

Classroom: Shinmay 2502
Class Time: M/W 10:00 – 11:15 am

SOCS-SHU 135 / ENVST-UA 101

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Environment and Society

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This syllabus is subject to adjustment.

Overview

This course introduces you to the interdisciplinary literature on the relationship between the human world and the natural world. We engage scholarly writings from a wide range of disciplinary traditions, including sociology, history, philosophy, journalism, and political science, among others.

Broadly speaking, this course invites you to look both outward and inward. The *outward-looking* part of the course takes you to an in-depth analysis of contemporary environmental challenges. We will discuss issues such as climate change denialism and industrialized agriculture. You will gain an understanding of different social forces that shape our environmental attitudes and behaviors, and how these forces continue to re-shape our collective relationship to nature. The *inward-looking* part of the course motivates you to initiate a private conversation with nature. Class discussions seek to provoke a sense of discomfort amidst the pinnacle of modern comfort; we will bring into question “modern” life that often goes unquestioned. Taken together, this course stands with one foot in the scientific study of society, and the other foot in the normative understanding of social life.

Additionally, the conceptual tools you learn from this course will be applied to better understand contemporary environmental challenges in China. We will discuss some of the main drivers of environmental degradation, the political underpinnings of environmentalism, and environmental justice in the Middle Kingdom. We will also situate China’s environmental challenges in the broader context of global environmental change in the Anthropocene.

By the end the semester, you will be able to examine environmental challenges from a social scientific perspective. You will gain general familiarity with the concepts, methods, findings, and theories of Environmental Studies. This course prepares you for more advanced inquiries into various aspects of the contemporary environmental condition.

Required Texts

- **Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M.** (2012). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. London: Bloomsbury. (ISBN: 978-1608193943)
- **Pollan, M.** (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin Press. (ISBN: 978-0143038580)
- **Shapiro, J.** (2015). *China's environmental challenges, second edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (ISBN: 978-0745698649) Full-text available at <https://getit.library.nyu.edu/go/9466970>

All texts are available for purchase through the Office of Academic Affairs. Other required readings are available electronically on NYU Classes.

Paper Formatting Guidelines

All written work you submit to this course should follow the formatting guidelines below, unless otherwise specified. Failure to follow them will result in grade penalty at the TA's discretion.

- Format on A4/letter-sized paper and double-space your text.
- Papers are graded anonymously. Help us achieve that by only using your "N number" to identify yourself on the papers and in the file names, e.g. N31415926RR1A.docx.
- Submit each paper to the designated folder on NYU Classes on or before the due date.
- Attach a list of works cited only if you cite sources outside the syllabus.

Requirements

- **Reading Reflections**

*100*4=400 points (40%)*

You are required to submit **four** reading reflections. For each of them, you must choose one from the two options, marked A and B in the syllabus. Each reading reflection should be roughly three pages in length. It will be marked against the following rubric.

Expectation	Mark
The essay provides a concise summary of major arguments and findings in all the readings for the current assignment, and articulates them with your own words.	___/60
The essay relates one major issue raised by the author(s) to your personal observations and/or experiences, and critically engages with the author(s).	___/40

- **Film Reviews**

*100*2=200 points (20%)*

You are required to submit **two** film reviews. For each of them, you must choose one from the two options, marked A and B in the syllabus. Each film review should be roughly three pages in length. It will be marked against the following rubric.

Expectation	Mark
The review demonstrates appreciation of the film's originality, cinematography, message, and/or overall theme. (It is fine to for you to include "spoilers.")	___/40
The review critically assesses the focal film by relating it to the course readings and/or discussions. It concludes with a final "verdict" on the film's worthiness.	___/60

- **Exams**

300 points (30%)

There are two exams – a mid-term (on October 14; 100 pts) and a final (on December 14; 200 pts). They cover lectures, class discussions, films, and readings. They are non-cumulative. The mid-term exam will consist of multiple choice and short-answer questions. The final exam will consist of identification and short-answer questions. Exams will take place in the regular classroom during the regular class meeting hour, unless otherwise announced. Cheating on the exam will result in serious disciplinary consequences.

- **Participation**

100 points (10%)

You can earn up to 100 points for constructively and productively participating in class. Note, however, that you are not evaluated on the basis of how loudly you speak, how lengthy your comments are, or how frequently you speak up. Quality participation builds on course readings, engages with the ongoing theme of the current class, and recognizes your peers' contributions. Around mid-semester – in early November – you will be able to view a tentative participation grade on NYU Classes, which will be a reflection of your in-class participation up to that point. It is for reference only. Your final participation grade will be posted after the conclusion of the last class.

