

ENVIRONMENT & SOCIETY

SOC/ES 261

12:40 – 1:40 MWF

Sage 4232

Fall 2019

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Course Description

This course will introduce you to thinking about connections between social relationships and the natural environment. Environmental sociologists study how environmental problems have social origins, often asking the following questions: How does human organization and action affect the natural environment? How does the natural environment affect human organization and action? How do relationships between humans and non-humans construct and sustain society?

As an “Explore Society” general education course, this class takes an approach characterized under the large umbrella of liberal arts education. Liberal arts is *not* a reference to politics. Rather, liberal arts refers to an approach to education that focuses on broad knowledge and transferable skills while focusing on values, ethics, and community. Along with developing skills described in the course goals, you will also be introduced to several issues that you will encounter as a private citizen and community member long after you leave UWO.

UW Oshkosh Bulletin Description

Examines relationship between social structure, culture and natural environments; compares different modes of production and cultural systems. Examines economic, political and ideological structures of industrial and industrializing societies. Analyzes the impact of these structures upon natural environments and analyzes the impact of natural environment upon these structures. Sociology 261/Environmental Studies 261/Political Science 261 Students may receive credit for only one of the three cross-listed courses. Special course fees may apply.

Course Goals

A core Learning Outcome at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is “Knowledge of Sustainability and Its Applications.” Certainly, this course will address the concept of sustainability, and particularly focus on challenges to sustainability faced by environmental advocates at different scales of society. Along the way, we will have an opportunity to engage in critical thinking and quantitative literacy applied to various ethical dilemmas regarding sustainable practices.

Course Materials

Leslie King and Deborah McCarthy (eds), *Environmental Sociology: From Analysis to Action* (2009)

*Additional materials made available online

Quizzes

Much of this course will rely on a discussion of assigned readings, so it is important that you keep up with the reading schedule and take careful notes. There will be five (open-note, but closed-laptop) quizzes throughout the semester that assess your engagement with assigned readings and lecture material. Your lowest score will be dropped from your grade. Make-up quizzes will only be granted if you give me advanced notice and/or have a documented excuse.

Friday Forums

At nine points in the semester, we will devote our meeting time to a “Friday Forum.” Early in the semester, we will form groups (each with a unique topic). Each group will be responsible for delivering a presentation and leading a discussion on their topic for one Friday Forum, as well as submitting a written summary of the research you prepared for the presentation. Audience members are expected to engage in the discussion, which will often take the form of a debate. Your grade will depend not only on your preparation for and performance during your presentation day, but also upon your attendance at other groups’ forums.

Energy Use Ethnography

This assignment is both individual and collective. We will be looking at common ways of assessing energy use before deciding as a class what categories we would like to apply to ourselves. Each of us will document detailed data (in both qualitative and quantitative formats) about the social context of our energy use. I will centralize this data and each of you will write a paper analyzing your energy use. More details will be provided, but if you would like a jump start, you may read ahead to the materials assigned for October 7th or 9th.

Actionable Project Plan

For this assignment, we will form groups of 3 and prepare a brief presentation (5 minutes) regarding practical action to address environmental problems that take account of social causes/obstacles. The content and focus will vary widely from group to group, but examples include crafting a social media strategy, a brief media production (e.g., a public service announcement video), a social marketing campaign, a proposal to amend practices at your place of work, reviewing a successful social movement that addressed an environmental problem and drawing general lessons we can learn from it, or something entirely different that the group and I agree upon. In addition to presenting on this action, each group must write up a 3-4 page paper outlining the context of the problem you address, the product you produce (e.g. a social media strategy), why you think this action is a good idea, and what sort of outcomes you would expect to come from it and why.

GRADING

Quizzes (4)	20%
Friday Forum	20%
Energy Use Ethnography	30%
Action Project	20%
Attendance and Participation	10%

Late work will be penalized.

Your final grade will be computed on the following percentage scale:

A	92.5-100%
A-	90.0-92.49
B+	87.5-89.99
B	82.5-87.49
B-	80.0-82.49
C+	77.5-79.99
C	72.5-77.49
C-	70.0-72.49
D+	67.5-69.99
D	62.5-67.49
D-	60.00-62.49
F	0-59.99

SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Environment & Society

- Sept 4 W Introduction to the Course / What is Environmental Sociology
- Sept 6 F Environmental Problems as Social Problems
- Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?” (KM, ch. 22)
 - *Optional*: Bohr and Dunlap, “Key Topics in Environmental Sociology”

Week 2 – Social Construction of Nature

- Sept 9 M Friday Forum Signup
- Sept 11 W Social Construction I
- Robbins et al., “Social Construction of Nature”

