



DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIOLOGY, GENDER, and SOCIAL WORK

2016 Course Outline

SOCI 208 Environmental Sociology

Lecturer

Dr. Katharine Legun
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Office hours: Tuesday 9-12 or by appointment

Lectures

Tuesdays 3:00-4:50

Blackboard

<https://blackboard.otago.ac.nz>

COURSE GOALS

This course provides an introduction to environmental sociology. We will be covering a range of interrelated topics spanning from theory to contemporary issues. We will cover debates around material versus constructivist views of nature, the relationship between capitalism and environmental politics, and environmental problems in the context of modernity. These concepts will be explored through application to important environmental issues in New Zealand and abroad.

Specifically, the aims of the course are to:

- To become familiar with foundational ideas and debates in environmental sociology.
- To understand how the environment and nature are socially constructed.
- To understand the relationship between social processes and environmental crises.
- To critically engage with key thematic issues that demonstrate the relationship between social dynamics and environmental problems.
- To develop critical thinking skills in relation to social dynamics of environmental problems.
- To demonstrate information literacy as demonstrated by successful identification of research topics, group assessment and examination.
- To demonstrate communication skills and teamwork through the group presentation assignment.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course considers how the environment is interpreted, used, and experienced through social norms and organization. We will focus particularly on how environmental problems are created by society, and experienced unequally for different social groups. The course will begin by focusing on our social relationship with the environment through production and consumption, move to a discussion of inequality and environmental risk, and conclude by looking at governance and change.

READINGS

Required text:

Bell, M. and L Ashwood (2015) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology (fifth edition)*. Books are available as an eBook from Google books (<https://books.google.co.nz>).

Supporting texts will be available on eReserve through Blackboard.

While there are two assigned readings per week, students are not expected to gather academic materials outside the assigned readings for their projects. These projects will use course assigned readings to analyze popular media sources.

ASSESSMENT

Journals	(3x15%)	45%
Group Assignment		25%
Final Exam		30%

Journals

Journals will be due three times over the course of the semester. Each week there will be a question or prompt listed in the outline. You will respond to the question in your journal entry. You must include three entries for each journal you hand in, which means you will do a total of nine entries over the course of the semester. This means that for the second and last journals, where four weeks of material have been covered, you must choose the three weeks you would like to respond to.

The journals **will be due in tutorial on August 4th, September 8th, and October 6th.**

Group Assignment

In tutorial on the third week of the semester (July 28th), you will be split into groups for the group assignment. In your groups, you must find a local environmental problem and gather media about that problem. That media can be gathered from newspapers, websites, blogs, advertisement, and anything you can document and cite. A list of possible topics will be made available to you in the second week of tutorial, but you are also welcome to elect a topic outside of those suggested. Your job will be to present your problem to the class on **October 4th**. Feel free to make it fun! You will also submit a one-page summary of your problem and your contribution to your group work. An information sheet will be provided about the project in tutorials and uploaded onto Blackboard. Some of the tutorials will be used for your projects.

Topics and Readings

Week 1 July 12

Introduction: Environmental problems as sociological problems

- How to think about environmental problems sociologically
- Materialism vs constructivism, and new ways of combining these two approaches

Case topic: Energy

Journal question: Is your home energy use sustainable? Try using a dialogic approach.

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 1: Environmental Problems and Society" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*

No tutorial

Week 2 July 19

Consumption and class

- Green consumerism
- Inequality and consumption

Case topic(s): Electric Cars

Journal question: Is green consumerism good for the environment?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 2: Consumption and Materialism" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*

Tutorial (July 21): Evaluating our favorite green goods. Come prepared with an environmentally branded product in mind and bring your laptops or other portable research-capable devices if you have them.

Week 3 July 26

The Economy and the Environment

- The Treadmill of Production
- Resource depletion

Case topic(s): Economies of obsolescence, apple products

Journal question: What is a good you have to continually replace? How is it produced? Is there a more durable option?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 3: Money and Markets" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*

Tutorial (July 28): You will be divided into your groups for the assignment and given an assignment sheet. These will also be your groups for the debate the following week.

Week 4

Science and Technology

August 2

- Ecological Modernization
- The Green Revolution

Case topic(s): GMO seeds

Journal question: Does efficiency reduce environmental impacts?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 4: Science and Technology" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*
- Mol, A. P., & Spaargaren, G. (2000). Ecological modernisation theory in debate: a review. *Environmental politics*, 9(1), 17-49.

Tutorial (August 4th), Debate: Is social equality necessary for environmental integrity? **First journals due (covering W1-W3)**

Week 5

Population

August 9

- Malthusian arguments
- Carrying capacities/ecological footprint

Case topic(s): National comparisons, degrowth

Journal question: Calculate your ecological footprint using the link. Is this a good measure of your environmental impact?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 5: Population and Development" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*
- Sahlins, M. (1995). The original affluent society. *Sociological Worlds: Comparative and Historical Readings on Society*.

Tutorial: No tutorial this week. In lieu of tutorial, look at your ecological footprint using the link listed below. Sadly, there is no New Zealand on the list of available places. I would suggest doing it for Australia (you'll be able to select a region, and perhaps Tasmania would be the best). You can also try playing around with different locations.

http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/page/personal_footprint

Week 6

Risk

August 16

- Pollution, toxic waste
- Risk and Inequality

Case topic(s): Hurricane Katrina, Chernobyl, Climate Change

Journal question: Are "natural disasters" really natural?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Ch 10: The Rationality of Risk" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*
- Excerpts from Beck, (1992) *The World Risk Society*

Tutorial (August 18): Risk and justice. What happens when homes become hazardous? Who is responsible?

