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 two absences at the end of the semester, I reserve the right to lower your grade. Latecomers disrupt the class. Be on time. 2 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/pager 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. 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.

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 environmental issues. I do not expect all of you to agree on these issues, 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.

**Requirements**

**Blog:** Our class has a blog on the Blackboard course site. You will post 5 entries throughout the semester. Your entries must relate course readings to relevant news stories. 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 8 am 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. To enhance your participation grade, you may post more than the 5 required blogs, and you may comment on your classmates’ posts as well.

**Exams:** You will have a midterm and a final exam. They are not cumulative. In order to perform well on the final exam, however, you must understand the concepts from the first half of the course. The exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

**Final Paper:** You will write an 8-10 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 annotated bibliography (that will include the 5 outside sources) and an outline of your paper. Additionally, you will exchange a draft of your paper with a group of peers and provide comments for one another. 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 [www.asanet.org/Quick%20Style%20Guide.pdf](http://www.asanet.org/Quick%20Style%20Guide.pdf). This guide is also 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 via email by 8 pm on Wednesday, December 10. I do not accept late papers.
Grading

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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
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Grading Scale

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Readings

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)
**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).

**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. For substantial discussions, please see me during office hours.

**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.
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.

SECTION I: WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY?

WEEK 1  How do sociologists approach environmental issues?
Sept 2 (Tu):  Introductions
Sept 4 (Th):  ES Preface and Introduction

ES Ch 1 “Nature’s Looking Glass.”

WEEK 2  How do sociologists approach environmental issues?
Sept 11 (Th):  ES Ch 2 “Why Ecological Revolution?”

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

SECTION II: WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT?

WEEK 3  How do people think about the environment? (social construction and identity)

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


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**WEEK 4**  
**How do people think about the environment? (domination and consumerism)**


*Szasz, Andrew. *Shopping our way to Safety.* Intro, Ch 3

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**WEEK 5**  
**How do people think about the environment? (concern)**


**Annotated Bibliography Due**


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**SECTION III: HOW DOES SOCIAL INEQUALITY AFFECT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE AND THE ENVIRONMENT?**

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**WEEK 6**  
**What is environmental (in)justice? (national & international perspective)**

Oct 9 (Th):  
*ES Ch 14 “The Unfair Trade-off: Globalization and the Export of Ecological Hazards.”

*ES Ch 22 “Politics by Other Greens: The Importance of Transnational Environmental Justice Movement Networks.”

WEEK 7  
Midterm Exam

Oct 14 (Tu):  
Exam Review – Come to class with questions

Oct 16 (Th):  
MIDTERM EXAM

WEEK 8  
OCTOBER 21—23  
NO CLASSES—FALL BREAK!!!

SECTION IV:  HOW DO PEOPLE RESPOND TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS?

WEEK 9  
What are the individual and community responses to environmental issues?

Oct 28 (Tu):  
*ES Ch 20 “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?”

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

Oct 30 (Th):  
*The Oberlin Project. “A Roadmap for Full-Scale Change.”

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

*“Transforming and Embracing Innovation in Ohio’s 9th Congressional District.”

Read the Executive Summary, Introduction, and Conclusion

WEEK 10  
What are the social movement responses to environmental issues? (concern)

Nov 4(Tu):  

Nov 6 (Th):  

**Final Paper Outline Due**
WEEK 11  What is an example of the community & social movement responses to environmental injustice?


WEEK 12  What are the social movement responses to environmental issues? (domination, denial)


Nov 20 (Th): Workshop papers with peer groups (in class)

WEEK 13  How do institutions respond to environmental issues? The case of higher education

Nov 25 (Tu): *American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment. “A Call for Climate Leadership: Progress and Opportunities in Addressing the Defining Challenge of our Time.”*

*“The Adam Joseph Lewis Center”

*“Sustainability at Oberlin”

Nov 27 (Th): **NO CLASS – HAPPY THANKSGIVING**

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**WEEK 14**  
**How does the US government respond to environmental issues?**


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**WEEK 15**  
**How does the international community respond to environmental issues?**


Dec 10 (Wed): **Final Papers Due via email to cparris@oberlin.edu by 8 pm**


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**Dec 18 (Th):  9:00-11:00  341 King**  
**FINAL EXAM**