

## Environmental Sociology – SOC 309

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We live in an age of ecological crisis: biodiversity loss, global climate change, air and water pollution, urban and rural sprawl, and depletion of fisheries are just a few of the crises one is likely to encounter personally or through media accounts on any given day. What can the field of sociology offer our attempts to understand and address these environmental challenges? How applicable are classical and contemporary sociological theories to problems of ecological change and degradation? What are the intersections between social and environmental systems? How are environmental issues socially constructed, and how do these constructions influence social action? These are the kinds of questions we will address in this course. Through a combination of theoretical and applied readings, class discussions, relevant films, real-world experiences, and independent student research, we will explore and critically analyze multiple ways of understanding the complex interrelationships between human society and the nonhuman environment.

### Required texts:

Ulrich Beck. 2007. *World at Risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis (eds.) 2009. *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

John A. Hannigan. 2006. *Environmental Sociology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Abingdon: Routledge.

Paul Robbins. 2007. *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

## What will I learn in this course?

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain, compare, and synthesize multiple theoretical perspectives on society-nature relationships.
- Explain how the experience of and/or response to environmental degradation varies along the lines of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and spatial location.
- Engage in informed critique of causal explanations for environmental degradation encountered in popular media and popular discourse.
- Analyze contemporary environmental issues using both classical and contemporary sociological frameworks and concepts.

## Course structure:

Classes will combine lectures, small- and large-group discussions, viewing and discussion of films, and occasional field experiences in and around Walla Walla. Students will be expected to engage substantively in class discussions and activities (including completing all reading assignments as well as leading two small group discussions) and demonstrate competency in environmental sociology theory and concepts through completion of an in-class midterm exam. In addition, each student will complete a two-part final project combining a written paper with a five minute-long “podcast”-type audio story on their chosen topic.

## Discussion leadership:

At the beginning of week 2, the class will be organized into small groups (group membership determined by the professor). Most class periods will include 20 to 45 minutes of peer-led discussion of assigned readings within these groups. Discussion leadership will rotate among the members of the group, with each student leading two discussions by the end of the semester. The duties of discussion leadership include: preparing a list of provocative discussion questions along with any “unanswered” questions (i.e., points or concepts you had difficulty understanding or for which you need clarification). These must be submitted to the professor by 5:00 pm on the day prior to leading the discussion. On the day you lead discussion, your role is to facilitate exploration of the concepts covered in the readings with others in your group. Note that, whether leading discussion or not, everyone is expected to come to class each day having completed assigned readings and having given them substantial and critical thought.

### Final project:

The two-part final project combines a written component and a “podcast”-type audio component, each of which should complement the other. The written component is a 12 to 15 page (double spaced) paper exploring some aspect of environmental sociology in detail and depth. This may be, but is not limited to, the following formats: a case study (examination of a particular environmental issue using sociological concepts, e.g., global warming, wind energy development, a particular environmental social movement) or a detailed exploration and/or critique of a particular environmental sociological concept (e.g., the treadmill of production, ecological modernization, or the risk society thesis). Regardless of the format or topic chosen, the paper must be clearly written, show critical and informed engagement with concepts and theories of environmental sociology, and draw on a variety of academic sources above and beyond those assigned as required readings in this course. A brief description of the intended paper topic and theoretical approach is due during week 8, a detailed paper outline with list of literature to be used is due during week 10, and a substantive paper draft is due for peer review during week 11. This draft is more than an annotated outline; it must include at least six pages of substantive text as well as detailed descriptions of remaining work in any unfinished sections. The final written project is due Monday, December 12 at 5:00 pm.

The audio component of the final project is your opportunity to communicate the relevance and significance of your selected topic in a creative way. The format for this component is a “podcast”-type audio story no more than five minutes in length, and may include interviews with affected individuals, “audio postcards” from important sites, or any other components you feel will spark interest in and attention to your topic. Each student will present the audio component of their project during the final two weeks of class. Small-group collaboration on the written and/or audio components of the final project will be considered upon consultation.

### Evaluation of student performance:

Class engagement	25%
Discussion leadership	20%
In-class midterm exam	15%
Final paper	25%
Audio project	15%

### Readings and submissions

All assigned readings, other than those included in the required texts (available at the Whitman bookstore) are available via the SOC309 CLEo site. Unless otherwise stated, assignments should be submitted to the instructor via your CLEo dropbox. Only files in .doc or .docx formats are acceptable for electronic submissions. Use the following format for naming your files: `firstname_lastname_assignment` (e.g., `Jesse_Abrams_Discussion1`).

### Policies on absences and late submissions

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and submit assignments by the deadlines stated in this syllabus. If you have a conflict which will cause you to miss class or assignment deadlines, you will need to communicate this as early as possible to avoid late penalties and deductions to your “class engagement” evaluation. In all other cases, late submissions will be penalized 10% on the first day and 5% each additional day.

