

FIRST YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or any other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first year seminar requirement.

COURSE NUMBER:	FSEM 100		
COURSE TITLE:	ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:		
SUBMITTED BY:	Tracy Citeroni	DATE:	September 12, 2008
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			X

***NOTE:** Click on the link for “first year seminar” at www.jtmorello.org/gened to see the criteria used to evaluate courses proposed to meet the first year seminar requirement. See the report entitled “General Education Curriculum as Approved by the Faculty Senate” for additional details.*

COURSE DESCRIPTION. In the space below, provide a one to two sentence description of this class. The description will be entered in Banner, and will also be used in other publications about the first year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

This course explores the complex relationship between human societies and the natural environment. We will use a sociological framework to analyze environmental issues as social issues, with an emphasis on activism and social justice.

RATIONALE. Using only the space provided in the box below, **briefly** state why this course should be approved as a first year seminar course.

[This proposal is for a revised version of Kristin Marsh’s previously approved first year seminar on Society & the Environment. Therefore, all overlap is entirely intentional. We plan to share responsibility for teaching the course.] The proposed Environmental Justice seminar will naturally embrace the general FSEM requirements to emphasize critical inquiry, liberal learning, and depth of exploration; these goals are central to the project of teaching sociology. Your guidelines also insist that freshmen seminars should not be traditional courses and this one is not. Rather than introducing students to a specific sub-field in the discipline, Environmental Justice poses timely, relevant questions about a specific set of social/environmental problems and invites students to grapple with them throughout the semester. Our readings are primary sources that map out various dimensions of the problems under consideration. The class will be entirely discussion-based. Students will be responsible to present and evaluate course readings. They will not find definitive answers, but instead will be challenged to refine the questions at hand and develop a coherent stance. Writing assignments will provide them ample opportunity to practice research techniques, organize their thoughts, and construct solid arguments to convey them.

SYLLABUS. *Attach a course syllabus.*

SUBMIT this form and attached syllabus electronically as one document to Warren Rochelle (wrochell@umw.edu) or Maya Mathur (mmathur@umw.edu). All submissions **must be in electronic form.**

---Draft Syllabus---

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:

First Year Seminar
Spring 2009

Office: Monroe 302A
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Instructor: Dr. Tracy Citeroni
Office hours: ____TBA____
& by appointment

Course Objectives:

We will collaboratively grapple with questions of global environmental justice from a sociological perspective. The emergence of the environmental justice movement is at least in part a critique of mainstream environmentalism. In addition to traditional concerns about the so-called 'natural world' (preservation, conservation, etc), environmental justice argues that we need to consider social discriminations (racial/ethnic, class, gender, etc) as well. To state the case bluntly, it is not possible to draw a clear, definitive line between the 'social' and the 'natural.' They are not the dichotomous, mutually exclusive categories that popular discourse would have us believe. We will critically examine the social construction of 'nature' and trace the historical relationship between society and nature. In addition, we will look at specific case studies that illustrate the importance of considering social dimensions of inequity in our analyses of environmental problems. Marked and increasing disparities between those who have access to clean and safe resources and those who do not have been documented around the world. The consequences of these disparities are dire. We will interrogate specific cases of environmental injustice and study the coordinated responses to them, not only to better understand the complex relationship between society and nature, but also to help us conjure ideas about the multiple strategies possible to move us toward justice.

Two key assumptions will provide the foundation for our intellectual reflections in this seminar: All individuals and communities, regardless of their social or economic conditions, have the right to a clean and healthy environment; and environmental exploitation, human exploitation, and social justice are intimately related to one another.

Reading material, oral and written assignments, and class discussion are designed to enhance your critical thinking and analytical skills. Your ultimate goal in this course is to use the material at hand and the exchanges with other seminar participants to develop, refine, and communicate a coherent, well-informed stance on current environmental issues of concern to you.

Course Requirements

Class Participation and Attendance (20%)

This seminar is designed to encourage student engagement and collaborative learning. This is not a course where I present facts or textbook material for you to write down, memorize, or otherwise consume and be tested on. Rather, learning is a process and a learner-dependent endeavor. Because we are 15 only, everyone in this class matters. Please come to class having

read and thought about the readings, and please be prepared to participate actively and thoughtfully in class discussion. We will be exploring issues that have no clear right or wrong answer, issues that are sometimes politically and emotionally charged; therefore, we have a mutual responsibility to ensure the classroom is a learning environment where all viewpoints are respected and everyone feels comfortable expressing their perspective and understanding. If you feel uncomfortable participating in class for any reason, please talk with me about your concerns.

