

Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
College of the Holy Cross  
Spring 2016

**Environmental Sociology**  
(SOCI 236)

---

Wednesday/Friday 2:00-3:15  
Beaven Hall 113

---

Daina Cheyenne Harvey  
Office • Beaven Hall 231  
Office hours • M/W/F 10-12  
Phone • (c) 609-865-0651 • (o) 508-793-2630  
Email • dharvey@holycross.edu

*Course Description*

In this course we will study the interaction between human society and the natural environment, more specifically, this course will investigate the relationships between various environmental and social problems, as well as emphasize current theory and research in environmental sociology aimed at understanding and addressing those problems. By discussing issues of science and technology, popular culture, disasters, urbanization, racial and gender relations, domination and violences, as well as social movements, and by engaging in issues from a diversity of disciplines including anthropology, biology, economics, geography, psychology, and history, we will reach a broad understanding of environmental issues.

The course has four primary objectives. The first objective is to instill a sociological understanding of contemporary environmental issues. To do so we will focus on several prominent works in environmental sociology and cover fundamental and topical debates in the field. The second objective is to promote students' awareness of local environmental issues. Toward this end, students in the course will work with a community/locally based organization on a particular environmental issue. This semester we will work with the Coes Zone Task Force to identify barriers to community involvement with pollution problems in Coes Pond and Coes Zone upstream waterbodies. The third objective is to promote the idea of environmental activism and citizen science. Our work with our cbl partner and involvement with other environmental actors during the semester will give us the opportunity to gauge the potential for activism and citizen science as solutions we can all undertake to mitigate environmental issues. The fourth and final objective is to enhance students' writing, research, and presentation abilities. Toward this end, each student will complete regular writing assignments and a paper based on their organizational partnership. Students will also present their findings from their cbl research to the Worcester community.

Additionally, there are several broader sociological objectives that this class meets.

1) By participating in this course you should hope to gain a critical perspective of the environmental problems associated with contemporary society. Much of social life is simply taken-for-granted. This unfortunately includes our interactions with the environment. In this class we will critically evaluate different social causes and consequences of both local and global environmental problems, as well as potential solutions. Much of this involves questioning basic assumptions about our economy, political system, even relationships with others; basically, I want you to rethink how social life works.

Some of this simply means asking questions of the course material, rather than taking for granted what is in the text or shown in a video. What is being assumed? What evidence is offered for the claims being made? Who is making the claims? Some of this critical thinking, however, involves asking tough questions, such as: What do we mean by sustainability? Is population growth a problem? Can we continue with our current lifestyles? Students will be evaluated on their critical perspective through in-class essays on the readings and in their contributions to the course weblog.

2) In your readings and through class discussion you should begin to appreciate and understand both the qualitative and quantitative methods used to analyze environmental problems. While some erroneously believe that sociological knowledge is compiled through common sense, sociologists in fact use a variety of methods to examine the social world. Course readings will involve both qualitative and quantitative methods and research conducted in the course will be mixed-methods (including historical and empirical research). Students should leave the course with the ability to evaluate research methods used to explain the interaction between society and nature.

3) Hopefully, by the culmination of the course you will recognize environmental inequality and environmental suffering as constraints on social justice. A large part of the reason you are here at Holy Cross is to be (or become) “men and women for others”. There are probably few areas in which this is more important than in our relationship to the environment (which ultimately entails a relationship to others—both now and in the future). In keeping with the College’s mission (as well as that of the Department) we will spend considerable time in the course focusing on how our everyday behavior, attitudes and actions work against our goals for social justice and what we might do to change environmental constraints that mitigate our work towards a more just society.

4) You should develop a reflexive understanding of your/our relationship with the environment. We are awfully good at critiquing others, but often don’t question our role in environmental degradation or creating conditions of environmental peril. Part of being reflexive is coming to terms with how our experiences, and how our peers and families and other agents of socialization have come to shape our understanding of the environment (and our relationship with it). Students will be asked to keep contribute to a course web blog that reflect their everyday relationship to the readings and concepts discussed in the course and environmental issues that arise in the course of the semester.

