

Classroom: AB 304  
Class Time: Tu/Th 9:45 – 11:00 am

SOCS-SHU 135

Professor Yifei Li  
Email: yifei.li@nyu.edu  
Office: AB 1203  
Office Hours: Tu/Th 8:30 – 9:30 am

Teaching Assistant: Tian Tian Wedgwood Young  
Email: nwy204@nyu.edu

# Environment and Society

*This syllabus is subject to change.*

## Overview

This course introduces you to the interdisciplinary literature on the relationship between the human world and the natural world. We engage scholarly writings from a wide range of disciplinary traditions, including sociology, history, philosophy, journalism, and political science, among others.

Broadly speaking, this course invites you to look both outward and inward. The outward-looking part of the course takes you to an in-depth analysis of contemporary environmental challenges. We will discuss issues such as climate change denialism and industrial agriculture. You will gain an understanding of different social forces that shape our environmental attitudes and behaviors, and how these forces continue to re-shape our collective relationship to the ecological system. The inward-looking part of the course motivates you to initiate a private conversation with nature. Class discussions seek to provoke a sense of discomfort amidst what feels like the pinnacle of modern comfort; we will bring into question “modern” life that often goes unquestioned. Taken together, this course stands with one foot in the scientific study of society, and the other foot in the normative understanding of social life.

Additionally, the conceptual tools you learn from this course will be applied to better understand contemporary environmental challenges in China. We will discuss some of the main drivers of environmental degradation, the political underpinnings of environmentalism, and environmental justice in the Middle Kingdom. We will also situate China’s environmental challenges in the broader context of global environmental change in the Anthropocene.

By the end the semester, you will be able to examine environmental challenges from a social scientific perspective. You will gain general familiarity with the concepts, methods, findings, and theories of Environmental Studies. This course prepares you for more advanced inquiries into various aspects of the contemporary human environmental condition.

## Required Texts

- **Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M.** (2012). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. London: Bloomsbury. (ISBN: 978-1608193943)
- **Pollan, M.** (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin Press. (ISBN: 978-0143038580)
- **Li, Y., & Shapiro, J.** (2020). *China goes green: Coercive environmentalism for a troubled planet*. Cambridge: Polity. (ISBN: 978-1509543120)

All texts are available for purchase through the Office of Academic Affairs. Other required readings are available electronically on NYU Brightspace.

## Paper Formatting Guidelines

All written work you submit to this course should follow the formatting guidelines below, unless otherwise specified. Failure to follow them will result in grade penalty at the TA's discretion.

- Format on A4/letter-sized paper and double-space your text.
- Papers are graded anonymously. Help us by only using your "N number" to identify yourself on the papers and in the file names, e.g. N31415926RR1A.docx.
- Submit your work to the designated folder on NYU Brightspace by the due date/time.
- Attach a list of works cited only if you cite sources outside the syllabus.

## Requirements

- **Reading Reflections**

*100\*4=400 points (40%)*

You are required to submit **four** reading reflections. For each of them, you must choose one from the two options, marked A and B in the syllabus. Each reading reflection should be roughly three pages in length. It will be marked against the following rubric.

Expectation	Mark
The essay provides a concise summary of major arguments and findings in all the readings for the current assignment, and articulates them with your own words.	___/60
The essay relates one major issue raised by the author(s) to your personal observations and/or experiences, and critically engages with the author(s).	___/40

- **Film Reviews**

*100\*2=200 points (20%)*

You are required to submit **two** film reviews. For each of them, you must choose one from the two options, marked A and B in the syllabus. Each film review should be roughly three pages in length. It will be marked against the following rubric.

Expectation	Mark
The review demonstrates appreciation of the film's originality, cinematography, message, and/or overall theme. (It is fine for you to include "spoilers.")	___/40
The review critically assesses the focal film by relating it to the course readings and/or discussions. It concludes with a final "verdict" on the film's worthiness.	___/60

- **Exams**

*300 points (30%)*

There are two exams – a mid-term (on October 13; 100 pts) and a final (on December 15; 200 pts). They cover lectures, class discussions, films, and readings. They are non-cumulative. The mid-term exam will consist of multiple choice and short-answer questions. The final exam will consist of identification and short-answer questions. Exams will take place in the regular classroom during the regular class meeting hour, unless otherwise announced. Cheating in any form, including assisting others to cheat, will result in serious disciplinary consequences.

- **Participation**

*100 points (10%)*

You can earn up to 100 points for actively, constructively, and productively participating in this class, including regular instructional time and additional academic activities that are germane to the course. Information about additional activities will be announced in class. Note, however, that you are not evaluated on the basis of how loudly you speak, how lengthy your comments are, or how frequently you speak up. Quality participation builds on course readings, engages with the ongoing theme of the current class, and recognizes your peers' contributions. Your participation grade will be posted on NYU Brightspace after the conclusion of the last class.

