

Sociology 3980, 2012-13

THE SOCIOLOGY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Weds 12:00-3:00, York Hall B204

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course website: <https://moodle2012.glendon.yorku.ca>

**THE COURSE WEBSITE IS THE UP TO DATE AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE.
CHECK THE WEBSITE REGULARLY. THERE WILL BE CHANGES.**

READINGS – see course website by weeks for additional and recommended readings

Jacques, Peter J., Dunlap, Riley E. and Freeman, Mark. 2008. “The organisation of denial: Conservative think tanks and environmental skepticism,” *Environmental Politics* 17:3, 349 - 385. On course website.

Guha, Ramachandra. 2000. *Environmentalism; a global history*. New York: Longman.

Bell, Michael Mayerfeld. 2012. *An invitation to environmental sociology, 4th edition*. Thousand Oaks, California, Sage.

Davis, Mike, “Planet of Slums.” 2004. *New Left Review* 26:5-34. On course website.
Sustainable Development Timeline, 2012. International Institute for Sustainable Development. Winnipeg. Download from <http://www.iisd.org/publications/pub.aspx?pno=764>

“What is a social movements?” (definitions)

<http://www.oup.com/uk/orc/bin/9780199574971/01student/additional/ch16/01/>

Global Witness. 2012. *A hidden crisis?* <http://www.globalwitness.org/library/survey-finds-sharp-rise-killings-over-land-and-forests-rio-talks-open>

ON-LINE VIDEOS

CBC, The Fifth Estate. 2006/7. “The Denial Machine.”

<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=522784499045867811>

The Story of Stuff. storyofstuff.com

CBC, The Nature of Things. 2011. “Tipping Point”

http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The_Nature_of_Things/1242300217/ID=1769597772

WEB-SITES see course website and presentation list by weeks for additional websites

Al Gore. <http://www.algore.com/> + link to the climate reality project

Desmog blog. <http://www.desmogblog.com>

Heartland Institute.

<http://heartland.org/> home page for context,

<http://news.heartland.org/climate-change-weekly> climate change page.

<http://heartland.org/issues/environment> energy and environment page

Institute for Research and Innovation in Sustainability (York University). <http://iris.yorku.ca>

The Glendon Campus Project. <http://glendon.iris.yorku.ca/>

Additional on-line sources:

Environmental History Timeline

<http://www.radford.edu/wkovarik/envhist/index.html>

State of the World, Vital Signs and reports. Worldwatch Institute. <http://www.worldwatch.org/>

“There are no environmental problems, only problems with the environment caused by people.”

INTRODUCTION

This course focuses on the ways in which the routines of daily life and the social relations in which these routines are embedded are the background to the world environmental crisis. Topics covered include interpretations of the human-nature relationship, environmentalism as a social movement, human needs and social consumption standards, the economics of production, population growth, development and under-development, and proposals for transformation to an ecologically responsible way of life.

This third year sociology course does not have prerequisites. However, it does require students to use academic skills appropriate for the social sciences. These skills include reading for understanding, critical reading, identifying the structure of an argument, appropriately documenting sources, finding information, responding thoughtfully to information, systematic note taking, and writing skills – outlining, sentence structure, clearly saying what you mean.

Drinks, but not food, are permitted in the classroom. Eat lunch; bring a healthy snack – fruit, nuts – for the break.

Important information for students regarding the Ethics Review process, Access/Disability, Academic Honesty/Integrity, Student Conduct, and Religious Observance Days is available on: http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/senate_cte_main_pages/ccas.htm

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments and due dates. Late paper penalty: 5% for each week or part of a week, max 30%.

Class presentation and exploratory research paper	Variable	15
Short responses to class presentations	Variable	5
essay 1 – social construction	September 26	10
essay 2 – climate change denial	October 10	10
essay 3 – Bottom Up change, Top Down change	October 24	10
essay 4 – Glendon campus	November 7	10
essay 5 – environmentalism, 1st wave	November 28	10
essay 6 – consumption and production	January 23	10
essay 7 – population and development	February 27	10
Final exam	Exam week	10
		100

Consistent Attendance and participation can raise a marginal average (e.g., 74, B to 75, B+).

ESSAYS

Each of the following essays should be 3-5 pages, including references. Submitted by email: schoenfe@yorku.ca.

Essay 1. Bell argues that we socially construct “the environment” as something that people dominate and something that people protect. How, in chapters 6 and 7, does Bell explain these two different views? Pay particular attention to the influence of religion, individualism, gender, “the natural conscience,” social status, “postmaterialism,” “paradigm shifts,” “ecological

modernization” and democracy. Which of these factors is most important to you personally? Why? Are there other factors that **you** think help to explain how people construct the environment in different ways?

Essay 2. A. Explain how the article on conservative think-tanks uses a social constructionist perspective to understand policy on global warming. B. Compare “An Inconvenient Truth,” “The Denial Machine,” the environment page of the Heartland Institute, and desmog.blog as social constructions of the environmental crisis. Who is crafting the message? What is their social location and what are their interests? What information is highlighted? What information is left out?

