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:


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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class engagement</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion leadership</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class midterm exam</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio project</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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) 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:


Does the Sociological Tradition Matter?

Week 2. Sociological Traditions

Tuesday, September 6:


Thursday, September 8:


**Discussion leader:**

**Does Economic Structure Matter?**

**Week 3. Relations of production**

Tuesday, September 13:


**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:

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.


**Discussion leader:**

Thursday, September 22:

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

**Does Risk Matter?**

**Week 5. World Risk I**

Tuesday, September 27:


**Discussion leader:**

Friday, September 30:


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

**Week 6. World Risk II**

Tuesday, October 4:


**Discussion leader:**
Thursday, October 6:


*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:


*Discussion leader:*

Thursday, October 20:


*Guest speaker (TBD) or walking tour of local “lawnscapes”*

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

**Do Ideas Matter?**

Week 9. Environmental attitudes and behaviors

Tuesday, October 25:


**Discussion leader:**

Thursday, October 27:


**Discussion leader:**

Week 10. The social construction of nature

Tuesday, November 1:


Discussion leader:

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

Thursday, November 3:


Guest speaker: TBD

**Does Population Matter?**

**Week 11. Malthus and beyond**

Tuesday, November 8:


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:


Discussion leader:

Thursday, November 17:


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