

SOCI/PSCI 247

Environmental Social Sciences I: Problems and Paradigms 2011-2012

Dr R Bantjes

Annex Rm 9B

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Office hours: Monday 2:15-3:15; Tuesday 10:45-12:30; Thursday 10:15-12:05

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course introduces students to the major environmental challenges of the 21st century from a social science perspective. Modern societies that have sought to conquer natural limits have now conjured up unanticipated “environmental” consequences. Students will explore how human understandings of environmental “problems” as well as action towards environmental solutions are shaped by ways of thinking, social contexts and institutional power relations.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Szasz, Andrew. 2007 *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed From Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Plus readings made available through the [Moodle outline](#).

COURSE WORK and EVALUATION:

[Participation](#)

In class and/or news discussions (12%)

Reading discussions (25%) Reading Questions

Questions on the week’s reading (4 randomly selected Tuesdays) 12% Quiz (Sept 27) (5%)

[Research Project](#) (18%) Final Exam (December, 2011) (28%)

• 8 September - 14 September

A World Transformed

1 – Climate Change: The Anthropocene

McKibben, Bill. 2010 “[A New World](#),” *Earth Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. Toronto: Knopf Canada
Concepts: climate change, anthropocene, natural /artificial, modernization project, unintended consequences,

-  [Understanding McKibben Forum](#)

This week 15 September - 21 September

A World Transformed

2 – Climate Challenge and Societal Paralysis

Norgaard, Kari M. 2011 “[Climate Change as Background Noise in the United States](#),” *Living in Denial Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. ([Reference list](#))

Concepts: denial machine, power and knowledge,

22 September - 28 September

A World Transformed

3 – Biodiversity Loss

Smil, Vaclav. 2008 “Environmental Change,” *Global Catastrophes and Trends the Next 50 Years*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Quiz: Climate change (based on McKibben, Norgaard, and Smil)

Concepts: population explosion, biodiversity, evolution and adaptation, ecosystem services, invasive species, resilience, modernization project, unintended consequences,

29 September - 5 October

Politics of Fossil Fuels

4 – Scarcity of Fuel

Smil, Vaclav. 2008 “Unfolding Trends”

Concepts: peak oil, scarcity paradigm, human agency, substitution, sustainable development paradigm, complexity /unpredictability,

6 October - 12 October

Politics of Fossil Fuels

5 – Tar sands

Nikiforuk, Andrew. 2008. “It Ain’t Oil,” “The Vision of Herman Kahn” *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent*. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

Concepts: unconventional oil, externalities, state regulation, market regulation, power and risk assessment, full cost accounting, environmental justice, the myth of sustainability

13 October - 19 October

Politics of Fossil Fuels

6 – Fracking

Finkel Madelon L. and Adam Law. 2011. "[The Rush to Drill for Natural Gas](#): A Public Health Cautionary Tale." *American Journal of Public Health* 101(5):784-5.

Concepts: risk assessment, risk society, precautionary principle, citizen science, social movements, NIMBY, NIABY, greenwashing

20 October - 26 October

The Sociology of Risk and Denial

7 – Inverted Quarantine

Szasz, Andrew. 2007 “Inverted Quarantine,” “The Fallout Shelter Panic of 1961,” *Shopping Our Way to Safety*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Concepts: green consumerism, inverted quarantine, individualism, privatization, citizen vs consumer, liberalism, neoliberalism

27 October - 2 November

The Sociology of Risk and Denial

8 – Suburbanization

Szasz. 2007 “Suburbanization as Inverted Quarantine”

Concepts: suburbanization, distancing, social cultures of nature, structural causes of overconsumption, inequality/exclusion/global security enclaves,

3 November - 9 November

Commodity Bubble

9 – Water Scarcity

Szasz. 2007 “Drinking”

Concepts: hydrological cycle, fresh water shortage, scarcity paradigm

10 November - 16 November

Commodity Bubble

10 – Toxic Chemicals

Szasz. 2007 “Eating,” “Breathing”

Concepts: modernization project, unintended consequences, risk society, toxic waste, environmental injustice, boomerang effect, state regulation, precautionary principle, neoliberalism, industry self-regulation

17 November - 23 November

The Problem of Environmental Action

11 – Political Consequences

Szasz. 2007 “Imaginary Refuge,” “Political Anesthesia”

Concepts: privatization and political responsibility, governance: state, intergovernmental, market, civil society, social movements

24 November - 30 November

The Problem of Environmental Action

12 – Conclusion

Szasz. 2007 “Conclusion”

Concepts: paradigms: scarcity, risk society, sustainable development, resilience