### Access and individual accommodations

If you are a student with a disability who will need accommodations in this course, please meet with Julia Dunn, Director of Academic Resources (Memorial 205, x5213, [dunnjl@whitman.edu](mailto:dunnjl@whitman.edu)) for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs. All information regarding disabilities is considered private; if I receive notification from Ms. Dunn that you are eligible to receive an accommodation, I will provide it in as discreet a manner as possible.

### Academic Honesty

Plagiarism, cheating, or misrepresentation of work will be considered very serious offenses in this course and may be grounds for failure of the course and/or more substantial consequences. Please do not jeopardize your Whitman education by engaging in academic dishonesty.

## **Course Outline and Assignments**

### Week 1. Introduction

Tuesday, August 30:

Introduction to Environmental Sociology.

Thursday, September 1:

William R. Catton, Jr. and Riley E. Dunlap. 1978. Environmental sociology: A new paradigm. *The American Sociologist* 13(1): 41-49.

John Hannigan. 2006. Environmental sociology as a field of inquiry. Pp. 1-15 in *Environmental Sociology*.

Luiz C. Barbosa. 2009. Theories in environmental sociology. Pp. 25-44 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

### **Does the Sociological Tradition Matter?**

### Week 2. Sociological Traditions

Tuesday, September 6:

John Bellamy Foster. 1999. Marx's theory of metabolic rift: Classical foundations for environmental sociology. *American Journal of Sociology* 105(2): 366-405.

Raymond Murphy. 1994. Rationalization and ecological irrationality. Pp. 27-42 in *Rationality and Nature: A Sociological Inquiry into a Changing Relationship*.

Eugene A. Rosa and Lauren Richter. 2008. Durkheim on the environment: Ex libris or ex cathedra? Introduction to inaugural lecture to a course in social science, 1887-1888. *Organization and Environment* 21(2): 182-187.

Thursday, September 8:

John Hannigan. 2006. Contemporary theoretical approaches to environmental sociology. Pp. 16-35 in *Environmental Sociology*.

Mary Mellor. 1997. Gender and the environment. Pp. 195-203 in *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*.

Jonathan Murdoch. 2001. Ecologising sociology: Actor-network theory, co-construction and the problem of human exemptionalism. *Sociology* 35(1): 111-133.

Discussion leader:

## **Does Economic Structure Matter?**

### Week 3. Relations of production

Tuesday, September 13:

Bob Edwards and Adam Driscoll. 2009. From farms to factories: The environmental consequences of swine industrialization. Pp. 153-175 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

Kelly Austin. 2010. The “hamburger connection” as ecologically unequal exchange: A cross-national investigation of beef exports and deforestation in less-developed countries. *Rural Sociology* 75(2): 270-299.

James McCarthy. 2004. Privatizing conditions of production: Trade agreements as neoliberal environmental governance. *Geoforum* 35: 327-341.

Discussion leader:

Friday, September 16 or Saturday, September 17:

*Experiential education*: Field trip TBD.

### Week 4. The treadmill of production and ecological modernization

Tuesday, September 20:

Allan Schnaiberg. 2009. Labor productivity and the environment. Pp. 59-67 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

Kenneth A. Gould, David N. 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(3): 296-316.

Eric O. Wright. 2004. Interrogating the treadmill of production: Some questions I still want to know about and am not afraid to ask. *Organization and Environment* 17(3): 317-322.

Arthur P.J. Mol. 1997. Ecological modernization: Industrial transformations and environmental reform. Pp. 138-149 in *The International Handbook of Environmental Sociology*.

Brian Obach. 2007. Theoretical interpretations of the growth in organic agriculture: Agricultural modernization or an organic treadmill? *Society and Natural Resources* 20(3): 229-244.

Discussion leader:

Thursday, September 22:

*Film:* We Feed the World (96 mins)

### **Does Risk Matter?**

#### Week 5. World Risk I

Tuesday, September 27:

Ulrich Beck. 2007. Pp. 1-66 in *World at Risk*.

Discussion leader:

Friday, September 30:

Ulrich Beck. 2007. Pp. 67-114 in *World at Risk*.

*Experiential education:* Field trip to Hanford site, 12:30-4:30 pm

#### Week 6. World Risk II

Tuesday, October 4:

Ulrich Beck. 2007. Pp. 115-186 in *World at Risk*.

Discussion leader:

Thursday, October 6:

Ulrich Beck. 2007. Pp. 186-234 in *World at Risk*.

Discussion leader:

Week 7.

Tuesday, October 11: No class

Thursday, October 13: *Midterm exam (in class)*

**Do hybrid ecologies matter?**

Week 8. Actor-networks and the creation of environmental subjects.

Tuesday, October 18:

Paul Robbins. 2007. Pp. 1-95 in *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*.

Discussion leader:

Thursday, October 20:

Paul Robbins. 2007. Pp. 96-138 in *Lawn People: How Grasses, Weeds, and Chemicals Make Us Who We Are*.

*Guest speaker (TBD) or walking tour of local "lawnsapes"*

*Final paper topic due by 5:00 pm, Friday October 21.*

**Do Ideas Matter?**

Week 9. Environmental attitudes and behaviors

Tuesday, October 25:

Riley E. Dunlap and Kent Van Liere. 1978. The 'New Environmental Paradigm.' *Journal of Environmental Education* 9(Summer): 10-19.

