

MESS56, Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science: Sustainability and Popular Culture, 7.5 credits

Miljö- och hållbarhetsvetenskap: Hållbarhet och populärkultur, 7,5 högskolepoäng
Second Cycle / Avancerad nivå

Details of approval

The syllabus was approved by The Board of the Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies on 2017-09-05 (STYR 2017/1123) and was last revised on 2025-02-07 (STYR 2025/368). The revised syllabus comes into effect 2025-02-07 and is valid from the autumn semester 2025.

General information

The course constitutes a 3rd term elective (non-compulsory) course at LUMES, Lund University Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science.

Language of instruction: English

Main field of study

Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science

Specialisation

A1F, Second cycle, has second-cycle course/s as entry requirements

Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, the student shall be able to:

Knowledge and understanding

- Demonstrate critical knowledge and theoretical understanding of popular culture and its representations of nature.

Competence and skills

- Demonstrate the ability to analyze how sustainability discourses are manifested in cultural understandings of nature and the environment.

- Demonstrate the ability to collaborate constructively in a team and communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds.

Judgement and approach

- Demonstrate the ability to critically reflect on and provide examples of the way sustainability is communicated and contested in and through popular culture.

Course content

Discourses of sustainability are increasingly embedded within culture in all of its multiple dimensions, including different worldviews and values, ways of life, and other forms of cultural expression. This increase of sustainability discourses in the daily practices of society might contribute to shift the current unsustainable trajectory.

For this course, popular culture is defined as the entirety of attitudes, ideas, images, perspectives, and other phenomena that are within the mainstream of a given Culture. The most common pop culture categories are: entertainment (movies, music, television, games), sports, news (as in people/places in news), politics and fashion/clothes

The overall aim of this course is to increase the students' awareness and understanding of popular culture and its different representations of sustainability and nature. The course is divided into three parts:

Part 1 will provide an overview of the competing theories and concepts surrounding popular culture and its linkages with sustainability.

Part 2 will examine a series of case studies such as sustainable fashion, food, political campaigns and advertisement, and critically analyze the way they represent sustainability. In this part, the complexities of popular culture are in greater focus. Examples of questions that can be discussed: How advertisement and entertainment influence the ways we imagine nature and the environment; and how ideas about sustainability are communicated in politics through political campaigns.

Part 3 will ask what strategies sustainability studies can learn from popular culture, for example by analysing media strategies of successful sustainability initiatives. The course will, as an example, analyse visual data to understand how visual methods such as photography and documentary film create arenas for the public to engage in and discuss sustainability.

Course design

The teaching consists of lectures and seminars.

Compulsory participation is required in an in-class presentation of a group work. Absence from participation will be compensated with substitute activities.

Assessment

Course assessment is based on:

- Written individual take-home exam, 5 credits

- Oral in-class group exam (peer teaching), 2.5 credits

Each assessment item is designed to further student understanding of, and skills in, analysing and researching popular culture and society.

Three opportunities for examination are offered in conjunction with the course: a first examination and two re-examinations. Two further re-examinations on the same course content are offered within a year of the end of the course. After this, further re-examination opportunities are offered but in accordance with the current course syllabus.

The examiner, in consultation with Disability Support Services, may deviate from the regular form of examination in order to provide a permanently disabled student with a form of examination equivalent to that of a student without a disability.

Grades

Grading scale includes the grades: Fail, Three, Four, Five

The compulsory course component is excluded from the grading scale above. The grade for this component is Participated. For the grade Participated, the student has shown a sufficient result.

At the start of the course, students are informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus and about the grading scale and how it is applied on the course.

Overall course grade

The grade for the entire course consists of the average grade of the two exams that are assessed according to the Fail-3-4-5 grading scale. The oral in-class group exam (peer teaching) is worth 30% of the final grade. The written individual take-home exam is worth 70% of the final grade. For a grade of 3 on the entire course the student must have been awarded at least 3 on all graded exams and have participated in the compulsory component.

Exam	Credits	Grades	Part of final grade for the course
Oral in-class group exam (peer teaching)	2.5	Fail-3-4-5	30%
Written individual take-home exam	5	Fail-3-4-5	70%
In-class presentation of group-work (compulsory component)	0	Participated	0%
	7.5		100%

Example: The student got the grade 3 on the oral group in-class exam and the grade of 5 on the written individual take-home exam (and participated in the compulsory component). The final grade is 4 $((3*30)+(5*70))/100=4.4 < 4.5$ is rounded down and 4.5, 4.5 > is rounded up.

Entry requirements

To be admitted to the course, students must be admitted to Lund University International Master's Programme in Environmental Studies and Sustainability Science 120 credits, and have fulfilled course requirements of at least forty higher education credits in the programme.