

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

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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:

- Foster, John Bellamy. 1999. *The Vulnerable Planet: A Short Economic History of the Environment*. NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Goldman, Michael. 2005. *Imperial Nature: The World Bank and Struggles for Social Justice in the Age of Globalization*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Speth, James Gustave. 2008. *The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*. New Have: Yale University Press.
- Szasz, Andrew. 2008. *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

(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>

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 2. STUDENT WORK & PERCENTAGE OF GRADE EARNED

Paper #1	15%
Final Paper	15%
Team-led Discussion	20%
Daily Reading Summaries	30%
In-class Participation	20%

TABLE 1. GRADE SCALE

Letter Grade	% Range
A	93-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-90
B	83-87
B-	80-83
C+	78-80
C	73-78
C-	70-73
D+	67-70
D	63-67
D-	60-63
F	<60

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
- (Vista) Owen, Jonathan (2009) "The Planet's Future: Climate Change 'Will Cause Civilisation to Collapse.'" *The Independent*. Monday, 13 July
<http://www.commondreams.org/print/44531>

Recommended:

- (Vista) Davis, Mike "The Swine Flu Crisis" *The Guardian*

Film: The Story of Stuff

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK THREE: Monday September 28

Theme: How to Understand Environmental Problems as Social Problems: Introducing Key Themes, Social Theories, and Contemporary Environmental Debates: Society, Nature, Enlightenment, History and the Modern World; Marxism, liberalism, Keynesianism, nation-state, civil society, industry, production, capitalism, contradictions

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) Boykoff, Max and Jules Boykoff (2004) Balance as Bias: Global Warming and the US Prestige Press. *Global Environmental Change*. 14: 125-136.
- (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>

http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2005/05/some_like_it_hot.html

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:
 - Ch. 2: Ecological Conditions before the Industrial Revolution
 - Ch. 3: The Environment at the Time of the Industrial Revolution
- (Vista) Malthus, Thomas: "An Essay on the Principle of Population."

Recommended:

- (Vista) Diamond, Jared "The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race."

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

Recommended:

- Gareau, Brian J. (2008) Ecological Values amid Local Interests. *Rural Sociology*. 72(2): 244-268

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK SEVEN: Monday October 26

MIDTERM QUESTIONS HANDED OUT TODAY

Theme: Needing a New “Great Transformation”

Read:

- Speth
 - Ch. 2: Modern Capitalism: Out of Control
 - Ch. 3: The Limits of Today’s Environmentalism
 - 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
 - Part Two: The Great Transformation
 - Ch. 6: Real Growth: Promoting the Well-being of People and Nature
 - Ch. 7: Consumption: Living with Enough, Not Always More
 - 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: _____

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
 - Preface
 - Chapter 1: Introduction
 - Chapter 3: Producing Green Science inside Headquarters
 - Chapter 5: Eco-Governmentality and the Making of an Environmental State
 - 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) Cowan, Richard (2009) US Congress Begins Drive for Climate Change Bill. *Commondreams.org*.
- (Vista) Manibot, George (2009) The Failed State of U.S. Climate Change Policy. *Commondreams.org*.
- (Vista) Friedman, Thomas (2009). Show Us the Ball. *New York Times*. 8 April. (Vista)
- (Vista) Nisbet, Matthew C. (2009). Tom Friedman: Time to Switch the Climate Change Frame. *New York Times*. 8 April.
- (Vista) Tierney, Richard (2009). Use Energy, Get Rich, and Save the Planet. *New York Times*. 21 April.

Read:

- (Vista) Byers, Michael (2000) Woken Up in Seattle. *London Review of Books*.
- (Vista) Jorgenson, Andrew (2009). The Transnational Organization of Production, the Scale of Degradation, and Ecoefficiency: A Study of Carbon Dioxide Emissions in Less-Developed Countries. *Human Ecology Review*. 16(1): 64-74.
- (Vista) Wanted: Fresh Air (2009) *The Economist*. July.

