

SOCIOLOGY 2077: ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY

University of Colorado Boulder
Spring 2017
Tuesday and Thursday, CLRE 207

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COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Why study the environment from the perspective of sociology? The field of environmental sociology has grown with rising awareness of the complexity of environmental problems. Understanding and solving environmental problems will require more than measuring atmospheric CO₂ – it requires an understanding of human social organization, cultural beliefs, and economic and political structures. Sociology offers useful tools for this task. Sociology also reminds us that the very definitions of “nature” and environmental problems result from contested and political processes. Furthermore, not all groups of people experience the environment – both its goods and bads – in the same way, nor do they imagine the same solutions.

This course is designed for students who may have limited knowledge of sociology, but are interested in how the social sciences can help us understand the relationship between humans and the environment. Along the way, we will engage with theories of population growth, development, colonialism, capitalism, justice, race, class, and gender. Students will learn to critique and question different theories, and to make connections between diverse topics. The course does not emphasize a “right answer,” but asks students to engage with various positions and to challenge preconceived ideas.

The course is organized around the following themes:

- 1) **Explaining environmental degradation:** What is the root cause of human-created environmental degradation?
- 2) **Environmental inequality:** How do different groups of people experience the environment (and environmental problems) differently? Why?
- 3) **Knowing nature:** How do different groups of people perceive nature and environmental problems? How has this changed over time?
- 4) **Finding solutions:** Based on what we have learned, how do we think critically – and constructively – about improving environmental problems and environmental inequality?

REQUIRED READINGS

The following book is required:

- Carolan, Michael. 2017. *Society and Environment: Pragmatic Solutions to Ecological Issues*, Second Edition. Boulder: Westview Press

The rest of the class readings are posted on D2L in weekly folders, and indicated in the course schedule by the author’s last name. The course textbook and the course readings are on reserve at Norlin library, and you are welcome to read them there if you prefer hard copy and do not want to print. The reserve desk is at the West entrance to Norlin. The bibliography with full references for additional readings is posted on D2L.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Attendance and participation: (7%) At the start of most class periods, I will post a question on the board and give students a few minutes to write and reflect. These are not graded, but they will be used to keep attendance and to encourage timely arrival to class. They will also be used to help me assess your level of class preparation and thus participation. Missing more than 3 of these responses during the semester will hurt your attendance grade. If you are shy and do not talk much in class, I will look at your written responses as an indication of your engagement.

Reading responses: (10%) You will turn in ten reading responses during the semester. These are one page, double-spaced (12 pt, Times New Roman) reflections on a given day’s readings (you choose which days you want to do). They are not meant to take you a long time, but to help you keep up with the readings and critically engage with them. All reading responses should include:

- A brief summary of the author’s main argument (one paragraph)
- The rest of the response will reflect, critique, or engage the reading in some way. For example: What did you find interesting? Was there anything you disagreed with and why? How does this reading relate to other course topics, readings, or current events?

These will not be accepted late for any reason. However, I will allow you to turn in eleven and drop your lowest grade if you do poorly on one. I will grade these on a minus, check, or check-plus system, corresponding to 4, 7, or 10 points.

You can use this chart for keeping track of your progress:

My Reading Response Checklist:

RR #	Turned in (date/ author)	RR#	Turned in (date/ author)
1		6	
2		7	
3		8	
4		9	
5		10	

Course papers: (43%) This set of papers is an opportunity to apply the concepts you have learned in this course to an issue or topic of your choice. The papers are divided into segments that correspond to the units of the course. I will also group students by topic for occasional in-class group work. I will expect you to cite course material and to use course concepts in these papers, **and I will hand out additional guidelines in class before these papers are due.** The primary criterion of evaluation of these papers is how well you apply course material and

concepts to your topic. You should review learning goals and incorporate relevant readings into your papers.

- These papers will be turned in on D2L by the due date.
- Late policy: 20% off for one day late, 50% off thereafter.

