I. Course Description:

This undergraduate course examines connections between the natural environment, politics, and society across the global North and South. We will begin by discussing theories of environment-society relations in sociology and what we mean by “environmental problems” and “environmental values.” The remainder of the course will be organized into three substantive sections, on varieties of environmentalism; environment and development; and environment, inequality, and social justice. As we go through the readings, we will consider major themes such as the rise of organized collective action like environmental activism and individual responses like green consumerism and “freeganism”; the opportunities and limitations of institutional and policy responses to environmental degradation; the tensions between environmental protection and economic development; the relationship between environmental degradation and inequality within and among countries; and the roles of scientific knowledge and non-expert knowledge in making sense of environmental problems and solutions. Our substantive case studies will cover topics like water, energy, food, waste, and climate change.

The course is designed to provide students with broad knowledge about the social and political dimensions of environmental problems. The course materials are chosen to teach sociological perspectives regarding the relationship between society and the natural environment, as well as to expose students to concrete cases of environmental degradation and responses to it, in comparative perspective. By the end of the course, students will 1) become familiar with major sociological theories about the relationship between society and the natural environment, 2) discuss and analyze case studies drawn from distinct geographic contexts, 3) discuss and analyze different methodological approaches to conducting research on environmental topics in sociology, including ethnographic, historical, and quantitative approaches, 4) practice oral presentation skills, and 5) improve analytical and writing skills.

II. Readings:

All course readings will be available on Canvas (see “Course Reserves” and “Files”). If you prefer to have hard copies of all the readings, you can purchase a course reader from Quartet Digital Printing (825 Clark Street, 847-328-0720).
III. Requirements and Evaluation:

Class Participation: This course is structured as a seminar, so your participation is important to the quality of the course and to your final grade. Please come to class prepared to analyze the readings, pose questions, participate in the in-class exercises, and otherwise contribute to the discussion. The readings may at times be supplemented by materials such as video excerpts from documentaries, news pieces about contemporary environmental issues, and blogs, which we will also discuss in class.

Weekly responses: Each week, you will write a short response (about 200 words) to the readings and post it on Canvas (under “Discussions”). The class will be divided into two groups. Group A, please post your response by 8 pm each Monday evening, and Group B, please post your response by 8 pm each Wednesday evening so everyone has time to read it before class the following day. In the response, you should highlight a theme common to a set of readings, agree or disagree with a part of the argument, and raise questions for discussion. You don’t have to cover every part of the reading in these responses; the idea is to have you react and focus on a particular segment that you found interesting or problematic. Feel free to bring in current events if you choose, but be sure to respond concretely to the assigned readings. The purpose of these weekly responses is to engage with and reflect on the readings on a continuous basis, as well as to share your analysis and reactions with the rest of the class. Occasionally, I may ask you to answer a specific question or to look for information on a particular topic instead of doing a general response.

Films: I will be screening five documentaries during the course of the quarter to enrich the written material and discussion:

- *A Fierce Green Fire* (2012): Thursday, April 14
- *Urbanized* (2011): Thursday, April 28
- *Virunga* (2014): Tuesday, May 17
- *Crude* (2009): Thursday, May 19

They are all strongly recommended, but you are only required to attend at least one of them during the course of the quarter. You have the option of incorporating the films into your weekly response. More details will be distributed in class.

Midterm exam: On Thursday, April 28th (Week 5), I will distribute the take-home midterm exam. The exam will consist of a short answer section and an essay section. You will have until the following Tuesday, May 3rd, to complete the exam, which will be due at the beginning of class.

Final paper: At the end of the class, you will write a 12-15 page final paper on a topic related to the themes of the course. We will discuss format and other expectations for the final paper in class; format guidelines for the paper and bibliography will be posted on Canvas. The paper should identify a central question and develop an argument to answer it using evidence from secondary literature. For example, you might choose to ask a question about an environmentalist movement, counter-movement, or community, or you may pick a policy issue and explore articles providing evidence for different sides. The bulk of your references should come from books and articles in sociology and related disciplines such as anthropology, history, political science, and economics. You are welcome to use the readings, secondary historical sources, media sources, visual aids, and primary materials to make your case. On Thursday, May 12th (Week 7) of the course, you will
submit a **1-2 page proposal** of your idea for the final paper, including a draft description of your question/topic, a basic outline, and a preliminary reference list. We will do a round of short presentations on final papers on the last day of class. The final paper must be submitted by **10 pm on Wednesday, June 8th.**

**Attendance:** This is a discussion seminar and your participation is important, so you are expected to be in class. If you have to miss class for a specific reason such as illness or an emergency, please send me an email. Missing class repeatedly will be reflected in your final grade.

**Late submissions:** Please submit all work on time. Your assignment grade will be lowered if your assignment is late.

**Academic honesty and plagiarism:** Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Please refer to Northwestern University’s “Basic Standards of Academic Integrity” in the *Northwestern Student Handbook* and let me know if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

**Grades:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent of grade</th>
<th>Due date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly discussion and class participation:</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take-home midterm exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>May 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper proposal (1-2 pages)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>May 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>June 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>June 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**IV. Course Schedule and Reading List**

**PART I: INTRODUCTION**

**Week 1:**

**Thursday, March 31: Introduction and Overview**


**Week 2:**

**Tuesday, April 5: Theorizing Environment and Society Relationships**


**Thursday, April 7: Environmental Values**


**Week 3:**

**Tuesday, April 12: The Complexities of Defining, Knowing, and Valuing Nature and Environmental Impact**


**PART II: VARIETIES OF ENVIRONMENTALISM**

**Thursday, April 14: The Rise of Environmentalism in the US**


Week 4:

Tuesday, April 19: Environmentalism, States, and Markets


Thursday, April 21: Shifts in US Environmentalism


Week 5:

Tuesday, April 26: The Rise of Environmentalism in Comparative Perspective


Thursday, April 28: Environmental Activism in Comparative Perspective

*Take-home Midterm Exam distributed*


Week 6:

Tuesday, May 3: Environmentalism and Globalization

*Take-home Midterm Exam due at the start of class*


Thursday, May 5: (Green) Consumerism and Everyday Life


PART III: ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Week 7:

**Tuesday, May 10: Environment and Development in the US**


**Thursday, May 12: Environment and Development Abroad**


Week 8:

**Tuesday, May 17: Resource Conflicts**


**Thursday, May 19: Disasters**


PART III: ENVIRONMENT, INEQUALITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Week 9:

Tuesday, May 24: Environment and Inequality in the US


Thursday, May 26: Environment and Inequality in the US: Food and Water


Week 10:

Tuesday, May 31: Environment and Inequality in Comparative Perspective


Thursday, June 2: Paper Presentations

Final Papers are due by 10 pm on Wednesday, June 8