

Environmental Politics

Course Description

The aim of this course is to explore the emergence of environmental politics as a field of study. To do this, we will be looking at the rise of environmental discourses and awareness from 1970 onward, and asking how our understanding of environmental challenges and laws has been shaped by past and current events. This journey will take us from the oil fields and waterways of America to those walking the halls of power from Congress to the White House. We will look at who makes environmental law, what shapes those policies, and who has power in deciding what gets passed and what gets blocked.

Some of the questions we will explore include: How did the environment come to be a political issue, and how does this history shape our views today? What led to the proliferation of environmental discourses and laws in the 1970's? How did these discourses change over time, and what factors led to these changes? What is the role of public opinion and public policy in shaping environmental politics, and how much information does the public need in order to evaluate government decisions?

Course Goals

Throughout this course we will examine numerous issues, many of which don't have simple explanations or clear solutions. Many of the topics we will be covering are extremely contentious issues--such as the long-term impacts of industrial civilization, environmental critiques of federal protection agencies, and public opinion on recent issues like off-shore oil drilling and hydraulic fracturing (fracking). We will engage these issues with a critical eye, doing our best to weigh the merits of various claims based on available evidence. In the end, we seek to test assumptions about what we know on a wide range of environmental issues and political challenges today.

Required Books

Dryzek, John. *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. Oxford. 2005.

Juhasz, Antonia. *Black Tide: The Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill*. Wiley and Sons. 2011.

Lazarus, Richard. *The Making of Environmental Law*. Chicago Press. 2004.

Prud'homme, Alex. *The Ripple Effect: The Fate of Fresh Water in the Twenty-First Century*. Scribner. 2011.

Vaughn, Jacqueline. *Environmental Politics: Domestic and Global Dimensions*. Thomson Wadsworth. 2011.

Vig, Norman J. and Michael Kraft. *Environmental Policy: New Directions (7th Ed)*. CQ Press. 2009.

All other readings will be posted online: <https://sites.google.com/site/posc2507/>.

Course Requirements

Class Participation

Students are expected to read and reflect on the assigned material before class, and to actively participate in the seminar in an informed and respectful way throughout the semester. You are expected to bring readings to class.

Class Assignments

- Short Writing Assignments: Every other weeks you will be asked to complete a short writing assignment or other activity for the class. There will be 4 writing assignments in all. Information on each assignment will be handed out in the week prior to when the assignment is due.
- Group Projects: Students will be broken into groups as part of the final project. Students will have to work together in teams to develop comments and conduct research on some aspect of fracking.
- Final Project: For our final class project we will be exploring the issue of fracking in New York, and developing public comments on the project. The final paper will take the form of a letter of comment on the Draft SGEIS (more details later in the syllabus), and should be 12-15 pgs (12 pt font, double spaced, 1/2" margins). Other mediums for a final project (such as graphics or documentary) may also be proposed instead of final written comments, however they must be approved in advance.

Grading Breakdown

Class participation – 25% Short Writing Assignments – 25%
Group Projects – 25% Final paper/Fracking comments – 25%

Policies and Procedures

Attendance

Per Fordham policy, more than 4 unexcused absences can result in a grade reduction for the course. Coming to class significant late will count as one unexcused absence. The full attendance policy is available in Fordham's [Student Handbook](#).

The only exceptions are as follows:

- Personal illness or death in the immediate family (documentation required)
- Observance of a religious holiday
- Participation in university-sanctioned activity
- An act of nature or cosmic event making attendance impossible (flood, earthquake, apocalypse)

Electronic Distractions

All laptops, cell phones, and other electronic devices should be turned off and put away during class, unless the computer is being used for note taking. Violation of this policy may result in a reduced letter grade or possible failure of this course. Your friends can wait 2 hours for your text. Facebook and Gchat do not constitute active class participation.

