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NRSM 475.01: Environment and Development

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NRSM 475: Environment and Development¹

Tuesdays & Thursdays 11:00 am – 12:20 pm in Liberal Arts 205

Instructor: Colleen Livingstone, MS GIS

Email: colleen.livingstone@umconnect.umt.edu

Office: Stone Hall 210

Office hours: T, Th 12:40-1:40 pm or by appointment. *If possible, let me know ahead of time (in class or via email) if you plan to come to office hours.*

Course Description

Environmental problems and their solutions are today widely discussed around the world, both by specialists and everyday people. However, what is considered a “problem” and a “solution” varies by person, context, and historical moment. Increasingly, biological scientists have acknowledged that environmental/ecological problems and processes are highly linked or “coupled” with social problems and processes and thus require approaching them together as “social-ecological systems.”

Environmental social scientists – sociologists, geographers, anthropologists etc. – have argued for decades that society and environment are not just linked but co-evolved; they developed so closely together that they constitute one highly complex system. Understanding the connections between people, their societies, and their natural resources and ecosystems necessitates attention to many factors that are constantly changing! On the social side it demands attention to a variety of social forces (notably culture, economics and politics).

In this class we will apply a multi-scalar approach to examine the “big” processes that relate to organization of societies and economies (including colonialism, nation-state building and development, capitalism, and globalization) and how these processes influence the ways different types of people – differentiated by nationality, class, gender, age, ethnicity and their intersections – use natural resources over time and in their particular places across the globe. We will explore how particular histories, framings and assumptions about society, environment and development have led to different views of environmental “problems” and “solutions,” and how the latter themselves have created their own sets of opportunities and challenges for different states, regions, communities and individuals. Another way of saying this is in this class we will pay close attention to the politics of environment, development and conservation – who gets to decide how natural resources are used or not? Who gets to decide how particular resource uses are valued or not, including what indices we use to measure them and what constitutes “conservation” or “sustainability”? How have the uneven process of national development and globalization influenced who wins and who loses in the process of re-envisioning and recreating more “sustainable” and “just” societies, especially in light of current challenges wrought by climate change? To get at these answers, we will be linking theory and grounded case studies through our readings, in-class discussions, and written assignments.

The emphasis in this course is on learning to understand, think, and write critically about social forces in environment and development (though we will also address the ecological dimensions). Given the scope of the topic, this course will not cover all of the major environmental issues or conservation strategies in the world today. You will have the opportunity to pursue a particular issue or topic of your own choosing in your final paper. If you want to pursue any of the topics covered in more depth, or if you would like to discuss how your own interests connect to the course material, please reach out to me! I would love to help you make those connections and further your academic goals.

¹ Adapted from course materials by Jill Belsky, PhD and Marisela Chávez, ABD.

After completing this course, you will be able to:

- **Describe** key social forces influencing society-environment-development-conservation interactions
- **Analyze** different perspectives on the causes, consequences and potential solutions to a variety of environment and development issues today, and
- **Evaluate** the opportunities and challenges of strategies, programs and policies to reconcile tensions between environment and development, and their variable costs and benefits for different social groups and ecologies.

Readings

There are no required textbooks for this course. All readings will be posted on Moodle. Readings will be due by class on the days they are assigned.

Some readings may be marked "(graduate students only)". These readings are optional for undergraduates but a required for students taking the graduate increment.

Course Structure and Expectations

This course involves lectures, class discussions, videos, written assignments, take-home quizzes, and a final paper. In-class discussions will focus on the readings assigned that day. The instructor will provide background on readings and key concepts, but it is essential that students complete readings before class in order to be able to participate fully. Both the material covered in class and the material covered in readings may appear in quizzes and written assignments.

Some readings may be challenging, but students should bring their questions to class, where discussions and activities should help students better understand the material. All views are welcome in class but they must be communicated in a civil and never hostile manner, and any perspectives discussed in class may be subject to respectful examination and intellectual questioning.

Grading and Assignments***Participation 15%***

Participation includes attendance, punctuality, attentiveness, effort, completing all readings prior to class, and offering your thoughts, ideas, opinions, and questions during discussion. Your participation grade is not based on knowing the "right" answers or the quantity or length of your comments but rather your willingness to contribute, evidence that you have completed and thought through material presented in the reading.

