
Environmental Sociology - Spring 2021

SOC 196 (151)

Westmont College

MWF 2:10 - 3:15 pm (via Zoom, possible room TBA)

Instructor

Blake Victor Kent, PhD

bkent@westmont.edu

805-565-6783

Office: Dean Hall 209

Hours: Mon 3:30-5:00, Tue 2:30-4:00 or by appointment

Without self-understanding we cannot hope for enduring solutions to environmental problems, which are fundamentally human problems.

-Yi-Fu Tuan

Description

For many years the study of society and the study of nature were well-differentiated spheres. In its early days, sociology was fundamentally concerned with human culture, capital, religion, morality, the political sphere, civil life, etc. while the natural world was studied in its own right. There was little awareness of how interdependent we are with the natural world, and we had yet to do sufficient damage to the earth and its non-human inhabitants to realize that as the natural environment suffers, so do we. Dominant expressions of the Christian faith also contributed to this ignorance when they emphasized a theology of “dominion” over the earth. The earth was conceived of as a rental home on which God had signed the lease, one that would be torn down after we spoiled the carpets, broke all the windows, and moved out to enjoy our eternal heavenly mansion. Post WWII, however, this “throw away” consciousness began to change. Nuclear weapons, awareness of the toxicity of pesticides, major oil tanker spills, and other environmental problems coalesced to demonstrate not only how deeply people can harm the environment, but how thoroughly a harmed environment can damage people.

While sociology’s foundation was not designed to take the environment into serious account, as the sub-field developed in the 1970’s it became clear that new tools could be made and others adapted and applied. Similarly, Christian theology has found significant resources for environmental care, though it often feels as if the Christian church in the West is still behind the curve. This course in environmental sociology is primarily that—a sociology course—rather than a theology course, but religion will be a sub-theme throughout. The connection between religion and the environment is emblematic of how sociology can be used to assess any number of arenas in relation to the environment: ideology, consumption, food, technology, governance, etc. In this course we will assess all these and more, with the aims of: 1) understanding the interconnection between society and the natural world, and 2) living justly and courageously in light of what we discover.

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing the course, you will be able to:

- analyze environmental problems using several theoretical approaches
- evaluate the interconnected nature of environmental issues and social institutions
- reflect on your own ideological and religious heritage and its interplay with environmentalism
- articulate a vision of “green living” at the personal and structural levels

Required Resources

- Veldman, Robin Globus. 2019. *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism: Why Evangelical Christians Oppose Action on Climate Change*. Oakland, CA: UC Press.
- Antal, Jim. 2018. *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Climate Change*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Additional readings (on Canvas)

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Optional Resource

- Bell, Michael Mayerfield and Loka L. Ashwood. 2016. *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology* 5th edition (or previous). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Class Preparation

This class will contain heavy doses of reading and discussion, including daily and weekly readings as well as your own outside reading. In order for our class to be successful you must read the assignments with care. Each time we meet you will bring a small reading summary, your questions, observations, and full presence.

Academic Integrity

Westmont College holds all students responsible for maintaining academic integrity. Plagiarism, lying, unacceptable collaboration, submitting papers to more than one class, and cheating are all examples of violations of academic integrity. In the event that a student violates any provision of Westmont's policy on academic integrity, as spelled out in the student handbook, I reserve the right to assign whatever grade for the course that I deem appropriate, including a grade of F, without regard to the student's accumulated points. Violations of academic integrity will be handled in accordance with the College's policies. It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the policies of the College regarding academic integrity and to avoid violating these policies. You will likely find this website helpful: <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/provost/Plagiarism/PlagiarismStudentInformation.html>.

Accommodations

Students with a documented disability in need of learning accommodation should inform me at the beginning of the semester, then obtain appropriate papers from the Office of Disability Services. Please visit <http://www.westmont.edu/offices/disability/> or contact Sheri Noble, Director of Disability Services (snoble@westmont.edu) for further assistance.

