

# SOCS-SHU 135: Environment and Society

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Classroom: 304 Academic Building  
Class Time: Mo/We 9:45-11:00 am  
Office Hours: Mo/We 8:30-9:30 am

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## Overview

This course introduces you to the interdisciplinary literature on the relationship between the human world and the natural world. We engage scholarly writings from a wide range of perspectives, synthesizing current knowledge about environment and society from various disciplines, including sociology, history, philosophy, and political science, among others.

Broadly speaking, this course invites you to look both outward and inward. The *outward-looking* part of the course takes you to an in-depth analysis of contemporary environmental challenges. We will discuss issues such as climate change denialism and industrialized agriculture. You will gain an understanding of different social forces that shape our environmental attitudes and behaviors, and how these forces continue to re-shape our collective relationship to nature. The *inward-looking* part of the course motivates you to initiate a private conversation with nature. Class discussions will provoke a sense of discomfort amidst the pinnacle of modern comfort; we will bring into question “modern” life that often goes unquestioned. Taken together, this course stands with one foot in the scientific study of society, and the other foot in the normative understanding of social life.

The conceptual tools you learn from this course will be applied to better understand contemporary environmental challenges in China. We will discuss some of the main drivers of environmental degradation, the political underpinnings of environmentalism, and environmental justice in the Middle Kingdom. In addition, we will also situate China’s environmental challenges in the broader context of global environmental change.

By the end the semester, you will be able to examine environmental challenges from a social scientific perspective. You will gain general familiarity with the concepts, methods, findings, and theories of Environmental Studies. This course prepares you for more advanced inquiries into various aspects of the contemporary environmental condition.

## Required Texts

- **Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M.** (2012). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. London: Bloomsbury. (ISBN: 978-1608193943)
- **Pollan, M.** (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin Press. (ISBN: 978-0143038580)
- **Shapiro, J.** (2015). *China's environmental challenges, second edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (ISBN: 978-0745698649)

All texts are available for purchase through Academic Affairs. Other required readings are available electronically on NYU Classes.

## Paper Formatting Guidelines

All written work should follow these formatting guidelines, unless otherwise specified.

- Your papers should be formatted and printed on A4-size paper, with one-inch (or 2.54 centimeters) margins on all four sides, double-spaced. Print on both sides when you can.
- Use your student ID (N\*\*\*\*\*) to identify yourself; do not write your name.
- Both electronic and hard copies are required. Submit each paper to the designated folder on NYU Classes, and bring a hard copy to class on or before the due date.
- Attach a bibliography (a.k.a. references or works cited) *only if* you cite sources other than the ones on the syllabus. Bibliography does not count toward the page limit.

## Grading Rubric

Your reading reflections and film reviews will be graded according to the following rubric.

Expectations	Marks
The essay provides a concise summary of major arguments and findings in the focal readings (or main storyline of the documentary film) using your own words.	___/6
The essay relates one major issue raised by the author(s) (or film director) to your personal observations and/or experiences, and offers a critical evaluation.	___/4

## Requirements

- **Reading Reflections** *10\*4=40 points*  
You are required to submit four reading reflections. For each of them, you have the choice of two options, marked A and B in the syllabus. Choose one from each pair. The reading reflection should be between two to three pages in length.
- **Film Reviews** *10\*2=20 points*  
You are required to submit two film reviews. There are four possible films to choose from. You are required to watch all four of them, but choose only two to review. Each film review should be between two to three pages in length.
- **Exams** *10\*3=30 points*  
There are three exams – a mid-term, a take-home, and a final. They cover lectures, class discussions, films, and readings. The final exam is cumulative, but with an emphasis on materials after the mid-term.
- **Book Club** *5 points*  
You will be randomly assigned into one of the two book clubs, one on *Merchants of Doubt*, and the other on *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. Each club will collectively lead a discussion session and produce a glossary for the focal book. The glossary should follow the general format of Oreskes & Conway 2014 (the second reading assignment on 9/6). You will receive a separate handout with more information about the discussion session.
- **Practicum** *5 points*  
Refine your environmental sensibilities through practice. There are three arranged opportunities for you to choose from, but you may also design your own practicum in consultation with the instructor. The three arranged opportunities are: a one-day fieldtrip to an organic farm in Chongming (Oct 14), a weekend fieldtrip to a tea farm near Nanjing (Nov 4 to 5), and work in the raised garden bed in the backyard of AB (semester long). Submit a journal about your practicum activity/ies no later than Dec 1. Your grade will be based on the journal, which is evaluated not by the number of activities, but by the intellectual engagement you demonstrate in the journal.

