

Sociology 4999: Environmental Sociology
Spring 2017, Section 1 (CRN: 27883)
3 credits

Instructor: Dr. Shawn A. Trivette

Instructor Phone and Email: (423) 425-5461, Shawn-Trivette@utc.edu. Note: I try to reply to email quickly, but please allow 24 hours for a reply (I will do the same for anything I send you). Also, it is helpful to include [SOC 4999] in the Subject line; and be sure to include your name somewhere in the email.

Instructor Office Hours and Location: Brock 308A. Tu/Wed/Th 12:30-1:30 *and by appointment.*

Course Meeting Days, Time, and Location: TR 1:40 – 2:55 PM, Brock 402

Course Catalog Description: Examination of the relationship between social and physical systems emphasizing social, political, and economic factors as they interface with the environment. Topics include key environmental issues (energy, water, food, pollution, etc.), production and consumption, environmental justice, and methods of building ecologically and socially sustainable solutions.

Course Pre-/Co-Requisites: SOC 1510.

More Complete Course Description:

At its most basic, environmental sociology is about how society and the environment impact each other. Most such courses consider how we make sense of environmental issues, how social institutions contribute to environmental problems and solutions, and how to understand the political fault lines of environmental issues. This course meets all these hallmarks.

But more deeply, this course also asks a very fundamental (yet deceptively complex) question: why do we make unsustainable decisions? By "we" I don't mean any particular person or even subset of people; I mean this wider phenomenon we generally refer to as "society". On a whole host of environmental issues – from climate change to soil, air, and water pollution to biodiversity loss to resource extraction – the physical science paints a fairly clear picture: we are doing considerable damage to our world. Yet even in the face of such stark observations we don't do the most rational and logical thing. Why not?

Over the course of this semester we will unpack answers to this question. Along the way we'll cover some of the more "traditional" elements of a course on this topic, as well as a healthy dose of environmental sociological theory. We'll also spend time on some related questions: Just what is this "sustainability" thing anyway, where do sustainability and social justice meet, and how can we build a more ecologically sustainable society?

Course Student Learning Outcomes: By the course's end, students should be able to:

- Explain some of the ways society and the environment impact each other
- Identify the social trends that shape today's environmental problems
- Analyze and evaluate environmental data and information (i.e., basic scientific literacy skills) as well as (popular) societal interpretations of these data
- Critically evaluate and assess the practicality of various ecological solutions in their ability to bring about a sustainable and just society

In addition, students will also have the opportunity to:

- Sharpen critical thinking skills
- Present and craft logical, convincing arguments
- Develop reading, writing, and listening skills
- Become more engaged and aware "environmental citizens"

Required Course Materials/Texts/Resources: Gould, Kenneth A., & Tammy L. Lewis. 2014. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
 Bullard, Robert D. 1990. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Other readings will be posted on Blackboard and listed in this syllabus.

I highly recommend following the radio program *Living on Earth*, which airs on our local NPR station (WUTC, FM 88.1) Saturday mornings at 7:00; it is also available via www.loe.org.

Required Course Assessments, Evaluations and Requirements: There are 6 major components to your grade in this course:

