

Environmental Sociology

01:920:359

Summer 2025

Online Course with Asynchronous Content

Note: This syllabus is a living document and may be updated as required

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Canvas Site: <https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/350078>

Course Description

Environmental sociology sets itself apart from the broader field of sociology by examining human interactions with the natural environment. By bringing the environment into the core of its theories, environmental sociology can both better elaborate existing sociological theories, and can build new ones that introduce sociological dimensions to better explain environmental problems. In other words, the goal of the field is to expand how we understand both social and environmental life and problems by digging deeper into how they are related to each other. Thus, the field is quite expansive, covering social and environmental phenomena from the individual level to the global, and everything in between, including organizations and corporations, governmental institutions, families, and more.

Environmental sociologists engage in questions such as: How are theories of social interactions affected by the environment, and how is the environment affected by society? How do humans understand and think about the "environment" and "nature," and how do these understandings get socially constructed? How do environmental factors play into existing social hierarchies and inequalities such as class, race, gender, etc. and vice versa? Who controls environmental resources and causes environmental harms, and who experiences environmental hazards? This course aims to introduce students to how environmental sociologists try to answer these questions and how to apply concepts to existing environmental and social issues.

Upon successfully completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Appreciate the unique aspects of environmental sociology; how it differs from mainstream sociology
2. Understand how the environment and natural resources, and environmental change shape society and vice versa
3. Appreciate how society-environment interactions adds to one's sociological imagination
4. Appreciate how embedded our society & economy remain within our environment and natural resources
5. Understand the needs for and challenges to achieving a sustainable society and what will be required to achieve it
6. Appreciate the promises and limitations of technological innovations and fixes in achieving sustainability

Course Structure:

This is an online asynchronous course, meaning that you are not required to attend class meetings at a specific date and time. The course will be broken up into weekly units, which you can access via the

Modules page on Canvas. Each week's assignments will be posted on the first day of the week (usually Monday) by about 11am. These materials will typically include a mix of lecture videos, assigned readings (and sometimes materials in other mediums, such as films), writing assignments, and a quiz. The lectures have interactions built into them to encourage your active participation. It's recommended that you watch/read/complete these materials in the order listed in the module. Each week's work should be completed by the end of the day (11:59pm) Sunday, unless otherwise noted. Then, the following week's assignments will be posted. (For things due Sunday night, I am applying a 9-hour grace period. That is, things will not be counted late as long as they are submitted before 8:59 am on Monday morning.)

Please note that this is a full course condensed into six weeks (less than half the normal time period). In past summers with in-person classes, this course met four days per week and also had homework outside of class. You should therefore expect to spend a significant amount of time each week completing the work for the course. Due to the asynchronous nature of this course, it's up to you to decide when to "go to class." However, make sure you pace yourself—you will not succeed in this course if you try to do everything at the last minute on Sunday evenings.

Course Materials:

The textbook for this course is *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*, 6th Edition by Michael Bell et al. While you are not required to read every page of this textbook as part of your homework, most of the lectures will be following the broad outline of this book, so you are encouraged to consult it as an additional resource throughout the course, especially for topics that you want to review or that you'd like more information/detail about. There will also be some additional readings, films, and video clips outside of the textbook posted to Canvas. Students are expected to complete all indicated assigned readings/films.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Your grade will be based upon the following criteria:

Case Study Paper: 30%

Throughout the semester, we will work on a "case study paper" in which you will analyze an environmental problem of your choice using the theories and concepts we learn in this class. The final version of the paper will be about 2000-2500 words long (about 8-10 double-spaced pages). We will work on assignments throughout the semester to help you put together the paper, and the final paper will be due at the end of the semester. Within this 30% for the paper, 20% is for the paper itself, 5% for a presentation about the paper, 2% for the idealism outline, 2% for the materialism outline, and 1% for the topic proposal.

More detailed instructions are on the Case Study Paper Instructions page on Canvas and due dates are included in the calendar below. References should be in ASA format. You are encouraged to use a citation manager, such as Zotero or Endnote, to ensure your references are formatted correctly throughout your paper. The Rutgers Libraries have tutorials posted on how to do this and their librarians are available to help troubleshoot issues as they arise.

