

Environmental Justice

EVS 489 / 589

Fall 2020, 3 credits

EVS 489LEC – Course number 24804

EVS589LEC – Course number 24619

Mode: traditional (in person)

Tuesday and Thursday 11:10 - 12:25, Baldy 101

Instructor

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Course description

Environmental justice is both a social movement and an area of research based around the idea that all people have the right equal environmental protection, regardless of race, class, or gender: that everyone is entitled to a sustainable world. Despite this ideal, environmental hazards are unequally distributed throughout the US and the world. Why is our society so environmentally unjust, and what can we do about it? What are the power dynamics and social structures that create environmental inequality? How can environmental sciences further environmental justice?

This course will help you understand where the concepts of environmental justice and environmental racism originate, and how they are used in policy and advocacy. Through case studies from both national and global scales, we'll explore topics like climate justice, extraction, energy justice, and water justice, with emphasis on policies that have been proposed to address these, from international law to the Green New Deal. This course draws from multiple disciplines, including geography, sociology, and the humanities, but will pay special attention to how environment and sustainability scientists co-produce research that can help support environmental justice. The course aims to equip you with concepts, examples, and resources to pursue environmental justice through your careers and everyday life.

What are we going to learn?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to...

Learning outcome	This will be assessed by...
1. Articulate the social and historical context of how environmental justice movements emerged, and how they have shaped environmental policy and politics, both in the US and globally.	Assignment 4 (portfolio piece); assignment 2 (fact and concept book); weekly reflections
2. Compare different definitions of environmental justice, and explain how definitions of justice and the environment have evolved.	Weekly reflections; assignment 2 (fact and concept book)
3. Analyze environmental plans and policies using different conceptions of justice, and according to intersections of social difference.	Weekly reflections; assignment 4 (portfolio piece)
4. Identify opportunities to engage in environmental justice in activism, work, and research.	Assignment 3 (event reflection); weekly reflections
5. Assess scientific articles and critically read media reporting on them.	Assignment 1 (scientific article analysis); weekly reflections
6. Produce a piece of creative and critical work that explores course concepts; present ideas and work to a target audience.	Assignment 4 (portfolio piece)

Course schedule

Week 1: September 1, 3

How is environmental justice defined?

Ryan Holifield, 2001, "Defining Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism," *Urban Geography* 22(1): 78-90.

Week 2: September 8, 10

Race and the environment: What is the environment? How has environmental protection been racist?

Carolyn Finney, 2014. *Black Faces, White Spaces*, preface and chapter 5.

Laura Pulido, 2000. "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, 1: 12-40.

Week 3: September 15, 17

Race and the environment: How is Black Lives Matter an EJ challenge?

David Naguib Pellow, 2018. *What is critical environmental justice?*
Chapter 1, "Critical environmental justice studies"
Chapter 2, "Black Lives Matter as an Environmental Justice Challenge"

Week 4: September 22, 24

How can science support environmental justice?

Rachel Morello-Frosch, 2002. Discrimination and the political economy of environmental inequality. *Environment and Planning C - Government and Policy* 20(4): 477-496.

Alice Mah, 2017. Environmental justice in the age of big data: challenging toxic blind spots of voice, speed, and expertise. *Environmental Sociology*, 3:2, 122-133

Optional (recommended for grad students): Eve Tuck, 2009. *Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities*.

Week 5: September 29, Oct 1

What are the connections between EJ and health?

**** Assignment 1 due Oct. 1 ****

Harriet A. Washington, 2019. *A Terrible Thing to Waste: Environmental Racism and Its Assault on the American Mind*, Introduction + pages 23-27 and 49-58.

Sacoby Wilson and colleagues, 2020. Roundtable on the Pandemics of Racism, Environmental Injustice, and COVID-19 in America. *Environmental Justice* 13(3).

Andy Szasz, 2007. *Shopping Our Way to Safety: How We Changed from Protecting the Environment to Protecting Ourselves*, pages TBD.

Optional (recommended for grad students): Laura Pulido, 2016. Flint, Environmental Racism, and Racial Capitalism, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 27:3, 1-16.

Optional (recommended for grad students): Carlo Caduff, 2020. "What went wrong: Corona and the world after the full stop." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*.

Week 6: Oct 6, 8

Is there a such thing as a natural disaster?

Eric Klinenberg, 1999. Denaturalizing Disaster: A Social Autopsy of the 1995 Chicago Heat Wave. *Theory and Society* 28: 239-295.

