

Contemporary Environmental Debates

New York University
Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development
Environmental Conservation Education Program
E15.2020.001
Fall 2010
Tues. 6:45-8:25
Sept. 7-Dec. 14

Professor Howard S. Schiffman, J.D., LL.M. Ph.D.
howard.schiffman@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Tues. 3-6pm
ECE Offices, 34 Stuyvesant Street, 5th floor

SYLLABUS

Course Description: Critical examination of major environmental problems reveals a myriad of competing interests, priorities and perspectives. Can sustainability be merged successfully with developmental needs? Why is it so difficult to convert from fossil fuels to renewable energy? What are the risks and benefits of genetically modified foods? Should we continue to allow aboriginal whaling? The formulation of conservation agendas around these and other key environmental questions will naturally value certain objectives over others. This course examines some of the contemporary environmental debates from policy and ethical perspectives and explores why it is so difficult to develop satisfactory solutions that please all constituencies.

Objectives: In this course we will develop your analytical skills as you apply them to contemporary environmental debates. We will not achieve definitive answers to these compelling issues but we will explore the range of interests and values surrounding them. This course will also help you articulate and appreciate alternative arguments about critical environmental issues even if you disagree with those arguments. Understanding and articulating opposing points of view is a hallmark of strong advocacy and good scholarship! Respectful, informed, responsible and dispassionate discourse is necessary to address difficult environmental problems. These ideals will guide our work together in this course.

Course Materials and Requirements: We will use the following materials. They are available for purchase at the NYU Main Bookstore (726 Broadway):

- 1) Thomas A. Easton, Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Environmental Issues (14th ed.), McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2010; (Easton)
- 2) Bjorn Lomborg, Cool It: The Skeptical Environmentalist's Guide to Global Warming, Vintage Books, (2007). (Lomborg)
- 3) James Hoggan, Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming, Greystone Books, 2009 (Hoggan);

**4) Tyler Volk, CO₂ Rising: The World's Greatest Environmental Challenge,
MIT Press, 2008; (Volk) (strongly recommended)**

The readings for each class session are designated in this syllabus. They are designed to give you background knowledge for our class discussions and whenever possible should be done **before** the class session where that material will be discussed. Select documents I have assigned have been placed on Blackboard under External Links. Scholarly articles may be accessed via the Research tab on Blackboard. During the semester I may add additional readings to enrich our class discussions.

Attendance and Lateness Policy: All students must attend class regularly. Your contribution to classroom learning is essential to the success of the course. Any more than two (2) absences will likely adversely affect your grade for the course. A third absence could lead to a failing grade. The only exceptions will be cases of documented illness or other family emergency. In addition, every student must make an effort to be in class on time. It is disruptive to classroom learning when someone enters the room after class has started. Both attendance and lateness will factor in the calculation of your final grade. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class session. Therefore, being late could well be counted as an absence. Not only will lateness count against your final grade but persistent lateness will lead to a failing grade.

Writing Assignments and Oral Presentations: At designated class sessions during the semester you must come prepared with written “talking points” summarizing the most significant arguments and counterarguments presented by the environmental issue(s) we will address in that class session. You will not simply summarize an issue or the readings assigned for that session. Instead, you will present the key pro/con arguments advanced in the debate on that issue and demonstrate your own understanding of those arguments. As you construct the talking points you may use materials beyond those we read for class. Talking points must be in complete sentences and be no more than 2 word-processed pages in total length. While talking points are not exhaustive discussions of the issues you will be assessed for your understanding of the issues/debate arguments and the clarity of your expressions about them. Brevity is essential! You must be prepared to share your talking points in class discussions and hand them in at the class session where the issue is discussed.

