

Videos:

The Sustainable Development Goals – Action Towards 2030.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit: 17 Goals to Transform Our World

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals, Talk by Matthias Klettermayer

Discussion topics:

1. Which SDGs are most relevant to your own community?
2. What is your country, state or community doing to implement the SDGs?
3. How do the Sustainable Development Goals reflect ethical or moral principles?

Unit 4 Systems Approaches: Integration, Science and Ethics

Sept. 23-29

Learning objectives:

- To learn the basics of systems thinking and examples of systems approaches
- To perceive the interconnectedness of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability
- To understand the harmony of science and religion in addressing sustainability
- To appreciate the importance of religious or ethical principles for achieving sustainable development.

Readings:

Dahl, *The Eco Principle*, Chapter 4, The theory of Ecos, pp. 46-61

Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (2001) [Science, Religion and Development: Some Initial Considerations](#)

Selected Baha'i writings illustrating systems thinking
(others to be identified)

Discussion topics:

1. What new insights do you get by considering something in a systems perspective?
1. Can you think of an issue that does not have economic, social and environmental dimensions? Why not?
2. How might faith-based organizations support actions for sustainability?

Unit 5 The Environmental Challenge: Harmony with Nature

Sept. 30-Oct. 6

Learning objectives:

- To explain the different areas of environmental sustainability and the concept of planetary limits
- To perceive the need to respect and conserve nature.
- To discover how spiritual principles help us address environmental problems
- To find practical ways of living more environmentally sustainably
- To educate and empower others to work for an environmentally sustainable society

Readings:

[United Nations Environment Programme \(2012\). *Global Environment Outlook 5*, Summary for Policy-Makers, 1. Critical Thresholds and 3. Environmental Deterioration, pp. 6-13](#)

[Dahl, *The Eco Principle*, ch. 3: Where are we going? pp. 29-45](#)

Dahl, *The Eco Principle*, ch. 5: Ecos in nature, pp. 62-68

[Climate Change and Its Ethical Challenges](#), *The Bahá'í World 2004-2005*.

[Bahá'í Quotations on Environment and Sustainable Development: The Environment](#)

Videos:

Global Environment Outlook (GEO-5) UNEP

Abundance within planetary boundaries - by Professor Dr Johan Rockström

Discussion topics:

1. What do planetary environmental limits mean for sustainable development?

1. What do ethical principles tell us about our responsibility for the environment?
2. What are the implications of environmental vulnerability for our local resource use and waste management?

Unit 6 Economic Development and Sustainability: Poverty and Wealth

Oct. 7-13

Learning objectives:

- To identify some characteristics of the Western economic system that make it unsustainable
- To appraise the value of work in development
- To identify preconceptions about poverty and wealth and modify them to help achieve sustainable development
- To reflect on the meaning of true prosperity

Readings:

Dahl, *The Eco Principle*: Chapter 6, A more organic economics, pp. 69-96.

UNEP, *Towards a Green Economy, Summary of the Conclusions* (2 p.)

[Bahá'í International Community, *The Prosperity of Humankind*](#)

[Bahá'í Quotations on Environment and Sustainable Development: Economic Sustainability](#)

Videos:

Income and Wealth Inequality: Crash Course Economics

May Akale, Commission for Social Development - Baha'i International Community Oral Statement

Discussion topics:

1. What are some of the characteristics of the Western economic system that make it unsustainable?
2. What role does work play in development?
3. What attitudes towards poverty and wealth will help us to achieve sustainable development?

Unit 7 Social Development: Crises and Solutions

Oct. 14-20

Learning objectives:

- To identify the different areas of social unsustainability globally and in your local or national community
- To assess the importance of values for social development
- To apply Baha'i principles to social development, specifically the principles of trustworthiness, unity, justice, and service
- To discuss the important roles in social change of currently marginalized people, specifically women, indigenous people, the poor, and youth
- To demonstrate your learning by contributing in some way to social development in your community

Readings:

[Dahl, *The Eco Principle* \(1996\), ch. 7: Human Capital \(pp. 97-130\)](#)

[Bahá'í Quotations on Environment and Sustainable Development: Social Sustainability](#)

Videos:

Green Economy and Sustainable Development: Bringing Back the Social

Tim Jackson (2010), An economic reality check

Discussion topics:

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1. What are some of the principles of social organization that can guide society to a more sustainable course?
2. Why is it important to consider the spiritual dimension in social development?
3. Can terrorism be considered a symptom of unsustainability?

Unit 8 Implementing Sustainability: Individual and Community Action

Oct. 21-27

Learning objectives:

- To extend the concept of sustainable practices to the community and individual levels
- To consider how generalized goals can be turned into concrete actions
- To learn how to organize a community activity that has a sustainable goal

Readings: (others to be identified)

IEF: SDGs at the community level: <https://iefworld.org/node/882#Communities>

[Global Ecovillage Network, Community Sustainability Assessment](#)

Videos:

UNDP & the Sustainable Development Goals

Discussion topics:

1. What does sustainable development mean for your own lifestyle?
1. How sustainable is your community or neighborhood, and what could make it better?
2. Who might be potential partners for a community sustainability action?

