Introduction

This course draws on multiple sociological perspectives to examine two interrelated domains: 1) how dimensions of social organization shape the production and distribution of environmental health and illness in the United States; 2) how we know and regulate relationships between the environment and human health. Central to our examination is the question of how environmental health has been understood in various social worlds, at different historical moments, and by different (and often, competing) social actors. We will look at these questions across sites, including industry, clinics, neighborhoods, scientific laboratories, social movements, and government regulation and policy making.

This course satisfies the Writing Intensive (WI) component of the general university requirements.

Learning Goals

In this course, students will

- Critically examine different conceptualizations of “the environment” as it is relevant to human health and illness;
- Gain insight into how dimensions of social organization (e.g., race, class, neighborhoods, industry, etc.) shape the distribution of the risk of environmental exposure and illness in the U.S.;
- Master important sociological concepts – i.e., inequality, stratification, social movements, local knowledge – in the context of environmental health, policy, and activism.
- Develop and improve writing skills via in class exercises, assignments, and consultation with the instructors.

Course Structure and Requirements
This course covers a lot of material, and attendance to both lecture and discussion section is expected. You are also expected to bring readings, along with your notes on the readings, to class. Consistent absences will be noted and reflected in your final grade. Laptops are allowed but ONLY for taking notes or examining readings. Other observed uses of your laptop will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

As soon as we have been assigned discussion section rooms, we will meet in discussion sections during class time approximately every other Wednesday (see schedule below). We will announce the beginning of sections in class, and we will post section assignments on LATTE. These smaller discussion sections will provide an important opportunity to further explore and develop your thoughts, questions, and critiques. Section leaders will take attendance.

I expect that you will be respectful of others in class. Examples include arriving on time, not leaving early, listening when others speak, not monopolizing discussion time, and not having side-discussions. Please turn cell phones and pagers off.

**Assignments**

- **Response Papers:**

  During the course of the semester, you are required to turn in three response papers which address the set of readings for that week. Your paper should concisely summarize the key themes presented in the week’s readings (~1 page) and then either raise questions about these themes or provide an analysis, elaboration, or critique in your own words (1-2 pp). You may refer to other readings, personal examples, current events and newspaper articles, or other sources to reinforce your point(s). You should engage directly with the readings and not simply reiterate information from lecture. These papers should not exceed 4 pages each.

  In order to help you to help you stay on track through the semester, you are required to write a response paper for one of the weeks(or set of weeks) in each of the following categories. Response papers are due in class on the Wednesday on which we discuss the readings about which you are writing. So, for example, if you are writing a response paper on weeks 3&4, your paper would be due on Wednesday, February 8. No credit will be given for response papers turned in late.

  | Response Paper 1 -- | Weeks 3&4 or Week 5 or Week 6 |
  | Response Paper 2 -- | Weeks 7&8 or Weeks 9&10 |
  | Response Paper 3 -- | Week 11 or Weeks 12&13 |

  Please view response papers as writing/thinking exercises. Use them to engage the week’s materials, respond with questions, criticisms and new ideas they suggest, and put into words your thoughts about these topics!

  **2) During the semester, you will write two short papers on a contemporary environmental health issue of your choice.**

  **Due March 14 – Problem Definition Paper**

  Find a newspaper article which reports on the environmental health issue/concern. You may get an
article from an online source (e.g., Lexus Nexus) but it must come originally from a print
newspaper (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Boston Globe, Chicago
Tribune, LA Times, etc.). Cut out, photocopy, or print the article, including any photographs,
diagrams, or other graphics which accompany it.

Write a 4-6 page paper that describes the specific environmental health issue that is the focus of your
research & writing this semester. Your paper should draw on at least 4 sources from the syllabus.
In addition to having a clear thesis, it should address the following questions:

- What makes this an important environmental health issue?
- Who is affected by this environmental health issue? Are any populations are
disproportionately affected (whether defined by age, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, SES, etc.)?
- What are the social factors or social processes that contribute to the production of this
environmental health issue? These could include sociodemographic, institutional, industrial,
historical, economic, political, or other factors.
- Who are social actors (activists, government, industry, scientists, etc.) who are engaged with
this concern/issue? What are their goals/demands/priorities?

Be sure to turn in a bibliography of all cited sources with your paper. Your meaningful
engagement with the course readings is a component of your grade on this assignment.

Due April 30 – Paper Revision, With Policy Implications

This assignment asks you to incorporate the feedback that you received on your previous paper,
and also to extend your analysis to consider the policy dimensions of an environmental issue/
concern. The feedback you received should allow you to develop a (very!) compelling thesis and
incorporate your best evidence into a brief overview of the environmental health issue that is the
focus of your work. Then, drawing at least 3 sources from the syllabus and 3 published sources that
are not on the syllabus (e.g., from the peer reviewed literature in the biological, health, or social
sciences, policy briefs, or government reports), please address also the following questions:

- What are the major public policies that are relevant to understanding this environmental
health concern/issue? Are these federal, state, or local policies? When were they passed or
put into effect?
- What are the strengths of the current method of governance for this concern/issue? What
are the limitations?
- If you were asked to testify before federal, state, or local government officials about this
environmental health concern/issue, what programs or policies would you recommend?

