

Syllabus
Sociology 111 * Environment and Society
Instructor: Alison Alkon
MW 6-745
WPC 122
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This course satisfies GE requirement IIIB, the diversity requirement, counts towards the Ethnic Studies minor and as a lower division elective in the Sociology major.

Course overview:

Global warming, toxic cities, resource exploitation, species extinction. These are among the most pressing issues of our time. What do these problems tell us about the effects of society on the natural world, and of the natural world's capacity to affect, or even destroy, our society? What parts of these issues can the biological and social sciences each address? What kinds of social systems, institutions and behaviors contribute to the current environmental crisis? And what is the relationship between environment and inequality?

This course will take an interdisciplinary approach to the above-described problems, and will highlight and critique potential solutions.

Learning objectives

Students should emerge from this course able to do the following:

Sociology

1. Understand various ways that social systems contribute to the emergence of environmental problems and potential solutions.
2. Recognize the relationships between issues of resource conservation, biodiversity, economic growth and equitable resource distribution.
3. Identify and critically deconstruct various popular solutions to environmental issues.

Ethnic Studies

1. Understand how hierarchies of race, class, gender and nation influence our experience and understanding of environmental problems and solutions.
2. Trace the intellectual and activist history of the environmental justice movement.

3. Analyze popular solutions to environmental problems from a social justice standpoint.

General Education

1. Develop critical reading and writing and thinking skills.
2. Articulate and communicate students' own perspective on controversial issues.
3. Conduct an individual or small group research project identifying an environmental issue within their community (campus or Stockton).
4. Understand the relationship between social and scientific aspects of environmental problems and potential solutions.
5. Understand how an interdisciplinary approach can help students' become critical consumers and practitioners of science.

Diversity

1. Articulate, in both written and oral forms, how notions of difference work within frameworks of social hierarchy. (Difference may be defined by notions such as age, class, citizenship, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, language, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, and/or socioeconomic status.)
2. Express, in both written and oral forms, their understanding of how ideas and beliefs about diversity and difference in the United States have changed over time, identifying relevant historical movements and players;
3. Demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of how social institutions and individuals respond to issues of difference;
4. Apply their understanding of relevant theory and/or historical analysis of diversity to a specific "societal problem" for the purpose of developing solutions.

Required Books:

Gould, K. and T. Lewis. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

Steingraber, Sandra. *Living Downstream*

Other readings to be distributed through Canvas

Assumptions of this Course:

1. Human-caused environmental change is rapidly occurring, and threatens the continuation of non-human species and the lifestyles of many human communities. This course will not spend time debating the existence of global warming or the importance of biodiversity; it will begin with the assumption that environmental issues are real and need to be addressed.
2. Science and technology are social enterprises, and are shaped by social structures. These include inequalities based on race, class, gender and nation.
3. Environmental problems are social problems rooted in social structures. The goal of this course is to explore the human dimensions of environmental issues. We will focus on the social structures that encourage environmental degradation and the potential to create those that might foster environmental health.
4. Issues of environmental protection cannot be separated from issues of environmental justice, meaning the ways that race, class, gender and nation influence who has access to environmental benefits and who is harmed by the toxic consequences of environmental degradation.
5. This course will question the popular assumption that the three aspects of sustainability--economic growth, environmental protection and equitable distribution of resources—are necessarily compatible with one another. Therefore, students will be encouraged to critically assess the trend toward “green” economic solutions.

Class Format:

The course is based on seminar-discussion format with lectures interspersed. Students are required to arrive at class having read the material assigned for that day and prepared to engage in thoughtful and constructive conversation that takes seriously the issues and themes presented in the readings.

Class environment:

Discussion is essential to the nature of this course. I encourage questions and comments from students during lecture. Additionally, students can submit questions and comments in writing, which I will address during the following lecture. This class will also incorporate a variety of activities and group work that requires students to talk to each other both in and out of class.

As many environmental issues are well documented in video programs, several videos will be used for this course. They will play an important part in presenting the course material.

I will not tolerate any participation that demeans other students. This includes, but is not limited to, racist, sexist, heterosexist and classist remarks. That being said, it is sometimes difficult to know when we have offended someone else, and I do not want

to discourage you from talking about sensitive subjects.