Due Dates

No late assignments will be accepted. This is a firm policy, except in the extenuating circumstances noted above (documentation is required). Furthermore, there are no makeup assignments or papers. You will receive a zero for the assignment if it is not turned in on time as required.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a sign of poor academic skills and laziness, and will not be tolerated. Any student found guilty of plagiarism will receive an automatic F for the class, no exceptions. Fordham's statement on plagiarism can be found in the Student Handbook under [University Regulations, Undergraduate Policy on Academic Integrity](#):

“Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate. It is no defense to claim that one has “forgotten” to document ideas or material taken from another source.”

Writing Help

Students needing additional writing help should contact the Writing Center, which is located on the 5th floor of Dealy Hall. More information is available at: www.fordham.edu/writingcenter

Disabilities

Any students who requires differently-abled assistance is encouraged to contact Disability Services. http://www.fordham.edu/campus_resources/student_services/disability_services/

Part I: The Birth of Contemporary Environmental Politics

Week 1 (9/2): No Class

Read: *The Politics of the Earth* (pgs 1-24)

Class will not meet the first Friday before Labor Day. Tuesday (9/6) will be our first class.

This first reading offers a theoretical approach for thinking about environmental politics called discourse analysis. In short, discourse analysis focuses on what people are saying--their “discourse”, and uses that information to develop a better understanding of how various parties understand and talk about the environment and politics. This reading explores some of the main environmental discourses.

Week 2 (9/6 and 9/9): Introduction to Environmental Politics

Read: *Environmental Politics* (pgs. 1-30)

Hand out and review course syllabus and class logistics. Discuss basic approach to the course. What do we mean when we talk about “the environment” and “politics” in this course. What’s the difference between “Big P” -vs “Little p” politics in the field? What exactly is the “environment.”

Hand out Writing Assignment #1: Thinking politics and the environment.

Week 3 (9/13 and 9/16): Environmental Crisis: “It was a spring without voices”

Read: Excerpt from *Silent Spring*. Rachel Carson. ([Chs. 1-3 online](#))

Take: [Clean Water Act quiz](#). EPA.

Browse: [Summary of the Clean Water Act](#). EPA.

Browse: [Watershed Academy: Introduction to the Clean Water Act](#). EPA.

From Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) to E.F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful* (1973) and Love Canal (1976), suddenly everyone seemed to be worried about the future of the planet. The EPA was founded in 1970 in part to address these challenges, as were a number of other laws. Exploring what changed in American to suddenly generate such interest in the environment?

Writing Assignment #1 due in class.

Hand out writing assignment #2: Framing environmental issues.

Week 4 (9/20 and 9/23): Environmental Politics: A Diversity of Approaches

Read: *The Politics of the Earth* (pgs. 25-72)

Read: *Environmental Politics* (pgs. 37-70)

Watch: [The Crying Indian](#). (Keep America Beautiful PSA - 1971)

Read: [The Crying Indian](#). Orion Magazine (Nov/Dec 2008)

Read: [1973: The Year Environmental Filmmaking Was Born](#). Mother Nature Network ([Jan 5, 2010](#))

With the first Earth Day being held in 1970, it seemed the environmental movement had finally been born. Exploring the rise of US environmental politics and public concern for the environment.

Discussion about different approaches to environmental politics, and how earlier environmental movements influenced the shape of the 1970’s politics. This will set the stage for our move to Part II, where we will begin to delve into the nuts and bolts of environmental law and policy.

Part II: Policy, Law, Science and Public Opinion

Week 5 (9/27 and 9/30): The Rise of Green Laws

Read: *Environmental Policy: New Directions* (pgs. 1-26)

Read: *The Making of Environmental Law* (pgs. 1-42)

Explore the impacts of early legislation and some of the issue driving them. How forests, air and water became policy issues. Explore relations between environmental pollution and environmental politics. How crisis in the 70's and 80's shaped environmental discourse and subsequent policy.

Writing assignment #2 due in class.

Hand out writing assignment #3: Impacts of early environmental politics.

