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Sociology 309
Fall 2008
Maxey 142

Environmental Sociology

Welcome to *Soc 309: Environmental Sociology!* Environmental problems from global warming to loss of biodiversity are a significant feature of our world today. And, although we are rarely told so by political leaders or newscasters, environmental degradation underlies most national and global events, from our nation's economic health to political conflict in the Middle East. What does sociological theory have to say about why ecological degradation is happening? What are the social consequences of ecological problems? Do environmental problems affect all communities in the same way? How has society responded to ecological problems? Is there any cause for hope? These are some of the questions we will take up in the next fifteen weeks together. This course is organized into three parts: an examination of the social causes, of environmental degradation including population growth, human values, risky technologies and the global economic system; the social impacts of ecological problems such as resource scarcity, poverty and impacts to human health, and how society has responded in the form of individual actions, social movements and responses from government institutions.

Goals and Objectives

After completing this course you should be able to:

- * Explain theoretical perspectives on social causes, consequences and responses to ecological degradation.
- * Define and use concepts central to the field of environmental sociology.
- * Understand multiple ways that race, class, gender and nationality affect one's experience of and responses to ecological problems from toxic exposure to global warming and species decline.
- * Think critically about your own life, how you impact and are affected by ecological problems.
- * Know more about local environmental issues in the Walla Walla region and how these are linked to national and global events.

Operating Assumptions

- * People's experiences of and knowledge about the world (including environmental issues) differs by race, class, gender and nationality.
- * Although we recognize that different members of society have different perspectives on environmental problems, ecological damage such as species decline, toxic contamination, air and water pollution are real, and the rate of damage is increasing.

Class Format

Environmental problems are not "out there" in the world, they are created and experienced by each of us. We each contribute to ecological problems as we go about our daily lives, eating, using electricity, buying clothing and computers and so forth. And each of us is affected by ecological problems as we consume unhealthy food, breath polluted air, watch our communities change, or feel a sense of hopelessness as the problems multiply. Most importantly, we each have the ability to effect positive change in the world! Therefore, this class will be very interactive with lots of room for thoughtful input from each of you in the form of class discussions, memos and outside class research projects. We will frequently discuss current events, local issues and relate course material to our own lives. You will be asked to examine how your daily life affects and is affected by social and environmental problems. I expect this class to challenge you both intellectually and personally as you develop your ability to think theoretically about your own life. The format for this class will be varied and highly interactive. Most days we will have a mixture of lectures and discussions. Our class will also include films, guest speakers, and presentations by each of you!

Classroom Conduct

Being there

While I understand that it can be difficult to get to class on time for all of us, please make an effort to be to class on time. The disruption of late arrivals is a significant distraction for me as an instructor and the class as a whole. If you find that you are more than five to seven minutes late we'll see you next time. If you know in advance that you need to arrive late or leave early just let me know beforehand.

In Class

I expect to be transformed from the process of teaching, of interacting with all of you. And in turn, I expect you to be transformed by the interactions you have in this class, with me as an instructor, with other students, with videos, assignments and readings. In this sense I expect our classroom to be the site of fairly intense energy. I will be fully present as a person, and I expect each of you to be the same. Please come to class prepared to listen and learn.

Discussions

Discussions can be times of rich learning, but they can also be scary for many of us. In order to create as much safety as possible, you need to agree to the following ground rules:

- * Come to class as intellectually and psychologically prepared as you can.
- * Raise your hand and wait until called before speaking.
- * Listen to and be respectful of your classmates.
- * Be open to new possibilities

Late Policy

Computer problems, illness, out of town travel and general chaos affect us all! Each of you will receive two coupons good for two days extra on assignments, no questions asked. Beyond that, late assignments will be marked down one letter grade per day. No exceptions. Coupons not valid for final project presentation or final exam.

Required Texts -- Available at Reid Campus Center Bookstore

A River Lost: The life and death of the Columbia Blaine Harden

Twenty Lessons in Environmental Sociology Kenneth Gould

Additional readings will be on reserve

Readings are listed on the syllabus for the week or course meeting that they are due!

Assignments

Memos 10%

Ten of the fourteen Thursdays of our term you will turn in a memo with your own personal reactions to the course material. The purpose of the memo is to help you integrate course material with your own life, and for you to give me feedback on how the course is going for you. The content of the memos should focus on both the course material and your experiences, but are otherwise open to you. For example, you might describe your reaction to a class discussion, film or lecture, report an event in your life or a conversation with a friend or family member about course material, whatever is happening in your mind that week. **These are not reading or lecture summaries.** Your memo can be anywhere from a paragraph to a page. You will receive credit for work done but memos will not be graded.

