GEO 103
America and the Global Environment

Fall 2009
Lectures: Monday and Wednesday,
10:35-11:30
Hall of Languages 114

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“It may seem impossible to imagine that a technologically advanced society could choose, in essence, to destroy itself, but that is what we are now in process of doing.”

-- Elizabeth Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*

Overview
“We live in the twenty-first century, but we live with the twentieth century,” writes James G. Speth, author of *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment*. During the last century, world population increased by three times, energy use by 15 times, and economic output by 12 times. As Speth says, we live with the consequences of this tumultuous period. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the world is facing a number of new environmental challenges: human-induced global warming, the destruction of many of the world’s fisheries, and the loss of biodiversity. Environmental issues are on the global agenda as never before. Drastic, human-induced environmental change is now so common that the environmental historian J. R. McNeill calls the past 100 years the “regime of perpetual disturbance.” We regard such changes as normal. Yet in the longer frame of human history, they are anything but ordinary.

GEO 103 will introduce you to some of the ways people have modified the environment over the past century and examine how societies have attempted to cope with environmental problems. To provide some structure to this endeavor, the course is divided into four sections. First, we will examine a few of the drivers of environmental change over the past one hundred years. Second, you will learn about environmental politics throughout the past century to see how Americans have sought to deal with environmental challenges in the past. Third, we will use the concepts from these two sections to examine some of the leading environmental problems facing the world today: changing energy use and global climate change, the use and management of water and aquatic resources, and the protection of endangered species and biodiversity. Finally, we will end the course by exploring some of ways governments and individuals have recently sought to direct our society along a sustainable path.
Learning Outcomes
By the end of this course, you will:
- understand the social, economic, political, and ecological dimensions of some of today’s most pressing environmental issues, particularly global warming.
- identify the key drivers of environmental change over the past century.
- learn key concepts in environmental geography and environmental history.
- receive the tools necessary to become an ‘environmental citizen.’ That is, someone who is able to understand the social and natural aspects of environmental issues, make intelligent suggestions on their resolution, and is able to engage in the political process.

Course Etiquette
What to expect from your professor and TAs:
- provocative and challenging lectures.
- finishing lectures and recitation sections on time.
- a willingness to listen to and learn from you.
- prompt and fair grading of your assignments.
- timely responses to your questions and comments.

What we expect from you:
- being prepared for class, arriving on time, and not engaging in disruptive behavior. You can sleep, read the newspaper, talk to friends, and send text messages in the twenty-three hours each day when you are not in this class.
- completing the readings and preparing questions and comments for recitation sections
- a willingness to listen and learn from your instructors and your classmates.

Evaluation
10% Discussion Attendance and Participation
10% Reading Quizzes (4 or 5)
30% Short essays (2)
25% First Exam
25% Second Exam

Recitation Section Meeting Times and Locations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M002</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9:30-10:25</td>
<td>Eggers 111</td>
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<tr>
<td>M003</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>11:40-12:35</td>
<td>Maxwell 108</td>
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<td>M004</td>
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<td>3:30-4:25</td>
<td>SOM 001</td>
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Recitation Sections
Recitation sections are an essential part of the course. They are designed to complement the assigned readings and the lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays. Barbara Green, a teaching assistant and graduate student from the Geography Department, will facilitate these sections. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings and to participate in the discussion.

To assist you with this material, I will post 3 or 4 questions on the GEO 103 Blackboard web site under the heading ‘Reading Questions.’ You should keep these questions in mind as you do the assigned readings. Discussions in sections will cover them and other topics.
Some additional questions you should ask while doing the readings:

- What are the key points of the text? What are the implications of these ideas?
- What sort of evidence does the author provide to make his or her argument? Do you find the evidence convincing?
- Are there aspects of the readings that you do not understand? If so, discussion groups are an ideal place to seek clarification. Chances are if you find something confusing, others students probably do as well.

To make sure everyone is keeping up with the readings, we will give four or five reading quizzes in the recitation sections at various points throughout the term. We will not announce these quizzes in advance. Hint: some of the reading questions on the GEO 103 Blackboard site might also become quiz questions.

If you miss a quiz, you must turn in a two-page paper based on the reading that includes the following: 1) a summary of the key argument, 2) summary of the main points, 3) a personal response or comment on the material. This is due in recitation the week following the missed quiz.

Barbara and I will discuss the criteria for determining your recitation grade in more detail during the first couple weeks of class.

**Short Essays**

I will assign two 3-4 page writing assignments in the course. One will be due October 5th; the other on November 23rd. Approximately two weeks before these papers are due, I will distribute handouts explaining the essay topics and my expectations in further detail.

**Academic Integrity**

Cheating in any form will not be tolerated, nor is assisting someone to cheat. The submission of any work in this class is taken as a guarantee that the thoughts and expressions are the student’s own unless properly cited. Breaking this policy on exams, essays, or other assignments will, at a minimum, result in a failing grade for an assignment and likely a failing grade for the course. For more information, see the student section of the university’s web site about academic integrity (http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/).

This is what the university obliges me to tell you. This is my own simple take on the matter: plagiarize a paper or cheat on an exam and you will fail. Period. Other professors may let issues of academic dishonesty slide or let you off with a warning. *I am not one of those professors.*

**Student Athletes**

Many of you are student athletes. Athletics is an important part your time in college, and I will do my best to accommodate your travel schedules.

Typically, your coaches or another official associated with the team or athletic department will give you a letter explaining your status and a list of your away games. Once you receive this material, I want you to do two things: give me and your TA a copy. If you are missing a recitation section because of a game, clear this with your TA, not me.