Week 7

Environmental Ideologies

August 23

- Religion and the environment
- Indigenous knowledge

Case topic(s): spirituality and the scientific revolution, Māori world view (mauri, tapu, mana)

Journal question: Is science culturally diverse?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) “Chapter 7: The Ideology of Environmental Domination” in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*

Tutorials (August 25th): Laboratory life. We’ll be talking about science practices and values in a broader social and environmental context.

Mid-Semester Break

Week 8

Romanticism and the Environment

Sept 6

- The preservationists & environmentalism

Case topic(s): Parks, “Is the wolf the real American hero?”

Journal question: Should trophy hunting be used to support wildlife reserves?

Readings:

- Cronon, W. (1996). “The trouble with wilderness: or, getting back to the wrong nature.” *Environmental History*, 7-28
- “The Rhino Hunter” (2015) Radiolab, <http://www.radiolab.org/story/rhino-hunter/>

Tutorial (September 8): Iconic animals of New Zealand. What gets attention and why? What is being ignored? Bring your laptops or research-capable devices to class. **Second journals due (covering W4-W7)**

Week 9

Environmental Justice (possible guest lecture)

Sept 13

- Justice and environmental wellbeing
- Colonization/decolonization and the environment

Case topic(s): Water in US (Flint), Canada, and NZ

Journal question: What does water contamination have to do with inequality?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) “Chapter 6: Body and Justice” in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*

Tutorial: tbd

Week 10

Environmental Movements

Sept 20

- Histories of environmental movements
- Types of movements

Case topic(s): Oil Free Otago, transition towns

Journal question: What are good strategies for changing environmental policy?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 11: Mobilizing the Ecological Society" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*

Tutorial (September 22nd): You'll be split into groups and given news coverage of different actions. What lessons can we learn from these events and their coverage in the media?

Week 11

Environmental Governance (Guest Lecture – Lisa Ellis)

September 27

- The Commons
- Democracy and the environment

Journal question: Should households each pay for their water use?

Readings:

- Bell and Ashwood (2015) "Chapter 12: Governing the Ecological Society" in *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*
- Ostrom, E. (2008). Tragedy of the commons. *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*, 3573-3576.

Tutorial (September 29th): The current state of our resources. We'll be sorting resources we come across every day into categories based on how they're governed (private, open access, communal) and discuss the advantages and disadvantages associated with these governing forms.

Week 12

Group presentations

October 4

Tutorial (October 6): Environmental Sociology Jeopardy (Review)

Last journals due (covering W8-W11)

Week 13

Summary & exam prep

October 11

No Tutorial

University Policy on Plagiarism

Students should make sure that all submitted work is their own. Plagiarism is a form of dishonest practice and is defined as copying or paraphrasing another's work, whether intentionally or otherwise, and presenting it as one's own (approved University Council, December 2004). In practice this means plagiarism includes any attempt in any piece of submitted work (eg an assignment or test) to present as one's own work the work of another (whether of another student or a published authority).

Assignments submitted electronically may be checked through the software "Safe Assign" for evidence of copied material. Any matches with other written material may be interpreted as plagiarism if it is not properly cited according to bibliographical standards. Submission of an assignment requiring your student ID and password is an admission that what you submit is your own work.

Any student found responsible for plagiarism in any piece of work submitted for assessment shall be subject to the University's dishonest practice regulations which may result in various penalties, including forfeiture of marks for the piece of work submitted, a zero grade for the paper, or in extreme cases exclusion from the University.

Disability

The Department of Sociology, Gender & Social Work encourages students to seek support if they find they are having difficulty with their studies due to a disability, temporary or permanent impairment, injury, chronic illness or deafness.

Contact Disability Information and Support
Phone: 479 8235
Email: disabilities@otago.ac.nz
Website: www.otago.ac.nz/disabilities

Kaiāwhina Māori (Te Kete Aronui) - Maori Student Support Officer (Division of Humanities)

- The Māori Student Support Officer is available to help Maori students enrolled in Humanities papers.
- Contact for any questions, comments or concerns.
- Liaison with academic and general staff with respect to any issues relating to you and your course of study.
- Facilitate access to pastoral care, student services and course planning advice within the university.

Liaison office, 5C9, 5th Floor, Arts Building
Telephone: 479 8681
Email: ana.rangi@otago.ac.nz

Pacific Islands Students' Support Officer (Division of Humanities)

The Pacific Islands Students' Support Officer is available to help Pacific Islands students enrolled in Humanities papers.

- Contact for any questions, comments or concerns.
- Liaison with academic and general staff with respect to any issues relating to you and your course of study.
- Facilitate access to pastoral care, student services and course planning advice within the university.

Liaison office, 5C9a, 5th Floor, Arts Building

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Student Learning Centre

The Department of Sociology, Gender and Social Work encourages students to seek academic support through the Student Learning Centre. The Centre runs many workshops for students such as essay writing, study skills and exam preparation. Further information can be obtained at <http://hedc.otago.ac.nz/hedc/learning>