Neil Smith, 2006. There's No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster. From Understanding Katrina: Perspectives from the Social Sciences.

Week 7: Oct 13, 15

How is the indigenous environmental justice movement fighting for environmental justice?

Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*, chapters 1 and 2.

Week 8: Oct 20, 22

What is global environmental justice?

**** Proposal for assignment 4 due Oct. 22****

Joan Martinez-Alier, Leah Temper, Daniela Del Bene & Arnim Scheidel, 2016. Is there a global environmental justice movement?, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 43:3, 731-755.

Raj Patel and Jason Moore, excerpt from *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, pages TBD.

Optional (recommended for grad students): Ryan Holifield, "Environmental Justice and Political Ecology," from *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*.

Optional (recommended for grad students): J. Timmons Roberts and Bradley C. Parks, (2019), Ecologically Unequal Exchange, Ecological Debt, and Climate Justice: The History and Implications of Three Related Ideas for a New Social Movement. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*.

Week 9: Oct 27, 29

How will we realize climate justice?

Kari Marie Norgaard, 2006. 'We Don't Really Want to Know' Environmental Justice and Socially Organized Denial of Global Warming in Norway. *Organization and Environment* 19(3): 347-70.

Kyle Whyte, 2016. Is it Colonial Déjà Vu? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice. In *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledges, Forging New Constellations of Practice*. Edited by Joni Adamson, Michael Davis, and Hsinya Huang. Earthscan Publications, pp. 88-104.

Week 10: Nov 3, 5

How can clean energy be environmentally just?

Benjamin Sovacool, 2016. The political ecology and justice of energy. In *The Palgrave Handbook of the International Political Economy of Energy*.

Dustin Mulvaney, 2019. *Solar Power: Innovation, Sustainability, and Environmental Justice*, chapters 1 and 8.

Optional (recommended for grad students): Winona La Duke and Deborah Cowen, 2020. "Beyond Wiindigo Infrastructure." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, April.

Week 11: Nov 10, 12

What is a just transition?

Mijin Cha, 2020. A just transition for whom? Politics, contestation, and social identity in the disruption of coal in the Powder River Basin. *Energy Research & Social Science*.

Matthew Henry, Morgan Bazilian and Chris Markuson (2020). Just transitions: histories and futures in a post-COVID world. *Energy Research and Social Science*.

Damian White, 2020. Just Transitions/Design for Transitions: Preliminary Notes on a Design Politics for a Green New Deal. *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 31(2): 20-39.

Optional (recommended for grad students): David Ciptet and Jill Lindsay Harrison (2019). Transition tensions: mapping conflicts in movements for a just and sustainable transition. *Environmental Politics* 29(3): 435-456.

Week 12: Nov 17, 19

Do we need a Green New Deal?

The Red Deal, Part 3: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth.

Daniel Aldana Cohen, Alyssa Battistoni, Kare Aronoff, Thea Riofrancos, 2019. *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal*, pages TBD.

Week 13: Nov 24

How might we realize a Green New Deal?

Laura Pulido, Ellen Kohl & Nicole-Marie Cotton (2016) State Regulation and Environmental Justice: The Need for Strategy Reassessment, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 27:2, 12-31

Week 14 (remote) Dec 1, 3

Presentation / studio

**** Assignment 2 due Dec. 1 ****

Week 15 (remote) Dec 8, 10

Presentation / studio

**** Assignments 3 and 4 due Dec. 10 ****

Why do the parts of the course come in the order that they do?

This course begins by looking at some common definitions of EJ, and how the EJ movement emerged in the United States. The first few weeks cover fundamental concepts relating to environmental racism, and we also look at critical environmental justice — a more recent framework that extends EJ scholarship beyond topics typically seen as "environmental," and also critiques some earlier elements of EJ.

The second part of the course looks at the relationship of science with environmental justice, with particular examples around health and disasters. The point of weeks 4-6 is to look critically at how science has, and has not, supported environmental justice.

In weeks 7-9, having learned some fundamentals about EJ in the US today, we widen our scope further to look at global environmental justice, including the history and present of colonialism, and how this intersects with climate change.

In weeks 10-12, we look at concepts and proposals to address environmental justice, including just transition and the Green New Deal. The final weeks are spent discussing student projects, with a wrap-up session on speculative futures and EJ.

Basically, the course is structured so that you (1) first gain some background on EJ movements in the US and environmental racism, (2) improve your knowledge of how scientists produce knowledge related to EJ, (3) go deeper into historical and spatial factors that produce *global* environmental inequality and injustice, including how it manifests in climate change, and (4) critically analyze how various actors are attempting to address environmental injustice on multiple scales.

