

SOC 353: Environmental Justice

MTTh, 11:00 – 11:50 AM, Maxey Rm. 102

Instructor: Christopher Thoms, Ph.D. **Office Hours:** MTTh, 10-11 AM, or appointment

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Required Texts:

Agyeman, Julian, Robert D. Bullard, and Bob Evans, eds. 2003. *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*. Cambridge: MIT Press. [ABE]

Kallen, Evelyn. 2004. *Social inequality and social injustice: A human rights perspective*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. [KALLEN]

Pellow, David N., and Robert J. Brulle. eds. 2005. *Power, justice, and the environment: A critical appraisal of the environmental justice movement*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [PELLOW]

Recommended Texts:

Mutz, Kathryn M., Gary C. Bryner, and Douglas S. Kenney, eds. 2002. *Justice and natural resources: Concepts, strategies, and applications*. Washington: Island Press. [JNR]

Shrader-Frechette, K. S. 2002. *Environmental justice: Creating equality, reclaiming democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press. [SF]

All other readings available on CLEo or by special distribution

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Environmental justice refers to the fair, equitable and ethical distribution of environmental “goods” and environmental “bads”. Unfortunately, environmental services and benefits like clean air, agricultural land, and outdoor recreation are more available to some social groups than others and there is inequity in the distribution of environmental harms like toxic waste dumps, air pollution, and mine tailings.

In this course we will explore the relationship between environment, ideas of justice, and social inequity. We will examine how racial, economic, and cultural background can affect people’s access to a clean, safe environment and productive natural resources. We will consider examples of how people’s access to a safe, clean environment and vital natural resources are threatened or violated locally, nationally, and globally. We will examine how globalization and other economic transformations affect the relationship between poverty and the environment. We will make many stops around the globe in our intellectual travels – studying American cities, Native American tribal lands, rural communities of the intermountain west, and many international locales. Importantly, we will also explore some of the mechanisms being used to secure environmental rights and promote environmental justice. The course attempts to expand the traditional boundaries of environmental justice from its origins in environmental health to include issues of natural resource access.

Course Objectives:

- Understand the background to EJ, including concepts of justice, race, class, power, and inequality
- Understand the broad outline of the history of the environmental justice movement
- Gain exposure to some of the studies and evidence for environmental injustice
- Develop an environmental justice framework that can be applied internationally
- Examine the expanding remit of environmental justice into issues of natural resource access, global climate change, and the special plight of indigenous peoples

Process:

The format for most class meetings will be interactive lecture in which the professor expects considerable student participation via asking and answering questions. Many meetings will be run as discussion sessions/seminars, and there may be in-class group work/activities.

COURSE TOPICS

Introduction – Concepts of justice; Social Stratification; Power; Inequality; Civil Rights; & the Environmental Movement

EJ as a Social Movement – Origins of the EJM; Env. Racism; Activism; & an EJ Framework

Expanding the Scope of EJ – Human Rights; Basic Needs; Justice and Natural Resources; International EJ; & Sustainable Development

Policy, the Law, and EJ – Assessing EJ Claims; EJ and Civil Rights; & Correctives to Env. Injustice

EJ in Context – Energy; Food and Agriculture; Children and Toxins; Mining; & Conservation

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

- **Ask questions** in class when you are confused about a concept.
- Plan to **arrive on time** and to leave on time.
- Students are encouraged to study together and help each other learn the material. However, with the exception of group work, **everything you hand in must be your own, individual work!**
- **Do not abuse e-mail.** Complex questions or issues are best addressed during class discussions.
- Turn **phones off** during class. If you are expecting a phone call related to a family emergency, please notify me before class and use your phone's etiquette setting.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Because intellectual integrity is integral to the academic endeavor and the social sciences, I will not hesitate to **punish instances of plagiarism or cheating**, including referring the offender to the dean of students, in line with the Whitman College academic dishonesty policy (see Whitman College Student Handbook pp. 73-76). Punishment **will lead to a failing grade for the assignment in question and/or a failing grade for the class**, depending on circumstances and whether it is a first offense. If you have questions regarding what constitutes cheating or plagiarism, please ask. Some general guidelines:

Cheating includes but is not limited to:

- Copying other students' work or allowing others to copy yours for assignments [not lecture notes!]
- Submitting work that is not your own or allowing others to submit your work as their own
- Submitting the same work for two or more classes without prior approval

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to:

- Presenting another's published or unpublished work as one's own
- Taking works or ideas of another and either copying them or paraphrasing them without proper citation
- Using charts, graphs, statistics or tables without proper citation

GRADING CRITERIA/REQUIREMENTS

Daily preparation, attendance and **class participation** are essential. In addition to two **exams** (including the final) and a **final project**, at the end of most weeks you will submit a **reading log**, and on most Mondays you will prepare an **in the news** summary. Details follow.

