

# ENVS 435: Environmental Justice Syllabus Version 1.0

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## Course Information:

Meetings: 142 Columbia Hall, MTWRF 10-11:50

CRN: 40850

Shane's phone [ICE]: 240-434-3726

## Instructor Information:

Name: Shane Hall , Graduate Teaching Fellow  
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Office: Columbia Hall 240 / PLC 56  
Office Hours 30 min before/after class, and by apt.

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**Thinking is an action... the heartbeat of critical thinking is the longing to know—to understand how life works.” — bell hooks**



## Course Description: What's this about and what will we do ?

**It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. (Charles Dickens, 1859).**

The study of environmental justice is the study of environmental inequality. Environmental inequality refers to the uneven distribution of environmental burdens (such as being exposed to toxics) and benefits (like access to clean air) across space and time. This class will examine how space and place affects human and environmental well-being.

By taking this course you will develop a critical understanding of what constitutes environmental privilege and oppression by examining the historical roots of current, persistent, environmental inequalities across the globe. **What are the historical roots of environmental inequality? Why is it that some people are exposed to high levels of pollution or don't have access to clean water, while others enjoy green spaces and nutritious food? Does inequality drive ecosystem degradation? Is social justice essential to, or at odds with, efforts to build a sustainable world? What is just and good, and if we can name that which is just and good, how can we build a just world?**



**To answer these, and other, questions affecting each of us in an ever more interconnected, and embattled, world we'll work together to place different kinds of texts—scholarly articles, images, literary fiction, testimony, manifestos—into conversation with each other and ourselves as researchers of environmental justice. We'll examine how aspects of human identity (such as race, gender, and class), history (including colonialism, development, and globalization) and nature (biogeography, ecosystems, climate and weather) contribute to environmental inequality and tackle the ethical question of how much, if any, inequality is just in the 21st century.**

## Course Goals:

In short, we have three things to learn in this course:



- **We must learn to interpret the world deeply and insightfully.**
- **We must learn to share our own interpretations of the world with others.**
- **We must learn to share this world and change this world.**

Specifically, if you enthusiastically and critically engage in this course you will be able to...

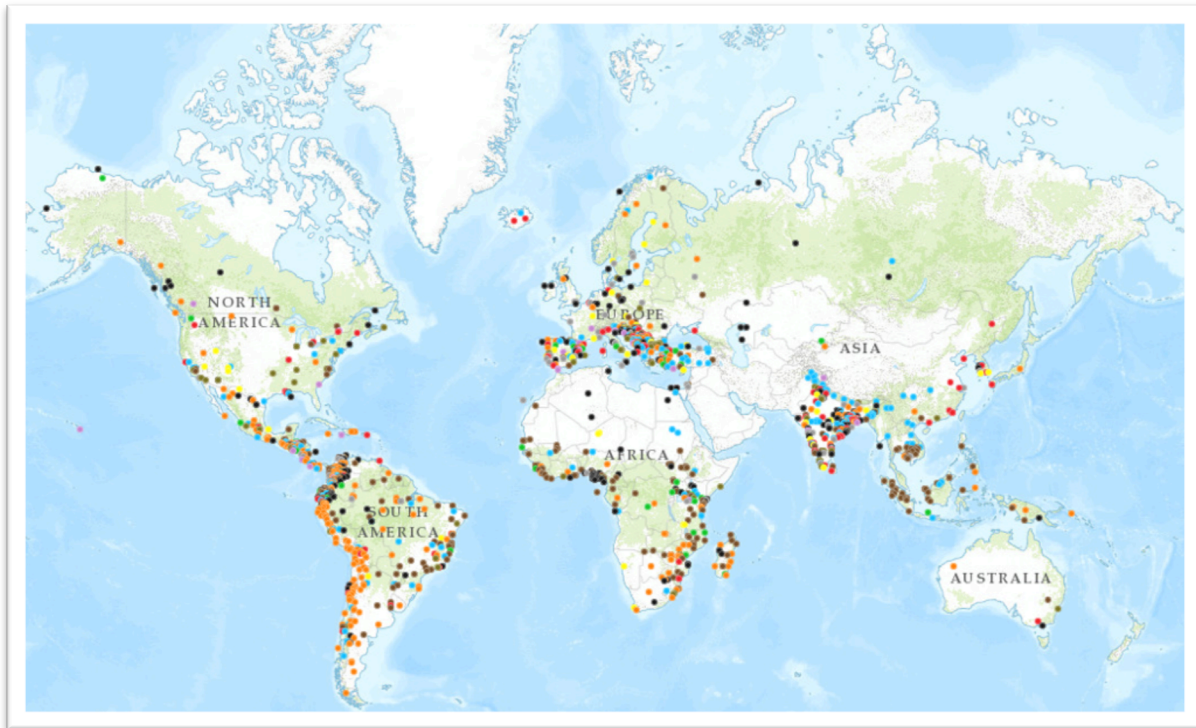
1. explain major historical root causes of environmental inequality and strategies for promoting environmental justice and equity.
2. articulate working definitions of key concepts in the field of environmental justice (e.g. race, gender, class, sustainability, social justice, env. privilege, env. burdens,).
3. demonstrate creative and critical thinking and communication skills, including the ability to interpret a variety of academic and popular literature pertaining to environmental justice.
4. locate and reflectively examine one's own position a citizen, consumer, and student in relation to the study and struggles over environmental inequality.
5. reflect on the ways in which you effectively learn.

