



Rensselaer

Course Syllabus

Course Information

Environment & Society		STSS 2300	Section 01
RPI Fall 2013	4 cr		
Lecture	MR	2:00PM-3:50PM	Low 3039

Prerequisites or Other Requirements:

STSH 1110/STSS 1110 or permission of instructor (typically given if student has taken another 1000-level STS course)

Instructor

Dr. Abby Kinchy	kincha@rpi.edu
Office Location: SAGE 5406	(518) 276-6980
Office Hours: M 4:00PM-6:00PM	

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.

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.

Course Text(s)

TITLE:INVITATION TO ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY
AUTHOR:BELL
EDITION:4TH
COPYRIGHT YEAR:2012
PUBLISHER:SAGE PUBLICATIONS, INC.

TITLE:SHOPPING OUR WAY TO SAFETY
AUTHOR:SZASZ
COPYRIGHT YEAR:2007
PUBLISHER:UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

Course Goals / Objectives

The course will serve as an introduction to sociological perspectives on society/environment interactions. 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

Assessment	Due Date	Description
Quiz	Weekly	Each Thursday, there will be a short in-class quiz, related to the week's assigned readings. Combined quiz scores will constitute 25% of the final grade.
Exam	10.10.2013	This course has two take-home essay exams. 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.
Exam	11.04.2013	See above
Paper	12.05.2013	The final assignment in this course is a review (2,000-3,000 words) of the book <i>Shopping Our Way to Safety</i> . Further details will be handed out in class.

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:

Quizzes - 25%

Take-home exam one – 25%

Take-home exam two – 25%

Take-home exam three (book review) - 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

This class will primarily follow a discussion format. Students are expected to be regular, engaged, thoughtful class participants. This includes respectful listening to one another and serious consideration of diverse viewpoints. In addition, please avoid disruptions such as arriving late or packing your bag before the end of class. Close laptops (unless in use for an assigned classroom activity), turn off cell phones and do not use text messaging during class time.

Attendance will be taken. Two unexcused absences will be permitted. After the second unexcused absence, each unexcused absence will result in a reduction of one full letter grade (see grading policy).

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

Please note the following:

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.

All exams and assignments 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.

Students will be required to accept an invitation to Dropbox from the instructor in order to facilitate sharing of documents. All assignments will be handed in, graded, and returned electronically using Dropbox. Each student will have a folder that is privately shared with the instructor. Furthermore, readings not in the textbooks will be distributed electronically through a Dropbox folder to which all students will be invited.

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.

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.

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.

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

Course Calendar

Date	Topic	Readings
Aug. 26, 2013	Introduction	
Aug. 29, 2013	Environmental Problems and Society	Bell, Ch. 1
Sep. 5, 2013	Capitalism and Ecology	John Bellamy Foster, "The Vulnerable Planet"
Sep. 9, 2013 (NO CLASS)		
Sep. 12, 2013	Consumption and Materialism	Bell, Ch. 2

Date	Topic	Readings
Sep. 16, 2013	Treadmills of Production	Bell, Ch. 3
Sep. 19, 2013	Technology and Environmental Change	Kenneth Gould, "Technological Change and the Environment"
Sep. 23, 2013	Population and Development I	Bell, Ch. 4
Sep. 26, 2013	Population and Development II	Bill McKibben, "A Special Moment in History"
Sep. 30, 2013	Toxic Exposures	Bell, Ch. 5
Oct. 3, 2013	Environmental Justice	Robert Bullard and Glenn Johnson, "Environmental Justice"
Oct. 7, 2013	Review and preparation for exam	
Oct. 10, 2013 (NO CLASS)	TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE BY 5:00 PM	
Oct. 15, 2013 (Tuesday)	Ideologies of Environmental Domination	Bell, Ch. 6
Oct. 17, 2013	Ideologies of Environmental Concern	Bell, Ch. 7
Oct. 21, 2013	The Human Nature of Nature	Bell, Ch. 8
Oct. 24, 2013	"Wilderness" and Tourism	William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"
Oct. 28, 2013	The Rationality of Risk	Bell, Ch. 9
Oct. 31, 2013	Disaster Vulnerability	Nicole Youngman, "Understanding Disaster Vulnerability"
Nov. 4, 2013 (NO CLASS)	TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE BY 5:00 PM	
Nov. 7, 2013	Mobilizing the Ecological Society	Bell, Ch. 10
Nov. 11, 2013	Environmental Movements	Robert J. Brulle "U.S. Environmental Movements," Tammy L. Lewis "Environmental Movements in the Global South"
Nov. 14, 2013	Governing the Ecological Society	Bell, Ch. 11
Nov. 18, 2013	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz
Nov. 21, 2013	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz

Date	Topic	Readings
Nov. 25, 2013	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz
Dec. 2, 2013	Shopping Our Way to Safety	Szasz
Dec. 5, 2013	ESSAYS DUE	