Attendance and Preparation

Attendance is required. Come prepared. Throughout the semester, there will be checks in different forms, such as pop quizzes and surveys. These will be graded on a check/no-check basis. Based on your record, the final grade will be adjusted according to the table below.

Number of no-checks	Final grade adjustment
0	Twenty points of extra credit
1 or 2	Ten points of extra credit
3, 4, or 5	No adjustment
6 or more	A fifty-point grade penalty for each additional no-check beyond the fifth

This policy, in its gist, allows for up to five no-checks without any grade penalty. This is meant to accommodate late enrollment, medical conditions, student activities, conference attendance, family emergencies, visa applications, internships, or other extenuating circumstances that prevent you from doing the readings and/or attending classes on time. Therefore, additional excuses will not be granted, for the sake of fairness.

Late Enrollment

If you sign up for this class after the start of the first class and therefore have missed instructional time, it is your responsibility to catch up. The first two weeks of class meetings are recorded and made available to you on NYU Classes until 11:59 pm on Friday October 9. Course materials for the first two weeks will appear on the mid-term exam. For the sake of fairness, I am not in a position to repeat the lectures during office hours.

Office Hours

In accordance with the University's "responsible reopening" policy, office hours in the Fall 2020 semester are strictly by appointment only. No walk-ins. Use the sign-up link on the top of page one to claim your slot. Set your calendar time zone to GMT+8 to avoid confusion. You may choose to meet in person or on zoom. If you choose to meet in person in my office, note that a mask that covers your nose and mouth is required for the entire duration of the meeting. If you choose to use zoom, the meeting link will be automatically sent to your email after you sign up.

Grading Scale

A=95% or higher A-=90-94.9% B+=85-89.9% B=80-84.9%
C=70-79.9% D=60-69.9% F=59.9% or lower

Classroom Etiquettes

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that the environment in the classroom is conducive to learning. If you are late, you should find a seat in the back of the classroom. If you need to leave early, please let me know in advance and sit in a location where it will be easy to quietly leave the room. Please hold side-conversations and discussions until after class.

Responsible Use of Technology

Although electronic devices are valuable for research and study, they are inimical to participation and collegiality in the classroom. You may take notes on a laptop or tablet, provided that you use it responsibly. All other uses of electronic devices are prohibited in this class. Note that photographic, audio, or visual recordings are not permitted. If you are found in repeated violation of this policy, a discretionary course grade penalty will apply.

Academic Honesty

All work that you submit to this course must be your own. All sources and assistance used in preparing your work must be precisely and explicitly acknowledged. It is NOT acceptable to copy, paraphrase, translate, or otherwise draw from other sources without acknowledging them. This includes your own work previously submitted to a different course at NYU or elsewhere. Cheating on the exam and/or writings will not be tolerated. Students caught cheating and/or plagiarizing will receive an immediate F for the course, in addition to being referred to Academic Affairs for disciplinary action. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with NYU rules regarding academic integrity.

Readings

It is extremely important for you to keep up with the required readings for each class meeting. I lecture with the assumption that you have read all pieces before class. I normally do not lecture from the readings, but try to build on them. In order for you to benefit from the lectures, it is in your best interest to read the texts in advance.

Lateness

If you submit your work after its due date, your mark will be penalized by 10% of the assignment's total mark for each day of lateness. The date and time of your submission are determined by the timestamp on NYU Classes. To avoid confusion, be sure to set your time zone on NYU Classes to GMT+8.

Make-up Exams

A make-up exam will be arranged only if you provide in writing an acceptable excuse that is endorsed by an accredited professional. You should submit the written notice before the day of the exam. Last minute requests will not be accommodated. The make-up exam will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for all students who miss the exam, but no later than a week from the original exam date.

Mid-term Grades

Mid-term grades are only posted for students whose cumulative performance by the end of the seventh week is at or below letter grade C, i.e. 79.9% or lower. They help you and your academic advisor make informed decisions about course load adjustments before the add/drop deadline.

Communications

Course-related information will be communicated to you via email messages. Make sure you check your nyu.edu emails at least once a day. You are welcome to communicate with me via emails. If you write to the TA, make sure you copy me in by adding my email to the "cc" field of the message. If you prefer to meet in person, please use the office hours (see above).

