

## NRE 566 - PUBLIC OPINION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Fall 2008

**Professor:** Paul Mohai, 3520 Dana Building (763-4598; [pmohai@umich.edu](mailto:pmohai@umich.edu))

**Time & Place:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 4:00-5:30 pm      **Credits:** 3 hours

### Objectives

This course examines trends in public opinion on the environment, influences on people's concerns about the environment, the depth and strength of concerns, and how environmental concerns affect personal behaviors and the political process. Also covered are the role of the media in shaping environmental public opinion, the linkages between environmental values and core social values; race, class, gender, and intergenerational differences in environmental opinion and what implications such differences have for society. In addition, we will be making cross-national comparisons and explore the reasons why environmental concern appears to have become a worldwide phenomenon. Based on the understandings developed in the course, we will attempt to predict where public opinion on the environment is likely to head in the future and assess its potential for affecting future political and social change.

**SPECIAL FOCUS FOR THIS SEMESTER: PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THIS NOVEMBER'S ELECTIONS.**

### Grading and Evaluation

Grades will be based on class participation, a newspaper tracking exercise, eight 2-page commentaries on the weekly readings, and a 12- to 15-page term paper.

Class Participation (including newspaper tracking):	35%
Commentaries:	35%
Term Paper:	30% (Due December 4)

Class participation: The class participation grade will be based on punctual attendance in class (absences and lateness are recorded), contribution to class discussions, the newspaper tracking exercise (see below), and oral presentation of reports.

Tracking environmental issues in the news: As a class exercise, students will divide into teams of 4-6 and track environmental issues covered in the media over a 4-6 week period. Each team will pick a newspaper to monitor (e.g., New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, etc.). So as not to make this exercise burdensome, each member of the team needs to take a turn only once in monitoring the team's paper over a one-week period. Information about what to look for and how your team should analyze the findings will be given in class.

Commentaries: Students will turn in eight commentaries over the term on the weekly readings that a) summarize and critique the readings' principal ideas, arguments, findings, etc. and b) discuss new ideas and insights obtained from them. Each commentary should be focused on the collection of readings in a given week and should be about 1 ½ to 2 pages, single-spaced. More information about the commentaries will be given in class. No commentaries are assigned for readings in Weeks 1, 2, 3, 8, and 15. Students may choose any of the 8 of the remaining 10 weeks for which to submit commentaries. More information about the commentaries will be given in class.

Term Paper: The purpose of the paper is to bring course materials to bear in analyzing and understanding a subject of particular interest to you - within the general topic of public opinion and the environment. Your goal will be to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of course materials as well as your ability to apply that material in order to analyze and uncover new insights about a

phenomenon or issue of particular interest. A prospectus outlining the topic you plan to address will be collected and reviewed by me early in the term. More information about the term paper project will be given in class.

### **Reading Materials**

1. Guber, Deborah Lynn. 2003. *The Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
2. Other required readings will be available on NRE 566 CTOOLS site.

### **Weekly Reading Assignments**

#### **Week 1 – Sept. 2 & 4: Introduction to Course**

Guber, Introduction; pp. 1-15.

*Time Magazine*, “Special Report on Global Warming: Be Worried, Be Very Worried” (April 3, 2006)

#### **Week 2 – Sept. 9 & 11: Assessing American Concern for the Environment**

Guber, Chapt. 1 – Do Americans Favor Environmental Protection? Pp. 19-36

Guber, Chapt. 2 – Strength: How Deep Is Public Commitment to the Environment? Pp. 37-55.

Guber, Chapt. 3 – Stability: Have Environmental Attitudes Changed over Time? Pp. 57-70.

Nisbet, M.C., & T. Myers. 2007. “The Polls – Trends: Twenty Years of Public Opinion about Global Warming.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71(3): 444-470.

#### **Week 3 – Sept. 16 & 18: Explaining Trends in Environmental Public Opinion/The Role of the Media**

Iyengar, S., & D. R. Kinder. 1987. *News That Matters*. Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. Pp. 1-3.

Molotch - "Media and Movements," pp. 1-2

Archibald, E. 1999. “Problems with Environmental Reporting: Perspectives of Daily Newspaper Reporters.” *Journal of Environmental Education* 30.

Ader, C. R. 1995. “A Longitudinal Study of Agenda Setting on the Issue of Environmental Pollution.” *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 72: 300-311.

Boykoff, M.T., & J.M. Boykoff. 2007. “Climate Change and Journalistic Norms: A Case Study of U.S. Mass-Media Coverage.” *Geoforum* 38: 1190-1204.

#### **Week 4 – Sept. 23 & 25: Influences on Long-Range Trends in Public Opinion: More on the Media, Think-Tanks, and Corporations**

McCright, A.M., & R.E. Dunlap. 2003. “Defeating Kyoto: The Conservative Movement’s Impact on U.S. Climate Change Policy.” *Social Problems* 50(3): 348-373.

Boykoff, M.T. 2007. “Flogging a Dead Norm? Newspaper Coverage of Anthropogenic Climate Change in the U.S. and United Kingdom from 2003 to 2006.” *Area* 39(4): 470-481.

Pulver, S. 2007. “Making Sense of Corporate Environmentalism: An Environmental Contestation Approach to Analyzing the Causes and Consequences of the Climate Change Policy Split in the Oil Industry.” *Organization & Environment* 20(1): 44-83.

#### **Week 5 – Sept. 23 & 25: Demographic Correlates of Environmental Concern/Race and Environmentalism**

Guber, Chapt. 4 - Distribution: Is Environmentalism Elitist? Pp. 71-87.