So those are the topics... what will we actually learn?

We're going to work on four things: concepts, skills, facts, and context.

Concepts are ideas that help us describe and explain things in the world: structural racism, intersectionality, just transition. We will spend time learning about them, including who came up with them and why, when they might be useful, how to explain them to others, etc.

Skills are things your college education should be helping you develop: finding information, collecting and analyzing data, communicating and storytelling — in general, things that will be useful in life and in your next job. This is not a skills-intensive course compared to some, but some of the skills we want to continue to practice here include writing, presentation, how to be a good team member and contribute effectively to a discussion, etc.

Facts are things like: how much carbon dioxide is emitted in the world each year? How big is the US defense budget? The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention budget? In a world with Google, you don't need to know all the facts all the time. But there are a few facts that are useful to memorize and have in your pocket for when you need them.

Context is broader background knowledge (of which facts are just one part). Context may be historical or spatial.

How are we going to learn it?

What does a typical class session look like?

This is a discussion-based seminar course. Short lectures of 15-20 minutes will build on the readings, and most classes will feature a few short videos, but the majority of class time will be spent in both small-group and whole-class discussions.

This course meets in person up until the end of November. If it becomes necessary to transition to online, everything will be the same, but on Zoom — you will still need to attend discussions at the appointed time.

How is this course graded?

Weekly Reflections + Discussion questions	40%
Assignment 1 - Scientific article reflection	10%
Assignment 2 - Fact and concept book	5%
Assignment 3 - Event reflection	5%
Assignment 4 - Portfolio piece (concept, final, presentation)	40%

Letter Grade	Points	Letter Grade	Points	Letter Grade	Points
A	94-100 points	B-	80-82 points	D+	65-69 points
A-	90-93 points	C+	77-79 points	D	60-64 points
B+	87-89 points	C	73-76 points	F	< 60 points
B	83-86 points	C-	70-72 points		

Please also remember you are responsible for participating in the course evaluation process.

What are the weekly reflections?

For each week, you'll write a 1 page / ~4 paragraph reflection on the readings and post it in the discussion board. These reflections should

- summarize the arguments or main ideas of the articles (but ideally in one sentence - not more than a paragraph), or talk about your main takeaway from them.

AND do at least one of the following other things:

- link them to something else that you've read (in this class or others)
- link them to something going on in the world right now
- critique the articles — not "I liked it" or "I didn't like it", but what are its weak points, where is it lacking in evidence or failing to consider something, what could strengthen it, etc.

- respond to a point someone else made on an article.

Please at least mention both articles if there are multiple articles assigned on a week, though it's okay if you want to mainly focus on one in more detail.

You will also write two discussion questions for the week. Writing a good discussion question is actually an art. We will talk more about this.

You only have to do this for ten of the thirteen weeks that we have readings: the first week won't have one due; and you can choose two weeks over the semester to have "off" depending on your workload for other classes, etc.

Reflections will be due Mondays at midnight. This means you must read ahead for the entire week, and not do the reading an hour before class. This can admittedly be a pain if your customary rhythm is to read at the last minute. However, there is a collective benefit in that the class discussions will be richer.

What are the assignments?

Assignment 1: Scientific article reflection. Due October 1.

What is it? An analysis of a scientific journal article.

What is the purpose of it? To practice critically reading scientific articles, knowing where and how to find scientific research, understanding the methods used, and understanding how science is reported in the press and used by organizations.

Assignment 2: Fact and concept book. Due December 1.

What is it? A list of 15 facts you want to remember from the course, and 10 concepts you want to remember, with brief definitions. You should be able to compile this easily from your notes. Think of it as the study guide for the test you're not going to have.

What is the purpose of it? It's part memory aid. But it's also a chance to look back at what you've learned over the semester, in order to think about the gaps and your continuing questions as you move forward to the next things you'll be studying and doing in life.

Assignment 3: Event reflection. Due December 10.

What is it? A brief reflection paper on an event you attend (virtual is fine - there are lots of options these days) relating to environmental justice. We will have a running list of events you can attend. It could be anything from a rally to a webinar to a Congressional hearing. This can be turned in any time — suggest doing it sooner, in Sept. or Oct.

What is the purpose of it? To participate in environmental justice debates in the real world, to analyze the representations, narratives and strategies actors are using.

Assignment 4: Portfolio Piece. Proposal due Oct. 22, final piece due December 10.

