

Environmental Politics

aka 'Environmental Conservation'

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This course concerns the theory and politics of environmental conservation. More narrowly, we will study three core themes: nature-society theory; environmental degradation and capitalist social relations; and planetary climate change. This is a broad and complex set of issues. To bring it into focus and organize our studies, we will consider conservation mainly by way of philosophical inquiry and critical political economy. We will also draw from a series of case studies to examine how ideas about nature and conservation translate into concrete practices. Our aim is to examine the implications of different environmental problems and conservation approaches for distinct social groups.

Course requirements

Exam 1	20 %
Exam 2 (the final)	30 %
Research project: mid-term assignment	15 %
Research project: final paper	35 %

I hope to run the course as a lecture-led seminar. This means that I will combine lectures with class discussions. For our discussions to be effective, you must come to class prepared. Attendance is required but will not be formally graded. To participate effectively in classroom discussions, and to do well on exams, you will need to carefully read the assigned texts.

Half of your grade is earned by two in-class exams (October 14 and December 15); each will require you to compose three or four essays. Half of your grade is earned from an original research paper that is due at the start of class on December 9 (paper copies, please).

Our course has two assigned books: Paul Robbins (2008), *Lawn people: how grasses, weeds, and chemicals make us who we are*, and Fred Magdoff and J B Foster, *What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism* (2011). Other reading materials will be made available on Carmen.

The course plan

#	Day	Date	Topic	Reading assignment
1	Thursday	28-Aug	Course introduction	No reading assignment
2	Tuesday	2-Sep	Climate change 1: geophysical processes & basic parameters	IPCC AR5 WG1
3	Thursday	4-Sep	Climate change 2: adaptation & mitigation (introduction)	IPCC AR5 WG 2 and WG 3 (selections)
4	Tuesday	9-Sep	Population, science, ideology	D Harvey
5	Thursday	11-Sep	<i>Lawn people</i> 1	Cover to p. 71
6	Tuesday	16-Sep	<i>Lawn people</i> 2	p. 72 to end
7	Thursday	18-Sep	<i>What every environmentalist needs to know</i> 1	F Magdoff & J B Foster cover to p. 60; also Booth et al.
8	Tuesday	23-Sep	<i>What every environmentalist needs to know</i> 2	F Magdoff & J B Foster p. 61 to 122
9	Thursday	25-Sep	<i>What every environmentalist needs to know</i> 3	F Magdoff & J B Foster p. 123 to 158
10	Tuesday	30-Sep	The value of nature 1: value theory day 1	S Bailey & D Ricardo
11	Thursday	2-Oct	The value of nature 2: value theory day 2	K Marx
12	Tuesday	7-Oct	The value of nature 3: capital and nature	K Marx; N Smith
13	Thursday	9-Oct	The value of nature 4: case study of US wetlands policy	M Robertson; M Robertson & J Wainwright
14	Tuesday	14-Oct	EXAM 1 ~ normal class time	
15	Thursday	16-Oct	Climate change 3: adaptation politics 1, nature/capital †	D Harvey
16	Tuesday	21-Oct	Climate change 4: adaptation politics 2, green urbanization	M Davis
17	Thursday	23-Oct	Climate change 5: energy geopolitics 1, China	M Li
18	Tuesday	28-Oct	Climate change 6: oil geopolitics 2, 'McJihad'	T Mitchell, M Labban
19	Thursday	30-Oct	Climate change 7: Climate Leviathan	W Benjamin; J Wainwright and G Mann (and critics)
	Tuesday	4-Nov	No class: work on research papers	No reading assignment
	Thursday	6-Nov	No class: work on research papers	No reading assignment
	Tuesday	11-Nov	Veteran's Day observed: no classes	No reading assignment
20	Thursday	13-Nov	case study GM maize in Mexico part 1	Ortiz-Garcia et al.; K Mercer & J Wainwright; Piñero-Nelson et al
21	Tuesday	18-Nov	case study GM maize in Mexico part 2	Vargas; A Gramsci; Wainwright & Mercer; Mercer et al
22	Thursday	20-Nov	Heidegger and the critique of instrumental reason 1	M Heidegger
23	Tuesday	25-Nov	Heidegger and the critique of instrumental reason 2	M Heidegger
	Thursday	27-Nov	Thanksgiving break: no classes	No reading assignment
24	Tuesday	2-Dec	Heidegger and the critique of instrumental reason 3	M Heidegger
25	Thursday	4-Dec	Heidegger and the critique of instrumental reason 4	M Heidegger
26	Tuesday	9-Dec	Final class: where do we go from here?	Papers due: No reading assignment
27	Monday	15-Dec	Exam 2, classroom, 2:00 - 3:45 pm	

