

SOCIOLOGY 005: INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY
Boston College, Fall 2005

Course Information:

Course #6864

Classroom: Carney 204

Class time: Tuesday & Thursday 4:30

Course website:

Instructor: Michael Agliardo, SJ

michael.agliardo@bc.edu

(617) 552-4645 (office), 552-8218 (residence)

Office: McGuinn Hall 510

Office hours: Wed 10:00 AM – 12:00 noon,

Thursday 1:30 – 3:30 PM & by appointment

Course Overview and Goals

This course is an introduction to environmental sociology. Because it is an introductory course, we will also lay some preliminary groundwork before we focus on sociological theory *per se*. In the first part of the course, we will explore some of the basic concepts and assumptions of our society. We will pursue a historical overview of human interaction with the natural world in order to gain a better perspective on contemporary ecological issues. We will familiarize ourselves with the history of the environmental movement and environmental thought. And we will begin to explore the many ways in which environmental issues are in fact social issues.

In the second part of the course we will try out a variety of sociological lenses in order to see what they are able to bring into focus. First, we will examine the ecological implications of our economic system, our political system, and of our modern and "post-modern" condition. Then we will explore the potential contributions statistical analyses and social construction theory offer for a more adequate understanding of social processes and their ecological implications. By exploring a cross-section of sociological theories and methods of analysis, we will not be able to master any one, but we will get a feel for what each offers and insights that sociology in general can provide.

Sociology points us beyond mere technical and scientific problems to the social roots of contemporary ecological issues, as well as the justice issues this circumstance entails. In that respect, sociology is part of a larger attempt to gain a critical and reflexive grasp of what is taking place in society and how we should respond. For a number of reasons, the border between sociology, other social commentary, and what you read in various newspapers and journals is not hard and fast. What sets sociology apart is its theoretical nature, its reliance on evidence, and the rigor of its standards of argument. Sociology strives to be more systematic and more empirical than other modes of reflecting on society. Nonetheless, sociology takes place in the same social world as other ways of reflecting on society. It draws on them and contributes to them. This course will examine how sociology can contribute to an important debate taking place in our society today, the larger debate about how to manage our relationship to the natural world of which we are a part.

The notion that there are long-running, sophisticated debates taking place in society is crucial. It should constitute one of the central themes of your university education. Education at a prior stage emphasizes mastering a certain body of knowledge and skills, usually as they are summarized in a textbook. But central to a university education is the admission that the answers are not "in the book". What you get from a university education is not the answer to the debates taking place in society, but the resources you need in order to participate in them.

Since this is an introductory course, we will cover something of the range of ecological debates taking place in society today. Though we will certainly not be in a position to resolve any of them, after having

taken this course you should be able to understand them on a much deeper level. You should be able to identify issues and events raised in a discussion, or at least know where they fit into the larger scheme of things. And you should be able to recognize standard lines of thought and analysis. This course will provide the foundation for taking an informed, critical approach to contemporary environmental issues in society.

This course is also a Core course. At Boston College, courses in the Core are designed to serve a number of important objectives. They raise perennial questions, the deeper questions of human and social existence. They include a substantial historical component, because history provides a crucial perspective on the origins of our society and of the disciplines in which we are engaged. They further enrich our perspective by taking into account the cultural diversity of the world in which we live. They expose us to the range of methods that characterize a discipline. They include a significant writing component. And they provide some opportunity for assimilating the material we have covered on a more personal, existential level. How this course addresses these objectives is spelled out below.

Perennial questions: This course addresses certain larger, perennial philosophical questions. What is the relationship between human beings and the larger order (the natural world) of which we are a part? How do our historical circumstances affect the way we see things and shape society? How does the way we treat the environment affect various groups in society, especially those who are not privileged or powerful? What are the justice considerations this provokes?

Historical approach: In order to gain a critical perspective on the ecological issues that have arisen in contemporary society, this course traces the social history of these issues. It also traces the history of thought about ecological and environmental matters, both in the United States and, to a lesser extent, in the developing world. And it reviews the emergence of key institutions for addressing these matters.

