

UPDATED 28 March 2023

Spring 2023 POL329 / EPC390: US Environmental Politics

Northwestern University

Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30 am – 10:50 am, 555 Clark B03

Instructor: Dr. Kimberly R. Marion Suiseeya, Scott Hall 202; Office Phone: 847-491-8985; Email: kimberly.suiseeya@northwestern.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 2:00 – 4:00 pm; other times available by appointment only

Teaching Assistant:

Shawn Dean, ShawnDean2023@u.northwestern.edu, Scott Hall 111

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3:00 – 5:00 pm

1. Course Description and Philosophy

This course explores the ongoing socio-political challenges of addressing environmental problems. Drawing primarily on research in political science and political ecology, we will analyze the diverse types of social dilemmas that produce environmental problems and the social effects of environmental politics. We focus on contemporary environmental politics to consider emerging frontiers in US environmental politics. We will examine the nature of environmental problems through different theoretical frameworks, including collective action, distributive, and ideational explanations of environmental problems. We will explore core debates in environmental politics that interrogate the role of science, ethics, and economics in shaping environmental policy. We will also consider different approaches and institutions for addressing environmental problems. Throughout the course, we will pay particular attention to the values conflicts that constitute environmental politics, with a particular emphasis on Indigenous and underrepresented communities. The course is designed to give students an understanding of important conceptual issues in environmental politics.

The course is comprised of mini-lectures, interactive class sessions, and discussion sections. The lectures will provide an opportunity for students to contemplate different approaches to explaining and addressing environmental challenges. Interactive class sessions will facilitate debate and reflection. Discussion sections will challenge students to delve more deeply into a particular topic by applying concepts introduced in readings and lectures to specific US-based cases, as well as seek to understand the critical variables that explain how a case is evolving.

Note that this course is not an environmental law class. As such, you should not expect a full survey of environmental policies in the US. Instead, our treatment of US environmental policies is designed to assist students in understanding and applying concepts so that they may independently understand and evaluate a variety of environmental problems and solutions. Please check the resources folder on the course Canvas site for background material on US environmental laws and policies.

2. Learning Objectives

The overarching objective of this interactive course is to cultivate critical thinking and reading skills to generate a nuanced, analytical approach for understanding the socio-political dynamics of environmental issues. By the end of this course students will be able to:

Foundational Knowledge

- (1) Identify and analyze how key debates in environmental politics shape our understanding of various environmental challenges
- (2) Evaluate environmental challenges using different theoretical approaches
- (3) To understand and explain how problem structures shape the politics and policies around environmental issues
- (4) Interrogate how values shape environmental politics and policy and their impact on different communities, including Indigenous Peoples and marginalized groups

Application

- (5) Prepare appropriately to participate effectively in class discussion, including challenging and offering substantive replies to others' arguments, comments, and questions, while remaining sensitive to the original speaker/writer and the classroom audience
- (6) Produce an analysis that evaluates an environmental problem, analyzes the conflicts, institutions, and actors that shape the problem, and offers a well-reasoned assessment of politically, economically, and socially possible pathways forward
- (7) Effectively communicate ideas, opinions, and arguments on different environmental policy topics

During the course, students will develop:

- (8) An in-depth analysis of a current environmental conflict
- (9) Peer-to-peer relationships for ongoing support

3. Our Contract

By enrolling in this course, you and I are entering into a contract with each other. I will work hard to be prepared, enthusiastic, fair, and respectful of every student and their opinions. I will be accessible and try my best to return graded materials after no more than 1-2 weeks. By enrolling in the class, you have agreed to (1) attend and prepare for class, (2) participate by asking questions and joining in class discussions, (3) read the assigned material and complete assignments on time, (4) comply with class policies established in the **Course Policies** document available on Canvas, and (5) uphold Northwestern University's commitment to academic integrity (see <http://www.northwestern.edu/provost/policies/academic-integrity/>). If you have read this far in the syllabus, please email me and our TA an image of a short-eared owl using the subject line "POL329 Spring 2023." Details on all course policies, including general expectations, email, office hours, accessing materials, accommodations, academic integrity, technology and conduct, attendance, grading, extra credit, and course evaluations are provided in a separate document, **Course Policies**, available on the course Canvas site.

Disclaimer: This syllabus is a living document and is designed to guide our learning. In the spirit of reflexivity, I reserve the right to adjust the schedule, readings and assignments as appropriate and/or necessary. Updates will be posted on our course Canvas site.

