Environmental Social Sciences (ENV 202)

Davidson College

Fall 2016
Class Times: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:05 pm – 4:20 pm
Class Location: Wall 210

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course provides an overview of social science perspectives on environmental issues. As a required course for the environmental studies major, the course takes both a thematic and problem-based approach to the study of interactions between society and the environment. Students in the course will learn to integrate concepts and methods from the social sciences (anthropology, economics, geography, political science, psychology, and sociology) in interdisciplinary analyses of environmental issues.

The course’s content addresses significant environmental issues relating to society’s utilization of natural resources, the environmental pollution created by society, and society’s efforts to create a more “sustainable” future. Students will read and discuss papers relating to human-environment interactions relating to water and air pollution, mining, forests, food and agriculture, the ozone layer, climate change, and biodiversity. This content is organized around 15 key factors that influence the relationship between society and the environment. These range from micro-level factors such as individual and group perceptions of nature and risk to macro-level factors such as economic growth, technology, and institutions.

The course also introduces a range of important social science concepts, such as collective action problems, scarcity, marginal social costs, commodification, the demographic transition, and common pool resource management. Students are also exposed to a range of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, including surveys, case studies, geographic information systems, experimental designs, observation studies, geographic information systems, cost-benefit analysis and ethnography.

The course includes two written assessments, two field assignments, and a short final essay. It concludes with a discipline-based final paper and an interdisciplinary team-based presentation on a specific environmental issue. Examples of topics covered in past years include tree cover in Charlotte, hydraulic fracking, seafood sourcing, and mountain mining. These two final projects will help students synthesize the knowledge and skills they have gained throughout the semester.
COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

This course is designed to contribute to eight overarching learning outcomes, which are described below. Readings, lectures, discussions and assignments are all designed to help students achieve these goals. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. **Knowledge about the Social Sciences**: Describe the social sciences and the strengths and limitations of different ways of bringing them together to analyze the relationship between society and the environment.
2. **Knowledge about Social Science Methods**: Explain the strengths and limitations of different methodological approaches used by social scientists.
3. **Knowledge about Relevant Theories and Concepts**: Summarize key theories and concepts relevant to the relationship between society and the environment from a range of disciplines.
4. **Knowledge about the Relationship between Society and the Environment**: Describe 15 key factors influencing the relationship between society and the environment.
5. **Theoretical Application**: Classify, compare, and contrast these different factors using relevant theories and concepts.
6. **Synthesis of Theory, Empirical Research, and Action**: Write a literature review and present a policy proposal related to a current environmental challenge that systematically and creatively builds on relevant theory and empirical research.
7. **Collaboration Competency**: Negotiate, document, and implement a successful strategy for a group research project and presentation.
8. **Communication Competency**: Present theoretical concepts and empirical research relevant to the relationship between society and the environment in clear written and oral formats.

This course is designed to complement both introductory and advanced courses in other departments and to help students connect ideas learned in those courses to environmental problems. It is not designed to be a substitute for introductory courses in any of the related disciplines. This course is also not designed to be a comprehensive environmental studies or environmental science course, but should be viewed as one component of the broader environmental studies core curriculum at Davidson. ENV 201, Environmental Science, introduces and uses concepts and methods from the natural sciences – biology, chemistry, physics, and geology – to explore the physical interactions between society and the environment. ENV 203, Environmental Humanities, introduces ideas from the humanities – religion, literature, philosophy, and history (often viewed as in both the humanities and social sciences) – to explore the normative dimensions of humanity’s relationship with the environment.

While we will touch on these areas in ENV 202, we will leave them for deeper exploration in the other core courses. Our focus will be on how the structures and dynamics of human society impact, and are impacted by, the natural environment.