Essay 3. A. What we believe about environmental issues depends on the groups we belong to and the sources of information we trust. Consequently, part of the agenda for environmentalists is changing beliefs that are barriers to social change. Use the example of the Practical Farmers of Iowa (PFI) to show how it works to change the belief in industrial farming to the belief in sustainable farming. Explain 1) how members of PFI changed from believing in one type of farming to believing in another (hint: “phenomenological rupture”), and 2) the **organizational activities** and **social supports** that sustain trust in the transition to sustainable farming.

B. Bell recommends “virtual environmentalism” as a way of getting past the A-B split. He describes virtual environmentalism as behaving in ways that are environmentally responsible because they are the “cheapest, most convenient, and most enjoyable things to do.” 1) Identify, from chapter 11 and your own life experience, 4 examples of “virtual environmentalism” **already in place** (recycling instead of throwing everything in the trash is one example). 2) Identify, from your own ideas about how social practices could be made more environmentally responsible, 4 examples of top down changes **not now part of everyday practice** that could be introduced and explain how they would change everyday life. 3) What strategies could be used to change government policy to implement these changes?

Essay 4. The Glendon campus is a socially constructed landscape. What individuals and groups have shaped this landscape? What has been the influence of each? What groups are now influencing how our campus may change in the future?

Essay 5. How does each perspective in the first wave of environmentalism construct nature, diagnose the problem in human / nature relationships, propose solutions to those problems and organize social action to implement those solutions? Identify legacies of each that we can see in current social practices.

Essay 6. What are the treadmills of **consumption** and **production**? How do social critics argue that each one leads to social problems? How do social critics argue that each one jeopardizes our relationship with nature? Include health effects.

Essay 7. Some people argue that population growth is the biggest threat to a balance between humans and nature. Other people argue that the world economic system keeps poor countries poor, requiring poor people to seek security through family relationships. **Explain** both arguments. **Evaluate** both arguments.

Criteria for grading essays: clear and logical organization of ideas, appropriate and accurate use of information and concepts, clear writing (sentence structure, paragraph separation, spelling, and related writing skills), evidence of thinking for yourself rather than simply repeating back or paraphrasing what you’ve read or heard (i.e., insight, originality, and creativity). On format see the “General Style Guide and Tips for Academic Essays” on the course website.

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH PAPERS (8-10 PAGES), CLASS PRESENTATIONS (15 MINUTES) AND RESPONSES TO CLASS PRESENTATIONS (ONE PARAGRAPH)

Research Papers, topic to be selected by Sept. 19, are expected to explicitly relate an organization or individual to themes and readings in the course, use multiple sources, and have reference notes and bibliographies. Scan the flow of the course and submit choices by email. Papers and presentations should include more than what is found on an organization's website. Presentation dates vary. Research papers are due (by email) 2 weeks after the class presentation.

Class presentations should not cover all that is in the paper. Post outline or visual aids on course website and also submit them by email. Keep in mind that an important goal of a presentation is to keep other students involved with something interesting to think about. Outline, use visuals, ask the class questions. Hint: Often it helps to personalize: what were you curious about that led you to research this organization or person? Was your question answered or not?

Outline for class presentation and paper

For an organization: How is the organization connected to this week's readings? When, how and why did the organization come into existence? What are its mission and goals? What **activities** (e.g., letter writing campaigns, publishing, civil disobedience, fundraising) does it engage in to accomplish its goals? Give special attention to conflict. Environmental organizations struggle against adversaries. Who are they and what are they fighting about? How do they conduct their struggle? Place the organization in the context of Guha's discussion of different types of environmentalism. Place the organization in the context of the IISD sustainable development timeline: what environmental issues were high profile when this organization was formed? How has it changed over time?

For individuals: How is the individual connected to this week's readings? Give a brief biography. Place this individual in the context of Guha's discussion of different types of environmentalism and the IISD sustainable development timeline. Did this individual start an organization? Is there some other kind of legacy? What kinds of environmental conflicts and controversies is /was this person engaged in? Who are / were his / her opponents? Give an example of how she / he works(ed) to change the relationship between people and nature.

Responses to class presentations: Each student is expected within a week of each presentation to submit a short response, no more than half a page, answering two questions. 1) The most interesting thing you learned from the presentation. 2) What the presentation made you think about (e.g., a current event, a life-style choice).

FINAL EXAM. Guha closes his book, published in 2000, with a very short chapter on environmentalism as a global issue. Since then the social construction of environmental issues as global has become even more pronounced. 1) Describe the transnational network of civil society organizations and intergovernmental organizations that socially construct environmental issues and respond. 2) What are your own thoughts on both how the globalization of environmental concerns makes mobilization more difficult and also what strategies could be used to connect global environmental issues to individual life choices. Use both texts books – there is useful material on this in the Bell text – as well as class presentations and other course materials.