4. Course Materials

The following materials are required for this course. Student Enrichment Services offers advice on how to find and afford our course materials. Please visit <http://www.northwestern.edu/enrichment/> for more information on their services.

- (1) Nancy Langston. 2017. *Sustaining Lake Superior: An Extraordinary Lake in a Changing World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. ISBN: 9780300212983
 - a. The readings from this book are noted as **Langston** in the reading assignments.
- (2) Walter A. Rosenbaum. 2022. *Environmental Politics and Policy*. 12th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage CQ Press. ISBN: 9781071844519
 - a. The readings from this book are noted as Rosenbaum in the reading assignments.
 - b. *Older editions are available but may not have all of the same chapters. Please compare the table of contents to make sure you have access to the readings.*
- (3) Additional materials available through Canvas and Library Reserves (through Canvas).
- (4) Library Guide for Environmental Studies:
<http://libguides.northwestern.edu/environmentalstudies>

5. Learning Assessments (*Assessment details are available on Canvas*)

Due Date	Assignment	Points (%)	Learning Objectives
Ongoing	Research Study Participation	See below	
Ongoing	Participation: in-class and section engagement, participation in class and section activities	100 (20%)	1, 5, 7, 9
April 14	Module 1 Quiz: timed, online exam	75 (15%)	1 – 3, 5, 7
April 5	Issue Brief	200 (40%)	1 – 4, 6, 7, 8
April 5	- Preferences due	-	
May 1	- Draft	75 (15%)	
May 17	- Peer Review (in class and written)	25 (5%)	
June 4	- Final Brief with cover letter	100 (20%)	
May 15	Midterm: cumulative, timed exam	125 (25%)	1 – 3, 5, 7
	TOTAL:	500 (100%)	

Research Study Participation Requirement

Students enrolled in this course are required to complete a research assignment that can include up to 4 hours of research study participation. This will require students set up times to complete participation in on-line surveys and in-person studies at Scott Hall. Students will learn how studies are conducted and will receive a synopsis at the conclusion of the quarter describing the study’s goal, result, and relevance to the class. Students who prefer not to participate in research may opt for an alternative that entails reading a book chapter about political science research and writing a five-page reaction paper. The typical chapter is about 20 pages and thus reading it and writing a five-page paper should take approximately four hours.

During the two weeks of the quarter, students will receive an e-mail asking them whether they prefer study participation or the alternative assignment. The e-mail will also include details on how to complete either requirement. Failure to complete the requirement during the quarter will result in an incomplete. Failure to complete the requirement during the following quarter will result in a failing grade for the class. Note that if you are enrolled in multiple classes that require participation, you only need to satisfy the requirement one time. Also, if you already completed the requirement in another course in a previous quarter (year), you are excused from the requirement. Contact Info: Andres Matias Schelp, AndresSchelp2025@u.northwestern.edu

Please watch this [video](#) for more information on the requirement.

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COURSE SCHEDULE OVERVIEW

Please see detailed course schedule in Canvas for complete list of readings and assignments

