Environmental Sociology

Thursdays, 1:00pm-3:40pm
Seminar Room, Davison Hall, 26 Nichol Ave (Douglass)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 1-2pm

Environmental sociology examines the changing relationship between social systems and the environment, and explores how environmental issues come to be defined as social problems. This course examines multiple perspectives within the field--including risk, political economy, consumer studies and social movements--to understand the range of explanations for environmental degradation and improvement.

The first part of the course is dedicated to introducing students to key theoretical perspectives in environmental sociology. In the second part, we look at competing explanations for why a meaningful response to environmental problems, such as climate change, has failed to materialize and what transformative change might look like.

Learning Objectives

1. Identify main theoretical perspectives and research problems that are considered part of the ‘core’ or ‘classic’ environmental sociology.
2. Examine emerging approaches and questions that characterize contemporary environmental sociology.
3. Generate new theoretical and analytical questions related to the causal mechanisms underlying environmental degradation and improvement.
4. Identify theoretical and methodological overlaps, contradictions and gaps in knowledge in the environmental sociology literature.
5. Synthesize multiple academic readings and promote the exchange of ideas.
6. Identify new research questions related to the study of the environment and propose ways to study those questions.

To measure students’ achievement of these objectives, students will be evaluated through the following requirements:

• Moderation of a weekly seminar
• Weekly reading reports
• Final research paper or proposal
In class, I’ll draw on students’ interests and theoretical expertise to help move discussions forward and generate new questions and debates. Students should feel free bring other materials—both popular and academic—that can add to our discussions.

**Diversity Statement**

The Rutgers Sociology Department strives to create an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all manifestations, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation. We also celebrate diversity of theoretical and methodological perspectives among our faculty and students and seek to create an atmosphere of respect and mutual dialogue. We have zero tolerance for violations of these principles and have instituted clear and respectful procedures for responding to such grievances.

**Course Policies**

**Contacting me**

My office hours are listed above. If you are not able to make these hours, please contact me and we can arrange to meet at another time. The best way to reach me is by email. I check email throughout the week (not on weekends), and I will do my best to respond within 48 hours.

**Student conduct and plagiarism**

I expect students to be on time for class and to stay for the duration of the lecture. The classroom should be a place for the free exchange of ideas, and students should act with mutual respect and use common courtesy. I hope for, and indeed encourage, debate among students. I welcome thoughtful discussion and critical thinking; but discourteous remarks will not be tolerated. Students are expected to follow the Code of Student Conduct, which can be found here: [http://policies.rutgers.edu/PDF/Section10/10.2.11-current.pdf](http://policies.rutgers.edu/PDF/Section10/10.2.11-current.pdf).

**Academic integrity and Plagiarism**

All students must review Rutgers’ policy on plagiarism. I take plagiarism very seriously and will follow University policy if I suspect plagiarism. Please refer to: [http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/files/documents/AI_Policy_9_01_2011.pdf)

**Disabilities**

To discuss academic accommodations for a documented disability, please contact me during the first week of class. Note that you must also contact the Office of Disability Services:

Kreeger Learning Center  
151 College Avenue, Suite 123  
E-mail Address: dsoffice@rci.rutgers.edu  
Phone: (732) 932-2848
Grades
The final grade is based on your total score (out of 100) calculated from all assignments.
A  90-100
B+  85-89
B   80-84
C+  75-79
C   70-74
D   60-69
F   59 or less

Assignments
Reading Responses (30%)

Starting the week of January 27th, you will be responsible for submitting a reading response (RR) for every class. RRs are due by noon every Wednesday via Sakai. Reading responses should be submitted as blog entries on the Sakai site so all members of the class can read each other’s responses.

RRs should be about one-page (400-500 words or so) that address the assigned readings for the upcoming class. These should be analytic responses to the readings rather than summaries. You have a lot of freedom here: you can construct an argument, ask and answer a question, observe strengths and weaknesses in the authors’ argument(s), and relate concepts across multiple readings to each other.

(1) Leading a seminar (30%)

You will have an opportunity to lead one, perhaps two, weekly seminars. You can present your reading response for that week and provide a brief summary of the readings that identifies some of the key concepts and significance of the material. You can provide the class with a handout of discussion points and questions and use these points to guide class discussion and debate.

(2) Final Paper (40%)

Due: May 9th (Outline due March 27th)

This is a 5,000 to 7,000 word paper. I will provide more detail in class. You have two choices for this assignment:

A. Write an in-depth analysis of a topic related to course material. This involves reviewing, synthesizing and analyzing one or more bodies of literature. You can develop new research questions, identify overlaps and inconsistencies among several bodies of theory, etc.

B. Write a research proposal on a topic related to environmental sociology.
Assigned Readings
You must attend all classes and come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. I expect that you will complete the reading before class so that you can participate in discussions. All assigned journal articles are available on Sakai and books are available on reserve at Douglass Library.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

PART A: CONCEPTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY

Introductory class—Jan 23

Environmental Sociology: A brief history and overview—Jan 30


Competing explanations for environmental degradation—Feb 6

Gould, K. A., Pellow, D. N., & Schnaiberg, A. (2004). “Interrogating the treadmill of production: Everything you wanted to know about the treadmill but were afraid to ask.” Organization & Environment, 17(3), 296-316.


The nature-society divide— Feb 13


**Risk— Feb 20**


**Regulatory science—Feb 27**
Vogel, Sarah A. 2013. Is it safe? BPA and the struggle to define the safety of chemicals. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. [Chapters 1, 4, 5]


**Environmental (in)justice——March 6**


**Environmental (in)justice: Case Studies— March 13**


**MARCH 20th (Reading Break)**

**Environmental Social Movements--March 27**


*Due: Final paper summary and outline*
PART B: EXPLORING MECHANISMS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Postmaterialism and Global Environmentalism—April 3rd
Guest: Dr. Steven Brechin, Professor, Department of Sociology, Rutgers University


(Topic TBA)—April 10th

Political Polarization and Anti-reflexivity—April 17th


Denial—April 24

Lifestyle change and consumer citizenship—May 1st


Szasz, Andrew. 2007. Shopping our way to safety: How we changed from protecting the environment to protecting ourselves. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [Introduction, Part II, Chapter 7]

Final Paper Due May 9th, 2014