Accommodation

I wish to include fully any students with special needs. Please let me know (the earlier the better) if you need special accommodation in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to fully participate. The Moses Center on Washington Square verifies and certifies all requests from students across the Global Network. The Academic Resource Center (ARC) in Shanghai can help you obtain necessary documentation.

Class Schedule

Part I – Toward Conceptual Breadth

Monday September 14 – ONLINE INSTRUCTION TODAY; SEE NYU CLASSES

Reading:

- This syllabus

Wednesday September 16

Reading:

- Wallace-Wells, D. (2020). *The uninhabitable Earth: Life after warming*. Tim Duggan Books, Part I (pp. 1-40).

Monday September 21

Readings:

- Steffen, W., Crutzen, J., & McNeill, J. R. (2007). The Anthropocene: are humans now overwhelming the great forces of Nature?. *AMBIO*, 36, 8, 614-21.
- McKibben, B. (1989). *The end of nature*. New York: Random House, excerpt from Ch 2 (pp. 40-72).

Reading Reflection #1A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Wallace-Wells 2020, Steffen et al. 2007, and McKibben 1989.
- *Note that you can choose from #1A and #1B. Submit only one out of the two. The two options have different deadlines and different content requirements.*

Wednesday September 23

Reading:

- Magdoff, F., & Foster, J. B. (2011). *What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism: A citizen's guide to capitalism and the environment*. New York: Monthly Review Press, Ch 4 (pp. 61-93).

Monday September 28

Reading:

- Guha, R. (1989). Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation: A third world critique. *Environmental ethics*, 11(1), 71-83.

Wednesday September 30

Reading:

- Norgaard, K. M. (2006). “People want to protect themselves a little bit”: Emotions, denial, and social movement nonparticipation. *Sociological inquiry*, 76(3), 372-396.

Reading Reflection #1B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Magdoff & Foster 2011, Guha 1989, and Norgaard 2006.

Monday October 5

Film:

- Baichwal, J. (2019). *Anthropocene: The human epoch*. Toronto: Mongrel Media.
*This film is available for streaming through the NYU Libraries.

Film Review #1A:

- Due today before class
- Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

Wednesday October 7

Reading:

- Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2012). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. London: Bloomsbury, Intro & Ch 1.

Monday October 12

Reading:

- Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin Press, Intro and Ch 16.

Wednesday October 14

Mid-term exam during regular class hour

Part II – Toward Theoretical Depth

Monday October 19

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 3.

Wednesday October 21

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 4.

Reading Reflection #2A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&C 2012 Chs 3 & 4.

Monday October 26

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 5.

Wednesday October 28

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 6 & Conclusion.

Reading Reflection #2B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&C 2012 Chs 5, 6, and Conclusion.

Sunday November 1 Legislative Day

Film:

- Kenner, R. (2015). *Merchants of doubt*. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Classics.
**This film is available for streaming through the NYU Libraries.*

Film Review #1B:

- Due today before class
- Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

Monday November 2

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Chs 1-2.

Wednesday November 4

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Chs 5-7.

Reading Reflection #3A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan 2006 Chs 1-2 & 5-7.

Monday November 9

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Ch 9.

Wednesday November 11

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Ch 13.

Reading Reflection #3B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan 2006 Chs 9 & 13.

Monday November 16

Film:

- Chester, J. (2019). *The biggest little farm*. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios.
**This film is available for streaming through NYU Classes.*

Film Review #2A:

- Due today before class. Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

Part III – Toward Empirical Rigor

Wednesday November 18

Reading:

- Shapiro, J. (2015). *China's environmental challenges, second edition*. Cambridge: Polity Press, Chs. 1-2.

Monday November 23

Reading:

- Shapiro 2015, Chs 3-4.

Reading Reflection #4A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Shapiro 2015 Chs 1-4.

Wednesday November 25

Reading:

- Shapiro 2015, Ch 5.

Monday November 30

Reading:

- Shapiro 2015, Chs 6-7.

Reading Reflection #4B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Shapiro 2015 Chs 5-7.

Wednesday December 2

Reading:

- Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2013). The collapse of Western civilization: A view from the future. *Daedalus*, 142(1), 40-58.

Monday December 7

Film:

- Wang, J. (2019). *Plastic China*. Vancouver, British Columbia: Global Environmental Justice Documentaries.
**This film is available for streaming through the NYU Libraries.*

Film Review #2B:

- Due today before class
- Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

Wednesday December 9

Wrap-up and review

Monday December 14

Final exam during regular class hour