

Spring 2024

## **ENVIRONMENT & SOCIETY**

SOC/ES 261

9:10 – 10:10am MWF

Sage 4215

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30 – 2:30

### **Course Description**

This course will introduce you to thinking about connections between social relationships and the natural environment. Environmental sociologists study how environmental problems have social origins, often asking the following questions: How does human organization and action affect the natural environment? How does the natural environment affect human organization and action? How do relationships between humans and non-humans construct and sustain society?

As an “Explore Society” general education course, this class takes an approach characterized under the large umbrella of liberal arts education. Liberal arts is *not* a reference to politics. Rather, liberal arts refers to an approach to education that focuses on broad knowledge and transferable skills while focusing on values, ethics, and community. Along with developing skills described in the course goals, you will also be introduced to several issues that you will encounter as a private citizen and community member long after you leave UWO.

### **Course Goals**

A core Learning Outcome at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is “Knowledge of Sustainability and Its Applications.” Certainly, this course will address the concept of sustainability, and particularly focus on challenges to sustainability faced by environmental advocates at different scales of society. Along the way, we will have an opportunity to engage in critical thinking and quantitative literacy applied to various ethical dilemmas regarding sustainable practices.

### **UW Oshkosh Bulletin Description**

Examines relationship between social structure, culture and natural environments; compares different modes of production and cultural systems. Examines economic, political and ideological structures of industrial and industrializing societies. Analyzes the impact of these structures upon natural environments and analyzes the impact of natural environment upon these structures. Sociology 261/Environmental Studies 261/Political Science 261 Students may receive credit for only one of the three cross-listed courses. Special course fees may apply.

### **Course Materials**

*Reading materials will be made available on our course website.*

## Exams

We will have four online exams throughout the semester that will assess your understanding of both lecture material and assigned readings. All exams are open-note, and will be delivered through our Canvas course page. Each exam will be worth 10% of your final grade.

## Forums

At six points in the semester, we will devote our meeting time to a discussion forum. Early in the semester, we will form groups (each with a unique topic). Each group will be responsible for delivering a presentation and leading a discussion on their topic for one forum, as well as submitting a written summary of the research you prepared for the presentation. Audience members are expected to engage in the discussion, which will often take the form of a debate. Your grade will depend not only on your preparation for and performance during your presentation day, but also upon your attendance at other groups' forums.

### Forum Schedule:

- **Forum #1: Childbearing in the Age of Climate Change**
  - *Is overpopulation an environmental problem? Should the decision to have children be affected by climate change?*
- **Forum #2: Nuclear Power**
  - *Should environmentalists advocate for or against nuclear power?*
- **Forum #3: Agriculture**
  - *Do the benefits of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) outweigh their environmental risks?*
- **Forum #4: Climate Change Action**
  - *Should climate action be voluntary and self-regulated, or mandated and enforced by law? Should it be led by private actors and market forces, or centralized by government?*
- **Forum #5: Green Growth?**
  - *Is "less" more? Should environmentalists advocate for an overall "degrowth" to the economy as a means of sustainability, or is a "green" form of capitalism or economic growth possible?*
- **Forum #6: Open Topic**
  - *I will take suggestions from the class in determining our final forum topic.*

## Sustainability Essay

For this assignment, you will write a brief essay that defines sustainability in your own words, as well as focuses on a specific change that you think can lead to a more sustainable future. More details will be provided on our course site.

### **Film Review**

We will view Hayao Miyazaki's classic *Princess Mononoke*. You are responsible for identifying an environmental sociological theme present in the movie and analyzing it in light of one of the theories covered earlier in the semester. This film review should be about 4 – 6 pages in length.

### **Energy Use Project**

This assignment is both individual and collective. We will be looking at common ways of assessing energy use before deciding as a class what categories we would like to apply to ourselves. Each of us will document detailed data (in both qualitative and quantitative formats) about the social context of our energy use. I will centralize this data and each of you will write a paper analyzing your energy use. More details will be provided, but if you would like a jump start, you may read ahead to the materials assigned for Week 9.

