

**University of Manitoba
Department of Sociology
Ecology and Society
SOC 3838, A01
3 Credit Hours, First Term 2007/08**

Instructor: Rod Kueneman **Class Location:** 301 Tier - Slot 3
Office: 302 Isbister
Office Hours: 11:30 am - 12:20 pm MWF or by appointment
Phones: 474-6501 (office)
452-4560 (home) between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.
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REQUIRED TEXTS:

Brosimmer, Franz. Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species

Kovel, Joel. The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World

Harper, Charles. Environment and Society: Human Perspectives on Environmental Issues, 3rd ed.

OPTIONAL TEXTS: (Students are to select one of the three books)

Orr, David. Earth in Mind: On Education, Environment, and the Human Prospect

Louv, Richard. Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder

McGonigle, Michael and Justine Starke. Planet U: Sustaining the World, Reinventing the University.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be evaluated by way of the following activities:

First In Class Test	- 20%
Second In Class Test	- 20%
Third In Class Test	- 20%
Term Paper	- 40%

The tests are 50 minute essay type. Study questions are provided at the end of this outline. There will be some choice of questions for tests 1 and 2. The term paper assignment will focus on the special role of education in raising the consciousness of the public. The specific details will be discussed in class and guidelines will be provided.

DUE DATES AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

FIRST TEST **October 5th**
READINGS: Broswimmer: entire book
Harper: chapters 1- 3

SECOND TEST **November 7th**
READINGS: Kovel: chapters 1 - 6
Harper: chapters 4 - 6

VOLUNTARY WITHDRAWAL DATE - November 14th

TERM PAPER DUE **November 23rd**

THIRD TEST **December 5th**
READINGS: Kovel: chapters 7 - 9
Harper: chapters 7 - 10

Students who fail to write tests on assigned dates will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade unless an alternative date has been agreed to by the instructor. Such arrangements should be made in advance whenever possible. Missed tests must be rescheduled within 7 days of the above published dates. Rescheduled tests will only be permitted for good reasons. If the term paper assignment is not handed in on time, and prior arrangements for late submission have not been made, I will not accept it and you will receive a grade of F for that part of the course grade.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course, we will explore the changing nature of human interaction within the larger ecological community of which we are a part. Regrettably, much of this story is about human practices which are increasingly corrosive and destructive to life and our species has precipitated the current wave of species extinction which is tantamount to an ecocide. Colin Mason argues that “within thirty years, in the 2030-decade, six massive ‘drivers’ will converge with unprecedented force in a statistical spike that could tear humanity apart and plunge the world into a new Dark Age. Depleted fuel supplies, rampant population growth, poverty, global climate change, famine and growing water shortages are on a crash course with potentially catastrophic consequences.”

This course has five primary objectives: 1) to consider the ways that human beings have thought about our relationship to the rest of nature (the social psychological question), 2) to consider the socially-constructed processes, especially capitalism, that are driving our species to the brink of a major ecological collapse (the social structural question), 3) to identify and clarify the primary ‘drivers’ in play and to understand their operation and long-term consequences, 4) to identify the imperatives that must be met if we are to bring the human species back from the brink, and 5) to consider the special role of the educational system to inform a public which is surrounded by a media culture which makes a concerted effort to deflect attention away from the ecological crisis, obscure the urgency of the situation, and vilify those who advocate for fundamental

changes in human activity.

It is my contention that these issues are foundational to social theory and social action in the 21st century. If we fail to meet the ecological challenge of this time in human history, we will face a future ever more precarious, violent, unjust, and turbulent as we approach the nadir of human existence and risk oblivion.

GRADING PROCEDURES

The following description of my grading scheme should make it possible for you to calculate your final grade in the course. You are urged to make your own computations to ensure that I have not made an error.

I find the normal grading system too constraining, so I have modified it to a limited extent by introducing the minus grade (e.g. A-, B-, C-). In the final grade submitted, however, I must conform to the university scheme.

Your answers are being evaluated on a letter grade system, not on a point system which is converted to a letter grade. The main benchmarks for the grade ranges can be described as follows:

D/F = an answer which is factually weak, faulty analysis, and very poor organization.

C= an answer which is mostly complete in terms of facts but suffers from poor analysis, organization and integration. Knowing the facts is a good start, but only a beginning.

B= answer is factually accurate and mostly complete as well as organized and integrated.

A= answer factually complete, well organized, sophisticated analysis which demonstrates a good degree of comprehension.

