Syllabus

Course Overview

The primary goal of this course is to introduce sociology students to the growing intellectual and pragmatic interest in the relationship between people and the environment. We will focus on the sociological aspects of environmental issues, drawing from literature in social inequality, political sociology, social psychology, and culture. Our focus on social movements and policy bolsters the view that environmental issues are fundamentally structural, and must be understood as such in order to be addressed. Additionally, we will draw from literature on inequality and globalization to inform our understanding of the relationship between structural conditions and lived experiences of individuals in our own country and abroad.

In order to address the main concerns within environmental sociology, this course is divided into four sections.

I. What is environmental sociology?
   In the first section of the course, we will examine how social scientists approach environmental issues. We will focus on several sociological frameworks, including political economy, social inequality, and social psychology, to help us understand environmental issues.

II. What is the relationship between people and the environment?
   In the second section of the course, we will investigate the various ways in which people shape environmental conditions, and how those conditions, in turn, shape people’s lives. We will examine the economy, production, consumption, and development, and how each of these in turn impacts various environmental issues. Throughout this section, we will give particular attention to both historical trends and contemporary problems.

III. How does social inequality affect the relationship between people and the environment?
   In the third section of the course, we will consider how socio-cultural processes inform the ways in which people and the environment interact. This section focuses on social inequality, and how the environmental experiences of people living in low-income and/or minority neighborhoods differ markedly from those living in middle- and upper class and/or predominantly white neighborhoods.
IV. How do people respond to environmental problems?
In the final section of the course, we will explore responses to the issues we cover in the first half of the course at several different levels of analysis, including the individual, community, social movement, institutional, and governmental. Specifically, we will explore the environmental justice movement, workers' rights, fair trade, climate change, and greening trends on college campuses. Finally, we will investigate the historic and current policies that legislate our interactions with the natural world.

COURSE GOALS

Through class discussions each week, students will learn how to express thoughts on complex problems in an articulate, respectful manner with fellow classmates. Students will also be able to think through the pros and cons of current environmental initiatives and address how intended and unintended consequences affect the outcomes of those initiatives. Finally, students will have the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained throughout the semester to a community problem and work through a proposed solution to the problem.

By the end of the semester, students will be familiar with various aspects of environmental sociology, as well as historic and current attempts to implement environmental initiatives. Additionally, students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of how environmental, economic, and social systems are interrelated, and how sustainability is affected by, and affects, all three of these interrelated systems.

GENERAL INFORMATION

I expect regular class attendance. If you have more than three absences at the end of the semester, I reserve the right to lower your grade. Latecomers disrupt the class. Be on time. 3 late arrivals = 1 absence. Please talk to me beforehand if you anticipate missing a class. It is your responsibility to obtain notes from your classmates if you miss a class.

It is disruptive and unprofessional for a cell phone to go off in class. Turn them off (not on vibrate) before class starts. If your cell phone goes off in class, I reserve the right to lower your grade.

Laptop policy: Please ask permission if you prefer to take notes on your laptop. If I notice you navigating away from course material, I will ask that you put it away. I will also request that you send your notes to me via email so that I can verify that you are staying on task. Note: Research has found that students who take handwritten notes remember more of the material and possess a deeper understanding of the material than students who take notes via laptop. For additional information, see: http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/

I expect frequent, active participation from students. We will have class discussions about the readings every week, and therefore I expect you to have completed the readings before we meet each class period. Regular attendance and participation will work to your advantage and will be taken into account when determining final grades.
The readings we cover will certainly be cause for lively discussion regarding several sociological topics. I do not expect all of you to agree on these topics, and I will encourage you to talk through your varying viewpoints during our discussions. However, I will not tolerate discourteous behavior or language during class discussions. If at any point in the semester you become uncomfortable because of a comment made in class, please contact me as soon as possible.

Please complete the readings prior to class on the day they are assigned. I strongly encourage you to take notes as you read, and bring the readings and your notes to class each day. Not all readings are created equally. Some are more difficult than others. Days with more easily digestible material may require you to read up to 4 articles/chapters. As you approach sociological readings, I encourage you to ask yourself the following questions: What is the point of the article? What is the research question? What theories and methods do the author(s) rely upon? What are their findings? How does it relate to other things that we have read? Knowing the answers to each of these questions prior to class for each reading will bolster our class discussions of the material.

The required text is available at the Oberlin Bookstore. In addition to the full text, you will be reading numerous articles and individual book chapters. These articles are available through the class’s Blackboard site under the Readings tab. These readings are denoted by an asterisk (*) below.

**Required Text**


(Referred to as “ES” throughout the course schedule)

**Requirements**

**Blog:** Our class has a blog on the Blackboard course site. You will post 6 entries throughout the semester. Your entries must relate course concepts and theories to relevant news stories or cultural phenomena. This assignment is meant to encourage you to think about the issues we discuss in class as they are occurring in the real world (much of the material we will cover lends itself to this very well). Your entries should be at least 350 words. The blogs are due on Blackboard by 1:30 pm the day of class. This is my way of ensuring that you engage in the readings and class discussions, and continue to think about the issues we raise outside of the classroom. The blog also gives you an opportunity to be engaged citizens, consuming news stories in a thoughtful, critical manner. You may post more than the 6 required blogs, and I encourage you to comment on your classmates’ posts as well.