Date	Topic	Readings, etc.	Presentations	assignments
Sept 5	Introduction	Bell. Ch. 1. After “An Inconvenient Truth”		
Sept 12	The environmental crisis: a social constructionist theme.	Bell, ch. 6		Select presentation topic
Sept 19	The environmental crisis: a social constructionist theme.	Bell, ch. 7 IISD sustainable development timeline	1. International Institute for Sustainable Development 2. Worldwatch Institute	Select presentation topic
Sept 26	Library workshop: <i>begins 1:30.</i>			essay 1 due
Oct 3	Information and disinformation about climate	Jacques, Dunlap and Freeman, “The organisation of denial: Conservative think tanks and environmental skepticism” “The Denial Machine” (CBC) Desmogblog.com Heartland Institute	3. Heartland Institute http://heartland.org/ 4. Desmog blog http://www.desmogblog.com	
Oct 10	Mobilizing the Ecological Society	Bell ch. 10	5. Alternatives Journal 6. Corporate Knights 7. Bioneers 8. Jane Godall Institute / Roots and Shoots 9. The Nature of Things	essay 2 due
Oct 17	Governing the Ecological Society	Bell ch. 11	10. Curitiba: a sustainable city	
Oct 24	Glendon Campus and Campus walk	http://glendon.iris.yorku.ca/ plus course website links		essay 3 due
Oct 31	no class	York co-curricular day		
Nov 7	The environmental movement: first wave and its legacy – Back to the Land & Scientific Conservation	Guha pt 1, ch. 1, 2& 3	11. Ghandi on villages 12. Fellowship for Intentional Community (fic.ic.org/ under “directory,” go to map, choose example) 13. Federal government regulation: 1) natural resources, 2) fisheries and oceans, 3) environment, 4) aboriginal affairs and northern development	essay 4 due
Nov 14	The environmental	Guha pt 1, ch. 3	14. http://350.org/	

	movement: first wave and its legacy – Scientific Conservation	Time Permitting: CBC, The nature of things, “Tipping Point” http://www.cbc.ca/video/#/Shows/The_Nature_of_Things/1242300217/ID=1769597772	15. Sierra Club Dirty Fuels Campaign http://www.sierraclub.org/dirtyfuels/	
Nov 21	The environmental movement: first wave and its legacy – the wilderness ideal & urban environmentalism	Guha pt 1, ch. 4, “afterward”, Davis, “Planet of Slums”	16. John Muir, 17. Sierra Club (US), 18. Parks Canada, 19. Nature Conservancy (US / Canada) 20. International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUNC Red List 21. TRCA 22. Harbord Village Neighborhood Association	
Nov 28	Contemporary environmentalism: poisons and shortages	Guha pt 2, “prologue,” ch. 5 IISD timeline Bell, ch 5	23. Rachel Carson 24. Love Canal	essay 5 due
January 9	Contemporary environmentalism: Consumption and Production	Bell, ch. 2 & 3 storyofstuff.com	25. Story of stuff project storyofstuff.com 26. Center for the New American Dream. 27. Canadian Earth Institute (course on voluntary simplicity) http://www.canadianearthinstitute.org/voluntary-simplicity.php	
January 16	Contemporary environmentalism: Consumption and Production	Bell, ch. 2 & 3		
January 23	Contemporary environmentalism: environmental justice	Guha pt 2, ch. 5 Bell. Ch. 5 IISD timeline	28. Eco-Justice [Canada] 29. Saxe law 30. International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal 31. Grassy Narrows	Essay 6 due
January 30	Contemporary environmentalism: southern	Guha pt 2. Ch. 6 Global Witness. <i>A hidden crisis?</i>	32. Goldman Prize 33. Global Witness 34. Wangari Maathai	

	environmentalism	IISD timeline		
February 6	Contemporary environmentalism: southern environmentalism	Guha pt 2. ch. 6 IISD timeline Bell, ch. 4	35. Population Institute 36. United Nations Population Fund 37. Human Development Index	
February 13	Contemporary environmentalism: southern environmentalism	Guha pt 2 IISD timeline, ch. 6 Bell, ch. 4		
February 20	READING WEEK			
February 27	Contemporary environmentalism: global environmentalism – NGOs, UN	Guha pt 2, ch. 5 & 8 IISD timeline	38. Friends of the Earth International 39. Greenpeace International 40. WWF International	essay 7 due
March 6	Contemporary environmentalism: global environmentalism	Guha pt 2, ch. 5 & 8 IISD timeline	41. UNEP 42. Worldwatch Institute	
Mar 13	Contemporary environmentalism: global environmentalism / sustainable development	Guha pt 2 IISD timeline Bell, ch. 4	43. UN Commission on Sustainable Development 44. International Institute for Sustainable Development 45. David Suzuki Foundation 46. Forestry Stewardship Council	
Mar 20	Contemporary environmentalism: global environmentalism / climate change	Guha pt 2 IISD timeline	47. UNFCCC 48. IPCC	
Mar 27	NO CLASS			
Apr 3	Time permitting: Contemporary Canadian Environmentalism and global environmentalism		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canadian mining companies overseas • Water extraction • Toxic waste • Renewable Energy • Sustainable cities 	