ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND POLITICS

The course explores the issue of “the environment” as both a source of political argument and conflict, and as the object of a wide range of public policies. During the semester, we will study the debates between different approaches to understanding the relationship between politics, society, and the natural environment, and the ways in which governments have tried to regulate the interactions between human society and its natural environment. The focus will be on the United States, but we will also examine the increasingly important global dimensions of this politics of the environment. Over the semester, we will approach these issues in a number of different ways – exploring the emergence of the environment as a political issue, analyzing the development of policies designed specifically to protect the environment (and the controversies over these policies), and through focused discussions of specific cases which pose difficult choices for policy-makers and citizens. Along the way, we will pay particular attention to the intersections between science, politics, and policy-making, which is central to many of the dynamics of environmental policy. At the broadest level, we will consider the likely directions in which environmental policy and politics will develop over the coming years, and will consider the problem that while much has been accomplished, it seems that policy-makers are falling behind the main environmental challenges facing the globe.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to demonstrate the following:

- An understanding of how and why “the environment” became a key issue in contemporary politics and policy-making.
- The ability to apply some of the tools and concepts of policy analysis to the study of environmental policy-making, in the U.S. and beyond.
- The ability to critically evaluate the choices facing policy-makers, and come to considered judgments of their own on some of these choices.

COURSE READINGS:

The following books are required for this course, and are available for purchase at the College bookstore:

Michael E. Kraft, Environmental Policy and Politics, 7th edition. (Routledge)
William Nordhaus, The Climate Casino. (Yale)
Amitav Ghosh, The Great Derangement. (Chicago)

Additional readings may be assigned over the semester.
COURSE OUTLINE:

The following outline is a bit tentative, as I want to retain flexibility so that we can explore issues and directions in more depth if necessary. The schedule for readings is an aspiration; I will provide more specific assignments for each day and week as we go along.

A) The “Environment” as a Political and Policy Issue: Background and Context. What are the main arguments in the debate over “the environment” and how have these arguments evolved over time? How have governments responded with policies to protect the environment, and how have these policies changed over time? What is the current state of the environment? Is “environmentalism” at a crossroads?

January 15-22 – The Environment, Environmental Policy and “Environmentalism”.
Reading: Kraft, chapters 1 and 2.

B) Environmental Policy in the U.S. What are the basic policies adopted over the past few decades to limit air and water pollution? What approaches have been taken to accomplish these goals and how successful have they been? How does the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) carry out its missions?

January 24-31 – Making Environmental Policy in the U.S.
Reading: Kraft, chapters 3-4.
Layzer, chapter 1.

February 5-19 – Classic “Environmental Policy,” Pollution, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
Reading: Kraft, chapter 5.
Layzer, chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Thursday, February 21 – First Exam.

C) Energy and Natural Resources Policy in the U.S. What have been the politics and cultural symbolism surrounding energy and natural resources in U.S. history and politics? Why has the U.S. not developed a systematic energy policy? Why have land use and natural resource policy choices generated such deep conflicts in U.S. politics?

Reading: Kraft, chapter 6.
Layzer, chapters 6, 8, 13, and 14.

March 11-15 – Spring Break.

Tuesday, March 26 – Second Exam.
D) Rethinking Environmental Policy and Grappling with Climate Change. How have the tools and standards for evaluating environmental policy changed over the past decades? Which approaches have proven most effective? What value judgments are at stake in the different approaches? Finally, can anything be done about Climate Change…and/or will anything be done?

March 28 – How Much Progress Have We Made?
Reading: Kraft, chapter 7.
Layzer, chapters, 17.

April 2-25 – Climate Change Sustainable Development, and Global Environmental Policy.
Reading: Kraft, chapter 8.
Nordhaus, *The Climate Casino.*

Thursday, April 18 – NO CLASS: Easter Break.

Tuesday, April 30 – Policy Position/Research Paper Due.

April 30-May 2 – Case Study Discussions.

NOTE: As you can see, I have organized the readings so that we jump back and forth between the basic texts, case studies, and original source material (in politics and scholarship). I hope this will help generate lots of interesting things to discuss and fruitful arguments. My expectation is that you will read the material before the class for which it is assigned, consider its relationship to other material and the questions it raises, and be ready to discuss and evaluate the readings in class.

ASSIGNMENTS:

Your grade for the course will be based on your work on the following assignments:

1) A short answer/essay exam, given in class on Thursday, February 21. Your grade on this assignment will count for 20% of your grade in the course.

2) A short answer/essay exam, given in class on Tuesday, March 26. Your grade on this assignment will count for 20% of your grade in the course.

3) A final exam, which will cover both the last third of the class and have cumulative element. This exam is scheduled for Wednesday, May 8, 8:00-10:30 am. [NOTICE: You should note this date and time NOW and make sure to plan any vacations, etc. around that date. “Leaving early from campus” will not be an acceptable excuse for rescheduling the final exam.] Your grade on this assignment will count for 30% of your grade in the course.
4) A case study project, in which students will work in groups to investigate a pressing environmental policy controversy, research and develop the arguments of one set of participants in the controversy, and conduct a discussion in which an attempt is made to find a solution to the problem acceptable to all participants. The details of this project will be discussed early in the class, and the tentative date for the “discussion” is the final week of class, April 30-May 2. Your grade on this assignment will count for 30% of your grade in the course.

GRADING SYSTEM:

Each assignment will be graded on a point system, with 100 points being the maximum possible. You will then be given a letter grade that matches the score. I will use the following grading scale on each assignment:

A   = 100-93
A-  = 92-90
B+  = 89-87
B   = 86-83
B-  = 82-80
C+  = 79-77
C   = 76-73
C-  = 72-70
D+  = 69-67
D   = 66-63
D-  = 62-60
F   = 59 and below

In calculating your final grade, I will average and weight the numerical totals, and assign the appropriate letter grade.

NOTE: The major assignments of this class will require you to present ideas and arguments in written form, and in grading your work, I will be looking primarily at the quality and persuasiveness of your analyses and arguments, your ability to clearly support your opinions and conclusions. As a result, the quality of your writing, in addition to the quality of your analysis and arguments, will be weighed in determining your grade on each assignment.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND HONESTY:

All students should note and consider carefully the following policies:

- Absences from Exams: “Absence from an announced examination results in a failing grade for the examination, unless suitable arrangements are made for a special examination.” (Westminster College Undergraduate Catalog, p. 71) For this course, I will recommend a make-up exam only if I am notified more than 12 hours in advance of the scheduled exam, and the reasons for missing the exam are sufficiently compelling.

- Plagiarism and Cheating: These and any other forms of academic dishonesty and
theft will not be tolerated in this class. They are a violation of the norms of mutual respect, individual integrity, and the open exchange of ideas, and are subject to severe penalties, including automatic failure in the class. We will discuss the meaning and importance of academic honesty early in the class, and you can also consult the Westminster College Undergraduate Catalog, pp. 71-75 for the Westminster College Academic Integrity Policy. This Policy will be followed in our class.

**HOW TO FIND ME:**

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Office Hours – Wednesday, 10 am – 3 pm.  
and by appointment.