Online Reading Responses (20%)

You will post on Blackboard a response to the readings one day prior to each class session. This response need not be lengthy; one page will suffice. It may include your reactions to the reading, positive or negative evaluations of the author's argument, or questions to be considered in class discussion. You will earn credit for each posting; comments will not be graded.

Critical Essays (20% each, or 60% in total)

You are required to write three critical essays over the course of the semester. Each will be constructed in response to a specific question posed by me. The general topics of the essays may include any of the following: contemporary environmental issues in historical perspective, environmental issues as social issues, the cultural construction of environmental issues, environmental justice movements, and how we can make a difference. Specific details about these essays will be posted and discussed at least one week prior to their due date.

Preliminary Course Schedule

Part I: Overview of course themes and introduction to the sociology of the environment

This first section of the seminar gives an introduction to the question of environmental degradation as a social problem. Beginning with a recent statement of the global threat, we then introduce the sociological insight that social problems—including issues of sustainability and environmental degradation—are socially constructed and therefore changeable over time and debatable as facts. We will consider the roles of science and technology, the “nature” of nature, and the scope of sustainability as a goal.

- What's at stake?
Foster, John Bellamy. 1994. *The Vulnerable Planet*. Monthly Review Press.
- How do we experience nature?
Bryson, Bill. *A Walk in the Woods*.
Irwin, Alan. 2001. *Sociology and the Environment: A Critical Introduction to Society, Nature, and Knowledge*. Polity Press. (Selections)

Part II. Environmental movements: defining and contesting the problem.

In this section of the course, we consider the environment as contested politics. We identify the perceived threats, goals, and targets of the mainstream movement, including multiple levels of mobilization (national, state, community). And we consider why the movement has been marked as a middle-class movement of privilege. We then turn to the emergence and development of the environmental justice movement, exploring its relationship with the mainstream movement and with other movements of the mid- and late- 20th century.

- What sparked the modern U.S. environmental movement and on what terms?
Carson, Rachel. 2002/1962. *Silent Spring*. Mariner Books.

Sale, Kirkpatrick. 1993. *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992*. Hill and Wang. (Selections)

- What led to the emergence of the environmental justice movement as a separate movement?

Bullard, Robert D. 2000. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*. Westview Press.

Pellow, David Naquib. 2005. *Power, Justice, and the Environment: A Critical Appraisal of the Environmental Justice Movement*. MIT Press.(Selections)

Part III. Local sustainability in global perspective: issues, ironies, and conflict.

In this section of the seminar, we combine a global perspective with a local focus. To understand the global context of environmental conflict and contestation, we consider the impact of international financial institutions and the free-trade regime on indigenous communities, with a focus on the particular sustainability issues of land, food, and water.

- What's the global economy got to do with it?
Bennholdt-Thomsen, Veronika and Maria Mies. 2000. *The Subsistence Perspective: Beyond the Globalised Economy*. Zed Books. (Selections)
- Whose land is it, anyway?
Gedicks, Al. 2000. *Resource Rebels: Native Challenges to Mining and Oil Corporations*. South End Press.
- If there's no food shortage, why is there so much hunger?
Magdoff, Fred, John Bellamy Foster, and Frederick H. Buttel. 2000. *Hungry for Profit: The Agribusiness Threat to Farmers, Food, and the Environment*. Monthly Review Press.
- Water: natural resource or market commodity?
Olivera, Oscar and Tom Lewis. 2004. *¡Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia*. South End Press.

Part IV. Facing and claiming our future: personal and political approaches

In this final section, we reconsider the human-nature relationship and explore our own ideas about personal vs. state and society responsibilities to protect the environment. We will consider the U.S. position in current global patterns of energy consumption, resource depletion, polluting emissions, etc. And we will engage the current debate about the extent and impact of global warming, as well as the potential for containing or reversing current trends.

- Humanity: Can we choose our relationship with nature?
Gore, Al. 2006. *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*.
- Global Warming: Imminent Threat or Party Politics?
Stern, Nicholas. 2007. *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*. Cambridge. (Selections)