Also, if you are ever offended by remarks made by other students, or by me, please feel free to let me know. We are all struggling to understand difficult subjects, and to learn from others' experiences. If you feel like the classroom situation does not correspond to your life experience, please feel free to discuss that with me as well.

Attendance Policy:

Students are allowed two unexcused absences during the semester. After two unexcused absences, your final grade for the course will be lowered by one-third of a grade (e.g., from a "B+" to a "B") for each day that you are absent from class without a valid excuse. This means that if you miss five days of class without a valid excuse, your final grade for the course will be lowered by two-thirds of a grade (i.e., from a "B+" to a "B-"). A valid excuse for missing class will require *written documentation from a person who can certify your illness or other misfortune*. Please see the instructor in case of any extended illness or other emergency.

Come to each class meeting **on time**, so that all of us can devote the entire class period to most fruitful and rewarding discussions. Walking into class late is distracting and rude to both your classmates and the instructor.

If you miss a class, you are responsible for finding out what was covered and obtaining handouts. At no time will the instructor's lecture notes or transparencies be available for copying.

Office Hours:

I welcome and encourage you to come and talk with me in office hours whenever you'd like -- to discuss the books we've studied, the ideas we've been exploring, the writing you're working on, or anything else the class has sparked in you. I enjoy listening to your ideas on course materials. If you find yourself struggling through the course or have any serious concerns, it is important to let me know as soon as possible, so that we can together find the best way to address the situation. Please remember that I am here to help you as much as I can, so that each of you enjoys the most fruitful and rewarding learning experience.

Students needing accommodations:

If you need special accommodations for learning disabilities, please notify me during the first week of the semester. Please arrange for me to receive an accommodations request letter from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities in Bannister Hall Room 101.

Honor Code:

All your submitted writings must be your own original work. You must acknowledge any borrowing of ideas and words from other by standard documentations in various forms, such as parenthetical references, and bibliography. Keeping track of the sources you use and using a consistent style of documentation will help you avoid unwittingly committing plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual theft and fraud. Examples of plagiarism include buying papers from the Internet or other sources; downloading materials from the Internet and passing it off as your own writing or using any part of it without acknowledging the source; taking published ideas of others and claiming them as your own. Plagiarism will result in an F in this class and a report filed with the Dean of Students. Moreover, recent policy adopted by the College of the Pacific prevents any student found to be in violation of the honor code from dropping the course, even if the deadline to drop has not expired.

Grading:

Living Downstream paper: 15%

Response papers: 10% total

Exam I: 20% In class, short answer definition and application or take home essay

Exam II: 20% In class, short answer definition and application or take home essay

Final Research Project and Presentation: 25% total

Attendance and Participation 10%

Final Research Project and Presentation. For this final project, students have three options. You may work in groups of up to 3, with only one partner, or by yourself.

OPTION A: Environmental Justice at Home and Abroad

Step 1: Investigating secondary sources

- A. Read the article “Amidst Garbage and Poison: An Essay on Polluted Peoples and Places” on Canvas.
- B. Go over your class notes and choose one example we discussed of a community facing environmental injustices. Conduct additional secondary source research to learn more about this community.
- C. Investigate one other case of environmental injustice that we have not discussed in class using peer-reviewed sources.

Step 2: Primary research on Stockton or your hometown. Investigate examples of environmental injustices and responses to them in Stockton or your hometown. Take three photographs of sites that you think exemplify environmental inequality. Write one paragraph for each photo describing what it depicts and why it is an example of environmental injustice.

Step 3: Analysis: Write a 6-8 page typed, double spaced response paper addressing the following questions. Your essay must include cited references to at least 3 course readings and 2 outside readings. The page requirement does not include the photos and captions.

This paper is a comparative assignment of four cases of environmental injustice: Flammable (based on the reading on Canvas), one case discussed otherwise in class (based on class material, can also use peer-reviewed external sources), one case of your choosing (based on peer-reviewed external sources) and Stockton (or your home town, if you prefer, based on primary research [observations] and secondary research [external sources, not necessarily peer reviewed]).

