

Syllabus  
Can Humanity Survive Ecological Overshoot and Could it Lead to a Sustainable World?  
8 Weeks on Zoom, Thursday afternoon 1-3 pm  
Facilitator: Dean Tebbe

This course is meant to be thought provoking and not necessarily prescriptive. Key components will be introduced to the class through lectures, video interviews, and documentary film clips, with ample time for questions and discussion.

Session 1: What is ecological overshoot?

We will use “Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change” by William R. Catton, Jr. as a reference to better understand the concepts of overshoot and carrying capacity.

Session 2: Energy Blindness

All species on this planet require energy to survive and grow. We will look at how humans first relied entirely on their food to provide the energy necessary for survival, then advanced to using fire and, subsequently, other animals to increase their available energy.

Session 3: Food and Agriculture

Homo Sapiens has survived for most of its time on earth as a hunter/gatherer. Over the last 10 thousand years humans developed agriculture, which gave them the ability to store food and congregate in one place..

Session 4: Economics and Money

Money is invariably a claim on resources. These are typically physical resources, but can be social or human resources.

Session 5: Will Technology Save Us?

Technology has been with humans since the first tools were developed perhaps hundreds of thousands of years ago. Since the discovery of fossil fuels, technological innovation has typically been used to find ways to utilize cheap energy.

Session 6: What does this mean for the planet?

Human industrial consumer society has already crossed 6 of the 9 planetary boundaries defined at the Stockholm Resilience Centre.

Session 7: Human Behavior and the Meaning Crisis

A large component of the industrial consumer society is the human behavior aspect.

Session 8: What Would a Collapse Look Like and How do we Survive?

We live in a very complex society that is dependent on technology and constant growth. What happens when growth stops and technology can't save us?

Other Information and Resources:

Catton, William R. Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change. 1982  
Mann, Charles C. 1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus. 2006  
Graeber, David and David Wengrow. The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity. 2021  
Tainter, Joseph A. The Collapse of Complex Societies. 1988  
Graeber, David. Debt: The First 5,000 Years. 2014  
Ophuls, William. Apologies to the Grandchildren: Reflections on Our Ecological Predicament, Its Deeper Causes, and Its Political Consequences. 2018