

**Cedar Crest College**  
**Contemporary Environmental Issues**  
**May 2010**

Course: **SOC 271 – 90**

Credits: 3

College-Wide Requirements:

Global Studies (GS)

Fridays from 5:30PM – 8:30PM; Saturdays and Sundays from 9:00AM – 5:00PM

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Course Domain:

This course is primarily concerned with examining issues associated with the environmental health of the planet. Ecology is the study of the interaction of living organisms and the natural environment. The focus of this course will primarily be on those aspects of ecology that have to do with sociological concepts and issues. However, this examination will necessarily include consideration of related economic, political biological, cultural philosophical issues as well.

Course Objectives:

This course seeks to further enable students to:

1. Understand how particular cultural patterns and specific political and economic arrangements affect the natural environment;
2. Understand what the environment means to people of varying social backgrounds and the ethical considerations attached to those meanings;
3. Understand how conceptual approaches to our relationship to the environment are rooted in religious/spiritual assumptions and values;
4. Understand the global social and political controversies associated with defining certain environmental conditions as “problems”;
5. Develop skills in assessing the possible social, biological, economic and political consequences of environmental problems and their impact on individual and group health and wellness in impacted areas in the world;
6. Examine current and proposed policies designed to remediate specific environmental problems;
7. Examine the feasibility and necessity of implementing socioeconomic and global political strategies to develop an ecologically sustainable culture and ecosystem.
8. Enhance the ability to express oneself effectively in writing.

### Course Outcomes

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the cultural, political and socioeconomic roots of environmental problems and of the global controversies associated with those problems.

Assessment: Students will read the assigned issues in the *Taking Sides* text, view related videos, and critically analyze these issues in class discussions and in written graded assignments.

Students will demonstrate skills in assessing the possible health and wellness consequences of environmental problems.

Assessment: Students will read the assigned issues in the *Taking Sides* text, read *Plan B*, view related videos, engage in class discussions and submit written, graded assignments which reflect critical analysis of the health and wellness impact of environmental problems.

Students will demonstrate an understanding of how conceptualizations of our relationship to the environment are rooted in religious/spiritual assumptions and values as well as the ethical considerations attached to those meanings.

Assessment: Students will read *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*, view a related video, engage in a class discussion and then write a graded 2,500-word paper.

Students will demonstrate a critical understanding of current and proposed remedies for environmental problems as well as the feasibility of developing a sustainable world system of societies.

Assessment: Students will read *Plan B* and *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*, view related videos, engage in class discussions and submit a graded, written paper based on a critical analysis of the *Plan B* text.

Students will demonstrate the ability to communicate clearly, both orally and through the written word.

Assessment: Students will facilitate class discussions, participate in class discussions, and submit papers which will be critiqued and graded based on proper grammar, style, punctuation and content.

### Texts:

Brown, L. R. (2009). *Plan B 4.0: Mobilizing to save civilization*. Washington, DC: Earth Policy Institute/W.W. Norton Co.

Easton, T. (2011). *Taking Sides: Clashing views on environmental issues*. (14<sup>th</sup> ed.). Guilford, CT: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill.

Hartman, T. (2004). *The last hours of ancient sunlight*. (Revised ed.). New York: Three Rivers Press/Random House.

Student Assignments:

Each student is expected to fulfill the following assignments:

1. To read all assigned readings in advance of class sessions so as to meaningfully participate in class discussions. We all had opinions on various environmental issues before we shared this course. In reading assigned articles we become more informed than before and are then able to more meaningfully participate as students and as citizens in promoting social change.
2. To regularly attend and participate in class sessions. Attendance will be taken and will comprise a portion of the course grade. There are several avenues to learning in addition to reading. Another avenue is testing your thinking in class discussions and with interchanges with the instructor. Students will be graded on the percentage of class hours attended.
3. To creatively facilitate class discussion on selected issues from the *Taking Sides* text with assisted readings from the *Plan B/ 4.0* text as a resource. The class will grade this facilitation according to the following three criteria: Relevance to the topic, which the group used a creative format for facilitating discussion that effectively enhanced learning, and that the group provided good follow-up to the class discussion that the format initiated. The key point is to provide lively, informed discussion of that topic for no less than 45 minutes. This assignment also provides an opportunity for students to develop skills in making effective oral presentations in facilitating discussion. This is also a fundamental life skill. Students facilitating discussion are also responsible for assignment #4.
4. To write a 350-400 word informed personal opinion statement on each of the *Taking Sides* issues that will be discussed in class. For those discussions when more than one issue is assigned, students may elect to write on either issue even though both issues will be topics for class discussion. Each of these statements must be based on and reflect the student's understanding of the "yes" and "no" articles associated with the issues. At least three direct quotes from the articles must be included together with page numbers cited. Students may also include in each statement issues or concepts in support of their personal opinions which they believe the authors didn't adequately consider. The personal opinion statement for each issue is due at the beginning of class on the day on which that issue is scheduled to be discussed according to the daily class plan. A personal opinion statement written inadequately or handed in late will receive only half credit. No revisions will be permitted on papers with less than 350 words. In order for a paper submitted late to receive half credit, it must fulfill all of the other cited criteria. The last day this class meets will be the deadline for submitting any late papers. This portion of the course grade will be based on the percentage of the required statements submitted on time and written adequately. These statements

provide an opportunity for students to develop their critical thinking skills on complex social issues in a written format. The follow-up class discussions enable students to consider other points of view in further establishing their positions on these social issues. No one side has the whole “truth”. Each side makes a meaningful contribution to a synthesis of ideas that comprises a more holistic approach to what is the “truth.” We must seek to develop an open mindedness as we necessarily take positions on social issues while continuously being open to new evidence that may persuade us to alter our positions.

5. To write no less than a 200 word reaction paper to each of the chapters in *Plan B 4.0*.
6. To write a 2,500 word personal reaction paper to the book *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*. The paper must include ample use of references to the text to highlight your contentions, with page numbers cited in parentheses.
7. Assignments #5 and #6 will receive grade reductions of 1/3 for each day submitted late, including weekends. All multi-page papers must be submitted stapled. All papers must be submitted in typed format.

Grading:

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Class attendance, preparation and participation | 25%        |
| Facilitation of class discussion                | 10%        |
| Opinion statements on <i>Taking Sides</i>       | 25%        |
| Reaction papers to <i>Plan B 4.0</i>            | 20%        |
| <i>Last Days of Ancient Sunlight</i> paper      | <u>20%</u> |
|   | 100%       |

## Course Outline

- I. General social, political, economic and philosophical issues associated with the environment.
  - A. The sociological perspective – human choices affect the natural world
    1. Structural-functional analysis
    2. Social-conflict analysis
    3. Cultural ecology
  - B. The impact of cultural patterns in understanding the environment
  - C. The philosophical implications of the various meanings we attach to the environment and our relationship to it.
  - D. The role of politics and economics in interpreting and assessing environmental problems
  - E. The importance of the global dimension in understanding human impact on the environment
- II. The environment and technology
  - A. The connections between humans, technology, and the environment
  - B. The impact of the industrial revolution
  - C. Current global patterns and trends in the application of technology
- III. Environmental policy and politics
  - A. The history of environmental policy from 1970-2000
  - B. Environmental groups and the political landscape
  - C. Environmental values and public policy
  - D. Environmental policy and the courts
  - E. Public policy dilemmas
    1. Economical considerations
    2. Incentives
    3. Environmental regulation
    4. Environmental justice
- IV. The environment and the future
  - A. The environment, population and the developing world
  - B. The impact of the global consumption economy and international trade
  - C. New directions in environmental policy – the sustainable ecoculture?
  - D. An integral approach to the environment.