**Writing Assignments:** There are two writing assignments in this class. The first consists of a reflection of your own experiences with sustainability and environmental issues, as well as a sociological analysis of your environmental identity, concerns, skepticisms, and behaviors. The second writing assignment
consists of a letter to the editor, in which you respond to a letter-writer claiming that climate change is a hoax. I will distribute more information on these assignments as their due dates approach.

Written assignments are due at the beginning of class. You may submit them to me either via email (in a Word document) or a paper copy given to me. Late assignments will lose one letter grade per day that it is late.

Final Paper: You will write a 12-15 page final paper. For this paper, you will choose a class topic to explore in greater detail. This may include anything from a specific environmental justice issue to international environmental law. How have other sociologists approached the issue? What do they focus on? What do they leave out? What are some ideas for future work in the field? You must include at least 5 academic readings (articles or books) that we do not cover in class in your paper. In order to keep you on task and thinking about your paper, you will submit an outline of class in your paper. Additionally, you will exchange a draft of your paper with a group of peers and provide comments for one another. If you do not submit a draft to your peers for a peer review, I will NOT accept your final paper. I will provide more detailed information about these assignments as the semester progresses.

Please use ASA citation style in your papers. For details on ASA citation, see http://www.asanet.org/documents/teaching/pdfs/Quick_Tips_for_ASA_Style.pdf. This guide is posted on the course’s Blackboard page. I will also provide information on plagiarism. If you have any questions regarding citations, copyright, or what constitutes plagiarism after reviewing these handouts, please see me immediately.

Final papers are due to me by 11 am on Wednesday, May 11. I do not accept late papers.

Grading

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Accommodating Disabilities: If you have or acquire any sort of condition that may require special accommodation(s), please inform me as soon as possible (i.e., not the day an assignment is due) so that we may make the appropriate arrangements. If you need disability-related accommodations for your work in this course, please let me know. Support is available through Student Academic Services. Please contact Jane Boomer, Coordinator Office of Disability Services, (Room G27/28 Peters Hall, ext. 55588, [http://www.oberlin.edu/disability](http://www.oberlin.edu/disability)) for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

Email Policy: Email is the best way to reach me, although please allow 24 hours for responses. I do not respond to emails between 8 pm and 8 am. For substantial discussions, please see me during office hours or set up an appointment to see me.

Oberlin Honor Code: This course will follow the policies described in the Oberlin College Honor Code and Honor System. Please include the statement “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment” and your signature in all written work. Please contact me if you have any questions about citation/referencing, or the relationship of the Honor Code to your work in this course. For more information on the Honor Code, see [http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/student_pages/honor_code.html).

Other Issues: If you are encountering difficulties, academic or otherwise, that are negatively impacting your performance in this class, please speak with me as soon as possible. I can only help you if I know there is a problem, and the earlier I know this, the better. You have excellent resources at your disposal here at Oberlin, including your class deans, the Counseling Center, and the Office of Student Academic Services. For more information, see the following: [http://new.oberlin.edu/parents/student-life/support-services.dot](http://new.oberlin.edu/parents/student-life/support-services.dot)
I reserve the right to change the syllabus. I will announce any changes in class, but if you are absent, it is your responsibility to find out about any changes and to be prepared accordingly.

CLASS SCHEDULE
This class is scheduled so that we will discuss the readings on the day they are listed. Therefore, you need to complete the readings for each day by class time.

WEEK 1  What is Environmental Sociology?

Feb 1 (M):  Introductions


Feb 5 (F):  *Barbosa, Luiz C. Theories in Environmental Sociology.

WEEK 2  Environmental Sociology: Theory and Social Construction

Feb 8 (M):  ES Ch 2 Why Ecological Revolution?

ES Ch 4 Ecological Modernization at Work? Environmental Policy Reform in Sweden at the Turn of the Century.


Feb 10 (W):  Add/Drop Deadline


ES Ch 9 Wild Horses and the Political Ecology of Nature Restoration in the Missouri Ozarks.

Feb 12 (F):  Blog 1 Due


WEEK 3  Environmental Ideologies: Concern and Domination


*Gifford, Robert and Andreas Nilsson. *Personal and Social Factors that Influence Pro-Environmental Concern and Behaviour: A Review*.

Feb 19 (F):  **Writing Reflection Due**

*Bell, Michael. *The Ideology of Environmental Domination*.

ES Ch 3 *The Tragedy of the Commodity: The Overexploitation of the Mediterranean Bluefin Tuna Fishery*.

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WEEK 4  Environmental Inequalities: Social Structure

Feb 22 (M):  *Shapiro, Thomas M. *Race, Homeownership, and Wealth*.