Cultural diversity: This course takes into account cultural diversity, not simply by studying different cultures, but also by integrating the writings of American and non-American authors, women and men, and authors of various religious and ethnic backgrounds into the material of the course. To the extent that we can, we will hear what people have to say in their own voice.

Methodology in social science: As noted above (paragraph two), the second part of this course is specifically devoted to exploring a significant part of the range of methods that sociology offers for making sense of the social world. More than exploring particular modes of sociological analysis, in this course we will also reflect more generally on the distinctive perspective that sociological analysis can bring.

Writing: This course also includes a significant writing component. There are four essays and two written exams. (See the sections "Essays" and "Exams" below for more information.) All essays should be carefully written. They will be graded with care.

Creating a personal philosophy: The point of this course is not to accumulate facts and abstract ideas, but to be able to follow and participate in debates about contemporary ecological issues. In addition, the final classes of the course will explore ways of integrating what we have learned into our own lives. This will involve considering the implications of what we have studied insofar as we ourselves are members of the university community, consumers, members of religious and community groups, citizens, and (ultimately) workers and corporate decision makers. The point will be to assimilate the material we have covered on a more personal, existential level.

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

Introduction and Basic Concepts

9/6 The Range of Environmental Issues We Face

Initial Class Survey.

Frey, "Environmental Problems from the Local to the Global". eReserves.

Lomborg, "Things Are Getting Better" (chapter 1). eReserves.

_____, "Measuring Human Welfare" (chapter 3). eReserves.

9/8 Society, Nature, Science, Environmentalism, Ecology

Guha, "The Ideology of Scientific Conservationism" (chapter 3). Course text.

_____, "The Growth of the Wilderness Idea" (chapter 4). Course text.

_____, "The Ecology of Affluence" (chapter 5). Course text.

Historical background

9/13 The Population Debate and Economic Expansion

Foster, preface and chapters 2, 3 & 4 of *The Vulnerable Planet*. Course text.

Brown, "Eradicating Hunger." eReserves.

Bailey, "The Progress Explosion: Permanently Escaping the Malthusian Trap". eReserves.

Eberstadt, "World Population Prospects for the Twenty-First Century: The Specter of 'Depopulation'?" eReserves.

9/15 Overview of the U.S. Environmental Movement

Sale, chapters 2 through 5 of *The Green Revolution*. eReserves.

Gottlieb, "Resources and Recreation: Limits of the Traditional Debate" (chapter 1). Course text.

9/20 The Social History of Mainstream U.S. Environmentalism

Gottlieb, "Urban and Industrial Roots: Seeking to Reform the System" (chapter 2). Course text.

_____, "The Sixties Rebellion: The Search for a New Politics" (chapter 3). Course text.

_____, "Professionalization & Institutionalization: The Mainstream Groups" (chapter 4). Course text.

Social Justice and Ecology

9/22 Social Class and Ecology

Gottlieb, "A Question of Class: The Workplace Experience" (chapter 8,). Course text.

Levenstein, "Dying for a Living: Workers, Production, and the Environment." eReserves.

Foster, "The Limits of Environmentalism Without Class: Lessons from the Ancient Forest Struggle in the Pacific Northwest". eReserves.

9/27 Racial, Gender, and Justice Dimensions of the U.S. Environmental Movement

First Assignment due: Ecological Issues in Historical Perspective.

Gottlieb, "Gender and Place: Women and Environmentalism" (chapter 6). Course text.

_____, "Ethnicity as a Factor: The Quest for Environmental Justice" (chapter 7). Course text.

Grossman, "The People of Color Environmental Summit". eReserves.
Haggerty, "Crisis at Indian Creek". eReserves.

9/29 Perspectives from the Developing World

Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique". eReserves.
Parentelli, "Latin America's Poor Women: Inherent Guardians of Life". eReserves.
Shiva, "Let Us Survive: Women, Ecology and Development". eReserves.
Stephen, "Between NAFTA and Zapata: Responses to Restructuring the Commons in Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico". eReserves.

