

Contact Information

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Instructor Bio

Steve Vanderheiden is Associate Professor of Political Science and Environmental Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Communication Policies

Students should contact the instructor by email from their CU email account and can generally expect a reply within 24 hours during the academic term in which the course is offered. If no response is received within that time frame, students should first send a follow-up email, then contact the PSCI office after 24 hours. The instructor will also communicate with students by email and expects that these communications will be received and read in a timely fashion.

Course Description

This course examines normative concepts and theories as they apply to the understanding and evaluation of contemporary environmental issues. Over the semester, we shall consider accounts of environmental problems through discourses of development, modernization, and security, examine alternate frames for such issues as problems for ethics, economics, or political economy, and apply concepts such as justice, democracy, and rights to issues in environmental politics, considering the potential and limits of theorizing them in these terms. We shall also apply these theoretical tools and insights to issues of urban planning and climate change, along with an extensive application of such tools to issues of food production and consumption. The goals of the course are to better understand the normative bases of major contemporary environmental issues and movements, to critically assess the role of underlying theories and concepts in shaping environmental politics, and to appreciate how environmental problems and goals rest on social and political theories. The course shall assess a range of approaches to the study of environmental politics, but does not advocate any particular value system.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Define key terms in environmental politics and identify the important actors and events that have shaped contemporary environmental ideals and concepts
 2. Describe those ideals and concepts in terms of their constituent elements; explain how each concept originates in and relies upon some body of knowledge or value claim
 3. Relate key concepts and ideals to contemporary issues in environmental politics; interpret current policy conflicts in terms of differing concepts and ideals each uses
 4. Categorize competing policy positions on contemporary environmental issues in terms of their application and ordering of normative concepts; reconstruct those positions in terms of their constituent elements and value claims
 5. Evaluate contemporary issues in environmental politics in terms of their constituent elements; assess the strengths and weaknesses of these elements; and formulate a case for and against an environmental policy or program in these terms
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Course Outline

- Week 1: The politics of ecological limits
 - Module 1: Theorizing environmental politics
 - Module 2: Malthus, neo-Malthusians, and beyond
 - Module 3: Ecological limits and politics
- Week 2: Beyond limits: sustainable development, ecological modernization, post-growth
 - Module 4: Greening the development agenda
 - Module 5: Ecological modernization
 - Module 6: Sustainable growth, de-growth, and post-growth futures
- Week 3: Democracy, responsibility, and consumerism: agency in environmental change
 - Module 7: Democracy: obstacle or opportunity?
 - Module 8: Who or is responsible for environmental problems, and so what?
 - Module 9: Consumerism, consumption, and individualization
- Week 4: Environmental solutions: economy, security, and food systems
 - Module 10: The environment as an economic problem
 - Module 11: Securitizing the environment
 - Module 12: Transforming the system: the politics of food
- Week 5: Transforming and transformative ideals: rights, justice, and sovereignty
 - Module 13: The rise of environmental justice
 - Module 14: Rights as remedies to environmental threats
 - Module 15: Sovereignty: friend or foe of sustainable societies?

Required Texts

All required readings for the course can be found online in the Canvas LMS, organized by date. There are no required books for sale in the university bookstore.

Method of Instruction

Since this is an online course, all instructional materials and assessment measures will be presented online. For each course module, a set of reading questions will be posted on Canvas for students to consult prior to each block of reading and viewing assignments. Each module is accompanied by a video lecture, which corresponds to the instructional content that would be available in a face-to-face version of the course and which should be viewed after completing the reading quiz. Exams and paper assignments will be assigned and submitted through Canvas, with grades and feedback also made available through that site.

The instructor will maintain a discussion board on Canvas related to any challenges posed by the online format of the course. Students experiencing challenges related to the format should first consult that board for guidance on navigating those challenges (in case others had also experienced similar challenges and helpful responses to them had been posted), contacting the instructor if posted strategies for addressing their particular issue have not yet been posted or are otherwise unhelpful. The instructor will endeavor to respond promptly and accordingly.

Student Responsibilities and Class Expectations

Students are responsible for completing all assignments for the course in a timely manner, including assigned readings as well as graded components of the course. Each course module, which corresponds with one week of material during a 15-week semester, includes 3-4 article-length reading assignments. In addition to reading and viewing assignments, students will also be required to post short responses to discussion questions associated with each module on a Canvas discussion board. The course also includes an online exam (based on assigned texts as well as ideas from video lectures) for each week of the course and a paper assignment of approximately 5-7 double-spaced pages that is due by the end of the course.

