Human Dimensions of the Environment | EVPP 336

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Class Schedule: Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:30 pm - 2:45 pm, Aug. 23-Dec. 15
Location: Zoom (see below)
Office Hours: Fridays, 10 am-noon, or by appointment (phone or Zoom)

COURSE ADJUSTMENTS DUE TO COVID-19

1) The course will be delivered in an online lecture and discussion format using Zoom. If you have any problems using Zoom, please let me know.

   Join Zoom Meeting
   https://gmu.zoom.us/j/94731337756?pwd=V1A5elExaERsaVcyKzJqUGZ0VVk0QT09
   Meeting ID: 947 3133 7756
   Passcode: EVPP336

2) Optimally, we will all learn from each other in this course. Please plan on participating during the class sessions and using your web camera, unless you are unable to do so due to your location. Activities and assignments in this course will use web-conferencing software (Zoom). In an emergency, students can connect by telephone, but video connection is the expected norm.

3) Activities and assignments in this course will regularly use the Blackboard learning system, available at https://mymason.gmu.edu. Students are required to have regular, reliable access to a computer with an updated operating system (recommended: Windows 10 or Mac OSX 10.13 or higher) and a stable broadband Internet connection (cable modem, DSL, satellite broadband, etc., with a consistent 1.5 Mbps [megabits per second] download speed or higher.

4) Mason's site on COVID-19 is located here: https://www2.gmu.edu/coronavirus. If you experience difficulties during the term, please let me know. I recognize that the fall term may continue to present myriad challenges that are difficult to predict. Your health and wellbeing—and that of your family—take priority.

> *Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise.*
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> *— Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac (1949)*

Course description and objectives

In this class, we will take the stance of Leopold's "doctor." We will diagnose the environmental challenges that we face on a global scale, and locally, on our own campus and in our communities. In order to understand the causes and nature of the damage, we will take a historical perspective of how humans have interacted with their environments over time, and how they are likely to do so in the future. The path of human history is inextricably interwoven with that of Earth's ecosystems. The abundance of natural resources has fueled the rise of human societies and, when these stores declined, sometimes led to the rapid demise of civilizations. But human ingenuity and social organization factor into these outcomes as well, increasing the complexity of the diagnostic task before us. As difficult as it is academically to answer the question "what makes certain societies more environmentally sustainable than others?," it is of enormous practical import to do so. Only through better management of the social dimension of socio-environmental systems will we find opportunities for sustainable solutions.

During (~) the first half of the semester we will explore the conditions under which social change occurs by reading Prof. Leslie Crutchfield's book *How Change Happens*, complemented by other readings on socio-ecological systems and social movements. During the second half of the term we will consider changes in socio-ecological systems over time using Prof. Yuval Noah Harari's book *Sapiens* as a guide.

Mason Impact (Impact + Civic Engagement and Community Learning, CECiL)

This course takes a problem-based learning approach. As you will read in Harari's book, changes in the scale of human social communication and collaboration over thousands of years have given our species enormous power in transforming global ecosystems. Efforts to promote sustainability require the ability to motivate this capacity for social cooperation in addressing environmental issues, whether climate change, biodiversity loss, or marine debris. During the term you will engage in two projects that will require thinking through the lens of socio-ecological systems in order to diagnose human-environment interactions at various scales. For each project, you will prepare a report/memo on the topic, analyzing possible approaches, and present it. You will be required to base your research on citations that are of sufficient quality that they could be used by a decision-maker in credibly making the claim to others. Group meetings in class, and invited speakers, will support you as you research and write the assignments. Through these course components, the

following learning outcomes will be met:

1. Understanding how to conduct research and use knowledge to address environmental issues of societal importance;
2. Exploring different perspectives of stakeholders and being able to relate how their viewpoints affect social responses to environmental issues;
3. Engaging in inquiry about topics of importance to environmental protection in a series of increasingly challenging assignments.