Cultural & Religious Factors

10/4 Judeo-Christian Tradition and Ecology

White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." eReserves.
Allitt, "American Catholics and the Environment, 1960-1995". eReserves.
Christiansen, "Ecology and the Common Good: Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Responsibility". eReserves.
Shibley, "The Greening of Mainline American Religion: A Sociological Analysis of the Environmental Ethics of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment". eReserves.

10/6 Resources for an Ecological Ethic in Several Major Non-Western Traditions

Grim, "Native North American Worldviews and Ecology". eReserves.
Swearer, "Principles and Poetry, Places and Stories: The Resources of Buddhist Ecology". eReserves.
Tu, "The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism". eReserves.
Miller, "Envisioning the Daoist Body in the Economy of Cosmic Power". eReserves.
Narayanan, "Water, Wood, and Wisdom: Ecological Perspectives from the Hindu Traditions." eReserves.

10/11 Environmental Movements in Three Asian Countries

Lee, "Environmental Movements in Taiwan" (chapter 2). eReserves.
_____, "Environmental Movements in Thailand" (chapter 5). eReserves.
_____, "Environmental Movements in the Philippines" (chapter 6). eReserves.

10/13 Culture, Rationality, and Modernity

Murphy, "Rationalization and Ecological Irrationality". eReserves.
Tu, "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality." eReserves.
Lee, "Culture and Asian Styles of Environmental Movements" (chapter 8). eReserves.

Midterm and a Chance to Regroup

10/18 Midterm

Second Assignment due: Ecological Issues as Social Issues.

Note: This essay is due on the day of the midterm. Ideally, you will be able to integrate your writing and your exam preparation, since they deal with the same material. However, if things get tight, give priority to the midterm. As with all the essays, you can make arrangements for an extension by contacting me by noon of the due date.

10/20 Film discussion. Midterm review. Review first half course, preview second half.

Please arrange to view the following two films before class. You may check them out at the library or come to the class viewing(s). Arrangements for viewing the films will be made the week of 10/11,13.

Borderline Cases: Environmental Matters at the United States-Mexico Border

A documentary describing the consequences of 25 years of environmental neglect by factories along the U.S./Mexico border. It chronicles the 5 year bi-national effort to craft remedies to the border's deteriorating environmental conditions by grass-roots activists and government, academic and industrial leaders. 65 minutes.

Acts of Defiance

In a 1990 protest against a proposal to develop into a golf course land in Quebec claimed by the Mohawk of Kanasatake, tribe members blockaded a dirt road to protect their land. The video treats the conflict between Canadian Mohawks, the federal and provincial governments, the Canadian army, and stone throwing, non-Indian rioters. The confrontation escalated and in the ensuing gun battle, a policeman was killed. Originally a TV documentary produced in 1992. Re-released in 1995 released by Icarus Films. 105 minutes.

Also on reserve for your viewing pleasure:

Showdown in Seattle: Five days that shook the WTO

An on-the-ground, non-corporate perspective on the demonstrations against the meeting of the World Trade Organization in 1999. A five part presentation composed of segments shot on location in downtown Seattle during Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 1999. Covers the WTO meetings, world trade issues, popular resistance and police response to the demonstrators. 150 minutes.

Earth and the American Dream

This deliberately disturbing film recounts America's story "from the environment's point of view". From the arrival of Columbus to the simple wilderness living of the 16th and 17th centuries, through the agrarian lifestyle of the 18th century, the changes from the Industrial Revolution, to the 20th century when most of the planet's resources have been depleted -- this film examines the North American landscape and all the wildlife destruction, deforestation, soil depletion and pollution that have been wrought to make the American Dream come true. 79 minutes.

Theories of Collective Behavior and the Global Commons

10/25 Rational Choice, Collective Behavior, and Ecology

Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons". eReserves.

Goldman, "Tragedy of the Commons or the Commoners' Tragedy". eReserves.

Olson, "A Theory of Groups and Organizations" (chapter 1). eReserves.

Note: Just read what you think is necessary in Olson for you to get the main idea.

Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." eReserves.

10/27 The Emergence of Global Environmental Regimes

Vogler, "The Governance of the Commons" (chapter 1). eReserves.

