

STSC 168: Environment and Society

Spring 2015. Lecture: MW 12-1PM / Section: F12-1PM or F1-2PM

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Office hours: 325 Cohen Hall, Tues. 3-5pm

Course Description

Twenty-first-century humanity faces a variety of environmental challenges in domains such as energy production, waste disposal, pollution, population growth, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Scientific and technical expertise is essential to facing these challenges but not sufficient. All of them are deeply entangled with human history, society, and culture in ways that make simple technical fixes unlikely. This course introduces key concepts and theoretical frameworks from humanities and social sciences that help clarify the nature of today's environmental challenges and suggest possible paths forward. These include ideas about the nature/culture divide, the significance of animals, plants, and technologies in human history, the management of risk and uncertainty, the role of experts and expertise in modern societies, the unequal distribution of political power, and the possibility of hope in dire circumstances. By the end of the course you should have a sense of the broad sweep of human environmental history over the past several thousand years, understand in depth the key issues at stake in a number of contemporary environmental challenges, and be able to deploy techniques of social and cultural analysis to better understand them.

Assignments and Grading

Paper 1 (25%). Due February 16. 950-1050 words. Unit I: Defining, Knowing, and Caring for the Environment. With reference to relevant lectures and readings, answer the question: What is the environment?

Paper 2 (25%). Due March 23. 950-1050 words. Unit II: Human Environments in Historical and Social Perspective. With reference to relevant lectures and readings, explain what one of the provided historical primary sources can tell us about human relations to the environment in its time and place of origin.

Final Take-Home Exam (40%). Questions Handed Out on April 29, Due May 5. Unit III: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues. The exam will test your ability to draw on the course lectures, readings, and discussions to analyze the in-depth case studies of contemporary environmental issues addressed in Unit III.

Participation (10%). Your participation will be evaluated on the basis of the quality, not quantity, of your contributions to the discussion. Nonetheless regular attendance and participation is expected, and excessive absence may negatively affect your grade.

Paper Guidelines

All papers should employ one of the citation/reference formats of the Chicago Manual of Style, either “Notes and Bibliography” or “Author-Date.” For details and examples, see http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. (Note that you must click on the “Author-Date” tab to see details for that style.) More important than which style you use is that you use it consistently and provide complete reference information for all sources cited.

Representing others’ work — either that of your peers or from published sources or material found on the Internet — as your own is unacceptable and will result in a failing grade. Unless the specific wording of a source text is essential to your argument, it is almost always preferable to paraphrase rather than quoting directly. Any direct quotes should be set off in quotation marks.

All papers should be submitted electronically by midnight (11:59pm) on the due date via Canvas in one of the following file formats: Word (doc/docx) or OpenDocument Text (odt). PDFs will not be accepted. Use a standard 11- or 12-point font (such as Times New Roman or Cambria), 1” to 1.5” margins, and numbered pages. Include a title page with your name, the course number, and the date of submission.

Late papers will not be accepted unless a prior arrangement has been made with the instructor, and then usually only in cases of illness or other emergency.

Readings

See the schedule below for a detailed list of topics and readings. All readings will be available as PDFs via the course’s Canvas site. Since we will be examining the readings closely in discussion sections, please read them carefully before section and bring them and your notes with you in paper or electronic form. (See the note below about the use of electronic devices in class.) The approximate reading load per week is 2-3 articles or book excerpts, amounting to about 30-80 pages in total.

Code of Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by Penn’s Code of Academic Integrity, which prohibits *activities that have the effect or intention of interfering with education, pursuit of knowledge, or fair evaluation of a student’s performance*. Further details can be found here:

http://www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity/ai_codeofacademicintegrity.html. If you have any uncertainty about how the code applies to this course, or to a particular assignment, please consult with the instructor.

Use of Electronic Devices

The following guidelines are meant to promote an effective learning environment:

- Laptop computers may be used for note-taking during lectures, but they should not be used during discussion sections, where they can be disruptive to sustained engagement with the

conversation. However, unobtrusive tablet computers and e-readers may be used in section to refer to notes and readings.

- Please do not use text messaging, instant messaging, or social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) on any kind of device during lectures or sections. Such activities are more evident than you may suspect and can be a significant distraction to your peers and to the instructor.
- You are welcome to make digital recordings of lectures for personal use on the condition that you do not share them with anyone who is not currently enrolled in the class.

Schedule

Introduction

Week 1: Introduction

Jan. 14 (W) Lecture: Introduction and Course Overview

Unit I: Defining, Knowing, and Caring for the Environment

Week 2: Defining the environment

Jan. 19 (M) Lecture: Keywords: Nature, Landscape, Wilderness, Environment

Jan. 21 (W) Lecture: The Anthropocene

Jan. 23 (F) Discussion

Readings Williams, "Ideas of Nature," 19pp.
Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," 22pp.
Steffen et al., "The Anthropocene," 26pp.