- Sept 13 F Social Construction II
- Davis, “Touch the Magic” (KM, ch. 8)
 - Steingraber, “The Social Construction of Cancer” (KM, ch. 18)
 - **Quiz #1**

Week 3 – Science & Environmental Conflicts

- Sept 16 M Sustainability
- Heinberg, “What is Sustainability?”
 - Newton and Freyfogle, “Sustainability, a Dissent”
- Sept 18 W Scientific Knowledge & Environmental Conflicts
- Ozawa, “Science in Environmental Conflicts” (KM, ch. 15)
 - Edwards, “An Ounce of Precaution” (KM, ch. 16)
- Sept 20 F FRIDAY FORUM #1

Week 4 – Theorizing Environment & Society I

- Sept 23 M Political Economy
- Robbins et al., “Political Economy”
 - *Optional*: Foster (KM, ch. 1/2)
 - **Quiz #2**
- Sept 25 W Treadmill of Production
- Schnaiberg and Gould, “Treadmill Predispositions and Social Responses” (KM, ch. 3)
- Sept 27 F Ecological Modernization Theory
- Vail, “Ecological Modernization at Work?” (KMA ch. 5)

Week 5 – Theorizing Environment & Society II

- Sept 30 M Malthusianism
- Ehrlich and Ehrlich, “Population Bomb Revisited”
- Oct 2 W Eco-Feminism
- Shiva, “Development, Ecology, and Women”
 - *Optional*: Kennedy and Dzialo, “Locating Gender in Environmental Sociology”

Oct 4 F FRIDAY FORUM #2

- **Quiz #3**

Week 6 – Energy & Society

Oct 7 M Household Energy Use I

- Sovacool, “Cultural and Behavioral Barriers,” from *The Dirty Energy Dilemma*

Oct 9 W Household Energy Use II

- Lutzenhiser, “A Cultural Model of Household Energy Consumption”

Oct 11 F FRIDAY FORUM #3

Week 7 – Environmental Justice

Oct 14 M Film – *No Impact Man*

Oct 16 W Environmental Justice

- Bullard and Johnson, “Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making” (KM, ch. 4)

Oct 18 F FRIDAY FORUM #4

Week 8 – Climate Change I

Oct 21 M Individual Denial

- Norgaard, “Emotions, Denial, and Social Movement Nonparticipation” (KM, ch. 21)

Oct 23 W Cultures of Denial

Oct 25 F FRIDAY FORUM #5

Week 9 – Climate Change II

Oct 28 M Film (subject to reading quiz)

Oct 30 W WORK DAY

- We will collectively review our class energy data & discuss strategies of analysis (I encourage you to bring your laptop to class)

Nov 1 F FRIDAY FORUM #6

- **Quiz #4**

Week 10 – Climate Change III

Nov 4 M Climate Change Impacts & Social Vulnerability

- Bohle et al., “Climate Change and Social Vulnerability”

Nov 6 W Climate Policy

Nov 8 F FRIDAY FORUM #7

- **Energy Use Ethnography Paper DUE**

Week 11 – Environmental Values, Concerns, & Behaviors

Nov 11 M Post-materialism (Environmental Values)

Nov 13 W Concerns & Behaviors I

- Carolan, “Sociological Ambivalence and Climate Change”

Nov 15 F FRIDAY FORUM #8

Week 12 – Environmental Values, Concerns, & Behaviors

Nov 18 M Concerns & Behaviors II

- Kennedy & Horne, “Do Green Behaviors Earn Social Status?”

Nov 20 W Action Project overview & group signup

Nov 22 F FRIDAY FORUM #9

Week 13

Nov 25 M Office Hours (sign up for meetings)

Nov 27 W **No Class (Thanksgiving recess)**

Nov 29 F **No Class (Thanksgiving recess)**

Week 14 – Consumption

- Dec 2 M Consumerism and the Environment
- Schor, “Cleaning the Closet: Toward a New Fashion Ethic” (KM, ch. 23)
 - *Optional*: Kennedy, Baumann, and Johnston – “Eating for Taste and Eating for Change: Ethical Consumption as a High-Status Practice”
- Dec 4 W Action Project group meetings
- Meet in-class; I will be available to answer last-minute questions
- Dec 6 F Action Project presentations

Week 15 – Course Overview

- Dec 9 M Action Project presentations
- Dec 11 W Individual & Collective Responses
- Re-read Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World” & review your sustainability essay
 - Bring to this class: ideas on what inspires (or terrifies) you about environment-society futures (whether social movements, consumer patterns, policy, etc.)
 - **Quiz #5**
- Dec 13 F **Action Project write-up DUE**