## How will we meet these goals? Some expectations:

**What to expect from your instructor:** You can expect me to work hard to help you learn and succeed in this course. Specifically, I'll be available to help you in and outside of class. I will communicate clear expectations, criteria, and feedback for your efforts, and demonstrate the value of course activities and requirements (always feel free to ask about why we're doing each activity or assignment), and guide you in the completion of tasks in a timely manner so you can demonstrate your achievement. This course grapples with the challenges vast environmental violence and inequalities pose to us all, as well as the means by which communities struggle for justice within larger social systems. I believe these are vital issues to investigate, and consequently I love talking about all the issues we'll be examining over the next few weeks and I am here to help you explore these ideas. If I don't know answers to your questions that you're asking, I'm positive that I can help you find those answers.

**What your instructor expects from you:** You are expected to be present for every class, complete class readings and assignments on time and in the manner required, check for announcements on your email regularly, and participate vigorously and often in class discussions and activities – meaning you will share your ideas openly, relate course concepts and skills to your interests and real world experiences, and work to synthesize information from a variety of sources. In addition, you are required to comply with the course policies (below) and ask me questions when things get confusing (and I guarantee they will, because confusion and some level of disturbance is the first step towards learning anything worth learning).

**All of us are expected** to respect everyone's voice; listen to, read, reflect upon, and comment on each other's contributions; challenge each other to clarify our ideas; and encourage each other to deepen our mutual learning. We are extremely lucky to have a chance to work together in an intimate seminar.



The *EJ Atlas* ([ejatlas.org](http://ejatlas.org)) documents conflicts over environmental resources across the globe. We'll use this new media tool throughout the term.

## **Course Policies:**

### **Attendance**

In this seminar we will learn as a group. This means we need to be “present” in class each day in more ways than just getting our butts in these swanky plastic seats. This course will be most fulfilling if we are all in it together... literally. To encourage everyone to maintain excellent attendance, there is one “carrot” reward for coming and one “stick” disincentive for not coming. If you come to each and every class, your Course Journal and Classroom Citizenship grade will be raised a full letter grade at the end of the term (i.e. if you got a B on your CJCC it will become an A). That’s the carrot. If you miss more than two days, you’re CJCC grade will be reduced 20% for each additional absence. You cannot pass the class if you miss more than a week of class. Repeatedly arriving to class late or departing class early will negatively impact your classroom citizenship grade. Those are the stick.

### **Academic Honesty**

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Consistent, correct citation of sources is required, and failing to adequately cite source materials will result in a final grade of “F” for the course. Refer to the summary of the Code of Student Conduct on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website.

## Access

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in the first day or two of class if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or [uoaec@uoregon.edu](mailto:uoaec@uoregon.edu).

## A General Note on Communication

Due to the short, brutish nature of Spring Term, we are all expected and required to perform at a ‘high-octane’ level. That being said, we are human. If you are struggling with material, faced suddenly with a personal crisis, are stalked by rogue nutria, etc. please communicate with me via email or in person so we can coordinate and ensure you are able to access fully a positive learning experience (and pass the class). Coming to me a week *after* an assignment is due to tell me that your house burnt down is an awfully long time to wait to talk about an extension. So promptly communicate, communicate, communicate.

## Office Hours

Everyone is required to meet with me and their presentation group outside of class the week of your presentation. I hold “office hours” in Columbia 240 each day before and after class, but we can arrange other times that are more convenient for you or your group. Continuing with the “communication” mantra of the last policy, please feel encouraged to come to office hours on a regular basis. I’ll offer several “topical office hours” where anyone in the class can meet to carry a conversation further about a particular topic, or work on a certain part of their final project, etc.

## Religious Holidays

Students who observe religious holidays at times when academic requirements conflict with those observances must inform instructors in advance of the holiday. Students are responsible for making up missed work according to a schedule determined with their instructor.

## Late Work

Because of the extremely compressed nature of this course, late work will not be accepted unless you seek and receive permission from the instructor prior to the assignment’s deadline in the syllabus. All deadlines are included in the syllabus, so it helps to study –up on the schedule at the beginning of the course to see if you can predict any predicaments that you’ll need to talk to the instructor about.

## What We’re Reading:

- *The Tattooed Soldier* by Hector Tobar (available at the Duckstore, and generally through globalized marketplaces)
- All other readings are available as PDFs or hyperlinked to online sources via Canvas. Please print and bring to class.

