Course Background and Objectives

Environment and Society is an introductory course on the urban environment. It is designed for students with an interest in urban and environmental issues who might want to pursue further studies in Urban and Environmental Policy as well as for those interested in the topic even though they may be pursuing another major.

The class will examine a broad range of urban and environmental issues. Readings, discussions, presentations, class exercises and writing assignments will allow students to engage with the course material from a variety of perspectives and should provide a broad framework for linking the environment and society. The course will be organized around six broad topic areas: a) Environmental Footprints – Defining the Problem, Identifying Agencies for Change; b) the Global Environment – Climate Change, Global Trade, and China and the Environment; c) Pollution and Waste – the Toxic Environment; d) The Built Environment – Transportation, Planning, and Streets; e) Nature in the City; f) Food and the Environment. The class will include reading and writing assignments, seminar discussions, presentations, films, and speakers. Students will select a specific topic area by the second week of the semester to work with a group that will help organize the seminar and presentation sessions regarding the readings in that topical area. Students will also attend at least two events outside of class (see below).

Through the course, students will:
- critically examine a broad range of contemporary urban and environmental issues and policy debates.
- develop analytic skills to make connections between the urban environment and economic development, neighborhood and regional planning, community health, labor and workforce development, organizing and advocacy, and public policy.
- gain insight about the nature of urban and environmental problems and their possible solutions.
- gain understanding of the urban and environmental conditions and policy debates in Los Angeles by talking with activists, planners and policy makers in the classroom and also in the field.
- Develop understanding regarding how urban and environmental issues in Los Angeles
connect to those issues at the national and global level.

**Course Structure**
The six topic areas for the class encompass different ways to understand and frame urban and environmental issues. They include:

ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINTS: How individual, institutional, and political and economic factors contribute to community and environmental impacts and how to identify and evaluate different agencies for change.

THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT. How do our development, industrial and lifestyle practices relate to global environmental impacts, including climate change? How do global trade and freight traffic impact the environment? And what role does China play as an increasing industrial/manufacturing hub and the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases.

THE TOXIC ENVIRONMENT. Understanding the sources and impacts of pollution; air quality concerns; pollution prevention versus pollution control versus market strategies; precautionary principles; and environmental justice.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT. How does transportation affect land use and choices about the built environment? What is the connection between sprawl and the environment? How have cars and freeways become part of our culture and ways of viewing the world? What alternative transportation strategies are available, even in (or especially in) a place like Los Angeles?

NATURE IN THE CITY. How have we controlled nature to build cities? Can cities become more sustainable? More livable? More ecological? Is the concept “Nature in the City” an oxymoron?

FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT. Where does our food come from? How is it manufactured? Where is it bought, and how is it consumed? What alternative food strategies are available?

The course will also address current and emerging urban and environmental controversies and policy debates by drawing in guest speakers who are actively involved in urban and environmental problem solving and policymaking as well as viewing films and documentaries that inform those topics.

**Requirements and Grading**

Students are required to attend class and complete all assignments and class exercises, including the two out of class events. Grades will be based on the following:

1. PARTICIPATION (40% of grade)

   Participation and active engagement in class discussions, exercises, assignments, and out of class events are a critical component of the course.
A. Reading memos (15% of grade)
You are responsible for completing all readings listed in the schedule below, and submitting a weekly written reading response. Readings listed for each class on the schedule below are to be read before that class (e.g., the readings listed for Jan 31 or February 2nd are the readings we will discuss in those classes). Reading memos are meant to prepare you and to guide the class discussions, therefore they must be submitted on time to receive full credit. They are graded pass/fail. Students are expected to cite at least 2 readings in your memos.

Reading memos are NOT a summary of the readings nor a commentary about whether or not you liked the reading, but rather a critique, assessment, opinion, protest about the authors’ key arguments, or any combination of these. They may also highlight issues that are unclear to you or that you wish to discuss further in class. Reading memos should be no more than 200-250 words and must be posted to the appropriate forum (by date) on the class Moodle website (deadlines listed below). Students should also read the postings by other students to better facilitate a seminar-type discussion format.