Week 3: Knowing the environment

Feb. 2 (M) Lecture: Origins of the Environmental Sciences

Feb. 4 (W) Lecture: Seeing the Earth Whole

Feb. 6 (F) Discussion

Readings Burnett, "Matthew Fontaine Maury's 'Sea of Fire,'" 33pp.
Reidy/Rozwadowski, "The Spaces In Between: Science, Ocean, Empire," 15pp.
Helmreich, "From Spaceship Earth to Google Ocean," 32pp.

Week 4: Caring for the environment

Feb. 9 (M) Lecture: The Roots of Environmentalism

Feb. 11 (W) Lecture: The Death of Environmentalism?

Feb. 13 (F) Discussion

Readings Price, "Remaking American Environmentalism," 20pp.
Nixon, "Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor," 24pp.
Latour, "Welcome to Gaia," 12pp.

***** Paper 1 Due: Feb. 16 *****

Unit II: Human Environments in Historical and Social Perspective

Week 5: Human Origins, Expansion, and Limits

- Feb. 16 (M) Lecture: Human Origins and Expansion
Feb. 18 (W) Lecture: Cornucopianism and the Limits to Growth
Feb. 20 (F) Discussion

Readings Jonsson, "The Origins of Cornucopianism"
Sabin, *The Bet*, Intro + Chs. 1-2, 95pp.

Week 6: The Domestication of Animals, Plants, and People

- Feb. 23 (M) Lecture: The First Domesticates
Feb. 25 (W) Lecture: Scientific Breeding, Genetic Engineering, and Beyond
Feb. 27 (F) Discussion

Readings Serpell, "Canid Evolution," 8pp.
Ritvo, "Pride and Pedigree: The Evolution of the Victorian Dog Fancy," 28pp.
Haraway, "When Species Meet: Introductions," 42pp.

Week 7: Energy Transitions and Power

- Mar. 2 (M) Lecture: From Organic Energy to Fossil Fuels
Mar. 4 (W) Lecture: The Politics of Renewable Energy
Mar. 6 (F) Discussion

Readings McNeil, "Global Environmental History in the Age of Fossil Fuels," 14pp.
Mitchell, "Carbon Democracy," 35pp.
Jones, "Building More Just Energy Infrastructure," 7pp.

--- Spring Break ---

Week 8: Urbanization and Inequality

- Mar. 16 (M) Lecture: The Rise of the City
Mar. 18 (W) Lecture: Urban Sustainability and Environmental Justice
Mar. 20 (F) Discussion

Readings Davis, *Planet of Slums*, Chs. 1-2, 49pp.
Zeiderman, "Cities of the Future?" 17pp.

***** Paper 2 Due: March 23 *****

Unit III: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues

Week 9: Protected Areas

- Mar. 23 (M) Lecture: The Colonial Origins of National Parks

Mar. 25 (W) Lecture: The Environmentalism of the Poor
Mar. 27 (F) Discussion

Readings West and Brockington, "An Anthropological Perspective on Some Unexpected Consequences of Protected Areas," 8pp.
Spence, "Dispossessing the Wilderness," 33pp.
Warren, "Blackfeet and Boundaries at Glacier National Park," 26pp.

Week 10: Biodiversity

Mar. 30 (M) Lecture: Ecological Imperialism
Apr. 1 (W) Lecture: Valuing and Devaluing Species
Apr. 3 (F) Discussion

Readings Crosby, "Biotic Change in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand," 13pp.
Coates, "Eastenders Go West," 32pp.
Helmreich, "How Scientists Think; About 'Natives', for Example," 22pp.

Week 11: Agriculture

Apr. 6 (M) Lecture: Agricultural Improvement
Apr. 8 (W) Lecture: Alternatives to the Industrial Food System
Apr. 10 (F) Discussion

Readings Pollan, "No Bar Code," 5pp.
Sayre, "The Politics of Organic Farming," 11pp.
Guthman, "Bringing Good Food to Others," 17pp.

Week 12: Pollution

Apr. 13 (M) Lecture: Environmental Health, Hygiene, and Sanitation
Apr. 15 (W) Lecture: Risk and Expertise in Environmental Toxicology
Apr. 17 (F) Discussion

Readings Langston, "Protecting Our Bodies from Hormone-Disrupting Chemicals," 4pp.
Fortun and Fortun, "Scientific Imaginaries and Ethical Plateaus in Contemporary U.S. Toxicology," 12pp.
Dosemagen et al., "Grassroots Mapping," 14pp.

Week 13: Climate

Apr. 20 (M) Lecture: Roots of Climatological Theory
Apr. 22 (W) Lecture: Anthropogenic Climate Change
Apr. 24 (F) Discussion

Readings Castree et al., "Changing the Intellectual Climate," 6pp.
Hulme, "Reducing the Future to Climate," 22pp.
Oreskes and Conway, "The Collapse of Western Civilization," 19pp.

Last Thoughts

Week 14: Apocalypse ... and After

Apr. 27 (M) Lecture: Environmental Hopes and Fears

Apr. 29 (W) Discussion

Readings Smith, "It's the End of the World as We Know It ... and He Feels Fine," 16pp.
Kingsnorth, "Dark Ecology," 13pp.

***** Final Exam Questions Handed Out: Apr. 29 ****

***** Final Exam Due: May 5**