Writing Center

The writing center is a creative, collaborative space where you can improve in writing skill and confidence. Our peer tutors serve as friendly "test readers" for your projects, helping you develop and revise your writing before submitting it to professors, employers, and others. During the Spring 2021 semester, [Writers' Corner](#) tutors will meet with you online using video conferencing and other tools. We encourage you to meet with a tutor at least 48 hours before your writing deadline. Be ready to share your assignment prompt and your latest draft, no matter how rough. All tutorials are free of charge. Make an appointment at <https://westmont.mywconline.com>; tutorials resume on Wednesday, January 20.

Technology

Laptops, phones, and tablets are helpful tools...in some contexts. Research shows, however, that they actually decrease engagement in learning and comprehension (Mueller and Oppenheimer 2014). For this reason, and because they can prove distracting (internet, email, etc.), I do not permit them in class (applies to in-person learning only).

Assessments

Attendance and Participation

Participation and attendance are two different things, and both will count toward your final grade. A participating student is one who is actively engaged in the collective learning process; an attending student shows up for class. Please do both. While I know that speaking up in class is hard for some, I will provide times of reflection that allow space to gather your thoughts. For full credit you must *regularly* volunteer thoughts during class discussion time. Full attendance but no verbal participation will result in 10 out of 20 points for the A&P grade. Grades will go up or down depending on missed classes or increased verbal participation.

Environment & Ideology Reflection Paper

In this self-reflective piece I want you to think about your own relationship to the natural world. What does it mean to you now? What has it meant to you in the past? What kinds of activities, experiences, and beliefs have shaped your interaction with the environment? Are you aware of explicit or implicit ideologies within your family, religion, or culture that have contributed to your views of/interaction with the natural world? Think like a sociologist and try to identify structural components (religion, family, geographic location, etc.) that have been influential. What about material and non-material culture (i.e., surfboards, songs, etc.)? Paper should be at least 1,000 words in length.

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Reading Responses

To maintain accountability and increase conversation productivity, you will write a 250-350 word response to every assigned reading. This includes daily readings on Canvas as well as *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism* by Veldman. The responses are due at the end of the week, so for each week you should build your file. Have Monday's response ready for that class period, then add to that file for additional readings. The responses are meant to be productive for you, so you will have latitude in terms of what you discuss. What I require in terms of grading is that they provide evidence of your having read the material. You will probably find it helpful to answer one or more of the following questions:

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- 1) *What is the key message of this piece?*
- 2) *What is the theoretical takeaway?*
- 3) *What quotations sum up the key points and counterpoints?*
- 4) *What is the most interesting part of the reading?*
- 5) *Does this apply to anything I observe in the social world?*
- 6) *What questions do I still have?*

There are a total of 12 responses, but you may have a break for two weeks: only 10 responses are required.

Environmental Issue Project (EIP)

You will complete a course-term project on an environmental topic of your choice. This will be made up several components: an initial book summary, a 15 minute class presentation, a peer review process, and a final paper. You can take several angles on the project, including doing a deep dive on a particular problem or event, or asking a specific research question and searching the literature to learn what you can about that particular question. Several details for the project follow.

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Independent Book Summary/Proposal

In preparation for the EIP, you will select a book on the topic you are interested in pursuing for your EIP. Think of this as a way to get your juices flowing as well as a way to generate potential citations for your larger paper. Plan to submit a 1,000 word summary/analysis of the book in which you briefly outline its main structure and arguments, followed by discussion and commentary. The commentary should illustrate your evolving thinking on the issue using a sociological perspective. In an additional 200 words, describe what you would like to do for your EIP and include any additional citations you have collected.

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Peer Review

Toward the end of the semester you will review a classmate’s draft of their final paper, offering informative and constructive feedback. Further instructions will be supplied at the time of the peer review.

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Class Presentation

Taking all you have learned about your topic of interest, you will offer a 15 minute presentation on your topic, including an introduction to the problem/issue, any necessary literature or background information that will allow your listeners to develop a strong grasp of the problem/issue, the primary question that motivated you through the topic, and a summary of what you have discovered.

Environmental Issue Paper

The final paper should thoroughly summarize the problem/issue/research question you selected for the semester, including introduction, definition of problem/issue, background literature, and exploration of the topic. It should conclude with a strong statement about the issue and its relevance to human society. 3,500 - 4,000 words in length.
Note: This assignment must receive a passing grade in order to pass this course.