In the news: 5 % of your grade is based on writing very short reflections relating current events to material covered in class. These are all or nothing points, that is, as long as what you write is coherent and relevant to the topic, you will receive 100%. Given that there are five of these assignments due, missing one will result in a 1% reduction in your final grade. These can only be handed in at the beginning of class when due. Details of the assignment will be distributed later.

Class Participation (& attendance): 10 % of your grade is based on whether and to what extent you contribute to class discussions and participate in class activities throughout the term. As part of your participation grade, you are expected to **attend every class**, but you may miss up to two classes without penalty. Regardless of attendance, **you are responsible for all assignments and material** – talk to your classmates if you miss class. If you know you will miss class due to some scheduled event, notify me **two days in advance** so as to avoid penalties associated with handing in assignments late. Excessive absences should be noted and verified by a doctor.

Discussion Leadership: 15 % of your grade is based on the quality of your performance as a discussion leader twice in the semester. Each student will lead discussion of readings with a partner twice during the semester, once before October Break, and once after. Discussion leadership assignments will be determined the first week of class. You will be expected to coordinate with the other student also responsible for leading discussion, and develop a list of discussion topics that will cover the central points of the readings, as well as engage the class in connecting the readings to other relevant materials and topics.

Weekly reading log: 15 % of your grade is based on a weekly synopsis and analysis of readings. Each week you will turn in a reading log and a short list of discussion questions. Logs should be about 2-3 pages of double-spaced (or 1.5 spaced) typed pages. You should include 1) Summary of the main points of the readings, 2) deeper analysis of something of interest to you that the readings relate to (This could be: a connection to a previous reading or lecture; a connection to something you've experienced outside of class; an ethical question the reading relates to; or social theory or research methods. Occasionally, I may ask you to reflect on a specific topic in your reading logs). 3) A brief list of discussion questions, which should include: both questions about things you don't understand or would like additional examples of in the readings and questions you would like to explore with the rest of the class to more deeply understand the topics at hand. Logs may be narratives or bullet points. Logs will receive a $\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{-}$, or 0. ($\sqrt{+}$ corresponds roughly to an A/A-, $\sqrt{-}$ to a B+/B, $\sqrt{-}$ to a B-/C, and 0 to F).

Reading logs are discussion aids, critical thinking exercises, and, frankly, incentives for you to read assigned material. I want to see evidence that you are reading and reflecting on the assigned reading material. Hardcopies must be handed in by the end of Thursday classes as noted in the course schedule. Reading Logs will not be accepted late or via e-mail except in extraordinary circumstances. A given log may be turned in early if you will miss class, but please check with me first. Please include a header indicating your name, course number and the date of the assignment.

In addition, you will craft one suggested exam question for each reading. Each question must be accompanied by an answer you consider appropriate, with specific justification (e.g. citation and page number). The exam questions for each reading can be either multiple choice or short-answer/essay, but you must provide at least four short-answer/essay questions before each scheduled exam. I will include several of the best student generated questions, possibly modified, on each exam.

Final Project: 20 % of your grade is based on an end-of-semester final project. You may choose from a variety of options for your final project, including: traditional research paper; your own original social

research project; web page; video; magazine-style report; service project; something else – what is your media specialty? The primary focus of the final project is conveying information about a topic relevant to the study of environmental justice. You may also take a position and use your project to convince your audience of a particular perspective or that a particular action is necessary, given the information you've also presented. Although you are encouraged to use your creative talents in this project, please remember that *this is not primarily an artistic endeavor*. As always, you must appropriately cite the sources you use for your research. Final projects will be distributed/presented/performed during the final week of classes. It is expected that non-research paper alternatives will involve at least as much effort and research as a traditional research paper.

Exams: 35 % of your grade is based on your performance during two exams. The mid-term exam will be delivered in-class as a traditional exam. The final take-home exam will focus primarily on the last section of the course, but will cover other important concepts from earlier material. The mid-term exam is worth 15% of your grade, and the final is worth 20% of your grade.

Readings: You are expected to come prepared by reading the assigned material **prior to class**. I will very likely test you on material found in the readings that I don't cover in class.

GRADING MATRIX

| Item | % of grade | Grade Scale | |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------|----------|
| In the news | 5 % | <u>Grade</u> | <u>%</u> |
| Participation | 10 % | A | 93-100% |
| Discussion Leadership | 15 % | A ⁻ | 90-92% |
| Reading Log | 15 % | B ⁺ | 88-89% |
| Final Project | 20 % | B | 83-87% |
| Exams | 35 % | B ⁻ | 80-82% |
| TOTAL: | 100 % | C ⁺ | 78-79% |
| | | C | 73-77% |
| | | C ⁻ | 70-72% |
| | | D ⁺ | 68-69% |
| | | D | 63-67% |
| | | D ⁻ | 60-61% |
| | | F | 59-0% |

Late Assignments: Assignments will be penalized 5% for each day they are late, and will not be accepted more than 1 week late without prior approval (i.e. they will receive a grade of 0).