

SIS 250: Environmental Sustainability and Global Health

School of International Service
American University

Spring 2014

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Class time: Mon and Thurs, 8.55-10.10am

Class location: SIS 333

Office hours: Mon, 10.30am-12pm, Wed 2-4pm, or by appointment



A hand pump in a Bangalore slum. More than 2 billion people lack access to safe water and sanitation. Photo: MR.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

From the devastating Gulf Coast oil spill in 2010, to the food crisis in East Africa in 2011, to rapidly retreating Andean glaciers discovered in 2013, there is no shortage of alarming news on our global environment. While these appear to be singular events in time, in reality a complex web of environment-society relations—what we loosely term “environmental politics”—underlies them. This course is designed to: (a) expose you to a range of perspectives and tools in the study of global environmental and health politics, including market-based approaches, environmental justice, political economy, risk analysis, and sustainability assessment tools, and (b) train you to apply these approaches to specific areas of concern and assess possible routes forward.

Two guiding assumptions structure this course. The first is that society and the environment are inextricably linked or co-produced. It is impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins, but it is possible, through thoughtful analysis, to tell how each influences the other. The second is that what we *know* about the environment (and how we know it) shapes what we *do* about it. In other words, theory and practice are inextricably linked. We will revisit these assumptions periodically. Remember that no question is too simple and no concept or definition we come across—*especially* pertaining to “sustainability”—are without critique. In this spirit, this course is an opportunity for you to engage in lively and respectful debate on some of the most challenging issues and controversies of our time.

Part I of this course is titled “Big Ideas” and is dedicated to exploring a series of foundational environmental perspectives and their critiques. Part II, “Objects of Concern”, will apply these big ideas to specific problem areas and environmental issues. Important crosscutting themes, including governance and gender, will be discussed throughout the course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this class, successful students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast key theoretical perspectives and approaches on environment-society relations and debate their merits and shortcomings
- Read an academic or news article on the environment, point out the author's underlying assumptions and theoretical perspective(s), and reflect on why this matters for their analysis
- Discuss and debate an issue of your interest through different angles, and make an argument for why you think one angle might be more illuminating or valid than others
- Propose possible avenues forward for dealing with a particular resource or problem area and suggest concrete steps you and your community might take

REQUIRED READINGS AND SHORT FILMS

Required reading material and other resources for this class are drawn from a mixture of academic articles, books, the news, films, and the "grey" literature (meaning reports published by non-profits and other organizations). You will get the most from class if you do the readings *carefully* and *critically*. You are expected to complete the assigned readings (or watch the assigned short films) **before** class. We will occasionally have announced and unannounced in-class assignments based on the reading materials. These will count toward your participation grade. The following textbook is **required** and available for purchase at American University's Student Bookstore or online:

- **["RHM"]:** Robbins, Paul, John Hintz, and Sarah A. Moore. 2010. *Environment and Society: A Critical Introduction*

All other required readings will be posted under "Course reserves" on the course Blackboard site.

BLACKBOARD SITE

To access the course Blackboard site, go to <https://blackboard.american.edu>, login, and click on the SIS 250 tab. Unless it is in the textbook listed above or accessible via a link in this syllabus, all readings are listed under the "Course reserves" tab. In the interest of efficiency, I strongly encourage you post questions about assignments, grading, the exam, or any other logistical questions about the course on Blackboard under the "Q's about the course" tab rather than emailing me directly since it is very likely that other students will have the same questions. Blackboard is also where you must upload your assignments by 4pm on the due date to the "Assignments" folder.

ASSIGNMENTS, GRADING, AND DUE DATES

Assignment	%	Due Date
Attendance (5%) and class participation (5%)	10	Throughout the semester
Team-led reading discussion (4 x 5%)	20	Throughout the semester
Short paper 1	10	Feb 6 by 4pm on Blackboard
Short paper 2	10	Apr 3 by 4pm on Blackboard
Midterm exam	25	Mar 6 in class
Final take-home exam	25	May 8
TOTAL	100	

Attendance and participation (10%)

- I will take attendance on most days. Each student is allowed one unexcused absence. Additional absences will automatically reduce your final grade by 5%. Absences for valid reasons such as medical or family emergencies will be excused, but you will still be responsible for material missed. Please contact me in advance if you know you will be late or absent, or as soon as possible following the missed class, and ensure that you attend my office hours. If you walk in more than 10 minutes after the start of class, you will be considered absent for the day.
- We are here to learn from each other: active and meaningful participation in class is required and will improve your overall experience in the class. Most class sessions will comprise a mixture of lecture and structured discussion in which you will be expected to make informed contributions. I will pass out a class participation rubric in the second class.

