

## FAIR 336N: Topics in Science: Environmental Justice

4 credits, Fall Quarter, 2014

Tues and Thurs: 12-12:50 pm (FX 212)

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Office Hours: Mon: 1-3pm; Thurs: 10-11 am

Environmental justice (EJ) is both a mode of scholarship that critically examines the human-environment relationship, and a social movement that seeks to address inequities embedded in that relationship. The modern U.S. environmental justice movement emerged in the 1980s in response to the growing acknowledgement that marginalized communities were bearing a disproportionate burden of hazardous waste exposure. In the 1980s, researchers from academia, government and the nonprofit sector began to document these disproportionate impacts across a range of environmental hazards. Why do these patterns exist in many different geographic and regional contexts? What roles do power and privilege play in environmental decision-making? What can be done to ameliorate environmental (in)justice?

In this course, we will explore the history of the environmental justice movement in the U.S. and the ideas and theories of EJ scholarship, and then we will apply our new understanding of these issues to regional environmental justice case studies chosen by students. In addition to an intellectual exploration of these ideas, this course includes an experiential component, which connects the theories and scholarship of EJ to advocacy and mapping exercises.

This course serves as the upper-division science requirement for Fairhaven students.

**Texts:** Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. (ISBN: 978-0814715369). Additional articles and book chapters will be provided on Canvas.

### Requirements for Credit and Criteria for Evaluation:

- **Attendance and thoughtful contribution to seminar discussions:** We will grapple with the sticky issues of power, privilege and the environment together this quarter. The success of this class depends on our collective contribution to discussions and respect for one another's ideas.
- **Reading journal:** For each set of readings, I will provide two or three guiding questions to help you process the content you are encountering. On most days, you will write short responses to the questions, or provide your own critical analysis, and post these on Canvas by 10 AM. The journal submissions serve several purposes: they give me a sense of your engagement with the readings so that I can more effectively plan class discussions, they provide an opportunity for you to actively engage with the course readings, and they require you to develop a consistent writing practice. (Assignment sheet and guiding questions will be provided)
- **Group case study presentation/teach-in:** In the last third of the course, we will apply the concepts of environmental justice to a series of regional case studies of your choosing. In groups, you will learn about these case studies and then share your new insights and knowledge with the class in a series of "teach-ins". These provide an opportunity for us to apply what we've learned to controversies unfolding around us. (Assignment sheet will be provided)
- **Three short experiential assignments:**
  - Toxic release inventory: Environmental justice activists must often conduct research to characterize the environmental hazards in their neighborhood. In this assignment, you will do this

by accessing publicly available toxic release data from the U.S. EPA. (Assignment sheet will be provided)

- Sensory mapping: Much of the environmental justice literature documents the location of environmental hazards in relation to demographic characteristics. While the resulting maps are helpful and important in understanding environmental injustice, they tell us little about what it feels like to live in an EJ community. We will spend some time in this course creating neighborhood maps depicting smells, visuals and sounds, to help us think about the lived experiences of those affected by EJ. (Assignment sheets will be provided)
- Advocacy: By the end of the quarter, you will use the knowledge and insights you have gained to engage in an advocacy action of your choosing. You will also write a short reflection piece in which you will think critically about the effects of various advocacy approaches. You may choose the topic, mechanism (e.g. public comment, letter to the editor, and stance to advocate, culture jamming), but you must actually *do* something. (Assignment sheet will be provided)

### Learning Goals:

Upon graduation, Fairhaven College students will be able to ...	Upon completion of this course, students will be able to ...
Consider and listen openly to perspectives that are different from their own as they investigate complex issues.	Think critically and read carefully about the relationships between power and privilege and the “environment”
Recognize and trace the development of their own ideas, skills, perspectives and learning processes.	
Demonstrate the ability to imagine, problem-solve, and take creative risks.	Challenge preconceived notions of the relationship between the environment and society
Articulate the ways in which systems of power, privilege, and oppression shape their experiences as individuals and members of communities.	Understand how people from different backgrounds are differentially affected by environmental problems
Develop a sense of personal agency for creating positive social and ecological change within a multicultural and global context.	Connect environmental justice theory to practice by engaging in class teach-in and advocacy assignments
Effectively communicate complex ideas orally and in writing.	Communicate understanding of environmental injustice through writing and mapping
Apply quantitative reasoning to the construction, communication and evaluation of arguments.	Use quantitative and qualitative data to communicate conditions of environmental injustice

### Expectations:

I expect us to develop a classroom culture of respect and engagement. To accomplish this, we will each need to strike an appropriate balance between listening and verbally engaging. We will also each need to consider how our

use of technology impacts the development of this classroom culture. You are welcome to use laptops and tablets if these tools aid in your learning and processing of the material and discussion at hand. Most of us, though, spend a great deal of time bombarded by distractions from social media, email, texts, etc. Our time together in class provides you with a great opportunity to shed those distractions and focus on our work together.

You can expect me to create an inclusive classroom environment that respects the diverse perspectives offered by each of you. You can also expect me to challenge your previously held beliefs and ask you to question the status quo. I hope you will challenge me in the same way. We will be engaging with difficult, messy ideas and sometimes that can be difficult. You should not be surprised if I ask you to clarify, further develop, or justify an idea you put forth in our classroom discussions. I hope that we can all learn from one another and we can only do so through deep debate and discussion.

If you need to miss class due to a religious observance, please speak to me in advance to make arrangements to cover material from that day

Western Washington University has an official policy concerning **academic dishonesty** that is published in the General Catalog in Appendix D. **All students in this seminar are expected to abide by this and other policies listed in the official catalog.**

*To request **disability accommodation**, please contact **disAbility Resources for Students** office, 650-3844, or for **student assistance** related to required course procedures, please contact the **Student Life** office, 650-3706.*

*Students are also responsible for knowing and adhering to WWU's standards for **ethical computing**. Refer to these web sites:*

- **Policy for Responsible Computing**  
<http://west.wvu.edu/atus/helpdesk/acceptableusepolicy.shtml>
- **Ethical Conduct: User Agreement for WWU Network and Computer Resources**  
<http://west.wvu.edu/atus/helpdesk/useragreement.shtml>

You can expect me to be available to help you with course assignments, readings, or any other aspect of this course. I am always available during office hours. If you are unable to make it to my office during these times, please feel free to email or call my office to set up a separate meeting time. My goal is to help you succeed as a college student and my door is always open to discuss issues unrelated to this course.

You can expect me to promptly respond to your emails during normal working hours (i.e. M-F, 8-5).

This syllabus is likely to change, depending on student interest and our collective understanding of course material and concepts. Any changes will be announced in class and posted on Canvas.