

Sociology 567  
Environmental Sociology  
2:00 p.m. Thursday  
Dr. J. Steven Picou

University of South Alabama  
Fall Semester 2014  
HUMB 214  
[www.stevenpicou.com](http://www.stevenpicou.com)

## Environmental Sociology

### Course Description

This course will cover topics such as public awareness and the social construction of environmental issues, especially toxic contamination, climate change, and technological disasters.

### Course Goals and Objectives

Forty-four years after the first Earth Day, our planet is facing a greater global environmental crisis than previously realized. Environmental groups, political leaders, mass media, international conferences, scientific organizations, major corporations, and the general public now realize that environmental degradation must be reversed. Despite this general consensus on the importance of the problem, there are numerous disagreements about what should be done. **This course provides a sociological examination of the global and local problems of environmental degradation, as well as the different perspectives on the social nature of and possible solutions to this crisis. The relationships between social and biophysical systems are reviewed from a variety of perspectives.**

There are many dimensions to environmental degradation. Given that the vast majority of students in this course do not have a background in sociology, we will look at three major types of degradation in the context of changing environmental risks. First, the issue of climate change and global warming will be briefly reviewed. Class lectures will outline some basic sociological concepts and theories that relate to this topic, and the book, *The Vanishing Face of Gaia*, provides a provocative essay on this topic. Second, a more specific perspective is provided for both local and global toxic contamination of the natural environment. Bruce Johansen's book, *The Dirty Dozen*, examines the history, industrial uses and harmful impacts of the twelve most prevalent organochloride chemicals, e.g., dioxin and polychlorinated byphenyls (PCB's). Issues of environmental justice, bio-accumulation and human impacts are addressed in Francis Adeola's book, *Industrial Disaster, Toxic Waste and Community Impact*. Third, case-studies of the two largest oil spills in North American history, the *Exxon Valdez* and the Deepwater Horizon disaster will be reviewed in terms of ecological, social, cultural and psychological impacts on communities in Alaska and along the Gulf of Mexico. New information on the persistence of oil in the environment and the persistence of community impacts are presented. Comparisons will be made of these massive ecological catastrophes in terms of localized impacts. Throughout the semester, students will give classroom presentations that summarize recent peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters on risk, environmental justice, contamination from Hurricane Katrina, the BP catastrophe, and litigation and ecosystem responses to contamination. Taken together, the material in this course should provide the student with an understanding of the dynamic sociological issues that are associated with environmental contamination, community vulnerability, and modern risks that are associated with all ecological-human relationships. Given that many students are not sociology majors, initial class meetings will assume a lecture format, where basic approaches in Environmental Sociology will be discussed.

## **Course Information**

**Email:** spicou@southalabama.edu  
**Office:** Research & Technology Building 3, Suite 2500; 460-7118  
**Office Hours:** 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Tuesday & Thursday  
Other times easily arranged by appointment.  
**Website:** [www.stevenpicou.com](http://www.stevenpicou.com)

## **Course Requirements**

Students are required to attend class unless medical reasons can be documented. Students are required to complete one book review, complete a website review, and write a research paper on an environmental problem or ecological disaster. Students are expected to participate in class discussions and will make in-class presentations on reading assignments.

## **Required Textbooks**

1. Bruce E. Johansen. **The Dirty Dozen: Toxic chemicals and the Earth's Future.** Westport, CT: Prager 2003. ISBN #0-275-97702-1.
2. James Lovelock. **The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning.** New York: Basic Books. 2010. ISBN #978-0-465-01549-8.
3. Francis O. Adeola. **Industrial Disaster, Toxic Waste and Community Impact.** Lexington Books. 2012. ISBN #978-0739147467.
4. Assigned articles and book chapters.

## **Website Review**

***Due October 2***

All students will review a course-related website and provide a written evaluation (5-7 pages) of the site. Students are required to identify websites that contain information relevant to local environmental issues.

## **Examples of typical websites are:**

<a href="http://www.americanrivers.org">www.americanrivers.org</a>	<a href="http://www.sierraclub.org">www.sierraclub.org</a>	<a href="http://www.awf.org">www.awf.org</a>
<a href="http://www.leanweb.org">www.leanweb.org</a>	<a href="http://www.panda.org">www.panda.org</a>	<a href="http://www.wes.org">www.wes.org</a>
<a href="http://www.ecoworld.com">www.ecoworld.com</a>	<a href="http://www.nature.org">www.nature.org</a>	<a href="http://www.wilderness.org">www.wilderness.org</a>
<a href="http://www.greenpeace.org">www.greenpeace.org</a>	<a href="http://www.conservation.org">www.conservation.org</a>	<a href="http://www.masgc.org">www.masgc.org</a>
<a href="http://www.mobilebaynep.com">www.mobilebaynep.com</a>	<a href="http://www.cousteau.org">www.cousteau.org</a>	<a href="http://www.tri.gov">www.tri.gov</a>

## **Examples of search engine topics:**

- |                                |                          |                               |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Global warming              | 5. Climate change        | 9. Deepwater Horizon blowout  |
| 2. Ozone depletion             | 6. Toxic exposure/health | 10. Environmental degradation |
| 3. Water resources             | 7. Nuclear wastes        | 11. Contaminated communities  |
| 4. Methyl-mercury in gulf fish | 8. Hurricane Katrina     | 12. Environmental Risk        |

Please feel free to explore other websites.

**\*The website review is due October 2<sup>nd</sup>.**

## Research Paper

Due December 4<sup>th</sup>

All students will select a topic and write a research paper. The topic should be relevant to Environmental Sociology and the **approval of the instructor is required**. Students need to present a brief statement on their topic by 10/09/14. This should be a one-page statement and/or outline. Research papers may include library research and/or empirical research. Students are encouraged to select a topic that combines information from their major area of study, international interests, and material covered in this course. Secondary data analysis will also be considered as a possibility for the research paper.