5) By the end of the course it is my hope that you will have developed an appreciation for what sociology can bring to an understanding of environmental studies (and life in general). Much

discussion within environmental studies eschews the role of people. Naturalists see the ideal environment as one without or untouched by people. There is little (if any) of the natural world that humans have not affected in a serious and profound way. Social constructionism, the dominant sociological theory of knowledge, posits that the world only exists in particular understandings or contexts. That is, all knowledge, including that of the natural world, is socially constructed. Our understanding of the environment comes from very particular positions. Sociology in particular helps us step out of those familiar positions and look at other ways of experiencing the environment. This course will thus expose you to sociological concepts, such as the sociological imagination, anomie, and stratification—to name a few. Environmental sociology brings people back into an understanding of the environment and the course requirements, including the texts below, will give you a greater appreciation for society-environment relations.

**A further note** on the course. I have divided this course into four themes. This gives us an opportunity to balance breadth and depth. The first theme is pollution. The readings for this theme will not completely align with the focus of our cbl project, as there are many types of and issues regarding pollution, but it will give us a good foundation for thinking about pollution. It will also allow us to explore a local case study on the effects of industrial pollution and contamination. The second theme is the built environment. Here the readings will focus on issues with the built environment, most notably the relationship between infrastructural fails and disasters. We will also read a book about living off grid. The third theme is food. During this portion of the course we will partner with other courses and look at local foodways. This curricular collaboration will involve a film screening, guest lectures, and a slow food dinner. The fourth theme, which runs throughout the course, is environmental activism/citizen science. During each of the other themes we will read two texts, the second of which (in each theme) will be activist oriented (more or less). It's my hope that by spending at least four weeks on each of the first three themes you will have an opportunity to more fully understand a contemporary environmental issue and in some way gain some depth of understanding of those issues, but that by spending our semester looking at these three very different issues, that you will also gain some breadth of the current field of environmental sociology.

### *Required Texts*

Ross, Benjamin, and Steven Amter. 2010. *The Polluters: The Making of our Chemically Altered Environment*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brown, Phil, Edwin J. Mikkelsen, and Jonathan Harr. 1997. *No Safe Place: Toxic Waste, Leukemia, and Community Action*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Freudenburg, William R., Robert Gramling, Shirley Laska, and Kai T. Erikson. 2009. *Catastrophe in the Making: The Engineering of Katrina and the Disasters of Tomorrow*. Washington: Island Press.

Vannini, Phillip, and Jonathan Taggart. 2015. *Off the Grid: Re-Assembling Domestic Life*. New York: Routledge.

McMilian, Tracie. 2012. *The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields, and the Dinner Table*. New York: Scribner.

Foer, Jonathan Safran. 2009. *Eating Animals*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

## *Course Requirements*

- 1) Attendance/Participation (10% or one hundred points)
- 2) Letter to the Editor (10% or one hundred points)
- 3) A Community Based Learning Project (35% or three hundred fifty points)
- 4) Exams (45% or four hundred fifty points)

### 1) Attendance/Participation

I take role pretty much every class.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, as this is a discussion based class you will be graded on the quality and quantity of your weekly contributions. You are expected to do all of the assigned readings before class and to come to class ready to answer questions and contribute to class discussion. Please read and then re-read the section of this syllabus on discussion.

It is imperative that you attend all classes. If for whatever reason you must miss a class (or anticipate being less than punctual), let me know in advance. If you are unable to turn in an assignment on time, please let me know. For unexcused absences I revoke the right to issue a penalty of 10% for each day an assignment is late (including weekends). So if an assignment is due Friday and worth 35 points, on Saturday it is worth 31.5 points and by Monday only 24.5 points.