Choose your topic: due Week 4: Thursday, 9/17 (1/2 – 1 page) (1%)

- This is a short summary of what you will write your paper on. It is intended to get you started and for me to give you some feedback. If you decide to change your topic after this, come talk to me.
- Choose a topic that can be considered a human-caused “environmental problem.” More specific cases can sometimes make your task easier. If you don’t have ideas, browse the Carolan book or come talk to me after class or during office hours. I want you to find a topic you are excited about, that will also work for the assignments.
- Some topic ideas to get you started: climate change (or a specific component of it), water pollution (such as the Flint water crisis, or the problem of chemicals in our water), air pollution, fishery collapse, hazardous or nuclear waste, the California drought, agricultural pollution (such as pesticide or nitrogen run-off), the BP oil spill, deforestation, biodiversity loss, species extinction, mining, poaching, bee colony collapse, soil erosion, water shortages, invasive species, *etc.*

Paper 1: Explaining the problem due Week 6: 2/20 (3 – 4 pages) (14%)

- Briefly give an overview of the problem/issue.
- Use two theories from class that you think do the best job of explaining this case; that is, of explaining an underlying driver of this issue or problem and explain your reasoning (Population growth, the tragedy of the commons, affluence, consumerism, capitalism/the treadmill of production, ecologically unequal exchange, the world system). If you select a theory that our readings have critiqued, defend your reasoning.
- Next, pick one theory that you find least applicable for explaining your case – discuss.

Paper 2: Inequalities and Knowledge due Week 12: 4/3 (3 - 5 pages) (14%)

- Discuss how different groups of people experience environmental inequalities/ environmental privileges in relation to your topic.
- How do cultural structures such as race, class, gender, political affiliation (or others) shape how different people construct narratives about, view, or understand your topic?

Paper 3: Solutions due Week 16: 5/5 (3 - 4 pages) (14%)

- What are the major debates, social movements, or efforts related to solving the problem (of your topic)? Discuss two different approaches to solving the problem. If one of them is more mainstream or popular, discuss why this is.
- Explain how you would classify these approaches according to the varieties of environmentalism or movements we discussed in class
- What are the strengths and limitations of these approaches to solving this problem?
- Finally, what do *you* think should be done?

Mid-term test: Week 8: Monday, 3/6 (20%): The mid-course test will be multiple-choice and short-answer. It is meant to provide an additional way of evaluating your understanding of course concepts that is not based on writing.

Final exam: During Finals Week: Thurs. May 11, 4:30 p.m.– 7:00 p.m. (20%): The final exam will focus on material after the mid-term test, but will build on concepts from the first half.

GRADES:

Grades will be based on the following breakdown, following the university guidelines for grading (A = 94+, A- = 90-93, B+ = 87-89, B = 83- 86, B- = 80-82, C+ = 77-79, C = 73-76, etc.)

Attendance & participation	7
Reading responses	10
Research Papers	43
Topic: 1	
Paper 1: 14	
Paper 2: 14	
Paper 3: 14	
Mid-course test	20
Final exam	20
Total	100 %

POLICIES:

Class communication

D2L: Class readings are posted on D2L. Grades will also be posted there, and I will post announcements or news on D2L. I expect you to check D2L regularly for announcements.

E-mail: For questions about the course, please read and double check this syllabus first. By university policy, grades cannot be discussed over e-mail; please come to my office hours or set up an appointment. E-mail is official communication and should be composed as such. Do not expect replies to emails outside of normal working hours.

Disability accommodations: If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please bring me a letter from Disability Services **within the first few weeks** so we can figure out how to address your needs. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact: 303-492-8671, online, or e-mail dsinfo@colorado.edu. For temporary conditions or injuries, see Temporary Injuries under Quick Links guidelines at the Disability Services website (<http://disabilityservices.colorado.edu/>) and discuss your needs with me.

