



CES 248: Environment, Natural Resources, and Society
Course Syllabus and Schedule
Fall 2025

Our Class Meetings :

Class Meeting Times: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2:30 – 3:45 p.m.
September 5 to December 9, 2025

Class Meeting Location: Agricultural Hall 10

Canvas Course URL: <https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/471386>

Emily's Contact Information :

Name: Emily Burke (she/her)

Email: eeburke3@wisc.edu

Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Agricultural Hall 308

Land acknowledgment :

The University of Wisconsin–Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW–Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

Course Description :

In this course, we will explore the sociological dimensions of the use, management, and regulation of the environment and natural resources to uncover who controls, who benefits, and who is left out. Using the elemental forces of air, water, earth, and fire (energy) as our guide, we will tackle big questions of environmental governance, control, and resilience. We will problematize inequality and power structures in both historical and contemporary struggles for environmental justice, with specific attention to how indigenous knowledge systems and grassroots activism inform sustainable alternatives to extraction and exploitation.

Student Learning Outcomes :

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Articulate the complex and dynamic relationships between people and the planet.
- Identify how climate change intersects with and intensifies existing social inequalities and urgent social challenges.
- Evaluate diverse sources of knowledge, data, and lived experience related to resource conflicts and environmental problems, with attention to their unequal impacts on marginalized and vulnerable populations.
- Assess the contributions of indigenous knowledge and grassroots activism in shaping sustainable practices and futures.

Course Readings and Materials :

All readings and materials for this course will be available on Canvas.

Course Overview:

Unit 1: Foundations of Environmental Sociology

- The Sociological Imagination
- The Social Construction of Nature and Natural Resources
- Environmental (In)Justice and (In)Equality
- Indigenous Wisdom

Unit 2: Forces of Nature

- Air – Pollution, Regulation, and Climate Change
- Water – Access, Rights, and Scarcity
- Earth – Land Use, Mining, and Agriculture
- Fire – Energy Production, Conflicts, and Just Transition

Unit 3: Governance, Regulation, and Mitigation

- Environmental Policy
- Conservation
- Greenwashing and Corporate Responsibility
- Polarization and Politicization of Climate Change

Unit 4: Imagining Environmental Futures

- Grassroots Environmental Movements
- Intersectionality
- Navigating Climate Anxiety, Eco-Grief
- Finding Hope in Climate Crisis

Course Policies and Expectations

Communication Policies

- a. **Email:** One of the most important things you can do to succeed in this course is to make sure you have a clear and open line of communication with me. I want to help you do well!
- My email is ceburke3@wisc.edu and this is the best way to contact me. Please include “CES 248” in your email’s subject line.
 - I am a lecturer, a grad student, and I work part-time for a nonprofit, so as you might imagine, my inbox fills up quickly. I may not respond immediately, but you can expect a reply within 48 hours. If you still haven’t received a response after 48 hours, feel free to send me a gentle reminder so your email is moved to the top of my inbox.
 - Except in cases of emergencies, I will not respond to last-minute emails about assignments or exams.
 - Please check your official university email address daily (Mondays through Fridays) during our academic term.
- b. **Office Hours:** I will hold office hours every Thursday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. in Agricultural Hall 308. This is time I block out in my schedule specifically for you. If you have questions about course material or assignments, want to talk through strategies for studying or writing, or are just looking to chat, this is the time to do it!

I’d prefer that you email me or tell me in class if you plan to attend office hours beforehand, but walk-ins are also welcome. If you are not available during my dedicated office hours, email me and we will find another time that works.

- c. **Attendance:** You can miss up to two class meetings without incurring any penalty, as long as you let me know in advance (and have a good reason.) Absences beyond this will count against you, though you can make up the difference by completing additional assignments. *See the “Grading Policies” section below for more on how this portion of your grade is calculated.*

If something about your schedule (such as participation in a team sport) requires you to miss several classes, please let me know at the beginning of the semester and we will work out in advance a set of make-up assignments to compensate for your absences.

Of course, life happens, and sometimes issues will arise. Communicate with me as soon as possible and we will make a plan to catch you up.

Participation and Engagement:

- d. **Participation:** In addition to attendance, participation will be factored into your grade for this course. *See the “Grading Policies” section below for more on how this portion of your grade is calculated.* As a rule, always come prepared having 1) read the assigned readings and 2) thought critically about the material.

Although this class is listed as a lecture course, you should expect a great deal of interaction – both with me and with each other. Class participation is important, but there will be many ways to participate. If you are reluctant to take part in large group discussions, you will be able to participate in other ways throughout the semester.

I am looking for quality over quantity – speaking a lot does not necessarily mean you will earn a higher grade. In fact, honestly engaging the material and your classmates is the best way to receive full points in this category.

