Boston College

Environmental Sociology

SC 348 (Cross Listed with IN 348)

Fall Semester 2009

Dr. Brian J. Gareau

LOCATION: Higgins 265
Mondays 4:30-6:50

OFFICE: McGuinn, Room 412
OFFICE PHONE: (617) 552-8148
OFFICE HOURS: Mondays and Tuesdays 3-4pm and by appointment
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**If you want to receive credit for this course towards your sociology major or minor, you MUST register for the SC version of the course, not the IN version**

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an overview of environmental problems and issues through the lens of various perspectives in social and environmental theory. Topics will include: economic globalization and the environment; social causes and consequences of global climate destabilization; population growth and over-consumption; the promise and limits of technological solutions to environmental problems; links between poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation; and competing visions of an ecologically-sustainable society. The contributions and limits of existing sociological theories in understanding environmental issues will be an important theme throughout.

Environmental sociologist Michael Bell once stated that “social and environmental interactions are best understood as a kind of ecological dialogue, an unfinalizable conversation in which one interchange leads to another.” Sociologists like Bell have tried to devise the best way to think about society/nature interlinkages for a long time. A chief concern of many environmental sociologists is the continued survival of both society and nature. Such a task is not easy. Indeed, Bell went on to note that, for most students, courses that deal with society and nature are “depressing,” and that he too often feels “disheartened and discouraged.” The condition of the environment today can often lead to discouragement. However, the topic must not be ignored, and society/nature relations must be improved. The changes that are necessary to make society/nature relations long-lasting will not be easy: many sociologists link the severity of environmental degradation to a particular way in which modern society is organized today.

This course will accomplish several goals. First, to review the state of the environment as it exists today, both in the U.S. and globally. Second, to review social theories of the environment that are either critical or supportive of capitalism, explaining how it functions, and describing the environmental implications. The second goal will involve reviewing cases studies. Third, to discuss the link between these theories and the contemporary objective of global environmental governance, which has entered a “neoliberal” moment. Finally, the course will allow students to take the social theoretical tools learned here to critically appraise debates surrounding global climate change. The broad goal of the course is to provide students with a social theoretical understanding of the
relationship between society and nature in capitalist societies, and provoke students to formulate ideas about how to make our future more “sustainable.”

**REQUIREMENTS**

Please print out and read the assigned readings for the day they are due, so that we may have a complete discussion with maximum participation each week. Class participation counts for 20% of your grade. There are two major writing assignments: First, a 6-8 pp. paper (due November 2nd) in which I will ask you to answer some questions relating to the readings. This paper counts for 15% of your grade. Second, your Final Paper in International Studies, which is due by 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday, December 16, 2009 in my mailbox. We shall be conferring about topics and lengths of these papers.

1. **FOUR BOOKS:**

   (All four books will be held on Reserve at the O’Neill Library. Books may be taken out for 2 hours in the library and can be renewed if no one is waiting.)

2. **ELECTRONIC READINGS:**
   Course readings (Marked “Vista” in the syllabus) are available to view online, download, and print on Blackboard Vista. Students are automatically given access to the Blackboard Vista course site based on the course roster. Use your BC username and password to access the site.

3. **Blackboard Vista Chat:**
   Periodically, I will display the course Blackboard Vista Chat page on the projector screen. This will allow students to ask questions, make comments, and to respond to questions/comments during lecture. We will occasionally review the comments during class discussion. To get started: [https://cms.bc.edu](https://cms.bc.edu)

4. **ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION:**
   SC 348 is a seminar-format class that combines lecture with group discussion. Students’ final grade will depend, in part, on the quality of their participation in class discussion. Obviously, adequate participation requires regular attendance. You must be respectful of other’s viewpoints, experiences, orientation, etc. when discussing the concepts in this class. Debate is inevitable and useful, but be respectful. If you are not, you will be asked to withdraw from the course.

