

GEO 103

Environment and Society

Spring 2020
Hall of Languages 107
Mon. & Wed., 10:35-11:30am

Course Instructor

Professor: Bob Wilson

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Office Hours: Fridays, 12:30-1:50pm *or* by appointment

Teaching Assistants

Teaching Assistant: James Lindberg

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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 4 ½ times, energy use by 12 times, and economic output by 25 times. As Speth says, we live with the consequences of this tumultuous period. In the third 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 eighty years the Great Acceleration and 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 root causes of these environmental changes and examine many topics in-depth such as energy, wildlife, 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 Section 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	11:40am-12:35pm	Eggers 111
Sec. 3	10:35-11:30am	Eggers 070
Sec. 4	12:45-1:40pm	Maxwell 108
Sec. 5	10:35-11:30am	Crouse-Hinds 020
Sec. 6	9:30-10:25am	Maxwell 110
Sec. 7	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 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 a few questions on the GEO 103 Blackboard web site under the heading ‘Discussion Questions.’ You should keep these questions in mind as you do the assigned readings. They will help you focus on key ideas, arguments, 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 discussion 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 on time, you will get a zero on the quiz.

When your section first meets at the beginning of the semester, your teaching assistant will discuss the criteria for determining your discussion section grade in more detail.

Short Essays

I will assign two 3-4 page writing assignments in the course. 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. In short, it should not impede you from paying attention and making eye contact with other students and the teaching assistant. In short, these devices should be an aid to learning not a barrier.

However, if you find yourself on social media and non-course-related web sites often during class, you should drop this course immediately and take something else. Seriously. You (or your parents) are paying thousands of dollars to take this course. If you are surfing the web during lectures, that's a clear sign that this class is not for you.

However, if you still find the need to surf the web during course, you need to sit in the back two rows of our lecture hall. I find students ignoring lecture and doing other things online distracting. So, if you choose to go online during lecture, you cannot sit toward the front of the class.

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.

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 13 Introduction

January 15 The Planetary Experiment & Life in the Anthropocene

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 20 ****No class. MLK Day.****

January 22 Population

Readings

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

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

Roberts, David. "I'm an environmental journalist, but I never write about overpopulation. Here's why." *Vox*, November 29, 2018. (BB)

Kristof, Nicholas. "China's Worst Policy Mistake?" *New York Review of Books*, April 7, 2016. (BB)

Week Three

January 27 Markets and Commodities

January 29 Political Economy and the Environment

Readings

** Note: I recommend doing the activities (carbon emission calculators) before completing the readings.

Institute of Physics, “The most effective individual steps to tackle climate change aren't being discussed.” *Phys.org* July 11, 2017 (BB)

- See also this image “Personal choices to reduce your contribution to climate change” (BB)

Huber, Matthew. “Whose carbon footprint matters?” *Toxic News* August 7, 2017 (BB)

Roberts, David. “The best way to reduce carbon emissions? Don’t be rich.” *Vox* December 26, 2017 (BB)

Activities:

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Carbon Footprint Calculator

- Link to calculator available under Readings on Blackboard.
- Complete the exercise on-line. After completing it, print or write down the quiz results under “Your Carbon Footprint”
 - Your Current Total
 - New Total After Planned Actions
 - U.S. Average

Unequal Carbon Footprints

- Link to calculator available under Readings on Blackboard.
- Enter the “Your current total” figure from the EPA calculator.
- Print or write down your results. Write down the number for
 - High emission electrical power plant
 - High emission refinery
 - High emission steel plant
 - High emission cement plant
 - High emission ammonia (fertilizer) plant

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 chapter 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.
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Week Four

February 3 Liberal Democracy and Environmentalism in the U.S.