### (2) Letter to the Editor

At some point during the semester, I want you to write a letter to the editor of a local or national paper (we can discuss blogs like the Huffington Post). Your letter should focus on an environmental issue that you are interested in and on which you have done some research (of course being a letter to the editor it is not a scientific paper). As each paper has different parameters for letters to the editor, your letters will differ in length and perhaps scope. Your letter need not be published to “count” for your grade. I am more than happy to read your letter and give feedback before you submit it to the editor. When you submit your letter bcc me on the email.

### (3) A Community Based Learning Project

For this class we will be partnering with the Coes Zone Task Force. The Task Force has asked us to construct a survey and administer it to homeowners and business owners along Coes Pond in Worcester. They would like for us to gauge both interest and knowledge of pollutants in the pond and the effect of pollutants on water quality. We will aggregate the data collected from the surveys and present our findings to the community. Your grade will be based on your participation and a policy brief you will write and turn in at the end of the semester. I will provide a set of questions for you to respond to in your briefs (which will be 3-5 pages).

#### (4) Exams

There will be two in class exams. The last exam is not a final exam or cumulative and will take place during exam week. Each exam will be a mix of short and long answer essays.

#### *Discussion as a Way of Learning*

This is a discussion based class. I will often lecture on the weekly topic or suggest topics for discussion, but the majority of the time will spent engaging in dialogue (and hopefully not serial monologues). This course is designed to not only engage the substantive material (environmental sociology), but to complement your education here at Holy Cross and to prepare you to contribute to discussions outside of college. There are numerous benefits to participating in a discussion based course. A few are:

- studies show students learn as much from their peers as from professors
- discussion helps increase awareness of and respect for diverse opinions and ideas
- discussion forces you to more fully develop your ideas
- discussion encourages your to listen to others and to be more emphatic
- studies show students learn more from talking than by simply listening
- but, perhaps most importantly, discussion promotes co-ownership of the course and material

We will critically discuss all of the readings each week. You are free to voice your educated opinion, but you should respect the right of others to do so as well. As all knowledge is socially constructed, it is our job to examine the construction process. To do so we must be open to examining those taken-for-granted assumptions we have about social life (and the ways things work). This will require us to rethink, question, argue, counter-argue, rebut, and often question again (or is it rethink?). An essential tool for a discussion based course is mental flexibility. You will have to consider viewpoints or ideas that are sometimes antithetical to your own and be flexible enough to adjust your views if necessary. At the very least we should be able to agree to disagree.

#### *Office Hours & Email Policy*

My door is always open to you (and if not, just knock). Whether you have specific questions or concerns about the course, questions about sociology in general, want to borrow a book, or just want to chat, please feel free to stop by the office. I will always be in the office during office hours, Monday and Friday 9:30-12, but if you are unable to make it then and can't seem to find me in my office just email and we can set up a time to meet. I am addicted to email and technology in general, so I check email in one way or another every few hours. If I do not immediately respond, it is likely I am taking time to craft a response or sleeping (which I do from time to time). If, however, your question warrants a detailed response, please stop by the office rather than ask for a digital response. You should in general think of office hours as an opportunity to extend your intellectual and personal experience here at Holy Cross.

## *Academic Integrity*

I have a very low threshold for academic dishonesty. I break out in a rash, it's ugly. Any violation of academic integrity, including but not limited to: plagiarism, cheating, unadvised collusion, or the unauthorized possession or dissemination of academic materials (such as selling or purchasing academic work; taking someone's work without permission; submitting the same material/work for multiple classes without approval) will be sanctioned and reported. Additionally, the work in question will be given a grade of a zero. If you have any questions about academic dishonesty, please talk with me--especially as regards citing work and use of the internet.

Please read and then re-read:

[www.holycross.edu/catalog/academic-honesty-policy.pdf](http://www.holycross.edu/catalog/academic-honesty-policy.pdf)

## *A Brief Rant on Power point and Other Musings*

I will at times present information to you via power point or some other means of impressive display. I do not like power point and do not use it often. Do not ask for power point slides or copies of material I present. If I think you would benefit from them, I will provide them.

