

Environmental Sociology

SOCIOLOGY 223S
Fall 2010

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**Office Hours: 11-noon Wednesdays and Fridays, by appointment, or
drop by—I am often in my office**

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Course Web Page: http://www.skidmore.edu/~rscarce/Environmental_Sociology.html

Required Text

Leslie King and Deborah McCarthy, editors. 2009. *Environmental Sociology: From Analysis to Action*

Additional readings are available through the course website.

About Environmental Sociology

For all the talk about “greening” this and that, most people see the physical environment as pretty in its place but at its core as something to be scientifically understood, technologically managed, and transformed into the material things that we need to survive and that we want to enjoy. That perspective overlooks a lot of things, not least of which is the fact that the characteristics of societies—their cultures, traditions, beliefs, values, institutions, and the like—prominently figure in the ways that humans relate to the environment. The purpose of this course is to explore how the characteristics of human societies influence human/environment relationships, with an emphasis on Western Industrial societies like the United States.

Key questions that will guide us throughout the course include:

- What influences the ways that humans relate to the environment?
- What are the social and environmental consequences of those relationships?
- What are the roles of science and technology, the government, the economy, religion and culture—as well as other social institutions—in shaping how humans relate to the environment?
- Is “nature” (or “environment”) the same to all social groups?
- How do environmental organizations work, and what is your role in them?
- How can you effect environmental change?

Learning Objectives

In this course you will become conversant with an array of sociological and interdisciplinary concepts relevant to understanding human-environment relationships.

By the end of the semester:

1. You will be able to define and apply the fundamental concepts of the sub-discipline of Environmental Sociology. These include, but are not limited to: environmental attitudes and behaviors, human carrying capacity, ecosystem, sustainability, environmental justice, eco-Marxism, globalization, the various strains of the environmental movement, and the social construction of nature.

2. You will better understand the uses of such general sociological concepts as social inequality (especially social class, gender, and race), power, macro-social structure/social institutions, and social interaction.
3. You will become familiar with the basics of environmental policy, including major pieces of environmental legislation at the national level (such as the National Environmental Policy Act) and the administrative and regulatory bodies that apply and oversee those laws (like the Environmental Protection Agency).
4. In addition, through this class you will improve your critical thinking, speaking, and writing abilities through the analysis of several of the conflicting theoretical viewpoints used to explain human-environment interactions, and you will be able to identify the assumptions that undergird those conflicting positions.

Teaching Philosophy

Learning is a cooperative process that results in mutual- and self-improvement/realization. It requires us to open up our minds and challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. It is not a process of mere acquisition of information. You are not a vessel to be filled with the information that the “all-knowing” professor possesses. Whether professor or student, we are all learners and will all benefit from following the path to knowledge and insight together.

Given this outlook, our course is designed to provide us with a common language that we can use to question our conventional notions of reality. Such questioning is most effective when we share individual experiences and observations, then discuss and debate how such experiences apply to the ideas and theories presented in the readings.

For this learning process to be effective, it is necessary that we all have a certain amount of shared knowledge and understanding. This is where the course readings come in. If we all come to class knowing that we have read the same information, that information can serve as a basis for us to exchange ideas, relate experiences, and broaden our perspectives. As a result, we will be able to have rich in-class discussions with one another.

In addition, part of your learning will take place without traditional “teaching,” per se. What I mean is that you will be engaging in service-learning with the aim of understanding how some of the ideas and concepts from the readings and class actually get employed in the everyday world. Read on for more details. . . .

Environmental Service-Learning

A core component of the course will actually happen outside of the classroom. You are required to work three hours a week (on average) on one of several service-learning projects that I will present to the class. Understand at the outset that this component of the class is time-consuming, and you should be prepared to devote the necessary effort to fulfill this requirement.

This requirement is the largest single component of your final grade, and you need to commit yourself to working on it effectively. That is, you will need to show up for your service-learning project when you say you will, you will need to work well with others in your group and with your community partners, and you will need to be disciplined enough to do your part in your group’s final presentation and to write in your service-learning journal weekly, beginning the third week of classes.

Course Requirements

This course has three requirements.