As part of the broader environmental studies curriculum, the course is also designed to contribute to the department’s six primary goals for its majors. These include being able to demonstrate interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and systems/holistic thinking, apply appropriate methods to identify and explore environmental questions, work in teams to generate knowledge and solutions to problems involving both human and environmental factors, and communicate environmental knowledge in forms that are appropriate for audiences in both academic and non-academic contexts.
COURSE STRUCTURE

The course is structured into six units, which are organized around the four main themes of the course:

- **Unit I: An Introduction to the Environmental Social Sciences**
  - The Anthropocene, the Social Sciences, and Interdisciplinarity

- **Unit II: From Minds to Markets:**
  - Environmental Health, Biophilia, Environmental Risk, Environmental Values, Tragedies of the Commons, Negative Environmental Externalities, Economic Growth

- **Unit III: From Norms to Negotiations: Cultural, Social, and Political Factors**
  - Culture, Environmental Justice, Population, Technology, Knowledge, Power, Institutions, Coalitions, Scale

- **Unit IV: Synthesis – The Environmental Social Sciences in the Real World**
  - Team Presentations and Papers Relating to a Specific Environmental Problem

COURSE MATERIALS

Instead of textbooks, the course has been developed around the series of readings listed in the course outline below. Links to the readings, either through databases available in the library or posted in .pdf format, are available on the ENV 202 site in the Moodle course management system. In some instances, concepts will be introduced using videos and materials available online rather than through traditional articles and textbooks. These online resources are integral to the course and should be treated as such. While every effort will be made to ensure that the links on Moodle are available and current, it is ultimately the student’s responsibility to access academic resources through the Davidson Library website. Please contact the reference librarians if you are having difficulty. Students are encouraged to print the articles double-sided and bring them to class to discuss.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND POLICIES

In order to assess student learning and achievement of the objectives listed above, students will complete a variety of assignments during the course. Grading in this course will follow the system outlined in the Davidson Catalog and consist of the following components:

1. **Participation (15%)**: This course is designed for active student involvement and participation. Participation grades will be based on students’ preparation for class, careful attention to assigned readings, engagement with relevant current events, quality of contributions, respect for the ideas and remarks of others in the class, the relevance of those remarks, and your overall level of participation (both active and passive) in the classroom. I may call on individual students to discuss the key insights of particular articles.

2. **Field Assignments (20% total, 10% each)**: Students will complete two field assignments using standard social science research methods. The first assignment will use a deductive, quantitative approach while the second assignment will involve an inductive, qualitative approach. These field assignments will require students to conduct interviews either on or off campus with Davidson employees, community members, and other students. Further guidance and instructions for these assignments will be provided later in the course.

3. **Unit Assessments (30% total, 15% each)**: Students will complete two assessments over the course of the semester. The first assessment will cover the information and concepts included in Units I-III while the second assessment will cover the information and concepts included in Unit IV. The assessments will include both writing components (essays and short answers) and shorter identifications. The essays will be written in several different formats, including short policy memos and research proposals.

4. **Final Paper (17.5%, Individual-Based)**: Students will complete a 5-7 page final paper (double-spaced)
on one of six specific environmental issues from the perspective of one of six social sciences (e.g., economics, anthropology, political science, psychology, geography, sociology). For these papers, students will conduct a systematic and rigorous review of past research on the topic, and will analyze the contributions and limitations of that research. This assignment includes an annotated bibliography, research log, and outline of the paper, which are due several weeks before the final paper.

5. **Final Presentation (12.5%, Team-Based):** Once these papers are complete, students who worked on the same topics will form teams that will design and present a group presentation on their topic. Students will share their papers within their teams, and work together to develop an interdisciplinary analysis of their issue. The final presentations will summarize the insights of the relevant social science literature and provide policy recommendations based on that research. These presentations should successfully integrate the insights of discipline-based research with an interdisciplinary understanding of the issue. Each student will be responsible for presenting a relatively equal percentage of their team’s presentation.

6. **Final Essay (5%):** Students will submit a final essay describing the social sciences and the strengths and limitations of different ways of bringing them together to analyze the relationship between society and the environment.

**Campus Presentations:** Extra credit opportunities will be available for students who attend guest lectures on campus that are relevant to the course. To qualify for the extra credit, students will write short (1 page) response papers discussing the lecture’s insights. Such opportunities will be announced in class.

**Current Events:** In order to encourage students to be applying what they learn in the classroom to events happening in the real world, every week at least five minutes will be dedicated to discussing current events in environmental affairs. Students are expected to sign up for at least one regular email newsletter relating to the environment, such as Grist.org, the Environmental News Network (enn.com), Treehugger.com, GreenBiz.com, etc. As part of class participation, students will be regularly asked to relate current developments in environmental affairs to one of the concepts discussed in the course.

