

SOCI 3400: Environmental Sociology

512 Journalism, TR: 2 – 3:15

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office hours: 2:30 - 3; 3:15- 3:45, TR or by appointment

Required text: Environmental Science, G. Tyler Miller & Scott Spoolman, Thompson, Brooks/Cole, 12th edition, 2008

Purpose of the course: Environmental sociology is a relatively new area in sociology. Traditionally, sociology dealt with the study of human society, its evolution, social interactions, social organization, social control, and sundry social problems. The environment did not play a major role in the study of human behavior. In the past few decades it has become increasingly apparent that humans exist within a complex web of human, non-human and ecological environments. Human population has expanded to such a point that the very existence of our living environment is being sorely tested, degraded, and ultimately exhausted. This course is an attempt to understand how our environment is a part of human existence. This is not intended to be a doom and gloom course but rather an attempt to alter our patterns of human existence in order to sustain our environment.

Grading scheme:

Exam 1: 25% of final grade, Feb. 12th
Exam 2: 25% of final grade, March 20th
Final exam: 25% of final grade, May 1st
Paper: 25% of final grade

Final Grades

93% or better: A
90 – 92 : A-
87 - 89 : B+
83 - 86 : B
80 - 82 : B-
77 – 79 : C+
73 – 76 : C
70 – 72 : C-
60 – 69 : D
Less than 60%: F

Required paper

The class will be broken down into teams of 6 to 8 people and each team will be assigned a different topic dealing with the environment. The intent is to work with others on a topic, interview people, search the web, share thoughts and ideas, and then each person will write up an individual report on their specific topic. This paper will be worth 25% of your final grade and ought to be approximately 7 to 10 pages. Toward the end of the term, each group will present their findings in class. It is suggested that each person in the group present a 5 minute overview of their findings. The presentations will not be graded but points will be deducted from the paper grade for less than acceptable presentations.

Examinations

The three in-class examinations will correspond to the three sections of the course. That is, the first exam covers the first third of the course, the second exam, the second third and the final exam the last third. Each exam will be a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. Students are not expected to memorize any material but to simply understand the basic points. The textbook and some of the lecture material will contain some technical points but students are required simply to understand the basic point and not memorize details.

Class etiquette

Please turn off your cell phones before entering the classroom. Sleeping, reading of newspapers, and e-mailing will not be tolerated in class.

Class attendance

Students who do not attend class regularly will struggle in this class. Attendance will be taken during every class. We only meet twice a week for 15 weeks, a total of 30 classes. Students who miss more than 3 classes will be dropped. Prior to March 4th, dropped students will be given a grade of W but after March 4th, the registrar does not permit a grade of W but only a WF which is a failing grade.

Focus the Nation

On January 31st in Mahler Auditorium, there will be a teach-in on different topics related to climate change. Because we have class that day, we will meet for the 2 PM presentation on "Lessons from the Lost Glaciers." There will be sessions beginning at 8:15 AM and will follow the Thursday class schedule. The 3:30 lecture will be on the changing climate. Students are encouraged to attend the 3:30 presentation, but this will not be required.

Spring term

Classes begin Jan.4th
M.L.K. Holiday: Jan 21
Midterm withdrawal deadline: March 7th
Spring break: March 10-14
Classes end: April 28
Final Exam: May 1st (Thursday) 3:30 – 6:30
Commencement: May 10th

Course Outline

1. Introduction to environmental sociology
 - a. An Inconvenient Truth—Al Gore
 - b. The web of human existence
 - c. Human impact on the environment
 - d. The concept of sustainability
 - e. The founding “fathers” of environmental sociology

Reading assignment: Chapter 1 of Miller & Spoolman

2. The birth of the universe
 - a. The “big bang” theory
 - b. The creation of the planets
 - c. The evolution of the earth

Reading assignment: Chapters 3 & 4

3. The growth of human population
 - a. Demographic tools
 - b. World population
 - c. Urbanization
 - d. Strategies for controlling human population

Reading assignment: Chapters 6 & 7

4. Ecosystems and Living Organisms

- a. The threat from human population
- b. The need for biodiversity
- c. Sustaining the ecosystem
- d. Solar radiation
- e. The atmosphere
- f. Weather & climate
- g. Cycling materials within the ecosystem

Reading assignment: Chapter 5, 8 & 9

Examination 1: --February 12th

5. Sustaining the Environment: Soil

- a. Soil composition
- b. Soil problems
- c. Soil conservation and regeneration

Reading assignment: Chapter 10

6. Water pollution

- a. types of pollution
- b. organic & inorganic compounds
- c. thermal pollution
- d. water supplies

Reading assignment: Chapter 11

7. Minerals

- a. Mineral distribution
- b. Mining techniques
- c. Nonrenewable resource
- d. Mineral conservation

Reading assignment: Chapter 12

8. Fossil Fuels

- a. Coal
- b. Oil & natural gas
- c. Synthetic fuels
- d. Nuclear energy
- e. Radioactive waste

Reading assignment: Chapter 13

9. Solid waste

- a. Types of solid waste
- b. Waste prevention
- c. Hazardous waste
- d. Environmental justice and ethical issues

Reading assignment: Chapter 16

Examination #2: March 20th

10. Air Pollution

- a. Types and sources of pollution
- b. Ozone depletion
- c. Global warming
- d. Acid rain
- e. Climate change
- f. Strategies for dealing with global warming
- g. Indoor air pollution

Reading assignment: Chapter 15

11. Environmental Health Hazards

- a. Health issues in highly developed nations
- b. Health issues in developing nations
- c. Children and chemicals
- d. Cost-benefit analysis on risks

Reading assignment: Chapter 14

12. Land resources

- a. Land use: parks & refugees
- b. Forests: deforestation
- c. Tropical forests
- d. Wetlands and coastal areas

Reading assignment: class handout

13. The environment and politics

- a. Differing world views
- b. International treaties
- c. Limiting growth
- d. Notion of exploitation of natural resources

Reading assignment: Chapter 17

14. Case study: China

- a. Population
- b. Outsourcing
- c. Growth at all costs
- d. Pollution and the Olympics

Final examination: May 1, 3:30 – 6:30.