Julia Dawn Parker and Maureen H. McDonough. 1999. Environmentalism of African Americans: An analysis of the subculture and barriers theories. *Environment and Behavior* 31(2): 155-177.

Lynette C. Zelezny, Poh-Pheung Chua, and Christina Aldrich. 2000. Elaborating on gender differences in environmentalism. *Journal of Social Issues* 56(3): 443-457.

Riley E. Dunlap and Richard York. 2008. The globalization of environmental concern and the limits of the postmaterialist values explanation: Evidence from four multinational surveys. *The Sociological Quarterly* 49: 529-563.

Discussion leader:

Thursday, October 27:

Elizabeth Shove and Alan Warde. 2002. Inconspicuous consumption: The sociology of consumption, lifestyles, and the environment. Pp. 230-51 in *Sociological Theory and the Environment: Classical Foundations, Contemporary Insights*.

Gregory Peter, Michael M. Bell, Susan Jarnagin, and Donna Bauer. 2000. Coming back across the fence: Masculinity and the transition to sustainable agriculture. *Rural Sociology* 65(2): 215-233.

Dave Horton. 2003. Green distinctions: The performance of identity among environmental activists. Pp. 63-77 in *Nature performed: Environment, culture and performance*.

Discussion leader:

#### Week 10. The social construction of nature

Tuesday, November 1:

John Hannigan. 2006. Social construction of environmental issues and problems. Pp. 63-78 in *Environmental Sociology*.

James D. Proctor. 1998. The social construction of nature: Relativist accusations, pragmatist and critical realist responses. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88(3): 352-376.

Ruth Liepins. 1998. "Women of broad vision": Nature and gender in the environmental activism of Australia's 'Women in Agriculture' movement. *Environment and Planning A* 30(7): 1179-1196.

Discussion leader:

Final paper outline and list of possible references due by 5:00 pm, Tuesday November 2.

Thursday, November 3:

John Hannigan. 2006. Discourse, power relations and political ecology. Pp. 53-62 in *Environmental Sociology*.

J. Anthony Abbott. 2010. The localized and scaled discourse of conservation for wind power in Kittitas County, Washington. *Society and Natural Resources* 23(10): 969-985.

Roopali Phadke. 2011. Resisting and reconciling big wind: Middle landscape politics in the new American West. *Antipode* 43(3): 754-776.

Guest speaker: TBD

## **Does Population Matter?**

### Week 11. Malthus and beyond

Tuesday, November 8:

Thomas Malthus. 1817. An essay on the principle of population. Pp. 29-38 in *Classics in Environmental Studies: An Overview of Classic Texts in Environmental Studies*.

Paul Ehrlich and Anne Ehrlich. 1969. The population bomb. Pp. 115-124 in *Classics in Environmental Studies: An Overview of Classic Texts in Environmental Studies*.

The Club of Rome. 1972. The limits to growth: A global challenge. Pp. 195-198 in *Classics in Environmental Studies: An Overview of Classic Texts in Environmental Studies*.

Diane C. Bates. 2009. Population, demography, and the environment. Pp. 107-124 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

John Bellamy Foster. 2002. Malthus's essay on population at age 200. Pp. 137-154 in *Ecology Against Capitalism*.

Discussion leader:

Draft final paper due (emailed to instructor and group members) by 5:00pm, Tuesday Nov. 8.

Thursday, November 10:

Peer review of draft final papers.

### **Do Social Movements Matter?**

#### Week 12. Environmental social movements

Tuesday, November 15:

Frederick H. Buttel. 1992. Environmentalization: Origins, processes, and implications for rural social change. *Rural Sociology* 57(1): 1-27.

Robert J. Brulle. 2009. U.S. environmental movements. Pp. 211-227 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

Tammy L. Lewis. 2009. Environmental movements in the global south. Pp. 244-254 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

Stephen Schwartzman, Ane Alencar, Hilary Zarin, and Ana Paula Santos Souza. 2010. Social movements and large-scale tropical forest protection on the Amazon frontier: Conservation from chaos. *Journal of Environment and Development* 19(3): 274-299.

Discussion leader:

Thursday, November 17:

J. Timmons Roberts. 2009. Climate change: Why the old approaches aren't working. Pp. 191-208 in *Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology*.

Aaron M. McCright and Riley E. Dunlap. 2011. The politicization of climate change and polarization in the American public's views of global warming, 2001-2010. *The Sociological Quarterly* 52: 155-194.

John Hannigan. 2006. Biodiversity loss: The successful "career" of a global environmental problem. Pp. 122-135 in *Environmental Sociology*.

Guest speaker: TBD

**Do tofurkey and cranberry sauce matter?**

November 21-25: Thanksgiving Break

Weeks 13 and 14. Student Presentations

Students will have 10 minutes each to present their audio projects to the class (5 minutes for presentation, 5 minutes for Q&A)

*Final papers due by 5:00 pm, Monday December 12*