

**SOC485H1F – New Topics in Sociology: Culture and Environment**  
**Sociology Department, St. George Campus**  
**Summer (May – June 2025)**  
**Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:10am – 11:00am**  
**Location: Online Synchronous (see Quercus for Zoom link)**

**Course Instructor:** Rebecca Nachtigall (she/her)  
**Email:** [rebecca.nachtigall@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:rebecca.nachtigall@mail.utoronto.ca)  
**Office hours:** Mondays 11am – 12pm, and by appointment  
**Zoom link:** See Quercus for meeting ID and passcode

## Course description

This course explores sociological perspectives on our relationship with the environment. Environmental sociology is a relatively new subfield in the discipline, but its insights are increasingly relevant as the impacts of climate change are globally, though unequally, felt. How have we contributed to this development? How should we respond? Why are some groups seemingly more concerned about the environment than others, and how can we understand inaction on environmental problems? Sociologists posit that our relationship with the environment is cultural as much as it is structural, and have turned to concepts like emotion, discourse, and identity to make sense of it.

**Prerequisites:** 1.0 SOC credit at the 300+ level. Restricted to 4th-year sociology majors and specialists. Students without the prerequisite will be removed without notice.

## Land acknowledgement

“The Department of Sociology wishes to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.”

This course ‘takes place’ online, but we will all be somewhere while we learn. I will be leading this course from Toronto, where I also live as a settler on the traditional territories mentioned above. We can learn more about land acknowledgment, and the Indigenous land on which we may live, at [native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement](http://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement). This website also reminds us that land acknowledgement can become “a token gesture rather than a meaningful practice”. Much of what we will discuss in this course cannot be fully understood without attention to colonialism, past and present. I hope we can contend meaningfully with this legacy and strive to engage respectfully with Indigenous scholars and knowledge throughout this semester.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, you will be able to

1. **summarize** the core sociological schools of thought about the relationship between us (humans) and the environment, including the role of culture;
2. draw on your understanding of these theories to **demonstrate** how environmental sociologists make sense of contemporary environmental issues;
3. **compare** these frameworks and **make a critical argument** for which frameworks, according to your assessment, are best suited to orienting our collective social response to environmental issues, and;
4. **examine** your own convictions, assumptions, emotions, and experiences regarding course topics.

## Course policies

### Course environment

We will strive to create a course environment where everyone's knowledge, perspective, and experience is valued and treated with respect. This means listening attentively, engaging with different interpretations of course topics, and treating each other with dignity. In this upper-year seminar, contributing to the conversation will be a crucial part of everyone's learning, and it is our shared responsibility to ensure that people feel comfortable participating in the discussion.

University policy on equity, diversity and inclusion:

"The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves, engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. U of T does not condone discrimination or harassment against any persons or communities."

### Accessibility

If you have a consideration that may require accommodations, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: <https://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>, 416-978-8060 or [accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca).

### Communication

With questions outside of class hours, please reach out to the instructor via email using your official University of Toronto email address. I will do my best to respond within 48 hours on business days; if you have not received a response within this time, please follow up. When emailing, please include the course code in the subject line. I will not respond to emails on weekends or after 6pm.

### AI policy

"Students may use artificial intelligence tools for critiquing and editing an assignment for purposes of revision, but the first draft must be original work produced by the individual student alone." In this

class, you can use AI to **edit** your work, for example, for clarity or for grammar. However, the original draft (including its ideas, arguments, and evidence) must be created by you alone, except in cases of group work with other students. A key learning outcome in this course is to understand, apply, and critically evaluate arguments and perspectives from within environmental sociology. Drawing on artificial intelligence to generate ideas and applications undermines this goal and ultimately hinders your learning.

### **Recording lectures**

Please do not create or share seminar recordings. This is a synchronous virtual seminar in which everyone is expected to contribute and should be able to feel comfortable doing so. This policy is essential to ensure the safety and privacy of course participants.

