

# **NCLC 334: Environmental Justice**

**Robinson Hall Room A105**

**Fridays 10:30-1:10**

3 credits in-classroom + 1 credit Experiential Learning = 4 credits

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Office Hours: By appointment

Participants in this course will examine historical and contemporary sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions, from the local to the global, that have given rise to the environmental justice movement. Drawing on a range of disciplines (including environmental studies, critical race studies, cultural geography, and others), we will interrogate environmental policies and practices, the implications of these policies and practices for various groups of people, and the disproportionate adversity that environmental degradation has on already-disenfranchised communities such as low-income and indigenous peoples. Our examinations will focus on issues such as the over-siting of industrial plants and landfills in predominantly low-income and indigenous areas; the role of economic policy in wealthy countries on climate change, environmental degradation in developing countries, and other conditions; the extent to which one's access to power and privilege affects their access to clean and safe natural resources such as air and water; and the relationship between environmental injustice and larger systems of power and privilege in the contemporary world. We will also analyze how we as individuals have consciously or unconsciously contributed to environmental justice or injustice through everyday decisions and behaviors. Finally, we will consider how the environmental justice movement has responded—and continues to respond—to these conditions and issues.

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

Students who take this class will increase the extent to which they:

1. Understand the sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions related to environmental injustice and identify the symptoms of these conditions locally and globally;
2. Express with depth and complexity the relationships between environmental injustice and larger sociopolitical and socioeconomic injustices (such as systemic racism, colonialism, and poverty); and
3. Comprehend the implications of their choices and actions on environmental justice or injustice.

## **Required Texts**

All required readings will be available online or on the course Blackboard website.

## **Experiential Learning Credit**

Assignments Two and Four will inherently involve experiential learning. In addition, the class will take one Saturday (4/12) during the semester to tour areas around local facilities in the Washington, DC metro region.

## Assignments

### Assignment One: Class Participation (20 points)

Participation is not measured by the amount of class time one consumes. Rather, it is measured by the extent to which one comes to class prepared and contributes constructively to the discussion. The question is, within the context of your participation style, were you prepared and engaged? We will use this outline as a general guideline:

- A. (20) Excellent Participation. Student attends class each week and participates in discussion each week. Student consistently asks questions or makes observations that demonstrate deep reflection and analysis. Student engages actively and civilly in small group and other in-class activities.
- B. (17-19) Good Participation. Student has no unexcused absences, participates in discussion most weeks, and engages fairly actively and civilly in small group and other in-class activities.
- C. (14-16) Average Participation. Student has one unexcused absence and frequently asks questions or makes observations that demonstrate deep reflection and analysis. Community member generally engages actively and civilly in small group and other in-class activities.
- D. (10-13) Lackluster Participation. Student misses two or more classes, rarely participates in discussion, or fails to engage actively and civilly in small group and other in-class activities.
- E. (9 or below) Poor. Student misses three or more classes, clearly arrives to class unprepared and remains disengaged during discussions, or does not engage civilly.

### Assignment Two: Peer Teaching (15 points): weekly February 13 – March 27

The class will be divided into seven groups for Assignments Two and Four, which together comprise 40 percent of the total semester grade.

Each week from February 13 through March 27 one group will be tasked with leading the class in an in-depth discussion of the readings and topic for that week.

The grade for this assignment will be assessed on the extent to which each student:

1. Leads the class in a thoughtful, thorough, and active discussion of the topic and readings.
2. Finds and effectively integrates multi-media related to that class' issue and presents them to the class;
3. Works with his or her group to coordinate the activity and share the burden of completing it.

### Assignment Three: Essay – The Human Cost of Environmental Policy (40 points)

- Outline and annotated bibliography due March 1 (10 points)
- Final paper due March 22 (30 points)

Each student will compose a 5-7 page (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-pt. font) essay on an environmental topic of your choice. Whatever you choose, your essay should offer deep, critical, contoured *analysis* rather than mere description. Suggested topics include:

- A critical analysis of a particular state-, national-, or international environmental policy and its affect on a particular group of people;
- A critical analysis of the environmental philosophies of a corporation, how that corporation puts those philosophies into action, and the implications of those actions on some aspect of the environment;

- A critical analysis of some aspect of the environmental justice movement, such as the ways in which it tends to be dominated by people from particular identity groups;
- A critical analysis of a compelling intersection or potential conflict between an aspect of the environmental justice movement and an aspect of some other movement, such as social justice, economic justice, or human rights; or
- Another topic that is envisioned by the student and approved in advance by the instructors.

Most importantly, though, whatever approach you take, you must find a way to address the following question: “What is the human cost of environmental destruction?” Your analysis must draw on class readings and discussions as well as at least **three scholarly sources** from outside the class, such as journal articles, research reports, or scholarly books. Your paper must include in-text citations and a Works Cited or Bibliography (using MLA or APA format) of these sources.

You should choose a topic that is as specific as possible rather than trying to do something too broad and non-specific. For example, rather than writing an essay on the effects of environmental injustice on indigenous communities, you might choose a specific environmental condition or action and detail how, specifically, a particular indigenous community was affected by it. We are looking for depth and complexity rather than breadth. We are looking for analysis and interpretation rather than surface-level description. In addition to analysis and interpretation, your essay should include your proposal for redressing the issue or conflict you analyze.

