



# Rensselaer

**FALL 2011 STSS-2300**

## **ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIETY**

TF 2:00PM-3:50PM

Sage 4112

### ***Instructor***

Dr. Abby Kinchy

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### ***Course Description***

Society and the natural environment are crucially linked in a number of ways. Environmental problems such as pollution and natural resource depletion are not only problems for society, affecting the way we live our lives; they are also problems of society—the result of patterns of social organization and social practices. In this course, we will explore these society/environment interactions at various levels, from the local to the global, using the concepts and insights of environmental sociology.

### ***Course Text(s)***

TITLE:SHOPPING OUR WAY TO SAFETY

AUTHOR:SZASZ

EDITION:N/A

COPYRIGHT YEAR:2007

PUBLISHER:UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

ISBN:9780816635092

NEW:\$18.95

USED:\$14.25

TITLE:INVITATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY (P)

AUTHOR:BELL

EDITION:4TH

COPYRIGHT YEAR:2012

PUBLISHER:SAGE PUBLICATIONS, INC.

ISBN:9781412990530

NEW:\$67.95

USED:\$51.00

## **Course Goals / Objectives**

The course will serve as an introduction to sociological perspectives on society/environment interactions. Environmental sociologists aim to understand the social origins of environmental problems and propose workable solutions to them. By showing how social interaction, institutions, and beliefs shape human behavior, environmental sociology provides a useful complement to the natural sciences in the analysis of the environmental problems we face today.

Readings and lectures will provide overviews of social scientific theories and concepts that are important for understanding society's interactions with the natural environment. You will learn to apply these theories and concepts to real life situations using specific case studies. Special emphasis will be placed on learning to view problems from multiple perspectives and understanding the views of opposing and complementary sides.

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

1. Recognize and apply key sociological concepts for analysis of environmental and natural resource issues, such as institution, social construction, ideology, and social structure.
2. Compare, contrast, and describe several theories addressing the relationship between human society and the natural world, such as treadmill of production, ecological modernization, and risk society theories.
3. Interpret, explain, and critique contemporary environmental issues using sociological theories and concepts.
4. Generate hypotheses about society and the natural environment—including possible solutions to environmental problems.

## **Course Assessment Measures**

Homework: Each week, a set of questions will be assigned, related to the assigned readings. These questions will be posted on the LMS site on Friday. Answers to the questions are due on Tuesday before the start of class. Students must post the answers to the LMS site.

Exams: This course has two take-home essay exams. Students will have a full week to work on take-home exams, including one class period. It works like this: The exam questions will be handed out at the end of the class period before the day scheduled for an exam, and the answers will be due at the beginning of the class period after the day scheduled for the exam.

Take-home exams are designed to assess each student's understanding of the readings, ability to think critically, and apply course material to real world situations. The take-home exams are open-book, and should be written like a formal paper. Proper citation of all references used is required (see expectations for writing). You are encouraged to collaborate with classmates in studying before the exam questions are handed out; however, the essays themselves should be your original work and must not be written collaboratively or in discussion with

other students. Originality of thinking is rewarded; therefore, it will not benefit you or anyone else to share your work with your classmates.

Essay: The last assignment for this course is an essay (2,000-3,000 words) responding to the book *Shopping Our Way to Safety*. In this essay, you should assess the merits and limitations of the concept of "inverted quarantine" for understanding the contemporary relationship between society and the environment. To do this, you should compare the argument made by Szasz to \*at least\* one other theory about the society/environment relationship that you studied in this course. For example, an essay might compare, contrast, and try to reconcile the concept of "inverted quarantine" with the idea that nature is "socially constructed." Each essay should use "real life" examples to illustrate the points made. Finally, the essay must conclude with a discussion of your own assessment of how best to address the kinds of environmental problems that concern Szasz. This final discussion should follow, logically, from the points you make when assessing the merits of the argument of the book.

## **Grading Criteria**

All assignments and exams will receive a letter grade. Letter grades have numerical equivalents on the 4-point scale (e.g. A = 4.0, B = 3.0).

The relative value of each assignment, in relation to the final grade, is as follows:

**Homework questions - 25%**  
**Take-home exam one – 25%**  
**Take-home exam two – 25%**  
**Essay - 25%**

Students are expected to attend class (see attendance policy). Each unexcused absence after the second unexcused absence will result in the reduction of a full letter grade.