Recommended:

- Friedman, Thomas (2009). Moore’s Law and the Law of More. *New York Times*. 26 April.
- (Vista) Jackson, Tim (2009) [*Prosperity Without Growth? The Transition to a Sustainable Economy*](#). UK Sustainable Development Commission.
- (Vista) York, Richard (2008). De-Carbonization in Former Soviet Republics, 1992-2000: The Ecological Consequences of De-Modernization. *Social Problems*. 55(3) 370-390.

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
- (Vista) Wu, JunJie, (2009) "Environmental Compliance: The Good, the Bad, and the Super Green." *Journal of Environmental Management* 90: 3363-3381.

Seminar Leaders: _____

WEEK TWELVE: Monday November 30

Theme: *Environmental Solutions in the Global South?*

Read:

- (Vista) Engleman, Robert (2009) The More Hybrid Drivers the Better? *World Watch Institute*
- 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

- Bunker, Stephen G. 1984. "Modes of Extraction, Unequal Exchange, and the Progressive Underdevelopment of an Extreme Periphery: the Brazilian Amazon, 1600-1980." *American Journal of Sociology* 89:1017-1064.
- Buttel, Frederick H. 2000. "Ecological Modernization as Social Theory." *Geoforum* 31:57-65.
- . 2004. "The Treadmill of Production: An Appreciation, Assessment, and Agenda for Research." *Organization and Environment* 17:323-336.
- Castree, Noel. 2002. "False Antitheses? Marxism, Nature and Actor-Networks." *Antipode* 34:111-146.
- Cronon, William. 1995. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, edited by W. Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Gareau, Brian J. 2005. "We Have Never Been 'Human': Agential Nature, ANT, and Marxist Political Ecology." *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 16:128-140.
- . 2008. "Class Consciousness or Natural Consciousness? Socionatural Relations and the Potential for Social Change: Suggestions from Development in Southern Honduras." *Rethinking Marxism* 20:120-141.
- . 2008b. "Dangerous Holes in Global Environmental Governance: The Roles of Neoliberal Discourse, Science, and California Agriculture in the Montreal Protocol." *Antipode* 40:102-130.
- Gould, Kenneth Alan, David Pellow, and Allan Schnaiberg. 2004. "Interrogating the Treadmill of Production: Everything You Wanted to Know About the Treadmill but Were Afraid to Ask." *Organization and Environment* 17:296-316.
- Hooks, Gregory and Chad L. Smith. 2004. "The Treadmill of Destruction: National Sacrifice Areas and Native Americans." *American Sociological Review* 69:558-575.
- Jorgenson, Andrew K. 2009. "The Transnational Organization of Production, the Scale of Degradation, and Ecoefficiency: A Study of Carbon Dioxide Emissions in Less-Developed Countries." *Human Ecology Review* 16:64-74.
- McCarthy, James. 2004. "Privatizing Conditions of Production: Trade Agreements and Environmental Governance." *Geoforum* 35:269-393.
- McCarthy, James and Scott Prudham. 2004. "Neoliberal Nature and the Nature of Neoliberalism." *Geoforum* 35:275-283.
- O'Connor, James. 1998. *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001. *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Roberts, J. Timmons and Nikki Demetria Thanos. 2003. *Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and Environmental Crises in Latin America*. New York: Routledge.
- Slater, Candace. 1995. "Amazonia as Edenic Narrative." Pp. 114-131 in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, edited by W. Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. 1999. "Modernity and Hybridity: Nature, Regeneracionismo, and the Production of the Spanish Waterscape, 1890-1930." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 89:443-465.
- . 2004. "Scaled Geographies: Nature, Place and the Politics of Scale." Pp. 129-153 in *Scale and Geographic Inquiry: Nature, Society and Method*, edited by E. Sheppard and R. McMaster. Oxford: Blackwell.
- York, Richard. 2008. "De-Carbonization in Former Soviet Republics, 1992-2000: The Ecological Consequences of De-Modernization." *Social Problems* 55:370-390.