

## Geographical Perspectives on **Environment and Society**

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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Are humans separate from nature, or are they a part of it? Can humans ultimately control the natural world, or does the natural world determine the course of human history? Are some groups of people “closer to nature” than others? Is the earth made for humans to use? Is nature socially constructed? Must we change how we think about nature in order to solve environmental problems? How do ideas about nature reflect and influence our ideas about other people, including ideas about race and gender? These are longstanding questions not only in Geography and Environmental Studies but in a variety of other fields, from Philosophy to Ecology. This course will focus on how geographers have understood the relationship between humans and nature (or “environment” and “society”), and we will also examine how others—policy makers, historians, environmentalists—have thought about this relationship. We will look at how people have thought about nature in different times and circumstances (mainly in the US and Europe over the past 150 years), and how that influences people’s actions toward the environment and other people.

The overarching goals of the course are (1) to introduce you to key concepts, recurring themes, and important authors and thinkers in these enduring debates, and (2) to help you identify and understand the importance of human-nature relations in contemporary life.

### **GENERAL EDUCATION**

This course meets the requirements of GE for *Social Sciences: Human, Natural, and Economic Resources*. The goal of the Social Science GE is that students understand the systematic study of human behavior and cognition; the structure of human societies, cultures, and institutions; and the processes by which individuals, groups, and societies interact with communicate, and use human, natural, and economic resources. There are three central learning objectives:

1. Students understand the theories and methods of scientific inquiry as they are applied to the study of the use and distribution of human, natural, and economic resources and decisions and policies concerning such resources.

2. Students understand the political, economic, and social trade-offs reflected in individual decisions and societal policymaking and enforcement and their similarities and differences across contexts.
3. Students comprehend and assess the physical, social, economic, and political sustainability of individual and societal decisions with respect to resource use.

This course meets these goals and objectives by examining the relationship between society, behavior, and the natural world. In so doing, we will explicitly examine human societies, culture, and institutions. We will stress the importance of different contexts for altering the environment-society relationship and how we perceive it, and we will be examining how perceptions of environment and society impact social and environmental problem solving. We will also be learning about different methodological approaches for understanding environment-society relations.

### READINGS

- There is no single text for this course. The readings include a variety of articles, book chapters, and reports, drawn from multiple sources. *Readings are all available through Carmen.*
- We will watch a variety of videos to supplement readings. For your reference I list the titles in the schedule (but note we mainly will watch clips rather than the entire thing.)

### COURSE WEBSITE

On the Carmen website for this course you will find electronic readings, course handouts, announcements, a drop box, and your grades. Please check your grades regularly and inform me as soon as possible if you notice any irregularities or you have questions about how you are being graded.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and participation	20%
Essay	20%
Exam 1	30%
Exam 2	30%

**Attendance and participation** are required and will be graded. Talking with me outside of class about course material counts as participation. The **essay** requires you to use course concepts to identify, interpret, and evaluate ideas about environment and society that are present in everyday life. I will provide a detailed assignment. The **in-class exams** cover your basic knowledge of key concepts (e.g. definitions, examples, authors); there is also an essay portion of each exam that will require you to *use* these concepts to identify and explain ideas about environment and society. Exam 2 is not comprehensive; it is on material we cover after Exam 1 (this means it does include material from the first part of semester if we also talk about it in the second part!).

## GRADING POLICIES

- Participation: You cannot participate if you do not attend class. If you are regularly absent, your participation grade will reflect your absences, even if you participate well on the days you do attend.
- Essay:
  - Late essays LOSE 5% for every day they are late, including Saturdays and Sundays.
  - Avoid losing late points by making arrangements with me AHEAD OF TIME.
  - You may talk with other students, but the analysis and writing must be yours. You must do your writing individually and you must not share your written essays with each other. I will question any essays that are very similar (i.e. they need not be identical for me to raise questions). *Failure to follow these guidelines will be considered academic misconduct.*
- Exams:
  - Talk to me AHEAD OF TIME if you have scheduling conflicts for the in-class exams: alternative arrangements MAY be possible but are NOT guaranteed.
  - There are NO make-up exams if you fail to show up for an exam without making prior arrangements.
- Standard OSU grading scheme (minimum percent): A 93%, A- 90, B+ 87, B 83, B- 80, C+ 77, C 73, C- 70, D+ 67, D 60, E 0
- PLEASE SEE ME if you are having problems that prevent you from meeting any of the above requirements. We may be able to make alternative arrangements.

**DISABILITY SERVICES**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, VRS 429-1334; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>.

**OSU COUNSELING AND CONSULTATION SERVICES**

A recent American College Health Survey found stress, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, interpersonal concerns, death of a significant other and alcohol use among the top ten health impediments to academic performance. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises are encouraged to contact the OSU Counseling and Consultation Services (292-5766; <http://www.ccs.ohio-state.edu>) for assistance, support, and advocacy. This service is free to students and is confidential.

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY (ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT)**

Academic integrity is essential to maintaining an environment that fosters excellence in teaching, research, and other educational and scholarly activities. Thus, The Ohio State University and the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM) expect that all students have read and understand the University's *Code of Student Conduct*, and that all students will complete all academic and scholarly assignments with fairness and honesty. Students must recognize that failure to follow the rules and guidelines established in the University's *Code of Student Conduct* and this syllabus may constitute "Academic Misconduct."

The Ohio State University's [Code of Student Conduct](#) (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: "Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process." Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism (see more below), collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, and possession of unauthorized materials during an examination. Ignorance of the University's *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an "excuse" for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the *Code of Student Conduct* and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct.

If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. If COAM determines that you have violated the University's *Code of Student Conduct* (i.e., committed academic misconduct), the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University.

If you have any questions about the above policy or what constitutes academic misconduct in this course, please contact me. Other sources of information on academic misconduct and academic integrity to which you can refer include:

- [The OSU Committee on Academic Misconduct](#) and its [Resources page](#)
- [Ten Suggestions for Preserving Academic Integrity](#)
- [Eight Cardinal Rules of Academic Integrity](#)

*Plagiarism*: Plagiarism encompasses all activities in which you use another person's ideas without acknowledging that you are doing so. Plagiarism ranges from direct copying of someone else's words to using someone else's ideas without being clear the ideas are not yours. Please use citations to differentiate between your ideas and those you got from other sources (such as books, articles, and webpages).

**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS, IN-CLASS VIDEOS, READINGS, AND ASSIGNMENTS**  
(Subject to change)

For each topic I list a set of readings. I provide the *purpose* of each set and indicate *by when* you should read each item. Always identify the main point of each reading in relation to course themes; when provided, use the guiding questions to help make connections between new material and old.

**W Aug 26 Introduction: placing humans and nature**

**M Aug 31 Social natures (1 day)**

In-class video: *The Lorax* (1972)

Read: Castree (2014)

This reading asks you to think about “what is nature?” The excerpts from the preface provide examples, chapter 1 goes into the ideas. This is a major theme of this course. **Read before class.**

**W Sep 2 From “Man and Nature” to “Political Ecology”: Geographical approaches (1 day)**

Read: Marsh (1965 [1864]), Robbins (2012, pp. 11-13, 21-23)

The reading by Marsh, from 1864, is one of the very first to state that humans impact nature. The reading by Robbins provides a brief introduction of political ecology, which is a contemporary approach geographers use to understand human-environment relationships and is the central approach of this course. **Read before class.**

**M Sep 7 NO CLASS, LABOR DAY**

**W Sep 9 Dualism between Humans and Nature (3 days)**

**M Sep 14** Read: Merchant (1992), Soper (1995), Benton and Short (2000, pp. 21-23),

**W Sep 16** Gregory (2001)

These readings introduce and explore the idea of “dualism” between humans and nature: the idea that these are completely separate realms. As a group they explore the origins of this idea and how it influences what counts as human and as nature (surprisingly, this is not obvious!).

**Read Merchant by day 1, the others by day 2.**

**M Sep 21 Preservation, Conservation, and the Land Ethic (3 days)**

**W Sep 23** In-class video: *Ancient Forests, Rage over Trees*

**M Sep 28** Read: Benton and Short (2000, pp. 60-77); Muir (1901); Runte (1979), Pinchot (1910), Leopold (1949)

These readings introduce you to key ideas in environmentalism, dating to the late 1800s: preservation, conservation, and (later) the land ethic. Benton and Short provide an overview, Runte interprets the themes of preservation, and Muir, Pinchot, and Leopold provide famous historical examples. **Read Benton and Short and Muir by day 1, the others by day 2.**

**M Sep 21 we will go over and practice the essay assignment**

**M Sep 28 the essay assignment is DUE**

- W Sep 30**      **Environmental Determinism and Cultural Ecology (2 days)**  
**M Oct 5**      In class-video: *The Goddess and the Computer*  
 Read: Robbins (2004)
- This reading provides an overview of Cultural Ecology, a geographical approach to studying human-environment relations that emerged in the 1950s. Robbins also describes the ideas cultural ecologists were challenging; chief among them was “environmental determinism,” which is the idea that environmental conditions explain differences among human societies. **Read by day 1.**
- W Oct 7**      **Modern environmentalism: major themes (2 days)**  
**M Oct 12**      In-class video: footage on Rachel Carson/DDT and on the Population Bomb  
 Read: Dowie (1996), Carson (1962), Ehrlich (1969), Castree (2005), Devall and Sessions (1985)
- This series of short readings introduces you to key themes in “modern” environmentalism (since the 1960s). Dowie provides some overview and introduces Earth Day 1970. Carson is an excerpt of the famous *Silent Spring*, publication of which Dowie marks as the beginning of the environmental movement. Ehrlich is an excerpt of the famous *Population Bomb*, also mentioned by Dowie. Castree and Devall and Sessions respond and build on these in very different ways. Castree summarizes a 1970s critique of Ehrlich, by geographer David Harvey. Devall and Sessions is an excerpt of *Deep Ecology*, a form of holistic environmentalism with roots in the 1970s that become popular in 1980s. As you read, ask not just about the key ideas of each article, but how these ideas compare with each other and with ideas of our previous units. **Read Dowie, Carson, and Ehrlich, by day 1, the others by day 2.**
- W Oct 14**      **Political ecology on environmental degradation (1 day)**  
 In-class video: *Sweet Crude*  
 Read: Robbins (2012, pp. 87-94)
- This reading provides more information on Political Ecology (see Sep 2 for the introduction), here with an emphasis on explanation of environmental degradation. Remember that political ecology developed as a critique not only of degradation but of many forms of environmentalism. As you read, ask how the political ecology approach compares with the various forms of environmentalism we have been studying. **Read before class.**
- M Oct 19**      **Synthesis: dualism and its legacies in environmentalism**
- W Oct 21**      **EXAM 1**
- M Oct 26**      **Political ecology on social natures (3 days)**  
**W Oct 28**      In-class video: *Second Nature*  
**M Nov 2**      Read: Robbins (2012, pp. 122-127 and 130-131), Cronon (1995, pp. 1-15), Wisner (2005)
- Robbins provides an overview of the “social construction” of nature—which should seem familiar to you by now. Note his examples: we will be looking at several of them. One of those examples is the Cronon article, which was extremely controversial when it was written. Why was Cronon’s argument so controversial 20 years ago, and why might it be less so now? Wisner’s article applies these ideas to what seems most natural: hazards and disasters. How is it possible to think of disasters as social natures? **Read Robbins and Cronon by day 1, Wisner by day 3.**

**W Nov 4 Environmental Justice (2 days)**

**M Nov 9** In-class video: *Fenceline: A Company Town Divided*

Read: Bullard (2002), Lerner (2005)

Bullard, a famous figure in the environmental justice movement, provides information about environmental racism as a problem and environmental justice as a form of environmentalism. Lerner provides introduction to one case in Louisiana, the subject of the video. How does this differ from other forms of environmentalism? How is it a “social nature”? **Read by day 1.**

**W Nov 11 NO CLASS: VETERAN’S DAY**

**M Nov 16 Nature of the body (2 days)**

**W Nov 18** Read: Guthman and Mansfield (2015), Race – The Power of an Illusion: Ten things... (2003), Krieger (2006), Hammonds (2006)

Together, these readings ask you to think about the social nature of the biological body. The article by me (with my colleague) introduces you to science on the ways environmental factors influence genetic expression (i.e. epigenetics) and some of the issues raised by this new science. The other three articles explore the idea that race is not a natural, biological category but a social one. Think about what it means to apply the idea of social nature to humans: is it different than when applying it to external nature? Also think back to our material on the history of dualism: how does that relate to this material on race? Finally—how can we put these readings together: epigenetic science and race? **Read Guthman and Mansfield by day 1, the others by day 2.**

**M Nov 23 Post-wild environmentalisms (3 days)**

**(Continues to** In-class video: *Fresh* and *The Story of Cosmetics*

**M Nov 30** Read: Cronon (1995, pp. 16-20), Pollan (2010), Szasz (2007), Marris (2011),  
**W Dec 2)** Mansfield et al. (2015)

The Cronon reading is the last part of the essay you started on Oct 26, in which he argues for a new kind of environmentalism: of home. This has become quite prominent in the two decades since, as represented by the other articles. Pollan describes the rise of the food movement (himself a famous figure in this movement). Szasz positions this as part of a green consumerism and offers a critique. Marris and Mansfield et al. (me, with OSU colleagues, on Ohio) write about post-wild conservation and caring for socionatural landscapes. Cronon was sure that abandoning dualist ideas about wilderness would lead to a better environmentalism and a better world. What do you think? What are the pros and cons of these new environmentalisms of home, food, green consumption, novel ecosystems, and so on? How do we move forward from here: What does it mean to live in a post-natural world (and do you even agree we are in one?)? What does all this suggest about what we should do, how should we act? **Read Cronon and Pollan for day 1, Szasz for day 2, and Marris and Mansfield et al. for day 3**

**W Nov 25 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**M Nov 30 Post-wild environmentalisms CONTINUES**

**W Dec 2** Read: AS ABOVE

**M Dec 7 Synthesis: social natures**

**W Dec 9 EXAM 2**