People and Nature: The History and Future of Human Impacts on the Planet
Sociology 1025/History 2503
Spring 2016

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Course Description: The twenty-first century opened with combined crises of climate, bio-diversity, and eco-system functioning. In contrast to much sustainability discourse, human disruption of the natural environment is not new. 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. We devote substantial attention to solutions to current ecological dilemmas.

Core Credit: This course fulfills one Social Science Core. If you sign up through Sociology 1025, you will automatically receive Core Credit. However, if those slots are full, you can sign up through History 2503 and get Core Credit by going to go to Student Services and asking them to give you the credit.

Readings: The required texts are available at the BC Bookstore. Books and articles are on reserve at O’Neill Library and can be accessed through the course website.

Required texts:
Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun, Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown, (Oxford University Press 2011)
Mike Berners-Lee, How Bad Are Bananas? The Carbon Footprint of Everything (Greystone Publishers, 2011)
Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, Merchants of Doubt, (Bloomsbury Press, 2010)
Donald Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s (Oxford University Press, 1979)
**Requirements and grading:** You are expected to do the readings each week, watch the lectures (see below, “The Flipped Classroom,”) and come to class. There are also written and other requirements. The grading rubric is the following:

- Weekly in-class (Tuesdays) quizzes (30%)
- Final examination at 9 AM on May 16 (25%)
- Final section project (30%)
- Section attendance (10%)
- Participation in section (5%)

**The Flipped Classroom and Active Learning:** There is a growing body of evidence that suggests a more active classroom pedagogy leads students to learn and retain more, and to have a more engaged and interesting academic experience. For this reason, we have had all our lectures for this class professionally produced and taped. They are available on the course website for you to view on your own time, outside of class. Class time will therefore be devoted to discussion of readings and the lectures, participatory engagement, and project-based work. Tuesdays we will meet as a whole group and Professors Parthasarathi and Schor will lead the class. Thursdays we will be meeting in smaller groups to work together on specific projects. The first half of the term we will do two small projects. The second half each section will work on one project.

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

**Reading and Lecture List**

**Week 1 The Challenge of Sustainability (January 19-21)**

**Readings**

Lectures
The Historical Perspective on Environmental Change
Ecological Overshoot
Climate Change
Interview with Activists 1 (optional)
Interview with Activists 2 (optional)
Interview with Bill McKibben

Week 2 Paradigms of Environmental Explanation (January 26-28)

Readings
• 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/
• Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl*, Introduction, pp. 3-8.
• Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums*, chap. 6, pp. 121-150.

Lectures
Overview: Paradigms of Explanation
Power, Culture and History: Historical Capitalism
Contemporary Capitalism
Contemporary Inequalities in Relation to Environmental Degradation
Power, Culture and History: The State and Governance
Solutions from the Power, Culture and History Perspective

Week 3 The Columbian Exchange and Changes in Population (February 2-4)

Readings

Lectures
Introduction and Southernization
The Black Death
The Columbian Exchange 1
The Columbian Exchange 2
The Columbian Exchange 3
The Demographic Transition
The Ecological Expansion of Europe
Environmental Justice

Week 4 Early Modern Deforestation (February 9-11)

Readings

Lectures
- Tragedy of the Commons
- Ostrom and Common Property Management
- Wood and Forest Resources
- Deforestation and the Early Modern World
- Why Did Deforestation before 1800 Happen?
- The European Response to Deforestation
- The East Asian Response to Deforestation

Week 5 Modern and Contemporary Deforestation (February 16-18)

Feb 16: Guest Speaker, Representative from Cultural Survival (invited)

Readings

Lectures
- Deforestation before 1850 and Why
- Tropical Rainforest Destruction
- The Brazilian Case 1
- The Brazilian Case 2
- The Case of Chicago
- Paradigms of Forest Preservation

Week 6 Energy and Climate 1: The Rise of Fossil Fuels (February 23-25)

Readings
• Berners-Lee, How Bad Are Bananas?, pp. 1-36.

