



COURSE SYLLABUS

Environment and Society

STSS-2300-01

Spring 2017

SAGE 4112, T/F: 2-3:50

Professor Michael Mascarenhas

E-mail: mascam@rpi.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Fridays 12:00-1:50, or by appointment

Office: Sage Lab 5118

Office Phone: 276-2106

Course Description

Society and the natural environment are vitally linked in a number of ways. Environmental problems such as pollution and natural resource depletion are not only problems *for* society, affecting the way we live our lives; they are also problems *of* society—the result of patterns of social organization and social practices. In this course, we will explore these society/environment interactions at various levels, from the local to the global, using the concepts and insights of environmental sociology.

Environmental sociology is a relatively new and rapidly growing sub-field within the discipline of sociology. Environmental sociologists aim to understand the social origins of environmental problems and propose workable solutions to them. By showing how social interaction, institutions, and beliefs shape human behavior, environmental sociology provides a useful complement to the natural sciences in the analysis of the environmental problems we face today.

Course Objectives

The course will serve as an introduction to sociological perspectives on society/environment interactions. Readings and lectures will provide overviews of social scientific theories and concepts that are important for understanding society's interactions with the natural environment. You will learn to apply these theories and concepts to real life situations using specific community case studies. Special emphasis will be placed on learning to view problems from multiple perspectives and understanding the views of opposing and complementary sides.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- Increase awareness of the relationships between human society and the natural world. Demonstrate your progress toward this goal through thoughtful in-class writing and class participation.
- Learn to reference social concepts and use a sociological imagination when considering environmental and natural resource issues. Demonstrate progress toward this goal by

applying social concepts and sociological imagination in collaborative in-class activities and discussion.

- Increase critical thinking skills. Demonstrate this by seriously considering multiple viewpoints and perspectives in class discussions, in-class writing, group work, and on exams.
- Apply course material to real world situations. Demonstrate this through participation in in-class discussions and activities and in applying course concepts to real world experiences.
- Become active in the process of seeking, analyzing, and synthesizing information. Demonstrate this by seeking important sources of information, and critically analyzing and synthesizing that information.

Required Texts:

Gould, Ken and Tammy Lewis. 2014. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology, Second Edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Course Requirements & Evaluation

I. Exams (2 (mid-term= 25; final exam=35) = 60%). Exams will be short answer in format and may draw on the entire semesters content.

II. Homework Assignments: (30%). Over the duration of the term, you will be given various questions and other types of homework assignments. Some exercises will be group assignments, others like “chapter in the news,” will be individual. Evaluation will be based on the quality of your work.

III. Class Participation and Attendance (10%). You are expected to attend all classes and participate actively in class. Our first priority is to encourage everyone to be involved thoughtfully in the discussions. Evaluation of participation in class discussions and small group analyses and assignments will be based on the quality as well as the extent of contributions.

Additional Guidelines

The following is a list of questions that should be helpful to keep in mind as you read, and as you write about the readings.

- What is the argument that the author(s) is/are trying to make?
- On what data and/or literature are the claims based? What do the author’s assumptions seem to be?
- In what ways is the argument persuasive or not to you? Why?
- What do you think the author failed to consider about the issue? Why?
- Where do you agree or disagree with the author, and why? How do your own values and experiences shape your response to the text?
- What strikes you as particularly interesting, curious, insightful, irritating, etc.?
- How does the author’s argument relate to other things you have read or to your own experiences?

- What does this article/book chapter have to do with particular aspects of diversity, power, opportunity, discrimination and inequality? Why was it written? How is it important or not?

Chapter in the news: Each week students (3) will present a news article that corresponds to the particular topic in environmental sociology being discussed in class. The article will be discussed during the beginning of Friday's classes and will be 5 minutes in length. Please use official print media for your news article.

Writing proficiency is a minimum requirement for satisfactory completion of this course. All written work must reflect adequate writing skills in order to receive a grade. Here are some **general pointers for good writing:**

- Think your position through carefully – analyze your own ideas and beliefs about the topic
- Get clear about what it is you want to conclude – i.e. be clear about your thesis
- Give reasons for your thesis and support your reasons with evidence – examples are particularly helpful in explaining a point
- Anticipate possible objections and address these, for example, address all the points that an author makes which are pertinent to the issue you want to discuss
- Revisit your thesis in a conclusion

Please edit your work carefully and check for spelling/typographical errors before turning it in. All written assignments must be typed, single-spaced, in 12 point font. Cite your sources and include a reference section. References are part of your word count. Do not use a cover sheet or a binder of any type, just staple the sheets of your paper together.

Grading Scheme

The grading scheme is as follows:

A = 4.0=100.00-93.00; A- = 3.67 = 90.00-92.99; B+ = 3.33 = 87.00-89.99; B = 3 = 83.00-86.99; B- = 2.67 = 80.00-82.99; C+ = 2.33 = 77.00-79.99; C = 2 = 73.00-76.99; C- = 1.67 = 70.00-72.99; D+ = 1.33 = 67.00-69.99; D = 1.0 = 63.00-66.99; F = 0 = 59.99-0.00. There is no D- grade and the minimum grade to pass a course is a D.

