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University of Wisconsin-Madison
T 6:30 to 9:00pm, 301 Ag Hall

Sociology/Community and Environmental Sociology 948
SEMINAR: ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY

“The real issues in sustainability aren’t technical,” an agronomist said to me a few years ago, “they’re social.” An over-statement perhaps – sustainability certainly also involves many real, and often difficult, technical issues. But this agronomist’s words are indicative of how researchers from across the disciplines are increasingly coming to value the importance of a sociological perspective in the study of the environment. This seminar presents an opportunity for advanced exploration into that important perspective.

The organization of the course falls into three parts:

- where the field *has been*
- where the field *is going*
- where the field *might go*

We begin, rather immodestly, by reading of a book of mine, the 4th edition of *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*, over several weeks. This will serve to give us a foundation in where the field has been, and to give you a sense of my own current take on environmental sociology.

Next, we will take up cutting edge topics in the field, week by week, of the students’ choosing. Pairs of students, or a student alone, will choose and research a topic, and meet with me outside of class to select the readings. This section will be the largest part of the course.

We will conclude with writing workshops on short policy reviews or social science essays that students will prepare, with an eye to submission in the journal *Society and Natural Resources*, or a different environmental sociology journal that accepts this kind of work.

Along the way, students will keep a weekly intellectual journal, which they share with a 3 to 4 member “muddle” group. Each class will begin with small group discussions by each muddle on the previous week’s readings.

A Note on Student Evaluation

Your grade for this course will be based on the following: the weekly journal (33%), the final paper (33%), and class participation (33%).

A Note on the Intellectual Journal: The weekly journal entry should be in the range of at least 350 words (about a page and a half). But entries can be as long as you like. Your goal should be to integrate some particular theme in the week’s learning and that develops your critical inquiry. The best entries will develop one theme or argument, rather than a scatter of observations. Also, it is important to *document* your theme or argument and to explain your *reasoning*. Students will share their weekly entries with their muddle group via email, with a cc to me, by Sunday midnight each week.

A Note on the Final Paper

The central written work of the course will be the preparation – and possible submission – of a 2000-3500 word (about 8 to 14 double-spaced pages) policy review or forum contribution for the journal *Society and Natural Resources*, or another environmental sociology journal. This is both easier and harder than it sounds. On the easy side is that you do not have to spend months interviewing and running regression analyses to write a publishable manuscript. The hard side of all this, though, is that such pieces generally require a far higher level of writing and theoretical reasoning than a piece that mainly reports research findings. Thus, the best papers will be those that exhibit good writing and that develop your own lines of reasoning, and not merely report on those of others. As to topic, I will welcome anything that would be of interest to environmental sociology, and that fits *Society and Natural Resources's* description of policy reviews and forum contributions (or that fits the format of some other environmental sociology journal), which is as follows:

“*Policy Reviews* examine current or proposed policies associated with natural resource management. These articles can raise questions of policy, propose alternate action, or critique current or proposed policy. An essay is a creative article discussing social science issues related to natural resources or the environment. Total length of these manuscripts should not exceed 3,500 words.

“The *Forum* section offers a medium where authors can present editorial remarks and their perspectives and observations about social behavior, natural resources and the environment. These comments can be gleaned from the author's travels and derived from the author's particular disciplinary orientation, previous experiences, and the like. Such observations might focus on similarities or differences (and the likely bases for these) in the nature of problems, institutions, or social processes they encounter. Hypotheses and research questions prompted by such experiences are welcome. Editorial or professional reaction or commentary on published material in the journal is also welcome. Total length of a forum article should be 2,200 words.”

Please note that “first musings” on your policy review or forum piece are due October 8th, and that “second musings” with preliminary bibliography are due November 5th. We will be discussing everyone's draft manuscript in class during the final two weeks of the course. Your draft is due via email to the entire class 48 hours before the session in which it is to be discussed. The final paper is due to me via email December 17th by 5pm.

A Note on Discussion Format

The bulk of each class session will be devoted to an open discussion of the day's reading, in a sequence we might call *reflection* (what the reading says), *refraction* (what the reading should have said), and *projection* (what the reading means for our own work). The daily pattern will thus normally be as follows:

- meeting of the muddles
- discussion of points brought back to the full group from the muddles
- reflection, led by the student organizers for that week
- a 10 to 15 minute break around 7:45
- refraction and projection

A Note on Class Participation

Your grade for class participation will not be a measure of how loud you were, or of how often you spoke. Rather, it will reflect the extent to which you were “there.” Grading in this area will be based on the initial assumption that everyone will get full credit, with deductions made for negligent or “unthere” performance, if necessary. (If I think things aren’t going well in this area, I’ll let you know, and we can talk about it.)

A Note on Getting Ahold of the Readings

I have about 10 or 12 extra copies of the 4th edition of *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*, which I can give out for free. I also will make a PDF available of the first chapter, which we will read for the first class meeting. The other readings we will send around as PDFs, as we develop our syllabus.