Week 6 (10/4 and 10/7): Environmental Policy in Focus (Love Canal)

Read: *The Making of Environmental Law* (pgs. 43-124)

Read: [Love Canal Case Introduction. Online Ethics Center for Engineering \(4/7/2006\)](#)

Watch: [Loise Gibbs - Love Canal Revisited \(Pt. I\). Superfund 365.](#)

Read: [Love Canal: The Truth Seeps Out. Reason Magazine \(Feb 1981\)](#)

Exploring the mainstreaming of the environment into the political process. Federal environmental law and policy in the 1970s and 80s. Case focus on the Love Canal incident here in New York.

Week 7 (10/11 and 10/14): Policy in Focus - President, Congress and the Courts

Read: *Environmental Policy: New Directions* (pgs. 75-146)

Exploring how Presidential powers, Congressional legislation and Court rulings all shape and impact the outcome of environmental politics.

Writing assignment #3 due in class.

Hand out writing assignment #4: Legislating for nature. (*Last short writing assignment*)

Week 8 (10/18 and 10/21): Environmental Policy Today: A Graying of the Greens?

Read: *The Making of Environmental Law* (pgs. 167-254)

Browse: [New York Region 2 Water Quality Summary. EPA](#)

Exploring the contemporary landscape of environmental law and policy debates. What does environmental law and policy look like in the 21st Century? What are the challenges and opportunities that we should be paying attention to as we move forward and make new environmental laws?

Part III: The Reality of Environmental Politics

After spending 8 weeks discussing the past history, battles and outcomes of environmental policy in the US we turn to contemporary environmental politics from a larger perspective. So far, we have been looking at specific areas and issues of environmental policy, but not necessarily at the bigger picture. How do public laws, private actions and the messy reality of environmental politics play out in real life for normal people, and what happens when things don't go according to plan? In this section, we will

explore exactly these questions through two specific cases: the global water wars and the April, 2010 BP/Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico.

Week 9 (10/25 and 10/28): H₂O or Liquid Life

Read: *The Ripple Effect*. (pgs. 1-113)

Read: *Top Ten Water Quality Issues in New York State*. NYDEC. (2010).

Browse: *2008 NY Water Quality Report - 305(b)*. NY DEC. (2010).

Watch: *Poisoned Waters*. Frontline Documentary. (2009)

We begin our exploration of water politics with a look at the global and local water issues, including a focus on the history of Greenpoint, Brooklyn. How does the past use and regulation of our waterways and drinking water supplies impact policy decisions available to us today?

Writing assignment #4 due in class.

Week 10 (11/1 and 11/4): Global Resource Wars

Read: *The Ripple Effect*. (pgs. 201-324)

Watch: *Blue Gold: World Water Wars*. PBS Special. (2009)

As the issue of access to fresh water becomes more and more acute, many people are exploring alternatives to deal with a shortage of fresh water. Some of these solutions range from massive desalination plants to the privatization and rationing of municipal drinking water.

Week 11 (11/8 and 11/11): The BP Oil Spill: The Mother of All Disasters

Read: *Black Tide: The Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill*. (pgs. 1-146)

Watch: *BookTV Interview with author Antonia Juhasz*. (4/22/2011)

Watch *The Spill*. Frontline Documentary. (October 2010)

The April 20, 2010 oil explosion of the Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Macondo oil fields is now the largest oil spill in US history, and the second largest oil spill in the entire world. In this section we will take an in-depth look at the politics and the reality of what happened that fateful day in April.

Week 12 (11/15 and 11/18): The BP Oil Spill Continued

Read: *Black Tide: The Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill*. (pgs. 146-210)

What did we learn, and try to understand exactly what went wrong. Why didn't environmental laws and protections prevent the disaster, and do we need to re-think legislative policy in this area?

Week 13 (11/22 and 11/25): The BP Oil Spill Wrap-up

Read: *Black Tide: The Devastating Impact of the Gulf Oil Spill*. (pgs. 210-312)

Watch *Heat*. Frontline Documentary. (October 2008)

Explore how BP respond to the spill. Look at how Obama and various federal environmental oversight agencies like the Department of the Interior handle the fallout from the blowout. Examine how the public responded to the accident, who was held responsible and what are the lessons to learn.

