Econ 308: The Political Economy of the Environment

Course overview

This course examines the political economy of the environment. It addresses environmental protection and environmental degradation, including both pollution and natural resource depletion. In addition to the neoclassical economic question of how scarce resources are allocated among competing ends, this course explores the political economy question of how resources are allocated among competing individuals, groups, and classes.

Course structure

This online course is based on the brick-and-mortar course that Prof. Boyce teaches at the University of Massachusetts – Amherst. This intensive six-week course strives to exploit the opportunities of its online format. You will study the political economy of the environment though readings, video lectures, and films.

You will have readings assigned for Monday through Thursday each week. You will watch a 5-10 minute lecture by Prof. Boyce summarizing some of the main themes of the week. You will also watch a 5-10 minute technical lecture to help prepare you for the issues and problems in your problem sets. I will grade your participation in six discussion forums and your performance on five short problem sets and a final paper.

- There will be a discussion forum each week. You must post your essay by Wednesday, and post a response to two of your classmates' posts by Friday.
- There will be a problem set due on Fridays for the first five weeks of the course. Please upload your work as .pdf documents. You may create any graphs or images digitally (using MS Powerpoint or similar) or by hand (using a scanner or camera to put the images into your document).
- There will be a 1,500-2,500 word paper due on the last day of the course on a topic of your choice. You must submit your paper topic and key sources the second week of the course. For details, see the Final Paper Assignment.

Books

We will use three books. To succeed in this course, you must have access to all three books.

- Eban S. Goodstein, *Economics and the Environment*. 6th edition.
- James K. Boyce, *Economics, the Environment and Our Common Wealth*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2013.
- Frank Ackerman, *Can We Afford the Future?* London: Zed Books, 2009.

You should immediately obtain a copy of Goodstein's text. It is widely available, and used copies of the 6th edition sell for about $20 online. The books by Boyce and Ackerman are also affordable, though you may choose to borrow the e-books from the UMass-Amherst library.

Prerequisites

This course is designed for students who have completed Economics 103 or Resource Economics

102. We will use algebra to graph lines, find intersections, and calculate areas. Many students who take the Political Economy of the Environment as juniors or seniors learned their math in high school or at the beginning of college, so it's normal if your math skills are rusty. If you are struggling with the math in this course, please contact me immediately, so I can help you strengthen your skills.

Grades

Your final grade will be based on your performance in online discussions, problem sets, and a final paper. Your final score will be weighted as follows:

- 30% six online discussions
- 50% five problem sets
- 20% one final paper

You must complete your posts in the discussion forums on time. Late posts and responses will receive 0 points, because timely posts are essential to keep the conversation going. Late problem sets will be docked by one letter grade for every day they are late. A late final paper will also be docked one letter grade for every day it is late.

Your final letter grade will be based on the following cutoffs:

Grade	Cutoff
A	93
A-	90
B+	87
B	83
B-	80
C+	77
C	73
C-	70
D+	67
D	60

Throughout the course, you can see your "current grade" in Blackboard. It is based on a weighted average of all assignments for which you have a grade.

Calendar and due dates

All the readings, lectures, discussions, and problem sets are organized into six modules. The due dates for all assignments are also available in the course calendar.

Questions

If you have questions about the material or the course site, please post them in the "Questions about the class" forum. That way, my answers will be available for everyone in the class. If you want to ask me a private question, please send me an email. I will respond to posts and email regularly during the week. If you ask a question on the weekend, I may not respond until Monday morning.

Please review the schedule below

Week	Topic	Lecture #	Blackboard Course Content	Videos on Blackboard	Assignments Due
1	The political economy of the environment	1	Boyce Ch. 1 on the political economy of the environment	***Watch:*** • Prof. Boyce Lecture 1: Introduction to the Political Economy of the Environment; • Technical Lecture 1: Externalities, efficiency, and inequality	• Week 1 Discussion Problem Set 1 due
		2	Goodstein Ch. 1-2 on utilitarianism and externalities		
		3	Goodstein Ch. 3-4 on efficiency and safety standards		
		4	Boyce Ch. 2 on inequality and efficiency		
2	Sustainability and growth	5	Watch the *Gasland* (film)	• Prof. Boyce Lecture 2: Sustainability and growth • Technical lecture 2: Social welfare functions	• Week 2 Discussion • Problem Set 2 due • Final Paper Proposal
		6	Goodstein Ch. 6		
		7	Goodstein Ch. 7		
		8	Goodstein Ch. 11 and Boyce 2013 post		
3	Benefit-cost analysis and environmental justice	9	Goodstein Ch. 8	• Prof. Boyce Lecture 3: Benefit-cost analysis and environmental justice • Technical Lecture 3: Benefit-cost analysis and environmental justice	• Week 3 Discussion • Problem Set 3 due
		10	Goodstein Ch. 9		
		11	Goodstein Ch. 10		
		12	Boyce Ch. 3-4		
4	Regulating pollution	13	Goodstein Ch. 12-13	• Prof. Boyce Lecture 4: Environmental regulation • Technical Lecture 4: Incentive-Based Regulation	• Week 4 Discussion • Problem Set 4 due
		14	Goodstein Ch. 14-15		
		15	Goodstein Ch. 16		
		16	Goodstein Ch. 17		
5	Climate change	17	first third of Ackerman	• Prof. Boyce Lecture 5: Climate Change • Technical Lecture 5: Carbon tax and carbon cap	• Week 5 Discussion • Problem Set 5 due
		18	second third of Ackerman		
		19	third third of Ackerman		
		20	Boyce Ch. 6		
6	Globalization and development	21	*Murder in the Amazon* (film)	Boyce Lecture 6: Globalization and the environment	• Week 6 Discussion • Final Paper due
		22	Boyce Ch. 8		
		23	Goodstein Ch. 20		
		24	Boyce Ch. 9 and Summers' 1992 memo		