People and Nature: The History and Future of Human Impacts on the Planet

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Course Description: The 21st century opened with combined crises of climate, biodiversity, and eco-system functioning. In contrast to much sustainability discourse, human disruption of the natural environment is not new. Indeed, environmental historians have identified major human alterations in eco-systems over the last 500 years. This course combines contemporary analyses of human impacts on the environment with the historical record, and explores both the familiar and the novel in the realm of ecological challenges.

Requirements: Written requirements are six short response papers (30%), an in-class midterm (20%), a final examination (30%) and participation in weekly sections (20%). Assignments and discussion questions will be posted on the course website. The course website is at cms.bc.edu.

Readings: The books listed below are available at the BC Bookstore. Books and articles are on reserve at O'Neill Library. Articles not included in the required texts will be posted on the course website.

Mike Davis, Planet of Slums (London: Verso, 2007)

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy: We take cheating and plagiarism extremely seriously. We have appended the University’s academic integrity statement to this syllabus. You are responsible for knowing what that policy is, and how cheating and plagiarism are defined.
Reading List

I. **September 7: The Challenge of Sustainability**: The climate crisis, ecological footprint and overshoot, ecological issues in a global context.

Dumanoski, chs 1-3.

II. **September 12, 14: Human Movement and Unintended Consequences**: impacts from the Columbian Exchange

McNeill, chs 1, 9.

III. **September 19, 21: Population and Global Poverty**: Demographic transition and the late 20th century population explosion, the role of population in ecological degradation, global poverty.

Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, chs 1, 2, 6.
Oxfam, 2011, GROW: growing a better future, pp. 5-30.
Fred Pearce, 2009, “Consumption Dwarfs Population as Main Environmental Threat,” available at:
http://e360.yale.edu/feature/consumption_dwarfs_population_as_main_environmental_threat/2140/

IV. **September 26, 28, October 3, 5: Global economic growth and de-forestation**: deforestation in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and Asia, and the contemporary de-forestation of tropical areas.

McNeill, ch. 8.


October 10 Columbus Day NO CLASS
V. October 12, 17, 19, 24: The Energy Revolution and Climate Change: The shift to fossil fuels, industrialization and the climate crisis

Dumanoski, ch 4.


Film: The Age of Stupid.

OCTOBER 26 IN-CLASS MIDTERM No sections this week

VI. October 31-November 2: Poisoning People and Planet: how the energy and chemical industries produce toxic chemicals


VII. November 7, 9, 14, 16: Agriculture and the challenge of sustainable food systems

Enclosure of the commons, the rise of industrialized agriculture and the emergence of an alternative food system

Nov 7: William Cronon, Changes in the Land.

Debbie Barker, The Rise and Predictable Fall of Globalized Industrial Agriculture (SF:

VIII. November 21: Water, from Abundance to Scarcity: The breakdown of sustainable water use

McNeill, chs 5,6.

IX. November 28, 30: Poverty, Global Overshoot and Environmental Inequalities: Inequalities of resource use, the global spread of ecologically intensive lifestyles, and the global allocation of harms

Davis, chs. 7,8 and epilog

X. December 5, 7: Ecological Activism and the Sustainability Movement: the emergence of a worldwide movement that recognizes planetary trends and is determined to reverse them.

Ramachandra Guha, The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya (Delhi,1989), ch.7.
Paul Hawken, Blessed Unrest, (Penguin 2007), chs 1, 2.
Peoples’ Agreement, from Cochambamba, Bolivia
Optional: Dumanoski, chs 7-9.
Sociology 025 and the Core Curriculum Sociology 025 is a part of the Core Curriculum in Sociology. As such it is designed to address a range of intellectual issues, using a variety of methodologies, and to engage students in particular ways. These are discussed below.

1. The long-standing questions. Sociology, and intellectual inquiry more generally, have long been preoccupied with a set of big questions. These include the debate over biological versus sociological causality, the nature of human agency, what is social justice and how can it be realized, and what constitutes progress? This course addresses these, and other similar issues, through the lens of humans’ relationship to the natural world. For example, we will be considering the extent and ways in which ecological degradation is caused by human actions, and particularly whether outcomes have been intentional. We will explore alternative explanations for major ecological trends such as de-forestation. We will look at the climate debate through a number of lenses, including global justice, politics, and collective denial. We will examine the ways in which ecological resources are appropriated, used and degraded. Throughout, large themes explaining humans’ relationship to the natural world will be emphasized.