## Attendance and Preparation

Attendance is required. Throughout the semester, there will be attendance checks in different forms, including but not limited to pop quizzes, class activities, surveys, and sign-in's. These will only be graded on a check/no-check basis.

Your final grade will be adjusted according to the table below.

Number of No-checks	Final Grade Adjustment
0-1	Two points of extra credit
2-3	One point of extra credit
4-5	No adjustment
6 or more	A ten-percent grade penalty for each additional no-check beyond the fifth

This policy, in its gist, allows for up to five no-checks without grade penalty. This is meant to accommodate late enrollment, medical conditions, student activities, conference attendance, family emergencies, or other extenuating circumstances that prevent you from doing the readings and/or attending classes on time. **Therefore, additional excuses will not be granted.**

## Grading Scale

A=95% or higher      A-=90-94.9%      B+=85-89.9%      B=80-84.9%  
C=70-79.9%      D=60-69.9%      F=59.9% or lower

## Academic Honesty

All work that you submit for this class must be your own. All sources and assistance used in preparing your work must be precisely and explicitly acknowledged. It is NOT acceptable academic practice to copy, paraphrase, translate, or otherwise “borrow” without acknowledging the sources. Cheating on the exam and/or writings will not be tolerated. Students caught cheating and/or plagiarizing will be referred to Academic Affairs for disciplinary action. You should familiarize yourself with NYU Shanghai rules regarding academic integrity.

## Lateness

If you submit your work after its due date, your score will be penalized by 10% for each day of lateness. You are required to turn in both hard copies and electronic copies before they are due, unless otherwise specified. In this syllabus, dates appear in the MM/DD format, and times in China Standard Time (GMT+8).

## Re-writes

Each student has one opportunity to re-write. In other words, you may choose one solo-authored essay to re-write. It could be a reading reflection or a film review. Submit a physical copy of your re-write within a week after the graded original is handed back to you. There is no guarantee of an improved grade.

## Make-up Exams

A make-up exam will be given only if you provide in writing an acceptable excuse from an accredited professional regarding the situation. You should submit the written notice before the day of the exam. Last minute requests will not be accommodated. The make-up exam will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for all students who miss the exam, but no later than a week from the original exam date. This policy does not apply to the final exam.

## **Readings**

It is extremely important for you to keep up with the required readings for each class meeting. I lecture with the assumption that you have read all pieces before class. I normally do not lecture from the readings, but try to build on them. In order for you to benefit from lectures, it is in your best interest to read the assignments in advance. You may also bring along your questions about specific readings to class.

## **Communications**

Course-related information will be communicated to you via email messages through NYU Classes. Make sure you check your nyu.edu emails on a regular basis. You are welcome to communicate with me via emails. If you prefer to meet in person, please use office hours.

## **Classroom Etiquettes**

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that the environment in the classroom is conducive to learning. If you are late, you should find a seat in the back of the classroom. If you need to leave early, please let me know in advance and sit in a location where it will be easy to quietly leave the room. Turn off all cell phones and put away newspapers before class begins. Please hold side-conversations and discussions until after class.

## **Responsible Use of Technology**

Although electronic devices are valuable for research and study, they are inimical to participation and collegiality in the classroom. You may take notes on a laptop, provided that you use it responsibly. Refrain from using the laptop for purposes other than note-taking. Make sure your screen does not present a distraction to those around you. Do not let the device distract yourself from participating in class.

## **Accommodation**

I wish to include fully any students with special needs. Please let me know (the earlier the better) if you need special accommodation in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to fully participate. We work with the Moses Center on Washington Square to provide you with assistance and accommodation as needed.

*(The syllabus continues on the next page.)*

# Class Schedule

## Part I – Toward Conceptual Breadth

*Monday September 4*

Reading:

- This syllabus

*Wednesday September 6*

Readings:

- Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2013). The collapse of western civilization: A view from the future. *Daedalus*, 142, 1, 40-58.
- Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2014). *The collapse of western civilization: A view from the future*. New York, N.Y: Columbia University press, Lexicon of Archaic Terms (pp. 53-62).

*Monday September 11*

Readings:

- McKibben, B. (1989). *The end of nature*. New York: Random House, excerpt from Ch. 2 (pp. 40-72).
- Crutzen, J. & Stoermer E. F. (2000) The “Anthropocene”. *IGBP Newsletter* 41: 17–18.
- Steffen, W., Crutzen, J., & McNeill, J. R. (2007). The Anthropocene: are humans now overwhelming the great forces of Nature?. *AMBIO*, 36, 8, 614-21.