5. Each of you will be expected to keep abreast of the reading, **prepare and make a presentation on materials from at least two of the scheduled sections**. The success of the course depends on **the active participation of everyone**. During the first meeting we shall organize ourselves and generate a schedule of presentations.
6. You must come prepared with a one-page (at least) write-up on the day’s reading **every class**. Make notes, comments, questions, and critiques of the readings. Readings should be studied before the class for which they are assigned. These assignments count for your attendance, and you may not turn them in late or in absentia from the class. These write-ups will make valuable notes for your exams and potential future work on environmental issues.

**ASSESSMENT**

All grades in SC 348 are based on the percentages shown in Table 1.

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND ASSOCIATED GRADES.**

Students are responsible for the work listed in Table 2.

**Table 1. Grade Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>% Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-90</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>&lt;60</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Student Work & Percentage of Grade Earned**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper #1</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team-led Discussion</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Reading Summaries</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ORGANIZATION OF THE CLASS BY WEEK

WEEK ONE: Monday September 14
Theme: Course overview: Syllabus, readings, assignments, expectations. Assign seminar leaders.

WEEK TWO: Monday September 21
Theme: What’s the Problem? The State of the Environment. The successes and failures of nation-state and international attempts to alleviate global environmental degradation.

Read:
- (Vista)”The Wisdom of Crowds: Climate Change is Inherently a Social Problem.” Nature
- Speth, Gus The Bridge at the End of the World
  - Preface
  - Introduction: Between Two Worlds
  - Ch. 1: Looking into the Abyss
- Foster, John B. The Vulnerable Planet
  - Preface
  - Ch. 1: The Ecological Crisis

Recommended:
- (Vista) Davis, Mike “The Swine Flu Crisis” The Guardian

Film: The Story of Stuff

Seminar Leaders: ________________________________
WEEK THREE: Monday September 28


Read:
• (Vista) Heilbroner and Thurow, Economics Explained
• (Vista) Marx, Selected readings from Capital (please ignore notes to read references. Please read the main text, not necessarily the footnotes, although some footnotes will be interesting to some people.)

Read:
• (Vista) "A Convenient Untruth," by Michael Shnayerson, May 2007 Vanity Fair
• (Vista) "Some Like it Hot," by Chris Mooney, Mother Jones May/June 2005

Shnayerson and Mooney articles also available at:
http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2007/05/skeptic200705

Recommended:
• (Vista) Environmental Change and Security Report. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. http://www.wilsoncenter.org. (Recommended that you take a look at the findings, peruse the report, but don’t try to read it cover-to-cover (it’s 156 pages long))

Seminar Leaders: ________________________________________________________

*** Reminder: Thursday October 1: Last date for undergraduates only to drop a course or to declare a course pass/fail in Associate Deans’ offices)

WEEK FOUR: Monday October 5

Theme: Environmental-Historical Approaches. Human history, Industrial Revolution, Colonialism and Natural Resource Extraction

Read:
• Foster:
  o Ch. 2: Ecological Conditions before the Industrial Revolution
  o Ch. 3: The Environment at the Time of the Industrial Revolution

Recommended:

Seminar Leaders: ________________________________________________________
WEEK FIVE: October 12 Monday
*** Columbus Day—No classes

WEEK SIX: Monday October 19
Theme: Eco-Historical views of Human-Environment Relations (cont.) and; Bringing it Home: The Roles of the United States in Human-Environment Relations Worldwide

Read:
- Foster:
  o Ch. 4: Expansion and Conservation
  o Ch. 5: Imperialism and Ecology
  o Ch. 6: The Vulnerable Planet
- (Vista) Cronon, William, “The Trouble with Wilderness, Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”

Recommended:

Seminar Leaders: ________________________________________________________

WEEK SEVEN: Monday October 26
MIDTERM QUESTIONS HANDED OUT TODAY
Theme: Needing a New “Great Transformation”

Read:
- Speth
  o Ch. 2: Modern Capitalism: Out of Control
  o Ch. 3: The Limits of Today’s Environmentalism
  o Ch. 4: The Market: Making It Work for the Environment

Recommended:
- (Vista) Polanyi, selections from *The Great Transformation*

Seminar Leaders: ________________________________________________________

WEEK EIGHT: Monday November 2
Midterm Exam Due Today
Theme: Great Transformation, cont.