February 5 Environmentalism since 1980:
 Environmental Justice and Republican Reversal

Readings

Turner, James Morton, and Andrew C. Isenberg. “Introduction.” *The Republican Reversal: Conservatives and the Environment from Nixon to Trump*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. (BB)

Pulido, Laura. "Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism." *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, (2016). (BB)

Week Five

February 10 Environmentalism in the 21st Century:
Markets, Inequality, and the Light-Green Society

****First Paper Due. Submit on Blackboard.****

February 12 Socialism, Environment, and Authoritarian States – USSR & China

Readings

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

Week Six

February 17 Fascism, Environment, and Authoritarian States – Germany and E. Europe

February 19 (Un)Natural Hazards

Readings

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

Week Seven

February 24 **First Exam**

February 26 History of Energy

Readings

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

Week Eight

March 2 Lifeblood: Oil, America, and the Making of Car Country

March 4 Hydrofracking & Non-Fossil Fuel Energy

Readings

Wells, Christopher W. "Living in Car Country." *Streets MN*, April 23, 2013. (BB)

Lavelle, Marianne. "U.S. Automakers Double Down on Trucks & SUVs, Despite Talk of a Cleaner Future." *Inside Climate News*, October 25, 2018. (BB)

Johnson, Nathanael. "SUVs Are Back, and They're Spewing a Boggling Amount of Carbon." *Grist*, October 19, 2019. (BB)

Week Nine

March 9 Science of Climate Change

March 11 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. (*The assignment will count as one of your quiz grades!*)

Week Ten

March 16 ****No Class. Spring Break.****

March 18 ****No Class. Spring Break.****

Week Eleven

March 23 Hot Politics: Emotions & the Climate Crisis

March 25 Hot Politics (cont.) and Climate Denialism

Readings

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

Week Twelve

March 30 Climate Movements

April 1 Cli Fi (Climate Fiction): Storytelling and the Climate Crisis

Readings

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

Nilsen, Ella. "The New Face of Climate Activism Is Young, Angry -- and Effective." *Vox*, 2019. (BB)

Friedman, Lisa. "What Is the Green New Deal? A Climate Proposal, Explained." *New York Times*, February 21, 2019. (BB)

Week Thirteen

April 6 ****No Class. Away at conference.****

April 8 ****No Class. Away at conference.****

**** April 8th: Climate Change Futures paper due. Submit on Blackboard. ****

Readings

None. No discussion sections this week because of conference.

Week Fourteen

April 13 Wildlife and Urban Animals

April 15 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)

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

Watlin, Eve. "Are Canada Goose Jackets Unethical?" *Newsweek*, February 14, 2019. (BB)

Week Fifteen

April 20 Inferno: Cities, Wildfires, and Vulnerability

April 22 The Visual Arts and the Environment

Readings

None. Prepare for final. Bring notes to discussion sections!

Week Fifteen

April 27 Despair and Hope in the Anthropocene

Readings

None. Prepare for final.

**** Final Exam ****

Wed, May 06, 8:00am10:00am

You must be here for the final.

University Attendance Policy

Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at Syracuse University. Students are expected to arrive on campus in time to attend the first meeting of all classes for which they are registered. Students who do not attend classes starting with the first scheduled meeting may be academically withdrawn as not making progress toward degree by failure to attend. Instructors set course-specific

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity Policy: Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about university-wide academic integrity expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors.

Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and nongrade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. SU students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice.

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 the assignment. Period. If you are doing poorly in the class already, this probably means you will fail the course. Other professors may let issues of academic dishonesty slide or let you off with a warning. *I am not one of those professors.*

Also, this class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system Turnitin. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will also submit all papers you write for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at Syracuse University and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.

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 discussion section because of a game, clear this with your TA, not me.

Students with Disabilities

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Office of Disability Services (ODS) in this process. If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with ODS, please visit their website at: <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityservices@syr.edu for more detailed information. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible to begin this process.

Diversity and Inclusion

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. My goal as your instructor is to create a learning environments that are useable, equitable, inclusive and welcoming. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of

this course that result in barriers to your inclusion or accurate assessment or achievement, I invite you to meet with me to discuss additional strategies beyond accommodations that may be helpful to your success.

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.