*Conley, Dalton. *Wealth Matters*.


Feb 26 (F):  **Blog 2 Due**

*Čapek, Stella M. *The “Environmental Justice” Frame: A Conceptual Discussion and an Application*.

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WEEK 5  Environmental Inequalities: Case Studies


Mar 2 (W):  In Class Film: Tar Creek

Mar 4 (F):  **Blog 3 Due**

ES Ch 14 *The Unfair Trade-off: Globalization and the Export of Ecological Hazards*.

WEEK 6 Individual Responses to Environmental Issues: Consumerism and Environmental Privileges


*Szasz, Andrew. Introduction to Shopping our way to Safety.


*Szasz, Andrew. Suburbanization as Inverted Quarantine.

Mar 11 (F):  

Blog 4 Due

* Park, Lisa Sun-Hee and David N. Pellow. The Slums of Aspen. Introduction, Ch 1

WEEK 7 Individual Responses to Environmental Issues: Gender and Emotions

Mar 14 (M):  

ES Ch 20 Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?


*Cairns, Kate et al. Feeding the “Organic Child”: Mothering through Ethical Consumption.

*Brown, Patricia Leigh. For ‘EcoMoms,’ Saving Earth Begins at Home.

Mar 18 (F):  

Final Paper Outline Due

ES Ch 10 People want to Protect Themselves a Little Bit”: Emotions, Denial, and Social Movement Nonparticipation.

*Richardson, John H. When the End of Human Civilization Is Your Day Job.

*Thomas, Madeleine. Climate Depression is for Real. Just ask a Scientist.
WEEK 8  MARCH 21—25  NO CLASSES—SPRING BREAK!!!

WEEK 9  Organized Responses to Environmental Issues: Quiescence and Denial


ES Ch 11 Community Economic Identity: The Coal Industry and Ideology Construction in West Virginia.

Mar 30 (W):  In-Class Film: Climate of Doubt

Farrell, Justin. Corporate Funding and Ideological Polarization about Climate Change.

Apr 1 (F):  **Blog 5 Due**

*Freudenburg, William R. and Violetta Muselli. Reexamining Climate Change Debates: Scientific Disagreement or Scientific Certainty Argumentation Methods (SCAMs)?

*Elsasser, Shaun W. and Riley E. Dunlap. Leading Voices in the Denier Choir: Conservative Columnists’ Dismissal of Global Warming and Denigration of Climate Science.

*McCright, Aaron and Riley Dunlap. Cool Dudes: The Denial of Climate Change among Conservative White Males in the United States.

WEEK 10  Organized Responses to Environmental Issues: Concern


Apr 8 (F):  **Letter to the Editor Due**

*Moore, Mik. Coalition Building between Native American and Environmental Organizations in Opposition to Development.

WEEK 11  Social Movement Responses to Environmental Issues


*Cable, Sherry, Donald W. Hastings, and Tamara L. Mix. Different Voices, Different Venues: Environmental Racism Claims by Activists, Researchers, and Lawyers.


Apr 15 (F):  Blog 6 Due

*Bell, Shannon Elizabeth and Yvonne Braun. Appalachian Mothers and Coal-Mining Men: Collective Identities and the Gendering of Environmental Justice Activism.

*Tyree, Stephanie and Maron Greenleaf. The Environmental Injustice of “Clean Coal”: Expanding the National Conversation on Carbon Capture and Storage Technology to Include an Analysis of Potential Environmental Justice Impacts.

WEEK 12  Social Movement Responses to Environmental Issues

Apr 18 (M):  In Class Film: Burning the Future: Coal in America

Apr 20 (W):  In Class Film: Burning the Future: Coal in America

Apr 22 (F):  Workshop papers with peer groups (in class)

WEEK 13  Responses to Environmental Issues: Oberlin and Beyond

Apr 25 (M):  Guest Speaker: Bridget Flynn, Sustainability Coordinator, Office of Environmental Sustainability

*Sustainability at Oberlin College

*The Oberlin Project. A Roadmap for Full-Scale Change.

*The Oberlin Project. What do we Stand for Now?

**Apr 27 (W):**  

**Apr 29 (F):**  
*Blog 7 Due*

*A Abrams, Lindsay. The War against Renewable Energy just claimed its First Victory in Ohio.*

*A Atkin, Emily. House Passes Bill That Makes It Harder For Scientists to Advise the EPA.*

*A EPA. Overview of the Clean Power Plan.*

*A The White House. White House Launches American Business Act on Climate Pledge.*

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**WEEK 14**  
**National and International Responses to Environmental Issues**

**May 2 (M):**  
*Ehrhardt-Martinez, Karen et al. Mitigating Climate Change.*

**May 4 (W):**  
*Parks, Bradley C. and J. Timmons Roberts. Inequality and the Global Climate Regime: Breaking the North-South Impasse.*

*COP 21.*

**May 6 (F):**  
Wrap up, reflections, evaluations

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**May 11 (W):**  
**FINAL PAPER DUE BY 11 AM**