

2012

**Green Politics: The Science, Policy and Polarization of Modern-Day U.S.
Environmentalism**

**Instructor: Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post
Wednesday 6:30-9:30 pm**

Course Description

Environmental issues are increasingly central to aspects of human society, whether it's how we will feed the world's growing population or what sort of extreme weather events. But even as it becomes clear how critical these questions are, Americans are becoming more divided over how they perceive these problems, and what needs to be done about them. After failing to enact a bill that would cap greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, the Obama administration pushed to promote renewable energy through the federal loan guarantee program. But this initiative, along with a slew of others, came under fire from Republican lawmakers. And even as the nation's most important elected officials bickered over whether to develop clean energy, massive fossil-fuel projects such as the Keystone XL pipeline mobilized activists on the left and the right.

Rather than look at just one issue, this course will cover the range of environmental issues that have national implications. This includes climate change, oceans, renewable energy, endangered species and wilderness. The instructor, in her capacity as The Washington Post's national environmental reporter, has covered these issues extensively in recent years, and will review the evolution and current status of both public attitudes and policy approaches to these questions. The course will examine topics including the science behind global warming, the role that various interest groups have played in environmental debates, battles between the Obama administration and House majority, and the international implications of the current U.S. impasse. It will also feature talks by several guest speakers who have worked in the trenches on the issues, from environmental activists to corporate lobbyists.

Requirements and Grades

This course meets on Wednesday and requires regular attendance. In addition there will be

Papers required. Grading will be based on the following basis:

Papers 75%

Class participation 25%

Grading rubric for papers: It will be based on a 120-point scale which weighs students' understanding of the text and their arguments at 40 points each, with originality and style counting for 20 points each.

Reading Assignments

You will need to buy the Course Reader, which includes most of the readings for this course, and the book *Demon Fish: Travels Through the Hidden World of Sharks* by Juliet Eilperin

Writing Assignments

You will have to write a 1,500-word policy memo advising the president on how to meet either one of two policy objectives. As a final paper, you will have to write a 2,500-word analysis of one critical aspect of environmental policy.

Learning Objectives

The goal is give students a basic background in the science and history of several key environmental issues. Studying this issue will also give students a sense of how policy is made in Washington and the role that partisanship, interest groups and electoral considerations play. While this will not make you into an environmental expert by any means, it will strengthen your insight into issues with global ramifications.

March 28: The Push for Wilderness

More than most nations, America is defined by its landscape. This class will look at how the drive to preserve wild places began with a Republican president, Theodore Roosevelt, and was embraced by Americans regardless of ideology. With fits and starts, this has remained a relatively bipartisan endeavor.

Reading: Selections from Aldo Leopold, Theodore Roosevelt, Wallace Stegner's "Wilderness Letter" and the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Guest lecturer: William Meadows, president, The Wilderness Society

April 4: The Making of the Modern Environmental Movement

Just over 40 years ago a broad movement took off in the United States, prompted by the Santa Barbara oil spill and the Cuyahoga River catching on fire. This grassroots uprising lead to the passage of some of the seminal laws—the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act—that continue to define environmental battles today.

Reading: Selections in the Reader including excerpts from the writing of Rachel Carson, John Muir, Lois Marie Gibbs, Paul Ehrlich, Joe Lelyveld and the *Washington Post* piece on Earth Day's 40-year anniversary.

Guest lecturer: Frances Beinecke, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council (invited)

April 11: Endangered Species

Few countries have as robust laws protecting the most imperiled species as the United States. But the Endangered Species Act has become one of the nation's most controversial environmental laws, pitting landowners, homebuilders and business interests against conservationists.

Reading: Gene Stratton-Porter's "The Last Passenger Pigeon"

Guest Lecturer: Mark Salvo, wildlife program director, WildEarth Guardians

April 18: Fishing Policy

Fishing has helped sustain the earliest American settlers, along with the native American Indians they met upon their arrival. It also exemplifies a central environmental dilemma: the tragedy of the commons. Given the option of taking the sea's bounty for free, fishermen have depleted stocks to dangerously low levels. A look at what's happened to the resources off our shores, and how smart policy might begin to bring them back.

Reading: Selected articles in the Reader.

Guest Lecturer: Lee Crockett, Pew Environment Group

May 2: Global Oceans Policy

The health of the oceans, by definition, is a global challenge. The sea is at a tipping point, with some of its most charismatic residents in peril. A look at sharks, a key indicator species, and the push to save the wildest areas in the ocean.

Reading: Selected portions of *Demon Fish*, and articles in the Reader.

Guest Lecturer: TBD

May 9: Climate Change: the Science and History

In order to understand global warming, one needs to understand the science, as well as how this issue has evolved. This class will look at what we know now about climate science, including the carbon cycle, glacier melt, ocean acidification and changes in precipitation, as well as the start of the climate change debate. We will examine a few key moments in climate policy history, including the hearings the Senate held in the late 1980s; the Rio Summit in 1992; and the forging of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

Reading: Chapters 1, and 15 from *Climate Change Science and Policy*: "Climate Change Science Overview," and "Risk, Uncertainty, and Assessing Dangerous Climate Change," and Chapter 3 from *The Climate Solutions Consensus*: "Human Carbon as the Smoking Gun."

Guest Lecturer: TBD

May 16: The Rise and Fall of Climate Legislation

We will scrutinize the Democrats' push for climate legislation in 2009, why it died in the Senate in 2010, and U.N. climate talks between 2009 and 2011.

Reading: "As the World Burns: How Big Oil and Big Coal Mounted One of the Most Aggressive Lobbying Campaigns in History to Block Progress on Global Warming" by Jeff Goodell in the Jan. 2010 edition of *Rolling Stone*; "As the World Burns: How the Senate and the White House Missed Their Best Chance to Deal with Climate Change" by Ryan Lizza in the Oct. 11, 2010 edition of *The New Yorker*, and a few articles from *The Washington Post*.

Guest lecturer: Steven Brown, vice president, government affairs, Tesoro Corp.

May 23: The Solyndra debacle

Faced with stiff opposition in Congress, the Obama administration chose to direct tens of billions of federal funds into renewable energy development. But the bankruptcy of solar manufacturer Solyndra in August 2011, coupled with the failure of several other clean energy ventures, has raised questions about how best to transition away from fossil fuels. Reading: "The Clean Tech Meltdown," WIRED, Feb. issue, selected *Washington Post* articles in the Reader.

May 30: The Environmental Protection Agency as Environmental Commander-in-Chief

Despite all the obstacles the administration has faced in realizing its green agenda, one agency has managed to succeed in enacting a series of sweeping measures: the EPA. We will examine how EPA has pushed through stiff new requirements on air quality and mining practices, even as it has suffered setbacks and sparked a slew of lawsuits.

Reading: Selected articles in the Reader.

Guest Lecturers: A senior EPA official, and a lobbyist for coal-fired utilities

June 6: The Keystone XL Expansion Project

Whether it's a good idea to construct a massive pipeline stretching between Hardisty, Alberta to the U.S. Gulf Coast depends on who you ask. To its backers, it will bring jobs and a secure oil supply to the U.S.; to its foes, it will accelerate climate change and could cause oil spills in sensitive habitat. A look at the surprising twists and turns in the politically-charged debate over oil sands in Canada and the pipeline that promises to bring it to American refiners.

Reading: Selected *Washington Post* and *New York Times* articles in the Reader.

Guest Lecturer: Bill McKibben, co-founder, 350.org (by Skype)