

**Illness and the Environment**  
**Sociology 4930, Section 9407**

**University of Florida**  
**Department of Sociology**  
**Fall 2006**

**Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 11:45-12:35**  
**Computer Science Engineering, Room 119**

**Instructor:** Professor Brian Mayer  
**Office Hours:** Mondays 9-10am and Wednesdays 2-4pm  
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**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% + 20% + 25%):** 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 2-3 page double-spaced 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 (20%): The first half of your research paper should examine the science behind an environmental health problem. This 6-8 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 (25%): The second half of the Research Paper assignment includes revising the Science Paper based on the professor's feedback as well as an additional 6-8 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 24 hour take-home and due in my office by 5:00 p.m. the following day. Each exam will include several short answer questions with set word limits. These questions are designed to assess your understanding of the course material and your ability to critically compare, contrast, and integrate key ideas.

**Exam I – Distributed September 27, 2006.**

**Exam II – Distributed November 15, 2006**

4. **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 and take-home exams 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 take-home 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 and take-home exams 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:**

*Four 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.

Hormonal Chaos: The Scientific and Social Origins of the Environmental Endocrine  
Hypothesis. by Sheldon Krimsky. 2000. Baltimore: John Hopkins 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 on the course website or as handouts.*

### Assignment Schedule

Paper Prospectus:	<b>September 8, 5:00 p.m.</b>
Take Home Exam #1:	<b>September 28, 5:00 p.m.</b>
Environmental Health Science Paper:	<b>October 13, 5:00 p.m.</b>
Take Home Exam #2:	<b>November 16, 5:00 p.m.</b>
Environmental Health Policy Paper:	<b>December 1, 5:00 p.m.</b>

### 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 take home exam 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 at the beginning of each week having read all of the readings assigned for that particular week.*

### Week 1: (8/23 -8/25) Introduction: What is Environmental Health?

McCally. Chapter 1. (pp. 1- 14)

Hofrichter. Chapters 1-2. (pp. 1-38)

### Week 2: (8/28 - 8/30 - 9/1) Risk & The Social Production of Disease

Kroll-Smith. Introduction, Chapters 1-3. (pp. 1-72).

### Week 3: (9/6 - 9/8) Asthma, Cancer, & the Environment

Life Support. Chapter 2 & 11. (pp. 15-38 & 201-210).

*\*Paper Prospectus Due on Friday, 9/8 by 5:00 p.m.*

### Week 4: (9/11 - 9/13 – 9/15) Toxics in the Workplace

Illness & the Environment. Chapters 9-12. (p. 142-214)

Reclaiming the Environmental Debate. Chapter 3. (28)

### Week 5: (9/18 – 9/20 – 9/22) Global Climate Change & Environmental Health

Life Support. Chapters 6 & 8. (p. 99-118 & 135-146)

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

[“Infectious Disease: The Human Cost of Our Environmental Errors.” \*Environmental Health Perspectives\* 112\(1\)](#)

[www.ehponline.org/members/2004/112-1/focus.html](http://www.ehponline.org/members/2004/112-1/focus.html)

**Week 6: (9/25 – 9/27 – 9/29)                      The Science of Environmental Health**

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Illness & the Environment. Chapters 6-8.

*\*Exam I distributed on 9/27 and due 9/28 by 5:00pm*

**Week 7: (10/2 – 10/4)                                      How Do We Know What We Know?**

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Hormonal Chaos. Preface, Chapter 1.

**Week 8: (10/9 – 10/11 – 10/13)                      The Emergence of a Public Paradigm**

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Hormonal Chaos. Chapters 2-3.

*\* Environmental Health Science Paper Due on Friday, 10/13 by 5:00 p.m.*

**Week 9: (10/16 – 10/18 – 10/20)                      The Politics of Environmental Health**

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Hormonal Chaos. Chapter 4-5.

**Week 10: (10/23 – 10/25 – 10/27)                      Environmental Health Policy Continued**

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Illness & the Environment. Chapters 23-25.

**Week 11: (10/30 – 11/1 – 11/13)                      Popular Epidemiology**

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Illness & the Environment. Chapters 20-22.

**Week 12: (11/6 – 11/18)                                      Public Responses to Environmental Hazards**

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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.

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.

**Week 13: (11/13– 11/15 – 11/17) Environmental Justice & Community Health**

Reclaiming the Environmental Debate. Chapter 4 & pp14-15.

*\*Exam II distributed on 11/15 and due 11/16 by 5:00pm*

**Week 14: (11/20 - 11/22) The Precautionary Principle**

Reclaiming the Environmental Debate. Chapter 7-9.

**Week 15: (11/27 – 11/29 – 12/1) Opposition to Change**

Reclaiming the Environmental Debate. Chapters 10-13.

*\* Environmental Health Policy Paper Due on Friday, 12/1 by 5:00 p.m.*

**Week 16: (12/4 – 12/6) Student Presentations**

No Readings!