Don't take this too seriously--it's just an attempt to say what I think the program is all about. But if you disagree, or have different emphases, or simply want to say it all differently, feel free to rewrite it or edit the hell out of it. Burt

THE GOOD LIFE: ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMICS, ESTHETICS

This program will investigate a hypothesis about the Earth's environment and what the Good Life--both for people and for the planet--entails. Planet Earth is a sick patient. The planet's illness stems from a surface infection by humans who are temporarily outstripping all of their resources through unrestrained population and economic growth. The outlook for humans and the entire biosphere is grim.

Among the complex factors driving population growth and environmental destruction, two points seem to stand out. First, the underlying forces are primarily economic, the result of a largely unregulated capitalist economy, which seems to be incompatible with a sustainable society. Second, this economy promotes societal values that encourage destruction of the natural environment; when the prime values are economic and materialistic--the accumulation of money, land, and possessions--the natural world becomes merely an object to be exploited for short-term gains. Thus, humans become caught up in a positive feedback loop of alienation from the natural world, whereas the good life entails a strong esthetic and ecological sense of closeness to that world. Thus, all sense of values is lost. Humans become more destructive, both of the environment and of human society, and are increasingly drawn into a rat race in which their lives become more frantic, more stressful, less satisfying, less meaningful.

This is our hypothesis about the present condition of humanity and the world that must sustain it. The purpose of the program is, first, to investigate the hypothesis, challenge it, and search for supporting evidence; second, to search for alternatives and solutions. Economists are searching for alternative economic systems that are compatible with sustainability; we will investigate these. Philosophers talk about values and, especially, about esthetic values that are integral to the good (and sustainable) life. We will discuss values and the importance of esthetic values in the attitudes of humans toward the environment.

Along the way, we will learn something about this environment that so concerns us--about its ecology, its diversity, its beauty. In addition to a lot of reading and discussion, our days will be filled with observation, drawing, journal writing, and quiet reflection. Perhaps we can even live a bit of the Good Life as we learn what that life entails.

F, W, S: Core Program
Coordinator: Brian or Burt ?
Enrollment: 60 or 80; Faculty, 3 or 4
Prerequisites: None
Special expenses: None
Part-time options: No
Internships possibilities: ??