Soroos, "Global Institutions and the Environment: An Evolutionary Perspective". eReserves.

Brown, Porter, & Chasek, "The Development of Environmental Regimes". eReserves.

Economics and Politics in Ecological Perspective

11/1 The Level of the Individual – Consumerism

Bell, "Consumption and Materialism" (chapter 2). eReserves.
Gardner, Assadourian, Sarin, "The State of Consumption Today" (chapter 1). eReserves.
Schor, "The Visible Lifestyle: American Symbols of Status" (chapter 3). eReserves.
Marx, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret". eReserves.

11/3 The Level of the System – Capitalism

Foster, "Imperialism and Ecology" (chapter 5). Course text.
_____, "The Vulnerable Planet" (chapter 6). Course text.
Daly, "Elements of Environmental Macroeconomics." eReserves.

11/8 Risk Society

Bell, "The Rationality of Risk" (chapter 9). eReserves.
Field, "Risk and Justice: Capitalist Production and the Environment." eReserves.

Religion, Culture, and the Construction of Ecological Issues

11/10 The Construction of Social Issues

Hannigan, "Social Construction of Environmental Problems" (chapter 2). eReserves.
_____, "Acid Rain: From Scientific Curiosity to Public Controversy" (chapter 7). eReserves.
_____, "Biodiversity Loss " (chapter 8). eReserves.
_____, "Biotechnology as an Environmental Problem" (chapter 9). eReserves.
Suggested: "Nature, Ecology, and Environmentalism " (chapter 6). eReserves.

11/15 Ecology and "Postmodern" Trends

Taylor, "Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality, Part I: From Deep Ecology to Radical Environmentalism". eReserves.
Inglehart, "Public Support for Environmental Protection: Objective Problems and Subjective Values in 43 Societies". eReserves.
Brechin & Kempton, "Global Environmentalism: A Challenge to the Postmaterialism Thesis?" eReserves.
Suggested: Taylor, "Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality, Part II: From Earth First! and Bioregionalism to Scientific Paganism and the New Age". eReserves.

11/17 Exploring the Debate on Religion and Ecology

Third Assignment due: Social Theory and Ecological Issues.

Eckberg, "Varieties of Religious Involvement and Environmental Concerns: Testing the Lynn White Thesis". eReserves.
Greeley, "Religion and Attitudes toward the Environment". eReserves.
Wolkomir and others, "Substantive Religious Belief and Environmentalism". eReserves.
Kearns, "Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States". eReserves.
Suggested: Eckberg, "Christianity, Environmentalism, and the Theoretical Problem of Fundamentalism". eReserves.

Theories of Civil Society and Ecology

11/22 Democracy, Civil Society, and Ecology

Gottlieb, "Grassroots and Direct Action: Alternative Movements" (chapter 5). Course text.
Brulle, "The Dynamics of the Environmental Movement" (chapter 10). eReserves.
_____, "Agency, Democracy, and the Environment" (chapter 11). eReserves.

[11/24 Thanksgiving Break]

11/29 Local, International, and Global Eco-Social Movements

Wapner, "Greenpeace and Political Globalism" (chapter 3). Course text.
_____, "The World Wildlife Fund and Political Localism" (chapter 4). Course text.
_____, "Friends of the Earth and Political Internationalism" (chapter 5). Course text.

Synthesis & Appropriation: The Final Exam and Beyond

12/1 The Worlds We Inhabit – The University, the Churches, Civil Society

Gardner, "Engaging Religion in the Quest for a Sustainable World". eReserves.
Uhl, "Process and Practice: Creating the Sustainable University". eReserves.