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**COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

The course outline below lists the topics we will cover each day and week of the semester, and includes the readings associated with each topic. With the exception of the first day of the course, students should read these materials before the class for which they are assigned and be prepared to discuss them. For your convenience and planning purposes, each reading’s approximate number of pages in parentheses after the bibliographic information has been included below. Readings average approximately 45 pages per class (or approximately 90 pages per week), although this will vary to some extent by day and by week. Keep in mind that the materials will also vary in their difficulty and density, and some may take more time to read than the average text while others will take less time to read. While much of the materials below contribute to several learning outcomes, I have classified each reading or video in three categories: “Discipline in Focus,” “Method in Focus,” and “Factor in Focus.” These categories correspond to Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 4. Relevant theories and concepts (Learning Outcome 3) are discussed throughout the materials.

**Important Note:** I reserve the right to make modifications to the information below if in my judgment the flow of the course is best served by such adjustments.
Unit I: An Introduction to the Social Sciences and the Environment

August 23: The Anthropocene and the Environmental Social Sciences (2)


August 25: Disciplinarity, the Social Sciences, and the Environment (26)


August 30: Interdisciplinarity, Transdisciplinarity, and the Environment (43)


Roleplaying Exercise Preparation

Unit II: From Minds to Markets: Psychological and Economic Factors

September 1: Environmental Health (38)


Field Assignment #1 (Deductive) Distributed

September 6: Biophilia (42)


September 8: Environmental Risk (40)


September 13: Environmental Values (40)


September 15: The Tragedy of the Commons (35 + 7 min)


FIELD ASSIGNMENT #1 (DEDUCTIVE) DUE ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 @ 5 PM

**September 20: Negative Environmental Externalities (39 + 12 min)**


**September 22: Economic Growth (34)**


Final Paper and Presentation Assignment Distributed

**September 27: Review Session**

**September 29: ASSESSMENT #1**

Assessment #1 Distributed Online on Thursday, September 29 @ 3 PM

ASSESSMENT #1 DUE ON FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30 @ 5 PM

Unit III: From Norms to Negotiations: Cultural, Social, and Political Factors

**October 4: Culture (50)**


Field Assignment #2 (Inductive) Distributed

**October 6: Environmental Justice (58)**


http://www.annualreviews.org.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/action/doSearch?startPage=0&pageSize=20&sortBy=relevancy&text1=Environmental%20Justice&field1=title&filterByPub=all&dateFilterSelect=Year&Year=2009


FALL BREAK

**October 13: Population (44)**


http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/23251042.2015.1022983


October 18: Technology (49)

http://jed.sagepub.com.ezproxy.lib.davidson.edu/content/21/1/24

http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/technological-innovation-sustainability-energy-green-investment


October 20: Knowledge (21)


ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY AND PAPER OUTLINE DUE ON FRIDAY, OCT. 21 @ 5 PM

October 25: Power (53)


October 27: Institutions (46)


FIELD ASSIGNMENT #2 (INDUCTIVE) DUE ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 28 @ 5 PM
November 1: Coalitions (31)


http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=cde9712b-5a9f-4ba1-a73a-07d2a86072d5%40sessionmgr115&hid=101&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=1362890&db=ecn

November 3: Scale (36)


Roleplaying Exercise Preparation

November 8: Review Session

November 10: ASSESSMENT #2
Assessment #2 Distributed Online on November 10 @ 3 PM
ASSESSMENT #1 DUE ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11 @ 5 PM

Unit IV: Synthesis – From Disciplinarity to Multidisciplinarity and Beyond

November 15: The Environmental Social Sciences in the Real World (Part I)
Team Meetings
FINAL PAPER DUE IN CLASS (HARD COPIES FOR TEAM MEMBERS AND PROFESSOR)

November 17: The Environmental Social Sciences in the Real World (Part II)
Team Meetings

November 22:
Team Meetings

November 24: THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1: PRESENTATIONS
December 3: PRESENTATIONS
RESEARCH LOGS DUE IN CLASS

December 8: Synthesis and Evaluations
FINAL ESSAY DUE IN CLASS