

Sociology 238
Investigations of Environment and Society

Spring 2008
Th 6-9 PM, 250 AMD

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The production of life, both of one's own in labor and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship.

--Karl Marx, 1845

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.

--John Muir, 1869

It has required 19 centuries to define decent man-to-man conduct and the process is only half done; it may take as long to evolve a code of decency for man-to-land conduct.

--Aldo Leopold, 1947

If we wish our civilization to survive we must break with the habit of deference to great men.

-- Karl Popper 1950

If we confine the concept of weeds to species adapted to human disturbance, then man is by definition the first and primary weed under whose influence all other weeds have evolved.

--Jack Hanlan, 1975

You could look at climate change as a response of the system to get rid of an irritating species: us humans. Or at least to cut them back to size...about 500 million."

--James Lovelock, 2007

This is an advanced course in environmental sociology. We will examine the complex relationships between human society and its surrounding environment, paying particular attention to issues relating to the local and regional California environment, especially the use and misuse of water resources and the policies governing resource use. We will examine sociological theories of nature and society, including political, economic, social-constructivist, and historical perspectives on this changing relationship. We will address contemporary issues such as new technologies, environmental movements, and global environmental change and global environmental governance. Most importantly, this course will ask you to take a careful look at the assumptions behind understanding both our ecosystem and our social system, and to examine our society and natural environment with a critical perspective.

The emphasis of this course is on the rigorous examination of the ideas and issues involved. The course will be in seminar format in order to facilitate this focus. Traditionally the classroom is a place where the professor produces or reports knowledge and the students consume this knowledge (and regurgitate it in exams). This course will be different: students are expected to be active participants in the production and interpretation of knowledge and ideas. This will occur through reading, reflection, discussion, and research. The emphasis is on critical thinking and rigorous engagement with the ideas of the course. Thus, there will be no exams. Instead, you are expected to keep up with the readings and participate vigorously in discussion. There will be a weekly written assignment, a group project, and one final 20-page paper (or four 6-page

papers due over the semester). The 20 page research paper may be on a wide range of topics related to the course material; it might investigate an empirical environmental science question, a specific governmental policy, or it may relate to a community environment issue. The shorter papers should focus on two or three texts from the readings.

There are three required texts, available at the Hornet Bookstore, and one required reader, available on webCT. A copy of the texts will also be on reserve at University Library. **Students are required to keep up on the readings and attend class**, where we will discuss the readings and broad issues.

Course reader (WEBCT).

Environment and Society. Schnaiberg and Gould. Blackburn Press 2000.

Shopping Our Way to Safety. Andrew Szasz 2007

Water and American Governance. Donald Pisani 2002

Western Times and Water Wars: State, culture, and rebellion in California. John Walton. University of California Press 1992

1. Introduction (31 January 2008)

“Every drop for sale”; “Road to Ruin”; “Battlefield Earth”

2. The Problem with Nature/The Nature of the Problem (7 February 2008)

“The dialectic of ordinary disaster”; “The trouble with wilderness”; “A gospel according to the earth”

3. Theories of society and environment (14 February 2008)

“Marx’s Theory of the Metabolic Rift”; “The Great Transformation”; “Footprints on the Earth”; “The 2nd Contradiction of Capital”

DEADLINE TO DECIDE ON 6-PAGE OR RESEARCH PAPER OPTION

4. The Treadmill of Production: naming the system (21 February 2008)

Schnaiberg and Gould *Environment and Society*

FIRST 6-PAGE PAPER DUE/TOPIC AND BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR RESEARCH PAPER DUE

5. Products of the Treadmill I: to toss or not to toss? (28 February 2008)

“Recycling is Garbage”; “Urban Recycling”; “Garbage Wars”

6. Products of the Treadmill II: environmental inequality (6 March 2008)

“Dumping in Dixie”; “Unintended, inexorable”; “The Environmental Justice Frame”; “Race, Waste, and Class”

7. Products of the Treadmill III: inverted quarantine (13 March 2008)

Szasz, *Shopping our way to Safety*

8. Products of the Treadmill IV: peak oil (20 March 2008)

“End of the age of oil”; “Peak Oil”; “Peak oil and World Conflict”; “Beyond oil”

Society and Natural Resources: The case of water (27 March 2008)

9. Pisani *Water and American Governance*

SECOND 6-PAGE PAPER DUE/RESEARCH PAPER OUTLINE DUE

(Spring Break 3 April 2008)

10. (Cancelled for PSA 10 April 2008)

Water, Society, and the State 1

11. Walton *Western Times and Water Wars* (17 April 2008)

Water, Society, and the State 2

12. “DamNation”; “Dam Politics”; “Adapting the Treadmill” (24 April 2008)

THIRD 6-PAGE PAPER DUE/RESEARCH PAPER FIRST DRAFT DUE

Water internationally

13. “Silenced Rivers”; “The greater common good” (1 May 2008)

Water privatization

14. “Blue Gold”; “Priceless”; “Leasing the Rain”; “Bolivia”; “drinking problem” (8 May 2008)

15. Towards a conclusion: “The death of environmentalism”; “The soul of environmentalism”; “Hoping against history”; “Edilia” (15 May 2008)

LAST 6 PAGE PAPER DUE/RESEARCH PAPER DUE

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND FINAL GRADES

In accordance with the emphasis of this course (on students as active and critical producers of knowledge rather than passive consumers of knowledge), I have not scheduled any exams. Student evaluations are based entirely on written work. The reasons for this are manifold, based in part upon the inherent variability in student's abilities at taking exams, the difficulty in expressing critical engagement with a wide body of work in an exam format, and problems with assessing "correct" or "incorrect" responses to queries. Exams are deeply problematic, but written responses to course materials can be as well. This is why our emphasis is for students to grapple with the ideas and concepts of the course as presented in the readings, the lectures, and the classroom discussions. Parallel to this, the coursework components give you an opportunity to respond to each of these levels of work. Because of the focus on grappling with ideas and the difficulty of "getting the right answer" to such a request (since there is no right answer), there are no grades given to the written work. Each portion of the components are graded as either PASS or NO PASS. Outstanding work will be indicated with a STAR. Final grades will be based upon a range beginning with satisfactory completion of all the work (which earns a "B") to outstanding completion of all the work (which earns an "A").

There are 4 required coursework components:

15 weekly READING REACTION PAPERS (one per week)

1 TWENTY-PAGE (typed, double spaced) RESEARCH PAPER

OR 4 SIX-PAGE PAPERS

1 GROUP PROJECT

SEMINAR PARTICIPATION

These coursework components are designed to give you credit for reading, thinking critically about the content of the course, and presenting your thoughts verbally and in written form. A READING REACTION PAPERS is due each week. This is to be a simple one page single spaced response to the readings for the week—it must be a serious critical engagement with the substance of the readings. The RESEARCH PAPER assignment gives you an opportunity to engage in an in-depth project: either an empirical investigation of an environmental science topic, a community-level environmental problem, or an analysis of a governmental environmental policy. You should consider writing a research paper if it can contribute to progress on your thesis work. The research paper is due at the last seminar meeting. You may choose instead to do 4 six-page papers instead of the research paper to complete this component. These four papers must engage with several of the readings from the course and at least one outside source. This option is meant to provide you with a set of exercises in literature review. The 6 page papers are due every three weeks. The GROUP PROJECT is an endeavor that the entire class will engage with; this topic is subject to the discussion and approval of the whole group.