Team-led reading discussion (4 x 5% = 20%)

- At the beginning of semester, you will sign up to co-lead a discussion of a reading marked **(*) in four different weeks in the semester** (a roster will be ready by the first week of classes). You are responsible for coordinating with your teammate for that particular week (note that you will have four different teammates) to present the reading to the rest of the class and facilitate its discussion during the last 20 minutes of class. As a discussion co-facilitator, you are responsible for: (a) briefly summarizing the reading and relating them to other readings, (b) pointing out interesting or surprising findings and (c) putting discussion questions on the table. Where useful, feel free to offer additional information and contextualization beyond the readings.

Short Papers 1 and 2 (2 x 10% = 20%)

- The short paper assignments will assess your ability to do research outside of class and tie your analysis back to key themes covered to date. Questions will be handed out 7-10 days in advance, along with an expected citation style and a grading rubric. Each paper should be 3-5 pages double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Papers are to be posted on Blackboard under the "Assignments" folder by 4pm on the respective due dates (Feb 6 and April 3).

Midterm exam (25%)

- The in-class midterm exam will test your ability to recall concepts and definitions from the material through short-answer questions. You will also be expected to analyze a problem and argue a position through longer essays. The midterm will cover material covered to date from lectures, readings, and in-class discussions. No late or make up exams will be given. The midterm will be in class on Mar 6.

Final take-home exam (25%)

- The final open-book exam will test your comprehension and critical analysis of the material covered over the entire semester through longer essays. It will require you to draw connections between the "big ideas" covered in class and to discuss their applicability to contemporary environmental problems, i.e. "objects of concern". The final exam is due on Blackboard by 4pm on May 8.

EMAIL AND OFFICE HOURS

Ask questions regarding class logistics and assignments in class well ahead of deadlines, and use Blackboard to share questions and answers with your classmates. As a last resort, email me, and I will aim to reply within two days. I highly encourage you to come to my office hours at least once

during the semester to discuss your final project and any thoughts you may have about the course. If you cannot make my office hours, please email me so that we can find another time to meet.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND OTHER COURSE POLICIES

- Electronics. You are allowed to use your laptop or tablet to take notes and refer to the readings in-class, but other uses, when observed, will count against your grade without warning. Out of respect for your classmates and professor, cell phone use of any kind is not permitted and will count against your grade without warning.
- Disability accommodations. The University has an extensive support system for various learning styles and needs, and I am keen to accommodate these needs in my class. Please bring a letter from the Disability Office and let me know if you need any classroom or learning accommodations.
- Ethics. When in doubt, cite your resources. Plagiarism, both intentional and unintentional, is unacceptable under any circumstance, and easy to discover in our Internet era. I will post instructions on the recommended citation style for your final assignment and go over them in class. Refer to AU's Code of Academic Integrity at www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm for definitions of plagiarism and the University's policies.
- Emergency preparedness. In the event of an emergency, AU will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Web site (<http://www.prepared.american.edu>) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college-specific information.

OUTLINE OF TOPICS AND DUE DATES

	Monday	Thursday
PART I: BIG IDEAS		
Jan 13 and 16	Course Introduction: Overview & Logistics	Population and Consumption
Jan 20 and 23	<i>No class – MLK Day</i>	Markets and Commodities
Jan 27 and 30	Institutions and “the Commons”	Environmental Ethics
Feb 3 and 6	Environmental Justice and Health	Risk and Social Vulnerability <i>Short paper 1 due 4pm on Bb</i>
Feb 10 and 13	Political Economy and Political Ecology – I	Political Economy and Political Ecology – II
Feb 17 and 20	Social construction and the Politics of Knowledge	Sustainable Development
Feb 24 and 27	Global Poverty and Health – I	Global Poverty and Health – II (Guest lecture by Prof Yamanis)
Mar 3 and 6	Review	<i>In-class midterm exam</i>
Mar 10 and 13	<i>No class – Spring Break</i>	<i>No class – Spring Break</i>
Mar 17 and 20	Assessing Sustainability	Governance and Civil Society
PART II: OBJECTS OF CONCERN		
Mar 24 and 27	Fossil Fuels	Extraction and Indigenous Rights In-class film: Crude
Mar 31 and Apr 3	Water	Forests <i>Short paper 2 due 4pm on Bb</i>
Apr 7 and 10	Biodiversity	Agriculture and Food (Guest lecture by Prof Diamond)
Apr 14 and 17	Sanitation and Health	Waste
Apr 21 and 24	Informal Labor and Waste In-class film: Garbage Dreams	Climate Change and Global Health
Apr 28 and May 1	Review and wrap-up	<i>No class</i>
May 5 and 8	<i>Final take-home exam posted at 4pm on Bb</i>	<i>Final take-home exam due at 4pm on Bb</i>

WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND SHORT FILMS

Remember that each set of readings must be done **before** the date indicated below. **An asterisk (*) indicates the reading that should be used for the team-led reading discussion.** Come prepared to discuss it!