B. Urban and Environmental Issues in the News (5% of grade)
Each week, students should post the link to a news or journal article with an urban and environmental focus related to one or more of the topical areas that will be discussed in class or from speaker presentations. These should also be posted on the class moodle website on alternate times with the reading memos (deadlines also posted below). Similar to the reading memos, the news postings can help guide the class discussion. They are also graded P-F. Sources for news stories could include newspapers (e.g., LA Times, NY Times, Wall Street Journal), magazines (e.g., The Nation, Mother Jones, The Economist), journals (e.g., Planning, American Journal of Public Health, Environment), or blog posts (e.g., Grist (www.grist.org), Common Dreams (www.commondreams.org), AlterNet (www.alternet.org), etc.. These are all examples that provide potential sites for news on urban and environmental issues, policies, and social movements.

C. Attendance & Class Participation (15% of grade)
Class attendance and active participation in class is essential to the class. Let me know if you’re unable to attend class; if you don’t, I’ll assume you just failed to come without a particular reason for doing so.

D. Out-of-Class Events (5% of grade)
Students are required to attend at least 2 out-of-class events (see below for possible events to select from). Students should also post an event memo (no more than 200 words) afterwards on moodle to share your observations with the class about the event.

POSSIBLE EVENTS
1. Toxics Tour (TBA)
2. CicLAvia (April 15)
3. LA River Tour (TBA)
4. UCLA Complete Streets Conference (March 2)
5. “Media for the 99%” conference (Story of Stuff speaker) (March 3)
6. North East Trees memorial and planting of a grove (Jan. 29)
7. Good Food Day/Mayor’s Community Day of Service (March 31)
8. Food and Immigrants Panel, L.A. Food Policy Council (March 31)
9. Earth Day events (April 21-22)

2. ASSIGNMENTS (25% of grade)

Assignments will consist of 3 essays and 1 group presentation.

A. Short Essays (15% of grade)
Students will write two short essays on the different topic areas covered in class, plus an additional short commentary on your environmental footprint. Essays should reference all sources. Footprint commentary will be graded P-F and should be about 200-400 words – 1 to 2 pages. The grading for the other two essays will be based on your ability to state a clear and compelling argument, provide some evidence to back up this/these claim(s), organize your paper logically, cite appropriate references, and provide a clear written presentation. The short essays, which will receive a letter grade, should have page numbers and are expected to be 3 to 4 pages (approximately 800-1000 words).

Commentary #1: Environmental Footprint Commentary (required for all students)

For this essay, calculate your own environmental footprint using:

Your commentary can focus on the following:

- What are the implications regarding the number of “earths” it would take to sustain everyone at your lifestyle?
- How do you think you could reduce your environmental footprint?
- What would your environmental footprint be if you made all the same choices but lived elsewhere (say in Africa)?
- What do you see as the major environmental problems facing the planet? In your home community?

For this exercise and for subsequent class discussions be prepared to discuss and evaluate the importance of the following: reducing your own environmental footprint; changing consumer behavior; changing institutions; bringing about policy change to reduce footprints; increasing the activism to better advocate for change; using market signals such as raising taxes; and/or creating incentives or disincentives to influence practices.

Essays #2 and #3: Short Essays for Topic Areas (choose 2)

Note: you will NOT write an essay on the topic that you are presenting on – see group presentation below – so students will have a choice of writing about 2 of the other 4 topics.
The short essays are meant to be a further exploration of one of the topics or debates within each topic area. You are free to choose any topic within each topic area, therefore there is no “prompt” for these two essays. Students are expected to reference at least two of the class readings within their topic area, but are encouraged to do additional research on their topic.

Due dates for the topic area essays are as follows:

- The Global Environment – due by Feb 21
- The Toxic Environment – due by March 6
- The Built Environment – due by March 27
- Nature in the City – due by April 10
- Food & Health – due by April 24

B. Group Presentations (10% of grade)
Groups of five to six students will be formed the second day of class. Each group will give a 30-minute presentation (followed by class discussion that the group will facilitate) on one of the five topic areas. Each group is encouraged to meet with the professor prior to the presentation day to discuss the topic and the presentation. Groups are encouraged to draw on the readings, speakers and reading and news memos. In-class presentations for each of the 5 topic areas will be on the following dates:

- The Global Environment – Feb 16
- The Toxic Environment – March 1
- The Built Environment – March 22
- Nature in the City -- April 5
- Food and Environment -- April 19

3. RESEARCH PAPER (35% of grade)

 Due by Friday, May 4
The research paper should be on a specific topic, issue or question of your choice. The purpose of the research paper is to conduct research on a topic of your choosing that relates to one of the broad topic areas or a current environmental debate (upon approval of the professor).

