

ENVS 201: Introduction to Environmental Studies—Social Sciences

(a.k.a. Why smart people do dumb things to the planet...)

Winter 2017 Tuesday/Thursday 2:00-3:20 182 Lillis Hall

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New York Stock Exchange during Hurricane Sandy 2012

Environmental Studies 201 introduces some of the major contributions of the social sciences to understanding why environmental problems happen—the social ‘root causes’ of these problems. This course is not about environmental topics (climate change, deforestation, toxics, etc.). It is about learning to think critically about why these problems happen and what it might take to solve them. Humans aren’t stupid, and environmentally harmful human behavior isn’t inevitable: rather, it is a product of specific social as well as physical conditions. Those conditions can be studied and understood. An understanding of the social root causes of environmental problems is an essential step in finding effective ways to prevent and resolve such problems. As such, this course examines both mainstream and non-conventional approaches to understanding and resolving environmental problems, including ideas such as ‘sustainability’, ‘market-based’ environmental policies, reforms of property systems, and social movements to promote concepts such as environmental justice, ecofeminism, and deep ecology. In this course students will learn to think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches and how these approaches can be used in integrative and interdisciplinary ways.

Course requirements: The course grade will be based on the following: one midterm exam (40%); a final exam (40%); and section participation (20%). Both exams will consist of multiple-choice questions and short essays. The midterm will cover all materials (including videos) up to the midterm date; the final will be comprehensive but emphasizes material after the midterm. There is no such thing as a make-up exam. In case of documented health or family emergency a make-up midterm or final course paper option may be offered. There is also no extra credit option. LAPTOPS CAN BE USED IN THE BACK ROWS OF THE LECTURE HALL; CELL PHONES MUST BE OFF. There is no textbook. Required readings are posted on Canvas.

Course Objectives:

Through this course, you will be able to:

- Identify major social science approaches to understanding environmental why environmental problems occur
- Apply your knowledge of social science approaches to the understanding of environmental problems to create your own critical, integrative and interdisciplinary diagnoses of why human do harm to the environment
- Using your knowledge of social science approaches and your own critical analysis, offer your own ideas of what it will take to create more sustainable and just human-environment relations

As a result of this course, you will:

- Understand approaches that social science disciplines use to examine and address environmental issues
- Have skills to conduct research on environmental issues that takes into account diverse social science perspectives
- Be able to go beyond failed conventional wisdoms about how to solve environmental problems

We're here for you!

One of the mysteries of teaching is how infrequently students use instructor and teaching assistant office hours. We're here for you. If you're confused about the lectures or readings, please ask! We will gladly answer. Office hours: Peter Walker: Wednesday 1:30-3:30. Please contact your GTF for their current office hours.

On group study:

We strongly encourage group study. The only time collaboration is not permitted is on quizzes and the final exam. If you share Google docs or other kinds of study notes, please share them to your GTF or to the instructor so that we can make sure the notes are correct.

On cheating:

*(**This doesn't apply to 99% of you!**)* There is no such thing as cheating *outside* of midterm and the final exam. We encourage collaboration. But in the exams we have zero tolerance for cheating. Smartphones, cameras, Bluetooth devices... just put that energy into studying. Failure to do so will result in severe disciplinary action. Respect others, respect *yourself*, don't do it.

Always in progress:

This course is always a work in progress. The world changes, new issues arise, new materials become available. So your instructor reserves the right to change reading materials and lecture themes. If you read ahead more than two class sessions, be aware the readings could change. You can help—if you know readings, videos, web pages, etc., that could benefit the class, please tell us!

Schedule and Readings (must be read before class each day)(see Bibliography, next page)

- Lect. 1 Jan. 10 Special “inclement weather” lecture (no assignment)
- Lect. 2 Jan. 12 Introduction & overview: social science perspectives on the environment; course and discussion section mechanics (no assignment)
- Lect. 3 Jan. 17 The Tragedy of the Commons (Ostrom & Burger 1999; Guardian 2015)
- Lect. 4 Jan. 19 Population (Sherbinin et al. 2007; UN 2015)
- Lect. 5 Jan. 24 Environmental Economics (Jaeger 2005; EPA 2011, pp. 9-28)
- Lect. 6 Jan. 26 Ecological Economics (Daly 1993; Rees 2003)
- Lect. 7 Jan. 31 Globalization and Trade (Frankel 2008; James 2011)
- Lect. 8 Feb. 2 Corporate Social Responsibility (Porter & Kramer 2006; Anderson 2010)
- Lect. 9 Feb. 7 Consumerism (DeGraaf 2001; Leonard 2010)
- Lect. 10 Feb. 9 Political Economy (Magdoff & Foster 2010)
- Lect. 11 Feb. 14 **MIDTERM EXAM**
- Lect. 12 Feb. 16 Political Ecology (Adams & Hutton 2007)
- Lect. 13 Feb. 21 Environmental Law (watch video: A Civil Action)
- Lect. 14 Feb. 23 Environmental Justice (Bullard 2008; Pellow 2007, pp. 97-103)
- Lect. 15 Feb. 28 Sustainability (Adams 2006; Rees 1997)
- Lect. 16 Mar. 2 Ideas of Nature (Kinsley 1995 Christianity; Kinsley 1995 Nature; Pope Francis 2015)
- Lect. 17 Mar. 7 Deep Ecology (Taylor & Zimmerman 2005; Leopold 1949)
- Lect. 18 Mar. 9 Ecofeminism (Shiva 1988 ****Ch.3 ONLY****; Hobgood-Oster 2005)
- Lect. 19 Mar. 14 Reasons for hope (Whitty 2006)
- Lect. 20 Mar. 16 Final exam review
- **FINAL EXAM:** Wednesday March 22, **12:30PM(!!!!)** 182 Lillis Hall

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