What is it? This is your main assignment, and it could take various forms based on what is useful to you in your life and career goals. Graduate students may want to write an academic paper. It could be a podcast, video, policy brief, virtual event, etc.: something you may want to share with a future employer or use to build your personal portfolio of work you did during these years. If it is non-written, you will need to write a page or two explaining, contextualizing or reflecting upon it. This assignment has three graded components: a proposal (10 points), the presentation (10 points), and the work itself (20 points).

What is the purpose of it? To use the opportunity of this class to get community feedback on

a piece of work that could help you advance your career (even if you don't know what that will be yet); to practice communication skills that will be useful in your life and work.

What if I can't turn them in on time?

If you have a reason for not being able to complete assignments on time, let me know. Late work without a reason will still be accepted, but will receive 10% off per day that it is late.

What books and equipment do I need?

Readings can all be found on UBLearn, including excerpts from books.

I'd still recommend buying two books if your financial situation allows you to — because it can be nice to have your own copy, and it supports the authors:

- *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*, by Dina Gilio-Whitaker

- *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?* by David Naguib Pellow

To effectively participate in this course, regardless of mode of instruction, the University recommends you have access to a Windows or Mac computer with webcam and broadband. Your best opportunity for success in the blended UB course delivery environment (in-person, hybrid, and remote) will require these minimum capabilities listed on the following website: buffalo.edu/ubit/service-guides/hardware/getting-started-with-hardware/purchasing-or-using-an-existing-computer.html

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is critical to the learning process. It is your responsibility as a student to complete your work in an honest fashion, upholding the expectations your individual instructors have for you in this regard. The ultimate goal is to ensure that you learn the content in your courses in accordance with UB's academic integrity principles, regardless of whether instruction is in-person or remote. Thank you for upholding your own personal integrity and ensuring UB's tradition of academic excellence. The academic integrity policy is available at buffalo.edu/academic-integrity.

Accessibility Resources

If you have any disability which requires reasonable accommodations to enable you to participate in this course, please contact the Office of Accessibility Resources in 60 Capen Hall, 716-645-2608 and also the instructor of this course during the first week of class. The office will provide you with information and review appropriate arrangements for reasonable accommodations, which can be found on the web at: <http://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/who-we-are/departments/accessibility.html>

Health and wellness

While your attendance and participation are essential components of this course, it is critical that you follow public health guidelines. As such, any student exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms should not come to campus to participate in coursework. If you need to miss class due to illness, isolation or quarantine must notify the instructor by email as soon as possible and no later than 24-hours after missing class. At that time, you are also expected to make arrangements to complete missed work.

As indicated in the [Student Compliance Policy for COVID-19 Public Health Behavior Expectations](#), in our classroom you are required to:

1. Obtain and wear masks/ face coverings in campus public spaces, including campus outdoor spaces.
2. Maintain proper physical distancing in public spaces and must stay 6 feet apart from one another.
3. Stay home if you are sick.
4. Abide by New York State, federal and Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) travel restrictions and precautionary quarantines.
5. Follow campus and public health directives for isolation or quarantine.
6. Should you need to miss class due to illness, isolation or quarantine, you are required to notify the course instructor and make arrangements to complete missed work.
7. You are responsible for following any additional directives in settings such as labs, clinical environments etc.

Students who are not complying with the public health behavior expectations will be asked to comply. Should the non-compliant behavior continue, course instructors are authorized to ask the student to leave the classroom. Non-compliant students may also be referred to the Office of Health Promotion to participate in an online public health class to better educate them on the importance of these public health directives for the entire community.

Critical Campus Resources

Sexual Violence

UB is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and stalking. If you have experienced gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), UB has resources to help. This includes academic accommodations, health and counseling services, housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and assistance with reporting the incident to police or other UB officials if you so choose. Please contact UB's Title IX Coordinator at 716-645-2266 for more information. For confidential assistance, you may also contact a Crisis Services Campus Advocate at 716-796-4399.

Mental Health

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning or reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. These might include strained

relationships, anxiety, high levels of stress, alcohol/ drug problems, feeling down, health concerns, or unwanted sexual experiences. Counseling, Health Services, and Health Promotion are here to help with these or other issues you may experience. You can learn more about these programs and services by contacting:

Counseling Services:

120 Richmond Quad (North Campus), 716-645-2720

202 Michael Hall (South Campus), 716-829-5800

Health Services: Michael Hall (South Campus), 716-829-3316

Health Promotion: 114 Student Union (North Campus), 716-645-2837