

# **Sociology 366: Environmental Sociology**

**Fall 2009**

**Administration Building, Rm. 12**

**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:45**

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**Office hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8:30 – 9:30 a.m., Wednesdays, 1:30-2:30 p.m.

## **Course summary**

This course is designed to give students an introduction to environmental sociology, the study of the relationship between society and the environment. Questions that will guide our exploration of this subject matter include: How do societies utilize and interact with natural systems? How do these interactions affect people, animals, plants, and ecosystems as a whole? How are our everyday behaviors mediated by the structure of society's relationship with the environment? How do ecological processes affect society? By the end of the course, students should be able to engage in discussions about the links between human societies and contemporary environmental issues/problems in an informed and critical manner.

## **Course objectives**

This course is designed to help you gain knowledge and develop skills that will aid you in becoming a critical thinker, a successful student, and an informed, engaged member of society. Specifically, in this course you will:

- gain knowledge of how society operates on the micro and macro levels
- learn how to interpret your and others' experiences using a sociological framework
- gain an understanding of the role of the environment in society and society's role in affecting the environment
- discuss social issues in an informed, critical, and civil manner
- learn how to utilize LCSC's library to conduct research
- write well-organized essays that demonstrate an understanding of key sociological issues and concepts
- gain experience presenting research to an audience of your peers

## **Overall goal**

I want you to learn something new in this class. Sounds simple, right? Well, in my experience, this isn't always such an easy task. We all have so many taken for granted assumptions about how the world works, what constitutes reality, why people behave in certain ways, etc., that it is sometimes difficult for us to recognize when "what we've always known" is keeping us from

knowing more. I think that all of us—teachers and students alike—need to continually challenge ourselves to learn more about the world in which we live. I believe the way to accomplish this is by questioning status quo interpretations of reality, seeking out information that will help us answer our questions, and understanding that we can always learn more about any given topic. You should do well in this class if you approach the material with this in mind.

### **Required readings**

The following required book is available at the LCSC Bookstore or from online booksellers:

Gould, Kenneth A. and Tammy L. Lewis. 2009. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The other required readings are noted in the course schedule and are available on the LCSC Library's Electronic Reserves.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Your grade in this course will be based on the following:

**Class Participation and Pop Quizzes - 20% (40 pts.)** Class participation will be an important part of your experience in this class. This participation will include small and large group discussions, activities, and in-class writing exercises. Also, a pop quiz may await you in class on any given day. These quizzes are my way of ensuring that you are keeping up with the assigned readings, and they may also test your knowledge of previously covered lecture material.

***In-class writing exercises, activities, discussions and pop quizzes cannot be made-up—you must be present in class to receive credit for these assignments and activities.***

**Experiential Research Project, Paper, and Presentation - 30% (60 pts.)** One of the best ways to learn something new is to DO something new. For the experiential research project you will modify your lifestyle in some way that is intended to lessen your impact on the environment. You should be prepared to maintain this lifestyle modification for at least a week. You might choose to stop driving a car to school/work, eat only locally produced foods, refrain from buying packaged items, stop eating meat, or any number of other behavioral changes. The important thing is to make a *change*, i.e. do something that you are not currently doing. The experiential project involves several components. First, you will turn in a 1-2 page proposal during Week 4 in which you state what sort of lifestyle modification you intend to make and why it is environmentally significant. Second, after having your proposal approved, you will make your chosen lifestyle change and keep a journal of your experience. After you have concluded the experiential portion of the project, you will write an 8-10 page experiential research paper in which you discuss your personal experience along with how it fits into the larger structural context of our society's relationship to the environment. Finally, you will present your findings to the class during the last couple of weeks of the semester. (Specific instructions for this project will be distributed and discussed in class.)

**First Exam - 25% (50 pts.)** essay exam, consisting of 3-5 questions of which students will choose 2-3 to answer.

**Final Exam – 25% (50 pts.)** essay exam, consisting of 3-5 questions of which students will choose 2-3 to answer.

### **Grading scale**

A+ = 99-100% (197-200 pts.)  
A = 91-98% (181-196 pts.)  
A- = 90% (179-180 pts.)  
B+ = 89% (177-178 pts.)  
B = 81-88% (161-176 pts.)  
B- = 80% (159-160 pts.)  
C+ = 79% (157-158 pts.)  
C = 71-78% (141-156 pts.)  
C- = 70% (139-140 pts.)  
D+ = 69% (137-138 pts.)  
D = 61-68% (121-136 pts.)  
D- = 60% (119-120 pts.)  
F = 59% (118 pts.) or below

### **Evaluation criteria**

Your experiential research project will be graded according to the creativeness and thoroughness with which you have engaged with your chosen lifestyle modification; the extent to which you offer a critical, sociological analysis/interpretation of your experiences; the extent to which you have integrated scholarly sources of information in investigating your topic; and the quality of your writing in the paper. “A”s are reserved for truly superior work. “B”s are assigned to above average, well-written work. “C”s are an indication that more detail and analysis are needed and/or your writing needs significant improvement. “D”s are a sign that you did not adequately meet the requirements of the project and/or your writing is unacceptable. “F”s are an indication that you have not met even the minimum requirements of the project and your writing is unacceptable.