The research paper

You will work independently to write an original research paper. Your papers will focus on the *state of* and *strategies for* conservation of one natural resource. Here are some sample titles:

- The state of soils and prospects for agricultural sustainability in Western Kenya
- The state of fresh water resources and the question of water conservation in SE Turkey
- The state of forests and the prospects for sustainable timber production in the Brazilian Amazon
- The state of the atmosphere: carbon, climate change, and capitalism

You should begin by narrowing down your topic by reading. Initially, read broadly in order to establish a critical overview of the literature. The purpose of such reading is to gather data, in a narrow sense, but more fundamentally to develop a grasp on the literature: the various ways your topic has been conceptualized; the key points of debate in the literature; and the strongest questions to define your research. This is the foundation for a strong research paper. The result of your research will be a paper of approximately 12-16 pages (~4,000 words all inclusive). Your paper should be formally formatted (double-spaced) with a cover page and non-annotated bibliography.

MID-TERM ASSIGNMENT (due October 16 at the start of class). You will turn in (1) one copy of a 5-600 word *abstract* that elaborates your central argument, as well as (2) an *annotated bibliography* with 15-20 key sources on your research. The annotated bibliography should include the following for each key source: a full citation; a concise summary of the text; a statement on the utility of the text for your research. You should include criticism. The principal sources of information should be academic journals, but you may also cite some texts by states and NGOs.

THE FINAL PAPER (due December 9 at the start of class) is a research paper that should address the following four elements (which may serve you as a structure for your paper):

1. *The facts.* A statement about the state of your ecological region/resource (oceans, soils, forests, freshwater, cities, etc.). Drawing from academic papers and texts by the UN, states, and NGOs, present a concise, synthetic, and critical statement of the conditions of your resource.

2. *History and geography.* Your paper should lay bare the history of use and/or degradation of your region. How did the environmental issues you outlined above develop? What factors or dynamics underlie their development? Be sure to address the geographies of resource use and degradation. Who uses these resources or regions, and why? Who pays the costs of their use?

3. *Explanation.* Third, and most importantly, your paper must present an argument about the reason for the decline or degradation of your region/resource. That is, you must present a coherent explanation for the environmental changes you document in the previous sections. You may draw from the frameworks that we will use in this course to explain why and how environmental degradation has occurred and how effective forms of conservation could be imagined. For instance, you may wish to reflect on the political economy of uses of your resource, or the ways that colonial legacies are reiterated in conservation politics, and so on.

4. *Conservation and sustainability.* Finally, your paper should conclude by presenting an argument for what could be considered the sustainable use of your region/resource. Be sure to define what constitutes a solution (e.g. do not presume that 'sustainability' is obvious) and also identify the key barriers to this state. I.e. your paper should conclude by arguing for a path towards effective conservation of your resource or a strategy for addressing your environmental problem.

Additional notes

Because many of us are easily distracted by use of cell phones, computers, recording devices, and the like, such equipment should be turned off and placed out of sight during class.

Late work loses ten percentage points per day (Saturday and Sunday count). For instance, a paper that is turned in six days late but would have otherwise received a score of 90/100 would be worth 30/100.

Because our exams are essay-based and unique to each course-group, they cannot be taken late or made up. Exceptions are rare – emergencies only – and up to my discretion. Arrangements for a make-up exam should be made before the exam is distributed.