Instructor's Expectation and Policies

- **Written work must be submitted to me directly or as otherwise instructed.**
- **Test deferrals and extensions on assignments are granted for legitimate reasons (medical or compassionate) only.** Students must contact me as close to the test or due date as possible and provide supporting evidence: a doctor's note indicating the nature and date of an illness or a family member's death certificate. Students who feel they have legitimate reasons that do not fall into either of these categories should contact me and I will assess the case based on the evidence provided. Note that in all other cases:
 - 5 % per day will be deducted from the student's total grade for each day after the due date.
 - No assignment will be accepted later than one week after the due date.

- A grade of zero will be given for tests or presentations for failure to attend on the scheduled date.
- In-class group work and homework assignments will not be accepted late.
- **Documentation for excused absences is processed by the Student Experience office.** If you require an official excuse, please contact the Student Experience office – 4th floor of Academy Hall, x8022, se@rpi.edu.
- **All students are expected to foster a healthy, enjoyable, and productive academic environment.** This means behaving in a professional and courteous manner, making meaningful contributions to discussions, listening attentively to others, being open to new ideas, and treating each other as equals. The use of cell phones and computers for personal use is strictly prohibited. Students using either will be asked to leave the class room immediately, and be deducted one percentage point per offence.

Academic Integrity

Student-teacher relationships are built on trust. For example, students must trust that teachers have made appropriate decisions about the structure and content of the courses they teach, and teachers must trust that the assignments that students turn in are their own. Acts, which violate this trust, undermine the educational process. The Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities define various forms of Academic Dishonesty and you should make yourself familiar with these (<http://www.rpi.edu/dept/doso/2006-2008RPI-StudentHandbook.pdf>). In this class, all assignments that are turned in for a grade must represent the student's own work. In cases where help was received, or teamwork was allowed, a notation on the assignment should indicate your collaboration.

Examples of plagiarism include:

- Borrowing the ideas, theories, illustrations, lab data, or language of others, in whole or in part, without properly quoting and citing the source within the text of the paper;
- Substantially paraphrasing without acknowledging the source, even though you have used your own words;
- Combining your words with substantial phrases from a source that is either not cited or under cited;
- Using synonyms to change words within a phrase or sentence derived from another source and then treating the phrase or sentence as if it was your own;
- Failing to cite the correct source of a quotation;
- Submitting an assignment that does not acknowledge the contribution of co-authors where such acknowledgement would be appropriate;
- Submitting an assignment, in whole or in part, that was previously graded in another course, whether or not the other course was taught at RPI;
- Submitting an assignment, in whole or in part, which was purchased from another source.

Submission of any assignment that is in violation of this policy will result in a penalty of zero for the assignment. A second offence will result in an F in this course.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week	Subject	Readings
Week 1: 01/17	Introduction	T: Introduction to Environment and Society F: An Introduction to Environmental Sociology
Week 2: 01/24	Theory	T: The Social Construction of Nature: Of Computers, Butterflies, Dogs, and Trucks F: Theories in Environmental Sociology
Week 3: 01/31		T: Theories in Environmental Sociology TH: How to Think about Science. Ulrich Beck and Bruno Latour http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/how-to-think-about-science-part-5-1.465006
Week 4: 02/07	Systemic Causes of Environmental Destruction	T: The State and Policy: Imperialism, Exclusion, and Ecological Violence as State Policy. F: Labor Productivity and the Environment.
Week 5: 02/14		T: Corporate Power: The Role of the Global Media in Shaping What We Know About the Environment. The Corporation F: The Science of Nature and the Nature of Science.
Week 6: 02/21		T: Monday schedule F: Midterm
Week 7: 02/28		T: Technological Change and the Environment. F: Population, Demography, and the Environment.
Week 8: 03/7		T: Energy, Society, and the Environment. F: The Death of Environmental Sociology
Week 9: 03/14	SPRING BREAK	
Week 10: 03/21	Some Social Consequences of Environmental Disruption	T: Environmental Inequality and Environmental Justice. F: The Sociology of Environmental Health
Week 11: 03/28		T: Producing and Consuming Food: Justice and Sustainability in a Globalized World? F: From Farms to Factories: The Environmental Consequences of Swine Industrialization in North Carolina
Week 12: 04/04	Some Social Responses to Environmental Disruption	T: Understanding Disaster Vulnerability: Floods and Hurricanes. F: Normalizing the Unthinkable: Climate Denial and Everyday Life,
Week 13: 04/11		T: U.S. Environmental Movements. F: Labor and the Environment
Week 14:		T: Environmental Movements in the Global South.

04/18		F: Indigenous Cultures: Environmental Knowledge, Practice, and Rights.
Week 15: 04/25		T: The Paradoxes of Sustainable Development: Focus on Ecotourism F: Unanswered Questions and the Future of Environmental Sociology
Week 16: 05/02		T: FINAL EXAM