Use the internet to learn about the work and goals of some of the following organizations:

Center for a New American Dream - <http://www.newdream.org>
EarthJustice - <http://www.earthjustice.org>
Earthwatch Institute- <http://www.earthwatch.org>
Environmental Defense - <http://www.edf.org>
GreenpeaceUSA - <http://www.greenpeaceusa.org>
Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship - <http://www.stewards.net/About.htm>
League of Conservation Voters - <http://www.lcv.org>
Nature Conservancy - <http://www.nrc.org>
National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Page - <http://www.ncccecojustice.org/>
National Parks & Conservation Association - <http://www.npca.com>
National Religious Partnership for the Environment - <http://www.nrpe.org/>
Natural Resources Defense Council - <http://www.nrdc.org>
Sierra Club - <http://www.sierraclub.org>
Union of Concerned Scientists - <http://www.ucsusa.org>
U.S. Catholic Bishops Environmental Justice Program - <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/ejp/index.htm>
Waterkeeper Alliance- <http://www.waterkeeper.org>
Wilderness Society - <http://www.wilderness.org/>
World Resources Institute - <http://www.wri.org/index.html>
Worldwatch Institute - <http://www.worldwatch.org/>
World Wildlife Fund - <http://www.worldwildlife.org>
WWF - Conservation Action Network - <http://takeaction.worldwildlife.org/index.htm>

12/6 The Worlds We Inhabit – Individual Ethics and Public Policy

Schor, "Towards a New Politics of Consumption". eReserves.
Shove & Warde, "Inconspicuous Consumption". eReserves.
Murphy & Cohen, "Consumption, Environment, and Public Policy" (chapter 1). eReserves.

12/8 Review & Open discussion

Fourth Assignment due: Ecological Issues and Our Social World.

12/13 Course exam

About the Readings

In this course, you are not being asked to pursue a major research project. Neither will you be asked to apply any of the concepts we cover to the analysis of a particular environmental issue. Since this is an introductory course, rather than have you pursue one line of inquiry in great depth or begin working through the resolution of a specific issue, we will review a range of important concepts, as well certain basic factual material. And the course readings and class lectures will provide the sole material that we will work with in order to accomplish the goals of the course.

Since the readings form the basis of this course, you are expected to master those readings. That is your primary task. The course outline highlights those selections you are to prepare prior to coming to class that day. During class we will refer to the readings, and I will offer some background to the larger debate in which they figure. If you do not prepare, you will not fully benefit from class. The other components of the course, the written assignments and exams, also require you to engage the readings. They do not require you to do outside research. So if you keep up with the readings, you should find the papers and exams quite manageable.

One note: The readings were chosen not because the point of view they present is somehow the official point of view of this course. They were chosen because they reflect the state of the debate in society today, because they allow us to view the issues they treat from a range of vantages, and because (in most cases) they offer a perspective worthy of consideration, whether or not you ultimately find yourself in agreement. So read appreciatively but critically.

Focus Questions

In order to help you prepare, at the end of each class I will give you a preview of the readings for the next class and a series of focus questions. After you read the selections for a given class, review the focus questions for that assignment. Are you able to answer them? Perhaps not right off the bat. However, you should be able to back over the readings and put together a response. Moreover, doing so will help you to appropriate and synthesize the material you covered. You do not read in order to accumulate masses of inert data. You want to have active command of what you read. The focus questions will give you an initial opportunity to work with the readings on your own. We will continue to work with the readings in lecture, class discussion, assignments, and exams.

In lecture, I may not always go back over the focus questions, but you are welcome to raise them yourself. The focus questions are meant to highlight the main reasons the texts were assigned. By highlighting what is relevant in the assigned texts, the focus questions of each unit not only help you prepare to participate actively in class. Ideally, they will also help you excel in the course assignments and exams.

Texts for purchase

Assignments for this course entail your reading all or most of the following books. They are available at the Boston College bookstore under "required texts":

- Foster, John Bellamy. 1999. *The Vulnerable Planet: A Short Economic History of the Planet*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Gottlieb, Robert. 2005. *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 2000. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. New York: Longman.
- Wapner, Paul. 1996. *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*. Albany: SUNY Press.

We will also read portions of the following texts, so you may find it worthwhile purchasing these, as well. They are available at the Boston College bookstore under "recommended texts":

- Bell, Michael Mayerfeld. 2004. *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*. Thousand Oaks, California : Pine Forge Press.
- Merchant, Carolyn. 1994. *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press.

Texts on reserve

See "Complete Bibliography" (below) for a full listing of all your readings and complete bibliographic information.