Grading options for the course are A,A-,B+,B,B-,C+,C,C-,D+,D, E. Grading is not 'curved' and is based on the OSU standard scale. An 'I', or Incomplete, will only be given under special circumstances and where the instructor has made an arrangement with the student before the end of the quarter. If you wish to request an 'I', be prepared to explain (a) why an Incomplete is an appropriate grade option, and (b) how and when you will complete the incomplete.

Any academic misconduct, such as plagiarizing, will be reported to Ohio State's Office of Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). They have prepared a useful statement on academic integrity (see next page). Please read it carefully.

Accommodation will be made for any student with special needs based on the impact of a disability. Please contact the instructor and also the Office for Disability Services at 292-3307 (150 Pomerene).

Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity

Ohio State Office of Academic Affairs, Committee on Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, students are expected to complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. The following suggestions will help you preserve academic integrity[...].

1. **ACKNOWLEDGE THE SOURCES THAT YOU USE WHEN COMPLETING ASSIGNMENTS:** If you use another person's thoughts, ideas, or words in your work, you must acknowledge this fact. This applies regardless of whose thoughts, ideas, or words you use as well as the source of the information. If you do not acknowledge the work of others, you are implying that another person's work is your own, and such actions constitute plagiarism. Plagiarism is the theft of another's intellectual property [...].

2. **AVOID SUSPICIOUS BEHAVIOR:** Do not put yourself in a position where an instructor might suspect that you are cheating or that you have cheated. Even if you have not cheated, the mere suspicion of dishonesty might undermine an instructor's confidence in your work. Avoiding some of the most common types of suspicious behavior is simple. Before an examination, check your surroundings carefully and make sure that all of your notes are put away and your books are closed. An errant page of notes on the floor or an open book could be construed as a 'cheat sheet'. Keep your eyes on your own work. [...]

3. **DO NOT FABRICATE INFORMATION:** Never make-up data, literature citations, experimental results, or any other type of information that is used in an academic or scholarly assignment.

4. **DO NOT FALSIFY ANY TYPE OF RECORD:** Do not alter, misuse, produce, or reproduce any University form or document or other type of form or document. Do not sign another person's name to any form or record (University or otherwise), and do not sign your name to any form or record that contains inaccurate or fraudulent information. Once an assignment has been graded and returned to you, do not alter it and ask that it be graded again. [...]

5. **DO NOT GIVE IN TO PEER PRESSURE:** Friends can be a tremendous help to one another when studying for exams or completing course assignments. However, don't let your friendships with others jeopardize your college career. Before lending or giving any type of information to a friend or acquaintance, consider carefully what you are lending (giving), what your friend might do with it, and what the consequences might be if your friend misuses it. [...]

6. **DO NOT SUBMIT THE SAME WORK FOR CREDIT IN TWO COURSES:** Instructors do not give grades in a course, rather students earn their grades. Thus, instructors expect that students will earn their grades by completing all course requirements (assignments) while they are actually enrolled in the course. If a student uses his/her work from one course to satisfy the requirements of a different course, that student is not only violating the spirit of the assignment, but he/she is also putting other students in the course at a disadvantage. Even though it might be your own work, you are not permitted to turn in the same work to meet the requirements of more than one course. [...]

7. **DO YOUR OWN WORK:** When you turn in an assignment with only your name on it, then the work on that assignment should be yours and yours alone. This means that you should not copy any work done by or work together with another student (or other person). [...]

8. **MANAGE YOUR TIME:** Do not put off your assignments until the last minute. If you do, you might put yourself in a position where your only options are to turn in an incomplete (or no) assignment or to cheat. [...]

9. **PROTECT YOUR WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHERS:** The assignments that you complete as a student are your "intellectual property," and you should protect your intellectual property just as you would any of your other property.[...]

10. **READ THE COURSE SYLLABUS AND ASK QUESTIONS:** Many instructors prepare and distribute (or make available on a web site) a course syllabus. Read the course syllabus for every course you take!