2. Cultural diversity. This course takes a broad and culturally diverse perspective, using examples from most parts of the world. We will look at de-forestation in Central America and Europe, land use in India, how Western conceptions of population have been colored by racial stereotyping, and so on. The main historical text is global.

3. Historical perspective. The course is being co-taught by a historian and a sociologist. As such, a historical perspective is present throughout. In each unit of the course, we begin with a historical analysis of the topic and then move to contemporary period.

4. Methodology. Students are exposed to a variety of methodological approaches and tools. We will be reading standard historical and social science articles, some activist writing and journalistic, first hand accounts. By looking at a variety of points of view we are able to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of various methods of analysis.

5. Writing component. The course requires not only reading, but also considerable writing. In addition to a mid-term and a final examination, students write bi-weekly essays that incorporate readings.

6. Creating a personal philosophy. Every one of us is a citizen of the planet, but not all of us have thought consciously about what that means. How do our consumption decisions affect eco-systems? How does our participation in a global economy impact the earth? What is our personal ecological footprint? A major objective of this course is to get us to think critically and consciously about human impacts on the planet and their role in them. In addition, the course is designed to get us to think analyze how we conceptualize the planet and humans’ relationship to it. As we shall see, those fundamental ideas are central to both how humans fare on the planet and how they alter it.
Boston College Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures (excerpted)
Copied from: http://www.bc.edu/integrity

The pursuit of knowledge can proceed only when scholars take responsibility and receive credit for their work. Recognition of individual contributions to knowledge and of the intellectual property of others builds trust within the university and encourages the sharing of ideas that is essential to scholarship. Similarly, the educational process requires that individuals present their own ideas and insights for evaluation, critique, and eventual reformulation. Presentation of others’ work as one's own is not only intellectual dishonesty, but also undermines the educational process.

Standards: Academic integrity is violated by any dishonest act which is committed in an academic context including, but not restricted to the following:

Cheating is the fraudulent or dishonest presentation of work. Cheating includes but is not limited to:
- the use or attempted use of unauthorized aids in examinations or other academic exercises submitted for evaluation;
- fabrication, falsification, or misrepresentation of data, results, sources for papers or reports, or in clinical practice, as in reporting experiments, measurements, statistical analyses, tests, or other studies never performed; manipulating or altering data or other manifestations of research to achieve a desired result; selective reporting, including the deliberate suppression of conflicting or unwanted data;
- falsification of papers, official records, or reports;
- copying from another student's work;
- actions that destroy or alter the work of another student;
- unauthorized cooperation in completing assignments or during an examination;
- the use of purchased essays or term papers, or of purchased preparatory research for such papers;
- submission of the same written work in more than one course without prior written approval from the instructors involved;
- dishonesty in requests for make-up exams, for extensions of deadlines for submitting papers, and in any other matter relating to a course.

Plagiarism is the deliberate act of taking the words, ideas, data, illustrations, or statements of another person or source, and presenting them as one's own. Each student is responsible for learning and using proper methods of paraphrasing and footnoting, quotation, and other forms of citation, to ensure that the original author, speaker, illustrator, or source of the material used is clearly acknowledged.

Other breaches of academic integrity include:
- the misrepresentation of one's own or another's identity for academic purposes;
- the misrepresentation of material facts or circumstances in relation to examinations, papers, or other evaluative activities;
- the sale of papers, essays, or research for fraudulent use;
- the alteration or falsification of official University records;
* the unauthorized use of University academic facilities or equipment, including computer accounts and files;
* the unauthorized recording, sale, purchase, or use of academic lectures, academic computer software, or other instructional materials;
* the expropriation or abuse of ideas and preliminary data obtained during the process of editorial or peer review of work submitted to journals, or in proposals for funding by agency panels or by internal University committees;
* the expropriation and/or inappropriate dissemination of personally-identifying human subject data;
* the unauthorized removal, mutilation, or deliberate concealment of materials in University libraries, media, or academic resource centers.

Collusion is defined as assistance or an attempt to assist another student in an act of academic dishonesty. Collusion is distinct from collaborative learning, which may be a valuable component of students' scholarly development. Acceptable levels of collaboration vary in different courses, and students are expected to consult with their instructor if they are uncertain whether their cooperative activities are acceptable.