ENVS 411: Contemporary Environmental Topics in China

CRN: 16950
Fall 2012 – 4.0 credits
Mon. & Wed. 12-1:50  142 Columbia

Instructors:
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Office Hours:
Monday 2-3 PM in Columbia 47 A  Thursday 10-11 AM in Columbia 47 A

Course Description
As the most populous country in the world with more 1.3 billion people, China faces a diverse set of environmental challenges. This course is designed to introduce students to some of the greatest environmental concerns in China today. We will investigate air, land, and water issues throughout the six regions of China and examine some of the activism and solutions that emerging to tackle these problems. We will familiarize ourselves with China’s geography as well as the political, historical, and social context of environmental issues in China before examining case studies on specific issues.

Course topics include soil erosion and deforestation, coal mining, dams, glacial melt, and water pollution. We will enrich our understanding of these topics by drawing connections to parallel issues and movements in the United States. Each student will develop a regional focus for a regional report, case study paper, and final presentation. In-class time will include film clips, some mini-lectures and presentations, and discussions. Active student participation is encouraged. We will watch many film shorts throughout the course to give students the opportunity to see the physical environmental changes we discuss in class.

Course Format
This course will not be lecture based. Active, engaged participation is central to this class. There will be few lectures. We will watch and analyze film clips, and do critical analysis of readings using small group discussions and participatory exercises, with an emphasis on critical thinking, effective communication skills, and having fun while learning. We as a class will be responsible for the learning that occurs. That means you are responsible for doing all the reading and coming to the class prepared for critical discussion. Everyone is expected to share their opinions, perspectives and experiences. Welcome and we look forward to learning with you!

Course Goals
- Recognize and understand the causes and effects of contemporary environmental issues in China
- Examine the cultural, social, and economic implications of environmental challenges
- Stay current with media stories about China’s environment
- Examine China’s position in the context of the global environment
- Gain experience in teamwork through a group project and presentation
- Gain critical thinking and effective communication skills through class activities and assignments
Practice interdisciplinary thinking: bringing together social science, natural science, and the humanities through the study of economics, policy, anthropology, ecology, and history

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify and discuss key political, economic, ecological, and cultural issues in China
2. Identify potential human and environmental impacts from proposed economic or political actions
3. Engage in nuanced discussion about China’s role in a variety of national and international environmental topics
4. Evaluate media coverage of China’s environmental situation for bias and balance
5. Effectively present your new understandings to an audience

**Course Requirements**

**Participation (10%)** You are responsible for completing all the assigned reading and coming to class prepared to discuss the materials in an analytical manner.

**Regional Report (10%) submitted and presented in week 2.** This is a short report (2 pages) in which each student is asked to introduce a specific aspect of a specific region in China which is pre-assigned. Examples include: demographics, ecological characteristics, major industries and economic activities, and key environmental concerns. Students will give an informal presentation at a “roundtable” discussion with other students assigned to the same region so that they may become more familiar with that region. Each student will have 5 minutes to share what they learned with their group and the group will also work on other assigned discussion questions. You will be given a resource list to help with your research and will be required to hand in their report the day before the discussion so that the instructors can review them.

**Reading Reviews (15%) 2 total, submitted weeks 3-8.** The reading review is a writing assignment in which you are asked to summarize the main points of the readings and include your own thoughts and reactions to the readings as well as any questions they may have. It is a way for you to demonstrate their understanding of the materials and for instructors to gauge students’ understanding of the material. They will be due at noon on the Tuesday prior to the Wednesday for which the readings were assigned. Instructors will review the assignments to determine how to best lead class discussion.

**Current Event Reports (15%) 2 total, submitted weeks 3-8.** Weekly writing assignments that record media clips/recent events in the news, your reaction to them and how these relate to the readings assigned for that week. You are required to do three two assignments throughout the course of the term worth 7.5% each. Articles would preferentially originate from the region assigned in the first group assignment. You will be asked to briefly present their news clips to the class once or twice during the term. Please refer to the resource list to aid you in your research.

**NOTE:** You will need to hand in 2 Readings Reviews and 2 Current Events Assignments between weeks 3 and 8. You can only submit one each week but can choose which one to submit each week.

**Midterm Exam (15%) week 6**

**Case Study Paper (20%) due in week 9.** This research-based paper assignment will ask you to examine case study of an environmental issue from assigned region. Case studies may be more indepth examinations of topics covered in class or new material. You will outline specific political, cultural, and social aspects of the particular environmental issue. More specific instructions will be handed out and discussed in class. Please refer to the resource list to aid you in your research. You
are required to hand in a draft or outline at least one week before the paper is due for instructors to read, review, and provide comments. The draft/outline will not be graded. It is an opportunity for you to get feedback and revise your work.