CU-Boulder Honor Code: All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aiding academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty

member involved and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). For more information see <http://honorcode.colorado.edu/>

- **Plagiarism** is an important aspect of this honor code. All work that you submit for this class must be your own work, which means properly citing and quoting all references. Please be careful in your writing to use your own words and cite others' work when you draw upon their ideas. If you are ever unsure of how to cite, just ask. If you reference ideas from lecture, cite them as (9/6/15) in your text, and if you use direct words from lecture, PowerPoint, or the blackboard, put them in quotes, the same as you would for direct quotes from articles or books.

Discrimination and harassment: CU-Boulder is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. The University of Colorado does not discriminate on the basis of "Protected Classes" (race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual, orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or veteran status) in admission and access to, and treatment and employment in, its educational programs and activities (Regent Law, Article 10, amended 11/8/2001). CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes, or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. More information at www.colorado.edu/institutionalequity/. For sexual harassment policies and reporting see www.colorado.edu/sexualharassment or call the Office of Sexual Harassment at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550.

Respectful classroom environment: Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important in dealing with subject matters that touch upon race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, and nationalities. I will do my best to create a respectful classroom environment, and I expect students to do so as well. If you have any personal concerns about how I can best respect you, please do not hesitate to contact me and discuss how we (or I) can improve our learning environment. I also expect that students, you will do your part to respect your peers and help build a space of open and non-threatening dialogue in our classroom.

Observance of religious holidays: I will make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. Please inform me in person or in writing by the end of the second week of class if you will be unable to attend class, take exams, or turn in assignments on time because of religious obligations and observances so that we can work out a revised schedule with you to meet course requirements.

Student-Athletes: Please notify me by the end of the second week of class – in person and in writing – about any known conflicts between academic requirements and intercollegiate varsity athletic events.

The Writing Center: I encourage students who want to improve their writing to use the Writing Center, which teaches strategies to formulate and organize strong thesis statements, use and cite evidence appropriately, master style and grammar, and overcome writing anxiety. Services are free to all CU students. The Writing Center is in Norlin Library, Room E-156. Contact

wrtghelp@colorado.edu, (303) 735-6906, <http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Items listed for a given date (readings or assignments) should be completed by that date. For example, on 1/20, you should have read Carolan Ch. 1 when you come to class. Carolan readings are from your textbook. All other readings are posted on D2L and are on reserve at Norlin.

Date	Lecture Topic	Readings	Work due
Week 1: Introduction			
W 1/18	Introduction		
F 1/20	What is environmental sociology?	Carolan Ch. 1	
UNIT 1: What are the drivers of environmental degradation?			
Week 2: Classic explanations			
M 1/23	Environmental degradation since the industrial revolution	“The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical Perspectives,” Steffen et al. (2011)	
W 1/25	Tragedy of the Commons	Hardin: “The Tragedy of the Commons”	
F 1/27	Population	Carolan Ch. 6: Population	
Week 3: Growth and consumer society			
M 1/30	Wealth, growth, and ecological footprints	Arrow et al. “Economic Growth, Carrying Capacity, and the Environment”	Calculate your Ecological Footprint
W 2/1	The Consumer Society	Excerpt from <i>The Consumer Society Reader and</i> Carolan pgs. 254 – 255, “The Sociology of Consumption”	
F 2/3	Case study: Waste	Carolan Ch. 3: Waste	
Week 4: Capitalism			
M 2/6	Capitalism: “The treadmill of production”	Carolan Ch. 10: pgs. 210 – 220 <i>and</i> Magdoff and Foster Ch. 3: “The growth imperative of capitalism”	Choose your topic
W 2/8	The environment and capitalism	Magdoff and Foster, Ch. 4: “The Environment and Capitalism”	
F 2/10	Case study: Food	Carolan Chapter 8: Food	
UNIT 2: Environmental Inequalities			
Week 5: Ecologically Unequal Exchange			
M 2/13	Colonialism and resource	Clark and Foster,	

