

Sociology of Environmental Health
Sociology 4403, Section 9104

University of Florida
Department of Sociology
Spring 2008

MWF 9:35-10:25
Turlington Hall 2334

Instructor: Professor Brian Mayer
Office Hours: Mondays 10:30-12:00 and Wednesdays 2-4
Office Location: 3338 Turlington Hall
Phone: (352) 392-0265 x228
Email: bmayer@soc.ufl.edu

Course Description and Purpose

This course examines the relationships between human health and the environment from a sociological viewpoint. Using an interdisciplinary sociological perspective, we will explore the increasing number of illnesses linked to environmental pollution and disasters. Since this is a course in the social sciences, only a basic understanding of the biological and chemical sciences related to environmental health will be needed. Our focus will be on how scientists, policy makers, and laypeople mobilize and interpret scientific data to make claims regarding the link between health and the environment.

We will draw on the fields of medical and environmental sociology to explore environmental health problems such as asthma, breast cancer, and emerging infectious diseases potentially linked to global climate change. Using these perspectives, we will examine how social structures influence the relationship between human health and the environment.

This course will also explore issues such as how individuals and groups seek to demonstrate a link between health and the environment, the sociological implications of the scientific process, and how scientific trends influence the creation of public policy regarding environmental health issues. We will focus on the reaction of communities across the globe to environmental health problems and the organizing work of the environmental health movement to prevent future communities from being exposed to potential threats.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course students will be expected to have achieved the following learning objectives:

- 1) Demonstrate knowledge of the major areas of environmental health problems.
- 2) Understand the basic science and controversy surrounding our understanding of environmental health.
- 3) Critically assess environmental health issues and the social and political structures that determine them through sociological analysis.
- 4) Understand how communities respond to environmental health problems and identify the challenges a disease group face in linking its condition to environmental causes.
- 5) Be able to offer a comprehensive account, verbally, visually, and in writing of a particular environmental health issue – including the science, policy, and community reactions to that problem.

Requirements

1. **Class Participation (10%):** Because a large portion of this course involves in-class discussion and other activities, your participation in class is an important part of your grade. Participation will be graded by the instructor through a combination of the evaluations of your performance and attendance in class throughout the semester.
2. **Research Paper (5% + 15% + 20%):** The main assignment for this course is the completion of a two-part research paper examining the scientific evidence and possible debate and public policies surrounding a contemporary environmental health problem. Students will select a problem in consultation with the professor and propose an outline for their research in a Paper Prospectus.
 - A. Paper Prospectus (5%): Students will submit a 1 page description of your proposed paper topic – a current environmental health problem, outlining the scientific and policy issues you are planning to address. You must include a preliminary list of at least 5 references demonstrating background research on your proposed topic. I will review your prospectus and provide feedback to help you with your research.
 - B. Environmental Health Science Paper (15%): The first half of your research paper should examine the science behind an environmental health problem. This 5 double-spaced page paper will provide an analysis of how the scientific data behind your environmental health problem are analyzed and interpreted by various stakeholders.
 - C. Environmental Health Policy Paper (20%): The second half of the Research Paper assignment includes revising the Science Paper based on the professor's feedback as well as an additional 5 pages where the student will examine the social dimensions, or series of policy solutions, to their environmental health problem. This paper should review past solutions to manage the environmental health problem as well as proposing at least

one alternative management strategies and examining the strengths and weaknesses of each in comparison.

3. **Exams (15% + 15%):** A mid-term and final exam will cover all course material, including lectures, readings, videos, and handouts. The exams will be conducted in class on the dates listed below. The questions are designed to assess your understanding of the course material and your ability to critically compare, contrast, and integrate key ideas.
4. **Op-Ed (10%):** Roughly half-way until the policy paper is due, students will prepare a 2 page op-ed on their topic suitable for publication in a journal, magazine, or newspaper. The op-ed requires you to develop a very concise presentation of your environmental health problem along with an argument about what is to be done. Guidelines for the op-ed will be handed out in class.
5. **Research Presentation (10%):** At the end of the course, students will present to the entire class a summary of their research projects. This presentation will require the student to present their work in a professional manner in a short amount of time (10-15 minutes). Specific guidelines for the presentations will be distributed in class. The remainder of the class will engage the presenting student's work with questions and comments.