In addition, a traditional research paper of 15-20 pages will be due at the 14th class session. The research paper may critically analyze any environmental debate that is of interest to you. You have wide latitude in what you write about, however, all paper topics must be submitted in writing and approved by me. Proposed paper topics, a preliminary outline of the key points of inquiry and a preliminary bibliography are due by the sixth class session. The paper should rely substantially upon primary sources. The paper must be word-processed and contain both footnotes and bibliographic references. More detailed information about the research paper will be provided at the time your paper topics are approved. In addition to the talking points and research paper, you will need to do a short presentation (approx. 10-15 minutes in length – this may vary to accommodate

class size) of your research to the class during the second half of the semester. Your midterm grade will be an average of your first two talking points plus or minus a half-grade reflecting my judgment about your class work and progress thus far in the semester. Your final grade will be calculated according to the following percentages: class preparation, participation and presentation of research (25%); talking points (25%); research paper (50%).

Finally, please regularly check the **Blackboard** course page on NYUHome (<https://home.nyu.edu>). I will often post announcements, updates and items of interest on Blackboard. Certain assigned readings/primary source documents are available under External Links or the Research function on Blackboard. Copies of key course documents such as the syllabus and paper requirements will be available on Blackboard. As importantly, please take the time to read all course policies posted on Blackboard, especially those pertaining to attendance, lateness and grading, to avoid any misunderstanding about what will be expected.

Sept. 7	Lesson 1 Introduction and overview of course content. A review of major environmental issues and the role of various actors in addressing environmental problems. Readings: Easton, xix-xxxii; 1-105
Sept. 14	Lesson 2 Framing environmental debates and evaluating arguments Identifying major themes in environmental discourse Anthropocentrism vs. Biocentrism Sovereignty vs. Global Commons Resource use/Development vs. Conservation Readings: Easton, xix-xxxii; 1-105 (cont.)
Sept. 21	Lesson 3 Should we allow whaling in the 21 st Century? Commercial whaling “Research whaling” Readings: Howard S. Schiffman, <i>The Protection of Whales in International Law: A Perspective for the Next Century</i> , 22 BROOKLYN J. INT'L L. 303 (1996); Gillian Triggs, <i>Japanese Scientific Whaling: An Abuse of Right or Optimal Utilization?</i> , 5 Asia Pac. J. Envtl. L. 33 (2000); Eldon V.C. Greenberg, et al, <i>Japan’s Research Whale Program and International Law</i> , 32 CALIF. WESTERN. INT’L L.J. 151 (2002).
Sept. 28	Lesson 4 Whaling (cont.) Aboriginal subsistence whaling: Should we allow traditional hunters of whales to continue those hunts?

Readings: Robert J. Miller, *Exercising Cultural Self-Determination: The Makah Indian Tribe Goes Whaling*, 25 AM. INDIAN L. REV. 165 (2001); Leestefly Jenkins and Cara Romanzo, *Makah Whaling: Aboriginal Subsistence or a Stepping Stone to Undermining the Commercial Whaling Moratorium?* 9 COLO. J. INT'L ENVT'L L. & POLY 71 (1998).
Talking Points Due (on aboriginal whaling)

Oct. 5

Lesson 5

The Climate Debate

The Spectrum of the Debate: Who's causing this anyway? How do we deal with "uncertainty"?

Readings: 4th IPCC Assessment Report (available on Blackboard); Hoggan; Lomborg; (Recommended: David Michaels, Doubt is Their Product: How Industry's Assault on Science Threatens Your Health, Oxford University Press, 2008; Naomi Oreskes & Erik M. Conway, Merchants of Doubt, Bloomsbury Press, 2010)

Oct. 12

Lesson 6

The Climate Debate (cont.)

The pros and cons of carbon trading and carbon capture/sequestration

Readings: Volk (Strongly Recommended); Easton, 106-128; 148-270
Talking Points Due (on carbon trading or capture/sequestration)
Paper Topic/Proposals Due

Oct. 19

Lesson 7

Researching and writing papers about contemporary environmental debates.

The Pros and Cons of Genetically Modified Foods (GMOs)

Readings: Easton, 262-273; (recommended: Jeffrey M. Smith, Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods, Yes Books, 2007; Jeffrey M. Smith, Seeds of Deception: Exposing Government and Industry Lies About the Safety of the Genetically Engineered Foods You're Eating, Yes Books, 2003; Paul Driessen, Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death, Free Enterprise Press, 2003)

Oct. 26

Lesson 8

The Fisheries Crisis: why can't we just have sustainable fisheries?