### **Distributing course materials**

You may download course materials for your academic use. Please do not share course materials for any other purpose. You may not share or live stream any materials or recordings from this course in the public domain or social media, in its entirety, or in small excerpts.

### **Extensions**

Assignments 1 and 2 have an automatic, “no questions asked” 3-day grace period past the deadline. If something comes up in your life or semester (e.g., an illness, a family emergency, you need a mental health break), you do not need to let me know or supply evidence to submit your assignment *within this period*. Assignments submitted during this grace period are not subject to late deductions. However, you should not plan to use the grace period to write your assignment. Any extensions beyond this period require documentation (see below under “Missed deadlines”). Note that, if relevant, the grace period will be considered to cover (part of) your accommodation.

No extensions will be granted on *Reading reflections*, *Leading a discussion*, *Being a discussant*, or the *Annotated bibliography*, as these assessments are intended to prepare you for the class before which they are due. Some flexibility is built into the *Reading reflections*, as there are 9 different dates to submit, but you need to submit only 5.

### **Missed deadlines**

Students who miss a paper deadline or a test will receive a mark of zero for that paper or test unless the reason is a circumstance beyond their control. **Within three days** of missing a paper deadline or test, students must send the instructor a request for consideration. Students must document their request with **one of the following**:

- Absence declaration via ACORN (**can only be used once during the semester**)
- U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form
- College Registrar’s letter (e.g., in case of personal/family crisis or emergency)
- Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services

Students who miss the test or are late in submitting an assignment for other reasons, such as family or other personal reasons, should request their College Registrar to email the instructor.

## Late work

All assignments, including annotated bibliographies and reading reflections, that are late beyond the grace period (where applicable) and that are not supported by any of the documents mentioned above (i.e., Absence Declaration via ACORN, a letter from your college's registrar, a U of T Verification of Illness or Injury Form (VOI), or Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services) will incur a late penalty of 5% per day. No assignments will be accepted more than 8 days late without documentation.

## Re-grades

I will do my best to grade fairly. If you notice any problems with your grade and you would like to request a regrade, please follow this procedure: Take 48 hours to consider your grade, the rubric, and any feedback you received. If you still believe that your grade is not justified, contact me with a written explanation detailing why you believe the work was unfairly/incorrectly marked using the rubric or other feedback from Quercus as an explanation. This is due within 7 days after receiving the original grade. *If I re-grade your work, you, the student, must accept the resulting mark as the new mark, whether it goes up or down or remains the same.*

## Assessments and evaluation

Assessment	Due date	Weight as part of final grade
Reading reflections	Rolling deadline, Classes 1-9	25%
Leading a discussion	Individualized	15%
Being a discussant	Individualized	5%
Assignment 1	May 22, 11:59pm	20%
Annotated bibliography	June 5, 11:59pm	10%
Assignment 2	June 25, 11:59pm	25%

There will be **no** exam during the final exam period in this course.

## Assessments

### 1. Reading reflections (25% of final grade | due Weeks 1-9 before the start of class)

Each student will submit 5 reading reflections worth 5% each. Reflections should be 1 – 1.5 pages double-spaced in length and should provide a critical reading of assigned sources. This means that rather than merely summarizing the readings, you should evaluate them and “put them in conversation” with each other. Consider questions such as:

- i. What is the author's argument?
- ii. What, if any, concepts form part of the author's argument?
- iii. What are the argument's/author's assumptions? (What underlies the argument?)
- iv. What constitutes knowledge to this author? (What methods do they use?)
- v. What is missing from the author's argument?

vi. Where do the authors agree? About what do they disagree?

**2. Leading a discussion (15% | individualized due dates)**

In this upper-year seminar, students, in pairs, will lead discussion for part of one class. For the class of your choice (first come, first served), you will critically introduce the course readings for that class and bring questions to guide our discussion. Students leading discussion should a) email 3-4 discussion questions to the instructor by 5pm the day before class, and b) prepare to submit presentation materials (template available on Quercus) by 12:00pm after class. As our class discussion will follow from your guidance, I cannot offer extensions.