**How Your Grade is Evaluated:** (full descriptions of assignments on Canvas)

1. Course Journal and Classroom Citizenship: 35%
2. Environmental Conflict Analysis: 50%
  - Conflict profile: 15%
  - Power map: 10%
  - Theories of Change Statement: 20%
  - Project Reflection Narrative: 5%
3. “Expanding EJ” Presentation: 15%

<p>How your Grade is Evaluated:                  A: 94-100%                  A-: 90-93.49%                  B+: 86.5-89.49%                  B: 84-86.49%                  B-: 80-83.49%                  ...and so on!</p>
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**Brief Descriptions of Graded Work:**

**Note:** The full assignment descriptions are on the Canvas site and go into greater detail on the logistics and requirements of each major assignment.

<p><b>1. Course Journal and Classroom Citizenship (35%)</b></p>	<p>Being a good “classroom citizen” means that you meet the expectations laid out on page 2 of this syllabus. This means that a portion of your grade will come from how well you prepare for and participate in classroom discussions and respond to your peers. Participation may include activities such as active listening and discussion in class, responding to “pop” quizzes, in-class writing assignments, meeting in office hours, and other participatory activities.</p> <p>The course journal is a running log of your engagement with course material and ideas. Typically course journal entries will take between 15-30 minutes to complete, and there will be 3-4 journal entries each week.</p>
<p><b>2. Environmental Conflict Analysis (50%)</b></p>	<p>You will choose an environmental conflict and create a critical profile of this conflict. This large, term-long assignment is broken into several parts, each worth between 5-20% of your grade. These include a short description of the conflict with historical background, a “power map” from the perspective of one of the actors in the conflict, a description of the “theories of change” being used by the actors in the conflict, and your personal assessment of the efficacy and ethics of those theories of change.</p>
<p><b>3. Expanding EJ Provocation (15%)</b></p>	<p>Groups of students (2-3 people) will research a topic, figure, or problem <i>not</i> covered in the course readings or our larger discussion. The group’s task is to creatively and effectively teach the class about this additional topic and facilitate a short discussion of the topic’s relevancy to the course; how what you’ve learned changes how we understand EJ. Each group will meet with Shane before their presentation. You will sign up for a group and presentation date in class.</p>

### **Three Major Frames of Analysis that we'll use in this course:**

In this course we will rely on three major frameworks of analysis to unpack the complex cultures of coal we encounter in course readings, discussions, and research. The following descriptions introduce how I understand each of these frames going into the course. We can add and amend to these frames as we get to work:

**Interdisciplinary Study:** Environmental studies relies on the contributions and interplay of many disciplinary perspectives as well as interdisciplinary perspectives. The “objects” of our study are never simple objects, but complex combinations of different elements and processes. The philosopher Bruno Latour puts the inadequacy of single-discipline study succinctly in the following examples: “The hole in the ozone is too social and too narrated to be truly natural; the strategy of industrial firms and heads of state too full of chemical reactions to be reduced to power and interest; the discourse of the ecosphere too real and too social to boil down to meaning effects.” Like the hole in the ozone or the decisions of multinational firms, issues of environmental justice are simultaneously material, narrated, socialized, and natural. Yet acknowledging the *need* for interdisciplinary study and *performing* interdisciplinary study are two horses of entirely different colors. As we tackle course material, constantly ask yourself: “what disciplinary perspectives am I using to interpret this material? What intellectual framework(s) is this text asking me to be fluent in? What perspectives are lacking in this material or our discussion?”

**Ethics:** Philosopher Nancy Tuana defines ethics as “the ways we live with one another.” In this class we will assume ethical lenses on the topics we discuss and investigate. How ought humans live with one another in a world of finite natural resources filled with complex human and non-human histories, conflicts, and communities? How does what we learn in this class cause us to reflect on our own lives, goals, and actions? While we will not always agree on the answer to these questions, let alone basic frameworks for what is “just” and what is “right” or “wrong,” we *can* all ask these questions of ourselves and push each other to challenge and clarify our own ethical grounding in the world.

**Interactive learning:** The positive links of learning through action are long-established in the field of teaching and learning. Julius Caesar puts it succinctly: “Experience is the teacher of all things.” Yet it is only recently that cognitive neuroscience has shown that human brains form more robust and elaborate neural connections (a strong sign of deep learning) when students actively discuss, reflect, and problem-solve in the classroom as opposed to simply listening to an instructor lecture. Environmental Justice is a hugely complex field of study, and thus we must match our educational practice to the level of complexity we face. This means we’ll be quite active in and out of class. We’ll write a lot. We’ll talk a lot. We’ll sketch, and brainstorm, and move around, and more! We’ll also take a significant chunk of our time and devote it to processing and reflecting what we’re learning. No one in this class will be a passive body in the room. We will be interacting with each other, and actively learning and defining what the study of environmental justice is and should be.