**Students with Disabilities**

Syracuse University has a commitment to aiding students with disabilities. If you have disability that will affect your ability to succeed in this course, please let me know and we will work out an
arrangement in consultation with SU’s Office of Disability Service to ensure that you can complete assigned readings, attend lectures, and finish assignments.

H1N1 Virus (aka ‘swine flu’)
Many of you have heard about the H1N1 flu virus, commonly known as swine flu. This strain of the virus first appeared in the United States last spring. At that time, H1N1 infected relatively few Americans, but this fall, the U.S. Center for Disease Control believes it is possible for a large percentage of Americans to become infected. People under the age of twenty-four (which includes most of you in this class) are especially vulnerable.

In most cases, those who contract the illness have symptoms similar to the ones caused by the normal seasonal flu with which you are all familiar. However, this strain appears much easier to transmit than other flu viruses. Because of this, if you have flu symptoms such as a fever (above 100 degrees F.) or the chills, do not come to class. Remain away from class until you are 24-hours without a fever. Contact me via email or phone to let me know you are ill. We can arrange for you to get material missed in lectures and to make-up missed assignments.

Required Texts
** all of these texts are available at the SU Bookstore, Schine Student Center.

and

GEO 103 Course Reader/Packer (a collection of readings) #20093-1012
➢ this is available at The Copy Center in the Marshall Square Mall.

Course Schedule
(CR) – Course Reader/Packet

Week One Introduction
Mon., 8/31 Introduction

Wed., 9/2 The Regime of Perpetual Disturbance (or Life in the Anthropocene)


Insatiable Appetite: Population, Consumption, Technology and the Environment

Week Two
Mon., 9/7 ** Labor Day. No class **

Wed., 9/9 Population


Week Three
Mon., 9/14 The Population Debate
Wed., 9/16 Consumption and Waste


Activity: Ecological Footprint Quiz by Redesigning Progress
Complete the exercise on-line: http://www.myfootprint.org/. After completing it, print or write down the quiz results. You will hand in your results during the recitation section.

A (Brief) History of American Environmental Politics

Week Four
Mon., 9/21 *** No Class. Eid ul-Fitr ***
Wed., 9/23 Progressive Conservation, New Deal Conservation


Week Five
Mon., 9/28 *** No Class. Yom Kippur ***
Wed., 9/30 Environmentalism

Recitation Readings:  Rachel Carson, “I. A Fable for Tomorrow” and “II. The Obligation to Endure” in Silent Spring, 1962, (CR).


Geographies of Energy and Climate Change

Week Six
Mon. 10/5  Energy History
**1st short paper due**

Wed., 10/7  Blood and Oil: Geopolitics of Energy


Recitation Readings:
   The Energy Problem: Address to the Nation, 1977
   The Carter Doctrine: State of the Union Address, 1980 (pp. 124-129)

Part 5: The Legacy of the Oil Crisis, (pp. 134-135)
31. National Security Council, Oil and National Security Interests, 1990 (pp. 137-139)

32. The SUV: Master or Monster of the Road?, 1999 (pp. 140-143)

Week Seven
Mon., 10/12  Oil Frontiers: North Slope of Alaska and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR)

Wed., 10/14  Air Pollution: Local and Regional Effects


Recitation Readings:  **None. Review for the first exam. Bring your lecture notes!**
Week Eight
Mon., 10/19   **First Exam**

Wed., 10/21  Science of Climate Change

Course Readings: Dire Predictions, 10-29, 32-47.

Recitation Readings: Kolbert, Field Notes from a Catastrophe, Preface and Chapters 1-3 (p.1-66).

Activity: Calculate your carbon footprint on-line (I will give you the link in class). After completing it, print or write down the quiz results. You will hand in the results during the recitation section.

Week Eight
Mon. 10/26  Science of Climate Change (cont.)

Wed. 10/28  Politics of Climate Change in the US
            Video: Hot Politics (PBS Frontline Episode)


Recitation Readings: Kolbert, Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate
                      Chapters 7-8, 10 (p. 131-170, 181-187)

Week Nine
Mon. 11/2   A Different Planet?: Averting Catastrophic Climate Change

Water: Rivers, Wetlands, and Oceans

Wed. 11/4   Fouling the Waters: Water Pollution


Recitation Readings:

Week Ten
Mon. 11/9   Fragile Oasis? Water in the Western United States

Wed. 11/11  California’s Salton Sea
            Video: Plagues & Pleasures on the Salton Sea

Recitation Readings: “Quenching Las Vegas’ Thirst, Las Vegas Sun
* Read all five newspaper articles from this series and watch the accompanying videos.

Week Eleven
Mon., 11/16 Where Land and Water Meet: Wetlands in the U.S.
Wed., 11/18 Oceans in Crisis

Course Readings: None. Work on your second paper, which is due next week.

Recitation Readings: Julia Whitty, “The Fate of the Ocean,” Mother Jones (March/April 2006), (CR)

The Future of Life: Biodiversity and Endangered Species
Week Twelve
Mon., 11/23 The 6th Great Extinction
** 2nd short paper due**
Wed., 11/25 ** Thanksgiving Break. No Lecture or Recitation Sections. **

Week Thirteen
Mon., 11/30 Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species in the U.S.
Wed., 12/2 Biodiversity and Environmental Justice in the Developing World


The Geography of (Un)Natural Disasters
Week Fourteen
Wed., 12/2 Ghost City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans

Course Readings: None.


Hope in a Changing World – The Elusive Quest for Sustainability

**Week Fifteen**

Mon., 12/7   Searching for Sustainability in a ‘Light-Green Society’

Wed., 12/9   Reasons for Hope


*Recitation Readings:* **None. Review for the second exam. Bring your lecture notes!**

Mon., 12/14  **Second Exam**