Students will receive a final letter grade, based on the following scale:  
A = 4.0, A- = 3.7, B+ = 3.3, B = 3.0, B- = 2.7, C+ = 2.3, C = 2.0, C- = 1.7,  
D+ = 1.3, D = 1.0, F = 0.0

## **Attendance Policy**

Attendance will be taken. Two unexcused absences will be permitted. After the second unexcused absence, each unexcused absence will result in a reduction of a full letter grade. Documentation for excused absences is now processed by the Student Experience office (these were previously processed through the Dean of Students office). If you need an official excuse, contact the Student Experience office – 4th floor of Academy Hall, x8022, se@rpi.edu.

## ***Other Course Policies***

- All reading assignments must be completed before the class meeting on the date indicated.
- Assignments may change at the instructor's discretion. Any changes and adjustments to assignments will be announced in class. Be sure to ask me or a classmate about any changes if you miss class.
- Readings not in the textbooks will be distributed electronically.
- The exams and essay should be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, Times New Roman, with standard one-inch margins. References should be cited using APA style. Please print on both sides of the page if possible.
- This class will primarily follow a discussion format. All students are expected to contribute regularly to class discussion. This includes asking and responding to questions, commenting on the readings, respectful listening to one another, and serious consideration of diverse viewpoints.
- Please avoid disruptions such as arriving late or packing your bag before the end of class. Turn off cell phones, do not use text messaging during class time, and do not use computers for activities not directly connected to the class.

## ***Academic Integrity***

Student-teacher relationships are built on trust. Students must trust that teachers have made appropriate decisions about the structure and content of courses they teach, and teachers must trust that assignments that students turn in are their own. Acts that violate this trust undermine the educational process. Any acts of plagiarism will have grave consequences. The Rensselaer Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities defines various forms of academic dishonesty and you should make yourself familiar with these.

**In this class, all individual assignments that are turned in for a grade must represent the student's own work. Any instances of plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment. Repeated instances of academic dishonesty will be grounds for failing the course.**

Plagiarism includes purchasing term papers; copying or handing in the writing of another student (current or former); using sentences verbatim from a published source without appropriate referencing (when in doubt, cite the source); and presenting as one's own the detailed argument of a published source. "Recycling" papers written in other courses is also forbidden.

If you have any question concerning this policy before submitting an assignment, please ask for clarification.

## Course Calendar

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
Aug. 30, 2011	Introduction		
Sep. 2, 2011	Environmental Problems and Society	Bell, Ch. 1	
Sep. 6, 2011	Capitalism and Ecology	John Bellamy Foster, "The Vulnerable Planet"	Homework 1
Sep. 9, 2011	Consumption and Materialism	Bell, Ch. 2	
Sep. 13, 2011	Greenwashing and the Media	Eric Krieg, "The Greenwashing of America," and Robin Andersen, "Selling 'Mother Earth'"	Homework 2
Sep. 16, 2011	Treadmills of Production	Bell, Ch. 3	
Sep. 20, 2011	Technology and Environmental Change	Kenneth Gould, "Technological Change and the Environment"	Homework 3
Sep. 23, 2011	Population and Development I	Bell, Ch. 4	
Sep. 27, 2011	Population and Development II	Bill McKibben, "A Special Moment in History"	Homework 4
Sep. 30, 2011	Toxic Exposures	Bell, Ch. 5	
Oct. 4, 2011	Environmental Justice	Robert Bullard and Glenn Johnson, "Environmental Justice"	Homework 5
Oct. 7, 2011	Review and preparation for exam		
Oct. 14, 2011	<b>EXAM ONE</b>		
Oct. 18, 2011	Ideologies of Environmental Domination	Bell, Ch. 6	Homework 6
Oct. 21, 2011	Ideologies of Environmental Concern	Bell, Ch. 7	
Oct. 25, 2011	The Human Nature of Nature	Bell, Ch. 8	Homework 7
Oct. 28, 2011	"Wilderness" and Tourism	William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"	
Nov. 1, 2011	The Rationality of Risk	Bell, Ch. 9	Homework 8
Nov. 4, 2011	Disaster Vulnerability	Nicole Youngman, "Understanding Disaster Vulnerability"	
Nov. 8, 2011	Mobilizing the Ecological Society	Bell, Ch. 10	Homework 9
Nov. 11, 2011	Environmental Movements	Robert J. Brulle "U.S. Environmental Movements," Tammy L. Lewis "Environmental Movements in the Global South"	
Nov. 15, 2011	Governing the Ecological Society	Bell, Ch. 11	Homework 10

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
Nov. 18, 2011	Exam preparation		
Nov. 22, 2011	<b>EXAM TWO</b>		
Nov. 29, 2011	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz	
Dec. 2, 2011	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz	
Dec. 6, 2011	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz	
Dec. 9, 2011	Wrap-up		Essays due