Quizzes 10%

Tuesdays our class will begin with a short quiz. Quizzes will be one question drawn from the current reading or a concept from the previous week. Refer to the list of key sociological concepts provided on day one. These concepts are discussed in readings and are amongst the likely candidates for quizzes.

Participation 20%

This is your class, and to make it work, everyone needs to get involved. Most Thursdays three of you will be in charge of leading the half hour discussion of the week's readings. The rest of us will support the discussion by turning in two questions from the reading each week. These questions must be emailed to discussion leaders and me by **noon on Wednesday** so that the student discussion leaders for the day have a chance to look them over and prepare for the discussion. Your participation grade will reflect your ongoing involvement in discussions, leadership of the discussion for your week, and questions submitted throughout the term. There will be a sign up sheet for discussion leaders on the first day of class.

Recycling Project 15%

Our class will begin with a hands on learning opportunity to address a need for the College. The Whitman College recycling program has been in existence since the late 80s. Over that time the volume of material recycled has increased by orders of magnitude. Now a large portion of this material travels around the world to be recycled. Does it make sense to send our recyclables to China? What cost is this action having on the environment? What are the alternatives? What role should Whitman play in the local recycling market? Can we be a force for change by providing our

Local Civic leaders with information about new and emerging technology that could make local/regional recycling more sustainable? Our class will work in research teams to address these questions and provide a report back to Bob Biles, the Conservation Committee and city officials.

Project Dates:

Sept 9th Project Begins
Sept 30th In Class Report Back
Oct 7th Written Report Due

Semester Long Project: Produce A Five Minute Radio Show 25%

See details in separate sheet at end of syllabus

Final Exam 20%

The final exam will be oral and held in the form of a half hour conversation between one or two students and myself. You may choose to take the final individually or with another student (grading is always individual). Final exams will be scheduled for finals week during the last week of class.

Grading:

Memos	10
Quizzes	10
Recycling Project	15
Semester Long Project	25
Participation	20
Final Exam	20

Course Schedule:

Note! Our course schedule will likely vary slightly from the description below in order to accommodate guest speakers and special opportunities.

PART ONE: SOCIAL CAUSES OF ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Week One

Sept 2 Introduction to Environmental Sociology and to each other

Sept 4 Key Concepts in Sociology and Environmental Sociology

Reading: Ch. 1 Introduction to Environmental Sociology, Ch 2 The Social Construction of Nature: Of Computers, Butterflies, Dog and Trucks

Week Two

Sept. 9 **In Class Activity: Introduction to Recycling Project**

Reading: Ch. 3 Theories in Environmental Sociology

Sept. 11 Key Concepts in Sociology and Environmental Sociology

Reading: Ch 4 The State and Policy, Ch. 5 Labor Productivity

Week Three

Sept 16 Population

Reading: Ch. 9 Population, Demography and the Environment, Excerpt from The Population Bomb On Reserve

Sept 18 Values and Consumption

Reading: “The Social Context of Recycling” On Reserve

Week Four

Sept 23 Science and Technology

Reading: Ch 7: The Science of Nature and the Nature of Science, Ch. 8 Technological Change and the Environment

Submit topic and interviewee names for final project September 23

Sept 25 Guest Lecture: Martin Wagner, Earth Justice

Reading: None

Week Five

Sept 30 **In Class Report Back on Recycling Project**

Oct 2 Corporations, Economy and Globalization

Reading: Ch. 6 Corporate Power: The Role of the Global Media in Shaping What we Know about the Environment

Week Six

Oct 7 Capitalism vs. Ecological Modernization

Reading: None

Written Report Due on Recycling Project

Oct 9 Radio Editing Workshop Meet in class for discussion

PART TWO: SOCIAL IMPACTS OF ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Week Seven

No Class Tuesday, Four Day Break

Oct 16 Health Impacts

Reading: Ch. 11 Sociology of Environmental Health, A River Lost Ch 1
Interview Script and Names and Dates of Scheduled Interviews Due

Week Eight

Oct 21 Possible Guest Speaker Ron Reed, Karuk Tribe of California

Reading: River Lost Chs. 2-3

Oct 23 Environmental Impacts: Gender

Reading: TBA

Week Nine

Oct 28 Environmental Impacts: Race and Class, Rural Communities

Reading: Ch. 10: Environmental Inequality and Environmental Justice
Background information due October 28