Assignments and grading

You will have five types of assignments: 1) a short blog detailing your experiences during one hour of media use (Internet, television, video games) versus one hour spent outside in relatively natural area; 2) a policy memo assessing environmental policy approaches; 3) a brief written description of your assigned character's perspective of a historical societal "collapse" and participation in a class panel with others from your society; 4) contribution of an example of human-environment interactions from a period in history**;** and 5) a group project surveying Mason undergraduate students on equity, AI, and the environment. These assignments will constitute your grade for the term. You will be given a rubric prior to each assignment that details all required components and their associated point value.

Blog on your experiences of information from mediated vs. natural environments

After reading chapters from Bill McKibben's book on the age of missing information, you will write a minimum of a paragraph each on the information you receive from (1) one hour of time spent in a mediated environment (television, computer games, social media, other online sources) and (2) one hour in a relatively natural setting with no forms of anthropogenic audio-visual information (aka, no music on head phones or Youtube on your phone).

Writing a memo on environmental policy approaches

Working in teams, students will research a current environmental challenge and its socioeconomic dimensions for the purpose of making policy recommendations. The teams will present their recommendations towards the end of the term.

Experiencing a societal collapse: Your character's perspective

What was it like to see the last tree die on Easter Island? Would you notice if your society's way of life was out of sync with its environment? If so, how would you feel and who—or what—would you blame? You will write a paragraph as a character from one of four societies described in Jared Diamond's *Collapse*. In class, you will participate in a panel describing what life was like for your character and answer questions (in character) from your classmates.

Historical timeline of human-environment interactions
During our reading of *Sapiens*, you will be assigned an essay for one of the four broad historical periods of the book. In the essay, you will describe an example of human-environment interactions that occurred during the period and its environmental and social implications. All information must be appropriately cited.

Human-environment interactions, AI, and equity
As a class, we will survey Mason students about AI, equity, and the environment. We will discuss your findings at the end of the course with the Office of Sustainability and/or other representatives from the university.

Grade distribution overview

1	Blog on information from mediated vs. natural sources	15%
2	County environmental policy memo	30%
3	*Collapse* paragraph and group participation	15%
4	*Sapiens* essay	20%
5	Team project: Survey of Mason undergraduate students	20%
*	*[Extra credit, TBD (Social change activity)]*	*5%*

Loss of points
Please watch for emails from the instructor in regard to preparation for upcoming classes, and please attend all classes. Lack of preparation for class, including guest speakers, may incur loss of points.

Attending class is vital to your success in the course, even in an online format. One unexcused absence is permitted. Failure to attend more than one class will result in a loss of 1 point per class period. Please enter your full name when you log into Zoom. I use Zoom to record attendance. If you have a medical—or other—reason for missing class, please provide a letter from your physician or equivalent. If you face difficulties in attending class, please let me know.

Grades
Your final letter grade will be assessed based on the total points you have accumulated through completing the assignments. Grades will not be curved.

A	93-100	A-	90-92	B+	87-89
B	83-86	B-	80-82	C+	77-79
C	70-76	D	60-69	F	59 or less

Course Schedule (subject to change)

Week	Date	Topics	Readings & Assignments
Week 1	Aug. 23; Aug. 25	• Introductions • Course overview • **The age of missing information** • **Collective action**	*"Encouraged"—not required—reading:* Ostrom, E. (2010). Polycentric systems for coping with collective action and global environmental change. *Global Environmental Change*, *20*(4), 550–557.
Week 2	Aug. 30; Sept. 1	• **Ideas of nature**	**** Due Sept. 1: "2 hours of information" blog post** *Reading due Monday:* McKibben, B. (1992). *The age of missing information* (1st ed.). New York: Random House. — 7:00 am — Daybreak Crawford, K. (2021). *The atlas of AI: Power, politics, and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence.* Yale University Press. — Introduction
Week 3	***LABOR DAY-NO CLASS***; Sept. 8	• **Systems dynamics** • **Social change**	*Reading due Wednesday:* Crutchfield, L. R. (2018). *How change happens: Why some social movements succeed while others don't*. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