- To help you be well-prepared for class you will write **Reflections** on at least five of the assigned reading units. Each Reflection counts for 4% of your grade (for a total of 20%). Reflections are due via Blackboard by noon the day *before* it is assigned. Note that Reflections grades are cumulative and you may do more than five, but only if the regular due date for a given Reflection has not passed (thus, it behooves you to start early). Specific details regarding deadlines, how to write them, grading criteria, and prompt questions are available in a handout on Blackboard.
- To test what you are learning in this class, we will have two **Exams**, both a **Midterm** and a **Final** (each will count for 20%). Both will be take-home exams and will include a mix of short-answer and essay questions with some flexibility in which questions you answer; you are allowed (and encouraged) to draw on course materials to craft answers. I will provide the question list at least a week prior to the exam due date. The Midterm is due Feb 16 and the Final is due Apr 27 (during our scheduled exam block).
- To deepen your critical engagement with material we will have a Book Club (worth 10% of your course grade). You should read *Dumping in Dixie* over Spring Break and come to class the following week prepared for small-group, in-depth discussion. Though this is graded, think of it as a learning opportunity to engage with ideas simply for their own sake, not just another assignment. To help you prepare for the discussion come up with at least three discussion questions or prompts prior to class. This will ensure that our time that day is engaging and productive. A handout on Blackboard has further details.
- **Class Participation** is an essential part of the success of this class and will count for 10% of your grade. It will consist of three basic parts: small-stakes assignments, attending class field trips, and being engaged in class discussions and activities. Small-stakes assignments are simple activities you will prepare outside of class (such as a worksheet or gathering real-world data) that we will use for certain class activities (they are indicated on the schedule below). They are not meant to take a significant amount of time. There are also two class field trips which will occur during regular class time, but could extend beyond the official end of class (I will not require you to stay late, though I encourage you to be prepared to do so if possible – dates are also in the schedule below).
- To develop your critical thinking and writing skills (as well as further test your learning in this class and ability to apply it), you will complete an **Ecotopia Project** (20% of course

grade). Part of the task of building an ecologically sound society involves thinking both critically and creatively about the various environmental issues before us. The Ecotopia Project is designed to help you do this. You will select some activity to work on across the term which will require you to both draw on course material and engage with your more creative side. Project options are detailed on Blackboard and will be discussed in class. Note that small groups are an option for some projects. Everyone will present their project in our last week together and papers (or the equivalent, as appropriate) will be due by Apr 18.

- I'm a big fan of extra credit and routinely make it a part of my courses. I call the extra credit in this class "chits" (technically, a chit is something that represents monetary credit). Think of chits as the tickets you earn playing skee-ball at an arcade: As you play, you get tickets which can be redeemed for prizes at the counter. So it is with chits: certain "extra" things you do in class earn you chits which can be redeemed for certain other things in class. There are four ways to earn chits:
 1. Regular class attendance (1 chit/full class; see Attendance policy for details)
 2. Completing extra reflections (see the Reflection handout on Blackboard)
 3. Bonus questions on the exams
 4. Going above and beyond (awarded at my discretion)

And there are three ways to spend your chits:

1. Points on your final grade (a *full* 25 chits is worth one extra point on your grade)
2. Turn in an overdue [un-submitted] Reflection to be graded without penalty (35 chits)
3. A class auction on Apr 20 (see Blackboard for auction items)

Grading Scale: Final course grades will be rounded to the nearest whole number ($\leq .49$ rounds down) and assigned letter grades as follows:

A	90-100	C	70-79	F	0-59
B	80-89	D	60-69		

Attendance Policy: I don't count attendance as part of your normal grade, though I do keep track of it and use it for extra credit. Along with being on time, I would love for you to come to every class. Still, I recognize you are fully-functional adults capable of deciding what's best for you in a given moment; sometimes life just throws us curveballs: your car breaks down, you get hung over, your printer or computer is on the fritz, you'll oversleep, a relative will die (I hope not!), or something is just going on that makes your life difficult or simply prevents you from coming to class. Should this happen, please talk to me; I want to help if I can.

That said, and along with the fully-functional adult bit, I don't take kindly to "did we do anything important?" emails. I don't do throw-away days. If you miss one day (even if it was for some legitimate emergency) the responsible thing to do is (a) let me know and (b) check with another student from the class to find out what was covered. After you have done this I will gladly answer questions you have, but I will not discuss missed material with you before you have first made an effort to get notes from someone else.

Policy for Late/Missing Work: I will only accept the Exams or the Ecotopia Project late with a reasonable and documented excuse (i.e., illness, family emergency, etc.). The Book Club and Class Participation elements simply cannot be made up, even with such an excuse. Reflections will only be accepted late if you have extra chits to use (as outlined above and detailed in the Reflection handout on Blackboard); illness, emergency, and poor planning will **not** be considered valid excuses since there are so many opportunities available for submitting Reflections.

