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Providence College  
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# Environmental Politics

*Political Science 217 – Fall Semester 2009*

Tuesdays and Thursdays • 11:30 a.m. ~ 12:45 p.m.

## About this Course

Political Science 217 *Environmental Politics* is an introduction to social science perspectives on the politics of the environment, including debates about global warming, peak oil, mass extinction, sustainable agriculture, toxic pollution, bioengineering, and others. Includes field observation and research at the Atlantic Ocean in Narragansett or Newport, Rhode Island.

## Special Features

Each student will plan and conduct a field exploration to Narragansett or Newport, Rhode Island, using Rhode Island's public transportation system. In this course there will no final exam, but each student will plan and submit an individual project. The project will be research-based, and may be a conventional term paper, a website, or a short documentary video. To satisfy your curiosity and improve your grade, you may choose at any time to submit extra-credit assignments. See instructor for details. Attendance is mandatory for all class meetings.

## **General Requirements and Grading Rubric**

*Environmental Politics* includes lectures, assigned readings, videos, class discussions, short essays, individual projects, and field exploration. Your final course grade will be based on your attendance, participation, and effort (20%), your written assignments (50%), and your individual project (30%). Attendance is required, and assigned reading should always be completed before coming to class.

## **Discussions and Participation; Field Exploration**

Your participation in class discussions serves both to demonstrate and improve your mastery of course material, and to share your insights and knowledge with other students. Our class discussions, organized around the reading assignments, are central to the class. Your field exploration to Narragansett or Newport, Rhode Island, via public transit, will include observation and reporting on environmental threats, public behavior, and distinctive local conditions.

## **The Review Essays**

You will select three (3) of our required texts, about which you will write two- or three-page review essays summarizing the narrative, highlighting key themes and evidence, and locating the book's main contributions in the overall structure of the course.

## **Your Individual Project**

Each student will choose to complete an individual project, with original research and development, in the form of a conventional term paper, a thematic website, or a video documentary. Your detailed, one-page proposal will be due on October 22. Completed individual projects may be submitted at any time after mid-semester, but must be turned in no later than the final class meeting on December 10.

## **Required Texts**

The following books are the main texts for the course:

- A Short History of Progress*. Ronald Wright. (Carroll & Graf 2005).
- With Speed and Violence*. Fred Pearce. (Beacon Press 2008).
- State of the World 2009*. Worldwatch Institute. (Norton 2009).
- The End of Oil*. Paul Roberts. (Bloomsbury 2005)
- Green Political Thought : An Introduction (4th edition)*. Andrew Dobson. (Routledge 2007).
- Green Living*. The editors of E Magazine. (Penguin 2005).

## **Other Books about Environmental Politics**

The following selected books will give you a solid grounding in diverse approaches to the study of ecological crisis, eco-political theory, Green politics, and public policy.

- Silent spring*. R. Carson (Barron's 2004 [1962]).
- Ecotopia: the notebooks and report of William Weston*. E. Callenbach. (Bantam 1977).
- Nuclear madness: what you can do!* H. Caldicott. (Norton 1994 [1978]).
- Green politics: the global promise*. C. Spretnak and F. Capra. (Bear 1986).
- Dumping in dixie: race, class and environmental quality*. R. Bullard (Westview 1990).
- Ecological policy and politics in developing countries*. U. Desai, ed. (SUNY 1998).

*Against all odds: the Green transformation of American politics.* J. Rensenbrink. (Leopold 1999).  
*Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth.* James Lovelock. (Oxford 2000).  
*Environment and society: the enduring conflict.* A. Schnaiberg & K. Gould. (Kumarian 2001).  
*Understanding global environmental politics: domination, accumulation, resistance.* M. Paterson (Palgrave 2001).  
*Ecocide: A short history of the mass extinction of species.* F. Broswimmer. (Pluto Press 2002).  
*Green states and social movements.* J. Dryzek et al. (Oxford 2003).  
*The green state: rethinking democracy and sovereignty.* R. Eckersley. (MIT Press 2004).  
*The Party's Over : Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies.* R. Heinberg. (New Society 2005).  
*Forty Signs of Rain.* Kim Stanley Robinson. (Spectra 2005).  
*Field Notes from a Catastrophe.* Elisabeth Kolbert. (MPS 2006).  
*First Along the River.* Benjamin Kline. (Rowman & Littlefield 2007).  
*Blue Covenant.* Maude Barlow. (New Press 2007).