Your paper should begin with an introduction ending with a thesis that makes some supportable argument about how these cases are similar and different. This argument should make a substantial point rather than merely serve as an overview (in other words, in this paper I will compare these 4 cases is a poor thesis).

For each case, you will want to examine the following:

What are the causes of the environmental problems faced by each community? Which theories or course concepts best explain why there are environmental problems there?

What, if anything, is being done to fight environmental problems in that place? Are there social movements? If so, describe them. Are there efforts to reform city and regional planning? Create a green economy? Get local people to create a sense of place? If there is nothing being done, suggest what you think should happen and why.

Please conclude with a paragraph summarizing similarities and differences and reflecting on their consequences for addressing environmental crises.

OPTION B: Experiential learning and grant proposal

Spend 5 hours volunteering with an environmental organization of your choice. Then, write a grant proposal that fits within the goals of the organization you're working with while extending their ability to meet those goals. You will need to create a new program that your organization has the skills and capacity to run, and that fits within their mission. Your proposal should demonstrate both a strong understanding of the work your organization does as well as of the wider environmental movement.

The format of this assignment is loosely based on a composite of grant proposals I have written on behalf of non-profit organizations, and therefore offers you a proactive way to demonstrate and apply knowledge gained in this class. It also offers experience in an increasingly necessary job skill. You are to pretend to apply for support from a foundation or government agency, so write in a way that convinces me that you understand the nature of the problem you are trying to address, and that you have the ability to implement your program. In other words, convince me that this proposal would be a good use of time and resources! In

addition, your proposal must make use of two course readings and two outside readings.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY: Please provide a 1-2 sentence “elevator pitch” summary.

CONTEXT: In 2-3 pages, describe the problem your program is designed to address. Where does this program fit into the wider environmental movement? What kind of theories support the need for the program you’re creating? This description should be organized around a clear thesis.

OVERVIEW: Describe your project and how it addresses the above problem. In addition, describe how and why your organization has the capacity and knowledge to implement the program you’re creating. In other words, why is your organization a good fit to create this program? (1-2 pages). Lastly, describe the steps you and your organization would take to implement the program.

OUTCOMES: What are the main outcomes you expect from your project? Please be as specific as possible in describing tangible results (200 words max).

EVALUATION: How will you know that your program has been successful in the short term? In the long term? (Note: this should correlate with the outcomes section). (200 words max)

BUDGET: List the expenses you believe this project will incur. For each of the above expenses, give a one sentence justification of why you need that particular item.

FUNDERS: Provide a list of at least 3 foundations and agencies that you think might fund this research. In order to complete this step, you will need to do some internet research to identify relevant foundations. In 1-2 sentences for each, describe why you think your proposal fits within their priorities.

OPTION C: Environmental politics in the age of Trump

How have environmental politics and movements fueled the rise of Donald Trump, and how has Trump’s election affected national thinking and action on environmental issues? In this 8-10 page paper, you will consider how environmental or resource issues have been described by the right wing and how that has helped to fuel Trump’s popularity. You will also want to look closely at actions that the Trump administration has or has not taken and how they have affected environmental issues. You can do this more generally, or take one environmental issue as your theme (ie. Climate change, pesticide regulation, etc).

This paper should be organized as a traditional research paper, with an introduction ending in a thesis that is an argument rather than a topic sentence.

You will spend the bulk of your paper supporting your argument using evidence from in class, academic and popular readings. Your conclusion should address where the environmental movement should go from here. You must include at least 3 course readings and 4 outside readings, two of which must be peer reviewed.

OPTION D: Open ended research paper

Design and address a research question relevant to any aspect of this course. If you choose this option, please consult me prior to beginning. 8-10 pages

OPTION E: Creative or practical project

Create an event, website, photo exhibit, video or other project that represents and builds on any aspect of this course. Get creative! If you choose this option, please consult me prior to beginning.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS:

8/28: Introductory Class

UNIT I: WHY SHOULD WE CARE

8/30: Living Downstream Forward, Chapters 1-3

9/4: Labor day, no class

9/6: Living Downstream, Chapters 4-6

Film: Living Downstream

9/11: Environmental Justice

go over paper, finish and discuss film

Race and Waste: The Quest for Environmental Justice

<http://www.temple.edu/law/tjstel/2007/spring/v26no1-Ulezalka.pdf> pgs 51-57 (up to Development of a Legal Approach)

Race Best Predicts Whether you Live Near Pollution:

<https://www.thenation.com/article/race-best-predicts-whether-you-live-near-pollution/>

Are there two versions of environmentalism?