*Quizzes: 5 * 5% each = 25% total*

There will be a quiz at the end of each week consisting of questions derived from that week's lecture materials and readings. There are six total quizzes, but I will drop your lowest-scoring quiz. This leaves five that are counted for points. The quizzes will be around 15-30 minutes long (some weeks have more

material suitable for quiz questions than others). They will be made up of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. You will be able to see information about each week's format before you start the quiz.

The quizzes are open-note and open-book, and they do not require Proctortrack or anything along those lines, but you are still expected to take them seriously and prepare for them. They will be timed, since they are intended to be evaluations of your understanding of the material, not scavenger hunts. You will have time to go back into your notes or the slides to review things, but you will not be able to open up the quiz at the beginning of the week and have it next to you the whole time as you watch the lectures.

*Activities: 5 * 4% each = 20% total*

Each week (except for the last), I will provide an activity related to the course material for you to complete. These mimic the activities you might find in an in-person course, although they do not require group work or discussion. Instructions for them will be posted on Canvas and discussed in the relevant lectures.

*News Discussions: 5 * 3% each = 15% total*

Each week (except for the last), you will be asked to submit a news article that is relevant to the course material for the week. The article should be published no more than 14 days prior to the due date. You will write a 300-400 word memo that summarizes the article and links it to the course material we are covering that week. These will generally be graded for effort rather than correctness. To receive the maximum possible credit, you should make sure you refer back to the class materials (lectures, readings, films, activities, etc.) as specifically as possible. The main goal of these reflections is to demonstrate that you've understood and thought about what we've gone over in class, so you aren't really accomplishing this goal if you don't actually refer to stuff from class.

You will post this in a discussion board on Canvas; however, you cannot see other students' posts until after you have posted. You are encouraged to browse other the other posts to keep informed of what is going on in the world, but you do not have to respond to anybody for a grade. To ensure everybody can read your submissions, and that they are from credible sources, please choose articles from the following list of sources:

- New York Times
- Wall Street Journal
- Grist
- Carbon Brief
- Yale Climate Connections
- NPR, the Associated Press, Reuters

The Rutgers Libraries provide subscriptions to NYT and WSJ. All the others are freely available online. If you find an article on another site, you may email me for approval.

Lecture Participation: 10%

Lecture videos will typically include interactions, which are the equivalent of a professor asking students questions during an in-person class. These will include a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions. Many of these will be opinion-based or open-ended "What do you notice here?" kinds of questions, for which any intelligent answer will receive credit. There will also be occasional comprehension questions and attention checks for important concepts, but you typically will be given

multiple attempts to answer them if needed. These will be graded but should be sufficiently easy so that they are essentially participation grades if you are paying attention.

Course Schedule

The following is an overview of the topics we will cover each week. Each unit's materials (including lectures, readings, quizzes, and writing assignments) will typically be posted on Monday and due at 11:59 PM the following Sunday night. (As mentioned above, there is a built-in grace period for Sunday night due dates. I will not count it as late as long as it is submitted by 8:59 AM on Monday morning.) The exceptions are the first and last week, since the semester starts on a Tuesday and ends on a Friday. The calendar notes readings and assignments in brief; please consult the "Modules" page on Canvas for the most up-to-date and complete calendar.

Wk #	Posted	Due	Topics & Readings	Assignments
1	May 27 (Tues)	June 1	Intro to EnviroSoc IES: Chapter 1 A Fierce Green Fire (Film) Mohai (2018)	News Discussion Activity: Introduce Yourself Quiz
2	June 2	June 8	The Material, Part I IES: Chapters 2-4 Dubois et al. (2019)	News Discussion Activity: NJ Gov. Candidate Comparison Paper: Potential Topics for Papers Quiz
3	June 9	June 15	The Material, Part II IES: Chapters 5-6 Cronon (1983)	News Discussion Activity: Land-Grab University Paper: Materialism Applications Outline Quiz
4	June 16	June 22	The Ideal IES: Chapters 7-9 Gifford & Nilsson (2014) Dunlap et al. (2016)	News Discussion Activity: Climate Change in the American Mind Paper: Idealism Applications Outline Quiz
5	June 23	June 29	The Practical IES: Chapters 10-12 Cha & Pastor (2022)	News Discussion Activity: EN-ROADS Simulation Quiz
6	June 30	July 3 (Thurs.)	Climate Change & Conclusion	Paper: Paper Presentation Paper: Final Paper Quiz

IES: *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*.