Read:
- Speth
  o Part Two: The Great Transformation
  o Ch. 6: Real Growth: Promoting the Well-being of People and Nature
  o Ch. 7: Consumption: Living with Enough, Not Always More
  o Ch. 8: The Corporation: Changing the Fundamental Dynamics

Film: Interview with Gus Speth: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability Conversations with History Series, Institute of International Studies, UC- Berkeley.

Seminar Leaders: ________________________________________________________

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WEEK NINE: Monday November 9
Theme: Global Environmental Governance of Global Environmental Problems: A Sociological Approach to “Green Neoliberalism.” Green Neoliberalism and its impact of global environmental governance

Read:
• Goldman
  o Preface
  o Chapter 1: Introduction
  o Chapter 3: Producing Green Science inside Headquarters
  o Chapter 5: Eco-Governmentality and the Making of an Environmental State
  o Chapter 6: Privatizing Water, Neoliberalizing Civil Society

Recommended:
• (Vista) Foucault, Michel, selections from The History of Sexuality.

Seminar Leaders: ______________________________________________________

WEEK TEN: Monday November 16
Theme: Neoliberalism, Privatization, Entrepreneurism, Climate Change, and Critics of “Environmental Kuznets Curve” Solutions

Read:
• (Vista) Friedman, Thomas (2009). Show Us the Ball. New York Times. 8 April. (Vista)

Read:

Recommended:

Film: HEAT: Frontline Film on Climate Change

Seminar Leaders: ______________________________________________________
WEEK ELEVEN: Monday November 23

*** Reminder: Today: Last date for all students who plan to graduate in December 2009 to verify diploma name online

Theme: Green Consumption. The Answer?

Read:
- Szasz
  - Introduction: Inverted Quarantine
  - Ch. 2: Suburbanization as Inverted Quarantine
  - Ch. 3: Drinking
  - Ch. 4: Eating

Seminar Leaders: _______________________________________________________

WEEK TWELVE: Monday November 30

Theme: Environmental Solutions in the Global South?

Read:
- Wallace, *Sustainable Industrialization*
  - (Vista) Ch. 1
  - (Vista) Ch. 3
  - (Vista) Conclusion

Read:
- Hawken et al. *Natural Capitalism*
  - (Vista) Preface
  - (Vista) Ch. 1: The Next Industrial Revolution
  - (Vista) Ch. 14: Human Capitalism

Film: *Urban Solutions from Curitiba*

*** Reminder: Today: Last date for official withdrawal from a course or from the University

Seminar Leaders: _______________________________________________________
WEEK THIRTEEN: Monday December 7
FINAL QUESTIONS HANDED OUT TODAY
Theme: Debating Solutions to Our Environmental Problems

Read:
  • Speth
    ○ Ch. 10: A New Consciousness
    ○ Ch. 11: A New Politics
    ○ Ch. 12: The Bridge at the End of the World

Read:
  • Foster
    ○ Ch. 7: The Socialization of Nature
    ○ Afterward

Read:
  • Goldman
    ○ Ch. 7: Conclusion

Read:
  • Szasz
    ○ Ch. 6. Imaginary Refuge
    ○ Ch. 7. Political Anesthesia
    ○ Conclusion: The Future of an Illusion

Seminar Leaders: _______________________________________________________

WEEK FOURTEEN: DEC 14-21: Finals Week
Final Exam Due: Wednesday December 16th
Further Readings of Interest in Environmental Sociology