- All reading assignments listed under "Course Outline and Reading Assignments" may borrowed from the Reserve Desk at O'Neill Library.
- Those items followed by the notation "Course text" are available for purchase at the university Bookstore in McElroy Hall.
- In addition, those items specifically marked "eReserve" may be viewed over the internet. Most can be accessed over the internet by going to the Quest Library Catalogue of the Boston College Libraries website and clicking on the Course/Online Reserves tab.

A fuller selection of readings can be accessed at the website established for this course. To reach that website, go to the WebCT Homepage for Boston College, <http://webct.bc.edu:8900/>. Click the link for "Log on to My WebCT". Then on the next page enter your WebCT ID and Password (which may or may not be the same as your log in with your B.C. username and password). Once you have logged on, then go to the dropdown box and select this course, which should appear in your dropdown box if you have registered for this course.

Class participation

In class, I will provide background information for the readings, and I will highlight what in the readings is significant *for our purposes*. We will review and discuss many of the readings. The point is not only to understand the readings, but to be able to discuss them intelligently. We want to gain some critical perspective on the concepts and analyses they provide. That means being able to go beyond the written text itself. The answers are not "in the book" somewhere. We do this show live. With that in mind, you are expected to attend and participate in class. That is where this course takes place.

For your part, please show up to class having done the reading for that day. That will give me something to work with. I will solicit your questions and feedback concerning the readings. I will also ask questions of the class. Sometimes I will chose a person who has raised his or her hand in response to a question. Sometimes I will choose my "volunteers" at random. This interaction will help me gauge what made sense, what needs to be stressed more, and so forth.

The point is that you will not have done your job if you simply got through the readings and arrived at class with a mass of inert information. Plan to give yourself the time you need to begin to pull it all together: What were the readings about? What made sense? What questions do you have? How might this relate to previous readings or to themes we are building in the course? Do you see contradictions within a given argument or claim, or with previous readings? And so forth.

Attendance will be recorded by means of a sign-in sheet that is passed around at the beginning of class. If you arrive late, you not only disrupt class; you may also miss the opportunity to sign in. Please be considerate and arrive on time.

In order to gauge how well you are able to engage the readings, there will be a number of brief, unannounced quizzes throughout the semester. Some may be graded plus, check, and minus. Some may not be graded. I may simply use them to make a point, correct some misapprehension, or otherwise gauge things.

I will try to keep track of the impressive contributions you make to class, mentally or otherwise. I will not go out of my way to record lack of preparation, but I am sure it will make due impression. If for some reason you are not able to prepare for class for a given day, as can happen from time to time, just discretely hand me a note before class and I will avoid calling on you. You will also be exempt from any quiz we might have. When you turn in the quiz, just write on it "exempt", or "I turned in a note", and I will deal with your quiz accordingly. Not being able to prepare fully for class on one or two occasions will not be a problem. However, more than that could indicate that you are not able to participate fully in class. If a problem has arisen, or you are struggling, then come in and see me so that we can figure out how best to address the situation.

If something beyond your control arises where you cannot attend class for an extended period, then we can try to work out some alternative. In the past, what I have done is had students do the readings for missed classes, review other students' class notes, then come in to see me during office hours to go over things. However, if for some reason you have to miss classes for a very long period, it may not be possible or reasonable to expect you to be able to continue in the course.

Class participation will factor into your grade. (See "Grading Policy" below.) Attendance, contribution to class discussion, and performance on quizzes will constitute the basis of this part of your grade.

Written Assignments

The written assignments are designed to give you the opportunity to work with the readings and meet the goals of the course as outlined above. I certainly am interested in your answers to the questions posed in for each essays. But more importantly, I also want to see how well you are able to work with the material that we cover in this course. Think of it this way: If someone were to write a brilliant essay answering the question posed, but one which was essentially an essay he or she could have written without having taken this course, then that essay would get a zero. The main point of the essays is to work with the material covered in our readings and class discussions.

First Assignment Due 9/27

Synthetic essay: Contemporary Ecological Issues in Historical Perspective

What are the foundational ecological issues that societies face? What is distinctive about current environmental issues? What have been some of the turning points and causes that have led to our current circumstances?