**Regional Group Final Presentation (15%)** Students will incorporate the findings of their case study into a regionally based group presentation to the rest of the class. Given in week 10.

**Evaluation**
Every class is designed with explicitly defined learning objectives in mind. At the end of most classes we will evaluate where we stand in relation to these objectives. Students are encouraged to actively participate in thoughtful reflection and evaluation of their educational experience, both during and at the completion of the course.

**Course Outline for ENVS 411: Contemporary Environmental Topics in China**

I. Introduction and Background (2 weeks)

Week 1
  a. Course introduction, physical, historical, and political background
  b. Regions: our preview and assigning groups

Week 2
  a. Timelines of environmental law and activism in China
  b. Regional roundtable with groups

II. Environmental Challenges and Approaches: Land (3 weeks)

Week 3-Grasslands, soil erosion, and desertification
  a. Desertification and soil erosion. *Case study: Loess Plateau*
  b. Solutions/activism and reforestation efforts. *Case study: Loess Plateau*

Week 4-Forests
  a. Deforestation. *Case study: Heilongjiang province*
  b. Conservation and Reforestation efforts.

Week 5-Coal
  a. Coal mining and carbon dioxide emissions
  b. Renewable energy and anti-coal activism

**Midterm**

Week 6
  a. In-class midterm
  b. Air Pollution and Chinese Eco-Cities

III. Environmental Challenges and Approaches: Water (3 weeks)

Week 7-Dams
  a. Dams, displacement, and environmental impacts. *Case study: Three Gorges Dam*
b. Activism against dams. *Case study: Nu River*

Week 8-Dams and glacial melt
   a. Guest presentation and debate. *Case study: Nu River*
   b. Glacial melt impacts. *Case study: Tibetan Plateau*

Week 9-Water pollution
   a. Wetland encroachment, water pollution, and biodiversity. *Case study: Dongting Lake*
   b. Pollution and resistance.

**IV. Final Synthesis (1 week)**

Week 10
   a. Final regional presentations
   b. Final regional presentations and course conclusions
ENVS 411: Contemporary Environmental Topics in China
Course Outline with Required Readings

I. Introduction and Background (2 weeks)

Week 1

a. Course introduction, physical, historical, and political background
b. Regions: our preview and assigning groups

Readings:


Week 2

a. Timelines of environmental law and activism in China

Readings:


b. Regional roundtable with groups

Readings:
II. Environmental Challenges and Approaches: Land (3 weeks)

Week 3-Grasslands, soil erosion and desertification  DUE: Reading Review or Current Event Assignment

a. Desertification and soil erosion. Case study: Loess Plateau

Readings:


Watts, Jonathan. 2009. “We have taken every measure we can think of to stop the desert moving closer and submerging our crops and villages.” The Guardian. May 18, 2009. The Guardian.co.uk [http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/18/china-ecorefugees-farming](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/18/china-ecorefugees-farming)


b. Solutions/activism and reforestation efforts Case study: Loess Plateau

Readings:


**Week 4-forests**

DUE: Reading Review or Current Event Assignment

a. **Deforestation. Case study: Heilongjiang province.**

**Readings:**


b. **Conservation and Reforestation efforts. Case study: Heilongjiang province.**

**Readings:**


Week 5-Coal

DUE: Reading Review or Current Event Assignment

a. Coal mining and CO₂ emissions.

Readings:


b. Renewable Energy and Anti-Coal Activism

Readings:


Midterm : Week 6

DUE: Reading Review or Current Event Assignment

a. In-class midterm
b. Air Pollution and Chinese Eco-Cities
**Readings:**


**III. Environmental Challenges and Approaches: Water (3 weeks)**

**Week 7-Dams**

DUE: Reading Review or Current Event Assignment


**Readings:**


b. Activism against dams.

**Readings:**


Week 8-Dams (cont.) & Glacial melt  DUE: Reading Review or Current Event Assignment, Case Study Paper outline or draft

a.  Guest presentation and class debate. *Case study: Nu River.*


*Readings:*


Week 9-Water pollution  DUE: Case Study Paper

a.  Wetland encroachment, pollution, and biodiversity. *Case study: Dongting Lake*

*Readings:*


b. Pollution and resistance.

**Readings:**


**IV. Final Synthesis (1 week)**

**Week 10: Conclusion**

DUE: Presentations

a. Final regional presentations

b. Final regional presentations and course conclusions