Remember, our classroom is a learning community, and individual perspectives are valuable. Everyone's learning trajectory is different. We are here to learn from and with each other. Some baseline rules:

- i. Critique *ideas* – not *people*.
 - ii. Do not assume what other individuals are thinking or what groups they represent. This does not make for good science.
 - iii. Opinions are different from facts. Both are good, but let's be clear about when we're making a factual claim and when we're expressing our opinion.
 - iv. If you can read and write English fluently, please be aware that there may be students around you who are still learning. I ask that you 1) speak clearly, 2) be willing to explain slang and figures of speech, and 3) offer other sorts of constructive help after you are sure that it is wanted. That said, check your assumptions *before* you offer help. Not all great writers and speakers of English look alike.
 - v. We are all colleagues; please treat each other as such. Disagreement and critique are healthy and normal, but animosity and disrespect will not be tolerated.
- e. **Electronics:** I generally allow the use of electronics in class for notetaking and looking up information relevant to our discussion. In the case that you are asked to use the internet for a class activity, a laptop or tablet (rather than a phone) is preferred. Otherwise, if this becomes a distraction or problem, I reserve the right to revoke the use of electronics during class.

I will not tolerate the use of ChatGPT or other generative AI in class. If I see it open, I will ask you to put your device completely away. It is not an appropriate substitution for a Google search. The expectation is that you're using your brain.

Grading Policies:

- f. **Assessment:** (How I calculate your grade)

I believe that your grade should be based primarily on your willingness to put time and effort into the course. To make this easier, there are multiple opportunities to improve your grade. Be aware, though, that these opportunities come before the end of the semester, so it is to your benefit to keep track of how you're doing. Your grade will be based on four things:

- i. **Attendance and participation (20%)** – 10 points are awarded for attendance, 10 for participation. For attendance: every class you miss beyond the two permitted absences will subtract one point from the 10 maximum attendance points. For participation: some people participate more in small group activities, while others make their best contributions in whole-class discussion. Either is fine, and I will note efforts in both settings. This score will reflect small and large group discussions, in-class activities, exit-ticket questions, etc. I will award you **10** points if you consistently participate and add your creativity and insights to activities, **7-9** points if you consistently participate, **2-6** points if you're only engaged sometimes, and **1** point for just showing up.
- ii. **Assignments (30%)** – Throughout the course, you will complete six brief writing assignments and/or small-scale research projects. These assignments will be graded on

a 1-5 point scale. Students may feel that the grading for these assignments is hard, but it serves an important purpose: I use these assignments to communicate my grading standards for the midterm and final exams. You can submit additional assignments for additional credit, but this requires planning ahead to make sure that you meet the required number of assignments (6) and leave yourself ample opportunities to earn more points.

- iii. **Midterm exam (25%)** – On Thursday, October 23, you will take a midterm exam designed to assess your comprehension of and engagement with class material (readings, lectures, in-class activities, etc.) from Units 1 and 2. For this exam, you will hand-write short answers in class. You will receive a study guide in advance that will contain possible questions for the exam, and you will be permitted a standard 4"x6" double-sided index card for notes or brief outlines. You will hand in this notecard with your exam.
- iv. **Final exam (25%)** – On the last day of class, Tuesday, December 9, you will take a final exam designed to assess your comprehension of and engagement with class material (readings, lectures, in-class activities, etc.) from Units 3 and 4. For this exam, you will hand-write short answers in class. Like the midterm, you will receive a study guide in advance that will contain possible questions, and you will be permitted a standard 4"x6" double-sided index card for notes or brief outlines. You will hand in this notecard with your exam.
- g. **Late Work Policy:** I will deduct points from late assignments unless you are granted an extension in advance.
- h. **Grading Changes:** Because of the flexibility with assignments and exams built into this course, I will not honor requests for re-grading. In general, grades will only change due to miscalculation. If you are not happy with a grade on an assignment or an exam, you are welcome to complete additional assignments to make up points.

University Policies:

- i. **Academic Integrity:** By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism (including the use of AI-generated text), and unauthorized collaboration are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.
- j. **Privacy of Student Records and the Use of Audio Recorded Lectures:** Lecture materials and recordings for this course are protected intellectual property at UW Madison. If a lecture is not already recorded, you are not authorized to record lectures without my permission unless you are considered by the university to be a qualified student with a disability requiring accommodation. [Regent Policy Document 4-1] Students may not copy or share lecture materials and recordings outside of class, including posting on internet sites or selling to commercial entities. Students are also prohibited from providing or selling their personal notes to anyone else or being paid for taking notes by any person or commercial firm without the instructor's express written permission. Unauthorized use of these copyrighted lecture materials and recordings constitutes copyright infringement and may be addressed under the university's policies, UWS Chapters 14 and 17, governing student academic and non-academic misconduct.

