

GEO 103

Environment and Society

Spring 2017
Hall of Languages 107

Course Instructor

Professor: Bob Wilson

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Office Hours: Fridays, 1:00-2:30pm *or* by appointment

Teaching Assistants

Teaching Assistant: Stephen Przybylinski

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Teaching Assistant: Maddy Hamlin

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:30-4:30 *or* by appointment

“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-and-a-half 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 second 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. We will explore some of the leading theories of what the root causes of these environmental changes are as well as explore issues in-depth such as food and agriculture, wildlife and endangered species, and most of all, climate change.

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 climate change.

- 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 scientific aspects of environmental issues, can offer 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 discussion 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, text, check Instagram/Snapchat, and talk with friends, etc. in the twenty-three hours each day when you are not in this class. ☺
- Completing the readings and preparing questions and comments for discussion sections.
- A willingness to listen to 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 |

Discussion Section Meeting Times and Locations

| | | | |
|--------|----|---------------|-------------------------|
| Sec. 2 | Th | | |
| Sec. 3 | Th | | |
| Sec. 4 | F | 12:45-1:40pm | Maxwell 108 |
| Sec. 5 | F | 10:35-11:30am | Crouse-Hinds 020 |
| Sec. 6 | F | 9:30-10:25am | Eggers 111 |
| Sec. 7 | F | 12:45-1:40pm | HB Crouse 209 (on quad) |

Discussion Sections, Participation, and Quizzes

Discussion sections are an essential part of the course. They are designed to complement the assigned readings and the lectures on Mondays and Wednesdays. Your teaching assistants Stephen Przybylinski and Maddy Hamlin, 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. They will help you focus on key ideas, argument, etc.

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 discussion 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 (or readings) that includes the following: 1) a summary of the key argument(s), 2) summary of the main points, 3) a personal response or comment on the material. *This is due in discussion section the week following the missed quiz.* If you do not turn in the short paper, you will get a zero on the quiz.

The teaching assistants will discuss the criteria for determining your discussion section grade in more detail when your section first meets at the beginning of the semester.

Short Essays

I will assign two 3-4 page writing assignments in the course. **The first will be due Monday, February 13th and the other on Wednesday, April 10th.** Approximately two weeks before these papers are due, I will distribute handouts explaining the essay topics and my expectations in further detail.

Laptops, Tablets, Smart Phones, and Texting

Laptops and tablets are marvelous technologies and you may use them in the class. However, in this course, *the use of laptops and tablets is a privilege not a right.* If your use of these devices becomes disruptive, I will ban you from using them in future classes.

You should use your laptop or tablet to take notes not chat, email, or surf the web. It should not impede you from paying attention and making eye contact with other students and the teaching assistant (in discussion sections). In short, these devices should be an aid to learning not a barrier.

You *may not* use your smartphones in class to text or use social media. Doing so is rude and disruptive. Also, texting students break my concentration during lecture. If you text in class, I will call you out and ask you to stop in front of your 150+ fellow students! Repeated infractions will result in significant deductions, or even a zero, on your course participation grade.

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

Some 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.

Religious Observances

Students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes if, and when, they will be observing their religious holiday(s). You may fill this out online via MySlice. When you log-on to MySlice, you (should) see a link for religious observances. Click on that and fill-out the requested material.

Required Texts

McNeill, J. R., and Peter Engelke. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Mann, Michael, and Tom Toles. *The Madhouse Effect: How Climate Change Denial Is Threatening Our Planet, Destroying Our Politics, and Driving Us Crazy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

** These texts are available at the SU Bookstore, Schine Student Center. You may, of course, find cheaper copies of these books on Amazon or through other online retailers as well as digital copies of the text for e-readers, tablets, and laptops.

Also, for most weeks, there will also be PDFs of articles and chapters on Blackboard. Check the syllabus for each week's required readings.

Course Schedule

(BB) – reading available on Blackboard

Week One

January 16 ****No class. MLK Day.****

January 18 Introduction

Readings

McNeill & Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, 1-6.

McNeill, John. "The First Hundred Thousand Years." In *The Turning Points of Environmental History*, edited by Frank Uekoetter, 13–28. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010.

(BB)

Week Two

January 23 The Planetary Experiment (or life in the Anthropocene)

January 25 Population

Readings

Ludden, Jennifer. "Should We Be Having Kids In The Age Of Climate Change?" *All Things Considered-NPR*, August 18, 2016. (BB)

Mosley, William. "A Population Remedy Is Right Here at Home." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 July 2007. (BB)

Demick, Barbara. "Judging China's One-Child Policy." *The New Yorker*, October 23, 2015. (BB)

McNeill & Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, 40-61.

Week Three

January 30 Markets and Commodities

February 1 Political Economy and the Environment

Readings

New York Times, Room for Debate, "Responsible Shoppers, but Bad Citizens?" (BB)

- Read *all 5* of the short pieces by the 'debaters' and be able to summarize their views in a couple of sentences.