Part IV: Environmental Politics In Our Backyard

In this final section of the course we will be taking everything we have been learning about and discussing so far this semester and put it into action by focusing on a current environmental debate right here in New York--the issues of hydraulic fracturing, or hydrofracking. On Dec. 13, 2010, Gov. Paterson issued *Executive Order No. 41*, which imposed a moratorium on hydrofracking pending a study by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) on potential dangers from this practice. On July 8, 2011, the DEC began the next stage of the process, publishing the Revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS), which outlines its recommendations for how New York can lessen or avoid environmental impacts from high-volume hydraulic fracturing (HVHF). This document is a revision of the original draft study released in 2009, and it attempts to address many of the concerns raised during earlier public comment periods.

Case Scenario: Our challenge will be to investigate the safety and advisability of fracking in the New York watershed. We will be breaking the class into teams and reviewing different positions on the issue, as well as developing our own analysis as a class of the issues. Teams will be designated as different stakeholders in the hydrofracking debate--energy and gas companies, impacted citizens, state/federal officials, scientists, industry lobbyists, and citizen groups. We will spend three weeks exploring the environmental details of this issue, with weekly progress updates in class.

Case Background:

NY SEQR: Environmental Impact Assessment in New York State

In New York State, a majority of the activities proposed by state agencies or local governments, and all public permits from NY State agencies or local governments, require an environmental impact assessment, known as a [State Environmental Quality Review \(SEQR\)](#). Specifics on this requirement can be found in NY law under [6 NYCRR Part 617 State Environmental Quality Review \(SEQR\)](#). [Statutory authority: *Environmental Conservation Law Sections 3-0301(1)(b), 3-0301(2)(m) and 8-0113*]. The SEQR requires sponsoring or approving agencies to identify and mitigate (ie. reduce or compensate for) all significant environmental impacts of the activity under review. Fracking in New York falls under this area of environmental policy, and the State of New York is currently updating its 1992 environmental policy to take into account permits for HVHF (High-volume hydraulic fracturing).

Week 14 (11/29 and 12/2): What the Frack?

Read: [New York State's Heated Hydrofracking Debate](#). Long Island Press. (Aug 4, 2011).

Read: [Preliminary Revised Draft SGEIS on the Oil, Gas and Solution Mining Regulatory Program](#). NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. (2011).

Browse: [NYS Watersheds](#). NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

Read: [We All Live in a Watershed](#). NYS Department of Environment Conservation.

Browse: [Background on Marcellus Shale and Fracking](#). NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Browse: [SGEIS Draft report homepage](#). NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. (2011).

Read: [Senators, Representatives act to close Halliburton Loophole in the Safe Drinking Water Act](#). EarthWorks. (June 9, 2009).

Read: [Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals Act of 2009](#) (FRAC Act).

Read: [SEQRA](#). NYS Department of Environmental Conservation.

Explain final class project on fracking and break class into groups. Supporters of fracking say it will generate millions--perhaps even billions--of dollars in money and employ hundreds of thousands of people in much-needed work. Critics say that fracking is environmentally destructive, and that the impacts from drilling in the form of soil and water contamination, habitat destruction and toxic health effects far outweigh any economics-based argument. For others, the issue is simply too new and too complex for them to have an informed opinion about. As more calls for domestic energy combine with rising energy insecurity abroad, the issue is likely to grow in importance in the United States in the coming years, so becoming informed about fracking is critical for anyone interested in environmental politics today. Fracking is also an issue that crosses multiple fields of environmental policy and interests, ranging from energy and water to economic justice and federal resource policy, thus making it a perfect case study of real-time environmental policymaking.

Week 15 (12/6 and 12/9): Hydrofracking Continued

Read: [2011 Recommendations for Permitting High-Volume Hydraulic Fracturing in NYS](#). NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. (2011).