Be sure to turn in a bibliography of all cited sources with your paper.

3) Meeting re: Writing

Additionally, you are required to meet with either Professor Shostak, Catherine, Julian, or a tutor at
the Writing Center to discuss a writing assignment of your choice. We will send around sign up
sheets for meetings with the course instructors. If you choose to meet instead with a tutor in the
Writing Center, you will need to bring a note documenting your meeting.

Please note that there are a lot of students in this class this semester, so it is important that you not
wait until the end of the semester to schedule this meeting!

Policies for Written Work

All written papers are to be typed, double-spaced, using a 12-pt. Times New Roman font, with one inch margins, and must include page numbers, proper use of citations, and bibliographies.

Written assignments are due at the beginning of class. **I will NOT accept your assignments through e-mail. I only accept hard copies.** If you have an emergency and are unable to complete the assignment, you must speak with me as soon as possible so we can discuss how you will complete the assignment. Do not assume that you may hand in all of your assignments at the end of the course, or that you will be granted an extension. Unexcused late papers will be marked down ½ grade for each day or part of day for which they are late. Personal illness and family emergencies constitute acceptable grounds for late papers (that is, you will not be penalized in these cases); in the event that you managing a serious illness or a family emergency, you must let me know prior to the due date of the assignment.

Your papers will be graded according to the following criteria, which we will discuss in detail in class:

- **Thesis:** Is there one main argument in the paper? Does it fulfill the assignment? Is the thesis clearly stated near the beginning of the paper? Is it interesting, complex? Is it argued throughout?
- **Structure:** Is the paper clearly organized? Is it easy to understand the main point of each paragraph? Does the order of the overall argument make sense, and is it easy to follow?
- **Evidence and Analysis:** Does the paper offer supporting evidence for each of its points? Does the evidence suggest the writer's knowledge of the subject matter? Has the paper overlooked any obvious or important pieces of evidence? Is there enough analysis of evidence? Is the evidence properly attributed, and is the bibliographical information correct?
- **Sources:** Are they introduced in an understandable way? Is their purpose in the argument clear? Do they do more than affirm the writer's viewpoint or represent a "straw person" for knocking down? Are responsible inferences drawn from them? Are they properly attributed, and is the bibliographical information correct?
- **Style:** Is the style appropriate for its audience? Is the paper concise and to the point? Are sentences clear and grammatically correct? Are there spelling or proofreading errors?

We will do exercises in class that will aid you in developing your writing skills, evaluate sources, and craft a successful paper.

**All written work must be completed to receive a passing grade in this class**

Grades

**Final Grades will be computed on the following basis:**

| Attendance | 15 points |
Meeting re: Writing
Weekly response papers (3 @ 5 points/each) 5 points
Problem Definition Paper 15 points
Paper Revision, with Policy Implications 20 points

...using the following distribution (%s):

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**Academic Integrity**

You are expected to be familiar with and to follow the University’s policies on academic integrity. Faculty will refer any suspected instances of alleged dishonesty to the Office of Student Development and Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty may result in sanctions including but not limited to failure in the course, failure on the assignment in question, suspension from the University and/or educational programs.

**Reasonable Accommodations**

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately. If you have questions about documenting a disability or requesting academic accommodations, you should contact Beth Rodgers-Kay in Academic Services at 736-3470.

**Readings**

The following books are available at the campus bookstore and on reserve at the library:


All other materials will be posted on LATTE.

**Schedule of Sessions and Assigned Readings**

**Week 1**

**Introduction**

January 18  Course Overview

**Week 2**

**What Is The Environment? How Does It Affect Human Health?**


Chapters 1-7


Chapters 8-14

**Weeks 3&4**

**Physical/Chemical Environments (Inside and Out)**


Excerpts (on LATTE)

*Movie (in class) – “Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring”*


February 8  

**DISCUSSION SECTIONS**


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**Weeks 5&6  (Stratified) Consumption and Its (Unequal) Consequences**

February 13  
Introduction, Chapters 3, 4, & 5

February 15  
Chapters 6, 7, & Conclusion

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*** February 20-24 – Winter Break***

February 27  
Chapters 1-3

February 29  

**DISCUSSION SECTIONS**

Chapters 4-7

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**Week 7&8  Work/Industrial Environments**

March 5  


March 7  

   Chapters 1-3

   *Movie (in class) - “Blue Vinyl: A Toxic Comedy”*

March 14   **DISCUSSION SECTIONS**

   Chapters 4-6

**Problem Definition Paper Due**

Week 9&10   **Neighborhoods/Urban Environments**


   Chapter 1-3

   Chapter 4-7

March 28   **DISCUSSION SECTIONS**


Week 11-13   **Policy Environments (and Social Movements)**

   Chapter 6&7


April 18  DISCUSSION SECTIONS


Movie (in class): The Next Industrial Revolution.

April 25  DISCUSSION SECTIONS


Week 14  Wrapping Up & Looking Forward


**Policy Implications Paper Due**

RECOMMENDED:

Science and Environmental Health Network and International Human Rights


Green For All, Annual Report and Resources
http://www.greenforall.org/resources/reports-research