<http://grist.org/climate-energy/are-there-two-different-versions-of-environmentalism-one-white-one-black/#.U9p1M9hS52Y.twitter>

Pollution, Poverty, People of Color

<http://www.environmentalhealthnews.org/ehs/news/2012/pollution-poverty-and-people-of-color-richmond-day-1/>

9/13: Storytelling and data

The Climate of Man (Kolbert on Canvas)

Draft of Essay 1 due, peer editing

9/18: EJ in the Valley

Excerpt from Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice (on Canvas)

Pollution's Victims

http://www.recordnet.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=%2F20140430%2FA_NEWS%2F404300321%2F-1%2FA_NEWS14

Health hazard: West Fresno the riskiest place to live in California

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2013/03/16/3217239/west-fresno-the-riskiest-place.html#storylink=cpy>

Cancer-causing Chemical plagues California Drinking Water

http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/cancer-causing-chemical-tcp-plagues-california-drinking-water-n783726?cid=sm_npd_nn_fb_ma

9/20: Essay 1 Due

Option 1: Personal Storytelling on Environmental Health

Steingraber has said that she included her personal story as a bladder cancer patient in *Living Downstream* as a way to help her readers see that every data point in the scientific research represents a human life. Using a similar approach, tell your personal story in a new way that reflects your connection to—or opinion on—an environmental health issue. Write a personal essay about something that has happened to you or to someone you know. Some possibilities to consider include the following: tell your family history through any of the chemical policy changes that have occurred over the past five decades, tell the story of your hometown through an environmental transformation that has occurred since you were born (such as industrialization, creation of new real estate developments, reclamation of natural spaces, cleanup of a toxic site, conversion of a local farm into an organic operation), or tell the story of the journey taken by your food to get to your plate today. Include a blend of personal storytelling and factual information on the environmental health issue in question. You must include at least 3 non-class sources as factual information. NO WIKIPEDIA.

Option 2: Military operations and environmental health issues

In chapter five of *Living Downstream*, Steingraber describes the wartime origins of synthetic chemical production and the subsequent domestic use of these products in the United States. Today, global warfare continues to have significant environmental health impacts. Research one environmental health concern of your choice that is related to historical military operations. Some possibilities include (1) suspected cancer clusters among military personnel who lived on the same base or worked with the same toxic materials, (2) environmental health concerns of civilians living in former warzones, or (3) the contamination of communities by neighboring military bases that are now closed (or any one such base). Write an essay summarizing your findings. This essay should follow Steingraber and Carson's tradition of translating scientific findings into accessible prose for the general public, and interweaving narrative and expository writing. You must include at least 3 non-class sources as factual information. NO WIKIPEDIA.

Small group informal presentations

This paper will be graded on the following criteria:

Organization and logic	30
Descriptive storytelling	20
Incorporation of scientific research	30
Participation in peer editing	10
Presentation	10

Unit 2: What Causes Environmental Problems?

9/25: Is it population growth?

Excerpt from *The Bet on Canvas*

Overpopulation as a Propaganda Device on Canvas

9/27: Is it lack of care for nature?

The Land Ethic on Canvas

The Shallow and the Deep on Canvas

Response paper due: One paragraph describing whether either of these explanations are convincing and why?

10/2: Is it too much individual consumption?

Excerpt from *the Overspent American on Canvas*

Hundred dollar holiday on Canvas

Forget Shorter Showers

<http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/4801/>

Just 100 Companies Responsible for 71% of Global Climate Emissions

<https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/jul/10/100-fossil-fuel-companies-investors-responsible-71-global-emissions-cdp-study-climate-change>

Film: Story of Stuff

Response paper due: One paragraph describing whether this explanation is convincing and why?

10/4: Is it the way our economy is organized?