**3. Being a discussant (5% | individualized due dates)**

Students will sign up for one class in which to be the ‘discussant’ – this *cannot* be the same week that you lead the discussion. In this class, students will be expected to engage with the discussion leaders (e.g., by responding to discussion questions, making connections with relevant real-world cases, bringing in ideas of your own). As our class discussion will follow from your engagement, I cannot offer extensions.

**4. Assignment 1 – Applying Sociological Theories to an Environmental Problem (20% | due May 22, 11:59pm)**

This assignment asks you to select two of four core schools of thought in environmental sociology discussed in class (i.e., political economy, ecological modernization, environmental justice, social construction), and to apply these to a contemporary environmental problem of your choice. In your assignment, you should clearly outline the theories you chose, being mindful of identifying key characteristics. Apply *both* theories to the same environmental problem, being sure to give examples of how a theory (or concept within that theory) illustrates the environmental problem. Finally, in an appendix to your assignment, reflect on your reactions (e.g., emotional, intellectual, political) to these theoretical frameworks.

**5. Annotated bibliography (10% | due June 5, 11:59pm)**

In the final week of the course, we will have the chance to discuss a mystery topic related to culture and the environment that we haven’t covered up to that point. In class on May 29, you will nominate a topic that interests you and that you wish were on the syllabus. After we choose the topic, everyone will research one “reading” (this can be an academic article, but could also be a news article, a documentary, an interactive website, a podcast episode, etc.) about the topic we chose. You will create an annotated bibliography (two pages double-spaced) for your chosen “reading”, in which you summarize the source, explain why you chose this source and how it connects to themes from the course. As the instructor, I will select 2-3 student-nominated sources to add to the syllabus for our last class.

**6. Assignment 2 – Culture, Environment, and Consumption: Critical Analysis (25% - due June 25, 11:59pm)**

This final assignment asks you to develop your own case study in culture, environment, and consumption, building on the literature we’ve read and discussed throughout the course. You will make a sociological argument about your case, drawing on a theoretical framework or concept(s) from classes 1-9 of the course. Then, you will compare your chosen theory or concept with at least one other potential approach and explain your choice: Why is your chosen theory or concept best suited to orienting our understanding of the case? Finally, you will briefly reflect on your (intellectual, emotional, political) relationship to the analysis and consider how this has shifted throughout the course.

## Course schedule

Note that there may be minor changes to readings depending on what we find most interesting.

Date	Topic	Readings	Due
May 6	Introduction: <b>What’s sociological about the environment?</b>	Syllabus  Freudenburg, William R., Scott Frickel and Robert Gramling. 1995. “Beyond the Nature/Society Divide: Learning to Think about a Mountain,” <i>Sociological Forum</i> 10: 361-392.	Option to submit reading reflection
May 8	Theory workshop: <b>Political economy</b>	Gould, Kenneth A., David N. Pellow, and Allan Schnaiberg. 2004. “Interrogating the Treadmill of Production: Everything You Wanted to Know about the Treadmill but Were Afraid to Ask.” <i>Organization &amp; Environment</i> 17(3):296–316.  Givens, Jennifer E., Xiaorui Huang, and Andrew K. Jorgenson. 2019. “Ecologically unequal exchange: A theory of global environmental injustice.” <i>Sociology Compass</i> , 13(5), e12693.	Option to submit reading reflection
May 13	Theory workshop: <b>Ecological modernization</b>	Mol, Arthur P. J., Gert Spaargaren, and David A. Sonnenfeld. 2013. “Ecological Modernization Theory: Taking Stock, Moving Forward.” Pp. 15-30 in <i>Routledge International Handbook of Social and Environmental Change</i> , eds. Lockie. Stewart, Sonnenfeld, David A., and Dana Fisher. London and New York: Routledge.	Option to submit reading reflection