	extraction	“Ecological Imperialism and the Global Metabolic Rift”	
W 2/15	Free trade and unequal exchange	Excerpt from Wallach & Woodall, <i>Whose Trade Organization?</i>	
F 2/17	Case study: Cotton	Excerpt from Beckert, <i>The Empire of Cotton</i>	
Week 6: Environmental inequalities			
M 2/20	Theories of environmental inequality	Mohai et al., “Environmental Justice”	Paper 1 is due
W 2/22	Case study: Pesticides		
F 2/24	Case study: Climate change	Carolan Ch. 2 and Ciptet excerpt on climate justice	
Week 7: Environmental inequalities in Colorado			
M 2/27	Environmental privilege	Excerpt from Park and Pellow, <i>Slums of Aspen</i> –	
W 3/1	Health inequalities	Excerpt on health inequalities in Colorado	
F 3/3	Case study: E-waste	Faber, “The Unfair Trade-off”	
UNIT 3: Knowing nature			
Week 8: Social constructions of nature			
M 3/6	Midterm test		Mid-term test
W 3/8	The social construction of nature	Robbins, “Social Construction of Nature”	
F 3/10	Ideas of “nature”	Levinovitz, “What Is 'Natural' Food?”	
Week 9: Controversies over science			
M 3/13	Knowledge and capitalism	Bell and York, “The coal industry and ideology construction”	
W 3/15	Case study: Climate change	ICN, “What Exxon Knew”	
F 3/17	Film: <i>Merchants of Doubt</i>		
Week 10: Race and gender			
M 3/20	Gender and nature	Pacquette, “Your manliness could be hurting the planet”	
W 3/22	Race and nature	Excerpt from Finney, <i>Black Faces White Spaces</i>	
F 3/24	White male explorers	Excerpt from Fletcher, <i>Romancing the Wild</i>	
Week 11: SPRING BREAK !			
UNIT 4: Debating solutions			

Week 12: Varieties of environmentalism			
M 4/3	U.S. environmental movements	Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"	Paper 2 is due
W 4/5	Environmentalism of the poor and environmental justice movements	Guha, "Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation: a third world critique"	
F 4/7	Comparing contemporary environmentalisms	Downey, Ch. 2 from <i>Inequality, Democracy, and the Environment</i>	
Week 13: Technology			
M 4/10	Ecological modernization and the Jevon's Paradox	Downey and Bonds, "Green Technology" <i>and</i> Carolan pgs. 207- 210	
W 4/12	Case study: Energy	Carolan Ch. 9: Energy	
F 4/14	Case study: GMOs	Grist, "The GM safety dance: What's rule and what's real"	
Week 14: Neoliberalism			
M 4/17	Selling nature to save it?	Radiolab podcast, "The Rhino Hunter"	
W 4/19	Green consumers and eco-labels	Excerpt from Szasz, <i>Shopping our Way to Safety</i>	
F 4/21	Case study: Water	Carolan Ch. 5	
Week 15: Governance and Institutions			
M 4/24	Government regulation	Carolan Ch. 11	
W 4/26	Global collective action	Sunstein: "Of Montreal and Kyoto: A Tale of Two Protocols"	
F 4/28	Ecological economics	Carolan Ch. 10: pgs 220 – 227 (Solutions) <i>and</i> Daly, "Top 10 Policies for a Steady-State Economy"	
Week 16: Changing ideas, changing structures			
M 5/1	Changing the treadmill	Carolan Ch. 12 (<i>skip</i> pgs. 254 - 260)	
W 5/3	Beliefs and behaviors	Carolan Ch. 13 pgs. 275 - 284	
F 5/5	Brainstorming pragmatic environmentalism	Carolan Ch. 13 pgs. 284 - end	Paper 3 is due

Finals Week
Final Exam: