

Environmental Sociology: Nature, Society, and the Anthropocene

(SOCI 284, CRN: 23304)

Fall 2022

M, W, & F 3:30–4:20 pm

King Building 341

Instructor: Mauricio Betancourt

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Office: King 305-A

Student hours: W: 10-11am; F: 10:00 am-12:00; & by appointment

I. Description and goals

The objective of this course is to analyze the interrelation between communities, the environment, and society, with an emphasis on the ecological and socioeconomic crises in the Anthropocene. The central theme is to explore how to create a just and sustainable society. The course will serve as an introduction to the broad range of issues addressed in environmental sociology as a field. A specific focus will be given to interconnections between current lived lifestyles (*e.g.* the city/country divide, cars and cities, and production and consumerism) and questions of environmental justice and sustainability.

II. Assessment

Assignment / Requirement	Due date and time	Points worth
1. Attendance	Each class (Weeks 1-15)	10
2. Coming to Student Hours	Anytime during the term (Weeks 1-15)	5
3. Reading journal, <i>part 1</i>	September 30 by 8:59 am (Week 5)	15
4. First Essay	October 24 by 8:59 am (Week 9)	20
5. Reading journal, <i>part 2</i>	November 4 by 8:59 am (Week 10)	15
6. Reading journal, <i>part 3</i>	December 9 by 8:59 am (Week 15)	15
7. Final Essay	December 15 by 11:59 pm (Week 16)	20
Total:		100

1. Attendance and absences. There will be 39 sessions this semester. You are allowed to miss up to *two* classes throughout the semester without penalty. Attending each class is worth 0.27% of your final grade. If you miss more than two classes, you cannot make up for those points except if it is due to unforeseen extenuating circumstances (*e.g.* medical, legal, a family emergency, athletic, etc.). If you are allowed to make up for your absence, you must turn in a 300-word statement on a topic pertaining to the class you missed. You should contact the Instructor so you are informed about the specifics of these statements.

2. Student Hours. These hours are for you. To get to know you better and better engage with your interests, you must come to my student hours at least once throughout the term. Coming to student hours is worth 5% of your final grade.

3. Reading journals. The aim of the reading journals is that you can record your engagement with the course materials (**readings and videos**) in depth on a continuous basis. This will allow you to review the most important concepts and ideas in the materials, to reflect on them, and to develop an enduring record of the evolution of your thoughts related to the course. The journal will be turned in three times during the term.

Journal entries must be *typed* and uploaded to Blackboard as *.doc or .pdf* files in the appropriate column of the Assignments section in the date and time they are due. Entries should be written in a word processor using a *12-font size, 1-inch margins*, and must be *1.5- or double-spaced*. Entries should be *dated*, and should include reflections on *all readings and videos* related to *each week's* material. Students should average *at least two pages* of journal entries *per week*. The format of the journal entries is quite flexible, but they should unambiguously indicate a *deep engagement* with the course materials. Entries might include extracts from the **texts and videos** and *reflections* on them; reflections on class discussions; interrelations with current or past relevant events or lived experiences; notes for students' essays; and so on. Journals are a tool for developing a deep, long-lasting understanding of the ideas treated in class.

The grading of the journals will be based on both the quantity and quality of reflections, with an emphasis on: (1) serious engagement with the materials; (2) imagination and creativity; (3) effort; (4) and the capacity to interrelate the materials to the student's experience and current events. ***Journals that either just copy quotes verbatim from the texts, do not refer to the films, and/or only repeat what the instructor mentions in class or in the notes he uploads, will get poor grades.***

4. First and Final Essays. The aim of the two essays is that you engage profoundly with one or more topics of the class *through the development of a sound argument*. Essays must be *typed* and uploaded to Blackboard as *.doc or .pdf* files in the appropriate column of the Assignments section in the date and time they are due. Essays should be *three pages long, double-spaced*, and written in a word processor using a *12-font size and 1-inch margins*. You should choose an essay topic from a list of selected prompts that will be provided by the instructor through Blackboard in due course.

The grading of the essays will be based on: the (1) correct understanding of class materials; (2) the development of a coherent argument (with a thesis, a body, and a conclusion); and (3) the use of imagination and creativity. Any citation style can be used as long as it is consistent throughout the whole work.

5. Late Submission Policies. No late submissions are allowed in this class except if unforeseen extenuating circumstances (*e.g.* medical, legal, family, athletic, etc.) arise. If you need an extension due to any of the foregoing circumstances, *it is your responsibility to contact the Instructor in advance* to ask for an extension. For any late submission case, there will be a 10% daily deduction in your grade.

Grading Equivalents:

Grade	Points	Notations	Grade	Points	Notations
A+	97.1– 100	(outstanding)	C+	77.5 – 79.9	(satisfactory)
A	93 – 97	(excellent)	C	73 – 77.4	(below satisfactory)
A-	90 – 92.9	(very good)	C-	70 – 72.9	(below satisfactory)
B+	87.5 – 89.9	(above good)	D+	67.5 – 69.9	(inferior)
B	83 – 87.4	(good)	D	63 – 67.4	(inferior)
B-	80 – 82.9	(approaching good)	D-	60 – 62.9	(inferior)
			F	59.9 or less	(unsatisfactory)

III. Required Readings. All required articles, book chapters, and videos listed below will be provided on Blackboard or through syllabus links.

IV. Course Schedule (subject to changes if necessary)

Date	Topic	Reading/Video to Complete Before Class
Week 1: F 9/2	Introduction to the Course	<u>Friday:</u> Syllabus
Week 2: M 9/5 – F 9/9	The Neolithic Revolution: Anthropocentrism, Private Property, and Agriculture	<p><u>Monday:</u> No class (Labor Day)</p> <p><u>Wednesday:</u> Engels, F. (1950 [1876]). <i>The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man</i> (pp: 7; 16-22).</p> <p><u>Friday:</u> (1) Cole, S. (1961). <i>The Neolithic Revolution</i>. Preface, Introduction, Chapters 1-4.</p>
Week 3: M 9/12 – F 9/16	Capitalism and the Environment	<p><u>Monday:</u> Magdoff, F. & J. B. Foster. (2010). What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism. <i>Monthly Review</i>, 61(10): 1-30. (Read pages 1-14).</p> <p><u>Wednesday:</u> Magdoff, F. & J. B. Foster. (2010). What Every Environmentalist Needs to Know About Capitalism. <i>Monthly Review</i>, 61(10): 1-30. (Read pages 15-30).</p> <p><u>Friday:</u> See film “Six Degrees Could Change the World”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EU5tUY3W3WI</p>
Week 4: M 9/19 – F 9/23	The Ecological Rift and Ecological Paradoxes	<p><u>Monday:</u> Foster, J.B. (2013). Marx and the Rift in the Universal Metabolism of Nature. <i>Monthly Review</i>, 65(7): 1–19.</p> <p><u>Wednesday:</u> Foster, J.B., B. Clark, & R. York. (2010). “The Paradox of Wealth.” In <i>The Ecological Rift</i> (pp. 53-72).</p> <p><u>Friday:</u> Foster, J.B., B. Clark, & R. York. (2010). “The Return of the Jevons Paradox.” In <i>The Ecological Rift</i> (pp. 169-181).</p>
Week 5: M 9/26 – F 9/30	Facing the Anthropocene	<p><u>Monday:</u> Steffen, W., J. Grinevald, P. Crutzen & J. McNeill. (2011). The Anthropocene: conceptual and historical perspectives. <i>Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society</i>, 369(1938): 842-867.</p> <p><u>Wednesday:</u> Angus, I. (2016). <i>Facing the Anthropocene. Fossil Capitalism and the crisis of the Earth System</i> (pp. 25-47).</p> <p><u>Friday:</u> Foster, J.B. (2022). <i>Capitalism in the Anthropocene: Ecological Ruin or Ecological Revolution</i>. Introduction.</p>

Week 6: M 10/3 – F 10/7	“Biocides,” the fertilizer treadmill, and multi-resistant bacteria	<p>Monday: (1) Rachel, C. (1952). “Remarks at the Acceptance of the National Book Award for Nonfiction.” In <i>Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson</i>.</p> <p>(2) Rachel, C. (1962). <i>Silent Spring</i>, chapter 1, “A Fable for Tomorrow,” chapter 2, “The Obligation to Endure,” chapter 8, “And No Birds Sing,” and chapter 17, “The Other Road.”</p> <p>Wednesday: “A Sense of Wonder”, a portrait of Rachel Carson’s life (Film on reserve at the library).</p> <p>Friday: Angus, I. (2019). Superbugs in the Anthropocene: A Profit-Driven Plague. <i>Monthly Review</i>, 71(2): 1-28.</p>
Week 7: M 10/10 – F 10/14	Cars and Cities	<p>Monday: Mugenyi, B. & Y. Engler. (2011). <i>Stop signs: cars and capitalism on the road to economic, social and ecological decay</i>. “Preface,” chapter 12: “Behind the wheel it’s me, myself and I – Portland,” chapter 18: “An industry’s power,” chapter 21: “Creating a market,” chapter 26: “Honk if you hate cars.”</p> <p>Wednesday: Surface Transportation Policy Partnership, “High Mileage Moms” (2002).</p> <p>Friday: See film “Taken for a Ride”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-I8GDklsN4</p>
Week 8: M 10/17 – F 10/21	FALL BREAK	NO CLASSES
Week 9: M 10/24 – F 10/28	The Myth of Consumer Sovereignty and the Global Consumer Trap	<p>Monday: Marx, K. (1857). “Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy.” pp. 1-20. Fragment</p> <p>Wednesday: Dawson, M. (2005). <i>The Consumer Trap: Big Business Marketing in American Life</i> (pp. 1-15; 132-54; 169-74).</p> <p>Friday: See films: “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse” and “The Lightbulb Conspiracy”</p>
Week 10: M 10/31 – F 11/4	Ecology and Power	<p>Monday: Chapter 7, Manza</p> <p>Wednesday: Chapter 20, Manza</p> <p>Friday: The Guano Trade in 19th-century Peru (no reading)</p>
Week 11: M 11/7 – F 11/11	Environmental Justice	<p>Monday: Park, A. (2009). <i>Everybody’s Movement: Environmental Justice and Climate Change</i> (pp 3-41).</p> <p>Wednesday: Mohai, P., D. Pellow, & J.T. Roberts. (2009). <i>Environmental Justice. Annual Review of Environment and Resources</i>, 34: 405-430.</p> <p>Friday: See film “A Fierce Green Fire”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_C8Tx3gdM5M</p>
Week 12: M 11/14 – F 11/18	The Indigenous and the Environment	<p>Monday: Chief Seattle’s letter</p> <p>Wednesday: Norgaard, Kari M. 2019. <i>Salmon and acorns feed our people</i>. Introduction.</p>

		Friday: Sixth Declaration of the Selva Lacandona: https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/sdsl-en/
Week 13: M 11/21 – F 11/25	Agriculture and Global Food Systems	<p>Monday: Lappé, Frances Moore, and Joseph Collins. 2015. <i>World Hunger: 10 Myths</i>. Introduction and Chapter 1 (myth 1).</p> <p>Wednesday: (1) Marx, K. 1867. <i>Capital</i>, p. 636-38.</p> <p>(2) Lewontin, Richard C., and Richard Levins. 2007. “The Maturing of Capitalist Agriculture: Farmer as Proletarian.” In <i>Biology Under the Influence: Dialectical Essays on Ecology, Agriculture, and Health</i>.</p> <p>Friday: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)</p>
Week 14: M 11/28 – F 12/2	What is to be Done? Part I	<p>Monday: (1) Greta Thunberg and the youth Climate Movement. Selected Speeches: “Almost Everything is Black and White,” “Prove Me Wrong,” “Our House is On Fire,” “I’m Too Young to Do This,” “A Strange World,” “Can You Hear Me?”</p> <p>(2) Greta Thunberg’s Interview: “I’m a realist. I see facts”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M9_95eZr7w&t=2s</p> <p>Wednesday: Betancourt, M. (2020). The effect of Cuban agroecology in mitigating the metabolic rift: A quantitative approach to Latin American food production. <i>Global Environmental Change</i>, 63: 1-10.</p> <p>Friday: See film “Disruption”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uWPj6CxtsGo</p>
Week 15: M 12/5 – F 12/9	What is to be Done? Part II	<p>Monday: Angus, <i>Facing the Anthropocene</i>, pp. 189-223</p> <p>Wednesday: Foster, Clark, and York, <i>The Ecological Rift</i>, pp. 423-42</p> <p>Friday: Film: Carl Sagan’s <i>Cosmos: A Personal Voyage</i>, Episode 13, “Who Speaks for the Earth?”: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jp9IVYaMRbY</p>
Week 16: M 12/12 – F 12/16	Conclusion	<p>Monday: Course recapitulation</p> <p>Wednesday: NO CLASS</p> <p>Friday: NO CLASS</p>

Content Warning. Some sources might contain subjects that aggravate past or present trauma. Please care for yourself as necessary. It is impossible to forecast all content that might be difficult for students to encounter. Use your best judgement, and contact me as needed.

V. Honor Code/Academic Honesty

Students are expected to follow the Oberlin College Honor Code (<https://www.oberlin.edu/dean-of-students/student-conduct/academic-integrity>). Academic misconduct, plagiarism, fabrication, and cheating are not acceptable in this class. If a student is uncertain about what constitutes academic misconduct, it is her/his obligation to ask for clarification. Students will not receive credit for any assignment violating these expectations. In addition, remember that you must write and sign on each assignment the following official honor code pledge: “I have adhered to the honor code on this assignment.”

VI. Accessibility

Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You are also encouraged to contact the Office for Disability and Access (<https://www.oberlin.edu/accessibility-services>). If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: (1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Resources office in the Center for Student Success to determine the accommodations you need; and (2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs. I am committed to working with you, so do not hesitate to come talk with me.

VII. Classroom Behavior and Expectations

The Instructor is approaching this course with empathy and attentiveness to the challenges facing students during the extraordinary context of the still ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The College’s COVID-19-related policies can be found here: <https://www.oberlin.edu/obiesafe>. Students should at all times be attentive to and abide by the Oberlin College’s COVID-19 policies. As per the College’s guidelines, face coverings will be required indoors for students, staff, and faculty from, at least, August 28 through September 10. This includes our classroom. During that period, please come to class with a KN95 or N95 mask that covers both your mouth and nose. In addition, if you have even mild symptoms that you suspect could be due to COVID, please do not come to class. You are welcome to keep using face coverings throughout the semester.

All students will be treated with respect in this course. This course is supposed to spark lively discussions on a diverse set of viewpoints and social and environmental conditions. Everyone in the course is expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class, including in our email and Blackboard interaction. If a hurtful or inappropriate comment is made, the Instructor will handle it according to relevant course and College policy. In addition, students are expected to be on time for class. Students are expected to come to class prepared (*i.e.* having read the assignment(s) and ready to engage in class discussion). Eating will not be allowed in class (drinking plain water is acceptable). Students will not be allowed to look at their cell phones while in class, unless if due to a personal emergency or requested by the Instructor for class purposes. The Instructor strongly encourages the use of pen and paper, as opposed to electronic devices, to take notes while in class, although the use of electronic devices for this purpose is not forbidden.