Sociology 171: Environment & Society

Over recent decades, environmental problems have grown increasingly prominent in public discourse and activity. In this course, we consider four main questions:

(1) Articulate the problem. What’s wrong?
(2) What features of society contribute to the problem? (society → environment)
(3) How does the problem impact society? Are all affected equally? (environment → society)
(4) How can we alleviate the problem and limit its social consequences? (at global, national, organizational, and individual levels)

Throughout, we seek a deeper understanding of society’s changing relationship to the natural world.

Course grades will be allocated as follows:

(1) Attendance & Participation – Our class meetings will consist primarily of discussion. Attendance is required, and it, together with participation, will account for 1/4 of your final grade.

(2) Response Papers – We will read six books over the course of the quarter. You must write single-page response papers to four of the six (you choose which four). The responses should very briefly summarize the book’s arguments and then focus on the book’s sociological dimensions (questions two and three above). Responses must be turned in by the second day assigned to each book on the schedule below. No late responses will be accepted. The papers will be graded check or plus, and together they will comprise 1/4 of your grade.

(3) Final Group Project – At the beginning of the quarter, we will divide the class into groups of four. Each group will undertake a collaborative project on an environmental problem with a local dimension, i.e., affecting us on campus or in the region or the state. The best projects:

(a) will have four distinct parts, corresponding to the four questions above;
(b) will incorporate ideas from course readings;
(c) will root all four sections, at least to some extent, locally;
(d) will shift from an ecological focus (in section one) to a sociological focus (in sections two through four).

The final product will consist of both an oral PowerPoint presentation (of about 15 minutes, including 5 minutes of q & a) and a written paper (of about 18 pages, including key visuals from the PowerPoint – due Monday, March 17). Each member of the group will assess (i.e., grade) both themselves and other group members. The group project will comprise 1/2 your final grade.

1/6, 1/8 Introduction to the Course, Overview of the Human-Nature Relationship
1/27, 1/29 Film – Chinatown, Roman Polanski (131 minutes)
2/7 In-Class Project Meetings
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<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/10, 2/12, 2/14</td>
<td>Garbage Wars</td>
<td>David Naguib Pellow</td>
<td>MIT</td>
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<td>2/19, 2/21, 2/24</td>
<td>Eco-Warriors</td>
<td>Rik Scarce</td>
<td>Left Coast</td>
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<td>3/5, 3/7</td>
<td>Film – <em>An Inconvenient Truth</em></td>
<td>Al Gore</td>
<td>100 minutes</td>
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<td>3/10, 3/12, 3/14</td>
<td>Group Oral Presentations of Project Reports</td>
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