

Course Title: Introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Numbering code : INTD1001

Instructor: Hideo ICHIHASHI, Professor, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Saitama University

Medium of Instruction: English

Intended for: First- and second-year undergraduate students interested in global issues and sustainable development

Credit Value: 1 credits (Saitama University standard)

Schedule: November 28, 2025 – January 29, 2026 (7 weeks)

Prerequisites

- A willingness to understand the SDGs and their historical background.
- Prior knowledge of the SDGs is not required, but students must be prepared to consider the historical context, key concepts, problems, and challenges underlying their development.

Theme

Thinking about the historical background and key concepts of the SDGs.

Learning Objectives

- a) Gain an understanding of the 17 SDG goals and be able to outline their significance and associated challenges.
- b) Gain a contextual, historical and conceptual understanding of the SDGs and be able to critically discuss them in light of their origins.

Relationship with the Learning and Educational Goals

Saitama University, as the only national university in Saitama Prefecture, forming part of the Tokyo metropolitan area, aims to foster human resources that meet the needs of the local community and contribute to the international community by cultivating diverse global talent. Among the university-wide common goals for graduation certification and degree conferment at the undergraduate level, this course offers content that leads to "acquisition of broad fundamental knowledge with expertise." Evaluation will be conducted rigorously based on clear criteria. The course aligns with the university's diploma policy by promoting critical thinking on global issues through historical inquiry and interdisciplinary engagement.

Keywords

SDGs, United Nations, development, social construction, environment, peace, partnership, civil society, human rights.

Course Overview

This course does not provide a general introduction to the SDGs themselves. Rather, it examines the historical and conceptual foundations and issues of the SDGs. It approaches global issues mentioned in the SDGs as socially constructed phenomena and considers the particular difficulties associated with environmental issues and minority rights.

Course Format

The course will be conducted online. You will watch and listen to the pre-recorded session contents, which will become available at the start of each week and remain accessible until the end of the course.

After each session, students are required to complete quizzes and submit a comment on the session topic within the designated week.

All session contents, quizzes, and information related to course progress and assignments will be posted on WebClass. Checking WebClass frequently is a requirement for this course.

Study Outside of Class

Students are expected to read the SDGs-related materials listed in the textbook section and review all uploaded PDFs on WebClass prior to each session. A total of approximately four hours of study is recommended for preparation and review per class session.

Weekly Syllabus

1. (Nov 28–Dec 4) Introduction - Basic Knowledge for Understanding the SDGs
2. (Dec 5–11) Background of the SDGs: A Look Back at the History of the United Nations
3. (Dec 12–18) Revisiting 'Development' in the Context of the SDGs
4. (Dec 19–25) Socially Constructed Global Issues: 'Social Problems' from the Perspective of Social Constructionism
5. (Jan 9–15) Some Findings in the Sustainable Development Report
6. (Jan 16–22) Why the Climate Crisis cannot be Mitigated?
7. (Jan 23–29) 'Human Rights' and the SDGs

Quizzes and reflection comment for each session must be submitted within the designated week to receive credit.

Grading

There are three parts to the grade:

1. Each week I will ask students a couple of quizzes (20%).
2. Each week I will ask students to write their reflection comment on the topic of the session (30%).
3. Finally, students will write a short essay (2,000 words) on the SDGs. Students will choose their own essay topic which must be relevant to the themes discussed in the course (50%).

Grading Standard

Based on the regulations concerning credit recognition at Saitama University, students will be evaluated according to how well they achieved the learning objectives:

- S (4.0): Exceeded the objectives and is outstanding overall
- A+ (3.5): Exceeded the objectives and is excellent in part
- A (3.0): Exceeded the objectives
- B+ (2.5): Fully achieved the objectives and is excellent in part
- B (2.0): Fully achieved the objectives
- C+ (1.5): Partially achieved the objectives and exceeds B level in some areas
- C (1.0): Partially achieved the objectives
- D (0.0): Did not achieve the objectives
- F (0.0): No basis for measuring achievement

Credits and Certification

Students who successfully complete all required assignments, quizzes, and the final essay will be awarded official academic credit issued by Saitama University. The credit will be recorded on an official Saitama University transcript and may be recognised by the student's home university in accordance with its academic policies.

Textbooks

United Nations, A United Nations' web page on the 17 Goals.
(<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>)
United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2015. (will be uploaded to WebClass; also available for free download online)
Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Getting Started with the Sustainable Development Goals: A Guide for Stakeholders, 2015. (will be uploaded to WebClass; also available for free download online)
Thomas Pogge, World Poverty and Human Rights, Polity, 2010.

Message to Students

You can study the SDGs themselves on your own, and many reference books are available. Rather than simply acquiring standardised knowledge of the SDGs, this course encourages students to explore the historical context and key concepts in which the SDGs were developed, in order to gain deeper insight into their significance.

Office Hours

This is an online course and I am based in Saitama, Japan, so I will not be available for office hours; but if you have a question, please email me using the WebClass email function.