Activity:

Ecological Footprint Calculator by Global Footprint

- Link to calculator available under Readings on Blackboard.
- Complete the exercise on-line. After completing it, print or write down the quiz results (# of Earths required if everyone lived like you, acres of productive land to support your lifestyle, etc.) You will hand in your results during the discussion section.

Robbins, Paul, John Hintz, and Sarah A Moore. "7: Political Economy." *Environment and Society*. 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. (BB)

- I highly (**highly**) recommend you read this article at the beginning of the week. Also, this is a key source for your first paper. It's one of the more challenging readings in the course, so read it closely and take careful notes.

Week Four

February 6 Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism in the U.S.

February 8 Environmentalism since 1980:
Conservative Backlash and Environmental Justice

Readings

Steinberg, Ted. "Can Capitalism Save the Planet? On the Origins of Green Liberalism." *Radical History Review*, no. 107 (Spring 2010). (BB)

The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, “Principles of Environmental Justice,” October 27, 1991. (BB)

“Flint’s Water Crisis Is a Blatant Example of Environmental Injustice.” *Science Codex*, January 26, 2016. (BB)

Week Five

February 13 Environmentalism in the 21st Century:
Markets, Inequality, and the Light-Green Society

****First Paper Due****

February 15 Socialism, Environment, and Authoritarian States – USSR & China

Readings

Josephson, Paul R. *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917-1989*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, 3-17. (BB)

McNeill & Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, 155-175.

Week Six

February 20 Fascism, Environment, and Authoritarian States – Germany and E. Europe

February 22 (Un)Natural Hazards

Readings

**** None. You will review for the first exam during the discussion sections. Bring your lecture notes! ****

Week Seven

February 27 **First Exam**

March 1 History of Energy

Readings

McNeill & Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, 7-40.

Week Eight

March 6 Lifeblood: Oil, America, and the Making of Car Country

March 8 Hydrofracking & Non-Fossil Fuel Energy

Readings

Plummer, Brad. “The Battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline, Explained.” *Vox*, November 29, 2016. (BB)

Purdy, Jedediah. “Environmentalism Was Once a Social-Justice Movement.” *The Atlantic*, December 7, 2016. (BB)

Editorial Board. “A False Victory at Standing Rock.” *Washington Post*, December 6, 2016. (BB)

Week Nine

March 13 ****No Class. Spring Break.****

March 15 ****No Class. Spring Break.****

Week Ten

March 20 Science of Climate Change

March 22 Dire Predictions: Consequences of Climate Change

Readings

Mann & Toles, *The Madhouse Effect*, 1-52.

McNeill & Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, 63-82.

Assignment: Climate Change: How hot will it get in my lifetime?

- I will circulate the assignment the week before it is due. (*This will count as one of your quiz grades!*)

Week Eleven

March 27 Hot Politics and Emotions & Climate Change

March 29 Hot Politics (cont.) and Climate Denialism

Readings

Mann & Toles, *The Madhouse Effect*, 53-115, 131-150.

Week Twelve

April 3 Climate Movements

April 5 City of Flows: Developing Modern Water Systems

Readings

Wilson, Robert M. "Faces of the Climate Movement." *Environmental History* 22 (1), 2017. (BB)

McNeill & Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*, 103-128.

Week Thirteen

April 10 Industrial Food Systems

**** Second Paper Due ****

April 12 Alternative Food Systems

Readings

Pollan, Michael. "The Food Movement, Rising." *The New York Review of Books*, May 10, 2010. (BB)

Desrochers, Pierre, and Hiroko Shimizu. *The Locavore's Dilemma: In Praise of the 10,000-Mile Diet*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2012. (BB)

Week Fourteen

April 17 Wildlife and Urban Animals

April 19 Pets and Zoos

Readings

Revkin, Andrew C. "After Harambe's Death, Rethinking Zoos." *New York Times*, June 2, 2016. (BB)

Phippen, J. Weston. "Do We Need Zoos?" *The Atlantic*, June 2, 2016. (BB)

Brulliard, Karin. "Game Wardens Killed a Deer — in Front of the Family That Kept It as a Pet." *Washington Post*, January 7, 2017. (BB)

Kwong, Matt. "Kendall Jones Big-Game Hunting Furor: Is It Sexist?" *CBCNews*, July 6, 2014. (BB)

Week Fifteen

April 24 Inferno: Cities, Wildfires, and Vulnerability

April 26 The Canary Project: Art and Environmental Activism
Guest Presenters: Susannah Salyer and Ed Morris, Department of Transmedia

Readings

To be announced. Something related to film/photography/literature and environmental activism.

Week Fifteen

May 1 Hope in the Anthropocene

Readings

None. Prepare for final.

**** Final Exam ****
Friday, May 5th, 12:45-2:45pm