			— Introduction: How change happens Meadows, D. H. (2009). *Thinking in systems: A primer* (D. Wright, Ed.). London, UK: Earthscan. — Chapter one: The basics — Chapter five: System traps … and opportunities
Week 4	Sept. 13; Sept. 15	• **Socio-ecological systems** • **Social change**	*Reading due Monday:* Crutchfield, L. R. (2018). *How change happens: Why some social movements succeed while others don't*. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. — Chapter 1: Turn grassroots gold — Chapter 2: Sharpen your 10/10/10/20 = 50 vision Ostrom, E., & Cox, M. (2010). Moving beyond panaceas: A multi-tiered diagnostic approach for social-ecological analysis. *Environmental Conservation, 37*(4), 451–463.
Week 5	Sept. 20; Sept. 22	• **Environmental movements** • **Social change**	*Reading due Monday:* Crutchfield, L. R. (2018). *How change happens: Why some social movements succeed while others don't*. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. — Chapter 3: Change hearts and policy — Chapter 4: Reckon with adversarial allies Rootes, C. (2007). Environmental movements. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (pp. 608–640). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Week 6	Sept. 27; Sept. 29	• **Environmental justice** • **AI, equity, and the environment**	**** Due Sept. 29: Environmental policy memos** *Reading due Monday:* Bullard, R. D. (2020). From civil rights to Black Lives Matter. In M. Mascarenhas (Ed.), *Lessons in environmental justice: From civil rights to Black Lives Matter and idle no more*. Sage. Crawford, K. (2021). *The atlas of AI: Power, politics, and the planetary costs of artificial intelligence.* Yale University Press. — Chapter 1: Earth (Everyone) — Pick one or more other chapters of your choice (Chapters 2-6)
Week 7	Oct. 4; Oct. 6	• **Start student survey project** • **Human-environment interactions over time**	**** Due Oct. 6: Short essay on your character's perspective of societal collapse (submit on Blackboard before class starts); in-class group participation** *Reading due Wednesday:* Diamond, J. M. (2005). *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York: Viking. — (Group 1) Chpt. 2: Twilight at Easter — (Group 2) Chpt. 4: The ancient ones: The Anasazi and their neighbors — (Group 3) Chpt. 5: The Maya collapses — (Group 4) Chpt. 8: Norse Greenland's end

Week 8	Oct. 12 ***NOTE TUES RESCHED DATE***; Oct. 13	• **+ Policy recommendation synthesis** • **+ Student survey project**	**** Due Oct. 12: Student survey questions due** Crutchfield, L. R. (2018). *How change happens: Why some social movements succeed while others don't*. Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons. — Chapter 5: Break from business as usual — Chapter 6: Be leaderful
Week 9	Oct. 18; Oct. 20	• **Cognitive revolution** • **+ Student survey project**	**** Due Oct. 18: Team 1 cognitive revolution timeline additions/presentations** *Reading due Monday:* Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Toronto, Ontario: Signal. Part One; Chpts. 1-4
Week 10	Oct. 25; Oct. 27	• **Agricultural revolution** • **+ Student survey project**	**** Due Oct. 25: Team 2 agricultural revolution timeline additions/presentations** *Reading due Monday:* Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Toronto, Ontario: Signal. Part Two; Chpts. 2-8
Week 11	Nov. 1; Nov. 3	• **Unification of mankind**	**** Due Nov. 1: Team 3 mankind's unification timeline additions/presentations**

