

Instructor: Dr. Douglas Becker

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Tuesday/Thursday, 6:30-8:00 pm
and by appointment

Environmental Issues in Society (ENST 150, IR 150)

Lecture:

Monday/Wednesday, 12:30-1:50 WPH B27

Spring, 2025, 4 units

Course overview: This course is an interdisciplinary study of environmental issues and challenges, examining their scientific, social, cultural, political, and ethical aspects. During the course, we will explore the environmental and social impacts of modern industries and lifestyle; the roles of different actors and institutions; environmental debates on such topics as fracking, nuclear energy, waste management, etc. We will also explore institutional and social barriers to environmental and social policies and will discuss strategies for environmental regulation in the global economy. The course will place an emphasis both on international efforts and cooperation to address environmental issues as well as domestic politics, social practices and corporate responsibilities and roles in environmental protection. Finally, we will talk about our personal responsibilities and roles in environmental and social problems.

Some key norms and rules for the classroom. Please be aware of these as we progress throughout the semester:

- **Share responsibility for including all voices in the conversation.**
 - I know this is a large class. But we would love to hear from all of you this semester. These issues can often carry a significant resonance with us, since environmental issues are often contentious. Let's make sure everyone has a chance to speak. If you find yourself being shut out of conversations, please let me know privately and I will make adjustments.
- **Listen respectfully.**
 - A great classroom is a dialogue. It is not simply my thoughts and you trying to remember them for exams. I want to hear from all of you. And I want you to hear from one another. We need to listen respectfully but also actively and critically.
- **Be open to changing your perspectives based on what you learn from others.**
 - Nothing is more exciting than learning something new. This allows us to evolve our perspectives and develop as scholars. I have learned something new from students every semester I've taught. I change material from semester to semester based on what I have learned. Always be prepared to change your mind.
- **Understand that we are bound to make mistakes**
 - I may have been raised Roman Catholic, but I am not infallible. That's a joke I make throughout the semester. I will make mistakes. You will too. We learn from our mistakes, but we can't be afraid to present our work and our thoughts on an issue

because we might make one. When we do, we will respectfully update the information and learn from them.

- **Understand that your words have effects on others.**
 - Respect is based on the understanding that words matter. Freedom of speech means we can express ourselves freely. But it does not mean we don't consider the effects these words have on others in the classroom.
- **Take pair work or small group work seriously.**
 - In particular, we have group assignments and other work in discussion sections that require everyone to participate. Don't be a free rider. And communicate clearly with group members to make sure everyone is able to participate fully.
- **Understand that others will come to these discussions with different experiences from yours.**
 - The best thing about a campus like USC is the rich diversity of the student body. We have students from all over the world. And I think I learned as much as an undergraduate from the conversations I had with my classmates than even from class work. Toleration of different experiences is boring. Revel in them! Learn from one another. And be aware of them.
- **Make an effort to get to know each other.**
 - I like a class that's loud and boisterous before I come in. Spend some times getting to know each other. Some of the best learning I've experienced are the people I've met, the social interactions, the long conversations, and learning from one another. Think of the big class as a chance to get to know a lot more people. This class is a great place to meet everyone!
- **Understand that there are different approaches to solving problems.**
 - This is what we mean by interdisciplinary. We do more than just study different material. We also approach issues differently. You all have different majors and different academic backgrounds. You also come from all over the world. It's truly exciting to see the different ways we solve problems and wrestle with material.

Text and Readings

- McKinney et al, *Environmental Science: Systems and Solutions, 6th edition* ISBN: 978-1284091700. There is an electronic copy available to rent at considerably less cost.
- Additional reading materials for this class will be posted to Brightspace. Students are expected to complete the assigned readings prior to each class.

Brightspace and E-Mail: The Brightspace website is our main means of communication. Announcements about class, readings, and assignments will be all posted there. I will use your official USC email, so please make sure that you check it every day. Related current news articles will be posted in the "Readings" on some weeks. When you email, I will respond within 12 hours with the potential exception of weekends.

Research paper: This is a writing-intensive course. You will write a roughly 4000 word (that's an 8 page paper single spaced) on environmental issues that will require research and citation of sources. There are two other writing assignments are in discussion sections. Required number of sources: **10 per paper**. I will provide more details to the paper with a paper prompt the third week of classes.

Learning objectives:

1. Explain an interdisciplinary approach to complex environmental problems using basic tools of policy and international processes;
2. Describe the past developments on salient environmental issues, including international political actions as well as domestic environmental policies
3. Complete a cooperative project as a member of an interdisciplinary team on complex environmental problems involving multiple competing stakeholders and agendas;
4. Critically evaluate the economic and policy ramifications of diverse energy portfolios on air and water quality, climate, and societal stability;
5. Understand environmental policies in California including water and energy needs, air quality, marine and coastal issues;
6. Evaluate research and write effectively about complex environmental problems using resources directed toward both a specialist and general audiences;
7. Critically analyze and apply both quantitative and qualitative data in reasoning and evaluation of both to environmental problems, in proposed solutions, and in consideration of the student's own potential solutions and/or management of the issues

Grading

Midterm Exam	20%
Research Paper (4000 words)	30%
Final Exam	25%
Group Presentations in discussion sections	5%
2 Assignments	5% each 10% (total)
Participation in discussion sections and attendance	5%
Discussion Section reflection exercises	5%
Total	100%

The midterm and final are both in class, with both objective and critical analytic components (including essays). The final is cumulative. The paper, as referenced above, will require a student select a single environmental issue and explore the nature of the challenge, political discourses on the issue, and proposed solutions. I will post material to help you study, including Powerpoints used in class. Each student will contribute to a group presentation as well. They will be presented in sections and there will be a peer review component where you all comment on each other's presentations. These are groups of 3-4 on a topic selected from a list of topics. **You may not select a group presentation that is the same issue as your research paper.** There are two assignments throughout the semester. They are assigned in discussion

sections. And the discussion sections will have reflection exercises that require attendance to submit. You will learn more of them in the sections.

A NOTE: IF YOU ARE TAKING THE CLASS PASS/NO PASS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO CHOOSE TO NOT SUBMIT A PAPER AND STILL PASS. You need, by university rule, a 70 to pass in a pass/no pass. So you still need to submit a paper.

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	93-100
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Grading and Correction of Grades

Excerpts for this section have been taken from the University Grading Handbook, located at <http://www.usc.edu/dept/ARR/grades/gradinghandbook/gradingpolicies.html>

Please see the link for more details on grading concerns.

A grade of Missing Grade (MG) “should only be assigned in unique or unusual situations... for those cases in which a student does not complete work for the course before the semester ends. All missing grades must be resolved by the instructor through the Correction of Grade Process. One calendar year is allowed to resolve a MG. If an MG is not resolved [within] one year the grade is changed to [Unofficial Withdrawal] UW and will be calculated into the grade point average a zero grade points.

A grade of Incomplete (IN) “is assigned when work is not completed because of documented illness or other ‘emergency’ occurring after the twelfth week of the semester (or 12th week equivalency for any course scheduled for less than 15 weeks).”

Course Schedule

The date is for the lecture. Please read all material assigned for the date prior to the class

Week	Topic	Readings
<p>Jan 13 Introduction to Environmental Issues</p> <p>Jan 15 Environmental Norms, and what is "Sustainability?"</p> <p>Discussion sections: Introductions and what do we mean by sustainability?</p>	<p>Introductions, and what are the most important environmental issues we face?</p> <p>Norms in the International System and in Domestic Politics, and the relationship between norms and law</p>	<p>McKinney: Ch. 1, 3, 5</p> <p>McKinney, Chapter 6, 20</p>
<p>Jan 20 MLK King Birthday, no class</p> <p>Jan 22 Environmental Negotiation Regimes</p> <p>Discussion Sections: cancelled due to the holiday</p>	<p>How is Cooperation Built on Environmental Issues Internationally?</p>	<p>Porter, Brown, and Chasek, Chapters 3 and 5, On Brightspace</p>
<p>January 27: Economics and the Environment</p>	<p>Principles of the International Political Economy and Economic Development</p>	<p>McKinney, Chapter 19</p> <p>Alexandra Lindenthal and Martin Koch, "The Bretton Woods Institutions and the Environment: Organizational Learning within the World Bank</p>