Course Calendar/Schedule/Key Dates: *I will make every effort to notify you of changes in a timely manner.*

Topic	Date	Reading Due	Assignment Due
What is Environmental Sociology?	Jan 10		
Part I: Understanding the Environment-Society Interface [or: Causes of Environmental Degradation]			
Environmental Care & Sustainability	Jan 12	Lesson 1	®
Consumption	Jan 17	Lesson 2	®; Consumption Tracker
The State	Jan 19	Lesson 3	®
Environmental Agencies	Jan 24	<i>Select Lifestyle Changes</i>	Enviro Agency Worksheet
The Economy	Jan 26	Lesson 5	®; <i>Begin Lifestyle Change</i>
Technology & the Environment	Jan 31	Lesson 7	®
Lifestyle Change Discussion	Feb 2		<i>End Lifestyle Change</i>
Part II: Key Environmental Issues			
Energy	Feb 7	Lesson 9	®
Fracking & Health	Feb 9	Lesson 11	®
Global Climate Change	Feb 14	Lesson 15	®
	Feb 16		Midterm Exam
Water	Feb 21	Bb: Carolan Ch 5	®
	Feb 23	Field Trip: Water Plant	
Environmental Justice	Feb 28	Lesson 10	®
	Mar 2		
Environmental Disasters	Mar 7	Lesson 14	®
Labor & the Environment	Mar 9	Lesson 17	®
March 13-17: Spring Break [no classes]			
Book Club Day	Mar 21	<i>Dumping in Dixie</i>	Book Club
Part III: Creating Sustainability			
Agriculture, Food, & Society	Mar 23	Lesson 12	®
	Mar 28	Field Trip: Campus Garden	
	Mar 30	<i>No class; work on Projects &/or Scavenger Hunt List</i>	
	Apr 4	Lesson 13	®; <i>Optional Fast</i>
	Apr 6		Food Scavenger Hunt; <i>Optional Fast</i>
The Environmental Movement	Apr 11	Lesson 16	®; Enviro Org Worksheet
Building the Ecological Society	Apr 13	Conclusion	
Ecotopia Project Presentations	Apr 18		Ecotopia Project Papers
	Apr 20		
Final Exam	Apr 27	Due by 2 PM (exam is schedule 1-3 PM)	

Continued enrollment in this course implies acceptance of the following **five agreements**:

1. In class, be positive, willing, and prepared.
2. Come to class on time.
3. Don't give leaving cues (packing up early, snapping binders shut, etc.).
4. Be respectful.
5. Be authentic (honest, real, true, etc.).

Technology in the Classroom: While there are many benefits to the technologies available to us today, sometimes they can be more of a distraction than a benefit. Please silence your cell phones while in class. Please refrain from texting in class (it limits your ability to learn as well as being distracting to other students). If you use a laptop in class, it must be used **ONLY** for taking notes; surfing the web or playing games are wholly unacceptable. **Non-class-related computer use** (while class is in session) **will result in all student laptops being banned from class.**

UTC Alert System: We live in an uncertain world and emergencies (often by their nature) occur when we least expect. The university has an Emergency Alert System which sends text messages in event of an emergency. You can enroll or update your information in this system at utc.edu/TakingPrecautions and clicking on the Register for UTC R.A.V.E. Alerts button.

Plagiarism and Cheating: Acts of academic dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating, etc.) **will be reported and you will receive no credit for the assignment in question (and possibly the course).** Phrases or even ideas that are not your own should be cited. For example:

- *Attribute an argument or idea as follows:* Many people found their sociology course to be the best one they'd taken all year (Author's Last Name, Year of Publication).
- *Attribute a quote as follows:* "Many people found their sociology course to be the best one they'd taken all year" (Author's Last Name, Year of Publication: Page #).