## Carrot-and-stick Policy

I wish to reward hard work and disincentivize sloppiness, while remaining sensitive to rainy days in your private life. To that end, consistent hard work will be handsomely rewarded with a lump sum deposit of discretionary extra credit by the end of the term. Conversely, if you repeatedly fail to satisfy basic course requirements, such as completing all the readings ahead of time, attending classes for the full period, and participating in class discussions, I will have to apply a significant, non-negotiable deduction, which in extreme cases can result (and has resulted) in lowering one's overall course grade below passing.

This carrot-and-stick policy operates on the basis of in-class pop quizzes, surveys, roll calls, etc. These are graded on a check/no check basis. If you miss one or two of these, there is no reason to worry, as everyone can have a couple of "freebie" days to accommodate medical conditions, student activities, conference attendance, family emergencies, visa applications, internships, or other extenuating circumstances that prevent you from doing the readings and/or attending classes on time. For the sake of fairness, additional freebies will not be granted.

## Late Enrollment

I respect your freedom to adjust your course selection during the open add/drop period. If you sign up for this class after the start of the first class and therefore have missed instructional time, it is your responsibility to catch up. The first two weeks of class meetings are recorded and made available to you on NYU Brightspace until 11:59 pm on Sunday October 9. Course materials for the first two weeks will appear on the mid-term exam. For the sake of fairness, I am not in a position to repeat the lectures during office hours.

## Grading Scale

A=95% or higher	A-=90-94.9%	B+=85-89.9%	B=80-84.9%
B-=75-79.9%	C=70-74.9%	D=60-69.9%	F=59.9% or lower

## Classroom Etiquettes

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that the environment in the classroom is conducive to learning. If you are late, you should find a seat in the back of the classroom. If you need to leave early, please let me know in advance and sit in a location where it will be easy to quietly leave the room. Please hold side-conversations and discussions until after class.

## Responsible Use of Technology

Although electronic devices are valuable for research and study, they are inimical to participation and collegiality in the classroom. You may take notes on a laptop or tablet, provided that you use it responsibly. All other uses of electronic devices are prohibited in this class. Note that photographic, audio, or visual recordings are not permitted. If you are found in repeated violation of this policy, a discretionary course grade penalty will apply.

## Accommodation

I wish to include fully any students with special needs. Please let me know (the earlier the better) if you need special accommodation in the curriculum, instruction, or evaluation procedures in order for you to fully participate. The Moses Center on Washington Square verifies and certifies all requests from students across the Global Network. The Academic Resource Center (ARC) in Shanghai can help you obtain necessary documentation.

## **Academic Honesty**

All work that you submit to this course must be your own. All sources and assistance used in preparing your work must be precisely and explicitly acknowledged. It is NOT acceptable to copy, paraphrase, translate, or otherwise draw from other sources without acknowledging them. This includes your own work previously submitted to a different course at NYU or elsewhere. Cheating on the exam and/or writings will not be tolerated. Students caught cheating and/or plagiarizing will receive an immediate F for the course, in addition to being referred to Academic Affairs for disciplinary action. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with NYU rules regarding academic integrity.

## **Readings**

It is extremely important for you to keep up with the required readings for each class meeting. I lecture with the assumption that you have read all pieces before class. I normally do not lecture from the readings, but try to build on them. In order for you to benefit from the lectures, it is in your best interest to read the texts in advance.

## **Lateness**

If you submit your work after its due date, your mark will be penalized by 10% of the assignment's total mark for each day of lateness, as determined by the timestamp on NYU Brightspace. All dates and times on this syllabus are rendered in the GMT+8 time zone.

## **Make-up Exams**

A make-up exam will be arranged only if you provide in writing an acceptable excuse that is endorsed by an accredited professional. You should submit the written notice before the day of the exam. Last minute requests will not be accommodated. The make-up exam will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for all students who miss the exam, but no later than a week from the original exam date.

## **Communications**

Course-related information will be communicated to you via email messages. If you write to the TA, make sure you copy me in by adding my email to the "cc" field of the message. If you prefer to meet in person, please use the office hours (see top of page 1).

## **Chatham House Rule**

To maximize the free exchange of ideas and information in the classroom under these challenging political climates, I ask that all members of this class abide by the Chatham House Rule. In its most up-to-date rendition, the rule states that

*When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.*

It is, for example, not appropriate to disseminate identifiable information on social media, online forums, video sharing platforms, or any other channels outside the class. Please note that this rule is by no means an attempt to limit anyone's freedom of speech. On the contrary, this rule is set up to precisely guarantee a classroom environment that is conducive to the open and free expression of ideas. It is of utmost importance that we as a community of scholars follow the Chatham House Rule.

# Class Schedule

## Part I – Toward Conceptual Breadth

*Tuesday September 13*

Reading:

- This syllabus

*Thursday September 15*

Reading:

- Folke, C. *et al.* (2021). Our Future in the Anthropocene Biosphere. *AMBIO* 50, 4, 834–69.

*Tuesday September 20*

Readings:

- Steffen, W., Crutzen, J., & McNeill, J. R. (2007). The Anthropocene: are humans now overwhelming the great forces of Nature? *AMBIO*, 36, 8, 614-21.
- McKibben, B. (1989). *The end of nature*. New York: Random House, excerpt from Ch 2 (pp. 40-72).

Reading Reflection #1A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Folke et al. 2021, Steffen et al. 2007, and McKibben 1989.
- *Note that you can choose from #1A and #1B. Submit only one out of the two. The two options have different deadlines and different content requirements.*

*Thursday September 22*

Reading:

- Magdoff, F., & Foster, J. B. (2011). *What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism: A citizen's guide to capitalism and the environment*. New York: Monthly Review Press, Ch 4 (pp. 61-93).

*Tuesday September 27*

Reading:

- Guha, R. (1989). Radical American environmentalism and wilderness preservation: A third world critique. *Environmental ethics*, 11(1), 71-83.

*Thursday September 29*

Reading:

- Norgaard, K. M. (2006). “People want to protect themselves a little bit”: Emotions, denial, and social movement nonparticipation. *Sociological inquiry*, 76(3), 372-396.

Reading Reflection #1B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Magdoff & Foster 2011, Guha 1989, and Norgaard 2006.

Thursday October 6

Reading:

- Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2012). *Merchants of doubt: How a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from tobacco smoke to global warming*. London: Bloomsbury, Intro & Ch 1.
- Note that, starting from this week, the readings are from the required textbooks.

Tuesday October 11

Reading:

- Pollan, M. (2006). *The omnivore's dilemma: A natural history of four meals*. New York: Penguin Press, Intro and Ch 16.

Thursday October 13

**Mid-term exam** during regular class hour. Optional special event at 11:30 am.

*Saturday October 15 – NO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION TODAY; LEGISLATIVE SAT.*

Film:

- Baichwal, J. (2019). *Anthropocene: The human epoch*. Toronto: Mongrel Media.

Film Review #1A:

- Due today before class
- Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

## Part II – Toward Theoretical Depth

Tuesday October 18

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 3.

Thursday October 20

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 4.

Reading Reflection #2A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&C 2012 Chs 3 & 4.

Tuesday October 25

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 5.

Thursday October 27

Reading:

- O&C 2012, Ch 6 & Conclusion.

Reading Reflection #2B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on O&C 2012 Chs 5, 6, and Conclusion.

*Tuesday November 1*

Film:

- Kenner, R. (2015). *Merchants of doubt*. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Classics.

Film Review #1B:

- Due today before class
- Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

*Thursday November 3*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Chs 1-2.

*Tuesday November 8*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Chs 5-7.

Reading Reflection #3A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan 2006 Chs 1-2 & 5-7.

*Thursday November 10*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Ch 9.

*Thursday November 15*

Reading:

- Pollan 2006, Ch 13.

Reading Reflection #3B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize and reflect on Pollan 2006 Chs 9 & 13.

*Thursday November 17*

Film:

- Chester, J. (2019). *The biggest little farm*. Universal City, CA: Universal Studios.

Film Review #2A:

- Due today before class. Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

## Part III – Toward Empirical Rigor

*Tuesday November 22*

Reading:

- Li, Y., & Shapiro, J. (2020). *China goes green: Coercive environmentalism for a troubled planet*. Cambridge: Polity, Introduction.

*Saturday November 26 – NO IN-PERSON INSTRUCTION TODAY; LEGISLATIVE SAT.*

Film:

- Kingdon, J. (2021). *Ascension*. New York: Grasshopper Film.

Film Review #2B:

- Due today before class
- Note that, even if you choose not to review this film, you are still required to watch it in order to participate meaningfully in class.

*Tuesday November 29*

Reading:

- Li & Shapiro 2020, Ch 1.

*Thursday December 1*

Reading:

- Li & Shapiro 2020, Ch 2.

Reading Reflection #4A:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize Li & Shapiro 2020 Introduction, and Chs 1-2. Find a specific case to disprove one of their arguments in these chapters.

*Tuesday December 6*

Reading:

- Li & Shapiro 2020, Ch 3.

*Thursday December 8*

Reading:

- Li & Shapiro 2020, Ch 4.

*Tuesday December 13*

Reading:

- Li & Shapiro 2020, Ch 5.

Reading Reflection #4B:

- Due today before class
- In this Reading Reflection, summarize Shapiro 2015 Chs 3-5. Find a specific case to disprove one of their arguments in these chapters.

*Thursday December 15*

**Final exam** during regular class hour