Your papers should be between 10 -12 pages (without your citations and bibliography). Your paper should describe your topic and its relevance to the environment and society. In addition to a presentation and analysis of your issue, research papers can also present policy recommendations for the issue you have identified. You also have the option of undertaking an “action research paper” based on your participation in the research needs of a particular organization advocating around an urban and environmental issue that links to the class topics and discussions. For the research (either the traditional research paper or the action research paper) you can draw on and integrate concepts and discussions from the course as well as outside sources (e.g. books, journal articles, and
relevant websites). Also include a bibliography that lists resources used for your paper and please use the Chicago Manual style for references.

**Grading.** You will receive a letter grade based on the following:
- Completion of assignment
- Depth of analysis (rather than simply a description of facts and history)
- Critical thinking with clear arguments to support your assertions
- Integration of course lectures, discussions, readings, and films, where appropriate
- Overall organization and structure of the paper.
- Connection to the organization’s research agenda (for an action research paper)

We will go over the following research paper assignments in class.

Key tasks and due dates:
- Identify by memo your topic and research question: **By Monday, March 27**
- Identify by memo your work in progress, including an outline of paper with bibliographic sources: **By Monday, April 16**
- Paper due: **Friday, May 4**

For the Action Research paper option, you can select a group or organization with whom you would develop a relationship. The group would be able to help you identify a specific research and/or action-related objective that would be valuable for the group involved. We can work with you on how to identify a client group and how to best shape and complete such an assignment. Students conducting action research will also be required to present their findings and conclusions during the last class presentation sessions.

Key tasks and due dates:
- Identify research action option: **By Thursday, Feb 16**
- Identify client and research action objective and work in progress memo: **By Monday, March 27**
- Present findings in class: **Tuesday and Thursday April 24-May 3**
- Turn in 10-12 page write up of the goals, objectives, and results of the action research project, including a discussion of the partner or client group’s activities as well as referencing the readings and seminar discussions and events, where appropriate: **Friday, May 4**

**Readings and Class Schedule**

All readings are available on the class moodle website – refer to the website for the syllabus as well as links to specific readings.

**TOPIC #1: ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT AND AGENCIES OF CHANGE** (Jan 24-February 2)
Tu Jan 24 – Course Overview
[1] Review syllabus & student introductions
[3] Environmental Footprints Exercise and Group Presentation Information

Th Jan 26 – Environmental Footprints Discussion
[2] Footprint Essays Discussion – Review each other’s essays, posted on Moodle

ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT ESSAYS TO BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT Wed Jan 25.

Tu Jan 31 – Green Consumerism & the Story of Stuff

READING MEMO #1, TO BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT, FEB 1

Th Feb 2 – Agencies of Change, Greening Oxy, and Urban and Environmental Agendas
[1] –Guest Speaker—Intro to Greening Oxy initiatives

TOPIC #2 – THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT: CLIMATE CHANGE, GLOBAL TRADE AND GOODS MOVEMENT, AND CHINA AND THE ENVIRONMENT (Feb. 7-16)

URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #1, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT FEB 6
Th Feb 7 – Climate Change Politics


Class debate based on readings and news items: is climate change real or is it a hoax; Is human activity responsible? What strategies (if any) should be utilized to address greenhouse gas emissions?

READING MEMO #2, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT, FEB 8

Th Feb 9 – Global Trade and Goods Movement

Possible Guest Speaker: Jesse Marquez, Coalition for a Safe Environment


URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #2, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT FEB 13

Tu Feb 14 – China and the Environment

Possible Films: Manufactured Landscapes; China Blue


[4] Clean Air Network videos (Hong Kong-based advocacy group): a) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmH3xCpOSW8; and b) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0ebcIAQhWs; Optional: Film Documentaries: “Manufactured Landscapes” (available on reserve) and “Up the Yangtze” (available on Netflix)

Th Feb 16 – The Global Environment: Strategies for change/Group Presentation


Group Presentation and Class Discussion: What are the most significant global environmental issues; what solutions are available? What are the challenges for bringing about change?

