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GVPT 273—Fall 2022

Introduction to Environmental Politics

Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:30–5:45 p.m., Tydings 1118

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Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description

Environmental challenges are nothing new. Since the dawn of our history, human societies have made to make difficult decisions about the use and allocation of scarce resources, interactions with other species, and the competing concerns of current and future generations. It is only in the modern era, however, that human beings have begun to truly appreciate the global scope of their local actions. This course will introduce students to modern environmental politics, including theoretical approaches to the environment; the role of the environment in local, national, and international policymaking; and major environmental issues facing twenty-first century societies, including global climate change.

Course Materials

The primary resources for this class will be the following texts:

Elizabeth R. DeSombre. 2020. *What is Environmental Politics?* Cambridge: Polity Press. ISBN: 978-1-5095-3414-2.

This book is available from the UMD Bookstore. Copies may also be available for a lower price online. *It is also available as an e-book for Kindle, Google Books, and several other platforms.*

Supplemental and optional readings will be provided electronically on the course ELMS page.

Course Requirements and Assignments:

The course assignments are as follows:

| Assignment | Due Date | Percent of Final Grade |
|-------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Unit quizzes | Wed, Sept 21 Mon, Oct 10 Wed, Nov 2 Wed, Nov 30 | 20% (5% x 4) |

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|------------------------|---|----------|
| Issue brief | Mon, Sept 26 | 20% |
| Mid-term group project | Wed, Oct 12 | 15% |
| Final group project | Mon, Dec 5 Wed, Dec 7 Mon, Dec 12 | 15% |
| Final policy memo | Sat, Dec 17 | 20% |
| Course participation | Sat, Dec 17 | 10% |
| Extra credit | Sat, Dec 17 | Up to 3% |

Unit quizzes (20%): At the end of each unit, we will have a quiz. This quiz will be held during class time and will cover both the lectures and assigned readings for that unit.

Environmental issue brief (20%): Early in the semester (week 4), you will turn in a 2–3-page (1000–1500 word) description of an environmental issue that interests you. This can be a global issue, a regional issue, a local issue—anything that you think is an important or interesting issue. Your brief should consist of the following sections:

1. A description of the issue (what is the issue? what are its features? why is it a problem?)
2. A discussion of a real-life case related to the issue
3. A proposal for a course of action to address the issue

Your brief should be based on research and your own reasoning. You should cite at least three reliable sources in your brief. You can use any citation style you wish, but ensure that it is done completely and consistently.

Mid-term group project (15%): At the midpoint of the semester, you will be responsible for a group presentation related to an environmental issue simulation that we will run in class. We will discuss this assignment further in class.

Final group project (15%): At the end of the semester, you will be responsible for a group presentation in which your team will debate on side of an environmental issue. We will discuss this assignment further in class.

Final policy memo (20%): Instead of an in-class final exam, you will write a 2–3-page (1000–1500 word) policy memo on an environmental issue that you think is important, directed to a political leader of your choice (the scope of your issue will dictate the leader to whom you should address your memo). We will discuss this assignment further in class.

Course participation (10%): Your individual participation is a critical element for this class. This means not only showing up for class meetings, but being prepared, engaged, and actively involved whether we are having a lecture, discussion, or small group activity. Your participation will be evaluated in both the quality and quantity of your contributions. A self and peer evaluation

for your group projects (to be discussed further in class) will also factor into your participation grade.

Extra credit (up to 3% of your final grade): Extra credit can be earned for this course by attending (or virtually attending) an environmental event, listening to an environmentally relevant podcast, watching an environmentally relevant movie or video, or a similar engagement with course-relevant themes outside the immediate work of the course. After engaging in the activity, you should write and submit a one-page (~500 word) reflection paper, describing the event/activity, how it relates to environmental politics, and what impressions you got from it. I will announce some possible extra credit events throughout the semester, but feel free to search them out on your own as well—the DC area is full of lectures, seminars, and special events that qualify. Please check with me before attending an event/activity to see if it qualifies. (Note: Because of the way math works, I can't give you more than 100% in the course.)