Jan 13 – **Introduction to the class**

No required reading

PART I: BIG IDEAS

Jan 16 – **Population and Consumption**

Watch the 3-minute National Geographic Video at the bottom of the page:

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/7-billion>

RHM. Chapter 2, “Population and Scarcity”, p. 12-30, and the beginning of Chapter 3, “The Bet”, p. 29-30

Martin, R. 2011. “Why current population growth is costing us the Earth”.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2011/oct/23/why-population-growth-costs-the-earth-roger>

Pearce, F. 2009. “Consumption Dwarfs Population as Main Environmental Threat”, *Yale's Environment 360 Magazine*: <http://e360.yale.edu/content/feature.msp?id=2140>

Jan 20 – *No class – MLK Day*

Jan 23 – **Markets and Commodities**

RHM. Chapter 3, “Markets and Commodities”, p. 30-45

Klein, N. 2011. “Capitalism vs the Climate”. *The Nation*. November 9.

<http://www.thenation.com/article/164497/capitalism-vs-climate?page=0,2>

(*) Speth, JG. 2008. “The Market: Making it Work for the Environment” in *The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Jan 27 – **Institutions and “The Commons”**

RHM. Chapter 4, “Institutions and “The Commons”, p. 47-62

Hardin, G. “Tragedy of the Commons”. 1968. *Science* 162 (3859): 1243-1248

(*) Ostrom, E., J Burger, CB Field, RB Norgaard, and D Policansky. 1999. “Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges” *Science* 284 (5412): 278-282

Jan 30 – **Environmental Ethics**

RHM. Chapter 5, “Environmental Ethics”, p. 64-78

Guha, R. 1989. "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique", *Environmental Ethics* 11

Read the poem "The Peace of Wild Things" by American poet Wendell Berry:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/171140>

(*) Cronon, W. The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature:

http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble_with_Wilderness_Main.html

Feb 3 – **Environmental Justice and Health**

Brulle, RJ and DN Pellow. 2006. Environmental Justice: Human Health and Environmental Inequalities. *Annual Review of Public Health* 27: 103-124.

(*) Morello-Frosch, R et al. 2001. "Environmental Justice and Southern California's Riskscape: The Distribution of Air Toxics Exposures and Health Risks among Diverse Communities" *Urban Affairs Review* 36 (4).

Feb 6 – **Risk and Social Vulnerability**

RHM. Chapter 6, "Risks and Hazards", p. 80-95

(*) Ribot. 2009. "Vulnerability does not fall from the sky" in Social Dimensions of Climate Change: Equity and Vulnerability in a Warming World, p 47-67, Mearns, R and A Norton (Eds), Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Feb 10 – **Political Economy and Political Ecology – I**

RHM. Chapter 7, "Political Economy", p. 97-115

Blaikie, P. 1985. Chapter 1, "The issues addressed", p. 1-11 in The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries.

(*) Jarosz, L. 2009. "Energy, Climate Change, Meat, and Markets: Mapping the Coordinates of the Current World Food Crisis", *Geography Compass* 3 (6): 2065-2083

[Highly recommended reading if you're interested in the political economy of food:
Friedman, H. 1982. "The Political Economy of Food: The Rise and Fall of the Postwar International Food Order". *American Journal of Sociology* 88]

Feb 13 – **Political Economy and Political Ecology – II**

Bryant, R. 1997. "Beyond the Impasse: The Power of Political Ecology in Third World Environmental Research", *Area* 29 (1): 5-19.

Le Billion, P. 2001. "The political ecology of war: natural resources and armed conflicts". *Political Geography*, 20 (5): 561-584.

(*) Kalipeni, E, and Oppong, J. 1998 “The refugee crisis in Africa and implications for health and disease: a political ecology approach”. *Social Science and Medicine*.

Feb 17 – **Social Construction and the Politics of Knowledge**

[RHM]. Chapter 8, “Social Construction of Nature”, p. 117-133

(*) Forsyth, T and A Walker. 2008. “Environmental Crisis and the Crisis of Knowledge” in Forest Guardians, Forest Destroyers: The Politics of Environmental Knowledge in Northern Thailand, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Feb 20 – **Sustainable Development**

Browse the sustainable development timeline:

http://www.iisd.org/pdf/2012/sd_timeline_2012.pdf

Adams, W M. 2009. “The dilemma of sustainability”, p. 1-25 in Green Development: Environment and Sustainability in a Developing World”

(*) Borowy, I. 2013. “Global health and development: conceptualizing health between economic growth and environmental sustainability” *J Hist Med Allied Science* 68 (3)

Feb 24 – **Global Poverty and Health – I**

Guest lecture by Professor Nina Yamanis. **Readings TBD.**

Feb 27 – **Global Poverty and Health – II**

Brill, S. 2013. Excerpt: Why Medical Bills are Killing Us. *Time Magazine*.