Film Review #A:

- Due today before class
- In this Film Review, summarize and reflect on Bradshaw, S. (2015). *Anthropocene*. Oley, Pennsylvania: Bullfrog Films. (<https://getit.library.nyu.edu/go/9430122>)
- Note that this is the first of four films. Watch all, but review only two of them.

*Wednesday September 13*

Reading:

- Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2012). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. London: Bloomsbury, Introduction & Ch. 1. (\*\*This book will be referred to as “O&K 2012” hereafter.)

*Monday September 18*

Reading:

- Winner, L. (1986). *The whale and the reactor: A search for limits in an age of high technology*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, Ch. 2 (pp. 19-39).

Reading Reflection #1A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&K 2012 Intro and Ch 1, and Winner 1986 Ch 2.
- Note that you can choose from #1A and #1B. Submit only one of the two. The two options have different deadlines and different content focus.

*Wednesday September 20*

Reading:

- Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin Press, Introduction & Chapter 16. (\*\*This book will be referred to as "Pollan 2006" hereafter.)

*Monday September 25*

Reading:

- Magdoff, F., & Foster, J. B. (2011). *What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism: A citizen's guide to capitalism and the environment*. New York: Monthly Review Press, Chapter 4 (pp. 61-93)

Reading Reflection #1B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan Intro and Ch 16, and Magdoff & Foster 2011.

*Wednesday September 27*

**Mid-term exam** during regular class hour

## **Part II – Toward Theoretical Depth**

*Monday October 9*

Reading:

- O&K 2012, Ch. 3.

*Wednesday October 11*

Reading:

- O&K 2012, Ch. 4.

Reading Reflection #2A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&K 2012 Chs. 3 & 4.

*Monday October 16*

Reading:

- O&K 2012, Ch. 5.

*Wednesday October 18*

Reading:

- O&K 2012, Ch. 6.

Reading Reflection #2B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&K 2012 Chs 5 & 6.

*Monday October 23*

Reading:

- O&K 2012, Ch. 7.

Film Review #B:

- Due today at 9:45 am
- In this Film Review, summarize and reflect on Kenner, R. (2015). *Merchants of doubt*. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Classics.

*Wednesday October 25: Discussion session led by the O&K book club*

Reading:

- O&K 2012, Conclusion and Epilogue.

*Monday October 30*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Chs. 1-2.

*Wednesday November 1*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Chs. 5-7.

Reading Reflection #3A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan 2006 Chs. 1-2 & 5-7.

*Monday November 6*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Ch. 9.

*Wednesday November 8*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Ch. 13.

Reading Reflection #3B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan 2006 Chs. 9 & 13.

*Monday November 13: Special session on waste*

Reading:

- Leonard, A., & Conrad, A. (2011). *The story of stuff*. New York: Free Press, Ch. 5.

*Wednesday November 15*

Film Review #C:

- Due today before class
- In this Film Review, summarize and reflect on Kenner, R. (2009). *Food, Inc.* Los Angeles, CA: Magnolia Home Entertainment.

*Monday November 20: Discussion session led by the Pollan book club*

Reading:

- Pollan, M. (2010). *In defense of food*. Penguin, Introduction (pp. 1-15).

*Wednesday November 22: No class meeting today.*

**Take home exam** due by 11 am.

### **Part III – Toward Empirical Rigor**

*Monday November 27*

Reading:

- Shapiro, J. (2015). *China's environmental challenges, second edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press, Chs. 1-2. (\*\*This book will be referred to as “Shapiro 2015” hereafter.)

*Wednesday November 29*

Reading:

- Shapiro 2015, Chs. 3-4.

Reading Reflection #4A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Shapiro 2015, Chs. 1-4.

*Friday December 1*

**Practicum journal** due at 11 am

*Monday December 4*

Reading:

- Shapiro 2015, Ch. 5.

*Wednesday December 6*

Reading:

- Shapiro 2015, Chs. 6-7.

Reading Reflection #4B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Shapiro 2015, Chs. 5-7.

*Monday December 11*

Film Review #D:

- Due today before class
- In this Film Review, summarize and reflect on Wang, J. (2017). *Plastic China*. Surrey, UK: Journeyman Pictures.

*Wednesday December 13*

**Final exam** during regular class hour

*(The End)*