There is no grading curve used in the evaluation of our answers, as class could do very well or very poorly, I feel no obligation to artificially manipulate the distribution into a bell curve. Each letter grade has been assigned a numerical value to allow for averaging and the calculation of a final grade. The numerical value has been assigned to convert the letter grade into an interval scale. Thus a C is 30% rather than a C is equidistant from a C+ (4) and a C- (2) on the scale; a C is a factually complete answer which suffers from limited analysis. Mechanically, you assign each of your letter grades the comparable numerical weight in your calculation in the following way:

A+ = 10	B+ = 7	C+ = 4	D = 1
A = 9	B = 6	C = 3	F = 0
A- = 8	B- = 5	C- = 2	

On a test with two questions, which received a letter grade of A- and C+, your average grade is $8 + 4 \div 2 = 6$ or B. I take all of your tests and assignments and calculate them together, as weighted by their relative value and derive a final numerical value for the course. The final cutting points for your letter grade are very important, because the minus grades must now disappear. They give you a higher final numerical grade because a weak A answer was an A- instead of a B+. But in the final analysis, all A- would become a B+. You would need some A or A+ grades to pull you over the cutting point. The cutting points are:

A+	(9.6 - 10) exceptional
A	(8.3 - 9.5) excellent
B+	(6.6 - 8.2) very good
B	(5.3 - 6.5) good
C+	(3.6 - 5.2) satisfactory
C	(2.3 - 3.5) adequate
D	(0.5 - 2.2) marginal
F	(0.0 - 0.4) failure a grade of F

This grading scheme gives you the benefit of the buoyancy of the minus grade. If you fail to make it over a threshold, even by a fraction, it is unlikely that I will raise your grade unless you have shown significant improvement over the term; have submitted an exceptional piece of work, or have made positive contributions to class discussion. Otherwise, an 8.24 will remain a B+ and not an A.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I encourage collaborative and cooperative work ethics. Feel free to discuss your thoughts with other members of the class and thereby develop your comprehension and critical analysis. But remember, when it is time to submit your assignment, do your own work. The written material of your colleagues is the fruit of their labour and under no circumstances should you avail yourself of it when preparing your own answers. Likewise the printed work of other scholars must be properly recognized. Acts of academic dishonesty or plagiarism are serious offenses and are subject to academic discipline. Students should acquaint themselves with the University's policy on 'Examinations: Personations' (pg. 27) and 'Plagiarism and Cheating' (pp. 28) found in the Undergraduate Calendar. The Faculty of Arts also reserves the right to submit student work that is suspected of being plagiarized to Internet sites designed to detect plagiarism.

Study Questions for First Test

1. Through class lectures and assigned readings Harper, Broswimmer, Kovel, Wright, Quinn, Eisler, and French have each traced the changing orientation of human beings to the rest of nature. Organize these various ideas into an integrated account of how humans beings arrived at the social form called "civilization." What did we do to get here? How did we do it? What made it possible? What made it necessary? Why did we do it? Does it look like a good approach? (It is

not necessary to account for who said what; your task is to focus on the meshing of the ideas.)

2. Discuss the emergence of agriculture as one of the modes of production and comment on the seeming inevitable social relations of production (stratification and “stoop labour”) that form part of this form of societal organization. Why did agriculture spread and displace hunting/gathering as a way of life? In what ways is the industrial mode of production a continuation of the changes brought by agriculture and in what way is it different?

Study Questions for Second Test

3. Broszmitter and Kovel discuss why they think industrial capitalism is so corrosive to the health of the ecosphere. Briefly recount the kinds of harms that capitalism makes possible and distinguish the independent (yet inter-related) effects of capitalism from the effects of the industrial mode of production. Discuss why the logic of capital is so corrosive to nature and human nature. Can capitalism be the economic engine of a sustainable future?
4. Human beings have interacted with other living communities since our emergence as a species. Discuss how changes in the size and social patterns of organization of human societies have altered the nature of our **interaction with other living communities** (i.e. fisheries, forests, bi-diverse ecosystems, etc.). Pay particular attention to the production of food and extraction of water, energy, and the use of land to grow it. Comment on the consequences of the current human demand on the health and well being of humanity as well as the larger community of life of which we are a part. Are we on a sustainable course? If not, how might this be achieved?
5. The human imagination has given rise to the **creation of inert and relatively abiotic commodities** made of minerals and chemicals that are powered by various forms of energy (many of them different from the energy provided by photosynthesis of sunlight). Discuss the ecological consequences of the raw material extraction, production, distribution, and consumption, and disposal of such commodities. Outline some of the forces that stimulate over-consumption? Is our current use of planetary resources sustainable? If not, how might it become so?

Study Question for Third Test

6. The human impact on the ecosphere has become increasingly damaging. Various cultural orientations, processes, structures have contributed to the current crisis. There is much that needs changing; the question is what are the pivotal changes that are necessary to steer us towards a viable future for life on this planet. Identify the key **imperatives** that must be met if we are to bring the human species back from the brink. They may be directed toward ideas/attitudes, processes, structures, and/or practices (micro or macro). Recommendations about how to meet these imperatives are most welcome.