<http://swampland.time.com/2013/02/21/health-care-is-a-buisness-and-all-the-prices-are-too-damn-high/>

Huffington Post, November 21, 2013: “U.S. Life Expectancy Ranks 26th In The World, OECD Report Shows,” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/21/us-life-expectancy-oecd_n_4317367.html

Pick **one** of the following:

FRANCE: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92419273>, read the article or listen to the story.

GERMANY: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91963961>, read the article or listen to the story.

SWITZERLAND: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92106731>, read the article or listen to the story.

(*) Marmot, M. 2007. “Achieving health equity: from root causes to fair outcomes” *The Lancet*, 37

Mar 3 – **Review of Big Ideas**

No readings – use this time to study for the midterm

Mar 6 – **Midterm Exam**

Mar 10 – *****No Class: Spring Break*****

Mar 13 – *****No Class: Spring Break*****

Mar 17 – **Assessing Sustainability**

Browse the documents listed under “Sustainable DC Plan” (2012):

<http://sustainable.dc.gov/finalplan>

(*) Innes J E and D E Booher. 2000. “Indicators for Sustainable Communities: A Strategy Building on Complexity Theory and Distributed Intelligence” *Planning Theory and Practice* 1 (2): 173-186

Mar 20 – **Governance and Civil Society**

Leftwich, A. 1993. “Governance, democracy and development in the Third World”. *Third World Quarterly*. 14 (3)

(*) Wapner, P. 2002. “Horizontal Politics: Transnational Environmental Activism and Global Cultural Change,” *Global Environmental Politics*

PART II: OBJECTS OF CONCERN

Mar 24 – **Fossil Fuels**

[RHM]. Chapter 9, “Carbon Dioxide”, p. 138-159

(*) Ezzati, M et al. 2004. “Energy Management and Global Health” *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* (29)

Mar 27 – **Extraction and Indigenous Rights**

In-class film “Crude” – Take Notes!

Mar 31 – **Water**

“World Water Day 2013: How Shortages Affect Women, Kids, Hunger (And What You Can Do)” http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/22/world-water-day-2013-facts_n_2927389.html

(*) Bakker, K. 2003. Archipelagos and networks: urbanization and water privatization in the South. *The Geographic Journal*, 169 (4): 328-341

Apr 3 – **Forests**

[RHM]. Chapter 10, “Trees”, p. 161-180.

(*) Adams, W M. 2009. "Sustainable forests?", p. 242-274 in Green Development: Environment and Sustainability in a Developing World

Apr 7 – **Biodiversity**

Herndon, C and R Butler. 2010. "Significance of Biodiversity to Health". *Biotropica*. 42 (5)

(*) Adams, W M. 2009. "The politics of preservation", p. 275-298 in Green Development: Environment and Sustainability in a Developing World

Apr 10 – **Agriculture and Food**

Patel, R. 2012. "Food Sovereignty: Power, Gender, and the Right to Food" *PLoS Medicine* 9 (6): 1-4

RHM. Chapter 9, "Fries", p. 138-159

(*) Rocha, C. 2009. "Developments in National Policies for Food and Nutrition Security in Brazil". *Development Policy Review*. 27 (10)

Apr 14 – **Sanitation and Health**

Watch the video on the 2006 UNDP report "Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water and Sanitation Crisis" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jYr8MFTXrM>

Mara D, Lane J, Scott B, Trouba D. 2010. "Sanitation and Health. *PLoS Med* 7(11): <http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1000363>

(*) McFarlane, C. 2012. "From sanitation inequality to malevolent urbanism: The normalisation of suffering in Mumbai". *Geoforum*.

Apr 17 – **Waste**

Watch the 20-minute animated video "The Story of Stuff" by Annie Leonard: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>

(*) Vergara, S and G Tchobanoglous. 2012. "Municipal Solid Waste and the Environment: A Global Perspective". *Annual Review of the Environment and Resources* 37: 277-309.

Apr 21 – **Social Dimensions of Waste Work**

In-class film "Garbage Dreams" – Take Notes!

Apr 24 – **Climate Change and Health**

McMichael, A et al. 2006. "Climate change and human health: present and future risks" *The Lancet*, 367

(*) Haines et al. 2006. "Climate change and human health: Impacts, vulnerability and public health" *Public Health*, 120 (7): 585-596

Apr 28 - **Review and wrap-up**

May 1 - *****No class*****

May 5 - **Final take-home exam posted on Bb**

May 8 - **Final take-home exam due on Bb**