Assignments

There are three main categories of graded components to the course:

1. **Discussion** (15 percent): students will be required to post a response to one discussion question from each module on a Canvas discussion board and/or engage two

responses posted by other students. Full credit will be granted for each module in which students contribute substantively to discussion of course ideas and concepts from that module.

2. **Exams** (65 percent): online exams consisting of multiple-choice, short answer, and short essay will accompany each week's material. Each exam is worth 13 points, and tests material from that week only (exams are not cumulative). A study guide for each exam will be posted in advance, and exams will be administered through Canvas and limited in time. Students may consult course materials during exams but should refrain from using other sources of information (e.g. Google searches) in answering exam questions.
3. **Paper** (20 percent): students will develop a paper project related to subject matter in the course, including a project proposal that will be due midway through the term. The project (including the proposal) will be worth 20 points. Instructions for developing a paper topic and completing the paper assignment will be given during the second week.

Submission Policies

All work for the course should be submitted online through Canvas and in accordance with announced due dates. Reading quizzes and discussion posts should be completed by the Friday of each week in which the associated module is listed. Weekly exams will be available for a time-limited period each Friday, and are to be completed online. Paper should be uploaded through Canvas by the last day of the term in .docx or .pdf format. Instructions for formatting and references will be provided along with the paper assignment during the second week. Late assignments will be accepted at the discretion of the instructor.

Grading Criteria and Points Breakdown

Activity	Percentage	Criteria
15 discussions @ 1 point each	15%	full daily credit for one answer to posted question(s) supported by assigned texts or two substantive engagements of other posted answers that are supported by assigned texts

Activity	Percentage	Criteria
5 exams @ 13 points each	50%	12 multiple-choice, 3 short-answer and one short essay question (timed at 60 minutes)
term paper (20 pts)	20%	includes required proposal; see instructions and grading rubric posted in second week

Grading Scale

Grades will be assigned as follows

Table - Grading Scale

Letter Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
Percentage Grade	94-100	90-93	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	<60

Course Plagiarism Policy

All students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, constitutes grounds for academic sanctions imposed by the instructor and potential reporting to the CU-Boulder Honors Council. Students should take care to ensure that all submitted assignments for the course represent either their own work or properly attributes the ideas of others (rule of thumb: when in doubt, cite your source).

Netiquette

All students should be aware that their behavior impacts other people, even online. I hope that we will all strive to develop a positive and supportive environment and will be courteous to fellow students and your instructor. Due to the nature of the online environment, there are some things to remember.

1. Always think before you write. In other words, without the use of nonverbals with your message, your message can be misinterpreted. So please think twice before you hit submit.
2. Keep it relevant. There are places to chat and post for fun everyday stuff. Do not stray from the discussion in the assigned questions.
3. Never use all caps. This is the equivalent of yelling in the online world. It is not fun to read. Only use capital letters when appropriate.
4. Make sure that you are using appropriate grammar and structure. In other words, I don't want to see anyone writing "R U" instead of "are you". There are people in the class that may not understand this type of abbreviation, not to mention it does nothing to help expand your writing and vocabulary skills. Emoticons are fine as long as they are appropriate. A smile 😊 is welcome, anything offensive is not.
5. Treat people the same as you would face-to-face. In other words, it is easy to hide behind the computer. In some cases, it empowers people to treat others in ways they would not in person. Remember there is a person behind the name on your screen. Treat all with dignity and respect and you can expect that in return.
6. Respect the time of others. This class is going to require you to work in groups. Learn to respect the time of others in your group and your experience will be much better. Always remember that you are not the only person with a busy schedule, be flexible. Do not procrastinate! You may be one that works best with the pressures of the deadline looming on you, but others may not be that way. The same is true for the reverse. The key to a successful group is organization, communication and a willingness to do what it takes to get it done.

Website: <http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html> (Links to an external site.)

Compiled by Melissa Landin, Instructor, Dept. of Communication, Inver Hills Community College, mlandin@inverhills.edu

University Policies

You can find a copy of the University Policies on the [CU Resources](#) page.