The essay exams will be graded according to the thoroughness with which you have addressed the particular questions you have chosen; the extent to which you offer a critical, sociological analysis/interpretation; the extent to which you have integrated course readings, lectures, and discussions; and the quality of your writing.

For the participation component of your grade, you will receive points for in-class writing assignments, activities, and discussions. You will also receive grades on brief pop quizzes. There may be two of these quizzes or there may be ten – no way to know except by coming to class. In addition to these points, which you will accrue over the course of the semester, at the end of the semester I will ask you to evaluate yourself in terms of your class participation. I will take your self-evaluation into consideration in determining your final participation grade.

## **Expectations**

### **Classroom behavior**

If we all follow a few simple, common sense guidelines, our class time together will be a pleasant experience for everyone.

- Please be on time, and do not leave early. Coming in late or leaving early can be highly disruptive. Also, please do not begin shuffling papers and packing up before the end of class.
- Please do not interrupt others or talk to your neighbor while others are speaking.
- Address your fellow classmates respectfully, whether or not you agree with their particular viewpoints.
- Turn off cell phones, pagers, and any other little beeping, shrieking, or music-making devices before you come to class.
- Do not read the newspaper, work on an assignment for another class, or otherwise be disengaged from what is going on in the classroom.
- Finally, please, no web surfing in class. Despite the fact that that cute man/woman you've been obsessing over has just IM'd you or sent you a Facebook message, please do not read or respond to emails in class, all the while pretending to take notes.

### **Academic integrity**

Any instance of plagiarism, cheating, or other form of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in a manner that is unpleasant for all involved. Please do not ruin your academic future by engaging in such foolish behavior. If you have any questions about what is meant by the term "academic dishonesty," please see me for an explanation or clarification.

## **Attendance**

I believe very strongly in the benefits of regular class attendance. As you can see by looking at the percentage of your grade that comes from participation, you will not do well in this course if you do not come to class on a regular basis. My advice? Come to every class.

If you do miss a class and do not have a valid reason (defined below), please do not ask me, "What did I miss?" or, my personal favorite, "Did I miss anything?" Instead, get the notes from a fellow classmate, keeping in mind that s/he may or may not be a good note taker. But why take that risk? Just come to every class.

I do understand that in certain situations, you may actually have a valid reason for missing class. I consider the following to be such reasons:

-documented medical emergencies (*not* regular medical appointments, which you can schedule at a different time than this class)

-acute illnesses (such as the flu)

-documented legal conflicts (your arrest on the way to class, for example)

-family emergencies/issues that require your immediate attention (This sort of situation can, of course, be more sensitive and difficult to document. I trust that each of you has enough integrity to use this reason only if it is legitimate.)

-documented housing emergencies (fire, flood, etc.)

-documented pet illnesses/emergencies (I also have animals, and I know their well-being is of the utmost importance.)

If you are absent from class for one of these reasons (or another one that you are absolutely certain fits into the “could-not-possibly-have-been-avoided” category), contact me as soon as possible (prior to class, preferably). Please be prepared to provide me with some form of documentation (if appropriate), such as a signed note with the signer’s contact information, and I will arrange for you to get the notes for the class you have missed.

### **Policy on make-ups and late papers**

*In-class writing exercises and activities cannot be made up.* By definition, you must be present in class to receive credit for these assignments.

*Pop quizzes cannot be made up.*

*Exams can only be made up in extenuating circumstances.*

*Experiential research papers turned in late (i.e. after the start of the class period in which they are due) will receive an automatic 20% deduction (i.e. two letter grades). Papers not turned in by 4:00 on the Thursday following the due date will not be accepted. Rare exceptions to this policy on late papers (due to a documented, emergency situation, as defined above) will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The sooner you contact me after such a situation arises the better your chances of being granted an extension.*

### **Additional notes**

#### **Documented disabilities**

If you have a documented disability or other issue that may affect your performance in this course, please let me know during the first week of the term, and we will work together to figure out appropriate accommodations.

## **Contacting me**

If you have questions about the course material and/or would like to further discuss any of the topics we are covering, please come chat with me during my office hours. If you need to contact me otherwise, the best way to reach me is via email. I check email most weekdays. You can also try calling my office phone during office hours. Please be aware, however, that if you leave a message at any other time on my office phone, I may not get it until the following office hour, so if you need to be in touch with me in a timely manner, use email. If/when you email me, please include a phone number where you can be reached, so I can call you if necessary. All this being said, please use email sparingly. I would much rather talk with you in person during my office hours or after class.