Reflection Papers 20% (5% each)

Over the course of the semester, you will write **four** short reflection papers. For each reflection paper, you will choose one set of assigned readings and write 2-3 double spaced pages (12-point font, 1-inch margins) in which you:

- Concisely summarize the main points of the readings, including any relevant background on the author(s), why they were writing, and the social/historical/political context.

- Compare and contrast the views presented in the readings (if they address the same issues) and/or discuss how the ideas in the different readings fit together (if they address different issues/theories).
- Connect the content of your selected set of readings to at least **one** concept or reading from a previous session. You are also welcome to connect the readings to topics of special interest to you, as long as you focus on the content of the assigned readings.

While you may raise questions about the readings or introduce your own perspective on them, your *first* task is to present and discuss the arguments/ideas in the readings on their own terms. This will help you understand the readings more deeply *and* give you a stronger foundation from which to argue your own viewpoint.

Due dates: Each reflection paper will be due **one week** after the selected set of assigned readings. To ensure that everyone gets some feedback early in the semester, you must complete at least one reflection paper before **Tuesday, February 14th**. All reflection papers must be turned by **Thursday, April 27th**. *I strongly encourage you to consider your workload and plan ahead.*

For graduate students only: Your reflection papers should be 4-5 double-spaced pages. You are strongly encouraged to draw connections between the reading content and your own research topic or specialty.

Quizzes 20% (10% each)

There will be two take-home quizzes consisting of short answer and short essay questions. Each quiz will be assigned on a Thursday and due the following Monday.

Due dates: Quiz #1 will be assigned Thursday, February 9th and due **Monday, February 13th**. Quiz #2 will be assigned Thursday, March 9th and due **Monday, March 13th**.

For graduate students only: You will be assigned a modified version of each quiz in the format of an essay question requiring you to synthesize the foregoing course material. Your quizzes will have the same due dates and point values as undergraduates.

Final Research Project

For their final research project, each student will select an ongoing initiative or organization involved in responding to the tensions between environment and development and conduct independent research following the guidelines provided below. You are required to submit an abstract with a preliminary title and five references (5% of grade), present your findings briefly in class (10%), and submit a written final paper (30%).

Purpose: The purpose of the final paper is for you to select a topic related to your interests and use it to apply concepts from class to assess an initiative/organization's approach and effectiveness at resolving tensions between environment and development or working towards creating "sustainable" and/or "resilient" societies and environment. You will describe, analyze, and evaluate it according to criteria, lessons and evidence learned from class and your own readings, videos and discussions.

Paper Topic and Abstract 10%

Selecting a topic: Please select an initiative or organization for your case study analysis and evaluation. Pick an organization or initiative that has an explicit concern for addressing environmental, conservation, and/or sustainable development issues. If the scope of the initiative or organization is very

large, it is important to select a smaller program or project associated with it. You may choose something that is operating internationally, in the USA, or in Montana. You may make your selection based on the novelty of the initiative or organization's approach, a noteworthy project, its geographical location, or prior experience with the organization. You are encouraged to choose a topic that you would like to know more about and/or even volunteer or work for in the future. Do not select an initiative or organization with scant information as you will not be able to complete the assignment.

Abstract: The purpose of the abstract is to ensure that you have selected an initiative or organization that is in keeping with the objective of the assignment and which you can find sufficient information to complete it. Summarize, in 1 double-spaced page, the initiative or organization you have selected for your case study analysis and evaluation and provide a very brief description what you plan to examine. Include **five** references you will use in completing the requirements for the case study. Use a standard citation format (APA is preferred, but anything is fine as long as you are consistent).

Due date: The Abstract (including a description, preliminary title, and 5 sources) is due **Friday, March 10th**.

For graduate students only: You may choose to write your final paper on this prompt, or on any other topic related to environment and development and your interests, provided you discuss it with me ahead of time. Please include 10 sources (rather than 5) and annotate each with 1-3 sentences describing what kind of information they contribute and how you plan to use them in your final paper.

Presentation 5%

This will be a very brief presentation (about five minutes). It will be a chance to share some of your key findings with your classmates and to practice concise, focused communication. We will discuss guidelines in more detail later in the semester.

Due Date: Presentations will be given in-class on **Thursday, April 27th**, **Tuesday, May 2th**, and **Thursday, May 4th**.