### **Action Project Plan**

For this assignment, each student will prepare a 2-4 page paper that addresses a practical action to address a specific environmental problem, taking account of social causes/obstacles. The content and focus will vary widely from student to student, but examples include crafting a social media strategy, planning a brief media production (e.g., a public service announcement video), a social marketing campaign, a proposal to amend practices at your place of work, reviewing a successful social movement that addressed an environmental problem and drawing general lessons we can learn from it, or something entirely different that we agree upon. The final paper will follow a template that I will provide to you on our course site.

### **GRADING**

Exams (4)	40%
Forums	20%
Sustainability Essay	5%
Film Review	10%
Energy Use Project	15%
Action Project	10%

**Late work** will be penalized.

Your final grade will be computed on the following percentage scale:

A	92.5-100%
A-	90.0-92.49
B+	87.5-89.99
B	82.5-87.49
B-	80.0-82.49
C+	77.5-79.99
C	72.5-77.49
C-	70.0-72.49
D+	67.5-69.99
D	62.5-67.49

D- 60.00-62.49  
F 0-59.99

## SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1

- Monday, February 5 *Introduction to the Course / What is Environmental Sociology*
- Wednesday, February 7 *Environmental Problems as Social Problems*
- Maniates, “Individualization: Plant a Tree, Buy a Bike, Save the World?”
  - *Optional*: Bohr and Dunlap, “Key Topics in Environmental Sociology”
- Friday, February 9 *Forum Signup*

### WEEK 2

- Monday, February 12 *Social Construction I*
- Robbins et al., “Social Construction of Nature”
- Wednesday, February 14 *Social Construction II*
- Davis, “Touch the Magic” (KM, ch. 8)
  - Steingraber, “The Social Construction of Cancer”
- Friday, February 16 *Sustainability*
- Heinberg, “What is Sustainability?”
  - *Optional*: Newton and Freyfogle, “Sustainability, a Dissent”

### WEEK 3

- Monday, February 19 *Scientific Knowledge & Environmental Conflicts*
- Ozawa, “Science in Environmental Conflicts”
  - Edwards, “An Ounce of Precaution”
- Wednesday, February 21 **EXAM #1**
- Friday, February 23 *Forum group work in-class*
- Sustainability Essay **due** by end of day, Sunday Feb 25

## WEEK 4

Monday, February 26

*Political Economy*

- Robbins et al., “Political Economy”
- Optional: Foster, “Vulnerable Planet”

Wednesday, February 28

*Treadmill of Production*

- Schnaiberg and Gould, “Treadmill Predispositions and Social Responses”

Friday, March 1

*Ecological Modernization Theory*

- Vail, “Ecological Modernization at Work?”

## WEEK 5

Monday, March 4

**FORUM #1**

Wednesday, March 6

*Malthusianism*

- Ehrlich and Ehrlich, “Population Bomb Revisited”

Friday, March 8

**EXAM #2**

- Covers Political Economy, Treadmill of Production, Ecological Modernization

## WEEK 6

Monday, March 11

*Eco-Feminism*

- Shiva, “Development, Ecology, and Women”
- Optional: Kennedy and Dzialo, “Locating Gender in Environmental Sociology”

Wednesday, March 13

*Environmental Justice*

- Bullard and Johnson, “Grassroots Activism and Its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making”

Friday, March 15

**FORUM #2**

## WEEK 7

Monday, March 18

*Pop Cultural Nature*

- Todd, “Prime-Time Subversion: The Environmental Rhetoric of *The Simpsons*”

Wednesday, March 20      Film – *Princess Mononoke*

Friday, March 22      Film – *Princess Mononoke*

## WEEK 8

- No classes – Spring Break

## WEEK 9

Monday, April 1

*Household Energy Use*

- Sovacool, “Cultural and Behavioral Barriers,” from *The Dirty Energy Dilemma*
- Hargreaves and Middlemiss, “Importance of social relations in shaping energy demand”
- *Optional*: Lutzenhiser, “A Cultural Model of Household Energy Consumption”

Wednesday, April 3

*Energy Use Assignment Overview*

Friday, April 5

### EXAM #3

- Covers Malthusianism, Eco-Feminism, Environmental Justice, Energy Use
- Film Review **due** by end of day, Sunday April 7