Read: [Quinnipiac University Public Opinion Poll: Marcellus Drilling in New York](#).

Read: [The Great Frack Attack](#). Commonwealth Foundation. (July 2011)

Browse: [Natural Gas Resource Center](#).

Browse: [Chemicals Used in Hydrofracking](#).

Browse: [FracFocus](#).

Browse: [CONSOL Energy. Marcellus Shale](#).

Browse: [Marcellus Drilling News](#).

Groups report back on research and findings to date. Discuss any issues that have come up in the course of research, and identify any information which is needed but not available to evaluate certain arguments or pieces of information. Discuss process of SGEIS and continue with SGEIS review. Discuss the 2011 recommendations from the NYS DEC, especially the following: *“These recommendations, if adopted in final form, would protect the state’s environmentally sensitive areas while realizing the economic development and energy benefits of the state’s natural gas resources. More than 80 percent of the Marcellus Shale where gas extraction is viable would still be accessible under these recommendations.”* (2011 Recommendations NYS DEC).

Week 16 (12/13 and 12/16): Hydrofracking Wrap-Up

Watch: [Gasland](#). (2010)

Read: [Revised Draft Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement \(SGEIS\)](#).

Browse Slideshow: [Looking at Natural Gas Drilling from an Economic & Environmental Perspective](#).

Browse Slideshow: [Marcellus Shale in Our Community: What's in it for All of Us?](#)

Browse Slideshow: [Fracking: The Gas Drilling Method Causing Poisoned Water Across the Country](#).

Read: [Movie falsely represents shale hydrofracking](#). Adirondack Daily Enterprise. (June 16, 2011).

Read: [New Study Finds Natural Gas in Marcellus Shale Region Worth 280,000 Jobs, \\$6 Billion in Government Revenue](#). American Petroleum Institute. (July 21, 2010).

Read: [The Economic Impacts of the Marcellus Shale: Implications for New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia](#). A Report to The American Petroleum Institute. Natural Resource Economics, Inc. (July 14, 2010).

Final group report back on issue areas. Wrap up discussion of SGEIS process and present tentative recommendations from each group.

Week 17 (12/20): Final Exam

Final fracking paper due on **Tuesday December 20th**.

Cheers. Sayonara. Mahalo.

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Extra Links and Resources

Top 10 Enviro films list: <http://www.blueplanetgreenliving.com/2010/05/21/top-ten-must-see-films/>

[Nature and Environment](#). PBS documentary film series.

[Earthlings](#) - movie link

Recommended Books

Albanese, Catherine. *Nature Religion in America: From the Algonkian Indians to the New Age*. University of Chicago Press. 1990.

Conca, Ken and Geoffrey Dabelko. *Green Planet Blues: Four Decades of Global Environmental Politics*. Westview Press. 2010.

Freinkel, Susan. *Plastic: A Toxic Love Story*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing. 2011

Grim, John, Ed. *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology: The Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*. Harvard University Press. 2001.

Guber, Deborah Lynn. *The Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment*. MIT Press. 2003.

Kearns, Laurel and Catherine Keller, Eds. *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*. Fordham University Press. 2007.

Laduke, Winona. *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*. South End Press. 2005.

Orr, David. *Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect*. Island Press. 1994.

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

Shabecoff, Philip. *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement*. Island Press. 2003.

Shnayerson, Michael. *Coal River*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2008.

Sze, Julie. *Noxious New York: The Racial Politics of Urban Health and Environmental Justice*. MIT Press. 2006.

Taylor, Bron. *Ecological Resistance Movements*. SUNY Press. 1995.

Taylor, Bron. *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future*. University of California Press. 2009.

Thayer, Robert. *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice*. University of California Press. 2003.

Vaughn, Jacqueline. *Environmental Politics: Domestic and Global Dimensions*. Thomson Wadsworth. 2011.

Wapner, Paul. *Living Through the End of Nature: The Future of American Environmentalism*. MIT Press. 2010.