Mohai, P. 2003. “Dispelling Old Myths: African American Concern for the Environment.” *Environment* 45 (5): 11-26.

Mohai, P. and B. Bryant. 1998. “Is There a ‘Race’ Effect on Concern for Environmental Quality?” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 62(4): 475-505.

Mohai, P. & D. Kershner. 2002. “Race and Environmental Voting in the U.S. Congress.” *Social Science Quarterly* 83(1): 167-189.

**Week 6 – Oct. 7 & 9: Gender and Environmentalism**

- Mohai, P. 1992. "Men, Women, and the Environment: An Examination of the Gender Gap in Environmental Concern and Activism." *Society & Natural Resources* 5(1): 1-19.
- Mohai, P. 1997. "Gender Differences in the Perception of Most Important Environmental Problems." *Race, Gender & Class* 5(1): 153-169.
- Davidson, D. J. &, and W. R. Freudenburg. 1996. "Gender and Environmental Risk Concerns: A Review and Analysis of Available Research." *Environment and Behavior* 28: 302-229.

**Week 7 –Oct. 14 & 16: Environmental Actions and Behaviors**

- Guber, Chapt. 6 – The Ballot Box I: Issue Voting and the Environment in Presidential Elections; pp. 105-123.
- Guber, Chapt. 7 – The Ballot Box II: Environmental Voting on Statewide Ballot Propositions; pp. 125-152.
- Guber, Chapt. 8 – The Marketplace: Motivating the Citizen Consumer; pp. 153-174.

**Week 8 – Fall Study Break & Oct. 23: Dimensionality of Environmental Concern – NO COMMENTARIES**

- Guber, Chapt. 5 – Constraint: Are Environmental Attitudes Inconsistent? Pp. 89-102.
- Guber, Conclusions- Rethinking Environmentalism; pp. 175-187.

**Week 9 – Oct. 28 & 30: Environmental Values vs. Attitudes and Beliefs**

- Dunlap, R. E., and K. D. Van Liere. 1984. "Commitment to the Dominant Social Paradigm and Concern for Environmental Quality." *Social Science Quarterly* 65: 1013-1028.
- Stern, Paul. C., Thomas Dietz, and Linda Kalof. 1993. "Value Orientations, Gender, and Environmental Concern." *Environment and Behavior* 25: 322-348.
- Kempton, W., J. S. Boster, and J. A. Hartley. 1996. Chapter 5, "Environmental Values." Pp. 87-115 in *Environmental Values in American Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

**Week 10 – Nov. 4 & 6: Environmental Socialization**

- Chawla, L. 1998. "Significant Life Experiences Revisited: A Review of Research on Sources of Environmental Sensitivity." *Journal of Environmental Education* 29: 11-29.
- Chawla, L. 1999. "Life Paths into Effective Environmental Action." *Journal of Environmental Education* 31: 15-26.
- Bixler, R. D., M. F. Floyd, and W. E. Hammitt. 2002. "Environmental Socialization: Quantitative Tests of the Childhood Play Hypothesis." *Environment and Behavior* 34: 795-818.

**Week 11 – Nov. 11 & 12: The Use of Public Opinion Polling by Political Actors**

- Jacobs, L. R., & R. Y. Shapiro. 1995. "The Rise of Presidential Polling: The Nixon White House in Historical Perspective." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59: 163-195.
- Jacobs, L. R., E. D. Lawrence, R. Y. Shapiro. 1998. "Congressional Leadership of Public Opinion." *Political Science Quarterly* 113(1): 21-41.

**Week 12 – Nov. 18 & 20: Grassroots Environmentalism/Environmental Justice**

- Freudenberg, N., and C. Steinsapir. 1992. "Not in Our Backyards: The Grassroots Environmental Movement." Pp. 27-35 in R. E. Dunlap and A. Mertig, eds., *American Environmentalism: The U.S. Environmental Movement, 1970-1990*. Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis.
- Taylor, D. E. 1998. "Mobilizing for Environmental Justice in Communities of Color: An Emerging Profile of People of Color Environmental Groups." Pp. 33-67 in J. Aley et al. (eds.) *Ecosystem Management*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.
- Dalton, R.J., and R. Rohrschneider. 2003. "The Environmental Movement and the Modes of Political Action." *Comparative Political Studies* 36(7): 743-771.

**Week 13 – Nov. 25 & Thanksgiving: Environmentalism in Non-Industrialized (“Developing”) Nations**

- Guha, R., & J. Martinez-Allier. 1997. “The Environmentalism of the Poor.” *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*, pp. 3-21.
- Guha, R., & J. Martinez-Allier. 1997. “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique.” *Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South*, pp. 92-108.
- Gardner, S. 1995. “Major Themes in the Study of Grassroots Environmentalism in Developing Countries.” *Journal of Third World Studies* 12: 200-244.

**Week 14 – Dec. 2 & 4: Global Environmentalism**

- Brechin, S., & W. Kempton. 1994. “Global Environmentalism: A Challenge to the Postmaterialism Thesis?” *Social Science Quarterly* 75: 245-269.
- Brechin, S. 1999. “Objective Problems, Subjective Values, and Global Environmentalism: Evaluating the Postmaterialist Argument and Challenging a New Explanation.” *Social Science Quarterly* 80: 793-809.
- Mohai, P., S. Simoes, and S. Brechin. 2007. “Environmental Concerns, Values, and Meanings in the Beijing and Detroit Metropolitan Areas.” Paper presented at the 2007 Beijing International Conference on Environmental Sociology held in Beijing, China, June 30-July 2, 2007.

**Week 15 – Dec. 9: Conclusion of Course**