Lectures
Energy and the Land Constraint
Fossil Fuels and the Energy Revolution
Coal in the 19th Century
The Impact of Coal
Oil, Petroleum and Natural Gas
The Transport Revolution
The Seven Sisters and the Power of Fossil Fuel Companies

Week 7 Energy and Climate 2: The Problem of Climate Change (March 1-3)

March 1: Guest Speaker, Robert Pion, BC, Sustainability Program Director

Readings
• Impacts of climate change—Choose a website from these below, or find another one, and spend some time on it.
  http://climate.nasa.gov/effects/
  http://www.climatecentral.org/
  http://www.wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/tackling_climate_change/impacts_of_climate_change/
• Berners-Lee, How Bad Are Bananas?, pp. 37-76.

Lectures
Basics of Climate Change
Impacts of Climate Change
Let’s Do the Math: the Global Carbon Budget
Oil Wars and US Foreign Policy
Costs of Fossil Fuel Use
Climate Solutions: Achieving Double-Digit Emissions Reductions
Week 8 Energy and Climate 3: US Climate Change Politics (March 15-17)

March 15: Guest Speaker, Carl Spector, City of Boston, Commissioner of the Environment Department

Reading

Lectures
Climate Denial
Politics of Climate Change in the United States
Emotions of Climate Change (optional)

Week 9 Energy and Climate 4: Global Climate Justice (March 22)

Easter Break: No Sections on Thursday, March 24.

Readings

Lectures
The View from the Global South
Global Climate Policy
Climate Inequalities: the case of Bangladesh
Climate Solutions
US Climate Activism

Week 10 Food and agriculture 1: The Shift to Unsustainable Agriculture (March 29-31)

Reading
Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl*, chaps. 3-5, 12-14, Epilogue.

Lectures
What is Agriculture?
The Shift from Sustainable to Unsustainable Agriculture: Extensive Growth
The Shift from Sustainable to Unsustainable Agriculture: Intensive Growth
The Corporate Food Regime
GMOs
The Political Power of Agribusiness

Week 11 Food and agriculture 2: The Rise of a Sustainable Alternative (April 5 -7)

April 5: Guest Speaker, Phillip Warburg, Author and Former Executive Director, Conservation Law Foundation, Boston

Readings
• Berners-Lee, *How Bad Are Bananas?*, pp. 77-104.

Lectures
Corporate Food Goes Global
Resistance to Corporatization
Sustainable Agriculture
The Alternative Food Movement 1
The Alternative Food Movement 2
The principles of Sustainable Peasant Agriculture
Technical Dimensions of Sustainability

Week 12 Toxics (April 12 -14)

Reading
Javier Auyero and Débora Alejandra Swistun, *Flammable: Environmental Suffering in an Argentine Shantytown*, chaps. 1, 3, 4, 6-7.

Lectures
The Proliferation of Toxics
DDT and Silent Spring
Corporate Malfeasance
Environmental Racism
Global Toxic Exposures
Resistance and the Environmental Justice Movement
Week 13 Water (April 19-21)

No class April 19.  
April 20: Guest Speaker, Donald Worster 4 pm, Location TBA

Reading


Lectures

Water Crisis 1
Water Crisis 2
Electricity Generation and Production of Goods
Irrigation
Water as Repository for Waste
Water Privatization
Screenflow Electricity Generation 1
Screenflow Electricity Generation 2

Week 14 Greening the Planet 1: Environment and Economics (April 25-27)

Readings

- Thomas Friedman, Hot, Flat and Crowded (New York, 2008), chap. 10.

- Berniers-Lee, How Bad Are Bananas?, pp. 149-156.

Lectures

Green Capitalism and the Techno-utopia
Green Capitalism and The Role of the State
Green Capitalism Neglects Inequality
Growth Incompatible with Emissions Reductions
Worktime Reduction
Wind Power in Tamilnad
Solar Power in Germany
Interview with Chella Rajan and Sujatha Byravan 1 (optional)
Week 15 Greening the Planet 2: Pathways into Sustainability (May 3-5)

Reading

- Stephanie Baasch, “A Local Energy Transition Success Story,” chap. 8, in *Community Governance and Citizen-Driven Initiatives in Climate Change Mitigation*, editors, Jens Hoff and Quentin Gausset (Routledge 2016), pp. 130-149.

Lectures

Principles of Green Democracy
Critiques of Capitalism: The Role of the State
Urban Farming
The Cleveland model
The Natural Assets project
Rapid Transit in Curitiba, Brazil
Making Change and Building a Movement
Interview with Activists 3 (optional)
Interview with Ted Rouse (optional)
Closing Thoughts
Sociology 1025 and the Core Curriculum Sociology 1025 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.

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 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.