A note on due dates: An important part of life is getting things in on time. That being said, we all have lives to live, and they don't always conform with neat schedules. All assignments, unless otherwise noted, are due on the day noted in the syllabus. Late assignments are accepted, and I encourage you to make arrangements with me *as soon as you know you might have a late assignment*. The standard deductions for late work are as follows:

| Time Past Due Date | Deduction |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| First 24 hours (Day 1) | 1 point |
| Next 24 days (Days 2-25) | 2 points per day |
| After 25 days | Maximum grade = 50% |

Grading scale:

| | | | | | |
|----|--------|----|-------|---|---------------------------------|
| A+ | 100-97 | C+ | 79-77 | F | 59 and below (don't be here) |
| A | 96-93 | C | 76-73 | | |
| A- | 92-90 | C- | 72-70 | | |
| B+ | 89-87 | D+ | 69-67 | | |
| B | 86-83 | D | 66-63 | | |
| B- | 82-80 | D- | 62-60 | | |

For fractional scores, I will round grades to the nearest point.

Class Schedule

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| <p>UNIT 1: Foundations</p> |
| <p>Week 1: Aug 29/31</p> <p><i>Opening Questions I</i></p> <p>Reading:</p> <p>EPA, <i>Report on the Environment</i>, https://www.epa.gov/report-environment [explore website]</p> <p>Monday: <i>What is this class?</i></p> <p>Introductions and review syllabus</p> <p>Wednesday: <i>What is the environment?</i></p> |
| <p>Week 2: Sept 5/6</p> <p><i>Opening Questions II</i></p> <p>Reading:</p> <p>Aristotle, <i>The Politics</i>, Book I, http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.1.one.html</p> <p>Monday: <i>No class — Labor Day</i></p> <p>Wednesday: <i>What are politics?</i></p> |
| <p>Week 3: Sept 12/13</p> <p><i>Children of the Earth</i></p> <p>Reading:</p> <p>DeSombre, Chapter 1 (pgs. 1–28)</p> <p>Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, “The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?” [PDF on ELMS]</p> <p>Library of Congress, <i>World Treasures: Beginnings</i>, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/world/world-intro.html [explore exhibition sections]</p> <p>Monday: <i>Living on Earth</i></p> <p>Discuss issue brief</p> <p>Wednesday: <i>Ruling the Earth?</i></p> |

Week 4: Sept 19/21

Issue Brief Work Day/Quiz 1 (no class meetings — MR at conference)

Monday: *No class — Issue Brief Work Day*

Wednesday: *Unit 1 Quiz (online)*

Unit 2: Action & Actors

Week 5: Sept 26/28

Action & Uncertainty

Reading:

DeSombre, Chapter 2 (pgs. 29–57)

Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons” [PDF on ELMS]

Coase, “The Problem of Social Cost” [PDF on ELMS]

Ostrom, Stern, and Dietz, “Water Rights in the Commons” [PDF on ELMS]

Monday: *Command & Control*

Issue brief due

Wednesday: *Prices & Persuasion*

Week 6: Oct 3/5

Structures & Interests

Reading:

DeSombre, Chapter 3 (pgs. 58–93)

Habermas, “The Public Sphere” [PDF on ELMS]

Pew Research Center, *Climate Change and Activism*,

<https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2021/05/26/climate-engagement-and-activism/>

Monday: *Political Structures*

Wednesday: *Political Interests*

Discuss the simulation project

Week 7: Oct 10/12

Mid-Term Simulation

Reading:

[Simulation readings TBA]

Monday: *Unit 2 Quiz / Group Work Day*

Wednesday: *Simulation Day*

Unit 3: Methods and Movements

Week 8: Oct 17/19

Rights, Duties, and Roles

Reading:

DeSombre, Chapter 4 (pgs. 94–121)

Bullard, “Environment and Morality Confronting Environmental Racism in the United States”
[PDF on ELMS]

Sunstein, “The Rights of Animals” [PDF on ELMS]

Monday: *Human Rights?*

Wednesday: *Non-Human Rights?*

Week 9: Oct 24/28

Environmentalism as a Way of Life

Reading:

DeSombre, Chapter 6 (pgs. 155–175)

Murray Bookchin, “What Is Social Ecology?” [PDF on ELMS]

Susan Darlington, “The Ordination of a Tree” [PDF on ELMS]

Monday: *Radicals*

Wednesday: *Traditions*

Week 10: Oct 31/Nov 2*Intersections***Reading:**

Laura Paddison et al., “From Rainforest to Your Cupboard: The Real Story of Palm Oil,” *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/ng-interactive/2014/nov/10/palm-oil-rainforest-cupboard-interactive> [explore the interactive]

Monday: *Palm Oil***Wednesday:** *Unit 3 Quiz***UNIT 4: One Earth****Week 11: Nov 7/9****Reading:**

DeSombre, Chapter 5 (pgs. 122–154)

Quammen, “Did Pangolin Trafficking Cause the Coronavirus Pandemic?” *The New Yorker* [PDF on ELMS]

Daly, “Economics in a Full World” [PDF on ELMS]

Monday: *Governing a Planet?***Wednesday:** *Sustaining Development?*

Discuss the debates

Week 12: Nov 14/16*Climate Change***Reading:**

Gardner, “The Perfect Moral Storm,” [PDF on ELMS]

Singer, “One Atmosphere” [PDF on ELMS]

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, “Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis—Summary for Policymakers” [PDF on ELMS] [READ sections A–B, SKIM sections C–D]

Monday: *Change the System***Wednesday:** *Change the Planet*

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|---|
| <p>Week 13: Nov 21/23</p> <p><i>Thanksgiving Break</i></p> <p>No class this week</p> |
| <p>Week 14: Nov 26/30</p> <p><i>Change the Game?</i></p> <p>Reading:</p> <p>Keith, “Geoengineering the Climate” [PDF on ELMS]</p> <p>Monday: <i>Geoengineering and other crazy ideas</i></p> <p>Discuss the final memo</p> <p>Wednesday: <i>Quiz 4 / Group Work Day</i></p> |
| <p>Week 15: Dec 5/7</p> <p><i>Debating Environmental Politics I</i></p> <p>Monday: <i>Debate 1</i></p> <p>Wednesday: <i>Debate 2</i></p> |
| <p>Week 16: Dec 12</p> <p><i>Debating Environmental Politics II</i></p> <p>Monday: <i>Debate 3</i></p> <p>Saturday (Dec 17): <i>Deadlines Today!</i></p> <p>Final memo due</p> <p>Extra credit due</p> |

Other Course Policies

Please review the University of Maryland’s course related policies for undergraduate classes, available here: <http://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>. If you have particular concerns, please contact me and we can discuss them in detail.

Absences: Attending class meetings is a vital component of this course—and even more so in the current environment of online learning. However, there are a number of reasons that may require you to miss a class. If you do need to miss a class, you should contact me as soon as possible. Also, please keep in mind that attending and actively participating is a key factor in your participation grade. It’s very hard to participate if you don’t attend class sessions.

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty are a serious offense at the University of Maryland and may result in failure of the assignment or course, and in some cases, dismissal from the university itself. Please review the UMD plagiarism policy here: <https://www.studentconduct.umd.edu/academic-dishonesty>.

Accommodations: In accordance with UMD policy and the law, support and accommodation is available for students with documents disabilities. If you have a documented disability or feel that you need an assessment, please contact the Accessibility and Disability Service: <https://www.counseling.umd.edu/ads/>

Class Schedule: All required reading assignments must be done before class for the day that they are listed. This schedule is subject to change to accommodate guest speakers, special events, etc. All updates will be announced in class. Please also check ELMS regularly for announcements and updates.

Diversity & Inclusion: We are all the inheritors of diverse perspectives from many of sources. As such, this class will be one that respects and encourages a diversity of views, perspectives, and voices. We must pay particular attention to those voices and perspectives that have historically and politically marginalized. In this class, you should feel free to express your views and perspectives, while also respecting the rights of others to express theirs.