Course Policies

Grading Scale for Course Grades

A	=	90 - 100
B+	=	85 - 89.99
C	=	80 - 84.99
C+	=	75 - 79.99
C	=	70 - 74.99
D	=	60 - 69.99
F	=	59.99 or lower

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments (including lectures, quizzes, activities, news discussions, and other writing assignments) will receive a grade deduction of 10. Assignments that are more than one week late or submitted after the semester ends on July 3 (whichever occurs first) will no longer be eligible for credit. (If you have to miss more time than this, you are better off withdrawing from the course and trying again another semester, rather than scrambling to submit what will inevitably end up being subpar, rushed work.)

If some emergency prevents you from being able to submit an assignment on time, please let me know; I am willing to make accommodations to prevent exceptional circumstances from impacting your grade, so long as this does not become regularly-occurring. However, since this is already a condensed course, it is critical to avoid falling significantly behind, since, if you do so, it will likely become impossible to complete the missing work at an acceptable level of quality in the limited time available.

Policy on AI-Generated Work:

In recent semesters, an increasing number of students have been submitting AI-generated work, especially for writing assignments. Although AI is becoming an increasingly important tool in social life, it is not acceptable to attempt to pass off AI-generated work as your own. On a philosophical level, your grade is supposed to represent the understanding of sociology you emerge from this course with, so submitting an assignment you didn't write yourself undermines the purpose of the course. On a practical level, although AI produces detailed and confident-sounding responses, these responses are often wrong and, even when correct on a general level, cannot hope to incorporate and grapple with the full range of concepts, evidence, and ideas discussed in the lectures and readings. On both levels, submitting work you did not produce yourself is plagiarism.

For the purposes of this course, generative AI is not allowed to be used to summarize course materials (which is a violation of copyright policy anyway), nor for the creation of any written work which you will submit as part of the course. Accordingly, content that is suspected to be AI-generated will receive 0s and referrals to the Dean of Students, since this is a form of academic integrity violation. Even in cases where AI assistance cannot be proven, AI-generated work will fail to incorporate specific course material to the extent necessary to rise above D-level. You'd be much better off actually learning the material.

Contacting Your Instructor:

I am available to help answer any questions or clear up any confusion you have regarding course concepts or course logistics; feel free to send me an email or visit me in office hours. If you are having difficulties keeping up with the class, please come to me as soon as possible. The earlier we address the difficulties, the better chance we have for you to succeed. Please do not wait until the end of the semester to come talk to me, since by this point it will likely be too late. There will not be any extra credit offered at the end of the semester, so don't bother asking; rather, focus on completing your assignments and learning the material.

Please follow the following guidelines when corresponding via email:

- Please look over the syllabus before contacting me to make sure your question is not already answered.
- Please include "Soc 359" in the subject line of your email and make sure your name is indicated somewhere in the email.

- Please ensure you are using your Rutgers email account (such as Scarletmail), as I am legally not allowed to respond to questions about you otherwise.
- Please look over your assignment instructions early so that, if you have any questions, you'll have time to get a response.

I will try to respond to your emails within 24 hours during the week (Monday – Friday) or 48 hours over the weekend—if this doesn't happen, I may have missed your message, so feel free to email again.

Disability Accommodations:

If you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, please contact me at the beginning of the semester or when given an assignment for which an accommodation is required. Students with disabilities should verify eligibility through the Office of Disability Services (see ods.rutgers.edu for more information).

University and Departmental Policies:

Academic Integrity

Cheating, plagiarism, or any other kind of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. It will result in a failing grade and a referral to the Dean of Students. For further information on the definitions, examples, and consequences of violations, see the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy:

<http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/home/for-students/>

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.

Other Resources:

Learning Resources

[Learning Center Resources](#) (time management, study skills, writing skills, etc)

[Library Tutorials](#) (information literacy, critical thinking, how to do research, etc)

[Academic Advising for SAS Students](#)

Mental Health Resources

[CAPS](#) (counseling, alcohol/drug assistance, psychiatric services, therapy, etc)

[Crisis Intervention](#)

[Report a Concern](#)

Violence Prevention

[VPVA](#) (assistance for victims of sexual violence, domestic violence, and stalking)

Crisis Intervention: call (848) 932-1181

Basic Needs Resources

[Assistance for students](#) facing insecurity of food, housing, transportation and other “essential resources that impact one’s health, sense of belonging, persistence, and overall well-being.”