Is "fish farming" the answer?

A "Sample Presentation on a Key Debate in Fisheries"

Readings: FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA 2008, available on Blackboard)

Nov. 2

Lesson 9

Alternate Energy: each strategy has proponents and opponents

Readings: Easton, 131-147 (Should We Drill for Offshore Oil?); 171-185 (Is It Time to Put Geothermal Energy Development on the Fast Track?); 186-201 (Should Cars Be More Efficient?); 202-221 (Are Biofuels Responsible for Rising Food Prices?); 222-238 (Is It Time to Revive Nuclear Power?)
Talking Points Due (talking points should address any one of the alternate energy issues)

Nov. 9	Lesson 10 ***Paper Presentations***
Nov. 16	Lesson 11 What do we mean by “environmental justice”? Are certain communities and populations more likely to be harmed by environmental damage? Readings: (readings to be assigned). ***Paper Presentations***
Nov. 23	Lesson 12 ***Paper Presentations***
Nov. 30	Lesson 13 ***Paper Presentations***
Dec. 7	Lesson 14 ***Paper Presentations*** ****Papers Due****
Dec. 14	Lesson 15 Discuss papers and final thoughts. ***Paper Presentations***

Suggested Bibliography

In addition to the assigned and recommended readings you might find it useful to refer to the following sources, which offer a range of perspectives on environmental issues, to better understand contemporary environmental debates:

Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, **Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence**, 3d. ed. McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2004;

William C.G. Burns and Alexander Gillespie, **The Future of Cetaceans in a Changing World**, Transnational Publishers, 2003;

Pamela S. Chasek, et al, **Global Environmental Politics: Dilemmas in World Politics**, 4th ed., Perseus Books, 2006;

Jeremy Firestone & Jonathan Lilley, *An Endangered Species: Aboriginal Whaling and the Right to Self-Determination and Cultural Heritage in a National and International Context*, Vol. 34 ENVT'L L. REPORTER 10763-10793 (2004);

Al Gore, **Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit**, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992;

Al Gore, **An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It**, Rodale Press, 2006;

Garrett Hardin, *Tragedy of the Commons*, Vol. 162 SCIENCE 1243-1248 (1968);

Dale Jamieson, **Ethics and the Environment: An Introduction**, Cambridge University Press, 2008;

Frederik A. Kaufman, **Foundations of Environmental Philosophy: A Text with Readings**, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2003;

Bjorn Lomborg, **The Skeptical Environmentalist: Measuring the Real State of the World**, Cambridge University Press, 1998;

Larry L. Rockwood, et al, **Foundations of Environmental Sustainability: The Co-Evolution of Science and Policy**, Oxford University Press, 2008;

Jeffrey M. Smith, **Seeds of Deception: Exposing Industry and Government Lies About the Safety of the Genetically Modified Foods You're Eating**, Yes! Books, 2003.

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Some Helpful Websites to the Study of Contemporary Environmental Debates

The following is a list of Internet websites that I find quite helpful for research in environmental issues. This is by no means an exclusive list! There are many other excellent sites but these are ones I find myself returning to again and again. Many contain links with other related or more specific sites. I hope this is useful to you for present and future research needs.

United Nations Environment Programme
<http://www.unep.org>

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
<http://www.fao.org>

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
<http://www.ipcc.ch>

United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
<http://www.epa.gov>

International Whaling Commission (IWC)
<http://www.iwcoffice.org>

Environmental Treaties and Resource Indicators (ENTRI)
<http://sedac.ciesin.org/entri>

EnviroLink
<http://www.envirolink.org>

Global (Climate) Change Research Information
<http://www.gcrio.org>

Teaching Climate Change Law and Policy
<http://www.teachingclimatelaw.org/home/>

Conservation and Biodiversity: WWW Resources
<http://darwin.eeb.uconn.edu/hotlist.html>

Learning for Sustainability
<http://learningforsustainability.net>