Again, discussion is an integral part of this class. I'm fine with you bringing electronic devices to class, but numerous studies in cognitive science have shown that you cannot multitask. I know, I know, you think you can. You are different. You have rewired your brain's circuits to allow you to listen, engage in meaningful discussion, check Red Sox scores, and text your friends at the same time, but while you were reading this I was dancing in front of the class and you didn't even notice (too late, you missed it).

Required texts are available in the bookstore. In addition to these texts other required readings are available on Electronic Reserve. Two notes on the readings: (1) Required readings are just that. You have to do the readings for that day before you come to class. And by 'do' I do not mean passively reading the text or looking over it while you watch The Voice or PBS (hey, I can dream). In order to contribute to the course and understand the reading you must actively engage the texts. (2) I've organized the course in what Eviatar Zerubavel calls an "intellectual buffet". Each of the substantive sections is part of much larger paradigms within environmental sociology (entire courses can be taught on any of these subjects, the Department is offering at least two courses on aspects related to food just this semester). My hope is if you like a particular topic or reading you will pursue it. I'm more than happy to help you with any projects or ideas stemming from this course that you would like to continue with as a capstone or honors thesis or just cause.

## *Course Schedule*

### Section I: Pollution

Date	Topic(s)	Reading(s)	Other
Wed Jan 27	Introduction / Syllabus /		CES student survey

Fri Jan 29	Citizen Science	Ross & Amter 1-42 M: McCormick (10)	
Wed Feb 3	The Pollutants	Ross & Amter 45-106 M: Mol (19-38)	Visit from Coes Zone Task Force
Fri Feb 5	Industry	Ross & Amter 107-171 M: Capek 11-24	
Wed Feb 10	Woburn Cluster	M: Dickinson Brown 1-42	
Fri Feb 12	Community Organization	Brown 43-74	
Wed Feb 17	The Woburn Effect	Brown 75-124	
Fri Feb 19	Social Epidemiology	Brown 125-163	
Wed Feb 24	Toxic Awareness	Brown 164-199	

## Section II: Building Blocks

Date	Topic(s)	Reading(s)	Other
Fri Feb 26	Building Katrina	Freudenburg et al. 3-66	
Wed Mar 2	Developing the Environment	Freudenburg et al. 67-134	
Fri Mar 4	Engineering A Bad Defense Against Water	Freudenburg et al. 135-170	
Wed Mar	Voluntary Simplicity	Vannini & Taggart 3-55	
Fri Mar 18	Power Constellations	Vannini & Taggart 57-120	
Wed Mar 23			Exam
Wed Mar 30	Slow Homes	Vannini & Taggart 123-175	Trip?
Fri Apr 1	Slow Lives	Vannini & Taggart 179-216	

## Section III: Food (Sort Of)

Date	Topic(s)	Reading(s)	Other
Wed Apr 6	Gleaning Garlic	McMillan 1-55	Film: Food Recovery <sup>1</sup>
Fri Apr 8	Wal-Mart	McMillan 57-127	
Wed Apr 13	Social Justice	M: Thompson	
Fri Apr 15	Radical Food Projects	M: Sbicca M: Kitaro (CS)	Trip?
Wed Apr 20	Food Sprawl	McMillan 129-181	

<sup>1</sup> The film will actually be screened in Seelos on Monday at 6pm

Fri Apr 22	Fast Food	McMillan 185-254	
Wed Apr 27	A Case For Eating Dogs	Foer 1-77	Slow Food Dinner
Fri Apr 29	Factory Farms	Foer 78-148	CBL Paper Due
Wed May 4	Lagoons of Shit	Foer 149-199	
Fri May 6	Thanksgiving Turkeys Don't Have Sex	Foer 200-268	
tba			Exam