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Module 1: US Environmental Politics – Foundations and Concepts			
3/28 (Tu)	Introduction	Syllabus Course Policies Langston Preface, Chapter 1	
3/29 (W)	Contemporary Environmental Politics	Langston Chapter 2 Rosenbaum Chapter 9	
4/3 (M)	Environmental Movement: Agenda Setting and Policy Gains	Langston Chapter 3 Rosenbaum Chapter 1	Syllabus Quiz
4/5 (W)	Politics of Problem Definition	Langston Chapter 4 Rosenbaum Chapter 2	Issue Brief Preferences due at 5:00 pm
4/10 (M)	Institutional Choices in Environmental Policy	Langston Chapter 6 Rosenbaum Chapter 3	
4/12 (W)	Science, Risks, Costs, and Benefits	Langston Chapter 5 Rosenbaum Chapters 4 – 5	
4/14 (F)	MODULE 1 QUIZ due Friday at 5:00pm		MODULE 1 QUIZ due Friday at 5:00pm
Module 2: Understanding Contemporary Environmental Problems			
4/17 (M)	Atmospheric Politics Part I: Regulating the Right to Pollute	Rosenbaum Chapter 6	
4/19 (W)	Atmospheric Politics Part II: Climate Change <i>Guest Speaker: Mary McGrath</i>	Rosenbaum Chapter 10 Aklin and Mildenerger (2021)	Guest Questions by 9:00 am
4/24 (M)	Energy Politics Part I: Resources	Rosenbaum Chapter 8 Trost and Dunn (2023)	
4/26 (W)	Energy Politics Part II: Pipelines <i>Guest Speaker: McKenzie Johnson</i>	Sveinsdóttir and Johnson (2022) Bosworth (2021)	Guest Questions by 9:00 am
5/1 (M)	Water Politics	Langston Chapters 8 – 9	Draft Issue Brief due by 9:00 am
5/3 (W)	Waste Politics <i>Guest Speaker: Brian Zimmerman</i>	O’Neill (2019)	Guest Questions by 9:00 am
5/8 (M)	Politics of Rights and Responsibility: Toxics	Langston Chapter 6 Langston Chapter 7 Rosenbaum Chapter 7	
5/10 (W)	Politics of Environmental Justice	Whyte (2020) Taylor (2016) Perkins (2022)	
5/15 (M)	MIDTERM EXAM		MIDTERM EXAM
5/17 (W)	Peer Review Workshop	Assigned Briefs for Peer Review	Issue Brief Peer Review (submit online and bring to class)
Module 3: Engaging Environmental Politics			
5/22(M)	TBD	TBD	
5/24 (W)	Looking Forward	Kingsworth (2011) Maniates (2001)	
5/29 (M)	No Class – Memorial Day		
5/31 – 6/4	Reading Week – make-up class (if needed)		
6/4	FINAL ISSUE BRIEF DUE, 5:00 PM		FINAL ISSUE BRIEF DUE, 5:00 PM
6/5 – 6/10	Exam Period		

MODULE I: How have contemporary US environmental politics and policy emerged and evolved?

Class #1 (3/28, Tu) Introduction and Course Overview

Key Questions: Why environmental politics? What environmental issues puzzle you the most? How can this course help you grapple with that puzzle?

Readings:

- Syllabus
 - Course Policies
 - Langston Preface
 - Langston Chapter 1: *Ecological History of the Lake Superior Basin*
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Class #2 (3/29, W) Contemporary Environmental Politics in the United States

Key Questions: What makes something an environmental problem? What kinds of environmental problems are we currently facing? What is the scope and scale of these environmental problems? In what ways are these political problems?

Readings:

- Langston Chapter 2: *Industrializing the Forests, 1870s to 1930s*
 - Rosenbaum Chapter 9: *635 Million Acres of Politics: the Contested Resources of Public Lands*
-

Class #3 (4/3, M) The Environmental Movement

Assignments: Complete syllabus quiz in Canvas

Key Questions: How do environmental issues get on the agenda? What conflicts and values shape the environmental movement? What catalyzes policy action? When do policymakers act on environmental problems?

Readings:

- Rosenbaum Chapter 1: *After Earth Day*
- Langston Chapter 3: *The Postwar Pollution Boom*

Recommended Readings:

- Downs, A. (1972). Up and down with ecology: The issue attention cycle. *Public interest*, 28(1), 38–50. (Canvas Readings Folder)
-

Class #4 (4/5, W) Politics of Problem Definition

Assignments: Issue brief preferences due by 5:00 pm

Key Questions: What are different ways of explaining environmental degradation? What are its causes? What are the implications of problem definition for solving environmental challenges? How do identities shape environmental problems?

Readings:

- Rosenbaum Chapter 2: *Making Policy: the Process*
- Langston Chapter 4: *Taconite and the Fight over Reserve Mining Company*

Recommended Readings:

- Ostrom, Elinor. (2000). The danger of self-evident truths. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 33(1). (Canvas Readings folder)
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Class #5 (4/10, M) Institutional Choices in Environmental Policy

Key Questions: How do institutions (e.g., rules, laws, policies, and norms) shape human behavior and impact environmental outcomes? Whose values and voices shape US environmental politics and policy? What are the implications for social and environmental outcomes?