## CLASS SCHEDULE WITH READING ASSIGNMENTS

### I. "SEEING" ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

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- 9/8/09    **Introduction**  
*No reading assignment*
- 9/10/09    **The state of the natural environment in Rhode Island**  
*Reading assignment:* Book chapter, news article, or government report.  
*Special discussion topic:* Field exploration and essay instructions.
- 9/15/09    **NO CLASS: Field exploration, to Atlantic Ocean via public transit**
- 9/17/09    **NO CLASS: Field exploration, to Atlantic Ocean via public transit**

### II. THE HISTORY OF HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

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- 9/22/09    **Is 'Progress' Sustainable?**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *A Short History of Progress*.

**FIELD EXPLORATION ESSAY DUE**

- 9/24/09    **The Progress Trap**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *A Short History of Progress*.

- 9/29/09    **The Rebellion of the Tools**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *A Short History of Progress*.

**BOOK REVIEW ESSAY (1) DUE**

In a well-organized and carefully-written essay, explain the most significant lessons you've drawn from *A Short History of Progress*, and from our class discussions of this material. Your essay will be a two- or three-page review and assessment of the book summarizing the narrative, highlighting key themes and evidence, and locating the book's main contributions in the overall structure of the course.

### III. ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND HUMANITY'S FUTURE

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10/1/09 **The Anthropocene Era**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *With Speed and Violence*.

10/6/09 **Fire and Ice**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *With Speed and Violence*.

10/8/09 **The Lesson of the Storms**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *With Speed and Violence*.

10/13/09 **NO CLASS – Indigenous Peoples' Day**

10/15/09 **Video Presentation: Everything's Cool**  
*Reading assignment:* News article or government report, on climate change science.

#### **BOOK REVIEW ESSAY (2) DUE**

In a well-organized and carefully-written, two- or three-page essay, explain the most significant lessons you've drawn from *With Speed and Violence*, and from our class discussions of this material. Review and assess the book, summarizing the narrative, highlighting main themes and evidence, and locating the book in the overall structure of the course.

### IV. GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES, 2009

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10/20/09 **Climate Change and Global Threats**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *State of the World*.

10/22/09 **Global Cooperation?**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *State of the World*.

#### **INDIVIDUAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE**

10/27/09 **Energy and Climate**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *State of the World*.

10/29/09 **Cultural and Biological Resilience**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *State of the World*.

#### **BOOK REVIEW ESSAY (3) DUE**

In a well-organized and carefully-written essay, explain the most significant lessons you've drawn from *State of the World*, and from our class discussions of this material. What are the most challenging environmental conditions, and the most promising solutions for those problems?

### V. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PETROLEUM CIVILIZATION

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11/3/09 **The Free Ride**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *The End of Oil*.

11/5/09 **On the Road to Nowhere**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *The End of Oil*.

11/10/09 **Into the Blue**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *The End of Oil*.

11/12/09 **Are There Alternatives?**  
*Reading assignment:* Handouts.

**BOOK REVIEW ESSAY (4) DUE**

In a well-organized and carefully-written, two- or three-page essay, explain the most significant lessons you've drawn from *The End of Oil*, and from our class discussions of this material. Review and assess the book, summarizing the narrative, highlighting main themes and evidence, and locating the book in the overall structure of the course.

**VI. ECOLOGISM: THE PHILOSOPHY OF GREEN POLITICS**

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11/17/09 **Industrialism**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *Green Political Thought*.

11/19/09 **Environmentalism**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *Green Political Thought*.

11/24/09 **NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Week**

11/26/09 **NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Week**

12/1/09 **Political Ecology**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *Green Political Thought*.

**BOOK REVIEW ESSAY (5) DUE**

In a well-organized and carefully-written, two- or three-page essay, explain the most significant lessons you've drawn from *Green Political Thought*, and from our class discussions of this material. Review and assess the book, identifying the main strands of Dobson's argument, and responding to each with your own perspectives.

**VII. LIVING GREEN**

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12/3/09 **Food and Personal Care**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *Green Living*.

12/8/09 **Children and the Home**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *Green Living*.

12/10/09 **Money, Energy, Transportation**  
*Reading assignment:* Selections from *Green Living*.

**BOOK REVIEW ESSAY (6) DUE**

In a two-page essay, explain the most significant lessons you've drawn from *Green Living*, and from our class discussions of this material. How does the book alter your views of which personal behavioral changes are most crucial? What obstacles would you and others face, making such changes in your own lives?