Environmental Policy

By Josh Gellers, University of Cali

Course Description

The vitality of the world’s ecosystems rests upon a constellation of inevitable and purposive forces acting in concert. To be sure, how humans decide to formalize interactions with their natural surroundings holds important consequences for both the environment and the people who inhabit it. By studying policy, we can better understand how politics translates competing interests, strategies, and values into environmental outcomes. This course will introduce the concept of environmental policy and provide students with the analytical tools required to evaluate the merit of various approaches to solving environmental problems. The main focus will be U.S. environmental policy, but course materials will also incorporate international environmental policy as well as policy in a comparative perspective where appropriate.

Course Objectives

1. Understand the various ethical orientations toward the environment
2. Identify the root causes of current environmental issues
3. Develop knowledge about environmental policy making processes and actors
4. Examine different approaches to solving environmental problems
5. Analyze current environmental controversies
6. Apply theory and policy frameworks to devise practical solutions
7. Enhance critical thinking, public speaking, and writing skills

Course Logistics

Class Format:
Lecture attendance is mandatory and will be recorded. Most class sessions will be devoted to a mixture of lecture and discussion regarding assigned reading materials. There is no make-up for anything covered during these general class sessions. Graded portions of the class include four reaction papers, midterm exam, final paper, final paper presentation, and class attendance/participation. The reaction papers will be two-page, double-spaced analytical summaries of the week’s readings. Students must complete four of these throughout the term. The midterm exam will consist of two essay questions. This exam will cover readings from the textbook, films shown during class, and in-class lectures. For the final paper, students will be required to write a 7-10 page analysis of a current domestic or international environmental problem and devise a potential policy solution.
Expectations

1. Reading assignments should be completed prior to class meetings.
2. Class members are encouraged to take an active, participatory role in class discussions.
3. Students should study in advance for all exams.

Grading

The following weights will be assigned in the determination of final grades:

- Reaction Papers (4) (20%)
- Midterm Exam (in class: closed book) (25%)
- Final Paper (take-home) (30%)
- Final Paper Presentation (15%)
- Class Attendance, Participation (10%)

Course Materials

The required textbooks for this course are:


These textbooks are available for purchase at the bookstore. Copies of the textbooks will also be available on reserve at the university library at the Circulation/Reserve Desk. All other assigned articles should be accessed using the university's online library resources.

Course Procedures

Class Announcements: Check your campus email account on a regular basis for any announcements from the instructor. If you have trouble accessing your email account, an
archive of class email announcements can be found on the Announcements section of the course’s website.

Questions via Email: Please email your instructor with questions you may have regarding the administration of the class. Emails will normally be answered within 48 hours. Please raise all questions regarding the substance of the course material during class or office hours.

Recording Policy: Electronic recording of class sessions and discussion sections is not permitted.

Classroom Electronics: Cell phones must be turned off during class. Computers can distract everyone in the room, and will be permitted during class for note-taking purposes only. If anyone notices a computer used for any other reason during class, you will be instructed to turn it off immediately and work without it in the future.

Attendance: Attendance will be recorded in lecture. You will be responsible for all material provided in lecture and assigned readings. Anyone causing disruption in class or in discussion section will be instructed to leave immediately; no exceptions.

Exams: Bring 1 large (8.5” x 11”) unmarked bluebook and several blue or black pens to the midterm exam. All essays must be written in ink. No electronic devices or other personal items may be kept at your seat during the exams (other than a plain watch).

Excused Absences: An absence from a lecture or exam will only be “excusable” (i.e. subject to make-up) with written documentation of an extreme illness or death in the immediate family, presented to the instructor within one week of the absence. Make-up credit for attendance will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Make-up exams may take the form of alternate exams or research papers. [*A make-up final exam is only offered if you report your documented emergency prior to start of the exam to jgellers@uci.edu.]

Academic Honesty: Students found to be guilty of plagiarism or cheating as defined by official university policy will automatically receive a grade of “F” in the course. Other actions consistent with university policy may be taken where deemed appropriate. For more information, please consult the university’s policy on academic integrity.
Schedule & Assignments

The following reading list is provided as the authoritative guide to the assigned topics and readings for this course. As the weeks progress, the instructor may alter the reading assignments and/or provide links to recommended (optional) readings of further interest.

[WEEK 1: Ethical Approaches to Environmental Problems]


[WEEK 2: History and Perspectives on Environmental Policy]

- Submit and discuss “What’s My Carbon Footprint?” assignment.

[WEEK 3: Consumption, Population, and Economic Growth]

Proceedings of the PSO, New Series No. 25

- Submit final paper proposal.

[WEEK 4: U.S. Environmentalism and its Limits]


[WEEK 5: Framing and Agenda Setting]

- Submit final paper bibliography.

[WEEK 6: Market-Based Solutions]


[WEEK 7: Local Community Empowerment]

• Charles Sabel, Archon Fung, and Bradley Karkkainen, “Beyond Backyard Environmentalism: How Communities are Quietly Refashioning Environmental Regulation,” *Debating the Earth*, pp. 116-134.

[WEEK 8: Environmental Justice and Human Rights]


[WEEK 9: Rationality and Risk Assessment]

• Mary O’Brien, “Goal: Replace Risk Assessment with Alternatives Assessment,” *Debating the Earth*, pp. 135-144.

[WEEK 10: Proposing Solutions]

• Deliver Final Paper Presentations.

[FINALS WEEK]

• Submit Final Papers by 5:00pm.
• FINAL EXAM