

**Instructor Note:** *The following are the actual, unedited evaluations of AECN/NRES 883 Ecological Economics (it was numbered as 896 at that time) provided by the Spring, 2006, class which involved 14-students... with about one-half of these students in each group (on-campus and off-campus/distance ed). We have added a "Comment" at the end of each section to help in understanding the Evaluations. We will do our best to address the concerns expressed herein, as well as offered by you during the time you take the class. As you will learn when you see our "metaeconomics," the notion of empathy... walking-in-your-shoes and modifying instructor behavior accordingly... is prominent in the economics and the approach in this class. If you have specific questions/concerns after reading these materials, please feel free to contact me directly (Gary Lynne, [glynne1@unl.edu](mailto:glynne1@unl.edu); the approach of the course is described at <http://agecon.unl.edu/lynne/ecocon/ecoconsyllabus.htm> )*

**COURSE CONTENT: Please give your comments of the course content, subject matter, and any particular relevance this course has had to your area of study.**

The course was very interesting but a prerequisite, basic course in Economics, was misleading. Even friends, who did not take this course, who majored in business and/or economics agreed it was more in-depth than a basic economics course entails. I did not feel I got the most out of this course because of it. I do feel I can take some aspects of this course and apply it to future studies and career.

Not very satisfied with the textbook in terms of fail to provide new opinions using strong evidence, and relevant examples. Most of time, the authors just offer loosely or generally speaking.

I believe the discussion boards really detracted from what they were intended to do. Early on, it was a discussion, however it quickly turned into a public posting of one's homework. The requirements for posting were such that it left little room for discussion. So, instead, there are 20-40 posts generally stating the same thing. Overall, the workload was too much.

OK, since criticism seems to be the order of the day in these things, one little bit... the last few weeks have been a fast and furious run-through of the material. I'm not sure there is any other way to do it (heaven knows, the first few weeks were also that way because there were so many ideas and readings to think and talk about), but it is a bit disconcerting. The content has been wonderful! Of course, I now want to go find a few economics classes - maybe another degree? - so that I can get a better understanding both of the ecological economics side of things and of the traditional economics side of things... The topic is pertinent to the world today. It involves everything that we are and do - especially the problematic aspects. I think something similar to this class should be required by everyone before leaving college! It should be common knowledge!

It has helped me broaden my knowledge on the topic of environment, ecology and natural resources. More than anything else it has given me hope that the world can be made a better place!!!

Ecological economics is very interesting, but difficult to integrate into broader or alternate frameworks. It tends to be very Utopian at times, almost to a fault. I am glad I took the course and now know more about the subject, but I expect that it will be difficult or impossible for me to integrate the content of this course into my future academic and professional pursuits.

I was under the assumption that this course was going to be much more multidisciplinary than it was. If I had to choose between this course and another environmental elective; I would take the other environmental elective. Course content was more aligned for persons having an advanced economics base.

I am not sure what the prerequisites were for this class. Not having an economics background made some theories and discussions quite difficult. It seemed as though most of the students were more advanced in economics than myself, thus my discussion was not on a comparable level. I felt extremely elementary compared to other students.

Although "values" were quite difficult to me to associate in an economics class, they have been very useful to me to understand society behavior. My research has a strong emphasis in rural sociology and that combination of values with economics, philosophy and natural resources has enriched my knowledge.

### **Comment by the Instructor:**

*I certainly can see the point and the merit of many of these critiques, especially regarding the necessary amount of background training in economics. Intriguingly, though, there was only one student in the class with advanced training in economics, working on a PhD in the field. The rest had very modest backgrounds in economics, and some had virtually no formal training. This is a difficult one to resolve: Ecological Economics is by its nature transdisciplinary, so it does draw on the best parts of many disciplines. Also, students taking this class earn graduate credit: So, we need to draw on economic ideas (as well as ideas out of other disciplines) that are in alignment with a graduate level of training in the field. We continue to work at explaining such ideas in the terms and ways that make sense to those with only minimal formal training in economics. We also take account of these backgrounds when we grade exams, problem sets, etc. Also, as you can see from the above, there is not full agreement on the balance we did achieve: At least one student expresses disappointment that the book (and the Instructors) did not go deeper! Students will also have to understand that graduate education is largely about self-education, self-study: We mainly just point to the path, and do our best to help light that path enough such that you can at least see the terrain over and through which it passes.*

*Also, as we had hoped, students with more background in economics were helping other students (and vice versa: those with more background in other areas were helping those trained more deeply in economics), during the Discussion Board: The Board turned into a learning community, far more so than indicated by the few negative comments about it.*

*Regarding the Discussion Board, please see the Rubric (in the Syllabus) which we used in grading the dialogue: This will also help in understanding the evaluations of the Discussion Board.*

*We are quite encouraged by the enthusiastic and hopeful comments about the nature of the topics being addressed in the course. We, too, believe a good understanding of the material in this course will work to help each student (and the instructors) make this world a better place.*

*We are also not sure what the comment “I was under the assumption that this course was going to be much more multidisciplinary ” is all about. Ecological Economics is not a “multi-discipline”... nor is it an “inter-discipline” rather it is about integration of substantive ideas out of many disciplines... more like a “trans-discipline.” Ecological Economics has a different scientific foundation than either ecology or economics, which makes it unique. This is not a survey course pulling together material from many, multi-disciplines: Rather, it is a serious attempt at true integration of materials/ideas/science from several disciplines, reflecting the long-term focus of the Instructor’s research program.*