*Outline and Annotated Bibliography (Due on March 1 at 11:59 pm – submit to Blackboard; 10 points):*

- Detailed outline –
  - This should include main sections of your essay as well as sub-topics you will address under each section; it should be two double-spaced pages and should provide a clear roadmap of the paper you will submit.
- Annotated bibliography –
  - This portion of the assignment will supply the sources used in developing and defining your topic and paper. Your annotated bibliography must convince us that your paper will be based on sound, high-quality, and thorough research. Additionally, it must include at least **three scholarly sources** from outside the class, such as journal articles, research reports, or scholarly books.
  - An annotated bibliography is a list of citations to books, articles, and documents formatted properly using MLA or APA format. Each citation is followed by a brief, 1- to 2-paragraph description of the source’s argument, relevance, accuracy, and quality, which is the annotation. For more guidance on annotations, please see the following website:

<http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>

*Final Essay (Due on March 22 at 11:59 pm – submit to Blackboard; 30 points):*

This 6-8 page (double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-pt. font) essay will be graded based upon the extent to which the writer:

1. Identifies and analyzes critically, complexly, and deeply, a specific topic related to environmental justice;
2. Supports her or his analysis with references to in-class readings, additional readings, and concepts from class discussions;
3. Proposes and offers compelling support for strategies for redressing the issue or conflict being analyzed; and

4. Composes a well-written, well-organized, focused essay with a clear thesis statement.

#### Assignment Four: Environmental (In)Justice in My Community Digital Story (25 points): Due April 17

You will work in small groups to compose a 5-6 minute digital story essay documenting an issue or concern related to environmental justice and local to the Washington metropolitan area. You will use a multimedia format to expose an example of environmental injustice, document activism for environmental justice, or educate the community about a related local issue. Each digital story essay should incorporate, at a minimum, uncopyrighted music, original photographs and/or video footage, and voiceover. They might also include interviews, other sound recordings or effects, animation, charts or graphs, or any other media elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the story essay. For guidance on technology, please utilize the GMU STAR Lab.

Your digital story essay can take any of several forms: an exposé, a public service announcement, a short story, and so on. We will look at examples of digital story essays in a variety of genres during class. But like any good essay or text, yours should communicate a central point with clarity and complexity, dig *deeply* into an environmental concern rather than skimming along the broad surface, and hold the viewer's attention by making your topic relevant to your audience (in this case, your classmates).

These story essays will be shared during class, with half the groups presenting on April 24 and the remainder during the final class on May 1. Generally each member of the group will receive the same grade, but we will reserve the right to adjust grades somewhat to account for students' levels of participation in the group. While evaluating your digital stories, we will assess the following: purpose of the story; point of view; choice of content; clarity of voiceover; pacing of the narrative; appropriateness of the audio soundtrack; quality of visuals; economy of story detail; grammar and language usage; and overall organization.

#### **Final Semester Grading**

<b>A+</b>	100-97%	<b>B+</b>	89-87%	<b>C+</b>	79-77%	<b>D</b>	69-60%
<b>A</b>	96-93%	<b>B</b>	86-83%	<b>C</b>	76-73%	<b>F</b>	59-0%
<b>A-</b>	92-90%	<b>B-</b>	82-80%	<b>C-</b>	72-70%		

#### **Policies and Information**

1. Arrive to class on time. Two episodes of tardiness will be considered an absence for the purpose of participation grading.
2. Attend class. If you cannot make it to class, please let the instructors know in advance. If a last-minute emergency prevents your attending or causes you to be late, send Prof. Carter a text at 202-210-2079. Any absence without advance notice will be considered unexcused. Because the class is built around interaction and dialogue, attendance by each member of the Community is critical. So when you miss more than one class, your grade will be affected. An absence is excused when due to serious illness, religious observance, participation in University activities at the request of University authorities, or compelling circumstances beyond your control. We reserve the right to request evidence when you will be absent for one of these reasons.
3. When you miss class, it is *your* responsibility to arrange to make up the day's work. You must approach us about the absence and inquire about ways of making it up.

4. Engaged and respectful dialogue is encouraged. Demeaning, intolerant, and/or disruptive behavior or responses at any time will affect your participation grade.
5. You are responsible for completing individual and group assignments on time. For written assignments, this means turning in electronic versions via Blackboard by the due date. For presentations, this means being ready to go when class starts on the due date. Assignments submitted late will lose one letter grade for each day they are past due, including Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.
6. In compliance with a University-wide initiative, we will correspond electronically with students only through their GMU assigned email accounts. Please check your email account regularly for updates and important announcements; checking your email during University closings is especially important as we will alert you to schedule changes via email.
7. No laptops, tablets, cell phones, or other electronic devices are allowed in class. Please bring a pen and notebook to each class for important announcements or to take notes. But since there are no tests, it is more important to engage in than to transcribe the discussion.
8. George Mason University has an Honor Code with clear guidelines regarding academic integrity. Three fundamental principles you must follow at all times are: 1) all work submitted must be your own; 2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and 3) if you are uncertain about citation rules or assignment guidelines, ask us for clarification. No grade is important enough to justify academic misconduct. If you feel unusual pressure or anxiety about your grade in this or any other course, please let us know and also seek help from University resources. The University provides a range of services to help with test anxiety, writing skills, study skills, personal issues, and related concerns.