More details regarding this assignment will be announced the week prior to its due date.

Approximate length: 5 pages, 1200 to 1500 words.

Second Assignment Due 10/18 (the same day as our midterm)

Synthetic essay: Ecological Issues as Social Issues

Why is it that ecological issues are more than technical problems? In developing your response, focus on **one** of the following approaches: Discuss how ecological issues affect different groups in society in different ways (the question of social justice). Alternatively, discuss how the ecological practices of a society may reflect its history, beliefs, or political and economic circumstances (the question of how social issues are constructed).

More details regarding this assignment will be announced the week prior to its due date.

Approximate length: 5 pages, 1200 to 1500 words.

Third Assignment Due 11/17

Comparative essay: Social Theory and Ecological Issues

Take two of the sociological frameworks that we have reviewed and compare them. What do they say about how human society interacts with the larger natural world? How would you describe the kind of analysis each puts forward? On what level does each operate? On what evidence does each draw? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each?

More details regarding this assignment will be announced the week prior to its due date.

Approximate length: 6 pages, 1500 to 1800 words.

Fourth Assignment Due 12/8

Research Essay: Ecological Issues and Our Social World

After having studied society and ecological issues in an increasingly objectified and analytic way, this assignment offers an opportunity to re-ground ourselves in the actual social world in which we are members. Take an organization, movement, or other initiative in which you are interested – it could be a campus group, a local community-based organization, a church-based initiative, a consumer or corporate program, a piece of legislation, or a national or international group or movement – and discuss it in light of some of the topics we have covered in this course. What approach or construction of things is being advocated? What social group is doing the advocating?

To whom are they appealing? What judgments would you tentatively draw about this group?

More details regarding this assignment will be announced the week prior to its due date.

Approximate length: 5 pages, 1200 to 1500 words.

Mode of Submission and Extensions

Please submit your assignments to me electronically. If I have them in electronic form, I can insert comments and make editorial suggestions on my word processor in "Document Review" mode. Ideally, when you get the assignment back, also electronically, you will be able to readily track my suggestions and comments.

I use Microsoft Word to review your assignments. I can take your text in whatever form you submit it and place it in a Word document. However, if you do not have compatible software, you may not be able to track my responses very conveniently. In that case, let me know, and either I will convert my response to the appropriate format, or as a last resort I will give you a hard copy with my suggestions and comments (and your grade, of course).

Your assignments are due by **midnight** of the due date. If you need an extension, you must arrange for that by emailing me by **noon** of the due date. Let me know in brief what the problem is and when you expect to

complete the assignment. Generally, I am happy to grant an extension for a day or two, especially if that does not involve pushing beyond the meeting time of the next class. Longer extensions are not as easily arranged. I am concerned about students falling behind in the course. Since the readings and assignments are the focus of the course, rather than some other research project or lab work, keeping up is a priority.

Normally, for each **unexcused** day it is late, an assignment will lose one-half point (out of ten for the assignment, i.e., 5%).

The Quality of Your Work

Please take the time to plan your essays well. They are short assignments. That means you only have a brief space in which to construct a thoughtful response, and one which incorporates as much reference to the readings and lecture as you can manage.

Writing is an important dimension of any Core course at Boston College. Please write your assignments with care, and I will review them accordingly. Be sure to proofread and polish your work. And be sure to present your ideas clearly. For example, if you find yourself trying to include ten different ideas into the same sentence, why not try ten smaller sentences instead?

Turning in slapdash, last-minute work betrays a lack of consideration and maturity. Poorly executed work is not acceptable in the business world, and it certainly is not acceptable at the university. If I am going to make the effort to help you improve your writing, you should make the effort to give me the best work you can. Then you will derive genuine benefit from the exercise. Otherwise, you waste my time and yours.

Exams

There will be a midterm and a final exam. The midterm will take place on October 18 (during class time), and the final will take place on December 13 (during finals week).

A week or so prior to each exam, I will distribute a study guide. It will indicate the format of the exam and the material you are to review in order to prepare.