Readings:

- Rosenbaum Chapter 3: *Making Policy: Government Institutions and Politics*
- Langston Chapter 6: *Mining, Toxics, and Environmental Justice for the Anishinaabe*

Recommended Readings:

- Coglianese, Cary, and Shana M. Starobin. "Social science and the analysis of environmental policy." *Review of Policy Research* 37, no. 5 (2020): 578-604. (Canvas Reading folder)
 - Tempus, Alexandra. 2018. "The People's Forest." *Orion*, August. 14 pages. (Canvas Readings Folder)
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Class #6 (4/12, W) Science, Risks, Costs, and Benefits

Key Questions: How do policy-makers deal with risk and uncertainty in environmental decision-making? How should policy-makers make decisions under conditions of uncertainty?

Readings:

- Langston Chapter 5: *Mining Pollution Debates, 1950s Through the 1970s*
- Rosenbaum Chapter 4: *Common Policy Challenges*
- Rosenbaum Chapter 5: *More Choice*

MODULE 1 QUIZ (4/14, F), timed, online quiz due by 5:00pm

MODULE II: Understanding Contemporary Environmental Problems

Class #7 (4/17, M) Atmospheric Politics Part I: Regulating the Right to Pollute

Key Questions: What are new environmental policy instruments? What are market-based approaches? What kinds of tradeoffs must be considered when selecting policy instruments? How should policy impacts be measured?

Readings:

- Rosenbaum Chapter 6: *Command and Control in Action: Air and Water Pollution*

Class #8 (4/19, W) Atmospheric Politics Part II: Climate Change

Assignments: Submit discussion question by 9:00am on Canvas

Guest Speaker: Mary McGrath, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Northwestern University

Key Questions: What are contemporary air and atmospheric problems in the United States? What theories explain the emergence of these problems? What different principles (should) shape responses to atmospheric issues? What is the logic of collective action?

Readings:

- Rosenbaum Chapter 10: *The Politics and Policy of Global Climate Change*
- Aklin, Michaël, and Matto Mildemberger. "Prisoners of the wrong dilemma: why distributive conflict, not collective action, characterizes the politics of climate change." *Global Environmental Politics* 20, no. 4 (2020): 4-27. (Canvas Reading folder)

Recommended Readings:

- Selin, Henrik and Stacy VanDeveer. 2019. "Global climate change governance: Where to go after Paris?" Chapter 13 in Vig, Norman J. and Michael E. Kraft (eds.) *Environmental Policy: New Directions for the Twenty-First Century, 10th Edition*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Pages 322-346. (Canvas Reading folder)
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Class #9 (4/24, M) Energy Politics Part I: Resources

Key Questions: What are contemporary energy issues in the United States? What theories explain the emergence of these problems? What different principles (should) shape responses to energy issues? What is science? What is the role of scientists in environmental politics?

Readings:

- Rosenbaum Chapter 8: *Energy*
- Trost, J.N., Dunn, J.B. Assessing the feasibility of the Inflation Reduction Act's EV critical mineral targets. *Nature Sustainability* (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-023-01079-8>. (Canvas Reading folder)

Recommended Readings:

- Burns, Wil. "Biden signs Inflation Reduction Act: Its climate promise relies heavily on carbon capture, meaning thousands of miles of pipeline." August 12, 2022. *The Conversation*. Available online: <https://theconversation.com/biden-signs-inflation-reduction-act-its-climate-promise-relies-heavily-on-carbon-capture-meaning-thousands-of-miles-of-pipeline-188591>
- Parenteau, Patrick. "The Inflation Reduction Act doesn't get around the Supreme Court's climate ruling in West Virginia v. EPA, but it does strengthen the EPA's future abilities." August 24, 2022. *The Conversation*. Available online: <https://theconversation.com/the-inflation-reduction-act-doesnt-get-around-the-supreme-courts-climate-ruling-in-west-virginia-v-epa-but-it-does-strengthen-epas-future-abilities-189279>

Class #10 (4/26, W): Energy Politics Part II: Pipelines

Assignments: Submit discussion question by 9:00am on Canvas

Guest Speaker: McKenzie Johnson, Assistant Professor, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

Key Questions: What types of ethical dilemmas do decision-makers face when confronting environmental problems? How should policymakers decide what types of tradeoffs are acceptable when addressing environmental problems?