## **Course schedule**

The course schedule is subject to change depending on our progress in covering the material, and additional readings will likely be added for Weeks 10 and 11. Any changes or additional readings will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to know what is announced in class, whether or not you are present when it's announced.

Your active engagement with each week's assigned readings is key to your success in this class. **The readings listed for each week should be completed prior to that week's Tuesday class.** The exception to this is, of course, the reading for the first week. Read that as soon as you can after our first class meeting.

Films will be integrated with the lectures and class discussions throughout the semester.

### **Week 1 (8/25, 8/27): Introduction to the course: What is environmental sociology?**

*Readings:* Gould and Lewis, "An Introduction to Environmental Sociology" (Ch. 1, *Twenty Lessons...*)

### **Week 2 (9/1, 9/3): Social theory and the environment**

*Readings:* Capek, "The Social Construction of Nature: Of Computers, Butterflies, Dogs, and Trucks," and Barbosa, "Theories in Environmental Sociology" (Chs. 2 and 3, *Twenty Lessons...*)

**Week 3 (9/8, 9/10): Societies' interactions with the environment: the importance of time and scale**

*Readings:* Ponting, "Ninety-nine per cent of human history" and "The first great transition"; Adam, "Running out of time: global crisis and human engagement" (E-reserves)

**\*\*Review of how to do library research on Thursday, Sept. 10th. Meet in the classroom, and then we will go to the library together.**

**Week 4 (9/15, 9/17): How do we know what we know about the environment?**

*Readings:* Campbell, "Corporate Power: The Role of the Global Media in Shaping What We Know About the Environment," and York, "The Science of Nature and the Nature of Science" (Chs. 6 and 7, *Twenty Lessons...*); Lele and Norgaard, "Sustainability and the Scientist's Burden" (E-reserves)

**\*\*Experiential Research Project Proposals due in class on Thursday, Sept. 17<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 5 (9/22, 9/24): The systemic nature of environmental problems**

*Readings:* Pellow, "The State and Policy: Imperialism, Exclusion, and Ecological Violence as State Policy" (Ch. 4, *Twenty Lessons...*); Miller, "Economics and the Environment" (E-reserves)

Film: *Earth and the American Dream*

**Week 6 (9/29, 10/1): The systemic nature of environmental problems (continued...)**

*Readings:* Schnaiberg, "Labor Productivity and the Environment" (Ch. 5, *Twenty Lessons...*); O'Connor, "Uneven and Combined Development and Ecological Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction" and Foster "The Ecological Tyranny of the Bottom Line" (E-reserves)

**Week 7 (10/6, 10/8): Exam week**

*Readings:* None

**\*\*\*First exam on Thursday, October 8<sup>th</sup>**

**Week 8 (10/13, 10/15): Environmental issues in our backyard: Forests and logging**

*Readings:* Dumont, “The Demise of Community and Ecology...,” Foster, “The Limits of Environmentalism Without Class...,” and Berry, “Conserving Communities” (E-reserves)

**Week 9 (10/20, 10/22): What we eat and how it’s produced: The centrality of food**

*Readings:* Altieri, “Ecological impacts of industrial agriculture and the possibilities for a truly sustainable farming” (E-reserves); Edwards and Driscoll, “From Farms to Factories: The Environmental Consequences of Swine Industrialization in North Carolina” (Ch. 12, *Twenty Lessons...*); Rossett, “Small is Bountiful” (E-reserves)

**Week 10 (10/27, 10/29): Toxics, toxics everywhere: Health and the environment**

*Readings:* McCormick, “The Sociology of Environmental Health” (Ch. 11, *Twenty Lessons...*)

**Week 11 (11/3, 11/5): The elephant in the room: Global warming**

*Readings:* Roberts, “Climate Change: Why the Old Approaches Aren’t Working” (Ch. 14, *Twenty Lessons...*)

**Week 12 (11/10, 11/12): Individuals in society: Reflecting on our selves**

*Readings:* Durning, “Are We Happy Yet?” and Kanner and Gomes, “The All-Consuming Self” (E-reserves)

**Week 13 (11/17, 11/19): Exam week**

*Readings:* None

**\*\*\*Second exam on Thursday, November 19<sup>th</sup>**

**\*\*\* Thanksgiving Break (11/23-11/27)\*\*\***

**Week 14 (12/1, 12/3): Experiential Research Project Presentations**

*Readings:* None

**\*\*\**Experiential Research Papers due in class on Tuesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>***

**Week 15 (12/8, 12/10): Experiential Research Project Presentations (continued) and  
Course Wrap-up: What have we learned? What would we still like to  
learn more about?**

*Readings:* Gould and Lewis, "Conclusion: Unanswered Questions and the Future of  
Environmental Sociology" (Ch. 20, *Twenty Lessons...*)