<p>January 29: Environmental Justice</p> <p>Discussion sections: What is environmental justice—an exercise</p>		<p>and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).” Brightspace “Environmental Justice” Brightspace</p> <p>R Dean Hardy et al “Racial Coastal Formation: The Environmental Injustice of Colorblind Adaptation Planning for Sea Level Rise.” Brightspace</p>
<p>February 3 The MDGs</p> <p>February 5 The SDGs</p> <p>Discussion sections: LA’s commitment to the SDGs (PlanLA’s dashboard and the city’s status)</p>	<p>The role of the UN in developing sustainability norms</p>	<p>Kamau, Chasek ,O’Connor, pgs 1-46 Brightspace</p> <p>Kamau, Chasek ,O’Connor, Chapters 5, (for the online class) and 7 (for Tuesday) Brightspace</p> <p>Scholars Circle Podcast: the MDGs and the SDGs, link posted on Brightspace also</p> <p>Scholars’ Circle – Interview with William Greider -/- UN sustainable development goals – January 5, 2020 – The Scholars' Circle (scholarscircle.org)</p> <p>(it’s the second segment, so at the 25 minute mark)</p> <p>pLAn L.A.'s Green New Deal Sustainability pLAn 2019 (lamayor.org)</p>

<p>Feb 10 Climate Change, extreme weather, and the brutal summer</p> <p>Feb 12 From Kyoto to Paris, mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage</p> <p>Discussion Sections: The science of climate change; or why we should trust the science and ignore the political discourse</p>	<p>Climate Change</p> <p>UN Negotiations on Climate and the future of Climate Action</p>	<p>McKinney, Chapter 17</p> <p>Chasek and Wagner, From Kyoto to Paris, Chapter 2 and 10 Brightspace</p> <p>Scholars' Circle – COP29 , its outcome and looking ahead – December 1, 2024 – The Scholars' Circle</p>
<p>Feb 17: Presidents Day, no class</p> <p>Feb 19: Air Pollution</p> <p>Discussion sections: Cancelled due to the holiday</p>	<p>Air Pollution, the Environmental Risks of Smog</p>	<p>McKinney Chapter 16</p>
<p>Feb 24</p>	<p>Energy sources and infrastructures: the Pros and Cons of each energy</p>	<p>McKinney, Chapter 7</p>

<p>Traditional Energy Sources</p> <p>Feb 26: Alternative Energy Sources</p> <p>Discussion Sections: Energy Sources Pros and Cons Exercise Written assignment 1 handed out</p>	<p>source available and future research</p>	<p>McKinney, Ch 8</p> <p>Scholars' Circle – US provides policy incentives for mitigation and adaptation to changing climate and its effects – August 28, 2022 – The Scholars' Circle (scholarscircle.org)</p>
<p>March 3 Mid-Term</p> <p>March 5 Ocean Health and Plastics</p> <p>Discussion sections:</p>		<p>McKinney Chapter 15</p> <p>Marcus Haward “Plastic Pollution” Brightspace</p> <p>Daniel Cressey, “The Plastic Ocean” Brightspace</p> <p>Scholars' Circle – BBNJ Ocean Treaty to preserve Bio-diversity in the High Seas and Restoring ecosystem from invasive species – November 5, 2023 – The Scholars' Circle (scholarscircle.org)</p>

<p>Preserving the world's oceans</p>		
<p>March 10 Mining and Drilling</p> <p>March 12 Arctic Drilling and Navigation</p> <p>Discussion sections: The science of mining and the environmental risks</p> <p>Assignment 1 due</p>	<p>The environmental hazards of mining and drilling.</p> <p>The threats and opportunities of mining operations in the Arctic</p>	<p>McKinney Chapter 10</p> <p>Robert Harriss, "Arctic Offshore Oil" Brightspace</p>
<p>March 17, 19</p> <p>NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK</p>		
<p>March 24 Population and Overpopulation</p> <p>March 26 Urbanization</p> <p>Discussion sections: Ecology of carrying capacity and the role of technology in increasing it</p>	<p>Population</p> <p>Urbanization</p>	<p>McKinney Chapter 2</p> <p>Stephen Cohen, "The Sustainable City" Chapters 2-3 Brightspace</p> <p>Jennifer Wolch et al, "Urban Green Space, Public Health, and Environmental Justice" Brightspace</p>

<p>March 31 Endangered Species</p>	<p>Endangered Species and some thoughts on Animal Rights and what do we think of zoos?</p>	<p>McKinney, Chapter 11</p> <p>Rosalind Reeve, "Wildlife Trade, sanctions and compliance: Lessons from the CITES regime." International Affairs, 2006. Brightspace</p>
<p>April 2 Biodiversity</p> <p>Discussion sections: The science of biodiversity</p>	<p>Biodiversity</p>	<p>McKinney Chapter 4</p>
<p>April 7 Deforestation</p> <p>April 9 Trash and discussion on how to reduce</p> <p>Discussion sections: The environmental impact of trash dumps and landfills</p>	<p>Deforestation</p> <p>Trash and Waste, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle</p>	<p>McKinney, Chapter 12</p> <p>Lauren Gifford, "You can't value what you can't measure": a critical look at forest carbon accounting" Brightspace</p> <p>McKinney Chapter 18</p>
<p>April 14 Agriculture and Agribusiness</p>	<p>Agriculture and Agribusiness</p>	<p>McKinney Chapter 13</p>

<p>April 16 GMOs, Hormones, and new ways to produce food</p> <p>Discussion Sections: Media and Environmental Issues, an exercise on bias as homework</p>	<p>The GMOs Debate</p>	<p>“No Scientific Consensus on GMOs” Brightspace</p> <p>“Arguments For and Against GMOs” Brightspace</p> <p>Sheldon Krinsky “Labelling GMOs” Brightspace</p> <p>Maria Armoudian, <i>Kill the Messenger: The Media's Role in the Fate of the World</i>. Chapter 11. Brightspace</p>
<p>April 21: Desertification</p> <p>April 23: Freshwater Access and the California drought, plus, the plight of the Colorado River</p> <p>Discussion sections: Assignment 2 due Presentations 1</p>	<p>The World’s Growing Deserts</p> <p>Freshwater Health</p>	<p>Lindsay Stringer, “Can the UN Convention to Combat Desertification guide sustainable use of the world’s soils?” Brightspace</p> <p>McKinney, Chapter 9</p>
<p>April 28 Personal Care Products and Toxicology</p> <p>PAPERS DUE IN CLASS</p>	<p>Environmental Issues and Health</p>	<p>McKinney Chapter 14</p>

<p>April 30: USC and its commitment to Sustainability (and the future of sustainability)</p> <p>Discussion Sections: Presentations 2</p>	<p>Thinking Global, Acting Local, and Holding Carol Folt's feet to the fire!</p>	<p>Cawthorn et al "The future of Sustainability in the Context of Covid-19" Brightspace</p> <p>Oliver Taherzadeh, "Promise of Green Economic Recover Post- Covid" Brightspace</p> <p>Sophie Atwood and Cother Hajar, "How Will the Covid-19 Pandemic Shape the Future of Meat Consumption?" Brightspace</p> <p>"Straw Bans Seen as Tackling a Plastic Gateway" Brightspace</p> <p>Stan Cox, "The Green New Deal and Beyond" Brightspace</p>
<p>VOLUNTARY REVIEW SESSION!</p> <p>Monday May 5, 12:30 pm</p>		
<p>FINAL EXAM! Friday May 9 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM</p>		

Support Systems

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

<https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.

<https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

Tab for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.

Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu

Academic Conduct

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. Students are expected to submit original work. They have an obligation both to protect their own work from misuse and to avoid using another's work as their own. All students are expected to understand and abide by the principles of academic honesty outlined in the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00) of S-Campus (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>). The recommended sanctions for academic integrity violations can be found in Appendix A of the Student Conduct Code.

Emergency preparedness/course continuity

If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of Brightspace, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Students with Disabilities

USC is committed to making reasonable accommodations to assist individuals with disabilities in reaching their academic potential. If you have a disability which may impact your performance, attendance, or grades in this course and require accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Services and Programs (www.usc.edu/disability). DSP provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS (Grace Ford Salvatori Hall) 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776. Email: ability@usc.edu