Final Paper 30%

For your final paper, follow the general format below. Be sure to use section headings (you may use the exact headings listed below, or adapt them in a way that suits your topic, but you *must* include the content described below.) The final paper should be around 8-10 double-spaced pages (12 point font, 1 inch margins). You are welcome to discuss your paper with class members or anyone else with knowledge about the initiative or organization. However, the analysis, evaluation, and writing of the final paper must be your own individual work. The case study and evaluation must have the following sections:

- 1. Contact Information:** At the top of the first page provide the name and contact information for the initiative or organization, including its website, mailing address, and phone number. This section should be around 1/2 page.
- 2. Description:** Building on your abstract, very briefly describe the initiative or organization and its overall mission or the particular project you have chosen. This section should be around 1 page.
- 3. Analysis:** In this section, examine critically what the initiative or organization claims to be doing; interrogate their assumptions, claims, and look for contradictions between what they say

and actual evidence (if you can find any). The point of this analysis is to dive beyond face value acceptance of what is written on an organization's web page or pamphlets. Apply insights from class readings, lectures and discussions. To assist with your analysis, select two of the key concepts we have used in class appropriate to your topic and use them as a basis for the analysis, including how the initiative or organization defines its problem, selects an approach towards a solution(s), and explains its successes or failures. Even if no clear answers are available, I will be grading how well you ask questions and analyze the evidence that is available. This section should be around 3-4 pages.

4. Evaluation: Drawing on your analysis, briefly evaluate or judge what you see as the initiative/organization/project's major strengths and/or limitations. This could be related to their framing of problems and mission, chosen strategy, practical accomplishments or ongoing struggles. Be as specific as possible with regard to your reasoning and the evidence you provide for your evaluation. Be attentive to real social and ecological conditions so your suggestions are feasible and practical. This section should be around 3-4 pages.

5. Literature cited: Cite all the literature and resources you used to describe, analyze, and evaluate the organization. Use resources from class as well as additional readings (e.g., website and internet resources, reports, articles, book chapters, information from key informant interviews). Choose on standard citation format and use is consistently (APA is preferable).

Please note that the analysis and evaluation sections are the most important. You will need to do both original research and thinking. Search the library and internet for information about your organization and its activities. There may be formal evaluations available for larger organizations. Closely examine its website and other relevant sites. You may need to email your chosen organization. Email someone involved with the initiative or associated with your organization early on with a concise list of questions, or if local, try to contact them by phone. Be polite and persistent but realize that they are busy and may not respond immediately. I will provide some examples of international organizations and topics; feel free to use one of these or select one of your own choice.

Due Date: Final papers are due via Moodle (or, if necessary, email) **before or during the Final Exam period.** (There will be no in-class meeting or exam during the final exam period). ****If you wish to get feedback on a draft of your final paper, you may send to me by Friday, April 14th.****

For graduate students only: Your final paper should be 10-12 pages double spaced, and its structure and content may vary based on your chosen topic and conversations with me.

Assignment	Due Date	Points	% of Grade
Participation	Throughout	30	15%
4 Reflection papers	One week after selected readings were due 1 st due by 2/14, all due by 4/27	40 (10 each)	20% (5% each)
Quizzes	1 st due 2/15 2 nd due by 3/13	40 (20 each)	20% (10% each)
Paper Topic/Abstract	3/10	20	10%
Presentation	4/27-5/4	10	5%
Final Paper	Final exam period	60	30%
Total		200	100%

Late Assignments

A 10% late penalty will be deducted from any assignment turned in after the due date, unless the student has made other arrangements with me. If you think you may not be able to turn in an assignment on time, contact me before the due date.

Course guidelines and policies:

Academic Conduct

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at: [Student Conduct Code Link](#). Academic misconduct may result in being given a zero on any/all work and expelled from this course.

Advising

I encourage you to e-mail me, or come to my office during office hours. I also welcome you to make an appointment outside of my office hours (schedules permitting). I encourage you to talk with me as soon as you have questions or difficulties with the material. Do not wait until the day before a quiz or an assignment is due.

The University of Montana Writing Center welcomes all students in all disciplines to take advantage of free support as they write for any course. To make an appointment and learn more about The Writing Center's by-appointment and drop-in hours, visit [Writing Center Link](#) or call 243-2266.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications.