

## Sociology 482 / Sociology of the Environment

Instructor: Dr. Elaine Wellin

Prerequisites: None / General Education: No

Fulfills the Sociological Experience requirement and four units in Trans-National Sociology

### Course Description

Sociology of the Environmental explores issues of global social organization, areas of social concern, and socio-environmental alternatives to our acknowledged ecological crisis. We begin by defining socio-ecological issues and examine, as a timely example, chemical contamination in the US and its relation to cancer. We review environmental issues in four critical global areas and explore the roles of private capital, government, and major social institutions in relation both protection of and degradation of the environment. The personal, local, and societal implications of global climate and then choices for sustainable living are foci for weekly small group discussions.

Environmental social movements are discussed historically and with reference to common themes among actual community environmental movements and crises/disasters, including the ethical, environmental, social, and economic outcomes of exemplary case studies. The environmental movement for social justice provides a framework to examine the relationships between social inequalities and environmental degradation, especially the disproportionate effects due to differences in class, race, and gender.

We will discuss a range of theoretical and descriptive alternatives to our environmental crises, including discussions of 'the commons', civil society, deep ecology and the de-centering of humans, radical environmentalism, and a gendered view of global over-population, all within the contexts of global water and food insecurities, and world orientations to global climate change.

Toward the end of the course we will look at the rationale, benefits, and outlooks in the green economy, especially the promise of "green collar" jobs as a just and effective way for students to address both economic and environmental issues at home and abroad.

As a service learning course satisfying the Sociological Experience departmental requirement, students participate in volunteer positions within local environmental communities and formulate their own perspectives and analyses of local issues and their relations to regional, national and transnational environmental issues and actions.

### Course Requirements and Texts (subject to change)

Coursework includes lecture and presentations, larger and small group discussions, class exercises and reports, and video/film presentations. Attendance is required; active and lively participation is encouraged. Take-home midterm and final examinations, assigned reading summaries, and a class project in local environmental communities are required.

Texts:

Sandra Steingraber (1998). *Living Downstream: A Scientist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment*.

Charles L. Harper (2008, Fourth Edition only). *Environment and Society: Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues*.

Valerie Gunter and Steve Kroll-Smith (2007). *Volatile Places: A Sociology of Communities and Environmental Controversies*

Van Jones with Ariane Conrad (2008). *The Green Collar Economy: How One Solution Can Fix Our Two Biggest Problems*

*Change by Degrees: Addressing the Climate Challenge **and** Choices for Sustainable Living* (two workbooks for small groups from publisher Northwest Earth Institute)