1. Class participation. The course will depend on how effectively you work with others, and much of what you learn will emerge out of small group and whole-class discussions. You must come to class having read the day's assignment, and you must be prepared to participate in the discussions (15 percent of final grade).
2. Essays. You will complete 3 papers on subjects that I ask you to address, each of which should be between 750 and 1,000 words long. The papers will each count for 20 percent of your final grade (60 percent of final grade, total).
3. Service-learning project. Finally, 25 percent of your grade will be based on your participation in the service-learning project. A substantial portion of your grade will be determined by the quality of your service-learning journal (see below), but your effort toward fulfilling the project, including the final group presentation, will also be a part of your grade.

Service-learning emphasizes the connections between community needs and what you learn in the classroom. There is a circular relationship to service-learning: you should apply what you learn in the classroom to your community work, and your community work should feed back into the class. Each reinforces, and amplifies on, the other; you learn more and you do more as a result of service-learning experiences.

Your service-learning journal should run approximately 250 to 300 words each week, or 2,800 to 3,200 words for the semester as a whole. You should create a Word document and add to it each week—*be sure to date your entries*.

In each of your journal entries, you may briefly recount what you did for your project that week. However, the key component of your journal will be your *reflections* on the connections between the material we read in class and your project: as much or more as in class or while you are working in the community, your journal is where classroom-community connections (or critical evaluations of when those connections fail) should be made clear. *You do not need to draw from the week's readings when you write your journal entry for a given week—you may reflect on readings that were completed earlier in the semester, and you may return to the same reading(s) repeatedly in your journal.* Your journal is an analytical and reflective space; pick apart the readings and your service-learning work, and try to develop insights about one, or both, in each journal entry. In addition, you should use the journal space as a place to reflect on your own behaviors, attitudes, and outlooks in light of the readings-project interactions that you present.

Periodically, I will e-mail you to ask for your journal; you will have several hours to e-mail it to me without penalty; afterwards I will deduct points for lateness. These periodic submissions will not be graded; they are opportunities for me to share feedback with you that, I hope, will result in greater learning by you. You may edit and revise your journal entries throughout the semester—doing so will allow you to deepen your reflections and sharpen your analytical perspective.

Guidelines for Essays

Formatting. Your three essays must be typed, double-spaced, in an 11 or 12 point font. Be sure to follow the word count guidelines that I give you, and write or type the exact word count in the upper right-hand corner of the first page.

Citing. Cite your sources and include a reference section. References are not part of your word count. For guidelines on creating your list of references and citing them in the text, please see “Writing Tips,” which you can get to from the course web page. I created “Writing Tips” to help students avoid a variety of writing errors and to help them become better writers, so *please take some time to familiarize yourself with “Writing Tips.”*

Submitting. Your papers are due by the date and time designated on the assignment sheet. I will severely penalize late papers: a 10 percent deduction for papers less than one day late, a 50 percent deduction for papers 1 to 2 days late, and no credit after two days. You must submit all assignments to pass the course.

Paper Checklist. Before submitting each of your papers, check for the following:

- Is your paper double-spaced in an 11 or 12-point font?
- Is your paper proofread?
- Did you write or type an accurate word count at the top of the first page?
- Did you cite and reference your sources using the prescribed format?
- Is your name at the *end* of your paper (I prefer grading papers anonymously).

Grading. Your written assignments will be graded based both upon the quality of your writing and its content. Especially poorly written papers, either mechanically or in terms of their content, will be graded accordingly. All grades will be on a 100-point scale.

Class Participation

Because class participation is so important, it has its own section on this syllabus. Class participation is vital to this course and will be based on two factors: (1) your involvement in class discussions and small group analyses and assignments, and (2) the quality of what you have to say and of your interactions with your peers in class and in small groups. As college students you are expected to be able to express yourselves orally and in writing, so class participation is a reasonable expectation.

I will take attendance daily. It is my belief that poor attendance is a reflection of a student’s indifference toward her/his education. In addition, absences may disrupt class activities requiring a group effort, and/or may result in a failure to learn to hear details about assignments and other important information. I will deduct one percent from your final grade for each absence beyond the third, and I reserve the right to award you a failing grade for the course should you miss more than five classes (in the case of a severe flu outbreak, I will adjust this policy).

Full credit for class participation will go to those who enliven class discussion by grounding their comments in the class material but who, by the same token, allow others to speak and who respect others’ views. If you are talkative, try to avoid dominating class discussion. Discussions in this class can get heated, and that is understandable given the topics that we will cover. However, any student who does not show respect for the views of others will be reprimanded, and any further acts of disrespect may result in the student failing the course.

