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### EVST 420.01: The U.S. Environmental Movement

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# EVST 420: U.S. Environmental Movement

Class Times/Location: Tuesday and Thursday, 2:10 to 3:30 P.M. in LA 203

Instructor: Tom Roy

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## COURSE PURPOSE:

The environmental movement has had a profound impact on everything from passage of major legislation to changes in the way people live their daily lives to disruptions of global trade meetings. Despite clear successes and broad public support, whether the movement can effectively bring about the changes necessary to meet its goal of environmental protection and restoration is still an open and vital question. The purpose of this course is to study the environmental movement as a social movement, that is, as collective activity designed to promote (or resist) social change. More directly we shall address the question: Has the U.S. Environmental Movement gotten us closer to our vision of environmental protection and restoration? If so, how and why has it succeeded? If not, how and why has it failed?

In considering these questions, we assume that interest in conserving nature and protecting or improving our environment has been conditioned by historical context. In this course we shall study that history to come to a clearer understanding of how contemporary issues have been shaped. We can also assume that concerns about nature and the environment, and particularly our approaches to what needs to be done, are influenced deeply by our own and broader societal values about the role of government and the responsibility of individuals in effecting social change. Another emphasis of this course, then, is to provide you with an opportunity to think about your own values and perspectives about change and how we, in a democratic society, ought to go about it.

Instructors also bring their own biases to any course. Over the years, I have moved from anxious concern over Rocky Mountain specific issues (such as wilderness, mega-fauna protection, etc.) to two more universal concerns. First, I believe that the areas of the West that we cherish can only be protected and restored if we make our urban areas, where most Americans live and to which the peoples of the world are flocking, livable environments.

Hear the words of Wes Jackson regarding this:

*"It is possible to love a small acreage in Kansas as much as Muir loved the entire Sierra Nevada. This is fortunate, for the wilderness of the Sierra will disappear unless little pieces of non-wilderness become intensely loved by lots of people. In other words, Harlem and East St. Louis and Iowa and Kansas and the rest of the world where wilderness has been destroyed must come to be loved by enough of us, or wilderness is doomed."*

Second, I believe that the greatest immediate threat to our environment is the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the persistent use of armed conflict as a method for solving ethnic and state disputes. So, for me, if the environmental movement is to succeed it must become more inclusive, not shying away from social issues and the nuclear threat and war but, rather, somehow, include them within its historically more limited environmental protection-restoration agenda.

## TEXTS:

Dowie, Mark. *Losing Ground*. Required

Hawken, Paul. *Blessed Unrest*. Required

Koyol, Jonathan. *Savage Inequalities*. Required

Wylie, Arlet and Sam. *Between Piety and Desire*. Required

Worldwatch Institute. *State of the World: Our Urban Future*. Optional

## GRADING POLICY:

- 1.) Discussion point responses to the readings: 10%
- 2.) Essay response to the Dowie book, *Losing Ground*: 20%
- 3.) Essay response to the Koyol book, *Savage Inequalities* & to the Wylie's book *Between Piety and Desire*: 20%
- 4.) Group project: 30%
- 5.) Take home final exam: 20%

Note regarding papers: Papers are due in class on or before the date listed in the syllabus. Unless you have made a prior agreement with me, I shall take off one grade level (A becomes A-) for each class day an assignment is late. Papers with an undue number of errors of punctuation, spelling, or grammar will be returned ungraded for correction. Written work will be evaluated in terms of your depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection, clarity of writing and ability to address issues raised in the texts and in class on the topic at hand. Grades given reflect the following criteria of judgment:

F: Failure to meet minimum requirements

D: Unsatisfactory, but some effort to meet minimum requirements

C: Satisfactory, meeting minimum requirements of assignment but not much more

B: Good to very good; thoughtful reflection, good analysis, clear writing style

A: Excellent depth of critical analysis, thoughtfulness of reflection and writing style; demonstrate creativity and mature analytical skills in going beyond the primary requirements of the assignment.

Grades will be recorded using pluses and minuses. I shall say something more about grades after we review the syllabus the first class meeting.

## DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS:

1.) Discussion Point Responses to the Readings: Your main job for the participation portion of this class is to read each assigned reading thoughtfully before class and then to help us discuss it in class. To help you think critically about what you read, please write down at least 3 major questions or points you wish to pose for group discussion directly related to the reading assigned. Pick out things that are most interesting to you and relevant to the class. You might:

- identify points you agree or disagree with that you wish to discuss;
- relate the material to something else you have read or experienced;
- compare and contrast the ideas-interpretations of different authors or figures in the readings;
- identify questions or difficulties you had with the readings.

Turn in your list to me at the beginning of each Tuesday class session for the reading that had been assigned. These lists may be handwritten as long as they are legible to an old guy! They will be evaluated by: check-minus (needs more development); check (satisfactory to strong; could be further developed); check-plus (excellent and insightful.)

You should be prepared to speak about your ideas or questions during the class discussion; indeed, I may select interesting questions and ask you--as the author-- to discuss with the class what you have written. These papers will also let me know what you are thinking about or struggling with. You should have a conversation with what you read. Talk back to it. Be an active reader.

2.) Essay Response to Dowie Book: Write a 5-7 page paper on an idea, issue or question that really intrigues or challenges you based upon your reading of the Dowie book, *Losing Ground*. On the day the

assignment is due, be prepared to share the contents of your paper with the class. DUE: THURSDAY, 20 SEPTEMBER.

3.) Essay response to Koyol book, *Savage Inequalities* and to the Wylie's book, *Between Piety and Desire*. Write a 5 - 7 page paper, using what you learned from these two readings, to reflect upon the relationship of the urban environment to the future of the environmental movement. On the day the assignment is due, be prepared to share the contents of your paper with the class. DUE: TUESDAY, 23 OCTOBER.

4.) Group Project: You shall organize yourselves into teams of 3-5 students based upon your common interest in and urban environmental issues. (The Koyol, Wylie and State of the World, 2007 readings should help you identify an urban environmental issue of interest) Your project must:

1. Examine what previous and current efforts have been made to address the issue.
2. offer a proposal, based upon your examination of past and current effort, as to how you would address the issue and why.

Your final group paper, of 12 - 15 pages, is due TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER. Beginning on that date each group shall have 20 minutes to present their group project to the class.

5. Take-Home Final Exam based upon your reading of the Hawken book, *Blessed Unrest*. A 5 - 7 page essay. I offer you two ways to approach this assignment. First is a reflective piece in which you review the primary purpose and central assumptions of the course. Has the environmental movement succeeded or not? If so, why? If not, why not? And more especially, where do we need to go from here? While I encourage you to draw upon the readings and class discussions, I want this to be "your" thinking. Think about your vision statement developed at the course beginning. Where is the environmental movement falling short in its ability to get us there? What does this mean and say to you?

Let me offer another way to come at this. I have been involved with the EVST program for almost a quarter of a century. Increasingly I have become concerned with our tendency as a program to leave students with a sense of being overwhelmed by the problems we face environmentally and socially. I have found that what sustains me are the individuals whom and the organizations which, despite obstacles, sustain hope and continue to work to make ours a better world. For your final paper write about what your sense of the future is, what are your sources of hope and the individuals and /or organizations that you think will serve as your inspirations. Write your essay as a letter to someone and use your audience to shape how you frame your essay. DUE: MONDAY, 10 DECEMBER, 3:20 P.M.

A Note to Graduate Students. Please identify yourselves to me after class the first day. I shall expect your work to be more analytical and penetrating and will expect you to help in leading class discussions and projects.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE:**

I believe that learning is a joint or shared endeavor that should be driven not only by what I think we should be doing but by both how you are responding to material and what is of most concern to you. I also believe that learning is...or at least should be...fun. All this is my weak excuse for not presenting you with a day by day schedule of readings and class topics. Frankly, I can't know in August, while I am developing this syllabus, what, specifically, we really ought to be concentrating on, say at 3 P.M. on Thursday, the 16th of November. To me that is preposterous. So, the end of each class on Thursday I shall review where we are and what I wish for us to do the following week. I hope you can live with that!

And finally, I look forward to this class and working with you. Please don't be shy about asking questions, expressing your ideas and concerns and, yes, even criticisms!