## Online Writing Support

The University of South Alabama provides online writing tutoring services through SMARTHINKING, an online tutoring service. SMARTHINKING is available at <http://services.smarthinking.com>.

## Calculation of Final Grade

Course grades will be determined as follows:

Adeola Review Final Summary	100 points
Web-Site Review	50 points
Research Project Paper	150 points
<u>Classroom Presentations</u>	<u>100 points</u>
Total	400 points

## Grading Scale:

90-100	= A
80-89	= B
70-79	= C
60-69	= D
59 & below	= F

Date	Activity	Assignment (TBD = To be distributed)
8/21	Introduction to course; syllabus discussion	For 8/28 ... J.S. Picou and B.K. Marshall, "Contemporary conceptions of Environmental Risk: Implications for Resource Management and Policy." <b>Sociological Practice</b> . 2002. Website. Lovelock, chaps. 1-2.
8/28	Sociological concepts and Environmental Sociology	For 9/11 ... Lovelock, chaps.3-4. B. Marshall & S. Picou "Postnormal Science, Precautionary Principle & Worse Cases." <b>Sociological Inquiry</b> . 2008. Website.
9/11	Global Warming and Climate Change	For 9/18 ... Lovelock, chaps. 5-7. "Earth's Climate Timeline. Handout.
9/18	Brief Lecture and Discussion of Global Heating	For 9/25 ... Lovelock, 8-9, complete book. Student assignments for Johansen book. Chaps. Intro-8.

9/25	Student Reports	For 10/2 ... Localized Ecological contamination, C. Bevc, B.K. Marshall & J.S. Picou. "Environmental Justice and Toxic Exposure: Toward a Spatial Model of Physical Health and Psychological Well-Being." <b>Social Science Research</b> . 2007. Website.
10/2	Discussion of Global Heating, Localized Ecological Contamination and Human Impacts Turn in Website Review	Student Reports (cont.) J.S. Picou, "Katrina as a Natech Disaster." Website. J. S. Picou, <i>et al</i> , "Katrina as a Paradigm Shift. Handout.
10/9	Ecological Disasters and Student Updates on Research Project Topics	Reports on Katrina
10/16	Massive Ecological Contamination	Video: Black Wave; J. S. Picou, <i>et al</i> , "Disaster, Litigation and the Corrosive Community." Website. J. S. Picou, "When the Solution Becomes the Problem. <b>St. Thomas Law Journal</b> . Website.
10/23	The Exxon Valdez and Deepwater Horizon oil spills	B. Goldstein et al. "The Gulf Oil Spill." <b>New England Journal of Medicine</b> . S. D. Rice, "Persistence, Toxicity, and Long-Term Environmental Impact of the EVOS." <b>St. Thomas Law Journal</b> .
10/30	EVOS and DHOS (cont.)	L A. Ritchie, <i>et al</i> . "The BP Disaster as <i>Exxon Valdez</i> rerun." <b>Contexts</b> . Website. D. A. Gill et al. "The <i>Exxon Valdez</i> and BP Spills." <b>American Behavioral Scientist</b> . Video: "The Big Fix"
11/6	Applied Environmental Sociology: Reducing Human Impacts	J.S. Picou. "The Talking Circle as Sociological Practice." Website. J. S. Picou. "Disaster Recovery as Translational Applied Sociology." Website. J. S. Picou. "The BP Catastrophe and Sociological Practice." Website.
11/13	The Gulf Region Health Outreach Program	Health and the Social Fabric: Responding to Catastrophe – Lecture.
11/20	Guest Speaker	Restoring the GOB after the DWHOS
11/27	Thanksgiving Break	

- 12/4            Catch up & Review  
                  Turn in Research Project Paper: Hard Copy
- 12/11           Submit Book Review: Electronic Submission

### **University Statements**

The University of South Alabama provides equal educational opportunities to and is open and accessible to all qualified students without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, sex, or disability with respect to all of its programs and activities.

1. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, students with certified disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodation. The Office of Special Student Services (OSSS) will certify a disability and advise faculty members of reasonable accommodations. If you have a specific disability that qualifies you for academic accommodations, please notify the professor and provide certification from OSSS. OSSS is located at 5828 Old Shell Road at Jaguar Drive (251-460-7212).
2. Not all classes progress at the same rate, thus course requirements might have to be modified as circumstances dictate. You will be given written notice if the course requirements need to be changed.
3. The University of South Alabama's policy regarding Academic Disruption is found in *The Lowdown*, the student handbook. <http://www.southalabama.edu/lowdown/academicdisruption.shtml>. Disruptive academic behavior is defined as individual or group conduct that interrupts or interferes with any educational activity or environment, infringes upon the rights and privileges of others, results in or threatens the destruction of property and/or is otherwise prejudicial to the maintenance of order in an academic environment.
4. Students are expected to be cordial, courteous and respectful of faculty members and fellow students.
5. The University of South Alabama's policy regarding Student Academic Conduct Policy is found in *The Lowdown*. <http://www.southalabama.edu/lowdown/academicmisconductpolicy.shtml>. The University of South Alabama is a community of scholars in which the ideals of freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and freedom of the individual are sustained. The University is committed to supporting the exercise of any right guaranteed to individuals by the Constitution and the Code of Alabama and to educating students relative to their responsibilities.
6. Students enrolled in online courses are expected to adhere to the Academic Conduct Policy. In particular, students are expected to complete their own coursework and not provide unauthorized information or materials to another student.