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All written work should conform to standard expectations, i.e. 12 point font, 1” margins, etc. Please include word count with all assignments and submit via Canvas.

I reserve the right to modify this syllabus during the semester in order to meet our learning goals.

Late Work

Providing timely feedback on your homework is a priority of mine since the feedbacks aids you in correcting any errors quickly. The speed of my feedback is dependent on the promptness with which you complete your work. For this reason, late work is not acceptable in this course.

Grading

Letter grades are based on the total points you earn. You are encouraged to monitor your progress using the “Grades” function on Canvas. Please note that depending on your viewing settings your grade can be displayed in different ways. Please get in touch with me if you ever have a question about your progress.

Attendance & Participation	20%	A = 93-100%	C+ = 77-79%
Reading Responses (10)	20%	A- = 90-92%	C = 73-76%
Environment & Ideology Reflection	5%	B+ = 87-89%	C- = 70-72%
Independent Book Summary/Proposal	5%	B = 83-86%	D = 60-69%
Peer Review	5%	B- = 80-82%	F = below 60%
Class Presentation	15%		
Environmental Issue Paper	30%		
Total	100%		

Date	Topic	Reading/Activity	Due
1/11		No reading	
1/13	Introduction	No reading	
1/15		Pellow & Brehm "An Environmental Sociology for the Twenty-First Century" Laszewski "The Sociologists' Take on the Environment"	Readings, GCS Intro
1/18	MLK, JR. DAY - NO CLASS		
1/20	Environmental Problems & Society	Diamond "Under Montana's Big Sky"	
1/22		Bates "Population, Demography, and the Environment"	Readings, GCS 1
1/25	Nature & Society	Louv <i>Last Child in the Woods</i> Part 1	
1/27		Cronon "The Trouble with Wilderness"	
1/29		Crist "Against the Social Construction of Nature and Wilderness"	Readings, GCS 2
2/1	Environmental Theory & Markets	Myers "Theories in Environmental Sociology"	
2/3		Gould et al. "Interrogating the Treadmill of Production"	IB choice
2/5		Shellenberger "Sweatshops Save the Planet" & "Greed Saved the Whales"	Readings, GCS 3
2/8	Ideology	Environment & Ideology Reflection sharing	E & I Reflection
2/10		Bell & Ashwood "The Ideology of Environmental Domination"	
2/12		Bell & Ashwood "The Ideology of Environmental Concern"	Readings, GCS 4
2/15	MENTAL HEALTH DAY - NO CLASS		
2/17	Technology & Science	2040 film	
2/19		DIY reading on tech solution. 2040 film cont'd and discussion	Readings, GCS 5
2/22	Consumption	Smith et al. "Captive to Consumerism"	
2/24		Shove & Ward "Inconspicuous Consumption"	
2/26		Schlossberg "Technology and the Internet"	Readings, GCS 6
3/1	Food & Health	GCS discussion chapters 1-6	
3/3		Foer "Storytelling"/ "All or Nothing or Something Else" Shellenberger "Have Your Steak and Eat it, Too"	
3/5		MacKendrick "Sociology of Environmental Health"	Readings, GCS 7
3/8	Time for Scholarship	Independent book discussions & feedback	IB Summary
3/10		Independent book discussions & feedback	
3/12		WORK ON EIP - NO CLASS	
3/15	SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS		
3/17			
3/19			
3/22	Religion	GCS discussion chapters 7-8	
3/24		Dr. Veldman class visit	
3/26		Shellenberger "False Gods for Lost Souls"	Reading, GCS 8
3/29	Environmental Justice	Mohai et al. "Environmental Justice"	
3/31		Rise episode 1	Reading
4/2	GOOD FRIDAY - NO CLASS		

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4/5	EASTER MONDAY - NO CLASS	
4/7	Governance	Bell & Ashwood "Governing the Ecological Society"
4/9		Li & Shapiro <i>China Goes Green</i> chapter 1
4/12	Change	No reading. Paper draft due - peer review
4/14		Bell & Ashwood "Living in the Ecological Society"
4/16		Lorenzen "Going Green"
4/19	Scholarship	Presentations
4/21		Presentations
4/23		Presentations
4/26		Presentations
4/28	Scholarship & Wrap up	Last day of class
4/30		Paper due

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