The point of the midterm and final exams is not simply to derive your grade. That certainly is part of it. But more, my concern in constructing your exams is pedagogical. In other words, the whole process of preparing for and taking the exams should serve the larger educational goals of this course.

Given the goals of this course, as discussed above, your exams will require you to do a number of things. You will be asked to:

- 1) identify key persons, events, and developments that have shaped environmental issues in U.S. society and the global community;
- 2) explain central concepts reviewed in this course;
- 3) demonstrate mastery of the course readings;
- 4) distinguish between different modes of sociological analysis;
- 5) be able to compare and otherwise integrate the various components of this course.

Knowing isolated facts (#1) and ideas (#2) may make for good cocktail conversation, but without being able to make use of them in any larger argument, such knowledge is relatively useless. At the same time, trying to analyze an issue without drawing on some factual knowledge leads to the kind of vacuous, tired discussions that plague the academic world and much of our society today. With that in mind, as noted in

the discussion of course writing assignments, when you are writing answers to exam questions you are expected to view them as *opportunities* to bring your factual and conceptual knowledge to bear. For example, if when you are writing your exam, you miss a perfect opportunity to mention John Muir or the concept of wilderness or an insight concerning social justice made by Robert Bullard, then you will be graded accordingly.

In general, you should be able to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments and theories we cover (#2 and #3), compare two schools of thought (#5), bring some of the history we covered (#1) into a discussion of a sociological theory (#4), and so forth. If given a passage from a sociological text, you should be able to identify the theoretical approach it reflects (#4).

Again, there is a larger goal that even the grades themselves are supposed to serve, and that is your education. Ideally, the exams themselves will also be learning experiences. I will review them not only to score them, but also to highlight what you are doing right, as well as how you might do better.

Grading Policy

I will not distribute grades in this course on a curve. In other words, there are no predetermined number of A's, B's, C's, and so forth. I am happy to give out as many A's as people earn.

In order to facilitate your accomplishing as much as you can in this course, I try to make the course expectations and the basis of your grade clear, and I also try to make clear the concrete steps you can take to do well. If my expectations or your task are not clear, please raise the matter in class, or come in to see me during office hours.

You will be graded out of 100 points, distributed as follows:

First assignment	10
Second assignment	10
Midterm exam	20
Third assignment	10
Fourth assignment	10
Class participation and quizzes	10
Final exam	30

Your points earn the following grade equivalents:

97 – 100 = A+	87 – 89 = B+	77 – 79 = C+	67 – 69 = D+
94 – 96 = A	84 – 86 = B	74 – 76 = C	65 – 66 = D
90 – 93 = A-	80 – 83 = B-	70 – 73 = C-	below 65 = F

There is some leeway regarding the deadline for the course assignments, so you are expected to be able to do well on each. If you keep up with the course reading, which is a central expectation, you should do well on the exams. The point is that each assignment and exam counts, and once you have done each, the opportunity to earn the points in question has passed. The assignments and exams are for real. There are no make-up opportunities. At the same time, there are no major surprises or unknowns in this course, so I believe this policy is reasonable and salutary.

What if you improve as the semester proceeds? In fact, that is an expectation, and the grading standards will rise accordingly. Be aware of this. What you produce for the third assignment or the final exam should be more impressive and sophisticated than what you produce for the midterm or the first assignment. And I am sure it will be.

If you receive a grade on an assignment or exam that you believe does not give you full credit, then you are welcome to drop me a note or come in and see me. In order for me to help you receive full credit, you should then be prepared to show me that what you have produced is worth more credit. Of course, even when each assignment is graded appropriately, there are times when the numbers do not add up to the full story. I will try to have your grades ready as soon after the final as I can. If you believe your final grade for the course is not appropriate for some reason, then, again, be prepared to make your case. I will take into account what you have to say and, if warranted, will make an adjustment.

Academic integrity

In brief, academic integrity means you must cite your sources and not misrepresent someone else's work as your own. Please review and be aware of the university standards for plagiarism and academic integrity. University policy can be found at <http://www.bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/resources/policy/#integrity>.

The university is a community of learning. Any community is based on trust. Students who do not take this trust seriously will be asked to leave this course.

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