Labor, Productivity and the Environment in 20 Lessons

Global Economy and the Common Good (On Canvas)

<http://clogic.eserver.org/3-1&2/foster.html>

Neoliberalism: The Ideology at the Root of All of our Problems

https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

10/9: Debate and review

10/11: Exam 1: Choice between in-class (10 short answer questions) or take-home question below.

Take home exam: Why do we have environmental problems?

In this five paragraph essay, you will address the question of why we have environmental problems. This is a formal essay beginning with an introduction that includes a clear thesis. Underline your thesis. In the body of the essay, choose one of the theories we have discussed that you find most convincing and tell us why you believe it to be the best explanation. Do not merely summarize the theory, but focus on your reasons. Then choose two additional theories that you think are less good explanations. For each, describe 1. why it is a less good explanation and 2. whether it has any contribution to our understanding of society-environmental problems. In your conclusion, describe how society would have to change if the explanation you have chosen was widely accepted. Your essay must reference at least 3 class readings and include internal citations.

UNIT 3: Climate change

10/16: The Science of Climate Change

Executive summary of National Climate Assessment Report: pgs 16-19

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/07/climate/document-Draft-of-the-Climate-Science-Special-Report.html>

Global Warming's Terrifying New Math

<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719?page=5>

Climate Scientist Responds to Denier

<https://www.someecards.com/entertainment/web/climate-change-denier-schooled/>

Proof of Climate Change Caught on Camera

<http://www.upworthy.com/they-took-a-camera-to-a-remote-area-in-greenland-and-what-they-recorded-is-simply-terrifying>

Mid-semester evaluations

10/18

Film: This Changes Everything

10/23: The rise of the climate denial movement

Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem (on canvas)

http://stephenschneider.stanford.edu/Publications/PDF_Papers/McCrightDunlap2000.pdf

10/25: Denialism continued

Excerpt from Living in Denial (Norgaard on Canvas)

Excerpt from As the World Burns (Jensen, on Canvas)

10/30

Film: Merchants of Doubt

Unit 5: Solutions

11/1: Local and Regional Policy:

Neighbors Building Neighborhoods: Community Stewardship to Revitalize Midsize Cities (on Canvas)

Woodstock. Mirage in the Making, Mojave Dreams. Boom Fall 2012. (on Canvas)

11/6: State and National Policy

Did California Figure out How to Fix Global Warming?

<http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2016/03/california-cuts-greenhouse-gas-jerry-brown-growth-energy/>

Abolish the EPA?

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/abolish-the-epa-a-one-way-ticket-to-toxic-air-poisoned-water_us_58935862e4b0bf5206e6881f

Chile becomes first country to tax carbon

http://www.trust.org/item/20140927000016-jx232/?utm_content=bufferfca9f&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer

Response paper due: One paragraph describing which solution seems best to pursue and why?

11/8: Social Movements

US Environmental Movements in 20 Lessons

Woodward, Karah. The Climate Justice Groundswell From Copenhagen to Cochabamba to Cancun <http://www.indypendent.org/2010/05/12/climate-justice-groundswell/>

11/13: Social Movements Continued

Environmental Movements in the Global South in 20 Lessons

Protest and Persist

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/13/protest-persist-hope-trump-activism-anti-nuclear-movement>

11/15

Film: Thirst

Lessons of Stockton's Water War

<http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/openforum/article/Lessons-of-Stockton-s-water-war-2549287.php>

Response paper due: One paragraph describing which solution seems best to pursue and why?

11/20

Go over paper options

Library Visit

11/22

No Class, Thanksgiving

11/27

Debate and review

Paper outlines due, peer review

11/29

Exam 2: Choice between in-class (10 short answer questions) or take-home question below.

Take home essay: Working within the system?

In this five paragraph essay, you will address the question of whether environmental problems can best be addressed by working within or outside of “the system.” This is a formal essay beginning with an introduction that includes a clear thesis. Underline your thesis. In our unit on solutions, we’ve discussed approaches that work within the system to make policy as well as social movement approaches that challenge the state to do more from outside. In your essay, compare and contrast the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach. In your conclusion, state which approach you think you would be more likely to pursue and why. Your essay must reference at least 3 class readings and include citations.

12/4-12/6- in class presentations of final papers

Final paper due via Monday December 11 5pm