Assignment Standards

The research paper should be handed in to me by the due date in typed form. Assignments should be double-spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font, and with one-inch margins on all sides. Proper credit should be given to source information and ideas that are not your own. Proper citation format in the text includes author, year, and page when necessary, e.g. (Mayer 2005: 14). Citations in your lists of references should include author, year, title, source, publisher information, and pages. I will go over this in class to make sure everyone understands proper citation. Failure to do so will make it appear as if you are plagiarizing the information.

All written assignments must be turned in with proper spelling and grammar. Given the importance of the research paper and exams to your grade, I expect the highest quality from you. Repeated spelling mistakes and grammatical errors will result in the lowering of your grade for the assignment. I recognize that many scientific terms and disease spellings may not be recognized by typical spell-check engines such as Word or Wordperfect – so I am more lenient on misspellings in this regard. If you have questions about these requirements, contact me before you turn in the assignment.

Research papers will generally not be accepted late. Under exceptional circumstances, your grade will be reduced by a – for each day (e.g. from a B to a B- for one day, B- to a C+ for two days, etc.)

Required Readings:

Three books are required for this course and are available at the University Bookstore.

Life Support: The Environment and Human Health by Michael, McCally (ed).
2002. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Illness and the Environment: A Reader in Contested Medicine. by Brown, Phil, Steve
Kroll-Smith, and Valerie Gunther (eds). 2000. New York: New York University
Press.

Reclaiming the Environmental Debate: The Politics of Health in a Toxic Culture. by
Richard Hofrichter (ed). 2000. Cambridge: MIT Press.

All other readings will be made available online, on the course website, or as handouts.

Assignment Schedule

Paper Prospectus:	January 25
Environmental Health Science Paper:	February 29
Midterm Exam:	March 7
Final Exam:	April 18
Environmental Health Policy Paper:	April 25 by 5:00p.m. in Turlington 3338

Official Business

Students requesting classroom accommodation for any disability must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

Cheating is unethical, and as such, will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Plagiarism, whether it be from your fellow student's work or professional publications, in any form for the research paper and exams will result in an automatic F for that assignment and appropriate institutional action will be taken.

There should be no need to cheat. My goal is to help you perform well in this course and if you need information about how to do well on assignment, I will always be available to you. For further information on the University's Honor Code and Academic Honesty policy, see: <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/procedures/academicguide.php>

A note on classroom behavior: please endeavor to be at class on time. If you must be late, enter the classroom quietly without disruption. Use of cell phones, texting, and browsing the internet, should you bring a laptop, is not allowed. Please be respectful in your comments and courteous to your fellow students and the instructor.

Reading Schedule

Students should come prepared each day having read all of the readings assigned for that particular day.

Week One Introduction: What is Environmental Health?

- 1/7 Welcome!
- 1/9 *Life Support*. Chapter 1. (pp. 1- 14)
- 1/11 *RED*. Chapters 1. (pp. 1-15)

Week Two The Social Production of Disease

- 1/14 *RED*. Chapter 2. (pp. 19-38)
I&E. Introduction, Chapters 1-2. (pp. 1-45)
- 1/16 *I&E*. Chapter 3. (pp. 46-71)
- 1/18 *Life Support*. Chapter 5 (pp.83-98)

Week Three Air, Health, & Pollution

- 1/21 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 1/23 *Life Support*. Chapter 2. (pp. 15-38)
- 1/25 Pollution on the Rise: Local Trends in Power Plant Pollution.
http://www.cleartheair.org/reports/pollution_on_the_rise.pdf

**Paper Prospectus Due in Class Friday, 1/25.*

Week Four Water

- 1/28 *Life Support*. Chapter 3 (pp. 39-64).
 - 1/30 *RED* Chapter 5 (pp. 77-92).
- Main Street Reclamation Plant Tour**
- 2/1 *RED* Chapter 7 (pp. 113-134) & *Life Support* Chapter 13 (pp. 231-238).