Readings:

- Sveinsdóttir, Anna G., and McKenzie F. Johnson. "Doubling down on DAPL: the contentious politics of pipeline governance in Illinois." *Environmental Politics* (2022): 1-22. (Canvas Reading folder)
- Bosworth, Kai. "'They're treating us like Indians!': Political Ecologies of Property and Race in North American Pipeline Populism." *Antipode* 53, no. 3 (2021): 665-685. (Canvas Reading folder)

DRAFT Issue Brief Due (5/1, M, by 9:00 am)

Class #11 (5/1, M) Water Politics

Assignment: Draft Issue Brief due by 9:00 am

Key Questions: What are contemporary water problems in the United States? What theories explain the emergence of these problems? What are the causes of and solutions for distributive conflicts that lead to environmental degradation? What different principles (should) shape responses to water issues?

Readings:

- Langston Chapter 8: *The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreements*
- Langston Chapter 9: *Climate Change, Contaminants, and the Future of Lake Superior*

Recommended Readings:

- Teodoro, Manuel P., Mellie Haider, and David Switzer. 2018. "US environmental policy implementation on tribal lands: trust, neglect, and justice." *Policy Studies Journal* 46(1): 37-59. (Canvas Readings Folder)
- Mullin, Megan, and Katy Hansen. "Local news and the electoral incentive to invest in infrastructure." *American Political Science Review* (2022): 1-6. (Canvas Reading folder)

Class #12 (5/3, W) Waste

Guest Speaker: Brian Zimmerman, Solid Waste Coordinator, City of Evanston

Assignments: Submit discussion question by 9:00am on Canvas

Key Questions: What is waste? How should "waste" be governed? Who should make decisions about governing waste? Who is responsible for addressing environmental problems generated through waste?

Readings:

- O'Neill, Kate. 2019. "Understanding Wastes." Chapter 2 in *Waste*. Cambridge, UK: Polity. (Canvas Reading folder)

Recommended Readings:

- Liboiron, Max. 2021. *Pollution is Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
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Class #13 (5/8, M): Politics of Rights and Responsibility: Toxics

Key Questions: Why are some people denied the basic right to a clean and safe environment? Why are some groups disproportionately burdened with pollution?

Readings:

- Langston Chapter 7: *The Mysteries of Toxaphene and Toxic Fish*
 - Rosenbaum Chapter 7: *A Regulatory Thicket*
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Class #14 (5/10, W): Politics of Environmental Justice

Key Questions: What is environmental justice and how does it (and should it) inform decision-making? How does power matter for different communities experiencing and engaged in environmental governance? What roles do race, class, and gender play in the development and experience of environmental governance?

Readings:

- Taylor, Dorceta. 2016. "Nation building, racial exclusion, and the social construction of wildlands." Chapter 12 in *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection*. Durham: Duke University Press. (Canvas Reading folder)
- Whyte, Kyle. "Indigenous environmental justice: Anti-colonial action through kinship." In *Environmental Justice*, pp. 266-278. Routledge, 2020. (Canvas Reading folder)
- Perkins, Tracy. 2022. "Environmental justice has the White House's attention, building on 40 years of struggle – but California suggests new funding won't immediately solve deeply entrenched problems. November 9, 2022. *The Conversation*. Available online: <https://theconversation.com/environmental-justice-has-the-white-houses-attention-building-on-40-years-of-struggle-but-california-suggests-new-funding-wont-immediately-solve-deeply-entrenched-problems-181137> (Canvas Reading folder)

Recommended Readings:

- Marion Suiseeya, Kimberly R. "Critical Perspectives on Representation, Equity, and Rights: Developing a Comparative Politics of Environmental Justice." (2021). (Canvas Reading folder)
- White House Justice40 Initiative: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>

MIDTERM (5/15, M)

Class #15 (5/15, M): **MIDTERM (timed, online)**

Assignments: *The mid-term is cumulative and will draw from lectures, activities, and course readings.*

MODULE III: Engaging Environmental Politics

Class #16 (5/17, W): Peer Review Workshop

Assignments: Issue Brief Peer Review (submit online and bring to class)

Readings:

- Assigned Briefs for Peer Review
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Class #17 (5/22, M): TBD

Assignments:

Readings:

Class #18 (5/24, W): Looking Forward (Last class)

Key Questions: *Where do we go from here?*

Readings:

- Kingsworth, Paul. 2011. "Confessions of a recovering environmentalist." *Orion*. 12 pages. (Canvas Reading folder)
- Maniates, Michael F. (2001). Individualization: Plant a tree, buy a bike, save the world? *Global environmental politics*, 1(3), 31-52. (Canvas Reading folder)

FINAL PAPER DUE June 4 (Sunday) at 5:00pm