ACTION RESEARCH OPTION SELECTED AND IDENTIFIED BY FEB 16

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT SHORT ESSAY DUE FEB 21

TOPIC #3 – THE TOXIC ENVIRONMENT: POLLUTION AND WASTES (Feb 21-March 1)

READING MEMO #3, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT FEB 20
Tu Feb 21 – Everyday Toxins & Pollutants
Possible Guest Speaker: Bhavna Shamasunder, or Film Trade Secrets
[1] Look up chemicals listed on the label of some products you use everyday. Use the Chemical Index. http://www.simplesteps.org/chemicals

URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #3, POSTED ON MOODLE B MIDNIGHT, FEB 22
Th Feb 23 – Pollution Prevention, the Precautionary Principle, Environmental Justice, and the Clean Up-Green Up Campaign
Possible Speakers (combined with UEP 204): EJ and the Clean Up-Green Up Campaign

READING MEMO #4, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT, FEB 27
Tu Feb 28 – Community Players/Toxic Tour or Community Assessment of Air Quality (details to be provided in class)

URBAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/INK #4, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT FEB 29
Th March 1 – Alternatives & Group Presentation


Group Presentation and Class Discussion: How can we best reduce or eliminate the toxic products and toxic processes that are present in our lives and ubiquitous in our society? Are they a necessary evil of our urban and advanced industrial society? Are toxic issues overblown or are they far greater than what gets recognized and addressed?

TOXIC ENVIRONMENT SHORT ESSAY DUE MARCH 6

TOPIC #3 – THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: TRANSPORTATION, PLANNING AND STREETS (March 6-March 22)

READING MEMO #5, TO BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT, MARCH 5

Tu March 6 - Cars & Freeways


URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #5, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT MARCH 7

Th March 8 – Cities and Suburbs: Transportation, Housing, and the Built Environment


SPRING BREAK MARCH 11-15

READING MEMO #6 TO BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT MARCH 19

Tu March 20 - Transportation Alternatives
   Possible Guest Speaker: CicLAvia rep.; Ron Milam; Christopher Hawthorne

URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #6, TO BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT, MARCH 21 (LOOK FOR ITEMS ABOUT ALTERNATIVES TO THE CAR)

Th March 22 – Students Take to the Streets (By Car, Rail, Bus, Bike, or by Foot) & Group Presentation
   [2] Students report on their transportation experience

   Group Presentation: Is a Car Free (or Car Lite) Approach Feasible in Cities; in Suburbs; in Los Angeles? How would we design our cities differently?
TOPIC #4 - NATURE IN THE CITY (March 27-April 5)

READING MEMO #7, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT MARCH 26
Tu March 27 - Urban Nature


URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #7, POSTED BY MIDNIGHT MARCH 28
Th March 29 – Green Space, Open Space, Lawns, and Reconstructed Space
Speakers: Jessica Gudmundson and/or Stephanie Taylor, UEPI and Verde Coalition


READING MEMO #8 POSTED BY MIDNIGHT, APRIL 2
Tu April 3 - LA River Tour or Speaker


Th April 5 – Reinventing Nature in the City/Group Presentation


**Group Presentation: Is Nature in the City an Oxymoron?**

**TOPIC #5 - FOOD & HEALTH (April 10-April 19)**

**READING MEMO #9 POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT APRIL 9**

**Tu April 10 - The Food System, and its Dominant Players**


**URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK #9, ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT, APRIL 11**

**Th April 12 – Food Politics**

Possible Guest Speaker or Film


**READING MEMO #10, POSTED ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT APRIL 16**

**Tu April 17 - Food Globalization**


RESEARCH PAPER WORK IN PROGRESS MEMO DUE APRIL 16

URBAN & ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS ITEM/LINK ON MOODLE BY MIDNIGHT APRIL 18

Th April 19 - Food System Alternatives
Speakers and/or Film: Truck Farm

Group Presentation: What ways should the food system be changed? Doesn’t the current food system in the U.S. work best, with cheap food, convenient/fast food, available all year round?

FOOD & HEALTH SHORT ESSAY DUE APRIL 24

REPORTS ON EVENTS AND RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTATIONS
APRIL 24-26, MAY 3
(MAY 1, Occupy events; immigration march, general strike)

RESEARCH PAPER DUE MAY 4th