Class Decorum

As a courtesy to me and to your fellow students, please arrive to class on time; if you are chronically late, I will deduct points from your class participation score. Do not begin preparing to leave until the class is concluded. Finally, I expect you to respect the views of others in the class, which means that you are free to disagree with them, but abusive language or actions will not be tolerated and may be reported to the Dean of Studies.

Plagiarism

Skidmore's Honor Code is quite clear regarding the severe consequences that result from any act of cheating. The form of cheating most likely to emerge in our class is plagiarism. Should I find evidence that you have plagiarized or cheated in any other way, you will fail the course. To help you avoid plagiarism, review the "Writing Tips" web page and follow the guidelines there and those discussed in class.

Summary of Course Requirements

Graded Papers (3 papers @ 20 percent average): 60 percent of your final grade

Class Participation: 15 percent of your final grade

Service-Learning Presentation and Journal: 25 percent of your final grade

Final Grade Calculation

97 or more percentage points: A+	77 - 79.99 percentage points: C+
93-96.99 percentage points: A	73 - 76.99 percentage points: C
90-92.99 percentage points: A-	70 - 72.99 percentage points: C-
87 - 89.99 percentage points: B+	67 - 69.99 percentage points: D+
83 - 86.99 percentage points: B	60 - 66.99 percentage points: D
80-82.99 percentage points: B-	Less than 60 percentage points: F

COURSE CALENDAR

INTRODUCTION: ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY'S PERSPECTIVE

Wednesday, September 8	Course Introduction
Friday, September 10.....	King and McCarthy, Introduction and Reading 3
Wednesday, September 15	Carolan—Questioning the Precautionary Principle (PDF); Myers—"Debating the Precautionary Principle"—online at: http://www.sehn.org/ppdebate.html

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Friday, September 17.....	King and McCarthy, Reading 19
Wednesday, September 22	King and McCarthy, Readings 5 and 6
Friday, September 24.....	Smith—Postindustrial Detroit (PDF)
Wednesday, September 29	Saha & Mohai—Michigan TSDFs (PDF)
Friday, October 1.....	First Paper Due; service-learning groups check-in

SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTING NATURE

Wednesday, October 6.....	Greider and Garkovich—Landscapes (PDF)
Friday, October 8.....	King and McCarthy, Readings 7 and 8
Wednesday, October 13.....	Burningham and Cooper—Being Constructive (PDF)

THE SOCIOLOGY OF OIL

- Friday, October 15 Marshall, Picou, Bevc—Ecological Disaster
..... (PDF); Picou interview—online at:
<http://www.alexandracousteau.org/field/expedition-blog/expedition-voices-dr-steven-picou-forecasts-fracture-gulf-coast-communities>
Wednesday, October 20..... Widener—Ecuador; service-learning groups
..... check-in
Friday, October 22..... *No Classes—Study Day*

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: MARX AND DURKHEIM

- Wednesday, October 27..... Picou—Theoretical Themes (PDF); Rosa—On
..... Durkheim (PDF)
Friday, October 29..... Salleh—Metabolic Value (PDF)

Wednesday, November 3..... Second Paper Due; service-learning groups
..... check-in

GLOBALIZATION

- Friday, November 5..... King and McCarthy, Reading 11
Wednesday, November 10..... King and McCarthy, Reading 12

THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

- Friday, November 12..... Kuzmiak—American Env. History (PDF)
Wednesday, November 17..... Scarce—Earth First! (PDF)
Friday, November 19..... FitzGerald; Goodstein; Parks (all PDFs)
..... also see: <http://www.creationcare.org/>
Wednesday, November 24..... *No Classes--Thanksgiving*
Friday, November 26..... *No Classes—Thanksgiving*

DOING SOMETHING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

- Wednesday, December 1 King and McCarthy, Reading 22
Friday, December 3 King and McCarthy, Reading 25

Wednesday, December 8 Final Service-Learning Presentations

Friday, December 10 Third Paper Due

***FINAL SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT JOURNALS DUE BY E-MAIL TIME STAMPED
NO LATER THAN MONDAY, DECEMBER, 20 AT 5 P.M.***