		<p>Hayden, Anders. 2014. <i>When Green Growth Is Not Enough: Climate Change, Ecological Modernization, and Sufficiency</i>. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press. (Intro)</p> <p>Schor, Juliet. 2011. "Visualizing a Plenitude Economy." <i>New Dream</i>.  <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR-YrD_KB0M">www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR-YrD_KB0M</a>. (Short video)</p>	
May 15	Theory workshop: <b>Environmental justice</b>	<p>Mohai, Paul, David Pellow, J. Timmons Roberts, 2009. "Environmental Justice," <i>Annual Review of Environment and Resources</i> 34: 405-30.</p> <p>Sherwood, Yvonne P. 2019. "The Political Binds of Oil Versus Tribes." <i>Open Rivers: Rethinking Water, Place, &amp; Community</i> 13 (Spring).</p> <p>Fox, Sarain. 2018. "Whose earth is it anyway?" <i>Decolonizing the Anthropocene</i>. Art Gallery of Ontario.  <a href="https://soundcloud.com/agotoronto/episode-03-whose-earth-is-it-anyway-decolonizing-the-anthropocene">soundcloud.com/agotoronto/episode-03-whose-earth-is-it-anyway-decolonizing-the-anthropocene</a>. (Podcast episode)</p>	<p>Option to submit reading reflection</p> <p>Option to submit Assignment 1</p>
May 20	Theory workshop: <b>Social construction</b>	<p>Carolan, Michael S. 2005. "Society, biology, and ecology: Bringing nature back into sociology's disciplinary narrative through critical realism." <i>Organization &amp; Environment</i>, 18(4), 393-421.</p> <p>Kennedy, Emily H. 2022. <i>Eco-Types: Five Ways of Caring about the Environment</i>. Princeton University Press. (Preface, Introduction, Chapter 1)</p> <p>Green, John. 2019. "Air Conditioning and Sycamore Trees". <i>The Anthropocene Reviewed</i>. WNYC Studios.  <a href="http://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/anthropocene-reviewed/episodes/anthropocene-reviewed-air-conditioning-and-sycamore-trees">www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/anthropocene-reviewed/episodes/anthropocene-reviewed-air-conditioning-and-sycamore-trees</a>. (Podcast episode. Listen to 0:00 – 11:00)</p>	<p>Option to submit reading reflection</p> <p>Option to submit Assignment 1</p>

May 22	<b>Introduction to culture and the environment</b>	<p>Kennedy, Emily H., and Josée Johnston. 2019. "If you love the environment, why don't you do something to save it? Bringing culture into environmental analysis." <i>Sociological Perspectives</i>, 62(5), 593-602.</p> <p>Ford, Allison. 2019. "The Self-sufficient Citizen: Ecological Habitus and Changing Environmental Practices." <i>Sociological Perspectives</i> 62(5):627-645.</p>	<p>Option to submit reading reflection</p> <p><b>Deadline to submit Assignment 1 (20%)</b></p>
May 25	<b>Grace period ends for Assignment 1</b>		
May 27	<b>Place, identity, and culture</b>	<p>Norgaard, Kari M., Ron Reed, and J. M. Bacon. 2018. "How Environmental Decline Restructures Indigenous Gender Practices: What Happens to Karuk Masculinity When There Are No Fish?" <i>Sociology of Race and Ethnicity</i>, 4(1), 98-113.</p> <p>Norgaard, Kari M. 2011. <i>Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life</i>. Cambridge, MA, USA: The MIT Press. (Introduction)</p>	Option to submit reading reflection
May 29	<b>Extractivism</b>	<p>Davis, Heather and Zoe Todd. 2017. "On the Importance of a Date or Decolonizing the Anthropocene." <i>ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies</i>. 16(4): 761-780.</p> <p>Jerolmack, Colin. 2021. <i>Up to heaven and down to hell: Fracking, freedom, and community in an American town</i>. Princeton University Press. (Introduction)</p>	<p>Option to submit reading reflection</p> <p>Case study nominations for Week 12 (in-class, ungraded)</p>
June 3	<b>Sustainable consumption</b>	<p>Middlemiss, Lucie. 2018. <i>Sustainable consumption: Key issues</i>. New York, NY: Routledge. (Introduction)</p> <p><b>And EITHER</b></p> <p>Anantharaman, Manisha. 2018. "Critical sustainable consumption: a research agenda." <i>Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences</i>, 8(4), 553-561.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p>	Option to submit reading reflection