Week Five **Toxics in the Workplace**

2/4 *Life Support*. Chapter 15 (pp. 257-272).

2/6 *RED*. Chapter 3 (pp.39-56).

Murphree Water Treatment Plant Tour

2/8 *I&E*. Chapters 10 & 12 (pp. 162-174 & 192-214).

Week Six **Global Climate Change & Environmental Health**

2/11 *Life Support*. Chapters 6 & 8. (p. 99-118 & 135-146).

2/13 “Environment and health: 2. Global climate change and health.” CMAJ
163(6)

Kelly Power Plant Tour

2/15 “Infectious Disease: The Human Cost of Our Environmental Errors.”
www.ehponline.org/members/2004/112-1/focus.html

Week Seven **Toxics in the Community**

2/18 *I&E*. Chapter 14&15 (pp. 235-269)

2/20 *RED* Chapter 4 (pp. 57 – 76).

2/22 *I&E* Chapter 16 (pp. 270-288).

Week Eight **Toxics in Our Bodies**

2/25 *Life Support*. Chapters 10 & 11 (pp. 163-210)

2/27 *I&E*. Chapters 17&18 (pp. 289-332)

2/29 *Life Support* Chapter 9 & *I&E* Chapter 5

* *Environmental Health Science Paper Due Friday, 2/29*

Week Nine The Politics of Environmental Health

3/3 *Life Support* Chapter 5 (pp. 83-98)

3/4 *I&E* Chapter 23-24 (pp. 409-452)

3/7 **Midterm Exam**

Week Ten Spring Break

Week Eleven Popular Epidemiology

3/17 *I&E* Chapters 3-4 (pp. 46-94).

3/19 I&E. Chapters 21 & 22 (pp. 364-408).

3/21 *RED* Chapter 12 (pp. 219-254).

Week Twelve Public Responses to Environmental Hazards

3/24 *RED* Chapter 6 (pp. 93-112).

3/26 *I&E* Chapter 19 (pp. 333-344).

McCormick, Sabrina, Phil Brown, and Stephen Zavestoski. "The Personal is Scientific, the Scientific is Personal: The Public Paradigm of the Environmental Breast Cancer Movement." *Sociological Forum* 18(4): 545-576.

3/27 Brown, Phil, Brian Mayer, et al. 2003. "The Health Politics of Asthma: Environmental Justice and Collective Illness Experience in the United States." *Social Science and Medicine* 57(3): 453-465.

Op-Ed Due in Class Friday, 3/27

Week Thirteen Environmental Justice & Community Health

3/31 *I&E* Chapter 11 (pp. 175-191).

4/2 Brulle and Pellow. 2006. "Environmental Justice: Human Health and Environmental Inequalities." *Annual Review of Public Health* 27: 103-124.

4/4 *RED* Chapter 16 (pp. 301-312).

Week Fourteen The Precautionary Principle

- 4/7 Kriebel, David, Tickner, Joel, Epstein, Paul, et al. 2001. "The Precautionary Principle in Environmental Science." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 109(9): 871-877.
- 4/9 **RED** Chapter 7. (pp.113-134)
- 4/11 Tickner, Joel. And Sara Wright. 2003. "The Precautionary Principle and Democratizing Science: A US Perspective." *Science and Public Policy* 30(30): 213-218.

Week Fifteen Corporate Propaganda

- 4/14 **RED**. Chapters 9-11 (pp. 157 – 218)
- 4/16 **RED** Chapter 14 (pp. 257-274)
- 4/18 **Final Exam.**

Week Sixteen Final Presentations

- 4/21 Presentations
- 4/23 Presentations

Final Paper due Friday April 25th in my office by 5:00 p.m.