Oct 30 Political Impacts

Reading: A River Lost Chs:4-6

Week Ten

Nov 4 Fishbowl River Lost

Reading: A River Lost Chs:7-8, Epilogue

Radio Show Script due Nov 4

Nov 6 Mental impacts: Risk Society, Denial

Reading: Readings on Reserve: Lifton, Norgaard

Week Eleven

Nov 11 Climate Change

Reading: Ch 13 Understanding Disaster, Ch 14, Climate Change

Nov 13 **NO CLASS IN EXCHANGE FOR TIME AT JWC**

**Saturday November 15th
Johnston Wilderness Campus Radio Project Presentations 9:30 - 4:30**

PART THREE: SOCIAL RESPONSES TO ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Week Twelve

Nov 18 **NO CLASS IN EXCHANGE FOR TIME AT JWC**

Nov 20 Environmental movements

Reading: Ch. 15 The U.S. Environmental Movement

THANKSGIVING BREAK NOV 24-28

Week Thirteen

Dec 2 Environmental movements Continued

Reading: Ch. 17 Environmental Movements in the Global South, “Why Race and Class Matters to the Environmental Movement,” “The Lessons We Haven’t Learned from the Struggle for Civil Rights” from The Soul of Environmentalism On Reserve

Dec 4 Backlash movements: Development of agencies, legal developments

Reading: Ch. 6 “Agency, Democracy and Nature” On Reserve

Week Fourteen

Dec 9 Community Based Movements

Reading: TBA

Dec 11 Last Class: Course review and evaluation

Final Exams

December 15-17: Oral finals: Schedule exam times with me during last week of class

**Semester Long Project:
Production of a Five Minute Radio Show!**

The semester long project for our course is the production of a five minute radio show. This project is your opportunity to illustrate your understanding of course information and theory by conducting your own investigation, analysis and presentation of the social dimensions of a local ecological issue. Radio is not only another form of storytelling and information sharing besides the written work, it also requires the kind of concise messages that can only come with familiarity of a topic. Your radio script will be recorded and presented to the class on Saturday November 4 at Johnston Wilderness Campus. Anyone who is interested is encouraged to air their show on the Whitman radio station for extra credit. Although your final product will only take five minutes to present, you will need to compile a substantial amount of background material to produce an effective five minute radio segment. I have laid out steps that will guide you through this process.

<u>Timeline:</u>	Choose topic submit names	September 23
	Two scheduled interviews	October 16
	Submit background materials	October 28
	Submit radio script	November 4
	Live production JWC	November 15

Step One: Choose topic September 23

To start this project choose a local or regional environmental issue (e.e. impacts of global warming on salmon, invasive species in the Walla Walla Valley, new developments in organic agriculture, globalization and local farm practices, water quality in the Columbia, etc). In choosing your project read the local paper to get a sense of what is salient in the community or come by my office for a chat. Your radio show will contain two interviews, so you'll need to conduct these! Interviews may be with scientific experts, political leaders, local or regional community members impacted by the problem or individuals involved in finding a solution. Or if the issue has received widespread public attention, even a "person on the street" reaction to the problem..

Step Two: Confirm two scheduled interviews October 16

Submit the names of two people you will interview, dates for the scheduled interview and a sheet of the questions you plan to ask each person. Your interviews will need to be recorded so you'll need to sign up for recording equipment if you don't have something already (i.e. Marantz recorder, MP3 player or tape recorder). We'll take some in class time to talk about how to do an interview and answer questions. You'll want to have these scheduled by about this time.

Step Three: Submit background materials October 28

Two weeks before the project is due you will submit 5-8 pages of background research including:

- Scientific information about the environmental problem you have chosen, summaries of current studies, e.g. government research, university research, with complete and appropriate citations.
- Sociological integration: a summary of theories and information in class to explain the social

- causes, consequences and responses to the situation.
- Description of national and local significance (global if relevant).
 - Bibliography of at least 8 sources, you may use class material if relevant.

These materials do not need to be in the form of an essay, but they should be concise and complete. Your background materials will be one of the main ways that you explicitly demonstrate your understanding of course material and ability to integrate sociological theory into analysis of a real world problem.

Step Four: Submit radio script November 4

Submit a script of the radio show by this date at the latest, earlier is better if you want feedback from me. This timing also allows you time to work on creative content of the show (should you wish) and lets those that choose to have time to work with the media lab to produce a radio show.

Step Five Perform 5 min radio show!

Our radio performances will take place at the Johnston Wilderness Campus on Saturday November 15. Save the date now! Radio scripts must be pre-recorded and should include a passage of the actual voices of the people you have interviewed. We will skip two class periods in exchange for time at JWC.