		Willis, Margaret M., and Juliet B. Schor. 2012. "Does Changing a Light Bulb Lead to Changing the World? Political Action and the Conscious Consumer." <i>The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 644(1):160–90.	
June 5	<b>Case study 1: Food</b>	<p>Leguizamón, Amalia. 2020. <i>Seeds of power: Environmental injustice and genetically modified soybeans in Argentina</i>. Duke University Press. (Introduction)</p> <p><b>And EITHER</b></p> <p>Johnston, Josée, and Sarah Cappeliez. 2016. "You Are What You Eat: Enjoying (and Transforming) Food Culture." Pp. 34-48 in <i>Critical Perspectives in Food Studies</i>, 2nd ed., edited by M. Koc, J. Sumner, and A. Winson. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>Szasz, Andrew. 2008. <i>Shopping our way to safety</i>. St Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (Introduction: "Inverted Quarantine" (pp. 1-8) and Chapter 4 "Eating" (pp. 134-152))</p>	<b>Deadline to submit annotated bibliography (10%)</b>
June 10	<b>Case study 2: Fashion</b>	<p>Bick, Rachel, Erika Halsey, and Christine C. Ekenga. 2018. "The Global Environmental Injustice of Fast Fashion." <i>Environmental Health</i> 17(92):1-4. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1186/s12940-018-0433-7">https://doi.org/10.1186/s12940-018-0433-7</a>. (Short reading)</p> <p>Laing, Morna. 2024. "Sustainability and the Fashion Media: Micro-Utopia, Social Dreaming and Hope in the Margins." <i>Fashion Theory</i> 28(3):335-358.</p> <p>Williams, Rollie. 2021. "Fast Fashion is Hot Garbage." <i>Climate Town</i>. <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6R_WTDdx7I">www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6R_WTDdx7I</a>.</p>	
June 12	<b>Case study 3: Class choice</b>	In this week, we will wind down the course with a last case study. In Week 8, the class will nominate and vote on a case study for this week. We will then collectively research possible "readings" on	

		this topic (see “Annotated bibliography” above, due June 5).	
June 25			<b>Deadline to submit Assignment 2 (25%)</b>
June 28	<b>Grace period ends for Assignment 2</b>		

## University policies

### Academic integrity

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. Academic integrity is a fundamental value of learning and scholarship at the U of T. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that your U of T degree is valued and respected as a true signifier of your individual academic achievement.

The University of Toronto’s [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#) outlines the behaviours that constitute academic misconduct, the processes for addressing academic offences, and the penalties that may be imposed. You are expected to be familiar with the contents of this document.

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the [Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters](#). If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other institutional resources (for example, the [University of Toronto website on Academic Integrity](#)).

### Turnitin

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University’s use of the Turnitin.com service is described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Students not wishing their assignment to be submitted through Turnitin will not be assessed unless a student instead provides, along with their work, sufficient secondary material (e.g., reading notes, outlines of the paper, rough drafts of the final draft, etc.) to establish that the paper they submit is truly their own.

### Taping/Recording/Photographing of Lectures

The University considers an instructor’s lectures and course material to be the instructor’s intellectual property and covered by the Canadian Copyright Act.

Important: Students wishing to record lectures or other course material in any way are required to ask the instructor's explicit permission and may not do so unless permission is granted. This includes audio and video recording and photographing slides or other course materials.

Granting permission to record applies only for that individual student's own study purposes and does not include permission to "publish" or distribute them in any way. It is forbidden for a student to publish an instructor's notes on a website or to sell them in other form without formal permission.

Digital materials provided by the instructor in the normal course of teaching and learning are similarly protected by copyright and may not be shared without the explicit permission of the instructor.