- k. **Accommodations:** Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the McBurney Center. Their website has detailed instructions about how to qualify: <http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>. If you receive an accommodation through the McBurney Center, please check in with me to make sure I have been notified. Please also let me know if it would be helpful to meet to discuss your accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Even if you do not have a documented learning disability or accommodation, if there is something that I can do to make this course more comfortable or accessible to you, come talk to me during my office hours.

- l. **Flexibility Clause:** As this course's instructor, I reserve the right to modify the course readings, requirements, mode of delivery, and other related policies as circumstances may dictate with sufficient notification to all students.

University Resources

Need Support?	Check out these resources:
Need assistance with enrollment or transcripts?	Office of the Registrar
Want help with writing or revising course papers?	The Writing Center
Looking for books, videos, media for outside research?	Library Research Support
Need accessibility support in the classroom?	Accessibility at UW-Madison
In need of financial support for basic needs?	Office of Student Financial Aid ; Local food pantries
Searching for support with mental health and well-being?	UHS Mental Health
Feeling sick or unwell?	UHS Medical Services ; Covid Testing and Vaccination
Struggling to decide on a major?	Undergraduate Advising
Seeking support for a particular identity?	Gender and Sexuality Campus Center ; International Student Services , Multicultural Student Center
Seeking to report or get support for an incident of hate, bias, or assault?	Dean of Students Office , Sexual Misconduct Resource and Response
Are extenuating circumstances affecting your education?	Dean of Students Office

Grading Scale

A	92-100%
AB	87-91.99%
B	82-86.99%
BC	77-81.99%
C	72-76.99%
D	60-71.99%
F	< 60%

Semester Schedule

See Canvas for the weekly assigned readings and the most up-to-date schedule.

Date	Topic	Assignments
Thursday 9/4	Introduction & Syllabus	
Unit 1: Foundations of Environmental Sociology		
Tuesday 9/9	The Sociological Imagination	
Thursday 9/11	The Social Construction of Nature and Natural Resources	Social Construction of Nature Assignment – Due Monday 9/15 at 11:59 p.m.
Tuesday 9/16	Environmental (In)Justice and (In)Equality	
Thursday 9/18	Environmental (In)Justice and (In)Equality	Environmental Justice Assignment – Due Monday 9/22 at 11:59 p.m.
Tuesday 9/23	Indigenous Wisdom	
Unit 2: Forces of Nature		
Thursday 9/25	Air – Pollution, Regulation, and Climate Change	
Tuesday 9/30	Air – Pollution, Regulation, and Climate Change	Air Assignment – Due Wednesday 10/1 at 11:59 p.m.
Thursday 10/2	Water – Access, Rights, Scarcity	
Tuesday 10/7	Water – Access, Rights, Scarcity	Water Assignment – Due Wednesday 10/8 at 11:59 p.m.
Thursday 10/9	Earth – Land Use, Mining, and Agriculture	

Tuesday 10/14	Earth – Land Use, Mining, and Agriculture	Earth Assignment – <i>Due Wednesday 10/15 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Thursday 10/16	Fire – Energy Production, Conflicts, and Just Transition	
Tuesday 10/21	Fire – Energy Production, Conflicts, and Just Transition (and Exam Review)	Fire Assignment – <i>Due Wednesday 10/22 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Thursday 10/23	Midterm Exam – Units 1 & 2	
Unit 3: Governance, Regulation, Conservation, Mitigation		
Tuesday 10/28	Environmental Policy	
Thursday 10/30	Conservation	Conservation Assignment – <i>Due Monday 11/3 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Tuesday 11/4	Greenwashing and Corporate Responsibility	Greenwashing Assignment – <i>Due Friday 11/7 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Thursday 11/6	Polarization and Politicization of Climate Change	Climate Denial Assignment – <i>Due Monday 11/10 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Unit 4: Imagining Environmental Futures		
Tuesday 11/11	Grassroots Environmental Movements	
Thursday 11/13	Grassroots Environmental Movements	Environmental Movements Assignment – <i>Due Monday 11/17 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Tuesday 11/18	Intersectionality	Intersectionality Assignment – <i>Due Friday 11/21 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Thursday 11/20	Navigating Climate Anxiety, Eco-Grief	
Tuesday 11/25	No Class – Thanksgiving Week	
Thursday 11/27	No Class – Thanksgiving Week	
Tuesday 12/2	Finding Hope in Climate Crisis	
Tuesday 12/4	Finding Hope in Climate Crisis (and Exam Review)	Finding Hope Assignment – <i>Due Friday 12/5 at 11:59 p.m.</i>
Tuesday 12/9	Final Exam – Units 3 & 4	