## WEEK 10

Monday, April 8

### FORUM #3

- Begin Energy Use data collection

Wednesday, April 10

*Climate Change Attitudes*

- Norgaard, “Emotions, Denial, and Social Movement Nonparticipation”
- First installment of energy use data collection **due**

Friday, April 12

*Cultures of Skepticism*

- Second installment of energy use data collection **due**

## WEEK 11

Monday, April 15

*ENERGY USE DATA ANALYSIS*

- Energy use field notes **due**

Wednesday, April 17 *Climate Policy*

Friday, April 19 TBD - *Film and/or energy data questions*

## WEEK 12

Monday, April 22 *Post-materialism*

Wednesday, April 24 **FORUM #4**

Friday, April 26 *Environmental Concerns & Behaviors I*

- Carolan, “Sociological Ambivalence and Climate Change”

## WEEK 13

Monday, April 29 *Environmental Concerns & Behaviors II*

- Kennedy & Horne, “Do Green Behaviors Earn Social Status?”

Wednesday, May 1

### **EXAM #4**

- Covers Individual Denial, Cultures of Denial, In-class film, Climate Policy, Post-materialism, Environmental Concerns & Behaviors

Friday, May 3

### **FORUM #5**

- Final Energy Paper **due** by end of day, Sunday May 5

## WEEK 14

Monday, May 6 *Action Project Overview & Group Signup*

Wednesday, May 8 *Group Work Day*

Friday, May 10 **FORUM #6**

## WEEK 15

Monday, May 13 *Action Project Presentations*

Wednesday, May 15 *Action Project Presentations*

Friday, May 17 *Action Project Presentations*

- Action project write-up **due**

### **Early Alert Process**

Early Alert is a program that provides you with an Early Grade Report from faculty that will indicate if you have academic performance or attendance issues. You will receive an email during the 5th week of classes. It is common to be unaware of your academic performance in classes, so this will help you develop strategies for success early enough in the semester to not feel overwhelmed. Please see me if your grade is lower than a C or if you have not attended class regularly.

**Academic misconduct** will not be tolerated. More information on plagiarism can be found here: <http://www.english.uwosh.edu/shaffer/policies/plagiarism.htm>. Some of our work this semester will bring you to a greyer area of plagiarism than is typical or conventional, but I still expect you to do original work, even when I instruct you to make use of language models. If you ever have a concern or question about plagiarism in the context of this course, do not hesitate to reach out to me.

### **Campus Resources**

The Center for Academic Resources (CAR) provides free, confidential tutoring for students in most classes on campus. CAR is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 102. Check the Content Tutoring page on CAR's website (<https://uwosh.edu/car/>) for a list of tutors. If your course is not listed, click on a link to request one, or call 424-2290. To schedule a tutoring session, simply email the tutor, let him/her know what class you are seeking assistance in, and schedule a time to meet.

UWO is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities. Please contact the Accessibility Center [Dean of Students Office, 125 Dempsey Hall] at <https://uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/>.

Please visit the following page for a comprehensive list of resources available to UWO students: <http://www.uwosh.edu/resources/>

### **Accommodations**

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. It is the University's policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements.

Students are expected to inform Instructors of the need for accommodations as soon as possible by presenting an Accommodation Plan from either the Accessibility Center, Project Success, or both. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared Instructor and student responsibility.

The Accessibility Center is part of the Dean of Students Office and is located in 125 Dempsey Hall. For more information, email [accessibilitycenter@uwosh.edu](mailto:accessibilitycenter@uwosh.edu), call 920-424-3100, or visit the [Accessibility Center Website](#).



**Student Right to Know Act**

Students are advised to see the following URL for disclosures about essential consumer protection items required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990:

<https://uwosh.edu/financialaid/consumer-information/>.

**Changes to Syllabus or Schedule**

If any substantive changes are made in the course syllabus, such as changes in schedule or assignments, notification will be provided in a timely manner and a revised syllabus made available. It is expected that the grading criteria, as distributed to the students, will be adhered to throughout the term.