		• **+ Student survey project**	*Reading due Monday:* Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Toronto, Ontario: Signal. Part Three; Chpts. 9-13
Week 12	Nov. 8; Nov. 10	• **Scientific revolution** • **+ Student survey project**	**** Due Nov. 8: Team 4 scientific revolution timeline additions/presentations** *Reading due Monday:* Harari, Y. N. (2014). *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind*. Toronto, Ontario: Signal. Part Four; Chpts. 14-20
Week 13	Nov. 15: Nov. 17	• **+ Student survey project** • **Sapiens wrap-up**	****Due Nov. 15: Individual survey finding summaries**
Week 14	Nov. 22; ***THANKSGIVING BREAK***	• **+ Survey project**	**** Due Nov. 22: Final group submission of survey findings**
Week 15	Nov. 29; Dec. 1		**** Survey group work in class**
Exam period	Wed., Dec. 8 1:30 pm – 4:15 pm	• **Presentation of survey findings**	

Possible syllabus changes
As the instructor, I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus. Students will be given ample notice regarding any major changes to the course plan.

Late assignments
Assignments turned in late will be penalized by deducting 5% from the total points for each day it is late.

Gender identity and pronoun use
If you wish, please share your name and gender pronouns with me and how best to address you in class and via email. I use "she/her/hers" for myself. You may address me as "Karen" or "Dr./Prof. Akerlof" in email and verbally. Mason provides tools to change your name and pronouns on Mason records, see https://registrar.gmu.edu/updating-chosen-name-pronouns/.

Course materials and student privacy
I will not be video recording the classes except in rare instances. However the PPTs from each meeting will be available on Blackboard. All course materials posted to Blackboard or other course site are private to this class; by federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.

- Video recordings of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class
- Live video conference meetings (e.g. Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household or recorded and shared outside the class.

General
This course adheres to all university policies described in the academic catalog. Please pay close attention to the following policies:

- **Students with disabilities**
  Disability Services at George Mason University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students by upholding the laws that ensure equal treatment of people with disabilities. If you are seeking accommodations for this class, please first visit http://ds.gmu.edu/ for information about the Disability Services registration process. Then please discuss your approved accommodations with me. Disability Services is located in Student Union

Building I, Suite 2500 or can be reached at ods@gmu.edu or (703) 993-2474.

- **Diversity and inclusion**
  One of the goals for the course is to create a learning environment that fosters respect for people across identities. As a class, we welcome and value individuals and their differences, including gender expression and identity, race, economic status, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, first language, religion, age and ability. We encourage all members of the learning environment to engage with the material personally, but to also be open to exploring and learning from experiences different than their own.

- **Academic integrity: Mason's Honor Code**
  At George Mason University, Academic Integrity is demonstrated in our work, community, the classroom and research. We maintain this commitment to high academic standards through Mason's Honor Code. It is an agreement made by all members of our community to not "cheat, steal, plagiarize, or lie in matters related to your academic work." Students sign an agreement to adhere to the Honor Code on their application for admission to Mason and are responsible for being aware of the most current version of the code.

  The integrity of the University community is affected by the individual choices made by each of us. Mason has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental and rather simple principles to follow at all times are that: (1) all work submitted be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the ground rules on a particular assignment, ask for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving the person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes. Paraphrased material must also be cited, using the appropriate format for this class. A simple listing of books or articles is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in the academic setting. If you have any doubts about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.

- **Dropping the course**
  You are responsible for understanding the university's policies and procedures regarding withdrawing from courses found in the current catalog. You should be aware of the current deadlines according to the Academic Calendar.

- **Email**
  All course information will be sent to your George Mason University email account, including changes to the class schedule due to weather conditions. Students must use their Mason email account to receive important University information, including communications related to this class. I will not respond to messages sent from or send messages to a non-Mason email address.

- **Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking**
  George Mason University is committed to providing a learning, living and working environment that is free from discrimination and a campus that is free of sexual misconduct and other acts of interpersonal violence in order to promote community well-being and student success. We encourage students and employees who believe that they have been sexually harassed, sexually assaulted or subjected to sexual or interpersonal misconduct to seek assistance and support. University Policy 1202: Sexual Harassment and Misconduct speaks to the specifics of Mason's process, the resources, and the options available to students and employees.

  As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Non-Confidential Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, stalking, sexual exploitation, complicity, and retaliation to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.