### **GMU Student Resources**

1. *Writing Center:* (703-993-1200; Robinson A 114, main office; Enterprise 076, satellite office) Provides tutors, at no charge, who can help you develop ideas and revise papers. For more information, e-mail [wcenter@gmu.edu](mailto:wcenter@gmu.edu). An on-line Writing Guide is also available ([http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?page\\_id=1240](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/?page_id=1240)).
2. *Student Technology Assistance and Resources (STAR):* (<http://media.gmu.edu>; 703-993-8990; 229 Johnson Center). Provides support for web and multimedia design. STAR has video cameras and other equipment for student check out.
3. *Counseling Services:* (<http://caps.gmu.edu>; 703-993-2380; SUB I, Suite 3129) Provides individual and group sessions for personal development and assistance with a range of emotional and relational issues. In addition, the Learning Services Program (703-993-2999) offers academic skill-building workshops as well as a tutor referral service.
4. *Office of Disability Services:* (<http://ods.gmu.edu>; 703-993-2474; SUB I, Room 2500) Assists students with learning or physical conditions affecting learning. If you qualify for accommodation, the ODS staff will provide you with a form to give to your instructor at the beginning of every course.

5. *Library Support:* GMU Librarian Tina Adams is available to help NCC students with research. To make an appointment, please e-mail her at [tadams11@gmu.edu](mailto:tadams11@gmu.edu) or call 703-993-4038.
6. *Technology Support:* The Mason Online Student Technology Guide (<http://itusupport.gmu.edu/STG/STGfrontpage.asp>) has complete information, including web-based instructional resources and phone numbers/campus locations for technology support professionals who are ready to help you. For assistance with Blackboard, send an email to [courses@gmu.edu](mailto:courses@gmu.edu); include your GMU email address in all correspondence.
7. *Other Resources:* There are numerous resources on campus to help you make your academic and personal experience here at Mason successful. If you need assistance with a problem, please let your instructors or another faculty member know so that we can help you find appropriate resources. The GMU Student Handbook also provides information on campus services and resources.

## Class Schedule

Date	Topic(s)	Readings & Assignments
Jan. 23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction &amp; Course Overview</li> <li>- Exploring what we know about “environmental justice”</li> </ul>	Class Syllabus
Jan. 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conceptualizing “environmental justice”               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The range of lenses and disciplines providing insight</li> <li>o The history of the concept</li> <li>o Guest speaker: Jacqui Paterson (NAACP)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Principles of EJ EPA EJ Basic Info European Perspective on EJ
Feb. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contextualizing environmental justice and injustice               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Relationship between environmental justice, social justice, economic justice, and human rights</li> <li>o Environmental injustice as systemic oppression</li> <li>o Guest speaker: Todd Clark (filmmaker)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	The J Word Bullard Chapter One
Feb. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues in Environmental Justice: Waste and Industrial Siting               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Guest speaker: <i>Omar Eton-Martinez</i> (Smithsonian)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Social Aspects of Siting Hazardous Waste Facilities Carroll Wash Post on Ivy City
Feb. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues in Environmental Justice: Communities and Transportation</li> </ul>	NPR transportation stories Race Equity Project
Feb. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues in Environmental Justice: Air and Water Quality and Quantity</li> </ul>	Making the EJ Grade Alley Morrison
March 1		<b>Essay Outline and Annotated Bibliography Due – Submit to BB by 11:59 pm</b>
March 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues in Environmental Justice: Agricultural, Aquaculture, and Oceans               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Guest speaker: <i>Diana Prado</i> (GMU)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Dumas Alkon & Norgaard Coastal & Marine Pew Ocean Science Flocks Greger & Koneswaran
March 13	- <b><i>Spring Break: no class</i></b>	
March 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues in Environmental Justice: Fossil Fuel Extraction and Land Rights</li> </ul>	
March 22		<b>Final Essay Due – Submit to BB by 11:59 pm</b>
March 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Issues in Environmental Justice: and Climate Change</li> </ul>	EJ Dim. of Climate Change Begley EJCC Website - Explore
April 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Movements for Environmental Justice: Organization and activism in indigenous and low-income communities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Guest speaker: Prof. Michael Gilmore</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

April 10	- Discourses of Environmental Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Examination of the ways environmental concerns are framed in political and social contexts</li> </ul>	
April 11	- <b><i>Experiential Learning Trip in the Washington, DC Metro Region</i></b>	
April 17	- Public Presentations of <b>Digital Story Essays</b>	<b>Digital Story Essays Due – Submit to BB Before Class</b>
April 24	- Public Presentations of <b>Digital Story Essays</b>	
May 1	- Class conclusion and evaluations	