Unit 9 Governance for Sustainability: Processes, Institutions, Indicators

Oct. 28-Nov. 3

Learning objectives:

- To appreciate the relevance of governance processes for organizing and regulating a more sustainable society.
- To consider multilevel governance and which issues are best treated at each level: local, national, global.
- To evaluate existing institutions of governance and consider possible improvements
- To learn about indicators as tools to identify the status and trends of key factors relevant to sustainability

Readings:

Dahl, *The Eco Principle*, Chapter 8: Organic communities and institutions, pp. 132-156

Possibly selections from: Monkelbaan, Joachim. 2018. *Governance for the Sustainable Development Goals: Exploring an Integrative Framework of Theories, Tools, and Competencies*. Tokyo: Springer

Bahá'í International Community: [*Valuing Spirituality in Development: Initial Considerations Regarding the Creation of Spiritually Based Indicators for Development*](#).

Dahl (2014), "Putting the Individual at the Centre of Development: Indicators of Well-being for a New Social Contract" <https://iefworld.org/ddahl13a>.

Videos:

Ebbfgovernance – what new forms of governance are SDGs enabling? (Dahl)

Discussion topics:

1. What dimensions of sustainability are most in need of better governance?
1. How might a strong ethical framework in the general public reduce the need for governance?
2. What indicators might be appropriate for a sustainability issue that particularly concerns you?

Unit 10 Education for Sustainable Development and Responsible Living Nov. 4-10

Learning objectives:

- To discuss sustainable development at the individual level
- To design an action plan to live in a more sustainable way
- To assess the status of sustainability in your own community
- To explain to your community the importance of sustainability and to support it on its path to implement more sustainable practices

Readings: (to be identified)

IEF SDGs for individuals: <https://iefworld.org/node/882#Individuals>

Videos:

[What Sustainable Living Means to Me.](#)

Discussion topics:

1. How can we implement sustainable development at the individual level?
2. What are the most unsustainable things about life in your own community?
3. What do you plan to do after this course to live more sustainably?

Unit 11 Future Perspectives on the Prosperity of Humankind: Crises and Responses Nov. 11-17

Learning objectives:

- To examine different scenarios that explain how present Western civilization is unsustainable
- To develop a vision of a sustainable world and to perceive the changes that are necessary to make society more sustainable
- To apply ethical/spiritual principles that would make those changes possible

Readings:

[United Nations Environment Programme \(2012\), *Global Environment Outlook 5*, ch. 16: Scenarios and Sustainability Transformation](#)

[Bahá'í Quotations on Environment and Sustainable Development: Transformation - a New World Order](#)

[Dahl \(1996\), *The Eco Principle*, ch. 9, *Visions of an eco-civilization*, pp. 157-170](#)

[Meadows, Donella et al \(2004\), *Limits to Growth: The 30-year Update: Chapter 8*: Tools for the transition to sustainability \(p. 265-284\)](#)

Videos:

2 September 2015 GEPP Policy Dialogue - Implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Challenges and Responses (Dahl segment)

Wilmette Institute webinar [Eleven - The Future of Global Population](#)

Discussion topics:

1. How are economic, social and environmental dimensions linked?
2. What do scenarios tell us about the sustainability of present Western civilization?
3. What changes are necessary to make society more sustainable?
4. What are some of the ethical/spiritual principles that would make those changes possible?

Two weeks to write the final paper or project and wrap up any other work.

Faculty

Lead Faculty: Arthur Lyon Dahl



Professor Arthur Lyon Dahl of Geneva, Switzerland (<http://yabaha.net/dahl>), is President of the International Environment Forum (<https://iefworld.org>), a retired Deputy Assistant Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and a consultant on environmental assessment, observing strategies, indicators of sustainability, coral reefs, biodiversity, islands, environmental education, and social and economic development. He holds an AB in Biological Sciences from Stanford University and a PhD in Biology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has published many scientific papers and books including: *Unless and Until: A Baha'i Focus on the Environment* and *The Eco Principle:*

Ecology and Economics in Symbiosis.

Support Faculty: Christine Muller



Christine Muller graduated from the Conservatory Basel, Switzerland with degrees in piano teaching and early music education. She has been a lifelong student of the Baha'i Faith and of the environment. She serves as faculty for the Wilmette Institute courses on Climate Change and Sustainable Development, is involved with climate change education and action in the interfaith community, was active on the RI Interfaith Power&Light board for 9 years, and currently serves as board secretary of the Baha'i-inspired [International Environment Forum](#). She wrote the script and songs for a staged reading on Climate Change, Science and Religion, created an [Interfaith Study Course on Climate Change](#), and co-produced the [Story of Stuff: A Baha'i-inspired Program for Youth](#).

Support Faculty: Laurent Mesbah



Laurent Mesbah was born and grew up in France in a multicultural background. He did research and teaching in plant genetics at the free university in Amsterdam, the Netherlands where he completed his Ph.D. In addition Dr. Mesbah completed a certificate of advanced studies in Environmental Diplomacy at the University of Geneva and is member of the International Environment Forum since its foundation in 1997. He has been living in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2000 with his family where he has been involved in education and youth empowerment as well as in managing, implementing and evaluating projects related to sustainable development with international organizations. Laurent teaches environmental sciences and value based leadership at the university and co-founded and leads Bloom Earth School in Sarajevo. Dr. Mesbah has been active in Baha'i institutions since his youth in France, Netherlands, and Bosnia and Herzegovina where he

currently serves as an Auxiliary Board member.